

CONVOY

Report



KIEV & CHERNIHIV September 2006

Delivering the goods of life...

As with a project this size, the preparation began months ago, but after the trips to the weighing bridge, unloading and loading the goods, and the strangely enjoyable shopping trips it was now time to hit the road to Newcastle to meet up with my fellow convoy drivers including my co-driver Steve Rowlands.

It's 05.30am on Thursday 7th September 2006, I'm loaded for the last time, and now there is no turning back.

We eventually reached the Newcastle mail centre at around 19.00 and meet up with the six crews who were all staying at a local Travelodge.

After everybody had eaten breakfast, it was back over to the depot, and then round to a weighbridge, just to check all the weights for the last time. We meet up with the other four crews on the harbour and our first bonding session began. Everybody had a great time chatting and getting to know the whole team.

Once on the ferry we all met up in Navigators bar, for the first of many drivers' briefings. This is where everybody switched on and listened to Carl reminding us what was expected from us all, and to go through the red book.

The HI-De-Hi chime woke everybody for breakfast, and then we all had enough time to clean away our things, meet upstairs and wait for the ferry to dock. We docked at Imuiden in Holland at around 10.00. All the drivers knew that once we were off the ferry, to head for a small staging area where we can assemble and get ready for the off.

The planned stop reached, at a service station in a town called Ziesar. The cooks started preparing our evening meal, and Steve put the kettle on with Ian, whilst everybody else got the camp ready for us all. Tonight's



meal was either, Salty's famous veggie curry, or Steve Rowland's Italian special Lasagne.

With all the drivers sitting round the tailgate of the chuck wagon, it felt like a blazing saddles moment.

After a couple of hours winding down all the drivers drifted off to bed, knowing we had another long day tomorrow.

Another day... another latte!

Steve had warned me that he sometimes snored, but in the morning I got out of the wagon to see how close the saw mill was that we had parked next to. What a racket.

Early start, blimey, Steve and I woke at about 04.00 and started chatting. Then he graciously offered to fetch the coffee from the service area. A wonderful café-latte, to help start the day.

Most of the other drivers surfaced around about 06.00, most feeling the effects of Salty's most excellent curry.

After the T wagon had supplied us all with T and coffee, 07.30 came around, and it was in convoy order, and off again we went. Today we were heading for Berlin, then the Polish boarder. We arrived at the boarder at about 09.00. The wagons slowly shuffled through, and Carl informed us that we would have a cuppa, and some breakfast. Yet another great meal, from Alex and his team.

After we'd eaten, out came the football, some cultured touches were shown, except Chris, he was terrible. Alan Hansen would not have been impressed at all. Everything was cleared away, and we were off again, heading towards a city called Wroclaw.

As we approached the city, it became very clear that getting through the city together was not going to be easy. There were road works, diversions and heavy congestion. This meant

that radio contact was going to be extremely important, as was proper convoy drill, i.e. looking out for the vehicle behind you.

The only way to get through large towns is to constantly relay messages down the convoy, letting all the wagons know where we are, and having patience to help everybody get through the town centre.

The plan was to get to a town called Opoczno for the overnight stop, but things are getting a bit stretched due to the delays in Wroclaw. The convoy agreed we would drive for the extra time so we could be back on schedule for the morning. As we approached Opoczno, to our horror there were more diversions, and our leaders nearly took us down a track with a height restriction of 2.5m, this would have meant we would have had 10

newly formed convertibles. But I must say, the Enterprise did us proud again, and we pulled up outside the Hotel Park for our overnight stop.

