

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

June 2007

NEW DIMENSION

Rollout nears completion
but concerns remain



Annual Conference

Pay 2007 tops the agenda



The road to Iraq

Special pullout on a
journey to remember



Me and the hunt

The human fox

Once again – pay



Our annual conference met in Southport in May. It was the first conference for two years so was a welcome opportunity for your delegates to address key issues on your behalf and to identify and determine the policy and direction of the union for the coming year.

The most important debate was that on pay. In moving the Executive Council emergency resolution on the issue, I outlined our concerns at the government's approach to public sector pay.

The various statements by the Chancellor have set a target of a maximum 2% increase for 2007 pay rises. The argument used is that this will help to squeeze inflation out of the economy. It is a crude policy approach which is attempting to use public sector workers – and public sector workers alone – as the means to reduce inflationary pressures.

No such approach is taken in relation to private sector pay. In particular the pay levels in the boardrooms of the UK are ignored.

Record city bonuses

For example, last year saw record bonuses paid out by city firms with many individuals receiving bonuses of over a million pounds. The total bonuses paid out dwarfs the entire budget of the UK Fire and Rescue Service putting the whole issue into a rather different perspective.

We have also seen numerous cases within the public services, including the fire and rescue

service, where the restraint we are lectured about is ignored. Certain chief fire officers and others in senior positions have received very large pay rises. It appears that the argument is that pay increases for highly paid people have no impact on inflation but pay rises for those on lower wages and salaries do. That is not a position that makes much sense and it is one which conference rejected.

Conference agreed two resolutions on pay. We therefore continue to seek the APT pay formula for this year and for the

After four years of rapid change the fire and rescue service needs some stability

future. We are aware that this may cause problems because of the government's policies and all members are asked to support any campaign which may be necessary following negotiations.

Strong argument

However, as we go to press, those negotiations continue. The FBU has a very strong argument in relation to pay. After four years of rapid change the fire and rescue service needs some stability. Privately this is recognised by many fire service politicians but it should now be publicly acknowledged by agreeing to pay the rise due under the formula. That is the absolute priority of your national officials over the coming weeks.

Matt Wrack



City traders will continue to enjoy their bonuses as Gordon Brown squeezes the public sector alone

YOUR LETTERS

This Queen's Medal award is a big joke

I write regarding the debacle of the QFSM awarded to the Strathclyde accountant, Eileen Baird (Station Cat, May 2007).

I feel it is an absolute disgrace and if I were to be awarded one in the future "as a firefighter for an act of gallantry" I would have no hesitation in refusing it.

This award totally devalues the acts of bravery and exceptional achievements demonstrated by previous recipients. This job is rapidly turning into a big joke and I for one don't find it very funny!

Name and address supplied

→ Firefighter welcomes your letters relating to articles published in the magazine. We do not publish letters where an email address only is supplied. Please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

Not getting your own copy of FireFighter at home? Make sure you have informed your brigade secretary of any recent change of address.



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PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll be the owner of a Cosenza 400 3-4 berth tent



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JUNE 2007

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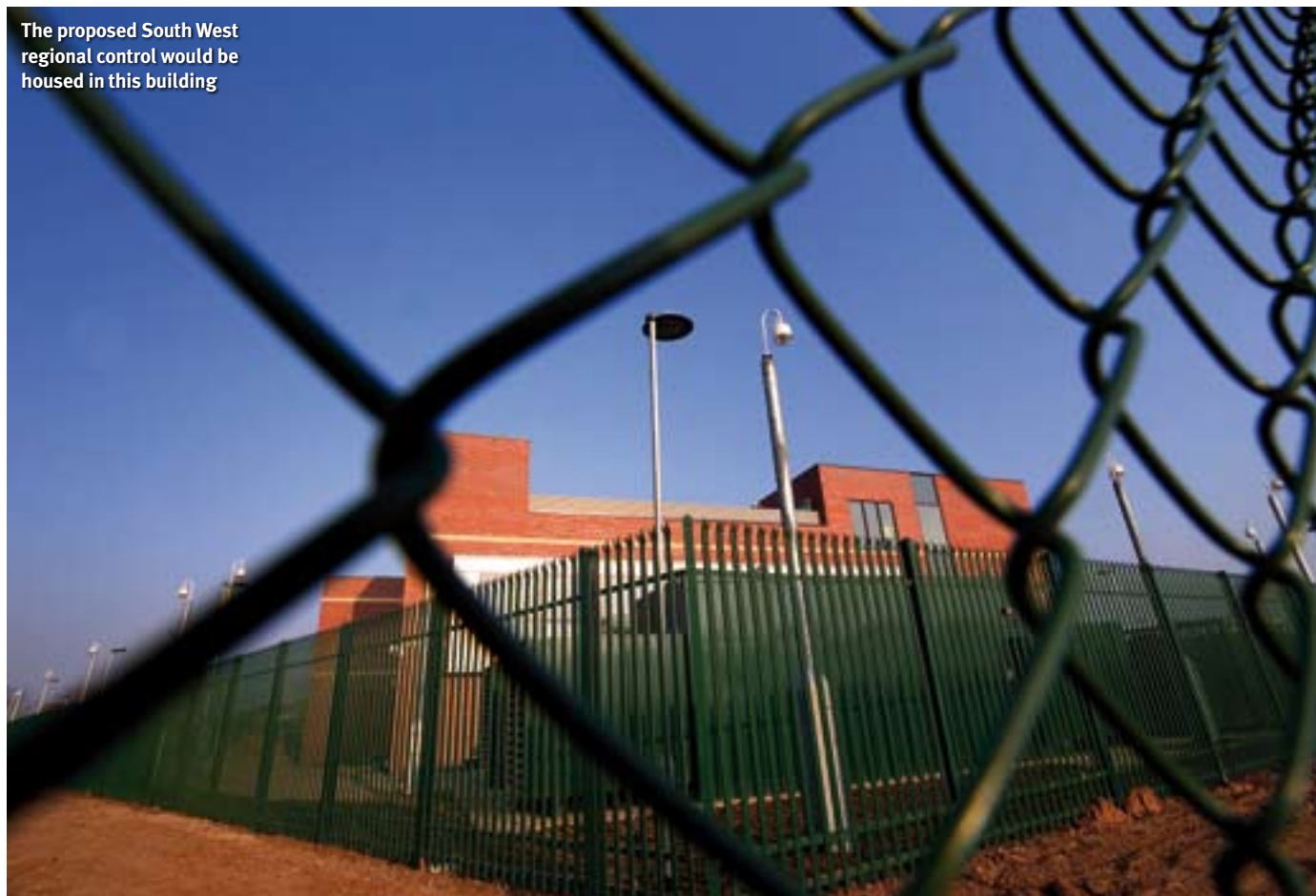
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JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

The proposed South West regional control would be housed in this building



PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Members give FireControl a massive thumbs down

REGIONAL CONTROLS

FBU members have little confidence in the Government's FireControl project and believe the plans should be halted. They say the £1 billion the Government is spending on the system would be better spent on more frontline personnel, training and equipment.

In a nation-wide poll of FBU members conducted by YouGov, 95% of firefighters polled said the proposed regional centres would damage the service's ability to respond to incidents. Some 90% said it would also hit the safety of firefighters.

In 'marks out of ten' for the level of confi-

dence they had in the Government's ability to build a new region-wide system that would work well, fire crews polled gave it an average score of 0.74 (less than one) out of ten.

Nearly seven out of ten (69%) of those polled gave zero out of ten and 96% said the project should not go ahead.

No confidence

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Fire crews have almost no confidence in the Government's ability to deliver this new system and think it should be scrapped.

"This project is being forced down the throat of local fire services by a central

government that thinks it knows what's best for local services. There must be a proper independent assessment of this entire project before it goes any further. The Government must listen and think again."

YouGov interviewed 1,876 FBU members online across the UK between 22 March and 3 April 2007. Data are unweighted.

→ Lobby Your MP Now! Write to your MP – at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA – and request that they sign Early Day Motion 805 or visit www.fbu.org.uk, follow the "Lobby Your MP" link and you will be guided through an easy step by step process. This takes less than five minutes.

Windsor fight will go right down to the wire

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Windsor FBU members are fighting to the finish line to prevent a downgrading of the fire station on Her Majesty's doorstep, having already stopped plans to close the station outright. In a sustained campaign targeting local press and politicians, the branch also wrote to the Queen who passed on the protest letter to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now DCLOG).

Royal Berkshire fire authority is due to decide on whether to close the station at night or replace the wholetime crew with a retained crew during management's so called "critical night period" between the hours of 8pm to 8am at a meeting on July 25. The Union is determined that neither option is given the green light. An additional concern is that such moves, which form part of its integrated risk management plan,

would be a prelude to a closure and a sell off of the site, which says Mick Rowley, a firefighter and Windsor FBU branch rep, is worth "a small fortune".

Senior brigade managers have already come under fire by the chief executive of the Borough council who told local press he "let the chief fire officer have both barrels" over the failure to properly publicise "forums" with the public as part of the consultation it is obliged to carry out on the changes. They have also been criticised for spending an estimated £60,000 on private consultants who have been using suspect figures to justify the cuts. For example, the consultants claimed the station takes 156 night time calls when in fact the figure is 447 for the year to April 2007, says Mick Rowley.

The downgrading of the fire station was a key issue in the recent local elections and the Union has won the support of local councillors and the local MP.

EUROPE

Continent's firefighters get together

Unions representing firefighters from 21 countries in the European Union have adopted in principle a "firefighters' charter" that sets out fundamental principles and rights for public sector firefighters and their trade unions.

The move came at a meeting in Luxembourg in May organised and hosted by the European Public Service Union (EPSU), which groups public sector unions across the continent, representing 8 million workers. This is the second meeting of the EPSU firefighters' network, the first having been hosted by the FBU in July 2006 at FBU Head Office in Kingston. The charter was drafted with

Protesting Belgian firefighters protect themselves from a police water-cannon during a demonstration in Brussels in February

assistance from FBU fire safety advisor Glyn Evans. National Officer Dean Mills, who attended the meeting in Luxembourg, said that "as part of the local government section of EPSU the FBU is involved in discussions and information exchange on areas such as pensions and countering employer initiatives, on a wide range of issues which directly affect our members. The charter is an instrument to support the development of EPSU's policies regarding firefighters.

"Network members are now looking at how we can best exchange information between meetings on shift patterns and retirement ages in addition to producing a comparative study on opportunities for education within each country's fire services. There are several areas which we would wish to discuss further, such as cross-border assistance which was touched on at the last meeting. There will be further meetings on this later this year."

➔ More on www.fbu.org.uk

Sounding off!

JIM PARROTT

FBU Region 11 Secretary

Marlie Farm

On Sunday 3 December 2006 an explosion at Marlie Farm, Ringmer, near Lewes, killed Brian Wembridge and Geoff Wicker of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS), injured a further nine firefighters, a police officer and two members of the public.

Following the tragic incident, a working group from FBU region 11 was established to identify good practice and bad practice for monitoring and regulating activities at Marlie Farm, as well as for the safe management of ESFRS operational activities at the farm.

The group will also make recommendations to improve the health, safety and welfare of FBU members and the communities they serve, identifying areas of weakness within the UK's systems for regulating, monitoring and classifying fireworks.

We will present findings on a regular basis through National Officer John McGhee to the Executive Council. Regularly airing these findings – which will also be presented to East Sussex Fire Authority via chief executive Des Prichard – will give the FBU its best chance of achieving its objectives.

The first presentation focuses on previous accidents involving fireworks, especially those transported and stored in "ISO" shipping containers. We identified ten incidents in the UK as well as incidents in a further six countries and found these common themes:

- labelling on imported fireworks was not reliable;

- each business involved had failed in its responsibilities;
- respective governments had failed to protect the public;
- government control of explosives was over-complicated with too many agencies involved and very little co-operation;
- fireworks stored in ISO containers and subsequently involved in fire react differently to their explosive classification;
- there is concern that ISO containers are completely inappropriate for the storage and transport of fireworks;
- all these accidents were preventable;
- poor information and guidance for emergency services seriously hampered their ability to prepare for and execute successfully their emergency response.

We also found that other countries have learned their lessons and implemented change quite quickly. The UK has not. The final reports into accidents in Australia, Denmark and Holland are found easily on the internet. Getting reports into accidents in the UK is like getting blood out of a stone.

If we do not learn the lessons here, and act on them, there is a very real danger of the type of incident experienced in East Sussex, or Northamptonshire, Devon and Somerset for that matter, happening again.

Jim Parrott is a member of the working group

In brief

◆ As *Firefighter* went to press, a demonstration was called for 31 May in Truro, Cornwall against the downgrading of Falmouth and Camborne fire stations. The demo was to congregate from 10.00 am in Union Square. Members and officials from across the UK are invited to attend.

◆ Firefighters are the most trusted among professions, while politicians have the worst reputation for the first time in an annual Readers' Digest study. Firefighters remain the most trustworthy with 97% of the poll giving them the thumbs-up. Just 7% of 1,900 readers said they trusted politicians, a point below car dealers.

Firefighter wins damages for partial hearing loss

LEGAL SERVICES

A retired firefighter who was exposed to different types of excessive noise during his career with the fire service has been awarded damages for partial hearing loss.

Paul Rogerson, 53, of Fareham in Hampshire, was compensated after proving that his hearing loss was caused by excessive noises at work. He brought his case with the assistance of the FBU and Thompsons solicitors.

Paul Rogerson, who started his career with the fire service in 1969, realised that he had a problem shortly before his retirement in 2004.

"I thought initially that I was

losing my hearing because I was getting older," he said. "However a routine medical examination suggested that it might have been caused by something else. Further tests revealed that I had suffered damage as a result of



Paul Rogerson: cumulative exposure to high decibel noise can result in permanent damage

different types of cumulative and high decibel noises at work."

During his career, Paul Rogerson, like many firefighters, was exposed to noises such as two-tone horns, in-cab radios and pumps. "As well as hearing

these noises in the course of duty, we also had them constantly in training drills," he said.

