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Local leads water search in Albania

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By ADAM HATCH

Dr. Roddy Tempest was going to Albania to deliver and install heavy equipment before jetting home to Durham to float through a few Carolina days in relaxation.

But Albania had a different plan for him.

What began as an eight-day trip for the water purification expert turned into 5 1/2 weeks in a dry and inhospitable nation teeming with thirsty refugees of the Kosovo conflict. "The problem with getting water in Albania isn't quantity, but quality," Tempest said Thursday, one week after coming home. "We had water, but you wouldn't want to drink it."

Tempest, who owns his own water purification company here, was hired to provide the initial water purification equipment to Camp Hope, a U.S.-sponsored refugee camp near Fier. But when he got there, there was no water to purify, and no river or pond to attach his equipment to.

So the camp's general tapped Tempest to help find water for the refugees. Thus began a five-week journey through mountains, drilling three wells and testing rivers as far as 17 kilometers away to see if they could supply the camps with drinking water.



Dr. Roddy Tempest, Chairman and CEO of Tempest Environmental Systems, discusses water purification with Commanding General Helland (USMC) of Operation Shining Hope

"He worked 16 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week for weeks on end to get this water," said Keith Gibbs, Tempest's U.S. point man. "Needless to say, he didn't get a lot of sleep. Dr. Tempest became the responsible person for getting water to the camp."

The team contacted local geologists and U.S. military to find good sources of water, all the time coordinating the testing with his company here in Durham. Tempest and his team tested wells and rivers and finally settled on pulling water from the Vyose River about 17 kilometers away. Until that point, the camp had been trucking in water from Fier, water was only available for two hours a day. The country does not have a single sewage treatment plant.

Once Tempest and his team picked the Vyose, because the river wasn't polluted or brackish, the problem became how to get the water to the refugees.

"We decided to divert the water from the Vyose down a system of aqueducts and canals mostly used for irrigation," he said.

What they didn't count on was that many people used the canals as garbage dumps. "The water was so bad that animals had come up and drank out of it and had died right away, falling into the canal and messing it up even more," he said. Eventually, Tempest and his team were able to filter, purify and pump enough water to satisfy the more than 20,000 refugees that had gathered at the camp - 1.2 million liters a day. "By the end of our time there, we were proud to have the only place in Albania or Macedonia to have clean water 24 hours a day for bathing, drinking and cooking."



Tempest Environmental Systems drills through alternating layers of clay and quicksand to reach the underlying brackish aquifer.



Refugees huddle around running water at Camp Hope, the first they've had in months.

Tempest is proud of the part he and his team played in setting up Camp Hope. "We take a lot for granted in America when it comes to things like water, " he said. "We saw that when you don't have it, you've got problems."

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