TRANSCRIPT OF “FILE ON 4” – “POLICE FIREPOWER”

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ACTUALITY WITH STUDENT POLICE

INSTRUCTOR: You loaded?

MAN: Stand by!

SHAW: There’s a drive on to find new firearms officers to boost Britain’s ability to respond to the threat from terrorism.

ACTUALITY OF GUNS FIRING

MAN: Okay guys … and check your targets.

SHAW: But will there be enough – and will they be in the right place if there is an attack?

APTER: If a firearms unit is the other side of the county, now that is almost 70 miles away, so the only officers that you have available are unarmed and vulnerable officers and they feel, in a terrorist-type situation, they would be sitting ducks.
SHAW: There are also concerns about the legal protection for firearms officers. On File on 4, we hear from them – and from those who call for a more robust approach to investigating shootings by police.

MACHOVER: In each case where someone dies at the hands of the state, the best thing for public accountability and for learning lessons is for the evidence to be captured quickly, evidence secured and the person treated as a suspect.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY ON FIREARMS RANGE

INSTRUCTOR: … the point, the magazine, five rounds, load, make ready and re-holster.

SHAW: This is the indoor firing range at Northamptonshire Police headquarters. This is where firearms officers from four forces in the East Midlands come for their training.

INSTRUCTOR: Two rounds per exposure, five seconds. When the targets appear, you may carry on. Watch and react.

SHAW: At the far end of the range is the line of targets – each one a picture of a man pointing a gun.

ACTUALITY OF GUNFIRE

SHAW: There are 14 firearms officers doing the training and nine instructors. Each officer is armed with a Glock 17 self-loading pistol and they’re told to stand from ten metres and take aim.

ACTUALITY OF GUNFIRE
HOGG: We’ve got some nervous sort of fresh students here.

INSTRUCTOR: You need to change the magazine. Magazine out, reload.

HOGG: It’s their introduction to the handgun.

SHAW: Police Constable Jon Hogg, a firearms officer for 11 years, is one of the instructors on today’s course. The men and women he’s training are police officers who’ve volunteered to carry firearms. There used to be special payments for the role, but not anymore.

What are the qualities that are needed to be a successful firearms officer?

HOGG: We’ll be looking for someone who is confident, capable in their day-to-day policing, they should have a good, sound knowledge of law and their policing values. We’re interested in also their threat perception in regards to how they assess risk, how they deal with threat, can they think quickly on their feet?

INSTRUCTOR: If you look at the majority of your rounds there, they’re all straight in the main, you know, core of the body and the scoring zone. It’s just that one, just let that weapon settle then squeeze the trigger. Okay? But the rest of them are nicely central and really really good shots.

SHAW: Northamptonshire Police says it takes great care selecting candidates for the course. The pass rate is about 80%. Across all forces, the average is 50%.

HOGG: The challenging phase is the handgun, because it’s the most difficult to use and that’s where unfortunately some people don’t come up to the grade. It’s a short barrel. It’s very easy for them to maybe be less accurate.

SHAW: It’s not as easy as it looks like on some of the cop dramas on TV and the films?
HOGG:      Certainly not.

SHAW:     And after the ten weeks, are they on the streets as a fully-fledged armed officer?

HOGG:      They’ll finish the course and be qualified as an authorised firearms officer. They’ve got all the skills and just need to gain the experience.

SHAW:     In Northamptonshire, as in other parts of England and Wales, there’s a big push to select and train more armed police. The number has been falling for six years. The latest official figures, for 2015, show there were 5,600 firearms officers. Our research has found that’s the lowest level since at least 1987 – the year Michael Ryan shot and killed 14 people at Hungerford in Berkshire - events that sparked a review of resources. The attacks by gunmen in Paris last November, which left 130 people dead and hundreds more wounded, prompted another rethink about the number of firearms officers here. Simon Chesterman, who leads on armed policing for the National Police Chiefs Council, says the conclusions were clear: 1,500 more officers were needed.

CHESTERMAN:    After Paris we ran exercises with a number of key police forces around the United Kingdom. On that Friday night when the Paris attacks happened, we actually modelled what we had on duty and we replicated the Paris attacks in various cities throughout the UK, recognising that although we had some capability, we certainly lacked the capacity to respond effectively or as effectively as we would want to, to protect the public. So we did the modelling, we came up with some numbers, we put that to Government and clearly we’ve been provided with the money to do the uplift.