Noise at work regulations came into force in 1989 but in Paul Rogerson's case the fire service was slow to act. "It took ages for them to get their act together," he said. "Even now I wouldn't be confident or sure that firefighters are not being exposed to excessively high levels of noise without adequate warning signs being in place.

"High decibel noise can often give no initial sign of any damage being caused, but cumulative exposure can result in permanent damage. Employers are responsible for testing possible high-decibel noises to highlight dangers."



Union Pension Rally in Birmingham to defend the Local Government Pension Scheme

Talks continue as new scheme becomes law

PENSIONS

The FBU, together with other local government unions, is continuing talks with Government to resolve outstanding issues regarding the local government pension scheme, following the laying before Parliament on 4 April of regulations setting out the terms of the new LGPS in England and Wales.

The issues still to be resolved include the introduction of banded contribution rates, ill health retirement proposals and protection for people formerly covered by the 'rule of 85' which allowed some members to retire at 60 on an unreduced pension. The new scheme proposals are now law,

although the scheme will not come into effect until April 2008. The final benefits outlined in the regulation include:

- a guaranteed final salary scheme;
- an improved accrual rate – from 1/80th to 1/60th of final salary for every year worked;
- pensions for unmarried partners.

Dean Mills, National Officer responsible for pensions, said: "The Union is fighting for the pension benefits of all LGPS members to be maintained, and where at all possible, improved. We have been liaising closely with our colleagues in other public sector unions to ensure a united response and strategy for the best protection of all members covered by the scheme."

JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

TIMM SONNENSCHEIN/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



◆ This year's annual Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival will take place from 13 to 15 July in Dorset and, as usual, the FBU will be participating alongside other trade unionists and labour movement activists. A stall run by Dorset FBU will be promoting the Union's campaigns and of course there will be a range of speakers plus music (including Billy Bragg) and comedy (including Mark Thomas). For more info: www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-12942-fo.cfm

◆ A slight fall in the number of union members in the UK, revealed in new figures from the DTI, is a union success story, the TUC maintains. While there was a continuing decline in traditionally unionised jobs in sectors such as manufacturing, unions managed to make advances in new areas such as women and professional workers, it said. Union membership has roughly stabilised since 1997.



The real world of Cleveland: Corus Teesside steelworks in Redcar

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

Fifth Column recently got sight of a letter sent last year by the chief fire officer of Cleveland, John Doyle, to his colleagues around the country in CFOA. In it, he reveals his personal views on industrial relations and modernisation following the end last summer of the trade dispute between FBU members and Cleveland Fire Authority over detrimental changes in the IRMP. In the letter, Mr Doyle reveals to fellow chief officers a perception of reality that is, at best, fanciful.

His starting point is his claim that the June 2003 pay and conditions agreement meant "IRMPs are not disputable" and he goes on to say that the disputes in "Suffolk, West Midlands Hertfordshire, ourselves and now Merseyside are all about that fundamental principle".

He then accuses the FBU for being "prepared to take the money but not deliver on their part of the deal". This at a time when Cleveland and other fire authorities were about to remove long service increment without offering any opportunity to access the continuous professional development payment – a key aspect of the 2003 agreement. Need we say more?

Mr Doyle mentions the Burchill report into industrial relations in the fire service and talks about "seeking resolution through negotiation rather than industrial action". This from a man who told the FBU that his set of proposals for the future of the service in Cleveland were "non-negotiable"!

Despite the FBU in Cleveland being given an overwhelming 74% mandate to take strike action, the FBU did not set one single strike date, let alone take one hour of strike action.

The FBU stated on many occasions before and during the dispute that a negotiated settlement was the desired outcome. Following the ballot result, meaningful negotiations took place and the rest, as they say, is history.

CLEVELAND

The personal view of Cleveland's Chief Fire Officer seems to be of a fantasy world

Mr Doyle is also highly critical of local FBU officials, stating that: "the reality, as has happened elsewhere, is the local officials slavishly follow their shortened and subjective view of the trade dispute mechanism, and then management has to help the local membership out of a strike which well over 90% of their membership don't want". And the 74% 'yes' vote? In an epic flight of fantasy, he goes on to say that the management negotiating team "helped the local FBU come up with

a Plan B even though those officials had no belief in Plan A".

It is a little disappointing that Mr Doyle chooses to attack local FBU officials (who worked tirelessly to achieve a solution without taking strike action) in such a way, so soon after the conclusion of the dispute. If this is his attitude towards local FBU officials it does not bode well for future industrial relations in Cleveland. But given the kind of people he appears to choose as his peers, this isn't perhaps surprising.

Having railed against a "lack of leadership from other than those courageous individuals and authorities who are undoubtedly driving progress for all in the service," he expresses his gratitude to "those who made contact and provided material support" (amongst others) Tony McGuirk who, as Mr Doyle states in his letter, "is in the process of getting another seen-it done-it teeshirt" (an obvious, rather flippant, reference to the Merseyside dispute) and Roy Wilshire: "some mileage on his clock considering he is a relatively new CFO" (not at all patronising I am sure you will agree).

One last illusion entertained by the CFO: "the FBU lost support and membership", he says. While a relatively small number of members did leave the Union following intense pressure from senior management, it is encouraging to note that the FBU in Cleveland has more members now than at the start of the dispute.

Mr Doyle. Wake up from your fantasy world, smell the coffee and get back to reality.

Some 300 delegates from around the UK debated a range of issues at the Union's first 'annual' conference in two years in Southport last month. At the top of the agenda was pay

What do we want? A pay formula ...

PAY

The Executive Council (EC) will consult members on all options, including strike action, if employers refuse to continue the pay formula for 2007 without detrimental strings attached, delegates agreed.

Representatives from the UK's 58 brigades overwhelmingly backed an emergency resolution from the EC that noted "with concern the statement to the House of Commons on 1 March 2007 from the Chancellor regarding public sector pay. The government's intention to restrict public sector pay increases to below 2% for 2007 will increase hardship in our public services".

Period of stability

As far as the fire service was concerned, "this approach follows four years of rapid change," the EC resolution continued, and the "Fire and Rescue Service would benefit from a period of stability". This, delegates



Matt Wrack: Deliver the pay formula for 2007

agreed, would be helped by the application in 2007 of the pay formula tied to the average pay rises of the associated and professional technical (APT) grouping of

workers agreed under the 2003 pay and conditions agreement.

However, "should the employers choose to destabilise the service by refusing to pay the increase determined by the operation of the pay formula without detrimental changes to conditions of service, then the Executive Council are instructed to fully consult with members on all options, including strike action".

Brigade reps also supported a resolution from Strathclyde which instructed the EC to "ensure the current pay formula that links annual pay rises in the Fire Service to the average pay rise achieved by the associate, professional and technical group of workers is retained" and which would be "without prejudice to any existing pay, conditions or national agreements." The Strathclyde resolution urged "all members to support whatever action is necessary to achieve this, up to and including strike action."

Proposing the EC resolution General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The Government argues that it is inflationary to give public sector workers a 2% pay rise. But it was OK to increase city bonuses by 16% last year to an astonishing £19 billion – a figure that dwarfs the entire budget of the UK fire and rescue service. And it was OK to say chief officers should get a 16% pay rise. It's one rule for them, one rule for us. It's completely unfair.

Deliver the formula

"A pay formula has served the service well for most of the last 25 years. It has produced stability. The Executive Council position is that the fire service could do with a bit of stability. We say to employers: deliver the pay formula for 2007.

"This matter can be resolved. We are keen to pursue negotiations. Nobody wants to see conflicts in the service. We don't want a fight but if we are forced into a fight then we'll take that fight on and we will win it."

PICTURES: ANDREW BARRET





Control Staff National Committee: The Government's regional control plans were among the top debates at conference

TUC leader calls for a rethink on FireControl

TUC GENERAL SECRETARY

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber backed the Union's call for the pay formula to continue for at least the 2007 settlement and called on the Government to have a "fundamental rethink" about its regional FireControl project.

In a wide-ranging speech that was critical of the Government for failing to tackle inequality in Britain and for its public sector reforms, Mr Barber also slammed the use of IRMPs to pursue cuts in many brigades, creating a "postcode lottery" in fire cover.

"With a new settlement due in July, the FBU is right to look for the stability of another long-term deal, right to seek the continuation of the pay formula," he said.

Strong case

"You certainly have a strong case to make. Time and again, firefighters have been expected to adapt to change, update skills and respond to new challenges. The past few years have arguably seen the biggest upheavals in the history of the fire service, an apparently endless cycle of reform, restructuring and reorganisation.

"The work you do is uniquely challenging. As we saw in London on July 7 2005, you are sometimes faced with the most



Brendan Barber: Postcode lottery

desperate of circumstances. And it is absolutely right that you should be well rewarded for what you do."

Referring to the damning conclusions on FireControl of the MPs on the Department for Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Select Committee, the serious failings highlighted by the independent Institute of Public Finance report and the concerns about regional controls raised by chief officers, Mr Barber also said: "Ministers need to look at the evidence again; to focus on what really works."

He also touched on the IRMPs: "The impact is becoming clear. From Suffolk to the West Midlands, from Staffordshire to Cleveland, IRMPs have often been used as a justification for damaging cuts. In effect replacing national standards of cover with a postcode lottery."

Fire minister admits Government's failings, promises to do better

FIRE MINISTER

Angela Smith, the first fire minister to attend an FBU Annual Conference in six years, admitted that the Government had not done enough on employment relations in the fire service and had communicated its policies poorly, making a commitment to delegates at FBU Annual Conference to improve on both fronts.

"Employment relations could have been better over the last few years. I believe we have a joint interest in promoting a period of constructive stability in employment relations.

"We need to focus on better engagement at every level and we have just not put enough effort into this in the past. I also believe we could do much more to improve communications as poor understanding has not helped," she told Conference.

The minister also acknowledged that: "We are seeing an increasing demand for FRS services. The scale is also changing and increasing. We also need to look at the challenges climate change brings, not only flooding but heathland fires. And we have to accept that terrorists will go on plotting to perpetrate atrocities in ways we can only – but must – imagine. We have to expect the unexpected."

No additional funding

However, the minister did not offer any additional funding, preferring to highlight what she claimed to be a 30% increase in central government finance to the service since 1997, and in particular, investments in New Dimension equipment. She also called for more co-operation



Angela Smith: commitment to improvement

between fire brigades, but pledged that the "Government has no plans to force, to lead or to push for the merger of fire services".

Key issue

Accepting that the FireControl project was one of the key issues of disagreement between the Union and the Government, the minister said she "did understand the concerns raised both from the [fire service] profession and the public," and that the Government would take on "many" of these concerns, seeking to "minimise the impact on staff."

On continual professional development (CPD), the minister confirmed the principle of "pensionability" but said that there were still ongoing discussions about the details and that the Government would be consulting the Firefighters' Pension Committee before making the changes. She said that pensionability would be backdated to 1 April.

All Annual Conference decisions and the final agenda are available on www.fbu.org.uk

Existing policy to stand

CO-RESPONDING

Annual Conference reaffirmed existing FBU policy on co-responding, overwhelmingly rejecting an EC emergency resolution calling for the Union to start negotiations at the NJC to address the Union's concerns on this issue, including payment for co-responding, and to place current policy under review.

Conference agreed a resolution, presented by Merseyside, which welcomed "the Liverpool employment tribunal of 1 May 2007, regarding actions taken against the FBU by former members who were subject to internal union discipline for continuing to co-respond in breach of FBU policy" as well as "the court of appeal decision of 27 February 2007 regarding the contractual position with regard to co-responding" and called for a reaffirmation of policy agreed at the 2001, 2002 and 2004 annual conferences.

Union concerns

The EC resolution that was rejected welcomed the court of appeal ruling, and highlighted Union concerns such as the lack of protection for legal claims; training; the negative impact on fire cover and in ambulance cover; the lack of funding; and the lack of a national agreement on co-responding. But it said that: "Employers had approached the FBU seeking negotiations on this issue" and "given the decision of the Courts there is now an opportunity for meaningful negotiations in order to resolve our concerns – and those of the public – regarding co-responder schemes within UK Fire and Rescue Services."

In its resolution, the EC was proposing a moratorium on the application of internal Union discipline procedures in respect of current co-responder policy during NJC negotiations, although during this period FBU members would still be advised not to participate in any co-responding schemes and the Union would oppose any existing or newly proposed scheme. Any nationally negotiated proposals on co-responder schemes would have been subject to full consultation of the FBU membership before final decision.



Ruben Linares from Venezuela's UNT trade union confederation beside General Secretary Matt Wrack tells conference of the social gains of the country's 'Bolivarian Revolution'

Guests pay tribute to firefighters' professionalism and dedication

TRIBUTES

Guests at Annual Conference joined delegates in paying tribute to the professionalism and dedication of FBU members and in highlighting the dangers of the job, recalled by the tragic deaths of firefighters Michael Miller, Jeff Wornham, Brian Wembridge and Geoff Wicker in the line of duty.

Fire minister Angela Smith, told delegates she understood "how tough the job can be even in controlled situations – let alone in the real world".

Remarkable achievement

Remembering firefighters who had paid the ultimate price, she said: "Thankfully, such deaths are rare but nonetheless a terrible loss

for colleagues and communities." She also paid tribute to the professionalism of the service, describing the response to Buncefield with no loss of life, as an "altogether remarkable achievement by Britain's firefighters".

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber recalling Geoff Wicker and Brian Wembridge, whom he described as "committed family men, respected colleagues, dedicated professionals," said: "When the call came out that fateful day last December, they were among the first on the scene at Marlie Farm, doing their jobs with skill and courage."

He added: "What happened that day is a stark reminder of the risks you face day in, day out, protecting property, protecting people, saving lives. The service you provide is difficult, demanding and dangerous".

Regional Union Learning Fund reps Bill Hendy and Jack Monro: With Government funding possibly running out next year, delegates called on the Executive Council to lead an examination of the possibility of mainstreaming lifelong learning into the FBU at all levels





THE ROAD TO

IRAQ

**6 people. 2 fire appliances. 3,000 miles. 10 days.
How and why we did it**



Words and pictures by Duncan Milligan

The task was simple to explain: take a team of six people and two fire appliances, leave England, travel over 3,000 miles through Europe into Iraq and down to Baghdad. It would mean passing through an area of Turkey with a low-level guerrilla war going on and which, when we arrived, resembled an area under occupation.

