



Sharing ideas, saving lives!

Early on Sunday everyone assembles to travel to Charlotte Fire Department's (CFD) HQ for the "official" welcome from the command staff, meet our Instructors for the week – all now good friends and comrades, including city officials. Without the vital support of people like Curt Walton, Charlotte City Manager, and the community of the city, this event cannot take place. The welcome is completed by Gerald A (Rudy) Rudisill Jr, Chief Deputy Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, and his colleagues Jeff Cardwell and Greg Atchley.

The teams are given a full briefing on the week's operations to come plus some background on the CFD and North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM) swift water/flood programme. Formed in the face of hurricanes and natural disasters, the CFD and NCEM strike me as providing bottom-up solutions shaped by their experiences at the cold and wet end. Rescuers – who had their Chiefs listening – made the case for new solutions while persuading the community of their efficacy (after all the community pays for these things). Professional enthusiasm is a contagious virus and our highly experienced delegates gleefully respond.

Monday sees us at the impressive CFD Training Academy (shared with the City Police Department) for a symposium that examines the latest swiftwater and flood rescue strategies and operational tactics. All CFD members are trained and equipped in disciplines such as swiftwater rescue, large animal rescue, boat operations, dive operations, and helicopter aquatic rescue. All are trained at an awareness level and equipped, as a

A large delegation of senior fire and rescue officials from the UK was invited to Charlotte (North Carolina) for a week-long master class in water rescue, writes David Lane, a fire, water and marine safety consultant, and former senior UK fire officer. This masterclass is one of a series facilitated over some years with the UK's Chief Fire Officers Association, working with fire and emergency management professionals from the US, with the aim of developing flood response and major incident management principles.

minimum, with a PFD and throwbag, one of the very few large fire departments in the US to do so. An aggressive programme was undertaken to train flood response managers, gain NIMS certifications for those managers, and develop incident support teams as a result. The department has gained vast experience since 1995 due to deployments through NCEM to areas affected by flooding in many disparate locations – indeed our cadre of instructors were fresh from a storm deployment the previous week.

Charlotte Fire Department, in partnership with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Stormwater Division, uses a GIS-based mapping system. The CFD's maps are enhanced and include flood zones as well as properties that will be affected due to flooding. Also,

UK delegation with CFD and NC Instructors at the US National White Water Centre, Charlotte.

UK delegation with CFD, National Guard and NC Instructors at the North Carolina Army National Guard, Salisbury, NC.



David Lane is a fire, water and marine safety consultant, film producer, and Managing Director (CEO) of Lane, Jefferies & Associates – a small specialist consultancy. Highly experienced, David has worked in Europe and the USA in all fire, water and marine-related matters, including training and resource provision.
 Email: Ljfireco1@aol.com
 Web: www.professional-rescue.co.uk

Short-haul training operations underway at the CFD Academy with the UK delegation.

Wednesday, delegates travel to Catawba County, when after classroom work in preparation for boat operations, we relocate to be based on the Duke Energy site on the Catawba river below the Oxford dam in Burke County. A whole feast of water rescue equipment is laid out in readiness for the water release from the dam – this is preceded by a roar as the river fills with a seething cauldron of white water.

PPE on, DRA done, boat operations commence. Demonstrations include the use of high power output(s) engines and their advantages in high volume higher velocity water conditions – that'll be the ferry-gliding in urban floodwater then! High power and the advantages of "jet" drives, and clearly demonstrated and proven in use. Surely this applies to all urban floodwaters – it's never the accountant who has to operate the



low power, low cost engine/boat option. This section of the event provides an excellent opportunity for a refresh of skills and equipment knowledge with delegates sharing what is available elsewhere and functional capacities under different operational environments.

Early Thursday sees delegates going to meet the North Carolina Army National Guard, Salisbury, NC for their helicopter operations presentations and to see how Helicopter-Aquatic Rescue Team (NC-HART) field operations works. The mission: to find and rescue person(s) in distress and move them from a bad place to a safe place.

In North Carolina we see how programmes involving rotary aircraft can benefit other public services and the growing opportunities for the use of helicopters in very effective support of civil emergency response.

On Friday I detect an air of high anticipation whilst colleagues listen intently to the day's briefing – so would you, if you were going to hang under a helicopter! Everyone then participates both as a rescuer and a "casualty" – dozens of helicopter-aquatic rescue training operations are readily completed – testimony to the short-haul's potency for flood rescue operations.