SHAW:      Has it come a little bit too late, the increase in numbers?

CHESTERMAN:    With hindsight, I suppose you could say that having had that attack and then asking for more, perhaps it was after the event. The majority, the vast majority of officers will go out there unarmed to protect the public, but I have to say we do need more firearms officers. At the moment there are 5%; this will add a few percentage points to that. Times are changing.
SHAW: But recruitment is proving to be far from straightforward. Although one thousand of the new firearms officers in England and Wales will be funded by the Home Office for a period of five years, individual forces will have to find the money for the other 500 from existing budgets. That raises the question as to whether those officers will be replaced in their current roles. In Scotland, which has 275 armed officers, there are so far no firm plans to increase the number. Sergeant Che Donald speaks on firearms issues for the Police Federation, which represents police constables, sergeants and inspectors.

DONALD: There isn’t a magic pot that we can just dip into and pull out a fully trained firearms officer. What eventually happens is that, as people progress from one level to the next, it’s going to leave a gap to be filled, so that means it’s going to come from the front line, it’s going to come from CID, it’s going to come from neighbourhood policing. But no one said how that gap is then going to be filled on the front line, which is already decreased and struggling to cope. Now we know that some forces are recruiting nationally – is that going to be sufficient to backfill that? I don’t know.

SHAW: You’re not complaining, are you, about money for more firearms officers - because that’s what it sounds like?

DONALD: [LAUGHS] No, I’m not complaining, and we’ve also got to bear in mind that to achieve 1,500 armed officers, we’re looking at an attrition rate of 50%, so we’ll have to recruit 3,000 to get 1,500. Another thing to consider is one of the largest forces that are going to increase is going to be the Met and it’s a lot cheaper for the Met to take fully trained firearms officers from surrounding force areas than to put a person through a programme from start to finish. So you’re going to get a drain from the forces surrounding the Met – your Surreys, your Sussexes, your Hampshires, etc, which means that they are going to have to doubly recruit.

SHAW: The Home Office said some of the new firearms officers would continue to perform core policing roles, reducing the need to backfill vacancies. However, File on 4 has uncovered other serious concerns about firearms capability and capacity.
ACTUALITY IN CAR

APTER: We have just come off the M27 and we are heading down into the New Forest, which is a massive rural area within our policing area.

SHAW: I’ve come to Hampshire – one of Britain’s biggest counties - to meet the head of the local Police Federation, John Apter. The officers he represents are responsible for policing two of Europe’s largest ports – at Southampton and Portsmouth; two national parks – the South Downs and the New Forest - as well as the Isle of Wight.

APTER: You are a handful of officers covering a massive geographical area and officers who work now in the more rural areas across Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight, where we cover, they are concerned. There’s a real feeling of vulnerability about the lack of firearms capability and that’s been really brought into focus because of the terrorist threat that we currently face. Areas like this, especially in the summer months, where the population quadruples in the New Forest because of the tourist activity, it’s really difficult to get from one place to another in a timely manner. I could take a more direct route, but they would be down country lanes and not really the sort of roads you want to be driving a response vehicle.

SHAW: The most recent set of official figures for Hampshire, from March last year, show that out of 2,800 police officers in the county, 76 were permitted to use firearms. To prevent or repel an attack by marauding gunmen, the force would rely on support from what’s called a counter-terrorism hub – a group of specialist officers, some with advanced weapons training. There are five hubs in England and Wales. The one which serves Hampshire also caters for four other counties and is based at Thames Valley Police.

APTER: Being realistic, if a firearms unit was coming from the middle of the county, you are still talking about 30 miles away, you’re not talking a few minutes. There’d be an understandable delay. And if a firearms unit is the other side of the county, you know, that is almost 70 miles away, so you’re talking a significant distance, so the only officers that you have available are unarmed and vulnerable officers and they are the
APTER cont: officers that are saying to me that they feel, in a terrorist-type situation, they would be sitting ducks.

SHAW: Isn’t this all a bit scaremongering on your part?

APTER: Times have changed. This is right and proper that we not only do something about it, but we talk about it, because what I feel is that the increase that we are going to see, which is most welcome, is not going to be enough.