Security concerns were such within Iraq and for our journey through Turkey that we could not flag up either our destination or route in advance. Few people in the FBU were aware of the trip.

We would have to keep out of trouble and avoid attention by travelling in two bright red fire appliances – one for delivery to the Iraqi Kurdistan Workers Syndicate Union (IKWSU) in Iraqi Kurdistan and the other to the Iraqi Assembly in Baghdad – with ‘Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue’ emblazoned across them and with working sirens and blue lights. Only the Fire Brigades Union would have attempted it. And no, we couldn’t stay out of trouble.

Our departure date was set for Sunday 24 September 2006, returning through Turkey and flying back from Istanbul on Wednesday 4 October. It would be ten days of a gruelling schedule travelling on 20-year-old appliances that were not going to have the creature comforts of modern long-haul coaches.

The team of six were three serving or former West Midlands firefighters and FBU officials who were also the drivers: Mick Henn (serving); Phil Goalby (retired) and Norman Breckenridge (retired). Also on the trip were Brian Joyce (former south west EC member); Val Salmon (Greater Manchester control and at that time EC member for control staff) and Duncan Milligan (the FBU’s head of research and communications).

Hunted

The delivery of the two appliances was part of a bigger picture of support for the firefighters and trade union movement in both Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq. On this occasion, part symbolic and part practical, to assist Iraqi firefighters in serving their communities, and help to promote the trade union movement in both countries. The contribution of the

FBU has had a positive impact across Iraqi and Kurdish trade unions. The General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW), is emerging from years of being underground, hunted and oppressed by Saddam and his Baath Party.

Brian Joyce, who has been to Iraq on several occasions, explained why the FBU was delivering the appliances: “The FBU was in Iraq within weeks of the end of the initial hostilities which followed the British and US-led invasion in 2003.

“There had been little to no investment in the fire service through most of Saddam’s reign, he preferred instead to equip his military for his various wars and to maintain his vicious and repressive regime.

“The aftermath of the invasion and the insurgency which is increasing each day is also taking its toll and has brought even more misery to the people of Iraq. But I don’t believe in sitting back and doing nothing just because something looks difficult – that’s the instinct of anyone in the fire service.

“When everyone else is heading away from the trouble, our training takes us towards it. Iraqi firefighters are trying to work in fairly desperate

We had advance warning of the dangers of the last leg of our journey through Turkey

conditions. They needed help and we have made a small contribution.

“The FBU went to Iraq when others were, quite naturally, reluctant to go. In that sense we have, to a degree, led the way for other trade unions, by forging links and supporting unions in Iraq.”

Brian Joyce, modestly personified, had caused a stir on previous visits to deliver fire kit and helped raise the FBU’s profile within Iraq to near legendary proportions.

On previous visits the FBU’s efforts in helping to equip the Iraqi fire service had made national news across Iraq because it was so unusual. Brian, with his shock of grey hair, had become the well-known face of the FBU in Iraq during his five previous visits to deliver kit.

His visits to Baghdad and Basra were at a time when foreigners were



Once on mainland Europe we hammered on down through Serbia

being kidnapped and killed. Safety was never far from Brian’s thoughts and his concerns were to remain for this team.

We were warned in advance about the dangers of the last leg of our journey through Turkey. The Kurdish PKK were active and we were advised not to travel in the hours of darkness – “not in the evening after dark and not early in the morning before dawn, it is dangerous to travel at these times.” I had been told before leaving the UK by an Iraqi Kurd who had done the journey himself many times. This was confirmed by other sources en route.

The Kurds had been gassed, killed, tortured and persecuted by Saddam. But the Turks and Iranians had historically got in on the act and were not supportive of the creation of the Kurdish region of the Iraqi Federation in northern Iraq, established under UN protection after the first Gulf War. Just before we left the UK, there were reports that the Iraqi Kurdish region had been subjected to artillery shelling from Iran and that the situation was getting worse.

Whatever was happening in the Iraqi Federation, it was becoming



BACKING IRAQI FIRE CREWS

Brian Joyce has been several times to Iraq to meet local fire crews and representatives from the Iraqi trade union movement. His early visits found a trade union movement emerging from years of repression under Saddam Hussein and an Iraqi fire service in a desperate state.

He explains: "In those early trips I found people in Baghdad trying to get on with their lives amid a background of gunfire and explosions. There was desperate poverty to add to that as well as being effectively in the middle of a war zone.

"Firefighters are firefighters. There is a bond which connects us, we do the same job and take the same risks wherever we are in the world. "Iraqis join their fire service for the same reasons we do. They are committed in the same way as we are and serve their communities as we do.

"In Iraq I found firefighters were trying to tackle fires wearing only sandals, t-shirts and boilersuits and suffering horrific burns as a result. Like firefighters all over the world all they were trying to do was save lives and help their people, but

they were doing that in appalling and dangerous circumstances.

"We could not in all conscience stand back and do nothing. That is not the instinct of anyone in the fire service anywhere in the world. But supplying kit could only deal with the symptoms. They also needed and wanted free and democratic trade unions and we have assisted with that.

"They asked us to come back, we promised we would and we have. The FBU has organised – with the help and assistance of a few brigades – numerous deliveries of fire kit, uniforms and protective equipment including helmets, tunics and boots.

"As we delivered the PPE we met with the firefighters and explained how the kit worked. The reaction was amazing. In a small way we have given them some hope.

"The people need help and they need hope. There is a role, however small and insignificant, for us there.

"We've done a lot of work and the next logical step was delivering some appliances. After these we hope to deliver some others."



Brian Joyce had been to Iraq before and promised to help the country's firefighters

TIMELINE

Sunday 24 September

Dover through France for first stop over that evening in Belgium

Monday 25 September

through Belgium to Germany stopover north of Ravensburg

Tuesday 26 September

through rest of Germany, Austria, Slovenia and stop in Zagreb, Croatia

Wednesday 27 September

through rest of Croatia through to Serbia, stop in southern Serbia short of the Bulgarian border, having skirted Kosovo.

Thursday 28 September

through Serbian/Bulgarian border then through Bulgaria to border with Turkey (arrive later afternoon at Turkish border).

Friday 29 September

at 00.30 get through Turkish border, travel through the night and all day. Get lost around Ankara and then make it to outside Kirrikale for an overnight stop.

Saturday 30 September

travel more difficult and one pump breaks down in Kayseri, but make it through and stop at Metalya overnight.

Sunday 1 October

from Metalya to Diyarbakir where we meet up with Abdhullah Mohsin and the guide who will take us into Iraq. Head for the border crossing into the northern Kurdish region of Iraq. Held on the border 200 metres short of Iraq from mid-afternoon.

Monday 2 October

late morning, released and arrived Dahok, Iraq at 3pm. We had only slept for 21 hours in the previous 132.

Tuesday 3 October

back over border to Diyarbakir where we stay overnight.

Wednesday 4 October

plane from Diyarbakir to Istanbul and from Istanbul to London Heathrow.

clear that there was a lot more to it than death squads and bombings. There was also a lot more to it than the UK-US-led invasion and the continuing presence of the coalition military.

Several systems were in place to help us stay safe during our journey. Each day we would call in at an agreed time and positively confirm our position with GMC fire control. This was one of the roles and responsibilities of Val and, if we did go missing, it would be known quickly.

In addition, we would keep in touch every day with the FBU head office who would advise us on any new risks identified in the areas we were travelling through or were about to travel through. This included not only the situation in Iraq, but in the Kurdish area of Turkey which was volatile and the Kurdish region of northern Iraq which was surrounded by hostile and, at times, aggressive neighbours.

If the situation did start to go even more pear-shaped security wise, we would re-assess whether we would go into Iraq and if so, how far. There was nothing we could do in terms of concealment as two bright red 15-ton fire appliances would stand out as they are designed to.

If the appliances had been covered in the disrupted pattern dark green of European camouflage or disrupted light brown pattern of desert camouflage they would look like military vehicles, potentially making them a target. If we dressed in camouflage and wore flak jackets we could also look like military personnel.

Like the other drivers, Mick Henn drove 2,000 miles in 10 days



Neither would be a good idea in a potentially hostile south east Turkey or in Iraq itself. Bright red it was then. So there could be no mistaking or hiding what we were or from where we came.

Perhaps any hostiles would be too gobsmacked to do anything if they saw two large bright red fire engines hammering towards them. What we were not sure about is what we were going to do in Iraq or what to expect, as the situation could change in a matter of hours. All there was to go on was the daily news reports of

OUR ROUTE





death and destruction as the country headed towards open and obvious civil war. However, once we met our contacts in Iraqi Kurdistan we knew they would be aware of the current situation and would make it very clear to us whether it was safe to continue or if our journey would be coming to a sudden end.

But what reality would we find behind the news reports, when we got to the end of our journey? It felt as if we may be heading towards some modern-day Heart of Darkness, a real-life remake of Apocalypse Now with a new version of a crazed Colonel Kurtz to meet at the end of the journey.

In Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and in Coppola's Apocalypse Now – which was an updated film of the book with the action transplanted from Africa to Vietnam – the main characters travelled by boat (the book is narrated from a boat on the Thames).

We were going by Eurotunnel and motorway, perhaps the modern-day equivalents of the boat and water. Ready when I arrive at the Eurotunnel terminal near Dover at midday on Sunday 24 September 2006 are two spruced up Perkins pumps. Phil Goalby, Brian Joyce, Mick Henn, Val Salmon and Norman Breckenridge had already been there for a few hours undertaking one

final check of all kit and ensuring the travel and Customs documents were in perfect order.

The appliances may be 20 years old but they pretty much looked the part. Both came complete with a range of kit including roof ladder, 13.5m ladder, 70mm and 45mm hose, hose reel, spare hose reel branch, 15m and 30m line, two dividing breeches, a zip gun, reciprocating saw, an EPCO kit and hydraulic cutting equipment.

Perkins had carried out some refurbishment to get them into reasonable mechanical order. Whether these two pumps could do over 3,000 miles across Europe and into Iraq was another matter.

Could the Perkins diesel engine in one and the Cummings diesel engine in the other survive the trip over some challenging terrain and over distances they were never built for? This was not going to be a five-minute dash on British tarmac, but a very long haul over who knew what kind of roads.

Safety

A quick glance down the paperwork confirmed we were on a humanitarian mission delivering two fire engines and associated equipment to a Mr S Hussein in Baghdad. The name rings an alarm bell.

A closer inspection reveals it to be an entirely different Mr S Hussein

who could not be further in every way from the other S Hussein who at that time was still being kept carefully alive so he could be hanged later. Our one was a Mr Subhi A Hussein, a member of the Baghdad Assembly – the Iraqi Parliament – who was to take formal delivery of an appliance on behalf of the Iraqi fire service.

Over a last coffee in the Eurotunnel terminal there is a final call to Mark Dunne, Merseyside FBU, and Kevin Brown, FBU north east regional secretary to check up on developments in the Merseyside dispute. Neither reports any problems.

We departed with the two appliances in separate following trains.

As we pass through the French side of passport control the French border official looks at the paperwork.

"You are going to Iraq?" he asks, incredulous. It was not to be the last time our journey raised an eyebrow.

The safety of those on the journey

**The team were delivering
the fire appliances to a
Mr S Hussein in Baghdad.
The name rang alarm bells**

was never far from Brian Joyce's mind. He told me: "This trip took eight months to plan and organise, all the funding had to be found through donations, the same for the two appliances and firefighting equipment they carried. Passage across the channel, routes, toll roads, calculating the diesel required, different currencies, Customs documents, letters and documents for the borders, letters written to each of the countries' embassies we were travelling through. Finding a company willing to provide personal insurance for the crews and green cards for the drivers all had to be prepared. All paper work had to be correct; we could not afford to make any mistakes.

"There was also the kit we might need for the journey ourselves, attempting to cover all eventualities that may occur, extra diesel, emergency food, sleeping bags, stove, first aid kits, walkie-talkies for use between machines, even tents. The

list was endless.

"The preparation was extremely important; if we got that right we could, hopefully, deal with most events and situations. All the team had different parts to play and understood the issues and problems we might face through the various meetings that took place prior to the off.

"On my previous visits my safety and security was dealt with by my comrades in Iraq and Kurdistan, they would assess the risk and make the decisions about travel arrangements and where I stayed while in Iraq. Iraq is clearly a dangerous environment and precautions have to be taken. You have to be aware and stay aware, but I trusted the people I was with.

"On my last visit to Basra whilst I was distributing fire kit, I was suddenly told it was time to go back to my hotel room. It was only 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I was told not to answer my door and stay in my room.

"As an added precaution a guard was placed there all night with an AK47. Early the next morning my stay in Basra was cut short as I left the city. I discovered later that an American businessman had been kidnapped from a hotel down the road by insurgents dressed as security police. Also within a short period of time several bombs exploded in Basra, these were the first of many to occur over the following months.

"It became common procedure; anyone who called at my hotel room always pre-arranged it with me beforehand. If they hadn't, the knock on the door stayed unanswered."

Since then the situation in Iraq had become even worse and was deteriorating by the day. To make matters worse, the low-level guerrilla war between Turkey and Kurdish separatists in the south east Kurdish region of Turkey was beginning to warm up.

"We were going to have to be careful and make sensible decisions about our own safety," said Brian. "It was not possible to be certain about what the state of play would be in Iraq when we got there – that was more than a week away."

The first part of our journey – by Eurotunnel – was to prove the easiest. An amazing feat of civil engineering, it is also a magnificent symbol of modern European unity and human endeavour.

When we get to mainland Europe

from our little island off the north shore of Europe, history steps on our toes immediately. Almost every road sign and every map-reading told a little bit of a longer and bloodier European history.

Signs to the Somme, Dunkirk, Waterloo, Ypres, Bastogne. Later, there would be signs to Berlin and Nuremberg. The further we went on our journey and the chronology of history became closer. Sometimes much closer: Slovenia, Zagreb in Croatia, Belgrade in Serbia, skirting Kosovo with recent memories of conflict, massacres and bloodshed.

