

Extract from 'An Ordinary Copper'

Article Response to PHS *Journal* 30 (2016)

By DAVE LEACH

The following is an extract, pages 253 to 256, of *An Ordinary Copper* which was published in 2015, and I give consent for this extract to be published in the *Police History Society Journal* as an expansion upon the piece referred to in edition 30 under 'Police launched Bristol Raids to Make Area Safe (extracted from *The Daily Telegraph* of Saturday, 13th September, 1986).

The largest operation for which an Operational Order was required during my two years in the Logistics Office came from a meeting in the ACC (Operations) office at teatime on Thursday, 4th September, 1986. A new Superintendent had recently been posted to command the subdivision at Trinity Road and it had been identified to him that the premises subject of the drug and unlicensed alcohol sales raid in 1980 was re-emerging. The 'softly-softly' approach encouraged by the most senior officers, to seek to avoid another riot, had brought the unintended resultant feeling among the drug dealers that they could operate with impunity. The Superintendent had brought the issue to the ACC as he was not prepared to allow this trade to continue, but needed support in order to combat it. The Deputy Chief Constable was asked to the meeting, as were senior officers from the Community

Relations Department and Traffic Department. It was decided, in a short meeting, that action was required but it would need to be well planned and there would need to be a significant element of surprise if it was to be successful. The following morning, the outline of the prospective operation was presented to and agreed by the Chief Constable.

The team, with me acting in the coordinating role, went about furthering their respective parts in the plan. The local station at Trinity Road found and manned an observation point with a view of the section of Grosvenor Road in front of the Black and White Café. The Traffic Department set about hiring coaches and, crucially, three soft-sided lorries and established timings for the journeys to Grosvenor Road from variously distant holding areas, one some miles away out near J1 of the M32. In addition to drawing together the overall operational order, with which I received the assistance over the weekend of the War Duties clerk typist, I had to plan how we were to draw together the largest single deployment of our force manpower on the targeted day, Thursday, 11th September.

Our presence in the Logistics Office over the intervening weekend could not go unnoticed as there was a routine for the Control Room staff

to carry out security checks of all the floors in New Bridewell. The visit from a Constable was soon followed by one from the duty Inspector, hoping that I would tell him more, but there was a real need for the number of people knowing what we were doing to be extremely limited.

It was a tradition at the time for all planned operations to carry an invented title which had the same initial letter as that of the Division on which it was to take place. In recent months the repercussion of the newspaper dispute in London, as production moved away from Fleet Street, had been demonstrations at a distribution depot near J18 of the M4 at Old Sodbury. We, therefore, called it 'Operation Delivery' and all bar those on 'D' Division seemed to have accepted, as more had to become involved, that the newspaper transfer point was the venue. Those on 'D' Division were sceptical that they would gain such support!

With a draft order and the other departments having been busy, the next phase of this unusual operation was agreed by the ACC. Over preceding months he had held, with some significant input from our office, a series of seminars to familiarise senior officers and key players from all parts of the Force, especially headquarters departments, with what was required to confront

large scale operations. This training now brought its full benefit as he called the many sector commanders and their deputies to Kingsweston House on the Wednesday.

I had, the day before, contacted all Divisional Commanders with the 'shock' request for many more PSUs than they would normally be able to supply. Their relief was audible when I explained that the overtime bill was to be handled from headquarters. This contact also required the senior officers they nominated to be at the pre-briefing on the Wednesday. Knowing that our internal demands for manpower would exhaust our capabilities, I contacted the ACC Operations in each of our neighbouring Forces to pre-warn them, confidentially, that we may be seeking urgent support from them on the Thursday night.

The sector command teams were provided with copies of the overall plan which the War Duties clerk/typist had produced from my dictation, and were required by the ACC to go to separate training rooms in Kingsweston House to create their own micro-plan for their own part of the operation. They then returned to the conference room and presented their 'bit' to the rest of us. With some minor fine-tuning, their sector plans were incorporated into the overall Operational Order. This necessitated another late night; there had been no other kind since the previous Thursday, and the production of a composite order for the final briefing on Thursday lunchtime. The benefit of the process adopted by the ACC was that every sector commander had a really intimate knowledge of his own planning within his area of responsibility and had heard more than he would have read from the Order through the presentations in the conference room.

The timings by the Traffic

Department proved to be invaluable and, when the time to move was established, each holding area sent its units away at appropriately slightly different times to reach their locations in the St Pauls area on time. The three soft-sided lorries had to take the journey from the M32 J1 slowly, as each contained three PSUs, a total of 69 Officers. The intention and briefing was for them to stop in Grosvenor Road, one directly in front of Brighton Street and the others front and rear of that vehicle. They arrived in the road with the first lorry outside the Black and White Café and the others close behind. Although the slight variation from the intended point at which the Officers jumped from the lorries was not overly problematic, it did point up, for the debrief, the importance of adequately briefing such key personnel as the three Constables driving the lorries. A mixture of hired coaches and our own crew busses brought officers to other strategic points from different start-off points and coaches were used again to convey the relatively few arrested back to Trinity Road Police Station.

The timings by the Traffic Department were 'spot-on', with all of the near-600 Officers deployed to their planned locations within less than a minute of each other.

