

### **THE METROPOLITAN POLICE – preparing for war.**

#### **Welfare.**

One of the attractions of belonging to an organisation such as the police is that there has always been a strong element of support for its officers including issues relating to health, housing and general well being. The planning for a war situation carried out by the police from 1936 covered a vast range of issues and these included the welfare officers of all ranks from Constable to Commissioner. As an example it was realised that there needed to be a rota of Senior Officers on duty at night so that decisions could easily be obtained for situations covering a wide area of the Police District. It was therefore decided that the Deputy and Assistant Commissioners, of which there were four, and the Commandant of the Police College, would work a rota to cover out of office hours, a note on the papers pointed out however that there was a need for these officers to be relieved for meals, a reasonable statement, and that 3 hours should be allowed for dinner! As the senior officers would often take their meals away from Scotland Yard a condition of this arrangement was that they would leave contact telephone numbers.

Arrangements were also put in hand to ensure that all divisional officers were able to have access to a canteen, often open 24 hours a day, and stocks of food were allocated for this purpose. These arrangements were particularly put in place so that local officers could be fed at their place of duty, it did however cause some concern when other officers, not locally based, tried to have access to the meals provided. These meals were not free but costs were kept down. At the same time divisional officers on routine duties were allowed a 30 minute break in an 8 hour tour of duty, initially this was to be extended by 30 minutes, before or after the refreshment period, when the officers would be on reserve. This extra half hour was cancelled in 1942.

Scotland Yard, being on the river and very close to parliament and government offices, was considered to be a target and arrangements were put in hand to move as many staff as possible to other locations. One of the suggestions was Hayes in Kent but it was pointed out that this would be directly under the main flight path of bombers and was not therefore such a good idea. Instead a girl's school in Putney, which was vacated, was taken over and used by several of the administrative branches of the police. Londoners will know that this latter location is on the river which was itself used by enemy pilots as an aid to navigation; it did however have the advantage of easier access. In the event Scotland Yard was itself bombed and the Commissioner's office badly damaged, fortunately there were no casualties.

As far as beat constables were concerned it was suggested that a system of ringing in (reporting from Police boxes or posts) every two hours, as against one in four, should be adopted. This had several advantages, one was that such regular reporting could assist in providing a regular supply of up to date information regarding damage, traffic conditions etc and also it would enable supervisory officers to monitor the well being of those performing duty on the streets. Additionally it was decided that, for officers posted to fixed locations and vulnerable points, there should be easy access to shelter in the case of air attack. In the majority of locations was already available but, in the case of twenty-three situations, special arrangements had to be made. In general terms beat offices were expected to remain on their beats during air raids but were encouraged to take precautions for their safety.

It was anticipated that officers might well be caught up in bombing raids and that some could be so badly injured as to make identification difficult. All officers were therefore issued with an identity disk which, suspended on a piece of string, was to be worn underneath the shirt.

#### **Family Welfare.**

The well being of police families, especially those living in the East End of London, was of concern and a suggestion was made by the Chief Constable of Surrey that they could be re housed in vacant properties in his area. In this way it was thought that officers would be able to work free of worry about the safety of their families. Whilst the original idea concerned London it was clear that similar arrangements could be made regarding other cities subject to heavy bombing. This suggestion was not formally adopted; it was pointed out that police officers were not the only ones with families in danger areas and that it would have been wrong to single them out from those of others such as Firemen etc.

During the war however many families of Metropolitan officers, for at least part of the time, were able, in addition to a system of 'self help' within the force, to shelter with police families living in less dangerous areas. This was invariably at the suggestion of police families outside London particularly in 1944/5 when London was being attacked by V1 and V2 rockets. On many occasions this was the result of individual approaches although some offers were made on a force wide basis.

In order to assess the views of officers in October 1939 a survey regarding possible relocation was taken on 3 District Metropolitan Police then comprising E, G, H, J, K and Thames Divisions. It was found that many officers were prepared for their families to be relocated, and that many Police officers had already made private arrangements. Further offers of assistance came from within the civilian branches at Commissioners office and it was suggested that to assist with the cost of travel, e.g. train fare to Scotland at £10 per person, Sub Divisional Inspectors could issue rail warrants the cost being later reclaimed from the officer's salaries. It must be repeated that in general the Home Office was against the idea of any such organisation from within the force.

Permission was also given for officers whose homes had been destroyed or badly damaged to be given hotel accommodation in extreme cases for up to forty-eight hours; in the case of Constables and Sergeants the costs to be paid by the Commissioner.

It would appear that to a degree this state of affairs had not been considered prior to the war. It was brought to a head by the case of a PC on Thames Division whose home had been completely wrecked in 1940 and who had to apply for public assistance, a state of affairs that the Commissioner wished to avoid. A Confidential Memorandum of 23 October 1940 spelt out the Commissioner's views on this subject. He stated that he particularly wished to avoid officers having to go to public shelters or ask for public assistance. He suggested that officers bombed out might be accommodated by other officers and that other police premises could be equipped to assist in such circumstances; he further suggested that the sports club at Imber Court might be such a place.

Special arrangements were also put in place to deal with the financial situation of officers, perhaps purchasing their own homes and receiving rent allowance, if their properties were destroyed or badly damaged. The Metropolitan Police had a variety of ways in which it could assist officers in difficulties. The two main ones were the Relief and Loan funds. There was a degree of flexibility between these funds and on one occasion 2 officers from W division were reluctant to accept assistance from the Loan fund as this would put them further in debt, the loan having to be paid back, and instead were provided with funds from the Relief fund which was normally reserved to assist officers or their families in difficulties through death or illness.

The above is a very small part of current research into war preparations which may one day be published in book form. In the meantime details can be found in documents at National Archives particularly under the MEPO 3 and 4 sections.

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### METROPOLITAN MATTERS 1893

From The Strand Magazine



#### Constable John Jenkins

(E Division, Metropolitan Police Force.)

"Constable John Jenkins was on duty on Waterloo Bridge at 2.45 a.m., on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1882, when he saw a man mount the parapet and throw himself into the river. Without hesitation, the constable unfastened his belt and jumped from the bridge after him. Notwithstanding a determined resistance on the part of the would-be suicide, Constable Jenkins succeeded in seizing the man and supporting him above water until both were picked up some distance down the river by a boat that was promptly sent from the Thames Police Station. The danger incurred in this rescue may be fairly estimated when it appears that the height jumped was forty-three feet, the tide was running out under the arches at the rate of six miles an hour, and a thick mist covered the river, so much so as to render it impossible to see any object in the centre of the river from either side. The place where the men entered the water was a hundred and seventy yards from shore."

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