After conducting the "wash-up" and lessons-learned at the academy, we view community storm shelters and logistics support available to first responders.

The week is rounded off by an evening meal of superb steak at the Rocking K Ranch (yes, a real ranch) put on and served by our CFD hosts, with Chief Jon Hannan handing out the well-earned "IFE and NCEM CPD" certificates, another first. Group Manager Derek Smith, Tyne and Wear FRS, leads the the response from the guests with sincere thanks and the funniest lines I've heard in years. He "accused" driver David of using a new Satnav type – the Pothole 9000 – to find and run into every single pothole in the state. Why the interest? Derek had used his headquarters to survey every stone and boulder in the 1/4 mile white water swim first!

Farewells are said and delegates are shuttled from hotel to airport on the Saturday. Did we achieve the outcomes Deputy Chief Jeff Dulin and colleagues set for the masterclass? You bet we did!

My thoughts for everyone involved are to repeat Jon's: "Outstanding!", "Excellent!", "You did me proud!".



Committed! UK delegate dynamically enters water for a rescue evolution.

each Battalion Chief and specialist unit carries large, laminated, base maps of the watersheds for use during flood events, vital and fundamental operational risk intelligence.

The area has developed an early warning system, the flood information and notification System (FINS), which has been



Concentration! Swiftwater rescue boat operations on the Catawba River, NC.

operational from the autumn of 2003. Using existing USGS stream and rain gauges, data is sent to a central computer for dissemination. Based on parameters determined by the storm water division, emergency services dispatchers and key personnel are notified of any flood threats via pager and e-mail. There are three levels of response: alert; investigate; and emergency. This enables emergency services personnel and managers to get and stay ahead of any potential flood problems.

CFD and NCEM operations procedures are derived from its basic philosophy: "In cooperation with our partners, we are committed to enhancing the quality of life in North Carolina by assisting people to effectively prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against all hazards and disasters". NCEM has a three-tiered response to a wide spectrum of major events which is locally centered, regionally augmented, state-backed and federally assisted, where all jurisdictions have some capability to respond to incidents/events.

My ProRescue colleagues, Messrs Ade Smart and Adey Mayhew and I provide perspectives on current EU and UK swiftwater and flood operations thinking. We also facilitate the Exercise Orion presentation (see page 12) by BM Roy Harold of Norfolk FRS and the UK's CFOA IWSG, without whose loyal support and commitment the event would not have happened.

Early on Tuesday we all travel to the US National White Water Centre in Charlotte where we initially receive some classroom tutorials and then shore-based practical instruction of water rescue techniques followed by in-water operations. Some of my favourite quotes of the day came from Battalion Chief Tim Rogers:

"Ever rescued a graduate of the Victim Academy?"

"A serious point as the sky lights up with throwbags – who will catch them with cold numb fingers as they rush on by in the flood?"

"Do victims use defensive swim techniques?"

Our CFD instructors are Messrs Dulin, Ogden, Rodgers, Brewer, Bright, Rogers, Cardwell (emergency manager reverting to his firefighter persona for the day), with Alex Auten giving logistical support and ably assisted by others (too many to mention, but I sincerely thank them for their outstanding work).

The group are led on a gruelling day of in-water rescue techniques which culminates in a sphincter-tightening, but confidence-boosting, "swim" down the white water run. I didn't think it possible to swim under white water for 1/4 mile – well done, David Frodsham of WL Gore.

PR guru Captain Rob Brisley is on hand to facilitate the news media's interest in the group and many TV interviews are given. Having previously done the submarine impersonation and an up-close and personal boulder survey, I gratefully accept the front-of-camera opportunities to publicly thank the community and our NC colleagues.

Evening time, and in the Academy's auditorium a mother holds her gorgeous child up high for all to see: "Thank you! Thank you!", she says out aloud, smiling at the saviour on stage. A high water mark of pride in a job well done – the life saved by a Charlotte firefighter. We witness this scene of emotion at the awards ceremony at Charlotte FD's Chief Jon Hannan's annual and very public staff event to honour bravery in the field and commitment during the last year. Whole arrays of awards are given out in front of TV cameras and his words "Outstanding!", "Excellent!", "You did me proud!", whilst pumping hands, seem very right when the saving of human life is the task and they've gone beyond the call of duty. Being from the UK makes me think our community has lost this art of cherishing excellence.