During the evening the two athletes of the convoy, Graham (who ate all the pies) Watson, and

Tony (Salty Balty) Salt decided

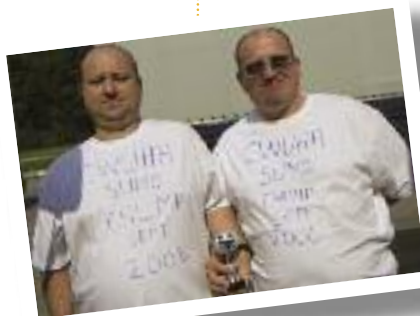
to have a inter dojo bash up. There they were, both athletes poised for action and ready for action. Off they went controlled aggression. Then came the contact, and after all those years of munching through curry menu after curry menu, the superior belly of the pie eater was enough to put Salty on his back, with his arms and legs waving around like a flipped turtle, what a sight.

After a short while the team drifted off to bed, with thoughts of crossing the Ukraine border tomorrow.

Keep on truckin'

With great discipline all the drivers had completed the vehicle safety checks, and were ready for the off at 7.30. Next the dreaded Polish/Ukraine border.

Once all the food and drinks had been finished off, and the chuck wagon was



► squared away, we were off again heading towards the Ukraine border crossing. At a town called Okopy Nowe.

We arrived at the border only to find a massive queue. I have never seen so many trucks, not even on the M25!

Carl and Alex took the chance and drove down the outside of these trucks, to see if we could get through any quicker. We got the call to come to the front of trucks, and wait at the gates. Well this line of trucks must have been at least three miles long, past loads of extremely disgruntled truck drivers.

We would have been there for days.

Off us all went, over the border, now comes the Ukraine side. We were herded in to a staging area, and told just to park up and wait our turn.

Stamp collecting!

How two worlds collide, everywhere we went there were guards with guns, big hats and paperwork. Bureaucracy has gone mad, a stamp for this, a stamp for that. Into this office, then the next.

Luckily for us, Alex had arranged for his main in-country contact from the Charity EveryChild to meet us at the border. Her name was Tetyanna. She was absolutely brilliant, and saved us possibly a day or two trying to get through the red tape.

The wagons didn't move again until

22.35, when they were moved 50 metres up the car park and locked up again! Then one by one the wagons were called into a shed, where a customs guard went into the back, mooched around and then put a seal on the back doors, not to be opened until we arrive at the customs yard in Kiev.

The lucky drivers, who stayed with the wagons, eventually got to the hotel on the border at 01.30.

Kiev or bust!

Today was going to be a late start anyway due to yesterday's border crossing, so we didn't expect to be moving off until around 10.00 ish.

The convoy passed through many towns and villages, all with unpronounceable names, making sure you could see the vehicle in front.

It was noted that the Ukrainian people do not turn left on their main roads, you have to turn right, then get straight over to the fast lane, indicate left, then do a U turn across the oncoming traffic to be facing the right direction, this certainly makes you clench your cheeks, and my friends on the convoy would probably wish that had happened more



often, but that's another story.

The convoy arrived at the outskirts of Kiev at around 19.30. We parked up and sorted out our gear we were going to take to our hotel in Kiev. This was going to be our base for the next five nights. We

all piled into a mini bus, and Tetyanna and Sergi (later Schummacher) took us to our hotel.

Breakfast had been arranged for 07.00 so we could meet our taxis. We all piled into three taxis and a mini bus to take us back to the compound where the vehicles were parked.

Once at the compound we had to wait here until we got the call for the convoy to split. Four of the wagons were going to Chernihiv, and the rest were staying in Kiev.

All the drivers wondered around stretching their legs. At this time the convoy discovered that Tony Salt's grandmother had passed away. Everybody gave Tony some time, and then to a person we shared a moment with him. This was a group of people from all over the UK coming together for Tony at his moment of loss.

Paul & Dave's Chernihiv story



After 3 hours we arrived in Chernihiv, which is just 30 miles from Chernobyl.

We parked our four vehicles at 66 Lyubets'ka Str, Chernihiv, where Everychild has a lock up. We all gathered around the chuck wagon where we had some food and a brew up. Some very special people who work so hard to help these children in the Ukraine met us. They were from Everychild and the Children's HIV Centre and the Mother and Baby Unit, these were the people receiving the aid we that we were delivering. They also brought TV cameras and the press with photographers too. Interviews took place and photos were taken and in no time we were on the move again, this time to the customs

yard as all the trucks were still sealed and needed customs clearance.

