

# Kosovo April 2004

## Royal Endorsement

Thursday 1 April 2004 - We received a letter from HRH Prince Charles with his good wishes for a successful convoy. His Highness also gave positive comment on the content of the website. The sentiments are very much appreciated.

## The story of the journey and the aid distribution for the Easter Convoy 2004

Two trucks, well packed, left as planned on Friday 2nd April just after midday, from Chandlers Ford. They met the rest of the convoy at a service station near Maidstone before going on down to Dover for the ferry.

By Sunday morning they had got to Austria, driving through snow topped mountains. Then on through Slovenia and Croatia. At midnight on Monday they had just about arrived at the border between Serbia and Kosovo. Going through border posts is not easy as details of loads and destinations have to be checked and can take as long as it takes. At the Serbia/Kosovo border on this occasion it took 5 hours, so the drivers were all hanging around with nowhere to go and no sleep either. They eventually arrived in Pristina, Kosovo at 6am Tuesday feeling very tired. They checked into a hotel leaving their precious load in a secure area, and promptly went to bed!

Awaking at lunch time, it was time to unload the vehicles. They emptied all the aid into their base at a warehouse. They finished off the evening by having a briefing about what they would be doing the next day.

Wednesday 7 April, the first day to deliver aid. Their first "drop" was to a large Roma camp at Plementina. The Roma camp where they were distributing aid on WEDNESDAY had 200 families. They were very excited that the trucks had arrived in their camp as there had not been any aid there for 2 years. Representatives from each family formed an orderly queue to collect the aid for their families depending on how many members they had. Charles helped a man carry some aid back to one of the houses, food, toiletries, clothes, bedding and a pair of shoes for his wife. The shoes didn't fit, so they took her back to get a pair that fitted!

The house consisted of one and a half rooms. On the wall was a picture of their son who is missing. They really want to find his body and bring him back to bury him near them. They then went to a further village which was housing families from near Pristina who had been burnt out of their homes in the recent troubles, only two weeks ago. One lady wanted to take the volunteers to her house. She had been re-housed there after been burnt out of her previous home in 1999, so she has lost everything, home and belongings, twice in five years.

Apart from the banana boxes that we collected through the Echo, we also collected sensible shoes in good condition. Maybe one of those went to the lady in the Roma camp. They were very grateful for what they received

On THURSDAY Bernie, Charles and Don went near to Pec, and gave out aid in five villages there. There was a centre in Klina for families who had been forced out of their homes -41 families in all. It must have been very difficult to have to receive aid, but these families were very patient while the crews were setting up their distribution point, dignified and very grateful for whatever they received.

One 10 year old boy asked for a Union Jack flags that was on the truck, with which he went off very proudly. A family of 8 living in two rooms, insisted on giving Charles a cup of thick "syrupy" coffee as a thank you. One of the men in the family was a football fan and asked Charles where he lived in England. When Charles said "Southampton" the man knew that our team is in the premier division!

They went on to a Serb enclave at Bica, a village enclosed with barbed wire, with protection from KFOR and surrounded by Albanians. Most of the women and families had gone away but about 30 men remained to protect what little they had. There was one Egyptian family of 10 amongst them who had also been displaced. These people had very little, but they offered the aid volunteers a drink called slivovitz (that's what it sounds like) which they made out of apples, and is pure alcohol!

Unemployment is very high. Some families get a mere £30 a month from the government, so they were very grateful for what they received. Some crews went in to Mitrovica and found a very high military presence there. This was where the recent fighting had started. The crews have not seen any trouble but had heard that a policeman in a neighbouring village had been shot and killed.

So far the convoy have delivered aid to 800 families already, with lots more to go. This is more than the total of what they delivered last year. Large toys (kindly donated by ELC in Winchester) and nappies (from Cotton Bottoms, Marchwood) were being delivered to a kindergarten.

GOOD FRIDAY, Bernie and Charles set off towards the Macedonian border. Here there was a village with 50 families who were Croatians, Macedonians and Albanians all living together.

Charles called it a photo opportunity day. A man tied 2 banana boxes on to the back of his horse. A boy of about 7 years sitting on top of his family's banana box which had been put in a wheelbarrow to keep it safe. A lad of 6 years munching on a Wheatabix straight out of the packet.

The volunteers fed back that there had been a very positive response from the people they had delivered aid to. They felt that the homeless, displaced and families of the missing were very grateful and expressed their thanks through interpreters, and were very happy. The volunteers wished them all a Happy Easter.