The remnants of the old Yugoslavia are perhaps Europe's own version of Iraq. Just the names of these places jogged memories of the darker side of we humans.

We have the skills to forge European unity out of wars. To build and do great things. But we are also capable of the worst stupidity, utter savagery and the destruction of what we have taken years – even centuries – to build by our endeavours.

A bomb or a missile destroys in seconds what it may have taken years to build. Destruction is quick and simple. Construction takes longer and is more difficult.

We can look down on the savagery of Iraq with an "Ah well, they are not civilised like us Europeans, what can you expect" approach. We can so quickly and conveniently forget our own European past of war, gas chambers and the very recent brutality of what happened in the former Yugoslavia.

Emergency

Our journey past and through former battlegrounds is gentler than for those who took part in them. Our first stop is Belgium. That evening over a bite to eat Norman, Mick and Phil gave me a quick run down of what is on the pumps. While we can remove our personal possessions, we can't take operational equipment off and the lockers can't be secured over night.

Phil says he has a two-ring gas stove and some basic food supplies for emergencies, plus coffee and tea. "You don't know what is going to happen, so it's best to be prepared," he explains.

Norman tells me there are emergency sleeping bags and tents. "We don't know what we are going to face, we could have a breakdown in the middle of nowhere, but at least we





can get our heads down.”

Mick, the third driver, explains the extra fuel supplies we are carrying. “We’ve got four large cans of diesel for emergencies. The pumps will only do 10 to 12 miles a gallon so they’ll be thirsty.”

“We’ve enough extra diesel in the cans for each of them to be able to do another 90 miles. You never know what is going to happen.”

I don’t say anything, but wonder if this is not all a bit too cautious and over the top. What could happen? What I didn’t know at the time is that we were to make use of all of these. My travel companions, far from being over-cautious and fussy, knew a lot more than I did and were properly prepared.

They were also using many years of fire service training and experience. If plan A failed, what was plan B? They had one. If that failed what was plan C? They had one of those as well.

As we progressed on our journey I got the impression that my colleagues probably had fallback plans that took them through most of the letters in the alphabet. They were very experienced and practical people, which, as it turned out, was just as well.

The following morning we are on our way towards Germany heading east, then south.

We are just north of Ravensburg at 7.30pm and we stop for the night at a small motel by the side of the motorway. Our travel plan was simple and the same every day. Wake up, eat breakfast, check the pumps, jump in, get to the motorway, reach 60mph and stay at that for four hours. Stop for lunch, eat, check and fuel the pumps, jump in and get them up to 60mph for the next five hours.

It works and we batter along towards southern Europe. Through Germany, into Austria and then Slovenia. It all being European Union there are no borders and no border delays. The journey will be a cinch.

From coming off Eurotunnel we’ve been on toll roads almost non-stop. Chancing our arm at all the tollbooths we say we’re emergency vehicles and ask if we should be exempt. Those staffing the toll booths always smile and let us through.

This is just all too easy, although tiring. We’ll make Iraq with days to spare. No problem. Then we get to the Slovenian-Croatian border where we come to a halt for the first time.



Mick Henn cleans off the windscreen at a brief stop in Austria. Mile after mile of driving was broken for cups of tea brewed up in the back of a cab on the two-ring stove



Croatia is not in the EU, hence the border and customs checks.

The Croatians seem to have privatised their Customs. Their job seems to involve getting as much money out of you as they can.

The first official says we count as freight and wants to charge us 870 euros. Brian Joyce is having none of it and brandishes the letter confirming we are delivering humanitarian aid to the Iraqi fire service.

The official is not impressed and then suggests we need to pay for a Customs 'minder' to travel with us across Croatia with us picking up their hotel costs as well. Brian and Phil head off to track down another official; she is not helpful to start with. The explanations and production of paperwork continues, they bring her

to see the appliances. She smiles and tells us to go through. We have just saved 870 euros.

We head off. The delay costs us an hour and it is getting dark. We plough on to the Croatian capital Zagreb and stop for the night. There is an intriguing reminder of the country's recent past on the walls.

There are instructions on what to do if there is a fire with a little 'fire' illustration. Then there are instructions on what to do if we are bombed, with a little illustration of two planes dropping bombs.

It finishes with instructions on what to do if the hotel is invaded by troops, with a little illustration of troops carrying guns. It is a stark reminder of what had recently taken place in the former Yugoslavia.

In Croatia they won't let us get through the road tolls without paying. And it's not cheap. The last toll road cost us 33 euros for each appliance. Within a few hours we are at the Serbian border.

This could be where our problems start. The Serbians don't like the fact – and who can blame them – that the British carried out many bombing raids and caused a lot of destruction to their country. It would be perfectly understandable if they didn't welcome us with open arms.

Armed

We pull up at our usual spot at borders – which is the non-freight section – and stop. The border guard, who is armed and has more of a military air, is not happy at what we have done.



Having expected a degree of hostility in Serbia, the opposite is true. The public and local police wave to us

Driver Phil Goalby checks his mirrors as we leave one stop. We had a daily diet of toll roads but also areas of natural beauty, even in the rain

Passing through the roadworks at last we see a place at the side of the road. It has a garage at the side of it and looks like a family-run business. I mentally cross my fingers and hope – with the proximity to Kosovo – that they do not have any family reasons why they would turn us away because we are British.

With none of us speaking fluent Serbian, communications don't get off to a good start. Luckily for us there are two Bulgarians who speak both very good English and Serbian. It is indeed a family-run guest house, they have enough rooms for us and we are welcome. It's late and we ask for food or a nearby restaurant.

There isn't one. They have no beer for us but they will send their son to get some. An older and younger woman – who later turn out to be mother-in-law and daughter-in-law – have a quick discussion. The Bulgarians translate: "They will supply food from their own kitchen. It will be good. They will make you breakfast too."

Leaking oil

Is their garage open? Another family member says – through the Bulgarians – no problem. He doesn't mind taking a look at the oil leaking from the axle of one of the pumps.

He and Norman, while speaking no common language, go off to take a look. Norman has been concerned for some time about the oil leak from one of the axles. He, Phil and Mick have been calculating how much oil is being lost from the axle. The obvious concern is that the axle will seize up in the Turkish desert region and we'll be knackered.

Later we get the news that there is no major problem and as long as we keep an eye on the amount of oil leaking from it we should be OK. The food is taking longer than we thought.

When it arrives we are stunned. Starters are a huge plate of yellow peppers stuffed with feta-like cheese. Plus salad and beautifully presented fresh tomatoes.

Then comes pork. The chicken arrives. Thin cutlets fried in a very thin pancake type mixture. Best of all a crate of the local beer arrives. Later still comes the slivovic (plum brandy) which goes down well.

The Bulgarians, our translators, are jovial and talkative company. If all Bulgarians are like these two, they will be a very welcome addition to the

He directs us to a small single storey building and shouts instructions to his colleague, finishing by nearly spitting the word "Anglicky!", the local word for English. Expecting the local officials to take that as a signal to mess us around for a few hours, we are pleasantly surprised when they don't. Within 20 minutes our documents are stamped and we are through into Serbia.

Not a word of hostility from anyone. We attract attention on our journey but people are waving to us. So do the local police. The cost of the toll roads in Serbia are the most expensive we have come across. But then again, the British and Americans bombed their road bridges, power stations and other infrastructure, so they have to get the money back to

pay the cost of rebuilding. Having expected a degree of hostility in Serbia, we find the opposite is true.

A few more hours and we start seeing the road signs to Kosovo where the most recent problems have been, and where NATO troops are still stationed. We are determined to get as close to the Bulgarian border as we can before nightfall.

The team is tired, but good spirits and sense of humour is always present. We press on after dark and find the roads in south Serbia have the biggest set of roadworks we have seen. There appear to be mile after mile of tunnels being cut through rock in bite-sized chunks to make the roads wider. In total darkness, it is tiring and we're on the lookout for a guest house or motel.

EU. The warmth of the Serbians and Bulgarians has helped make it a very happy evening. It was to be the last pleasant evening for several days.

Increasingly exhausted by our journey, and filled with food, beer and slivovic, we each go off in turn to bed. The next morning is the usual routine: wake, breakfast, check the pumps, check the fuel hit the road, get up to 60mph and stay there.

We're at the Serbian-Bulgarian border in a hour. Again, no problems from either the Serbs or the Bulgarians and we sail through. It's amazing how helpful people can be when you're on a fire appliance. All we need is a form on the Bulgarian side declaring the pumps are disinfected. It costs us 9 euros.

Aggressive

Our aim is to get through Bulgaria into Turkey and as close to Istanbul as we can by nightfall. We're on schedule. The team agrees to have a quick stop off to swim in the sea as we skirt Istanbul and the Med. We'll have time.

We hit the Bulgarian-Turkish border at 4.30pm and the first phases of the border are no problem. We end up in the car queue for Turkish Customs which does not seem to be moving very quickly.

Brian Joyce jumps out the cab and works his magic with the man who turns out to be Chief of Customs. He fast tracks us and motions to his officials to sort us out and goes off at the end of his shift.

We were discussing among ourselves what we'd do later that evening when the problems kicked in. The officials who had come on shift would not speak to us. They would not even look at us.

It was difficult to fathom. The Turkish Government had been behaving in recent years. Midnight Express? Not any more sir, we have moved on from that. It was sprucing up its act in attempts to get into the European Union. Welcome to the new Turkey.

Unlike the Serbians whom we had bombed, Turkey is an ally. Unlike with the Serbians, we had not attacked the Turks since Gallipoli in 1915. A thousand welcomes to the new Turkey. No over bearing corrupt state any more. All that's gone.

Civil rights abuses? Oh no. In the past. Welcome to the new Turkey.

We watch as everyone else passes through. The car queue shortens. Our

gentle and diplomatic approaches have not worked and we start gentle hassling. Smiles and handshakes do nothing to melt the aggressive attitude of these officials. The first hints of a problem. Shoulder shrugs from the officials and suggestions we might have to pay "transit fees". Yes, they understood we were humanitarian aid and not a business but what could they do? Rules were rules although they would not say what those rules were.

Phil started brewing up some tea and coffee on his two-ring stove. Then some curry. Thank God someone had the common sense to bring the stove and supplies along.

More contact with the officials. We stressed the Chief of Customs had told them to sort us out. Well, came the reply, we can wait until he comes back on shift then. When was that? 9.15 next morning came the reply, the sly smile dripping with insincerity thrown in for free.

One official who would help said they would do what they could, but the paperwork had to be very precise. Otherwise we could have problems when we crossed the border from Turkey to Iraq.

We waited and watched them search the other vehicles as they passed through. They became very aggressive and nasty with people if they were challenged in any way.

Our outward show of good humour hides simmering frustration and anger at hours of delays at border

One youngster was caught with some minor bottled contraband and was marched off, being screamed at by one official, to dump it in the bin himself.

They appeared to be particularly obnoxious with their fellow Turks and Bulgarians. They were not like that with us.

Other officials suggest we may have to wait until morning. Can you sleep on the pumps and wait until morning? Not really, mate.

The team goes into a huddle. It is becoming obvious that we may have to give the officials a bung to get us through. We assess that the threat that we might have to sleep on the

It would not be a journey on foreign soil if we did not get lost. Speaking no Turkish (and the local speaking no English) we relied on Phil Goalby being fluent in Armish: It's up the road, left at the first junction, right at the second set of lights and keep going straight on. You can't miss it.



pumps and wait until morning is to help open our wallets. We are not happy about it, but any delay could threaten the whole trip. Our flights back were in a few days time and we had nearly 1,000 miles to cover across Turkey.

Eventually, the officials introduce us to a third man who speaks some English. "I am not a Customs official," he tells me. "I am a Customs broker, you understand?"

Perfectly. The officials don't want to be bribed directly. He is the go-between. We had seen him working very closely with the officials for several hours. So closely we had assumed he was one. Our outward show of good humour hides our simmering frustration and anger as several hours have now passed.

It takes 10 minutes and 12 euros for each appliance to get the proper official papers. Then there is the rest of the pay-off in the shadows behind the appliances. That's another \$50 US dollars and another 50 euros, many times more than the official cost.



Welcome to the new Turkey. Have a nice day.

We had been stopped between passport control and customs for seven hours, it was near midnight and we would now struggle to find a place for the night. While we wait to go through the final border controls we agree to head for the first motel or hotel we find and try and get rooms.

At half past midnight we are over the border, angry, tired, cursing Turkish Customs and anxious at the impact the delay will have. It cost us three hours driving time but has a greater impact on the schedule. And we can't find a place to stop for the night.

We take directions, detours, get lost trying to find supposed hotels. None are found and we lose more time.

Go to next plan: drive through the night with the drivers doing a rota of two hours on and one hour off – to try and sleep on the floor on the back of the cab. So we batter on towards Istanbul and cross the Dardanelles in

almost total darkness.

In the gloom the only thing it is possible to distinguish are the hundreds of small mosques lit by either white light or green light. Their design appears to be based in Istanbul's world famous and beautiful 'blue mosque'. In the darkness it is possible to see hundreds of these little gems of beautiful architecture dotted all along our route.

At 5am we take a morning stop at a motorway service station for some coffee and a snack. We all look exhausted. How the drivers have kept going is astonishing, but we batter on.

Driving all night we get to Ankara in daylight. We are now deep in central Turkey and the road signs start to become more confusing.

Warnings

Exhausted and tired, we get lost for over an hour and then eventually find the road to Kirrikale which we make by late afternoon. We can either belt on or try to get some rest. Taking directions from a local we get lost

looking for a hotel and get on the wrong road heading in the wrong direction.

Hammering along a dusty road an amazing hotel is by the side of the road. It's the best we've seen on the journey and they have rooms. It appears to be run by the Turkish equivalent of the AA or RAC and is the cheapest place we have stayed so far. Stroke of luck.

The strongest drink we can get is the local black sweet tea.

The staff are very friendly, the food is good. Over some tea the locals give us directions to Diyarbakir in south east Turkey where we are to meet up with representatives of the Iraqi trade unions who will cross the border into Iraq with us.