SHAW: Here we are, in the idyllic New Forest. Are you really suggesting that this could be the seat of a terrorist attack? That we’ve got to have firearms officers on standby here in case of some outrage?

APTER: Just because we are in the heart of the New Forest doesn’t mean to say there are not areas or other rural areas that need and deserve protection from our specialist departments. There is a number of key facilities. You can see Fawley in the distance; it is a significant oil refinery which is right on our doorstep.

SHAW: The idea that Fawley oil refinery, which handles 22 million tons of crude oil a year, or another energy plant in the UK, might be under threat is not simply speculation. Terrorists have planned attacks like that before. In 1996, MI5 and the police thwarted preparations by an IRA gang to bomb six electricity sub-stations in London. And in 2009, it emerged that one of the Islamist extremists convicted of plotting to blow up transatlantic airliners had researched other targets, including nuclear power stations and Britain’s largest gas terminal at Bacton in Norfolk. Former police officer, Chris Phillips, headed the Government’s national counter-terrorism security office for seven years, until 2011.

PHILLIPS: The terrorists might not just want to kill people. Actually they may want to disturb our way of life and that could be through turning off electricity, that could be by disrupting gas. Our critical national infrastructure needs to be protected as well. Many of our critical national infrastructure are dotted around the coast, for instance, and they have to have a police response that is able to deal with a threat that might attack that. You can expect a very quick response time in central London - maybe
PHILLIPS cont: four minutes, five minutes. I think you can almost guarantee that there will be armed police officers on the scene. Clearly as soon as you get further out from the centre of London, those times cannot be guaranteed. But we also have to bear in mind that, if we’re thinking about marauding firearms attacks, if the terrorists are clever they move and they keep moving. And what that means is that police officers who are constantly trying to chase them down, so response times, you can get to the first scene of the incident but that may not actually be where the terrorists are.

SHAW: Simon Chesterman, from the National Police Chiefs Council, pointed out that police would have support from Britain’s armed forces and from the ranks of around 3,000 firearms officers in the Ministry of Defence police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. But he acknowledged that mobilising firearms officers, particularly in the countryside, was a significant challenge. Can you offer any reassurance to those areas that are concerned that they’re remote and they could be vulnerable?

CHESTERMAN: Yeah, what I would say is that I did a review into the Derek Bird shootings in Cumbria. Cumbria is one of the largest rural geographic forces in the country, with a limited firearms capability. However, on the day, they responded extremely effectively and they were able to get significant numbers of armed officers to the scene, supported by civil nuclear constabulary within a relatively short period of time, so there’s one example of how it can work. I’m not saying that it would be instant, but certainly with this uplift, with the counter-terrorist specialist firearms officers, the hubs, we will make sure they can be mobilised to areas where they will be needed, whether that’s rural or urban. And we are talking to partners, for example, in the MoD about aerial lift and shift to make sure if we need to, we can move people about by helicopter, so that’s all ongoing work.

SHAW: So the military might be moving police firearms officers from a location to the seat of the problem?

CHESTERMAN: Potentially yes.

SHAW: And at what point might soldiers be deployed?
CHESTERMAN: If an event like this was to happen, you would expect Special Forces to deploy, and following the event, it may well be that we’ll request further military support from other military units.

ACTUALITY OF TRAINING – GUNFIRE

SHAW: But police would be the first on the scene of a marauding gun attack, and that’s why they’re now being trained to respond in a completely different way from before.

INSTRUCTOR: .... Down to the right.

MAN: Run down to the right .... [GUNFIRE]

SHAW: Last year I observed one of the new counter-terrorism training exercises at an empty office block in central London. The scenario: a siege at a shopping centre, with gunmen intent on killing everyone in their path. The air in the building quickly filled with grenade smoke, making it hard for the police officers to see clearly. They fired their weapons - paintball pellets, rather than live rounds – as they hunted the attackers. The Metropolitan Police’s Assistant Commissioner, Pat Gallen, told me the police mission was no longer simply about containment: it was about meeting the threat head on.

Using that tactic would mean, for example, that if your officers came across casualties, they would have to step over them and go and face the threat, is that right?