We all thought that this meant hours more hanging around, but with the help of Tetyana and especially one of her colleagues who ran every where he went, we were through in less than an hour. Back into the trucks once more and back to 66 Lyubets'ka Str, Chernihiv. When we arrived there, on hand were several helpers and we unloaded the aid into the lock up one lorry at a time under the scrutinising gaze of the customs officer. Soon the trucks were empty except for our own personal kit and pressies for the children we made our way to our hotel still in Chernihiv.

We parked the trucks in a car park near the hotel and got out our overnight bags and started walking to the hotel. We had just got outside the gate when there was a thump and Carl suddenly jolted sideways. It was one of Ukraine's typical drivers he had hit Carl with his door mirror as he passed us; he had absolutely no intention of stopping and just continued driving. You'll be pleased to know Carl being the tough guy he is received no injuries and just shrugged it off.

After a goodnight's sleep we were met by a minibus in the car park. We unloaded all

the gifts for the children from our trucks and put them in the minibus we all boarded the bus and were taken to the Mother and Baby Unit. This was a triumph in what the charities can do. We found a building in beautiful condition renovated and freshly painted and decorated; all the rooms were lovingly furnished with all mod cons, (far better than any of the hotels that we had stayed in).

It was also great to hear all the experienced convoy drivers recognising all the different pieces of aid that they brought here on previous convoys. What was especially nice was the fact that the mothers were so trusting and allowed us to hold and cuddle their babies. The director gave us a tour of the unit and we found every room perfect. Afterwards we met all the mothers in the lounge, which gave us the opportunity of asking questions about the unit and the welfare of the mothers and babies.

Making the grass greener

The only small thing wrong that we found was the length of the grass in the gardens, we discovered that they did not possess a lawn mower, but after a quick chat amongst ourselves we





all agreed to go and buy a mower to allow the mothers and babies to sit out on the grass and enjoy the sunshine.

We visited the local B&Q equivalent; you would not believe how hard it was to buy a lawn mower but as it took so long and the fact that we were now running so seriously late that we had to get the store to agree that we would come back to pick it up.

Off we went to Children's HIV Centre. We arrived at a small brick building with wooden steps leading up to the front door, which led into the main reception area. We carried all the toys and sweets we brought and piled them into a corner of the room.

We were greeted by Deema who runs the Centre and his staff and of course most importantly the children and their mums. Deema presented us with a plaque as a thank you to the CWUHA for the help they have given them. We were then shown around the premises, which were of poor condition. There was an area where the walls and ceilings had plastic sheeting stapled to them to keep out the damp and wet. There is no running water or sewage in the building. The icing on the cake is a neighbour who is trying to close the centre down I can only believe due to his fear of HIV and AIDS. This neighbour has bought one of their rooms (I think this impossible to do in the UK) and banned them from using it; this room is the children's playroom, which they have had to empty of toys and furniture. The toys and furniture have had to be stored in another room making this room so full it is now unusable.

There is a court case coming up where Deema is trying to gain the room back. This neighbour also owns the area at the rear where

the only entrance to the basement is situated; he will not allow them access to this entrance and so rendering all of the space in the basement unusable. There is a solution that they maybe able to open a new doorway to the basement in the front of the building, hopefully and with some help this may happen.

Banishing winter blues

Whilst we were looking around Deema mentioned that their boiler was not working and has been condemned, this meant that in winter it is so cold that the buckets of water they bring in actually freezes solid, the only heating in the building is two small electric heaters.

Carl and Alex spoke to us all and said that the CWUHA could help but it must be agreed by us all. Alex and Paul went around to a local plumber and discussed what was needed and after some skilful negotiations they agreed a price equal to £600. They came back and we all agreed to help, and so we gave them the money to renew their boiler there and then. Deema was so overwhelmed and gave each of us a very tearful hug thanking the CWUHA for its kindness. The children will definitely be warm this winter.