They warn us to avoid travelling between the towns of Metalya to Diyarbakir in the hours of darkness. The Kurdish PKK are active and, they say, there is a significant Turkish Army presence. In the morning we're up at first light, breakfast, run through the checks, ensure we are

fuelled up, get on the main road at 6.45am heading for the next main town of Deyabesir, hit 60mph and stay at it. We need to batter on to make up some time.

Just south of Kirrikale we fall foul of the mobile speed cameras of the local police. We're very lucky they have only clocked us doing 18 kilometres an hour over the limit as just before this we were 70 kilometres an hour over the local limit.

It's a fair cop. The police are very polite and efficient. They check our Customs papers, charge a small on-the-spot fine for speeding and send us on our way. Our attempts at making up time have only led to a further delay we could ill afford.

Suitably, and deservedly chastised by the local police, we head on for Deyabesir which turns out to be a very major city. It is just after noon and we spot a garage where we can fuel up the pumps and have a quick bite to eat.

After refuelling, one appliance won't start. The local garage manager, frustrated that we are blocking off one of his fuel pumps, jumps in the cab and releases the air brake and now the appliance cannot even be towed for repairs by the other appliance. We are stuck.

The team is becoming very frustrated. We can't speak Turkish and they can't speak English. Nearly an hour goes by and we can't repair the fault although Phil, Mick and Norman have between them deduced it is electrical in nature rather than mechanical.

Phil Goalby dredges up some of his German and tries it on the locals. Contact! One of the local Turks has a friend who is an electrical engineer for Bosch and he will phone him on his mobile. He arrives with another mechanic, does his checks, gets the appliance started and takes it to his workshop with us following.

Garageland

None of us want to break down in the middle of nowhere. They do a thorough check at the workshop – in what appears to be Deyabesir's "garageland". During this time the call to prayer is broadcast from the local mosque but is rapidly and entirely drowned out by the wail of a fire appliance siren accidentally set off by a Turkish mechanic. I thank Allah it was not one of us. We take time out for a tea and coffee, made on the two-ring stove out of sight of the locals



And it would not have been a proper long journey without at least one mechanical breakdown. We were lucky it was during a fuel stop for diesel as we were leaving Deyabesir. The local Turks were very, helpful (despite no common language) and they managed to track down an electrical engineer. A few checks and tweaks and he got the appliance repaired enough for it to get to his main workshop. It was an area in Deyabesir, central Turkey, which can only be described as "garageland", a part of town with what seemed like hundreds of garages with thousands of mechanics. It was a minor fault with the electrical relay which was rapidly efficiently repaired for \$98 dollars.





who are observing Ramadan and are fasting.

With a total of another hour and a half delay and 98 dollars lighter, we leave Deyabesir and head off on the road to Diyabakir which is where we are meant to be at the end of today. Outside of town the landscape starts to change dramatically.

Dangerous

Before long we are in beautiful mountainous desert. The steep climbs and the twisting roads slow us down even more. The good news is the electrical repair is holding up and the oil leak from the axle is manageable.

Parts of the road are becoming little more than sand tracks. By dusk we have made it to Metalya and we discuss what to do. Brian is keen to keep on and try and make up time and get us back on track. But there are also fresh warnings through Head Office that the route from Metalya to Diyabakir is dangerous at night.

We find a hotel for the night and settle down. The entrance to the hotel has a detector for finding explosives.

**The call to afternoon prayer
is totally drowned by the
wail of our siren. I thank
Allah it was not our fault**

Perhaps the warnings were spot on. We agree to get up at first light and head off early. We must make Diyabakir then the Iraqi border the following day.

After five hours sleep we are off by 6am the following morning. A couple of miles out of town and we spot the first Turkish military control point but we are waved through without stopping. The landscape has changed again. It is now mountains and forests and lakes, similar to my native Scottish Highlands (except much warmer and without the midges).

All the major towns we have passed through in Turkey so far have an incredible amount of modern building work taking place. The evidence of modern flats, houses and new infrastructure going up is everywhere. It's like the whole place has been given the TV homes makeover treatment on a large scale.

We are making very good time on modern roads. Then just south of one

THE ROAD TO IRAQ

large lake there is one mountainous pass where the road runs through.

On this tight route I count over 20 mobile or fixed Turkish army checkpoints. Some have armoured cars, all are heavily armed and sandbagged. We are not stopped at any of them but they are stopping lots of cars.

A few miles through the pass and we start hitting villages in the predominantly Kurdish part of Turkey. This part of Turkey is very, very different. It is most certainly not on the regular tourist trail.

It looks starved of investment. Many of the homes look to be single room and of breezeblock construction with tin roofs and the roads are in poor condition. I have seen what potholes look like, but these – deep and large – are more akin to mining excavations.

Even the local mosques look run down. We see large scale use of donkey and cart as a means of transport. There is a significant Turkish military presence and there are regular mobile and permanent military checkpoints. Welcome to old-style Turkey, you're not going to have a nice day. No one is by the looks of it.

Having pressed on to Diyarbakir we meet up with Abdullah Muhsin, the international representative of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) and also the local driver and guide who will help get us down and into Iraq itself. The border is only three hours drive away and it is exciting to be so close to our destination.

Undercover

We had been up since 5am and had driven solidly for nearly six hours. At this rate we'd be over the border by 4pm, even with a lunch stop, and be a few hours into Iraq by nightfall, perhaps as far as Erbil.

If it had not been for the guide we'd have struggled to find our way through Diyarbakir and the road to the border. Maybe our luck has changed. It does, but not for the best. We stop at a garage about 12 miles north of the border which also has a little coffee shop. That's when they pounce.

A man described as an undercover police officer asks for our papers. He offers no ID himself and it might not be a good idea to start demanding it.

He calls a colleague on a mobile. When he arrives he declares our



This part of Turkey is starved of investment and most certainly not on the regular tourist trail. Left to right (main picture, foreground) Norman Breckenridge and Phil Goalby are briefed by Brian Joyce after the Turkish officials pounce



papers are wrong and says we'll not get through the border and we need to follow him to the next town. Maybe they will have to seize the fire appliances.

By the time we arrive in one of the dustiest and dirtiest towns with the worst pot-holed roads I have ever seen they have had a change of heart. With their invaluable assistance we might get over the border. We quickly realise they will want us to be grateful for their assistance. Perhaps very grateful.

Having photocopied our passports they lead us to the border, passing what seem like miles of parked trucks. Some drivers had clearly given up waiting and abandoned them to the desert.

At the border everyone appears to know the two as yet unidentified men who are our new friends. Staff working on the border shout greetings to them. Both have free

access to secure areas and have no problems getting us through passport control. They both walk around as if they own the place.

We are now between Turkish passport control and Turkish Customs. None of us has been given our passports back and there's a problem with our papers. It all has a familiar ring to it and we wonder if they'll try the same scam.

And yes, they do. The team plus Abdullah Muhsin, who joined us in Diyarbakir, were stuck between Turkish passport control and Turkish Customs. We have driven close to 3,000 miles across 10 countries and we're 200 metres short of our objective.

They have taken our passports and there is no sign of the officials. The official documentation shows we left Turkey after we'd passed through the passport control. In short, we've officially left. In reality we are in a No Man's Land between passport control and Customs, being unable to go back and being stopped from going forward.

The Turks don't appear to be bothered by what bits of international law they might be breaking. Welcome to the new Turkey.

Having been through the same scam getting in, we're a bit wiser

Officially, we have left
Turkey. In reality we
are being held in
No Man's Land



and tougher with the officials. The fire appliances, we tell them, remain official UK-state property until they are handed over to the Iraqis. They are therefore illegally holding state property.

We show the official documents certifying the appliances are old and no longer used by the British fire service but which were being given in humanitarian aid to fire crews in Iraq. We are not part of a commercial venture to sell the appliances. There had been no problems, we explain, at any Customs point until we reached Turkey.

No explanation was given as to why we were being held. Exactly what was wrong with the papers? If there was something wrong then how did we get through in the first place with papers supplied by Turkish Customs and which had been inspected by the police? Where were our passports? Under what authority were we being held?

And the replies came back. The man who could help had gone off shift and was not in again until the following morning. That sounded very familiar. The new computer system had broken down. That one was new. They were doing what they could, but this was a difficult problem.

During team huddles to discuss the situation we took the view that all the problems would go away if we gave them enough money and our time was running out. Welcome to the new Turkey. Give us a bribe.

The appliances are parked up next to a new building being specifically built for Customs. We are on a building site for the night. There is nowhere to sleep, no toilet facilities and no washing facilities. There's nowhere to eat.

More worryingly, no one knows we are here. Officially we're not. The team formulate a plan to get the news out so people know what is happening and start putting pressure on. I phone BBC Radio who say they will be interested if we get held for much longer. They make a note in case we disappear. We each phone home and tell members of our family where we are, but they are not to worry.

Blocked

If we are still here by morning we'll make contact with the Union, MPs, the TUC and Government departments. No point troubling people now (it is Sunday evening) but we could be held here for several days and it may turn into a diplomatic incident with a team on a humani-

tarian mission to Iraq being blocked at the Turkish border.

The stove appears along with emergency food supplies and sleeping bags. Phil starts cooking; Norman and Mick start washing down the marble forecourt in front of the new Customs' building, dry it off and put flattened cardboard boxes on the newly cleaned area. We might be sleeping rough, but it will be clean.

At the same time Turkish officials confirm we are here for the night they warn us about the local "Ali Babas". We are warned this is a very dangerous area because of organised gangs of "Ali Babas" who would cut our throats as we slept to nick our valuables.

The same warning is given separately by a police patrol later on. The local gangs of "Ali Babas" start to look around the appliances, testing the shuttered compartments which have no locks. We appear to convince them that the high pressure hose is a flame thrower (it does look very gun like).

Then Customs officials try a late deal on us. They will give some of us our passports back and we can go over the border and stay in a hotel for the night. But Brian and Norman have to stay with the vehicles.

To their surprise we tell them to shove it. We have come all this way together and we will not be split up now. There is no way we're going to leave two colleagues with this lot to sleep rough in an area which is very dangerous. No one is prepared to leave.

So we all sleep rough for the night. Some on the sleeping bags on the cardboard, some in the cabs of the appliances. The local "Ali Babas" leave us alone and instead loot a pile of material from the new Customs building. It is not our problem so we don't feel the need to raise the alarm.

The downside is we're attacked all night by gangs of kamikaze mosquitoes. Their bites will take months to heal properly.

In the morning we prepare makeshift washing facilities and have breakfast. We're two hours ahead of the UK so I check in with the BBC Radio Today programme, telling them we are still being held.

We'll be a fallback story and they keep my mobile number. Having waited for a reasonable time we start to phone home contacting the FBU, the TUC, and the FBU Parliamentary group so they can start putting

pressure on.

By 11am Turkish time we are told that the right officials have been bribed, but there are still problems, (when we return to the UK we find that contact had been made very quickly with the Turkish Embassy in London).

Our two mysterious contacts demand 600 US dollars as the officials had been particularly greedy. We tell them we'll pay on our way back, but no more than \$500 US dollars.

We deeply resent paying the money, but we have the choice of paying up or abandoning the vehicles 200 metres short of our country of destination, never a serious option as far as all were concerned. There was also a clear indication that they had the power to seize and commandeer the appliances.

Released

By late morning we pass through customs, all experiencing a mixture of emotions. But all was not over yet. We still had the military controlled area and barrier to get through. These military have the bearing of professionals with one officer, who speaks excellent English and two privates.

As the officer checks our papers I start to get down from the cab to offer to open the shutters of the lockers. One of the privates makes eye-contact and moves his head almost imperceptibly from side to side. I ask with hand and face gestures whether I should stay in the cab and he nods, again imperceptibly.

The papers are checked and within a few minutes we were across the border. Turkish Customs had delayed us by seven hours coming in and another 19 hours getting out.

We were glad to see the back of the place. I text back to the office what now looks like a strange message but was how we felt at the time: "Now over the border. Safely in Iraq".

We are warmly met on the Iraqi Kurdistan side by the President of the Kurdistan Workers Syndicate Union Hangaw Abdullah Khan, accompanied by several of his officials. They knew where we had been from the previous day because they could see the fire appliances. They too had been making representations on our behalf. They had slept in chairs and on the floor at the Kurdish Customs offices overnight, hoping that we might be released.

We are taken to a small cafe while we wait to go through Customs on

BREAK FOR THE BORDER



Brian, Norman in sleeping bags on cardboard at the border. Abdullah Muhsin asleep in the back of a cab. In the morning Norman Breckenridge creates a makeshift bathroom and Brian Joyce makes the teas and coffees.

the Iraqi side. Within an hour and a half we are on the road to Duhok with a local firefighter in each appliance. Our own drivers, despite being exhausted, were determined that they would deliver the appliances to Duhok and only there hand them over.

This is the Kurdish region of the Iraqi Federation. It has been a UN-protected territory since 1991. Relative to the rest of Iraq, it is a haven of peace. The Iraqi insurgency has not made great inroads into the Kurdish region. They take precautions and there is a strong local Kurdish military presence rather than a UK or US presence. This is no Heart of Darkness or scene from Apocalypse Now. There is no Colonel Kurtz, mad or otherwise. Not here, not in the Kurdish Region of the Iraqi Federation.

As we pass through villages on the way to Duhok we see evidence of the UN-backed reconstruction which has been taking place since 1991. They are about 15 years ahead of the rest of Iraq and it is obvious the signs are promising. There are new schools, hospitals and universities. We pass a brand new college for training vets, paid for by the UN.

All around we can see evidence of a region still under construction. If there was a model for the rest of Iraq, then this is a strong candidate. There is also a stark reminder of Iraq's problems as we pass makeshift refugee camps. The poor who have fled the more southern parts of the Iraqi Federation have settled here in these camps. The richer refugees have fled to Jordan or Saudi Arabia, their preferred safe havens where they don't live in camps.

Hangaw was keen for us to get to a hotel and have the opportunity to wash, sleep and eat. Due to the various delays, but primarily those experienced in Turkey, time was now very much against us. The meetings arranged for the previous day with the governor, ministers and media had all been cancelled.