SATURDAY - Bernie, Charles and Don are going to be delivering banana boxes to 108 families of the missing all over Kosovo and up to the Albanian border. They went first to Gjakove, to a group called the Mothers of Kosovo in the south west of the country and then north east to Skenderaj. Two representatives from the Kosovo action network (KAN) went with them to act as guides and interpreters. The volunteers were met by the Mayor of the town and were interviewed by a reporter from the local newspaper.

Some children in one of the villages got very excited by the exercise books and felt tip pens that they had been given. These are an absolute luxury as they don't get presents. There is no excess money as food takes priority, so these exercise books were very much appreciated. The people are very poor and one little old lady was wearing a pair of trainers which were several sizes too small for her, so she had pushed the backs of the shoes down. Unfortunately the men did not have any shoes with them on this day, so they were unable to replace the trainers.

Apart from delivering to towns and villages, Bernie, Charles and Don also called in on remote farms. On one of these farms there was a woman who had lost her husband and her sons, but she carries on doing what she can but now lives a very sad and lonely life.

EASTER DAY and Bernie, Charles and Don set off for a place called Babin Most. Here a mixed group of Serbs and Albanians live, but our volunteers were particularly visiting Serb families of the missing. They met a lady that Bernie had met on a previous visit, Lilianna, who now is quite poorly with cancer but never the less she insisted on greeting the volunteers and giving them food. Lilianna refused to eat with them as it is not the custom to do so, which left Bernie, Charles and Don feeling very uncomfortable but not wanting to offend. Lilianna took the men up to the church. The Priest gave out beautifully painted and decorated eggs and played a game with them!

Charles is hoping to bring one home as a souvenir. The Priest said this Church is famous as there had been a battle on the fields below, in the 12th century between Albanians and Turks. Apparently a Prince collected up all the bodies from both sides and buried them in the church. The Priest believed the village had not had any trouble three weeks ago when tensions rose because of the history there

The next visit was to a medical centre. They are in desperate need for an ambulance, so the team have decided to see if they can find one to take out on the next trip in September!

A women's village was where the volunteers stopped next. "Harrowing", was how they described it. All the men and male teenagers in the village (except 3 men who managed to get away) were wiped out. There are now no males in the village over 15 years. The women were all sat under a tree to welcome the trucks bringing them humanitarian aid. So sad, yet the view was so picturesque with snow topped mountains in the background

EASTER MONDAY and there is time for one last visit to the kindergarten. Don and Charles went back with the last of the aid and saw children enjoying and playing with the toys they had delivered a few days ago. Kevin (Don's co-driver) went to see a mobile bakery to see if he could get it up and running in the future.

The warehouse where Hope and Aid Direct had made their base in Pristina is now completely empty. All the aid has been distributed by the volunteers personally, with 2 arctic lorries and 10 trucks. They are all tired but well and have started the long journey back, some of them taking the scenic route by the Dalmatian coast, and others going back the way they came.

The final two crews, "Robin Hood" and "Dodgy Scales" arrived back safely on Friday evening. Robin Hood had stopped off at Zagreb to check on the situation of Voya, and "Dodgy Scales" had returned via Montenegro and the

Croatian Coast. An electrical fault on "Dodgy Scales" while in Montenegro resulted in failure of the fuel cut-off solenoid. This was repaired at the roadside by the crew who were able to continue their return to base.

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Another aid convoy completed, now we start work on the next, scheduled for October 2004. Thank you to every one who took part and all of you who contributed aid to help fill all the trucks. There won't be time to put your feet up for a rest, an enormous amount needs to be raised if we are to keep the promises made during this trip.

### **The support agencies were:**

KAN (Kosovo Action Network)  
UMCOR (United Methodist Commission on Refugees)  
ARC (Albanian Red Cross)  
UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)  
ICMC (International Catholic Migration Committee)  
GOAL (IRELAND)  
Mercy Corp (USA)  
Serbian Red Cross  
Samaritan's Purse International  
Balkan Sunflowers  
SOS Kinderhof (German Kindergarten organisation)

### **The convoy took 236 pallets = 85 tons of aid!**

In this amount were ;  
3 tons of bulk flour  
1/2 ton of seeds  
1/2 ton of medical aid  
30 bicycles  
20 sewing machines  
20 knitting machines  
20 wheelchairs  
1000 banana boxes with food and toiletries  
5000 mixed tins of food  
2 tons of tools