A special moment for me was simply the face of a little lad (whose name I cannot pronounce let alone spell) when we gave him a leather football you would have thought we had given him the world. Also the huge grin on his face whilst we were outside playing football in the street.

Going by the looks on the mums faces a special moment for them and all of us as well were when Karen was kissing the baby she was cuddling in the reception area, a sight to cherish.

We said our goodbyes and headed for 'B&Q', this time we got there picked up the lawn mower and returned to the Mother and Baby Unit. Once there we presented the lawn mower to the director who received it with great thanks.

Family time

Time was beating us and we quickly jumped back into the minibus and headed towards a family unit picking up some social workers that look after the families on the way. We stopped at the first house and Karen, Michelle, Stuart and of course Tetyana went in Paul, Alex and I (Dave) stayed outside as it was decided too many people going in would be intrusive. I asked Karen how it was and she replied that the woman has 3 children and they think her husband was in prison.

We continued the journey to the next family unit, Here Paul, Alex, Tetyana and I went to the next unit. Walking through the garden towards the house, one of the children was sitting on the fence and as

we passed he held his hand up to 'give us five' our hands met but he put so much force behind it he nearly broke our wrists which brought a big smile to his face.

We met Natasha at the front door, she introduced herself and explained that she has five children, two of which were at school; her husband had died and although she did have another partner he has since left them. Here she immediately pointed out the huge yellow gas pipe running around the house. She is so proud that she has arranged a loan to pay for

the installation of the gas, which means her five children, will not go cold this winter. She said via our translator Tetyana that she worked in the local military hospital and that is how



Convoy Drivers September 2006

Carl Webb - Convoy Leader	Dave Hodge	Nick Finnegan
Alex Pearson	Graham Watson	Paul Wilson
Amanda Davis	Jan Sykes	Phillip Lewis
Bonnie Campbell	Karen McSorley	Steve Park
Bob Miller	Katy Low	Steve Rowlands
Chris Keggie	Keith Ryder	Stuart Goodwin
	Michelle Simpson	Tony Gull

she is paying off the loan; this leaves her very little for anything else. She took us into her home, we walked in and the first room we came to was the kitchen.

Here Natasha had to show us her fridge she had bought second hand. She opened the door to proudly show us what she has achieved only to show us a fridge with nothing in it but a small box of mushrooms in it. We then went on into the dining room, this room had no plaster on the walls just bare brickwork and a large hole in the ceiling. Natasha turned on the light as we walked though and into the bedroom she then turned the light straight off. The bedroom was although sparse was very homely the children were playing and jumping on the beds they seemed very happy. We turned and went back through the dining room where Natasha turned the light on and as we went on into the living room Natasha turned the light off, she is so careful not to waste a single penny. The living room was surprisingly comfortable looking with rugs scattered around the floor and although the furniture was old and seen its best days Natasha works

extremely hard to keep her children and her home clean and in the best condition she possibly can.

Natasha showed us some photo's of her family her mum and dad and her grandparents. I asked if I could take a photo of her with her children, she agreed but insisted we go out side which we did and took some photo's unfortunately we only got pictures of two of her children as two were at school and the other one didn't want his picture taken.

Once again it was back to the minibus and back to the trucks and back to the hotel in Kiev city centre to meet up with the other six crews.



...back to the Kiev story

The six wagons that were staying in Kiev had to report to the Customs yard.

After two hours of waiting, the customs seals were broken and the back doors were opened. But it was still another one and a half hours before we were allowed to move again.

Off we went again, this time we were going to Brovary City. This is where we were going to off load our aid. We arrived at a football stadium, and were directed around to the rear doors. This is where the fun began. One at a time the wagons were reversed up to the doors and off loaded. At the stadium we were met by a merry band of students who had been recruited to help us. One box after another of the aid was off loaded, only stopping for the occasional bottle of water or a cigarette. These students were paid the sum of £2 for a days labour.