Erbil was still several hours away – we all knew that our journey was going to end here in Duhok. This was not an issue, Brian had always made it clear that Duhok could very well be where the handover took place and that any further travel would depend upon discussions with the Kurdish and Iraqi officials.

Those discussions would centre entirely on the safety and security



reports at that time. It was apparent that the roads to and town of Erbil were safe. However, the roads and situation after that was extremely dangerous and our safety could not be guaranteed. We would be travelling back the next morning. It would take a further two days to reach England.

On arrival at the hotel in Duhok, there was time for a quick shower to wash a few days of Turkish dust away, then back down stairs to the smell of hot food. As we sat several more officials arrived including Jalal-Najif Hassan the President of the KWSU in Duhok with his son and a few of his officials.

They greet us all, and there is extra warmth in their meeting and greeting Brian Joyce again. A formal meeting was to take place later, but for now we were enjoying the hospitality – non-alcoholic – of our hosts, attempting to explain our experiences and introduce the team through Mehdi, their young interpreter, or Abdullah Muhsin.

Disbelief

We handed the appliances over, Norman, Phil and Mick ensuring all the little quirks and problems were

The region is still under construction. This luxury furniture store is topped by a concrete skeleton on the first and second floors

well documented. One appliance would travel to Erbil, the other would go on to Baghdad. Both appliances had done incredibly well, over 3,000 miles of part tarmac, unkept mountain and dusty desert roads.

A few minor faults had occurred but we were sure, once rectified, the two appliances would continue in service for many years. Perkins had done a great job getting them in shape.

A large room in the hotel was to accommodate our meeting. There were some 26 officials of the KWSU present, many were presidents of their own unions covering transport, mechanics, engineers, building and construction workers as the KWSU is the equivalent of our TUC with various unions affiliating to it.

Hangaw spoke on behalf of the KWSU. He firstly apologised for the way we had been treated by the Turkish authorities and expressed their disappointment that we would not be able to spend more time with them due to the delays. He uttered disbelief that anyone would be prepared to do what we had done, yet he said that they should not be surprised, as it was the FBU that had undertaken the task. It was a practical task but also a monumental expression of solidarity and support, once again, for the people and firefighters of Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq.

Hangaw said that all the promises made by Brian on behalf of the FBU had been kept. He expressed their gratitude and need for the appliances and the prominent role they will play

**The text to Head Office
made sense at the time:
'Now over the border and
safely in Iraq'**

within a community just outside of Erbil.

He stressed how essential our continued support is for the trade union movement and the firefighters of his country. That the links of friendship between the KWSU and the FBU must never be broken and hoped would continue.

Further tributes were made by KWSU officials regarding the FBU's contribution and the timing of Brian's first visit which, they believed, was the first visit in 40 years of a union official from the UK.

Val Salmon addressed the meeting – followed by Brian – and gave an assurance that the FBU have not and will not forget the people of Iraqi Kurdistan or the people of Iraq. It would have been difficult not to have felt proud of the FBU at that moment, so clearly held in such esteem and respect by the members of the KWSU.

Internment

Phil, Norman and Mick also addressed the meeting, giving their thoughts on the importance of this act of solidarity to the local unions, fire service and the communities the appliances would serve. The fact is we could do so much more – they deserve so much more – but ask for nothing.

It was by now late evening, we were all tired and had to be up early the next morning to journey back to Diyabakir. Our hosts though had organised a meal.

Having eaten little more than dust for two days, it was a feast.

Phil, Norm and Mick met the local firefighters early the next morning and briefed them on the machines and operational equipment. While the others met and had a final meeting with Hangaw to discuss the issues and problems they were now facing.

We had hired two drivers and cars for the journey back. Farewells were made. All too quickly we arrived at the Turkish border and the first Customs check point which was run by the Turkish army, suggesting they may not have complete confidence in their Customs colleagues.

It was quick, efficient. The guard explained in perfect English: "I will carry out a search. If I find nothing you will be on your way. If I do find something you will be in trouble and you will not be on your way." Fair enough.

The cars were searched along



Turkish army conscripts with automatic weapons hold us at gun point, fingers on triggers

with our bags. After a further four checkpoints we were on to the open road. No money had changed hands; we had not seen our "friends" to pay them off. It all seemed so easy and far quicker than our exit from the country. The weather was hot, time to sit back and relax, although in the back of our minds we all knew we weren't out of Turkey yet.

Ten miles had passed and the drivers came to a stop in a small town. Surprise, surprise the same

chap who had stopped us on our way to the border appeared. Brian went and spoke to him, 600 dollars, please, as you agreed. Clearly Brian was not playing ball, the man produced a mobile and pushed it towards him, it was the main man from our internment at the border.

We all knew that we would have to pay, as we shared the suspicion that our journey would be coming to a sudden halt if we didn't, and if not there it would be later. Discussions over, 500 dollars became the figure again; Brian went to hand it to the man, "Cameras ready boys?" No, no you must give it to that boy over there, he pointed to a 12-year-old. Enough said, have a nice day!

No one wanted to part with any money, we all felt angry but we also believed it was the sensible choice. The team had come to a joint decision



Children crowd around as we hand over the appliances to local firefighters and later share a meal with trade union leaders

that we would pay. Perhaps it was worth the money just to get out of the country? Lovely people except for their Customs officials.

Still several hours to Diyarbakir, we all had our personal thoughts of the events since we drove on to Eurotunnel, but spirits were still good amongst us all.

At a mobile military spot check, we were pulled in off the road. Immediately three automatic weapons were being pointed at us.

Mick Henn, who had served in the British Army, was not impressed: "Young, nervous conscripts, automatic weapons pointing at us, safety catches off and fingers on triggers. I do not like this one bit."

A fourth soldier gestured for us to get out and checked our passports. The cars were searched, our rucksacks emptied onto the ground in front of

us, the contents kicked around.

Their automatic weapons pointing at us the whole time. The typical holidaymaker would not see this side of Turkey. We were stopped twice more, but arrived in Diyarbakir ready for an hour or two of sightseeing, or perhaps just a couple of cold beers. But first, time to pay the drivers, who strangely enough wanted more than the agreed price made with Abdullah who was still in Duhok.

Hijacked

Abdullah had also made the hotel arrangements, booked the rooms and said: "Just say my name." Of course the receptionist looked blankly and informed us he had no rooms booked for us. But there were vacant rooms, so problem solved, again! Then we watch the TV screen in reception and see a Turkish plane

has been hijacked and all flights are grounded. We phone home to confirm to our families that it is not ours.

The next morning, showered and refreshed we headed for the airport (everything back on schedule) and an internal flight to Istanbul. From there a flight back to Heathrow with our own personal memories.

Back to home and our safety. But remembering we had left Iraq only hours before. There homes and families being savagely torn apart, people kidnapped, horrifically tortured and executed.

Union officials who are being kidnapped and executed for their beliefs. Murdered because they believe – and are willing to fight and die for – democracy and the freedom to speak up for what they believe. Only five hours flying time away.

THE TEAM ON A JOURNEY

The journey involved travelling 3,000 miles through 11 countries in 10 days. Three drivers – Phil Goalby, Norman Breckenridge and Mick Henn – worked a shift system of two drivers on, one driver off.

All three are from the West Midlands. Phil Goalby is a recently retired firefighter and FBU official. Norman Breckenridge has been retired for a few more years and is also a former FBU official. Mick Henn is an FBU official and a serving firefighter from Halesowen station, West Midlands.

Adrian Clarke from Cambridgeshire helped obtain the appliances and equipment and was meant to join the trip. He was taken seriously ill and missed it.

Dave Green, EC member East Midlands was meant to be the fourth driver. The trip clashed with the dates given for the High Court hearing on the Notts and Lincs co-responding case. Dave was needed for the final preparations for the case and missed the trip.

Brian Joyce is recently retired as the long-serving Executive Council member for the South West. Val Salmon, from Greater Manchester, was the EC member representing control staff until recently. Duncan Milligan is the FBU's Head of Research and Communications and was the one with the camera and the notebook.

Phil, Norman and Mick drove 2,000 miles each in 10 days over roads which ranged from the perfect tarmac of a dull northern Europe to the poorer hot and dusty roads of eastern Turkey. The terrain ranged from the very flat to mountainous desert roads.

Each day they carried out the morning ritual of detailed checks on the appliances. It was these detailed checks that helped nurse one of the appliances over 3,000 miles with a slight oil leak on one axle.

Val Salmon said: "For one reason or another this team had not met up as a group before but gelled very quickly. The journey was difficult for everyone but the drivers are the ones who really pulled out all the stops.

"Phil, Norman and Mick just kept going, which was an incredible feat, especially in the last leg through Turkey. Given the pressure we were all under from the first crossing into Turkey it was remarkable that we didn't all end up having a row.

"No-one was getting paid for this, we were all volunteers. We did it because it was an important message to send our colleagues in Iraq.

"It was a symbolic and practical gesture which shows them that the world hasn't forgotten them. We'll do all we can to help them serve their communities and get some proper independent unions in place to protect themselves."

We thank all those listed below, who are not in any particular order, but without whom our journey would not have been possible.

- Perkins for their invaluable assistance in preparing the appliances
- FBU Regions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13
- Adrian Clarke (FBU Cambridgeshire)
- Tom Carroll (CFO Cambridgeshire)
- Barry Dixon (CFO, GMC)
- Ernie Thornton (FBU EC member, south east)
- Andy Gilchrist (former general secretary, on behalf of the FBU)
- Chris Woods (FBU West Midlands region)
- Matt Wrack (general secretary, on behalf of the FBU)
- EuroTunnel
- Thompsons Solicitors
- Hard Dowdy Accountants
- Transport and General Workers Union
- Community, The Union For Life
- Harbour Shipping
- British Chambers of Commerce
- National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
- Public and Commercial Services Union
- Members of Manchester Emergency Fire Control
- Officials and members of Cambridgeshire FBU
- And our families for putting up with our absence.



Shaw: 'We will have our say'

THE PRESIDENT

The FBU's new President Mick Shaw told delegates that the continuing strength of the FBU would ensure we would "have our say" in any changes in the service and expressed a wish that delegates leave conference "with a clear sense of priorities and purpose."

In his opening address, Mick Shaw touched upon some of the key themes conference would be debating, and in particular, pay: "We only kept that pay formula for the last 25 years because at times we were prepared to fight to defend it. And it may be that we will have to fight again at some stage to ensure the continuation of a pay formula for the fire service."

However, he expressed disappointment at a narrower agenda than in previous years. "It is entirely right that this conference with representatives from every brigade in the country should be concentrating on the priorities that our members have – issues involving the fire service, pay, hours, annual leave, pensions and internal organisation of the Union."

"However, looking at the agenda and comparing it with previous years it is difficult to discern a sense that we

are part of a wider movement. That is a disappointment.

"We may have disaffiliated from the Labour Party but I hope that decision isn't being interpreted as a decision to withdraw from political engagement because that would be a mistake for this Union."

"We have to engage with politicians. We are part of the wider UK labour movement. And we ally ourselves with trade unions and progressive organisations around the world."

'It may be that we will have to fight again at some stage to ensure the continuation of a pay formula for the fire service'

The problems that we face in the UK, significant as they are, are nothing compared to the situation trade unionists face in countries like Colombia and Zimbabwe. We should be cognisant of that fact and we should be offering our support in those countries."

The President also highlighted some "encouraging signs" internationally such as the progressive political wave sweeping Latin America, and in particular, Venezuela – about which delegates later heard from



President Mick Shaw highlighted the Union's stable membership and improved finances

a senior Venezuelan trade unionist – and argued that the Union was "at its strongest when our officials do recognise the common sense of purpose and interests we have with those who want to change the world for the better both in this country and the rest of the world."

Returning to the fire service and workplace themes, the President said that far from being the "defeated", "demoralised" and "marginalised" force in the wake of the national pay dispute some in Government, employers and the media had hoped for, the Union was in rude health, with stable membership and improved finances.

"We are going to ensure that we will have our say on any changes to the fire service and that we will try and ensure that the service is moulded in our interests."



South West FBU official John Drake addressed a well-attended Justice for Colombia fringe meeting



Former President Ruth Winters enjoying herself: Ruth, who was praised for work for the FBU by delegates and guests alike, returned to conference this year as a delegate for her brigade, Lothian and Borders



FUTURE FEARS WELFARE WORRIES

The Union has concerns about how deployment of New Dimension equipment is affecting FBU members and about the longer-term future of the capability. Paul Matthewman and Pete Goulden outline the issues at stake

The Government's New Dimension (ND) rollout programme is reaching its final stages with the capabilities expected to be absorbed into each fire and rescue service's "core activities" by the end of the year.

All the urban search and rescue, mass decontamination and high-volume pumping equipment is set to have been delivered by November, although training will continue into 2008.

The FBU has, from the start, been involved in this Government project to enhance the fire and rescue service's resilience and capa-

bility to respond to a range of 'catastrophic' incidents on a national scale. The goal was to protect FBU members' health and safety. But concerns remain.

For one thing, there are still questions about whether, by handing over the current ND capabilities and associated equipment to fire and rescue services, they will be able to meet national requirements and be "fit for purpose" for the next 20 years.

For another, there is still a distinct lack of welfare provision for all ND capabilities.

■ Below and right, the latest on the rollout, and some of the problems the FBU sees.



Firefighters after a chemical attack simulation in central London

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR)

The latest phase in the national roll-out programme for urban search and rescue (USAR) is the release of "module 2" or heavy transport equipment, designed primarily for use in major transport-related incidents, especially those involving in railways or aircraft.

The equipment should have all been delivered to brigades by November 2007, although training will not finish until March 2008 due to the complexity of the equipment and its intended use. It allows for two different methods of hot cutting (Petrogen and Thermic arc) as well as cold cutting, confined-space working equipment, including "SavOx" self-rescue sets (below), a ventilation system with ducting and air monitoring equipment.