GALLEN: Well, I think that is a sad reality of what may well be the case. I think we’ve got to understand, as we’ve seen in Paris, we’ve seen it in Australia, terrorists will be determined to kill people. We’ve got to, as quickly as possible, stop that threat, and that means that our officers go forward.

SHAW: So the tactics and training for armed officers are changing to counter the terrorism threat, but do they have the right weapons? Kevin Hurley doesn’t believe so. A former police firearms officer, who once headed the counter-terrorism
SHAW cont: team at City of London Police, he’s an army reservist and until earlier this month was the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey.

HURLEY: The only way you can take on people with automatic fire weapons is to put back more ammunition going in the opposite direction to them. The military call it ‘win the fire fight’. So you win the fire fight to close them down, stop their freedom of action and then you neutralise them or kill them, frankly. Our police officers at the moment on our response vehicles are armed with top quality rifles that have been deliberately downgraded from firing automatically if wanted, to only fire single-shot. This is a flawed philosophy based on the fact that police officers only used to need to fire single aim type shots at siege type situations with armed robbers. We’re talking now about murder gangs armed with machine gun type weapons that you have got to stop immediately otherwise you yourself will be killed.

SHAW: But the National Police Chiefs Council says that the weaponry has been very carefully considered and evaluated and they do not feel that automatic weapons are appropriate and that there is a danger with automatic weapons that you could hit innocent people, as well as the intended target.

HURLEY: Well, the only thing they’re right about there is the bit about the danger with automatic weapons that you can hit an innocent person. I have personally been at the other end of 762 machine gun fire on a number of occasions for real and it’s not very nice, you keep your head down. It just shows you that the decision makers at the highest level of police firearms policy don’t know what they’re doing. You’ve only got to look at what happened in Mumbai, at what happened in Paris. My goodness me, when will these people take their naive sunglasses off their eyes? If one of the policemen can spray bullets back, yes, he may well hit five or six innocent members of the public and kill them, he may well do, but he will enable his colleagues to go forward and kill the terrorists and save the other 95 or 100 people.

SHAW: The National Police Chiefs Council says the issue remains under constant review but says it’s satisfied with the weaponry available. What is far less clear is how the legal framework governing the use of lethal force would apply to armed officers in a terrorist attack. At present, police who shoot someone have to be able to show
SHAW cont: their actions are consistent with human rights laws: each bullet they fire must be absolutely necessary in the circumstances. But Brighton University’s Professor of Criminology, Peter Squires, who’s written three books on armed policing, says in the aftermath of a marauding gun attack, it might be impossible for police to prove that.

SQUIRES: They have to have this honest belief that in the circumstances they are facing an imminent risk to their own life or to the life of a member of the public and there is no alternative means of neutralising that risk other than a lethal force option. In the case of a Paris-type situation with marauding terrorist gunmen, you are talking about a firefight and I don’t think we’ve really begun to anticipate the consequences of that legally. You have to look hard to see how you can square that with a law that still says every trigger pull has to be human rights compliant, so in a sense we haven’t really got the ducks in a row here. Police are being trained to do things that really do stretch the framework of legal understanding.

SHAW: What are the consequences if the law has not kept up with these new terrorism training tactics?

SQUIRES: Then potentially any officer entering a kind of open fire fight is always likely to be liable to be prosecuted for shooting when it was not absolutely necessary. Officers are going to be wide open to challenge every time they fired a shot.

SHAW: The legal protection for firearms officers is now the subject of a Home Office review ordered by David Cameron after the Paris attacks. But the way police shootings have been dealt with in recent years does not augur well for the future -- with those on both sides feeling the process is deeply unfair.

ALEXANDER: Azelle was quite jolly at times, always smiling, and he always dreamed of being a footballer.

SHAW: Susan Alexander is the mother of Azelle Rodney.
ALEXANDER: In his late teens he had a really bad injury on his hip and he had to have a hip operation and he was in hospital for quite a long time and it put him out, I think it really set him back and he was quite depressed about it, really quite low.

SHAW: Aged 24 and about to become a father, Azelle Rodney died in north London in April 2005 at the hands of the police.

ALEXANDER: It was another normal day and until like I’d seen the newsreels going round on the screen that a man had been shot dead in Edgware. I’d also got a call from a relative that said that they think Azelle’s been hurt and I was frantically ringing round the hospital and police stations and I couldn’t get any answers.

