



Steve Owen-Hughes, President & Trustee.

One of my earliest memories is being rescued by the Fire Brigade from a fire in the children's home that I lived in at the village of Hinton-Martell in Dorset run by two eccentric holy sisters. I think this must have made quite an impact on me and I am now proud to play a small part in the continuation of that great tradition which being in the fire service entails. But more importantly it perhaps explains why I was driven to found the Fire service Charity 'Operation Florian' so that my fellow Fire and Rescue workers will also have the capability to carry out their calling within the communities they serve.

That said I didn't join the Fire Service straight away I first decided as a very young man (15½) to join the Army and served for 10 years; mostly with the airborne forces, in many theatres of operations around the globe. Like all of us who served their country I picked up a few of campaign medals on the way but more importantly I picked some of the life skills and friendships that service in the armed forces can give one.

By the time I was in my mid 20's it was time to make a decision, either stay in the army and make it a career or move to another profession. I decided that the only job I would ever like to do other than being a Soldier was that of a Firefighter. So I applied to the Brigade that had saved my life as boy and was very proud to be appointed as Firefighter in Dorset Fire Brigade, despite the huge drop in pay.

Following what seemed a lifetime of recruit training at Eastley (Hampshire Fire and Rescue), where I was lucky to be trained by Ivan Jack and his team (then Station Officer), I served in Dorset Fire Brigade at Westbourne (B23) Red watch and later White watch. I lived on the fire station in Poole and spent the next few happy years learning the skills of a professional firefighter and attending many incidents and making friends under the watchful eye of my various Station Officer riders.

Being now as poor a church mouse and deciding this was definitely the life for me I wanted, like most of us, to reach the top of the operational firefighters profession 'Station Officer rider on my own Station'. And so with no other view in mind and blissfully unaware of the changes to the service and the opportunities I would be given I went for promotion and attempted to get to my goal as quickly as possible. There then followed the inevitable moves and promotions best listed:

Wholetime Crew Commander at Llanbedr and retained service in Gwynedd Fire Service in my new hometown of Dollgellau.

Wholetime Crew Commander and then Watch commander at USAF Fairford for the Defence Fire Service and again retained this time for Powys in my next new hometown of Llandrindod-Wells.

Instructor at Fire Service Central Training Establishment. (Sub Officer and Station Officer)

Seconded Instructor to Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre at Teeside. (Station Officer)

Staff Officer at HQ Royal Air Force undertaking staff duties, inspections, NATO work and professional lead into the future Firefighter qualification system for the RAF firefighters. (Station Officer and Assistant Divisional Officer).

HQ Defence Fire Service (London) Operational Policy. (Divisional Officer).

Detached to Bosnia as Commander of the British Fire Service Training Unit. (Divisional Officer).

Divisional Commander Operations for 2nd Permanent under Secretary of States area, Chief of Joint Operations area, Defence Procurement Agency area covering: Cyprus, Gibraltar and Atomic weapons fire stations plus 30 other structural and airport fire stations. Responsible for policy, training, investigations, inspections, and day to day operational matters.

I started working in the Balkans in 1993 when I got involved in a scheme with Dover District Council who are twinned with Split. They wanted to take a fire vehicle to the Island of Brac just off the coast, which had suffered from severe fires and had a large refugee population, due to the war, with no firefighting resources. Together with a fellow firefighter from the training centre (Shawn Miller) we raised the money for the appliance and drove it to Brac.

During this time I saw the depth of the problem in Croatia and then began the idea of forming a charity to get more help into the region that was suffering badly. Initially I was interested in communities dealing with refugees and after 'Operation Storm' I began to think about helping returnee communities to provide safety and stability for them during these vulnerable years. At this time the newly formed charity also began to work in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the course was now set to begin what has been, and still is, one of the biggest fire and rescue aid projects ever. Not just in delivering Fire and Rescue aid and training to Croatia and BiH but to the rest of the Balkans and now world-wide too.