



Message from First Chief Fire Officer (1985 - 1989)

In the 1970's and early 1980's the British Virgin Islands, and Tortola in particular, were affected by an annually increasing frequency of fires involving properties, which necessitated the services of the then available fire-fighting capabilities of the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force.

The old second-hand fire appliances that they had available were manned on a part-time/volunteer basis by members of the Police force, and by 1983 two of these personnel had attended professional fire training courses at Fire Service training schools in the UK. However, the situation continued in need of further improvement and the BVI Government and the Governor ultimately decided to apply to the British Government, through its then Overseas Development Agency for the provision of professional assistance and funding to establish a fully functional professional Public Fire and Rescue Service Department.

Finally, in 1985, I, Mr. Colin Graham, previously an Assistant Chief Fire Officer [Operations] with the West Yorkshire [U.K.] Fire and Rescue Service was appointed to the post of Chief Fire Officer, British Virgin Islands, with a brief to establish an appropriate Service for the BVI Government.

In the following two years, with the co-operation of the variously appropriate BVI Government Civil servants and politicians and the able support of the two Police Firemen, Kellman and Stoutt, I produced the necessary enabling legislation for its passage through Legislative Council, structured and adopted a locally relevant financial structure and budget for the Department, recruited and started the initial training of both full and part-time fire-fighters, agreed a longer-term development plan to provide the Service to cover all the Islands to an appropriate level and finally specified and acquired a number of new modern fire appliances and equipment and operational premises.

These matters were effectively nearing fruition by the time of the passage of the legislation through Legislative Council and towards the end of my initial contract and before my departure I saw the initial ground clearance for the Road Town main Fire Station.

In 1988, I returned to oversee a further period in the initial developments, and finally left in 1989, leaving the Service in the operational control and management of local Officers Stoutt and Kellman, both, of whom, had been promoted to Station Officer ranks and were awarded greater Acting rank responsibilities on my departure.

In 1989 the BVI Government invited me to return again to officiate at the formal opening of the Main Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters and Fire Station in Road Town, which I took great pleasure in doing.

From thereon the Service has continued to serve and grow in ways that are a matter of record in the annual Departmental Reports produced for the BVI Government; and as the Service celebrates its 25th Anniversary it is proud to record that DCFO [currently acting C.F.O.] William Penn, ably supported by Senior Managers and Supervisors Caddle, George, Jeffers, Barry and Williams, all from the original group of recruits, continue to serve and develop the proud traditions and standards of the Service and Department.

Colin Graham
Former Chief Fire Officer