SHAW: When did you find out?

ALEXANDER: I really found out the next day when two people arrived at my doorstep, family liaison officers. They looked very shocked and really traumatised by something, they were just kind of vaguely just trying to say that your son’s been involved in a fatal incident and that was it really.

SHAW: When did it really sink in that Azelle had been killed?

ALEXANDER: When I went into the mortuary, because it was just in a small poky little place and I was just standing there thinking, God, what’s happened, what have they done? He looked in his face, he looked like Azelle. His hair was glistening and apart from the bandages around his head, he actually looked like he was asleep.

ACTUALITY ON STREET

SHAW: It took many years for Susan Alexander to find out exactly what had happened to her son, Azelle Rodney. She learned eventually that the Volkswagen Golf car he was travelling in with two other men had been followed by police to a roundabout here between Edgware and Mill Hill, a suburb of north London. Officers had secret intelligence that the men were armed with machine guns and on their way to steal cocaine from a Colombian drugs gang. As police cars boxed the Golf in, just by the Railway
Tavern pub, an officer shouldered his G36 assault rifle and fired eight bullets through the car window. Azelle Rodney was hit six times in his right arm, back and head. It was all over in two seconds.

EXTRACT FROM POLICE RECORDING

OFFICER: … we’re looking to do it sort of at the roundabout if he stops ….

SHAW: A police officer had been filming the operation from another car. His voice can be heard on the tape. He describes the way the vehicle was stopped. In the background are the sounds of the gunshots.

OFFICER: Right, yeah, sweet as, sweet as, sweet as [GUNFIRE].

SHAW: The recording was played at a public inquiry set up because legal complications had prevented an inquest from being held. During the inquiry, which heard evidence in 2013, there was another legal dispute, about footage from an aerial surveillance camera. The initial investigation report into the shooting had made no mention of it, and the Metropolitan Police wanted the evidence to be withheld. The solicitor representing Azelle Rodney’s relatives, Daniel Machover, said it illustrated the family’s uphill battle for truth and justice.

MACHEOVER: It was becoming very clear over a period of months rather than weeks that there was sensitive material, that we were being shielded from access to certain information.

SHAW: Do you think the police were hiding something?

MACHEOVER: They were hiding this particular bit of aerial footage. We went off to the High Court in the middle of the inquiry, where they still tried to prevent us having access to that. But in my view there could have been a prosecution in 2006. Susan didn’t need to wait for the public inquiry to reach the conclusion it did. It took too long and
MACHOVER cont: there was a failure of a series of processes and, you know, justice, accountability. Everyone’s interests would have been much better served by having that happen earlier.

SHAW: The inquiry was told that three guns had been discovered in the car Azelle Rodney was travelling in. But it concluded there was no lawful justification for the officer to open fire on him. The inquiry was also highly critical of the way police had planned the operation, stopped the suspects and dealt with the aftermath. The Crown Prosecution Service reversed its original decision not to charge the policeman and he was put on trial for murder.

WILLIAMS: He’s a very professional man, a very professional officer and he was very experienced, someone that we all looked up to, whether we were specialist firearms officers or armed response vehicle officers – anyone in firearms really.

SHAW: His name, Anthony Long, finally became public.

WILLIAMS: Inevitably it took its toll on him and his family as well. He tried not to show it, but without a doubt it wore him down.

SHAW: Mark Williams is the head of the Police Firearms Officers’ Association, which has 7,000 members across the UK. He was a Police Federation representative at the time of Azelle Rodney’s shooting and helped to give welfare support and guidance to the officers, including Anthony Long. He says the length of time and amount of detail involved in examining what happened in those few seconds when Mr Long fired his weapon was unreasonable.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely unequivocally there needs to be an investigation, it needs to be transparent and with the utmost integrity. The problem comes is the expectation we place upon the firearms officers themselves about what we expect them to recall or report back on following a police shooting. And Azelle Rodney is a good illustration there of you’re asking people to explain tenths of seconds of an incident, tenths of seconds, and it’s impossible to break it down to that minutia. And I think that’s expecting the
WILLIAMS cont: impossible from human beings, they’re not super human beings, they’re human beings, firearms officers.

SHAW: The families would say, well that’s what you have to do. To get to the truth, that’s the only way to establish whether an officer is telling the truth, to establish exactly what happened, that’s the only way is to go through it bit by bit by bit, because then you can sometimes see inconsistencies and flaws in the, you know, in their thinking or their argument.

WILLIAMS: Well, I have respect entirely what a family may expect, but breaking things down to such minutia is a very dangerous thing to do, because it doesn’t reflect accurately about what’s happened. We get officers asked about what was the subject’s hand doing at that time, his left hand, where was it raised and at what angle? They’re impossible to answer. All the other detail going around, it’s very very difficult to take all that information in because they’re dealing with the threat in front of them. It seems to me that the investigation starting point all the time is, well they must have done something wrong. And that’s what hurts the officers more than anything else, is that the investigators come in heavy handed, assuming that they must have done something wrong because they’ve discharged their firearms.

SHAW: At his trial, Anthony Long said he’d acted in self-defence, fearing Azelle Rodney was reaching for a gun and his colleagues’ lives were in danger. Mr Long, who by then had retired from the police, was found not guilty. The verdict came as a huge disappointment to Azelle Rodney’s family, who felt their ten year quest for justice had been weighted against them.

ALEXANDER: It was really frustrating knowing that officers were being protected in a way.

SHAW: Susan Alexander.

ALEXANDER: We asked loads of questions, but they took forever to answer the questions and not every one of those questions has ever been answered anyway. I just wanted answers.
SHAW: Some people might say that Azelle was in a car carrying guns, allegedly on his way to commit a robbery.

ALEXANDER: Prove it then, you know.

SHAW: And therefore, you know, if you do that, then you run a risk …

ALEXANDER: Well this is what people did say that right from the off, right? They covered up things, yeah, during all those years, yeah? And if we hadn’t come to the inquiry, we wouldn’t have known half of what we know. I’m sympathetic with the view that they’ve got jobs to do, but I always said that this was not a terrorist threat on the street of London, my son wasn’t a terrorist. He’s not perfect, but he wasn’t, it wasn’t like a terrorist threat.

SHAW: He didn’t deserve to be shot?

ALEXANDER: No. I would say if he deserved to be stopped and apprehended and arrested, then that’s fair, and then you prove why or you state why, and they had ample chance to do that.

SHAW: Scotland Yard told us it tries to learn from every firearms operation so it can improve the way it deals with incidents. The force said it was more transparent now about armed policing than ever before. But one issue, in particular, remains a source of tension: the police practice of conferring, under which firearms officers share their recollections of a shooting before writing up their notes of what happened. The latest police guidance says any such discussions must be documented, adding there should be no need for officers to confer about what was in their mind at the time force was used. But the Independent Police Complaints Commission wants to go further and ensure officers are kept separate until they’ve given their own detailed accounts. The Home Secretary is now considering the idea. For the IPCC’s Deputy Chair, Sarah Green, it’s about improving the process of gathering evidence.
GREEN: Where it works well, officers do provide detailed factual statements as soon as possible after the incident and they give those to us and that helps us, particularly with the early investigative steps to make sure that we're alert to any possible avenues of inquiry. Where it works less well is where officers are not forthcoming, they give incredibly brief statements, it can be “My name and rank and I came on duty and I went off duty” and all the salient points are missing in between, and that obviously makes it much harder for us.

SHAW: And what impact does that have on the overall investigation and the confidence of others in that investigation if you’re engaged in this very long, drawn out process?

GREEN: I think it has a massive impact. The public will be understandably perturbed if there’s a long delay before officers actually provide us with a detailed account and also if officers are seen to be sitting together in the police canteen and they all write exactly the same account with the same spelling mistakes word for word. That necessarily makes people feel, well, there must be a possibility of collusion.

SHAW: Are you telling me that’s still happening in 2016?

GREEN: It is still happening and there really needs to be a culture shift, and they give their own factual account as early as possible. In a fatal shooting, the most important thing to establish really is what the officer’s honestly held belief was about the situation that they’re facing and whether that justified the use of force.

SHAW: But police will say that ensuring that they don’t confer, perhaps that they’re separated, as you’d like to see, would treat them more like a suspect. They already feel that when there’s a shooting, they’re treated as a suspect, not as someone that was trying to do their duty.

