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# Briton tells of SAS Albania rescue

By MICHAEL EVANS, DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

A BRITISH aid worker described yesterday how he was rescued by the SAS from rebel-held southern Albania and flown out to safety in an RAF Chinook helicopter.

Richard Welch, working for the Bedworth Christian Centre in Warwickshire, had been trapped in the village of Borsh, near Sarande, since March 1 after people looted an arms depot. He and another Briton contacted the British Embassy in Tirana to let officials know they were desperate to be rescued.

Soldiers from the SAS Regiment flew out to Albania last week to protect the embassy and its ambassador, Andrew Tesoriere. They arrived with RAF Chinooks in case they had to help stranded Britons.

The 39-year-old aid worker from Dudley, West Midlands, was told to meet the SAS team. He said yesterday: "I contact-

ed another Briton in a nearby village and we both met up at the rendezvous point. Two Land Rovers were there and they were being driven by SAS soldiers in plain clothes. We drove five miles to the coast through roadblocks, without any trouble, and suddenly two helicopters came down."

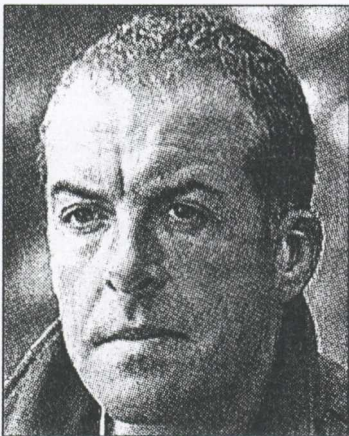
About 25 SAS men in full combat gear came out and spread around the ground "like ants, taking up battle positions. The soldiers were very self-effacing and very modest. But they thanked me because they were glad to see some action and said they had enjoyed coming to get me."

The two Britons were flown to Tirana and then across to Bari in Italy, before returning to England.

Mr Welch said that when the arms depot was looted Borsh was "suddenly filled with anti-tank missiles, guns, rifles and machineguns. When I left, people from outside were trying to buy a machinegun for \$200," he said.

Bedworth Christian Centre in Warwickshire sent 100 young people to Albania last year to help to renovate a school and a hospital. Mr Welch said he hoped to return.

The Foreign Office confirmed that two Britons and an American had been rescued by British soldiers in RAF helicopters. It added that all the Britons who wanted to leave had now been rescued.



Welch: sent out an SOS

## **ALBANIANS:** *Fears in Macedonia*

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culture and the ways of most of the other people of the region that lead some people here to predict violence.

Albanians, whose ancestors were among the first inhabitants of the Balkans, live in a society with its own language and history. Albanian leaders describe the country's Albanian population as mostly Muslim and say that close ties within extended families and the rules of a very conservative tradition are essential characteristics of their culture.

In the rest of what was once Yugoslavia, millions of Croats, Muslims and Serbs easily intermarried, while Albanians, for the most part, have lived in what one foreign diplomat called a parallel world.

"They were in the same country, but whether they were peasants or well-off urban merchants, they always felt apart," the diplomat said.

In Macedonia there is almost no intermarriage between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians.

Sounding as dogmatic as the most separatist politician in Bosnia, Mr. Xhaferi said, "We can live side by side, but we can never mix with the Macedonians."

Mr. Xhaferi, in a rumpled blazer, with a graying beard, gives the impression of a philosophy professor. But Macedonian politicians say his call for greater rights for Albanians is a barely masked first step toward setting up a semi-autonomous region in Macedonia.

For his part, he says the only way to protect Albanians is to essentially rewrite the constitution to guarantee that any government action affecting Albanians be approved by Albanian officials in Macedonia.

"This is a historical struggle," he said. "The Byzantines wanted to absorb us, and the Romans and the Turks. They could not, and we will not be absorbed now."

What makes the call for greater protection for Albanians draw support from even the most moderate among them is the feeling that they are an abused minority. Officially they have all the rights of any citizen, and on Tuesday night the Parliament passed a resolution calling for tolerance and cooperation between ethnic groups, but in daily life they feel they are treated as second class.

"The problem is, there is considerable discrimination against Albanians because people don't like them," said a Western diplomat. "Now it's getting worse because Macedonians are afraid of them wanting to secede."