The surprise element was achieved by the use of the lorries, which had been very easy to obtain by Constables with HGV licences simply hiring them for the day. More difficult, certainly in 1986, was the obtaining of coaches. All coach operators hired out their coaches complete with their own employee as driver. The Traffic Department managed this aspect by going to coach operators well outside the Bristol area and offering the owner an operational necessity argument for our own qualified drivers to have the vehicles for the day.

We had looked at avoiding the mid-afternoon, mindful of that timing problem in 1980, but had to 'go' when the observation point told us that dealing on the street was visible.

Despite the timing difficulty, the operation itself was a resounding success and the disturbances that followed it, which lasted a couple of evenings, were contained.

A point of self-criticism had to be that we stuck too long to the sectors and deployments for the operation which made redeployment to confront the moving street disorder situation less fluid than was ideal. On the plus side, of course, there was no shortage of immediately available, equipped and trained, Officers and, thanks to the seminars at Kingsweston, those capable of commanding the units.

As the situation went on beyond what was really the end of the planned operation, I made the calls necessary to bring in the mutual aid from the Forces I had contacted a couple of days before and all arrived to look after the night shift and, importantly, relieve much of our own manpower after a long, and in places strenuous, day.

One of the lessons learned from 1980 was the importance of fully debriefing the operation and its, fortunately not too serious, aftermath. This we most certainly did and involved most of the key players in the exercise. The most significant effect of the operation was that it restored police authority in an area where it had definitely slipped and made the task of the local Officers somewhat easier.

The operation had demonstrated to the law breakers and, more importantly, to the law-abiding in the area, that policing the street had returned to what was, then, the expected norm. In the early aftermath, we set up foot patrols

around the immediate affected area with Officers in pairs but each pair monitored from a visible distance by a Task Force Unit of a Sergeant and five or six Constables. A few days working in that way to safeguard the patrolling Officers soon enabled us to reduce the back-up.

An aside – a comment on the evening of Operation Delivery demonstrated to me that it is never safe to speak too soon.

With the small control room at Trinity Road monitoring a successful operation as we reached teatime on that Thursday, I went into the side

office in which the Logistics Office Inspectors were ready for what may come next. At the time there was a popular programme on television called *The 'A' Team* and I quoted one of the common sayings from it, "I do like to see a good plan coming together!" Almost immediately from behind me the noise level in the little control room grew louder as the follow-up disturbances started.



DAVID EDWARD (DAVE) LEACH joined the Somerset Constabulary in 1965 and served through the amalgamation with Bath in 1967, and that with Bristol &

South Gloucestershire to form the Avon and Somerset Force, from 1974 until his retirement as Superintendent in charge of the Communications Department in 1996.

An Ordinary Copper is the story through that progression of Police Service and includes his attendance at the Police College at Bramshill, brief attachment to Notting Hill in London and much longer involvement in the National Reporting Centre at New Scotland Yard before and during the 1984/85 National Union of Mineworkers Dispute.

For anyone who would like to get the full story, the cost of the book is £10.00 + £4.00 post & packing. Please contact Dave at dleachcmc@blueyonder.co.uk or consult the PHS Directory of Members (member number 1195). Cheques for £14.00 to be made out to D. E. Leach.

Murder at The Knoll

The Fatal Shooting of PC Frederick Atkins

By ADAM WOOD

Although fatal shootings of policemen in the Victorian era were rare - in fact, since the formation of the Metropolitan Police only two London-based officers had been killed through gunfire up to 1881 - the carrying of firearms by burglars was becoming alarmingly more frequent. The notorious criminal Charles Peace had shot and killed PC Nicholas Cock at Manchester in 1876, and two years later injured PC Robinson when firing five shots at the officer who had disturbed the burglar at Blackheath.

Those constables patrolling remote, outlying locations were becoming increasingly at risk. And so it proved when, in the early hours of Thursday, 22nd September 1881, PC Frederick Atkins approached The Knoll, a large house on Kingston Hill in the Met's V Division.

Mr. Short, the butler, was woken by the sound of a pistol firing and got up to search the house, on his rounds meeting the housekeeper, who had also heard the shot. Each door proved to be secure, but as they approached the front entrance they heard a groan coming from outside. On opening the door they found PC Atkins, unconscious on the ground and bleeding profusely.

The two members of staff immediately alerted their employer, Mr. Powyskecki, who telephoned the police station on London Road, Kingston. Several local inspectors, along with Divisional Surgeon Dr. Roots, attended The Knoll, where they found PC Atkins in a perilous condition, unable to be taken to hospital. He was, however, moved to Kingston police station, where he was examined by Dr. Roots. It was

discovered that the constable had been shot three times, once in the chest, with the bullet entering a lung, and also in the abdomen and left thigh.

The 22-year-old Atkins, who had been transferred to V Division just two months earlier, was gently questioned by Inspector Bond and Dr. Roots as to the attack, and, with great difficulty, was able to make a statement:

I did not see anybody or hear anything which should cause me to imagine there were burglars at work. I went along the avenue slowly, accordingly to my usual custom when on duty there, but there was no-one about. Before I was aware of anything I saw something like the gleam of a lantern, and then whispers, after which there was a report, and then I felt I was struck by something sharp in the chest. I turned to one side quickly,