By 18.00 we had just finished unloading the last wagon, the wagons were lined up again a few photos taken and hand shakes all round, we were off again to the overnight compound.

Everychild had some visits planned for us, so we could see where the aid from previous convoys had gone and the good it had done.

We were taken to a town called Borodyanka. Firstly we were introduced to



the director of the family, youth and children Social Centre. Her name was Irina Melnichenko, and she was to spend the whole day with us.

She took us to the local football club where we met the head coach; we also had a kick about with a number of children who had come to meet us. Unfortunately we could not spend as much

time with them as we would have liked. We handed out sweets and lollipops to the children, and Graham (sumo) Watson presented the coach a football strip that had been donated to him by a local team in his hometown.

When they see the photos they will know it went to the right place. We were then quickly ushered into the stadium, and onto the pitch, where we were presented some mementos of our visit. Chris Keggie accepted



► these on behalf of the CWUHA, and also presented the head coach with his beloved Scotland baseball cap. Irina Melnichenko gave us a short explanation on how the region had been affected by the disaster 20 years ago. Also how the rest of the Ukraine treated the region. Due to the disaster, there was zero employment, and the people were unable to grow nothing. Many people drifted into alcohol abuse, drugs or prostitution.

After leaving the football stadium we introduced to a lady called Natasha.

Natasha was a single mother. She had moved into this region from a neighbouring one, this meant she was not entitled to any help from the state. She originally had no income and no home. Her daughter was taken away from her twice, as she was not able to look after her.

With help from the social administration, she now has two jobs, a small two roomed apartment, and her daughter has a place in the local kindergarten. The apartment block was on the edge of town, it was a three storey building, and either side of a central

star well were corridors with approx 8 apartments, and a shared kitchen and bathroom.

We gave Natasha some gifts and sweets for her and her daughter. These projects helped keep families together, and gave the people some respect, as they are very proud people.

Then we were on our way to a small village called Maydanvika, which was approx 25 km away from Chernobyl. Once there we were introduced to a local administrator, and she took us to a kindergarten, which was immaculate. There were around about eight children there. At the time of our visit, they were having a nap, but Mick Finnegan and I went and gave them all some sweets, and a cuddly toy each. We were shown around by one of the volunteers. In this small building, not unlike a small run down scout hut the children had a sleeping area, a play area and a small room where the children were taught stories and to be self sufficient, and hopefully not make the same mistakes as the generations before have made. The other members of the team also left gifts and sweets for the children as we left.

The next family we visited was just around the corner. We met a lady called Lyudmila.

Lyudmila was raising four children, three of her own, and one was her nephew. Their house was small, and in need of a huge amount of work, the kitchen area was gutted by fire, and this meant there was one sink in the house and all the kitchen equipment was outside in the shed.

Lyudmila's husband was in jail and she owed money to the water company. The charity was helping with the repair work, and gave her children free places in the kindergarten and wood for heating.

We gave the children some sweets and toys, and Graham gave them a cricket set and some tennis balls. Obviously we knew MCC rules would not exist here, but the children really enjoyed playing bat 'n' ball and catch whilst we were there.

The tour continued to a flat around the corner just two minutes away. This flat belonged to a nineteen-year-old man who was looking after his fourteen-year-old brother. This flat was immaculate. With help from the project, the flat had been completely redecorated and was a credit to both of the young men. Again we left gifts for them both as a thank you for letting us view their home.

A village school

Irina then said as a surprise we were to be allowed to visit the small school in the village. This school had approx 60 children. We met a small group of children when the party arrived in the playground; they'd been playing sports. They were all given sweets



and gifts. Then the headmistress showed us around. The whole place was immaculate again. First there was a small classroom, inside were the types of lift up desks you would have expected to see in a 1950's school. Then into a gym and then best of all, the library, all the shelves were full of books all neatly placed, again absolutely spotless.

