



International Bodyguard & Security Services Association

Executive President: 1276 Budapest 22 P.O. Box 28, Hungary

E-mail: president@ibssa.org

Report on the 2003 winter rescue operations of the International Rescue Team

From 8th January 2003 a great amount of snow was falling in Hungary, which broke the record of decades. Since the machines of the public-road maintenance could not cope with the meter high snow the traffic was at a complete standstill.

As the blizzard covered the whole country in a few hours and almost without any antecedents, the majority of the people travelling by car were not prepared for this unexpected situation. More hundred cars with people were shut out the roads and almost one hundred settlements became blocked from the outside world. It was impossible to get the basic foods to these settlements, the transport of the ambulance, fire-workers and doctors, hereby the treatment of sick people.

In Hungary, the most critical situation was in Baranya County, because here among the mountains the blizzard raged more intensively than the average.

The Rescue Team already at the beginning of the snowfall – through the organized news-chain – notified the voluntaries, and assessed the human and technical resources available. As the leader of the Team, I negotiated with the National Catastrophe Center and it turned out to be obvious that the contribution of our Rescue Team is necessary.

Till the departure we carried out the following tasks:

- Through our news-chain we mobilized our voluntary staff, and our center-office was designated as the meeting point. Among our 58 voluntaries, 26 persons arrived at the given time.
- The persons responsible for our stocks selected those equipments, which could be necessary during the rescue operations (hawsers, tow-bars, shovels, blankets, gas-heater bottles, thermoses, etc.), which were put on the plateau of the lorry.
- The person responsible for the food-supply obtained the foods for the voluntaries enough for one week. We should have thought of this, because it was possible that we could not manage to obtain them at the spot of the salvages.
- The person responsible for the vehicles checked whether the truck and the jeeps were suitable for the participation in the rescue operations, whether it had the necessary documents, snow-chain, etc. In our work 4 Mitsubishi Pajeros, 1 Mitsubishi L200 Pick-up and one 3-axles, 6 tons Steyer truck were used.

As Chief of the Rescue Team, I checked the personal equipments of the voluntaries, and whether they are suitable for carrying out the tasks of our mission. Before departure I informed the Team on a short briefing about the tasks, the duration of the mission and the security prescriptions.

We created 6 groups from our voluntaries; one group belonged to one vehicle. I assigned a leader for each group, who were in contact with me by using walky-talkies.

The groups in jeeps had double tasks: on the roads the rescue of the cars got stuck in the snow, the transportation of the travellers in trouble to a safe location, and the transportation of the doctors in the settlements blocked by the snow. Besides, in emergency cases they should have carried the sick people to hospital. The task of the group with the truck was the food-supply of the blocked settlements.

I evaluated as a great result that in 5 hours – measured from the mobilization of our voluntaries – our Team was ready to depart. The almost 200 kilometres long way took us 6 hours, and we helped already on the way to rescue the cars, which were slid into the ditch near the road.

At the spot of the snow-catastrophe we found terrible conditions. On the most roads more than 2 meters high snowdrifts made the thoroughfare impossible. The snow falling permanently and densely made the traffic more and more difficult.

After arriving, I immediately contacted with the local authorities, the local dispatchers of the National Ambulance Service, and the employees of the National Catastrophe Center.

Our first tasks were the rescue of the cars got stuck in the snow, the transportation of the people into warming-places. We gave each person hot tea from the thermoses and blankets for the children. All in all we rescued approximately 50 persons from more than 20 cars.

The next task was the traction of the empty cars left on the roads, because they made the traffic of the snowploughs impossible.

I can give an account of a real life-saving: a man, after his car went out of order, tried to reach the nearest settlement 6 kilometres away on foot. We found him got strongly cold, in a slight frozen condition. He spent more than two hours in open air in the heavy snow falling. Our group carried him to the nearest ambulance station.

The Rescue Team worked on the roads at the whole night, several times helping in ceasing the snowdrifts by hand. In the morning we took a few hours rest, and in the decreasing snow falling new tasks were allocated.

In the territory of Szederkény, Bóly, Hímesházai we made active rescue operations in 9 settlements. We helped in the transportation of the doctors, escorted the ambulances, our truck transported the basic foods to the settlements from the Mohács Bakery.

Our mission took four days, the last day we only helped by removing the snow around some health institutions and schools.

At home we cleaned our equipments, took care about their maintenance and storing. I believe that our mission not only was important for the people needed support and help, but also strengthened the team spirit in our Team and the commitment to participate in similar humanitarian actions through the common work and trials.

It turned out very soon that this commitment was necessary, since two weeks after our mission, on 5th February 2003 the preceding snow-catastrophe repeated. In a few hours meter high snow had fallen again at several places of the country.

We could follow the previous scenario; hereby the preparation time took only three hours in this case. We departed with three jeeps and one truck to the blocked settlements of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, to the county, which was in the most critical situation at that time. Our mission was similar to the one described above, in which 16 voluntaries took part. In the territory of Rakamaz and Tiszalúc we helped the people in trouble for three days.

Arriving home I praised all of the participated voluntaries, since they really showed an example by their devoted work.

The lessons of the missions will be evaluated on a common staff meeting at the end of February, where we are going to summarize the experiences and the tasks waiting for us in similar situations. I believe that it is essential to make the members of our Rescue Team aware of the feeling that how important the assistance and support activities are carried out by us.

Several media gave an account of our rescue operations. In the reports the fact that our Team is operating under the authority of the Federation of Autonomous Pories of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta was always mentioned.

Dr. Levente GYENES K.C.M.

International Coordinator of IBSSA for Europe

Country Representative of IBSSA for Hungary

Chief of the International Rescue Team of the Federation of Autonomous Pories of the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta