

# Convoy 25 Lushnje/Fier Albania



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The purpose of Convoy 25 was to deliver an ex BAA Edinburgh Airport Landrover Discovery to the City of Fier in Albania and to train the Fire-fighters on the equipment carried, specifically on RTC Procedures using the Clan Lucas Equipment on board. The total travel was in excess of 2000 miles, 1200 of which was by road and would require us to travel through 5 countries on route.

This was IFRA's third visit to the country and it is plain to see that progress is being made both within the Fire Service and in the country itself.

The trip was to be split between the Cities of Lushnje and Fier. The visit to Lushnje was a follow up on last year to see how the station is progressing and to check on the serviceability of the Volvo appliance and Lucas cutting gear.

## DAY ONE

The journey started on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May with myself (Gary Johnstone) meeting up with Dave Hume, Alan Hughes & Dave Kay at Rosyth Fire Station for a photo shoot for the local papers before heading off to Newcastle to catch the Ferry to Amsterdam. Another tearful goodbye to Dave Kay and we board the ferry for the crossing to Amsterdam.

## **DAY TWO**

Depart ferry relatively quickly and we head off, making good progress on the way. Decided on a change of route which took us from Holland into Germany, both myself and Dave did all of the driving and while Alan tried to keep the equipment and bags from falling about in the back. Overnight stop at a superb hotel in a place called Denkendorf in Germany; Hotel overlooks the local Fire Station, so it may be one to remember for the future. Food was superb in the hotel, both I and Dave ordering a large Pork Schnitzel and chips, which turned out to be Extra Extra large when it arrives.

## **DAY THREE**

Depart bright and early for next leg, which will take us from Germany, through Austria and into Italy for our overnight stop just outside Trieste. Again it is a good drive and we make good progress with the Air conditioning which is proving to be a life saver. All goes well until we near our intended night stop, we input the location given by the travel company into the sat nav and it takes us up to a village in the hills. Unable to find the B&B, we ask around and after a translator is found we are directed 10 miles back along road, where we drive around before a friendly police officer points us in the right direction. The village turns out to be very beautiful and we have a good night in the village.

## **DAY FOUR**

Up bright and early next morning and we are off into Trieste. We have difficulty finding ticket office, before eventually arriving to find it in docks next to boat, lot of sitting about waiting to be boarded before we eventually get on board and are allocated our slightly small cabin. Thankfully the sun is shining and we move upstairs to the viewing deck with a large bag of refreshing drinks to keep us going.

## **DAY FIVE**

Another nice day and a breakfast of chocolate croissants and then its just sitting about waiting for boat to dock. Eventually we dock and it all seems to go a bit more smoothly, a contact is soon on site to greet us, before Tushka and Adriatic arrive. After much arguing and finger wagging by Adriatic, we are allowed to leave docks and it's off to Lushnje. Quick stop for bite to eat, then a visit to Fire Station and then off to hotel.

## **DAY SIX**

Breakfast of omelette and sausage (not again) and Dave is off to Tirana to sort out vehicle paperwork, while myself and Alan give some training on RTC procedures, extrication techniques before awaiting Dave back at Hotel.

## **DAY SEVEN**

I am unable to stomach another two weeks of omelette so I discover a shop that does chocolate croissants, this proves to be the staple diet for next two weeks. Dave heads off for another visit to Tirana to try and sort out paperwork, myself, Alan and crew from Lushnje head off to scrap yard to do some cutting techniques on car. They have grasped techniques well since last visit, it may not be perfect, but it achieves the aim. Treated to meal by on shift at station before heading off to hotel to await Dave again.

## **DAY EIGHT**

Arrive at station to heavy rain shower, so we decide to go over various presentations on laptop. Eventually rain stops, so we head down to scrap yard again, unfortunately, Volvo gets stuck, only after much shouting and “discussions” is it freed. Exercise cancelled and we retire to station. Later on we meet with the head of the Training for the Albanian Fire Service. Very good positive meeting and the beginnings of a plan to move IFRA’s involvement in Albania comes together.

#### **DAY NINE**

All head off to Fier to show them vehicle and equipment which will eventually be handed over to them. We demonstrate the various equipment before heading off to scrap yard to do some cutting techniques. Weather is very very hot and we all suffer a bit, interpreter collapses and has to be rushed off to hospital – thankfully he is fine. Crew’s very impressed with equipment. Taken for meal by Regional Fire Chief, excellent meal, somehow I get into a discussion with the mechanic who has not spoken any English in 25 years – not sure if it was me or the 12 pints he has. Later on we have a good chat with Adriatic about what we can do for Albania and what he actually needs us to do.