The Union has been giving its input into the USAR rollout process through the national Strategic Management Group (SMG) – which provides national strategic guidance to both USAR and non-USAR fire and rescue services – and the national Tactical Management group (TMG) – a Technical Group



USAR equipment will also be used in building collapses such as the Stockline factory in Glasgow in May 2004

which deals with the key specific areas of the capability itself and which is a practitioners' forum with key representation of all USAR aspects. Paul Matthewman (Region 4) and Pete Goulden (Region 7) represent the FBU on these two groups and then report back to the national officer for health and safety and the FBU health and safety committee.

What has become clear from meetings of these groups and from

reports from brigades themselves is that the move of the fire service from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) into the newly created Communities and Local Government (CLG) Department has created a host of financial problems for the USAR programme. These have led to delays and to reduction in funding to brigades for crewing, local training facilities and canine support. The Union is hopeful that these problems can soon be resolved both for this specific USAR funding and that for the programme more generally.

More seriously, there are concerns about the long-term management of USAR – and all New Dimension capabilities. The plan is for these capabilities to be absorbed into fire and rescue "core activities" this year. But without a long-term national perspective on these assets, there is a danger that, contrary to Government plans, the equipment will not be "fit for purpose" for the next 20 years.

Following on the rollout of incident response units (IRUs), the next phase of the mass decontamination (MD) programme was the despatch of 36 MD disrobe units, 14 MD robe units and 18 detection, identification and monitoring (DIM) units.

All 40 MD units have all now arrived in brigades and rollout of the MD programme was due to be complete by June 2007, following re-stowage of the IRUs and the establishment of a "casualty flow control" system. The main objective of this part of the programme – phase 2 – is to enhance the initial MD capability, developing it to meet the following requirements:

- deploy effective DIM of a range of contaminants (by deploying units) in attendance within 30 minutes of initial call/declaration of CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear) incidents in areas of highest risk and population in England and Wales;
- deploy the first IRU in attendance within 45 minutes (phase 1





JESS HURO/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

HIGH VOLUME PUMPS (HVPs)

With the high-volume pumps (HVPs) rollout programme completed in late 2006, most of the UK's 58 fire and rescue services are currently completing initial training of crews and placing vehicles on the run.

The use of the HVPs is growing rapidly as fire and rescue services realise the versatility of the pumps. Buncefield and Carlisle are just two examples of regional or national deployment. At Buncefield, 15 HVPs were used to great effect. They helped to deliver 53 million litres of clean water to the fire and assisted in recycling and reapplying 15 million litres of water, as well as moving from the site 10 million litres of water in order to protect the environment. Certainly, the power of these machines is formidable – based on the hose size and pumping capabilities, it is estimated that these 15 HVPs equated to 160 fire appliances! HVPs were also employed at the major flooding incident that occurred in Cumbria in January 2005, removing water at speeds hitherto impossible to achieve.

While the introduction and use of the HVPs has been reasonably successful, the FBU does have concerns. The most significant of these is the lack of welfare provision for HVP, and indeed all New Dimension capabilities, and this matter has been raised by the FBU in all national committees covering New Dimension including the practitioners' forum New Dimension sounding board. As a result of this and other concerns, the FBU health and safety sub-group responsible for New Dimension has produced an "HVP best practice guidance" document to assist local officials in negotiating policies within brigades.



STEFANO CAGNONI

STEFANO CAGNONI

MASS DECONTAMINATION (MD)

objective) with subsequent deployment culminating in a fourth IRU arriving within 180 minutes (phase 2 objective) in areas of highest risk and population in England and Wales;

- provide disrobe packs for 4,600 contaminated casualties within six hours
- provide adequate PPE resilience to enable decontamination of 4,600 people within six hours;
- decontaminate 4,600 casualties within a chemical (overt biological) or radiological environment within six hours;
- provide robe packs for the 4,600 decontaminated casualties;
- ensure safe systems of work for FRS responders.

With the rollout of the IRUs, the UK fire and rescue service received a basic capability to detect radiation. But it still lacked a capability to detect, identify and monitor chemical and biological contaminants. Early last year trials of the DIM equipment were carried out in several brigades. Eighteen fire and rescue services were identified to

receive a DIM capability, selected according to the degree of risk such as potential targets and prioritised by population areas larger than 300,000. There was also consideration of the ability of a FRS to be able to accommodate the DIM capability.

The DIM equipment consists of several pieces of high-spec kit including infra-red spectroscope, radiation survey meters, multi-gas detectors, chemical vapour identification and isotope identification.

All this equipment will be transported in a van with blue lights and will be equipped with a work position that will enable the CBRN advisor to plan operations and conduct sample analysis with communication and information system support.

POWERED RESPIRATOR PROTECTIVE SUIT (PRPS)



IAN HODGSON/REUTERS

The replacement of the gas-tight suits currently located on incident response units (IRUs) with the new powered respirator protective suit (PRPS) was completed in March 2007. This suit underwent exhaustive testing to establish the suitability for use in the risk area.

The PRPS will only be deployed for the following warm zone tasks:

- Verbal instruction to victims/casualties
- Guiding persons into the shower structures
- Clearing discarded disrobe packs from the shower structures
- Assisting in the management of persons through the shower process

The management of PRPS at incidents is taken from current breathing apparatus technical bulletin 1/97, to maintain a consistent approach for operators; this includes distress to wearer although this is now not RIDDOR reportable.

The suit is a "gas-tight suit" manufactured from Tykem TK, the same as existing gas-tight suits, fitted with an integral positive pressure "Jupiter 3" respirator, which is battery powered capable of running for four hours in continuous mode. This is produced to meet EN standard 466-1995 and EN 50020.

The standard operating procedure, training manual, hazards analysis and risk assessments have been the subject of intense negotiation and consultation with the FBU.



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

New Dimension instructor Ian Harrison with a high volume pump in action

Don't burn

We're all looking forward to the summer holidays, but don't overdo the sun

SKIN CANCER

After a scorching April we are all looking forward to the summer holidays. And most of us love to soak up the sun. We seek hot climates for our getaway and many of us want to come home with a golden glowing tan. There is no getting away from these facts – as research continues to show.

Cancer Research UK's recent survey of 2000 people found that 50 per cent of holiday-makers aim to get a tan when on holiday. But, worryingly, half that number thinks that getting sunburnt is all part of the tanning process.

And for youngsters, burning is the norm for the majority. Among 16-24 year-olds, 30 per cent said they would definitely get burnt on holiday this summer while a further 31 per cent said they might get burnt.

Overall 19 per cent of those asked anticipated getting burnt while a further 21 per cent said they might suffer sunburn.

This year the charity's SunSmart campaign is gearing its advice specifically to holiday-makers. And the key message is: don't burn.

Research has shown that sunburn doubles the risk of malignant melanoma – the potentially fatal form of skin cancer. And surveys carried out on behalf of Cancer Research UK show that the most likely time for Britons to get sunburnt is when they are on holiday.

Dr Lesley Rhodes, Cancer Research UK dermatologist, said: "Getting sunburnt increases the risk of skin cancer in general. But the kind of sunbathing binges that happen when people go to much hotter climates and bake on the beach is particularly dangerous.

"This kind of intermittent intense exposure to the sun, leading to burning, particularly increases the risk of malignant melanoma. And each year in Britain almost 2000 people die from this form of skin cancer."

Dr Rhodes added that it was particularly worrying that more than a quarter of people surveyed believed burning was all part of getting a tan. "Rates of melanoma are set to treble in the next thirty years unless there is a radical change of behaviour among sunbathing bingers."

SunSmart campaign manager, Rebecca Russell, said: "We want to raise awareness of the danger of burning – especially when people take off for holidays in warmer countries where the temptation to spend too long



CORBIS

SUNSMART MESSAGES

- ◆ Spend time in the shade between 11 and 3. The summer sun is most damaging to your skin in the middle of the day.
- ◆ Make sure you never burn; sunburn can double your risk of skin cancer.
- ◆ Aim to cover up with a t-shirt, hat and sunglasses. When the sun is at its peak sunscreen is not enough.
- ◆ Remember to take extra care with children. Young skin is delicate. Keep babies out of the sun especially around midday.
- ◆ Use factor 15+ sunscreen. Apply generously and re-apply often.
- ◆ Also report mole changes or unusual skin growths promptly to your doctor.

on the beach can be very great.

"But it is not just a problem for those who go abroad. People, especially those with fair skin, lots of moles or freckles or a family history of skin cancer, can be at risk of burning on hot summer days in the UK."

Skin cancer facts

- ◆ Nine out of ten skin cancers are easily treatable and unlikely to spread. They are called non-melanoma skin cancer and there are more than 75,000 new cases registered each year in the UK.
- ◆ Malignant melanoma, which accounts for less than one in ten skin cancers, is the

most serious type of the disease and may be fatal. It is more common in women than men.

- ◆ Around 8,000 people a year in the UK are diagnosed with malignant melanoma. It usually develops in cells in the outer layer of the skin but can spread to other parts of the body. There are almost 1,800 deaths each year from malignant melanoma.
- ◆ Melanoma is the second most common cancer among people aged 20-39 and early detection is crucial for successful treatment.

Who is at risk?

Some people are born with a greater risk of skin cancer. These people tend to:

- ◆ burn easily
- ◆ have fair skin and/or freckles
- ◆ have red or fair hair and/or pale eyes
- ◆ have had skin cancer before
- ◆ have a large number of moles (50+)
- ◆ have skin cancer in the family (especially melanoma)
- ◆ have had bad sunburn in the past.
- ◆ If one of more of the descriptions on this list apply to you, you should take extra care to protect yourself from the sun. Know your skin type and use the UV Index to find out when you need to protect yourself.

Babies and children need extra protection from the sun because their skin is delicate and easily damaged.

→ Find out more at : www.sunsmart.org.uk

Q I have recently gained promotion to a specialist post and was told at the interview that I would receive competent pay. After taking up the post I was then informed that I would only receive development pay; this was despite the fact that there was not yet a development phase in place for this role.

I immediately submitted a written grievance which was ignored by the relevant manager and have since submitted the grievance for a second time which has also been ignored. What is my next course of action?

A Grievance procedures exist to enable employees to raise any concerns with management. It is however best to try to resolve the grievance informally, with the help of an FBU rep, before invoking the formal procedure.

The formal grievance procedure has three steps:

1. The employee gives a written statement of the basis of their grievance to their employer.
2. The employer responds within 28 days by inviting the employee to a meeting, the meeting takes place and the employer informs the employee of their decision and of the employee's right to appeal if they do not agree with the decision.
3. The employee appeals and the employer informs them of their final decision.

If you submitted a written statement setting out the basis of your grievance and did not get a response from your manager, then they are probably in breach of the procedure. It may be possible then to raise the grievance at the next stage. Alternatively, the Union may be able to raise the matter through joint procedures including potentially bringing a collective grievance about the failure of



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

the procedure. Discuss this with your FBU rep before taking any further action.

Q Can I make a claim against my employer over an issue that is many years old?

A There are strict time limits for pursuing both personal injury and employment rights cases. In personal injury your claim must be lodged within three years of the date of the accident or knowledge of work-related disease. The earlier the claim is able to be commenced by your solicitor the better, as evidence, including medical and witness evidence can go very cold very quickly. The stronger and fresher the evidence, the

more likely the claim is to succeed. If in doubt ring 0808 100 6061.

In employment rights cases such as unfair dismissal and discrimination the claim must be lodged with an employment tribunal within three months of the event that led to the claim. Discrimination cases can be regarded as continuing over a long period where the discrimination continues. If in doubt, contact your FBU rep.

Q Recently our brigade ran an assessment centre and a number of officers in temporary positions were unsuccessful. Due to what the organisation called a 'business need' these middle aged white

males were allowed through to interview and appointed ahead of candidates that had been successful. If the same had been done for black people or women there would have been allegations of positive discrimination. The process was not equality impact assessed and was discriminatory to me as a black person who had been successful. How can this not be illegal?

A It is impossible to give advice on your concerns without close examination of the facts of the methods used by the assessment centre and the way in which the results were analysed and used by the Brigade and their justification on the grounds of "business need". Your first course of action should be to raise the matter with your FBU rep to assist with internal procedures including a grievance. If it is clear that legal assistance is required for a possible legal claim, your rep will ensure the formal application for assistance is made within 6 weeks of the decision to be challenged.

Q I need to change my will and I fear it will be quite complicated. Should I seek legal advice and can the union help?

A Generally a new will can be written to effect changes and replace the previous will. The FBU provides a free wills service for members for the first will so this will be free as long as the earlier will was arranged privately. For details phone 0808 100 6061. The process initially involves filling out a simple form which will be sent to you. Advice and help in doing this are also available through the free wills service and the details of how to do so are on the form.

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

‘He’s the only fox we have and is just as cunning’

Hunting foxes with hounds is banned, but Des Evans relishes his role as the ‘human fox’ pursued by a traditional hunt

Retained firefighter Des Evans likes to get out in the fresh air: he works as a groundsman for the local council and referees football matches. But, now that fox hunting is banned, he relishes his role as a “human fox” pursued by the hunt.

Being chased by a pack of hounds may not be most people’s idea of fun – but for sporty Nantwich firefighter Des it’s an excellent way to spend a Saturday. Des is a volunteer runner for the Cheshire Farmers Drag Hunt, whose members give chase on horseback in traditional bright red hunting gear, following hounds who are, rather scarily to the uninitiated, intent on following Des.

Des insists it’s invigorating and not at all scary. For the fox substitute is not really Des himself, but a towel soaked in a distinctive “concoction” which the foxhounds are hard-wired to hunt. But, as towels don’t have legs it is up to drag hunt runner Des to pull it round the course on a rope so hounds can follow the trail.

Des doesn’t dress up in anything fancy – just sporty top and running trousers. He reckons he covers around 14 miles most hunting Saturdays, on a predetermined route worked out with Cheshire Farmers’ professional huntsman David Harvey. He even jots down notes beforehand to remind himself of the agreed trail.



The day’s run is broken up into five different “legs,” giving the hounds and Des a chance for breaks. “I’ll start off in a wood, say,” he explains. “When I’m well on my way, David puts the hounds in the cover (wood), they pick up the trail and start ‘speaking’ (howling). David blows the horn to encourage them. The field – that’s the rest of the horses and riders – start to follow. When I hear the horns and the hounds start “speaking”, the adrenaline really kicks in.”

