

Montenegro News Letter

BA saves lives. This was brought home in a big way to the Operation Team that worked throughout the winter in Montenegro introducing a new style of training to the Charity's portfolio of services.

Montenegro has established fire services in many of its communities, some professional, many volunteer. Filip Mostrokol, the Commander of the fire service in the capital city Podgorica, was keen to improve and standardise the training of his fire fighters and, in particular, to introduce rescue training.

He is building an international training centre alongside his new fire station. This project is supported by the European Union and the British Government. The European Agency for Reconstruction is providing the money to construct both the fire station and the training centre. Podgorica is seen as an ideal centre for international training in the Balkans Region as the country was not involved in the civil war and people from other countries within the region are happier to go there than to some that were involved.

The Operation Florian team, led by Allan Henson, spent two periods in excess of six weeks each delivering phases one and two of the project. Phase one commenced at the beginning of November 2004 and involved putting the training resources in place and delivering the Fire Fighter One programme and First Aid modules that were used so successfully in Bosnia. Over fifty fire fighters were trained and the Podgorica Fire Service were able to select the best ten to train as instructors in phase two. Meanwhile, the Operation Team were able to use the knowledge gained about local training needs to develop a rescue module relevant to identified need utilising the locally available equipment.

Phase two began at the beginning of February 2005 and was preceded by methods of Instruction training for the local instructors. The plan was for them so assist the UK team in delivering the training. In practise, such were their skills and level of enthusiasm, they did so well that they were soon doing the bulk of the training under the supervision of the UK team. They even managed to teach some of the new rescue module after a thorough briefing by the UK team and a lot of work on their part.

What has been achieved? Podgorica Fire Service now has over 100 fire fighters trained in basic fire fighting, First Aid and rescue. It has ten able instructors, albeit they still have much to learn before they can teach the full range of courses one would expect an international training centre to offer. At first sight it may seem that little was achieved in terms of building

bridges between divided communities. However both groups were multi ethnic, Montenegrin, Serb and Albanian. In the longer term, if the centre is successful in attracting students from the rest of the region it will certainly meet that objective.

But what was that about BA saving lives? It was interesting to note that when the Operation Florian team first arrived there were two BA sets sitting in the locker room for a long time waiting for to be serviced and have new cylinders fitted. One of the UK instructors mentioned this on the station during phase two and the fire fighters said that in the past they had been reluctant to wear it as they did not have training or procedures which gave them the confidence to use it but after the first course they started using it all the time. Everyone knows how dramatically the life expectancy of UK fire fighter's has improved since the introduction the universal use of BA. That is just one immediate indicator of the success of this mission and alone makes it worthwhile.