

England 2 Germany 2

Again to explain, this is not a football score!
For all of you who read my yearly conference column! This is now the number of conferences I have attend in connection with NWFS, two in the UK (Morton) and two in Germany. Last years German conference was in Munster, this year I travelled to Düsseldorf or to be more precise a town called Solingen.



I arrived on the Thursday evening to be met by Heike who had translated for me at last years conference, having stayed with me in London after last years German conference, she kindly repaid the favour and I was to stay with her mum and dad, saves on the hotel bill!

We travelled to her mum and dads in her twenty five year old VW beetle, which was an experience in itself, I managed to take the UK weather with me so naturally it was raining, the sight of Heike driving down the German motorway turning the wipers on and off with a switch to clear the screen was a bit disconcerting, I suppose I could have taken over freeing both her hands to steer, but I was a bit busy holding on for grim death!

Anyway we arrived safely dropped my stuff at Heike's mum and dads and went off to the pub for dinner, no your right it didn't take me long to get to the pub!
On arrival the committee from the German NWFS were there and it was great to see all my old friends from last year, waiting for me at the table was a glass of tequila and a slice of lemon! (I have no idea where they get the idea that I drink that stuff!)
After dinner and a catch up it was time to get back to Heike's parents (brave the beetle again).

Next day Friday and after breakfast with mum, it was off to start the conference proper. As most of the delegates weren't arriving until the afternoon, most of the morning was spent helping to get the rooms ready and helping to put out chairs etc.

Come the afternoon and a steady stream of delegates had arrived for the start of the conference, it was nice to see lots of friends that I had made last year and to recognise certain voices when the shout went up "Ah! Tequila Sue you are back" (where do they get the idea that I drink tequila!).

The conference was opened by the fire chief and local politicians as it was the first time Solingham had hosted a women's fire conference it was quite a big thing, goody

bags were on hand from the local council and upon opening them, to my surprise found a very sharp knife in mine!

Turned out we weren't in a dodgy area just that Solingham is very famous for making knives and cutlery, just like Sheffield in the UK.

After the opening ceremony it was off to start the conference proper and we set off for dinner and a drink, there were plenty of people to catch up with from last year, and some new friends to make who were attending for the first time, some of my old friends and translators were there from last year namely Korine from the Dutch fire brigade and between us two we made up the international delegates from other countries, basically me from the UK and Korine from Holland!

Saturday started early and as usual there was a lot of workshops and practical events to attend, My first one was a self defence class (took me knife just in case!) which turned out to be lots of fun, especially as there was only one guy running it, and I was interested to see how he was going to survive twenty or so super fit German women fire-fighters (Oh and me!) Well he did and actually after a bit of a kicking, looked liked he enjoyed the class.

After lunch Heike took me off to see another practical workshop, namely the iron bridge that spans the local river, now this was impressive it was about 107 metres high. Heike and the local fire service had got permission to use the bridge for the conference in a workshop to teach abseiling and rope rescue, like she said 'What's the use of having it here if we don't use it' guess she had a point.

As you may have guessed as all women fire-fighters are a bit mad! It was a very popular workshop, it turned out to be quite an event having lots of women fire-fighters abseiling off the bridge, so much so that the local television news team and reporters from the newspaper turned up to cover the story, I had my fifteen minutes of fame and was interviewed by the press, hopefully I said all the right things, bit hard to tell as I don't speak German.

The day ended with a tour of the town and dinner and a couple of drinks in the pub. Well when I say a couple of drinks, for those of you who have ever been out drinking with Germans and for that matter one Dutch officer, you never have just a couple!

The issue of cutlery came up again in the evening with Annie picking up her bag and finding some souvenir spoons from the pub in there! And Sonja trying to acquire more spoons as the night went on! Now I'm not sure how me and Korine came to be blamed for everyone ending up with a spoon in their pocket as they were leaving, I'm sure it was a case of mistaken identity, and as for my new name of Sue the spoon well that's just the German sense of humour for you! (One year tequila the next year spoons) Somehow and I'm not sure how this happened either we ended up at an eighties disco (no really) I was about to strut my stuff and bust some moves when luckily at 3am Heike got tired and called it a day (Phew!) .

A couple of hours later otherwise known as Sunday, we were up for the conference again, I got stuck into a workshop on extrication which was very interesting, even in

NETZWERK FEUERWEHRFRAUEN E. V.

German, and I was very impressed at the next workshop as well which involved a large turntable ladder and some very precise manoeuvres.

Lunch followed, and all too soon it was time to end the conference, the delegates gave their feedback and although in English I gave mine in that I think it's important for members of NWFS to attend and support conferences where we can, as we can share experiences and show our support of all women in all fire services.

Everybody seemed to be saying the same thing that the conference was well organised and a great success and everybody had enjoyed meeting new women from all over Germany, not to mention the UK and Holland.

My thanks must go to all the organisers too many to mention individually (you know who you are) To Heike's mum and dad for putting me up, or should that be for putting up with me.

Also thanks to NWFS who helped me attend the conference, I hope I did you proud; the Germans seemed to think so!
See you next year.

Best Regards

Sue Douglas
London Fire Brigade
Arson Task Force.