

UK and Scottish politicians – just back from Ukraine

The MSP for Edinburgh Western, Alex Cole-Hamilton has just returned from Lviv in Ukraine after a gruelling drive delivering ambulances along with Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians from both Holyrood and Westminster, and Edinburgh businessman, Robert Kilgour.

The purpose of their trip was to help deliver five repurposed ambulances to Ukrainian troops on the frontline as part of the work which charity, Mighty Convoy, have been doing.

The body was set up by Simon Brake who has led a dozen convoys to Ukraine since August 2022, delivering 43 ambulances and more than 150 trucks. In the first place Mr Brake asked for volunteers to drive the vehicles to Poland, but this latest group took the vehicles right into the west of the country.

The visit was sparked by Angus MacDonald MP meeting the International Christian Medical and Dental Association at the House of Commons. He was impressed by what he saw and persuaded fellow Liberal Democrat MP Danny Chambers, to volunteer. After a call with the Scottish Liberal Democrat leader they also included Mr Kilgour in their group of six volunteers along with Mr MacDonald's wife, Michie.

While in Ukraine the team visited a rehabilitation centre where “virtually everyone was in a wheelchair, had lost an eye or a limb” – or in the case of one person, all four limbs. They were shown around a drone factory which produces 10,000 drones each month and they also met with the Mayor. On their return home they are anxious to keep a focus on Ukraine and the people there who they said were most grateful for the continued support from the UK.

The particular ambulances which were transported to Lviv came from Birmingham. The vehicles are those which have ended their useful life in the NHS and they are then purchased by the charity, given a complete service and overhaul and driven over land to Ukraine.



With commanders of 184th brigade at their training centre
Alex Cole-Hamilton, MSP, said: "In our case we actually took
one of the ambulances directly to a brigade commander at an
army base deep in the forest. By now they will already be in

use on the front line. While these vehicles are not four by fours they are used to evacuate casualties from clearing stations or field hospitals. It was very humbling to hear from the commander that these vehicles will save lives. As you would understand in a battlefield situation time is absolutely your worst enemy and if you can't get somebody to surgery within 20 or 25 minutes they will die or lose a limb."

Robert Kilgour said: "I have always been an armchair supporter of Ukraine but Alex reached out to me to help financially and I obviously said yes. But then I was asked if I would be up for co-driving with Danny Chambers. IT was the right thing to do to get off my backside and actually do something practical to make a real – be it small – difference. Clearly I was also there for political balance. I think all of us have been changed by what was only a few days but which seems much more significant. It gives you a reality check about what is important and what is not."

Mr Cole-Hamilton explained this was a 35 hour road trip, but the mood changed when they reached Ukraine. He said: "You know, it's not a it's not a country where rationing is a thing. There's no scarcity. It desperately wants to have business as usual, and they're very good at kind of seducing you into that feeling of normalcy. And then suddenly they'll give you an air raid briefing. And you realize this isn't a normal country, and they said there's a high likelihood this siren will go off, and this is what you do."

He continued: "Like so many Scots I have been appalled at the scenes of warfare we have seen in the last three years. The people of Ukraine are holding back the forces of Russian expansionist tyranny but they are paying a high price for it."

"Driving through the night was gruelling but it is nothing compared to what the people of Ukraine live with every day."

"My party will never give up on Ukraine. The UK Government

must redouble their efforts to ensure a Ukrainian victory.”

Angus Macdonald, the Liberal Democrat MP for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire, is a former member of the armed forces. He said: “Ukraine needs our help. The Russians have been targeting hospitals and medical services and we know the Ukrainians are desperate for ambulances, both for recovering military casualties but also taking the many civilians who are injured by shelling and glide bombs to hospital.

“I am urging people to make a donation to buy supplies and support Ukraine – your funding could save an innocent person’s life.”

Mr MacDonald confirmed he raised money by putting out an appeal on Facebook, and many small donations have mounted up to more than the cost of the ambulance so far.

Robert Kilgour said: “I have had the privilege of joining The Mighty Convoy – a group of 10 dedicated individuals – to drive several ambulances filled with essential, life-saving supplies to Ukraine. This effort was in support of those affected by the ongoing war, providing critical aid where it’s needed most.

“It has been a deeply humbling and emotional journey, one where political differences were set aside in the name of humanity. I’m incredibly proud to have played a small part in this mission, standing in solidarity with our international neighbours in their time of need.”

Mr Kilgour continued: “The reception we got from everyone, including the mayor and his deputy mayor, from the drone manufacturer and from the army commander at the military training camp really brought it home to me that us getting on our bikes and getting over there is hugely appreciated by them.

“It’s not just about sending money and it’s not just pick up

trucks and ambulances. Simon Brake of Mighty Convoy has a couple of trucks going next month- these are freezer vans and lorries. He almost has a shopping list from his Ukrainian partners, and who cover the whole of Ukraine. They just don't want to be forgotten and going out there yourself, as we have done, does help keep their spirits up."

Mighty Convoy's next convoy departs on 16 May and the charity is looking for donations. They are also seeking drivers for future trips. To fund a trip each driver needs a co-driver and they need to buy the ambulance which is £7,000 to pay for the vehicle, the insurance, the fuel and the Channel Tunnel crossing.

<https://www.mightyconvoy.org>



Alex Cole Hamilton holding the “Deputy Mayor” in his arms



Alex Cole Hamilton at the Field of Mars where the dead are buried



L-R Danny Chambers MP, Angus MacDonald MP, Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP and Labour MSP, Paul Sweeney



On the road



Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP centre (holding the “Deputy Mayor” in his arms) centre with Mayor of Lviv, Andriy Sadovyi, and Robert Kilgour on the right. Angus MacDonald, Michie MacDonald, Paul Sweeney, and Danny Chambers are also in the photograph.