

From: David Elliott, Diver

Subject: April 2008 DIDSON Training with the Fire Brigade in Florence, Italy

I have returned from Florence, Italy. The trip was a great success and my experience there was one of the best I've had to date. The divers were all very accomplished, quite skilled and graceful in the water. My interpreter spoke English well and I was able to learn some Italian during the process.

The first day was spent in the classroom from 9:00 until 5:00. There were a couple short breaks and an hour for lunch. The class was in a relaxed setting at the Fire Brigade Station and I asked them to feel free to ask questions during the program, rather than waiting until the end of the presentation. This created a relaxed environment and everyone in the group participated. I had a very long program with wide variety of photos, diagrams and videos, and included some pole mounts examples. Some interest was made apparent in the "Platform Status" position. I had never used this function as most of my diving has been free swimming. I had Marcello call Jeanne (DIDSON distributor in Virginia) and with a quick call we were on track to add this feature. We connected with a hand held Garmin GPS via a Bluetooth wireless connection. It worked perfectly and gives them a reference from shore or boat to the contact position. I also mentioned the floating antenna that may be available for use in the future.

On the second day we spent the morning in the pool with a variety of objects like hammers, props and lights for them to view and record. I was in the pool with them for about 1.5 hours observing and providing guidance where necessary to assist them creating the best image. They are all very quick studies and had no problems with operation. The Fire Brigade want to operate DIDSON with the topside cable at all times. It became apparent to me that they prefer this capability and having extra eyes in the course of filming is a bonus.

I was amazed at how quickly they moved along and warmed up to the instrument. Out of the seven divers in the class only two had previous experience. These two were the pair who found the body of the person tragically lost on Easter Sunday. During translation I was told that they actually tied the DIDSON to an oar and held it off the bow with the Diver Held display for the operator while another diver was at the control of the laptop. They observed a feature that had the appearance of a torso and measured it. Then from a second angle they took another measurement. At this point they felt confident they had found the body and deployed a diver who immediately swam directly to the contact. According to their lead diver there were footprints in the mud from a previous diver who came within two meters of stepping on the body. At the end of the day we returned to the class room to discuss the day's events and share questions, techniques and experiences with the sonar.

On the third day, we drove to the Old Vecchio Bridge (the oldest ecliptic bridge in Europe) where a tent was setup to support the morning diving activities. This was quite a privilege for me as tourists are not allowed in this region. It's very scenic and many people were looking on as the Sommozzatori (divers) prepared to enter the water. There were some newspaper photographers at the site as well. While diving in the river I suggested they take turns in a hide and seek scenario and exchange the display underwater as they moved through the exercise. They had practiced changing displays from mask to mask in the pool and had no trouble.



There was a change of plans for the afternoon diving and a real bonus for me as we left the confines of the city and traveled about 45 minutes north to a large reservoir to film some intake grates.

They had mentioned some difficulty on their first dive at this site and I later learned they had been working on a "manual gain". After moving them to an "auto gain" they had much better results and seem satisfied. Later returning to the Station and after cleaning gear we had a debriefing of activities. Overall it appeared they were all very happy with the training sessions, especially the Chief. I likewise conveyed to them my appreciation for their skills, diving techniques and hospitality.

Before departing they gave me a small plaque with the emblem of the "Vigili Del Fuoco" which means Guards of Fire! I was really surprised and had them all sign the back. The inscription at the bottom in Latin loosely translated means to "Love the Fight for Danger and Fire". My appreciation for them was certainly intensified by this unexpected gesture, it was a genuine thrill for me.

I should round off here as I have given you a brief synopsis of the training and not drag on too much more. Instead I want to take a line or two and let you all know how much I appreciate this opportunity to promote DIDSON and provide this kind of training. It really was the greatest pleasure for me and fantastic experience.



Thank you again for allowing me to take part in these wonderful journeys to share with other divers what I consider to be the greatest achievement in sonar imaging.
Dave Elliott