#### **DAY TEN**

Another hot day and we are off to Fier again. Morning spent going through every piece of equipment including BA, Cutting gear, Ked, Medical equipment and chocks and blocks. Then we are taken for meal before heading off down coast for a few days R&R. Country is very beautiful and we stop in a lovely fishing port for the night. Tushka is seen speaking to Police, it is only in morning that we find out they had guarded Landrover all night for us. Dave and I have good night sleep in our room(separate beds), where as Alan does not look impressed in morning as he complains about Tushka watching TV until small hours. Though Tushka does complain about Alan’s “wind” problem!

#### **DAY ELEVEN**

We hit the road and we head off to Saranda which is a city at the southern tip off Albania. It is like a completely different country here, more tourism is evident. We find hotel, which is run by another friend of Tushka, lovely little hotel and beach is like something out of a movie. Great day and the chance to recharge batteries relaxing on a sunlounger before we do our Tourist bit and visit an ancient Greek site.

#### **DAY TWELVE**

Quick visit to Saranda for some tourist shopping before we head inland on our mystery tour. Visit various touristy places en-route before returning to Lushnje.

#### **DAY THIRTEEN**

Day spent at Lushnje going over various techniques and procedures before heading off to scrap yard carry out exercise. We get Lushnje crews to conduct exercise with ourselves acting as observers. All in all they achieve their aims and casualty is rescued. We debrief exercise and point out few things they could do to improve, but all in all – we leave happy.

#### **DAY FOURTEEN**

Off to Fier again to go over equipment again and pay a visit to Patos Fire Station. Again, we leave feeling we could do so much as station has only one serviceable appliance and virtually no equipment. We head off for meal with District Chief again, but Alan is not feeling well and Tushka takes him to hospital for check up before dropping him off at Hotel. Alan has succumbed to a tummy bug.

#### **DAY FIFTEEN**

Dave and I head off to Tirana for a meeting with Albanian Government officials. Alan stays back in hotel as he is still not feeling well. Visit Tirana’s main Fire Station, which is relatively well equipped compared with rest of country. Meet station chief of Tirana before we head off for meeting with Director General of Civil Emergencies. Very constructive meeting, he is very impressed with what we have done so far and wants us to continue. Visit Albanian training school which is based at another Fire

Station in Tirana. Meet with head of Training again and we have lengthy discussions about where we go from here. We agree to send in letters from IFRA, detailing what we can possibly do to work with Albania. We are hopeful of getting Albanian government support for future missions.

### **DAY SIXTEEN**

Off to Fier again for a final cutting exercise, again we have had to leave Alan behind as he is not 100%. Weather is very hot, we have decided to run it as a scenario – with the Fier crew carrying out the exercise and myself and Dave as observers. They seem to have got a good grasp of the basic RTC techniques and they manage to successfully extricate the casualty from the vehicle. On completion of exercise we head back to station to get cleaned up and formally handover the vehicle to Fier.

### **DAY SEVENTEEN**

Alan is alive!! Our final day and the usual tearful farewells. We head up to Lushnje station to talk with Adriatic and the crew and make a few presentations. Tushka has as usual been a great help throughout our time in Albania. He also assisted with a lot of the training and has a very good grasp of everything we have taught. We informally induct him into IFRA as an Instructor much to his delight. Myself and Dave then go out for lunch with Adriatic, Alan does not feel up to it and retires to hotel. Once lunch is over, we load up and head off to Tirana Airport and our final farewells.

In the past year since our last visit, there has been a general improvement in the infrastructure of the country. There has though, been no major improvement or investment in the fire service and they are still in desperate need of our help. In short, in Fier District which encompasses the stations of Lushnje, Fier & Patos – they still need additional breathing apparatus sets, PPE and miscellaneous fire-fighting equipment – including appliances.

After lengthy discussions with at various levels of the Fire Service/Government we discussed the best way forward. There may be the possibility of financial assistance from Albania to pay for equipment/appliances. We do though need to start “the ball rolling” by sending a letter to the Albanian government detailing what we have done and more importantly what we can do. Hopefully this will improve communications between ourselves and Albania and move us in right direction.