Climbing through hedges

Des finds himself crossing streams and ditches, climbing through hedges, as well as charging across fields. From time to time, he lifts the rope and scent-drenched towel for a few hundred yards to make the chase more exciting. “If the hounds can’t find the scent they start sniffing and casting around until they pick it up again,” he explains. At the end of the day, they are rewarded by a treat – such as a calf’s stomach supplied by the farmers’ hunt, from “fallen stock” picked up from local farms.

Des has been running with the Cheshire Farmers Drag Hunt for five years, and has been a retained firefighter for four. Some colleagues at the station are a little bemused by Des’ hobby, and have been known to indulge in banter when they’ve come across a



Apart from the quarry, a drag hunt is exactly like a now-banned traditional fox hunt



DES EVANS

Fourteen miles across rough ground with a pack of hounds chasing him is a weekend's fun for Nantwich, Cheshire retained firefighter Des Evans. He's been acting as 'fox' for the Cheshire Farmers' Hunt for five years. 'The adrenaline really kicks in,' when he hears the hounds and hunting horns.

hunt when out on a job. "The lads say 'Look! There's Des out in the fields – has he got his fox's uniform on.'" It's all very good-natured.

But sometimes drivers can get a "bit abusive" when riding past the hunt, thinking riders, horses and hounds are out chasing foxes rather than a nimble-footed retained FBU member with an unusual hobby. The hounds are "really quite soppy," Des insists, which must be quite comforting to know

when you've got a charging pack of them giving chase.

Drag hunting – defined as the pursuit of a pack of hounds following an artificial scent laid down beforehand – predates the recent hunting ban, with Oxford and Cambridge Universities among the first to take up the sport in the mid-nineteenth century, closely followed by the Royal Artillery at Woolwich and the Royal Military Academy

at Sandhurst.

More packs have registered for the sport over the past five years, and these days it's more inclusive and newcomers are welcome, according to David Harvey, the professional huntsman in charge of the Cheshire Farmers hounds. It helps if you have a horse – and respect for the etiquette of the countryside is a must. David is glad to have Des on board. "He's the only fox we have and is just as cunning. It's very rare that we catch him. I liaise with farmers to ensure courses are available and when the hunt is finished a group of lads on quad bikes tidy up the stretch of land. Anyone can come along, though you do need a horse. It's great fun."

Great ambassador

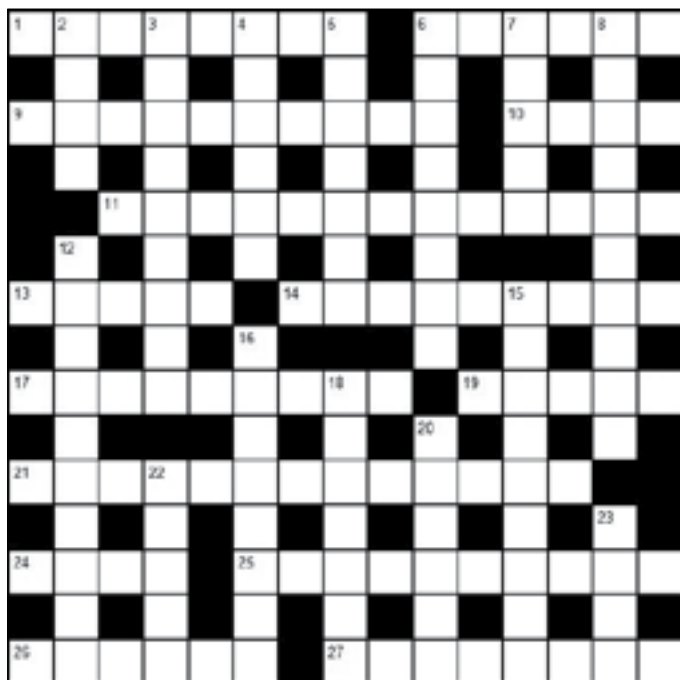
Des is a great ambassador for the sport. "I've been through some beautiful countryside and it's great to be out there running. Some people follow the hounds and horses on foot – or even on quad bikes. It's a great day out." After a day out as a human fox, he's glad to get home. But, enthusiast as he is, he passes on the cow's stomach and is happy to settle for "a nice cheese bap and a cup of tea with a bit of honey." And, of course, he comes home safe, sound and crucially, all in one piece.

➔ More info: www.bloodhoundhunting.co.uk



The hunt's hounds represent no danger to Des. 'They're quite soppy really,' he says

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Painful condition involving hip nerve (8)
- 6 Least old (6)
- 9 Every home should have one (5,5)
- 10 Al, former US vice president (4)
- 11 Usually goes with grit! (13)
- 13 Inert gas (5)
- 14 Flammable gas, smells like garlic (9)
- 17 Volume of listings (9)
- 19 Finished (5)
- 21 Story of one's own life (13)
- 24 Flying mammals – bonkers? (4)
- 25 Leader columns in newspapers (10)
- 26 Animals (6)
- 27 Old motors – full of light? (8)

DOWN

- 2 Run this through your hair (4)
- 3 ...is connected to you shin-bone! (5-4)
- 4 Pictures (6)
- 5 Lacking in red cells (7)
- 6 Put forward for election (8)
- 7 Isle, off Hampshire (5)
- 8 Encircled (10)
- 12 Able to express thoughts with ease (like a lorry?) (10)
- 15 Time for lunch!! (9)
- 16 Picket-line footballers? (8)
- 18 Wins back (7)
- 20 Colour of 14 cylinder (6)
- 22 Welcome sight in the desert (5)
- 23 Fruit, spot on! (4)



Solution to May crossword



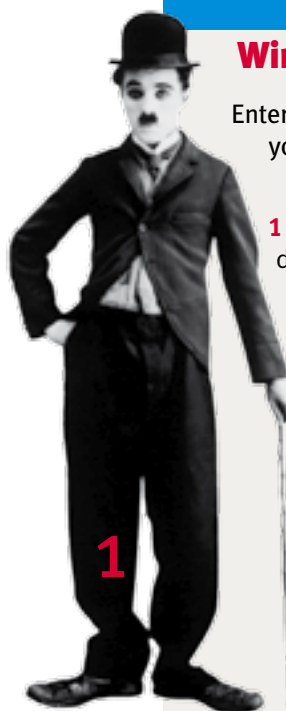
REUTERS/FRED PROUSER

Prize Quiz

Win a Cosenza 400 tent

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours. This issue the quiz is on famous quotes. Who said:

- 1 "A day without laughter is a day wasted"
- 2 "To be or not to be – that is the question"
- 3 "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it"
- 4 "You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time"
- 5 "I did not have sexual relations with that woman"
- 6 "I am a marvellous housekeeper. Every time I leave a man I keep his house."



1



3

AP/PA PHOTOS

HOW TO ENTER

To win a Cosenza 400 3-4 berth tent send your answers to the prize quiz by 30 June on a postcard to: Prize Competition (June 2007), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



Answers to May's quiz

1. Luddites
2. Martin Luther King
3. Spartacus
4. The slave trade
5. Bastille day
6. D-day

Winner of the April quiz was Mark Rayner of Bristol

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Hello Kevin



A warm Station Cat welcome to Kevin Firth, one of the newest recruits to McGuirkyside fire service. Hats off to Kevin who battled his way through the tough interview stage to secure his new job.

Kevin came straight in at Station Manager grade as a "locality manager" at Low Hill station on a salary not a million miles away from £30k. I brush aside as mere whingeing sour grapes from those who have been critical of this appointment.

The man has given his all to get this job and has a strong McGuirkyside fire service background. **Such a strong background that he stepped down as a Lib Dem councillor on McGuirkyside Fire Authority when he got the job.** It must have been a tough call for the appointments panel. But they carried out their task without fear or favour. No really, they did.

Money, money, money



Much to my astonishment McGuirkyside seems to get McGuirkeyer with every passing week. There's now news of up to £70,000 of secret interest-free loans.

You don't need legal aid or 'no win, no fee' agreements with lawyers when you work in McGuirkyside. The fire authority secretly

agreed to give up to £70,000 of interest-free loans to former FBU members who had been expelled from the Union so they could take legal action against the Union.

The loans were approved at the time the authority was publicly saying it was heading for more financial problems. It was also £70,000 which was badly spent by those who took the loans as the Union comprehensively won at the ensuing tribunal.

Sadly the action of supplying the interest-free loans – there is no explanation as to when they will be repaid – could open up the fire authority for a claim for the FBU's legal costs.

There will be questions about whether the secret interest-free loans were an entirely lawful use of council tax money which was meant to be spent on fire services.

And what of the Audit Commission's glowing praise about McGuirkyside's finances? How could they have missed an interest-free loan of £70,000. And who recommended the loans in the first place?

Spin, spin, spin



I see the Local Government Association is still trying to find a reason to be in existence. Much to the annoyance of many Fire Authorities, the LGA has slavishly toed the Government line on FireControl and just about everything else.

It now wonders why its "Fire Forum" is

in the doldrums (it's because the LGA is not representing the views of fire authorities). But all is not lost. **The LGA is now creating a new communications strategy and "revamping" with the launch of a "glossy, punchy two-page bulletin" which will knock your socks off (as you snooze on the sofa).**

Sadly minutes of their meeting reveal all the contents will be produced "with an LGA spin". And – just in case I missed it first time, they re-enforce the point later – the FireControl parts of this publication will also have "an LGA spin". Not worth reading then.

Doing the Durham spin

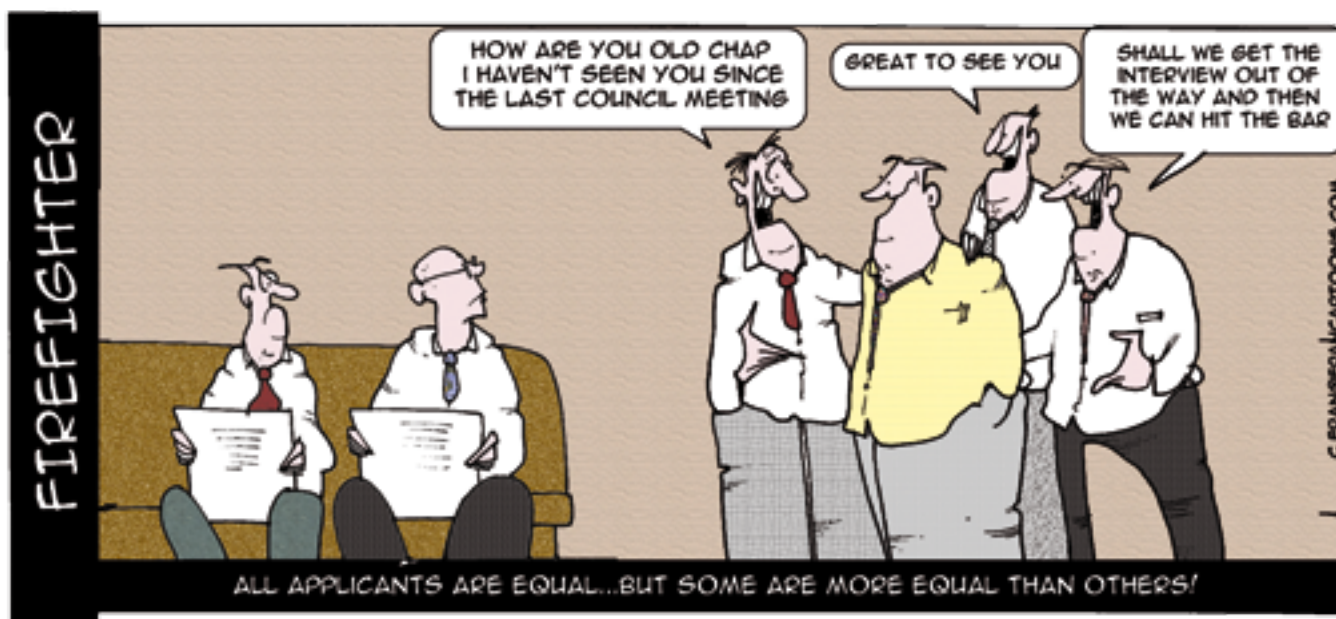


It seems like "spin" and being "on message" is once again becoming the rage. Sadly, even the newest recruits to the fire service are getting caught up in the need to be "on message". Step forward Durham and Darlington chief fire officer Sue Johnson.

She explained to her local media the brigade's new approach to communications and, in particular, a publication called *Action Stations* written by staff and for staff. Could be a bit off-message by the sounds of it.

The local newspaper reports her as saying: **"We have had an overhaul of the internal communications within the brigade because staff were receiving different publications with different messages".**

I am off-message and will stay that way.



25-year badges



Malc Barlow (l) Watch Manager, Lowedges Road, White watch, receives his 25-year badge from Darren Smith, Divisional Secretary



Crew Manager David Gwalchmai (r) Llanfair Ceireinion fire station, receives his 25-year badge from Grant Mayos, Regional Secretary



Fred Brown (l), Fire Safety, Buxton Fire Station, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Neil Sheppard



Andrew English (l) with colleagues from Buxton Red Watch, Derbyshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Dom McGlynn



Geoff Matthews (c) receives his 25-year badge from Regional Official Kevin Herniman (l), with them is Brigade Chair Scott Turner



Peter Reading (l), Green Watch Kentish Town Fire Station, London, receives his 25-year badge from FBU President Mick Shaw



Crew Manager Dave Thomas (l) receives his 25-year badge from Peter Bates, St. Mary's branch, Southampton



Mark Hazlewood (r) receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Dave Simonds alongside Staveley Green Watch, Derbyshire



Dave Simonds (l) receives his 25-year badge from Dave Parmley alongside members of Staveley Blue Watch, Derbyshire



Jack Douglas (l) Station Manager, Northants, receives his 25-year badge from Aidy Mitchell, Brigade Officers' Rep



Nigel Poulteney (r), Green Watch, Sittingbourne, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from Branch Rep Jim Green

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