Our tour over, Irina ushered us back to the bus, and back to Borodyanka. We had been invited to a meal by the local administration as a thank you. We were the guests of honour along with our interpreters Igor and Saska. There was a selection of local dishes including a dish, which consisted of rice and mince wrapped up in cabbage leaves, and it was very nice too. Our hosts, with a shot of vodka, toasted each course. Then a return toast was given by a member of our team.

After the meal we graciously thanked our hosts for their excellent hospitality. There was just a short visit back to the administration building, as Irina had to be at a meeting where their funding was top of the agenda.

Then an hour's blast back to Kiev. We had a free evening for a few drinks and a well earned break.

This also gave us time to think again, how our help and thoughts do make a difference. Igor our translator said it was great that people from outside their country are willing to help them.





An unexpected treat

Today was a free day, Tetyanna and Sergi took us out for a tour of the Kiev. They took us to a beautiful church with gold domes, and wonderful murals inside. Also just outside the church, there was a wall with information and commemorative plaques on it to show the atrocities of the 1939 famine caused by the Russians, who basically just came in and took all the food, which starved the population of the Ukraine, and hundreds of thousands of people died.

Fridays and Saturdays are traditional days for the Ukraine people to get married and as we toured the city we kept seeing the wedding parties at the beauty spots around Kiev, for their wedding photos.

We were shown many monuments of Kosaks, the Russian occupation, war heroes, the parliament buildings and other ministerial buildings. Also the Iron Lady, which welcome sailors in to Kiev harbour down the Nebrow.

The whole day was an unexpected treat, which had to come to an end, as our guides had to return to there office as it was Tetyanna's birthday today.

This evening is the night of the convoy meal with Every Child. Graham had prepared an excellent speech as our representative. This was full of feeling and heart felt emotion.

We all agreed that he had put in a lot of words exactly

how we all felt, and why we had collected our aid and volunteered to come on this convoy. Then followed the by now obligatory toast.

It's time to say our goodbyes and hit the road for home. Sergi and Tetyanna took us back to the compound where our vehicles were for the last time.

The team got there wagons ready for the off, taco's done, safety checks completed.

Carl called us all together to say our last goodbyes to Schummacher and Tetyanna, and they presented us all with keep sakes to remind us of our trip. Also Schummacher was going to escort us to the city limits then we were on our own to the border post.

We made great time; we arrived at the border at 18.20. So the same trip was completed in half the time and only 5km less, with three meal breaks. Once again we stayed in a cheap hotel on the Ukraine border.

The home strait

Everybody met at breakfast for Carl to go through his plans for the day. We wanted to get over the border as quick as possible and if anybody thought they had any problems with there paperwork they needed to let him know straight away.

We arrived at the border on 09.15. With a stamp here and a signature there, from guards sat next to each other, but you can't move unless that's been done.

Then with a few shunts from one lane to another we were through to the Polish border. Again we had to visit one window then the next for a stamp on a piece of paper they kept anyway. Once that was done we were allowed to leave the customs area. Great this was much quicker than anybody expected.

The journey home is a non-event with everyone wanting to get home as quickly and safely as possible to his or her loved ones. A job well done!

I would like to thank all our supporters for an unforgettable time that I don't really think I could put into words.

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION
HUMANITARIAN AID



Special thanks to...

A Big Thank You to Everyone who helped to make this September mission a great convoy:

- Bernie's Mum for knitting dozen's of woolly jumpers along with all the ladies who knit for us all the year round.
- Charlotte Swain
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- Inverurie Quads
- Scotvq.com
- ASDA Superstore at Minworth, Sutton Coldfield.
- Packington Church and friends parish council and associations
- Standard soap company
- Mr John Farnath "Kingfield Heath" Ltd
- Pollards of Countithorpe
- T. D. P.of Moira
- Coalville community hospital