GREEN: I’ve heard sort of references to a culture of suspicion and officers feeling that the IPCC is sort of starting from a point of assuming criminal guilt, and I absolutely reject that. If you turn that on its head, what officers are saying is, you
GREEN cont: should take what we say on trust. Now actually, we take nothing that anybody says on trust, and officers should expect that.

ACTUALITY AT PUBLIC MEETING

BUTTS: This afternoon a firearms officer has been arrested and interviewed under caution. The evidence we have at this stage does not mean that the officer definitively committed a criminal act.

SHAW: In December, a dramatic announcement at a public meeting in north London appeared to signal a new, tough approach to the way the IPCC examines police shootings. The organisation launched a criminal homicide investigation after 28 year old Jermaine Baker was shot dead by a policeman in Wood Green. The officer was questioned and remains suspended while the inquiry continues. Sarah Green, from the IPCC, accepts the arrest was a significant step, one they did not take lightly, she says, but felt was necessary. But it’s caused alarm in policing circles. Simon Chesterman says firearms officers are watching the case closely.

CHESTERMAN: There is a risk and a danger that as things develop, that we may get less volunteers; that troubles me. Officers are under a lot of pressure from their families not to do this, they don’t get paid any extra to do it, it’s a big ask. It’s probably the best job in policing at the moment, but there is a risk that if they are automatically suspected of wrongdoing after an incident and if they’re putting their liberty and their livelihoods on the line every time they go out with a gun and have to make perhaps a split second decision to protect the public. If we get that wrong, I would be surprised if we didn’t lose a number of volunteers.

SHAW: But there has to be accountability.

CHESTERMAN: Yes.

SHAW: If you make that decision to fire a weapon, it could result in someone’s death. You can’t just be treated as a witness. Your actions resulted in that person dying.
CHESTERMAN: You are a witness, you’re a professional witness, you’re trained to do that job, you are a volunteer, you are carrying a gun on behalf of the state. What they want is, if you like, a rebuttable presumption that they’ve done their duty, they’ve done what they’re trained to do and it was the right thing to do under the circumstances, it was a lawful thing to do. Clearly if there is something wrong then suspect them of wrongdoing and treat them as a suspect, but that shouldn’t be the default position. The default position should be a presumption that actually this officer has done their job.

SHAW: But who says it is the default position? When you look back over a number of shootings, it’s very very rare for a police firearms officer, for example, to be charged or to stand trial and I don’t think there’s been one conviction, so perhaps their fears are unfounded.

CHESTERMAN: They may well be, but what I would say is this is about perception, it’s about the way they’re treated.

SHAW: It is highly unusual for someone to be shot dead by police in England and Wales. The latest annual figures show that out of more than 14,000 armed operations, shots were fired only six times, resulting in one death.

ACTUALITY OF FIREARMS TRAINING

INSTRUCTOR: Let it release and you’ll feel the click. You don’t need to take your finger right off ….

SHAW: But the influx of new firearms officers, like those here in Northamptonshire, and the evolving nature of the terrorism threat, make it more likely they will have to use their weapons. And in spite of extensive training, there are serious questions as to how well police will be able to cope and if the legal framework can withstand the fall-out. Sarah Green from the IPCC.
GREEN: I think it is going to be a very challenging situation. We’re not going to be marching in there and insisting that they start investigating right in the middle of an ongoing situation – that is never going to happen. But what I would say about that is, you know, the very democratic freedoms and rights that we’re trying to protect here, you know, it’s fundamental to democracy that we have a full investigation after an event like that, and I think all of us would be acutely aware of the operational difficulties that would be involved. However challenging it is, we’re going to have to get on with it and do it.

SHAW: But will you be asking officers to justify every single shot they take? I mean, normally in a firearms scenario there’s a handful of shots at most. In this kind of scenario, we could be talking about hundreds.

GREEN: We will be asking officers to provide accounts about the whole of their actions and why they did it. We absolutely understand that you can’t look at this with hindsight and say, ‘Oh well, they should have done this, this and this,’ you know. They’re going into one of the most horrific and difficult situations you can imagine in peace time, you know, and you have to judge them on what they were faced with and how they responded in that split second.

SIGNATURE TUNE