

# KEEPING CONTROL

+ Chris Horrie  
+ back to Ian Davison

THE CALM efficiency of the control room was a direct contrast to the shouting, good-humoured crowds in the procession passing the front of Scotland Yard. The 20 or so officers who man it all sit facing the same wall, known in GT as 'The Front Plot'.

The Front Plot is a serial by serial breakdown of the officers on duty which shows each serial number and its location. Uniform serials are normally composed of an inspector, three sergeants, and 20 PCs, and the details of 4,000 police on duty for the CND march filled most of the 25 feet wide by six foot deep display. Each unit is listed on a separate lift-out board with columns showing parade and dismissal times, location, and time of feeding.

During the busier hours of a demonstration the Front Plot is changed constantly by two PCs on the instructions of the staff officer in the centre of the room and, during bigger demonstrations, Polaroid photos of the Front Plot are taken every half hour to enable GT to keep an accurate check on serial movements.

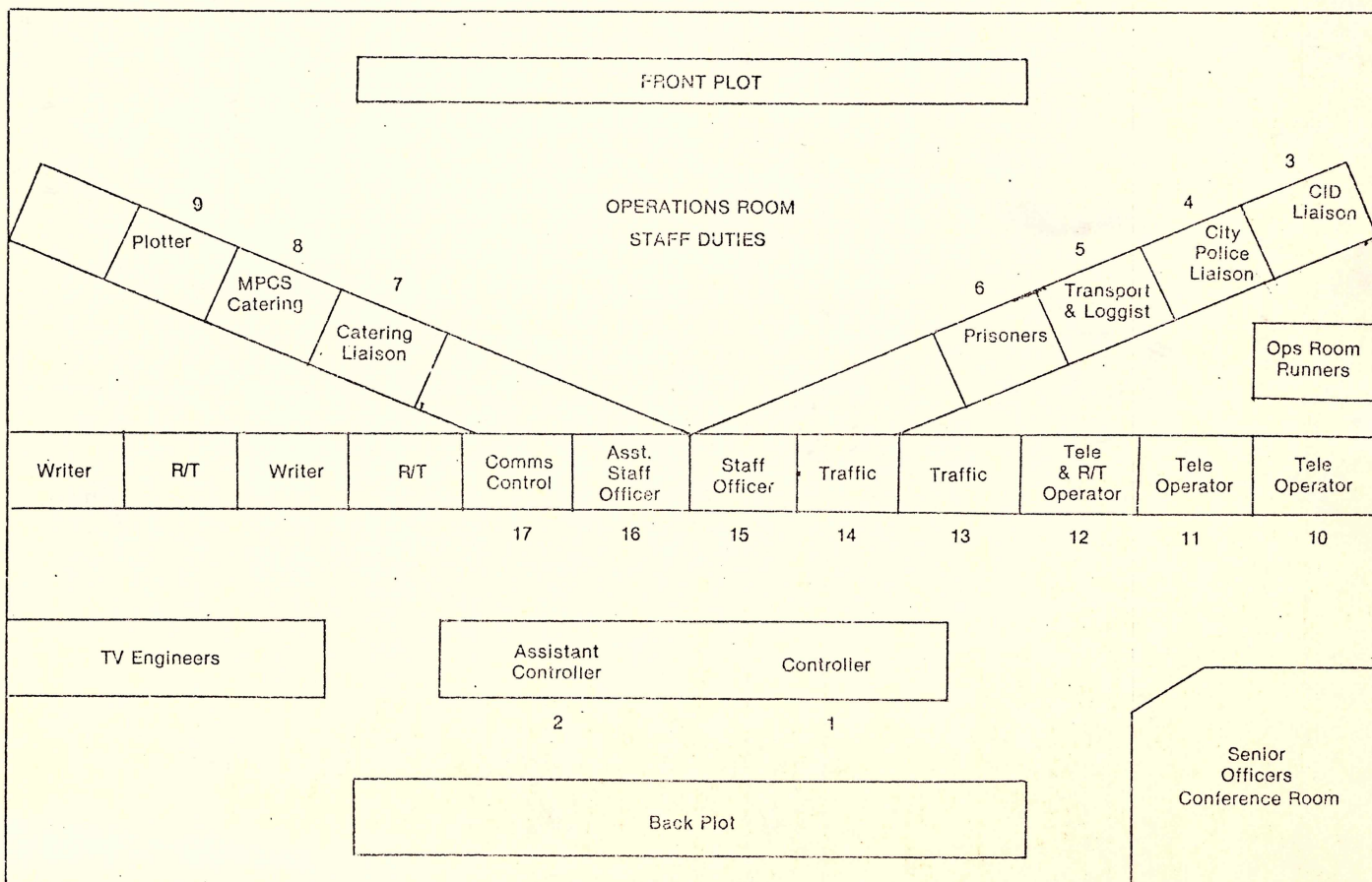
The staff officer and his assistant, usually chief inspectors, sit in the centre of a row of wireless consoles at the point of a 'V', both arms of which accommodate various liaison officers. The right arm of the 'V' has four desks for CID liaison, City of London Police Liaison, prisoner liaison, and transport liaison. The officer responsible for prisoner liaison records locations at which arrests have been made, the offences involved, and the charge centres to which the prisoners are eventually taken. The transport liaison officer arranges parking and pick-up for the coaches used to transport serials from their stations and to new locations. There is also a facility for a loggist, responsible for extracting and recording messages that need more than routine attention.

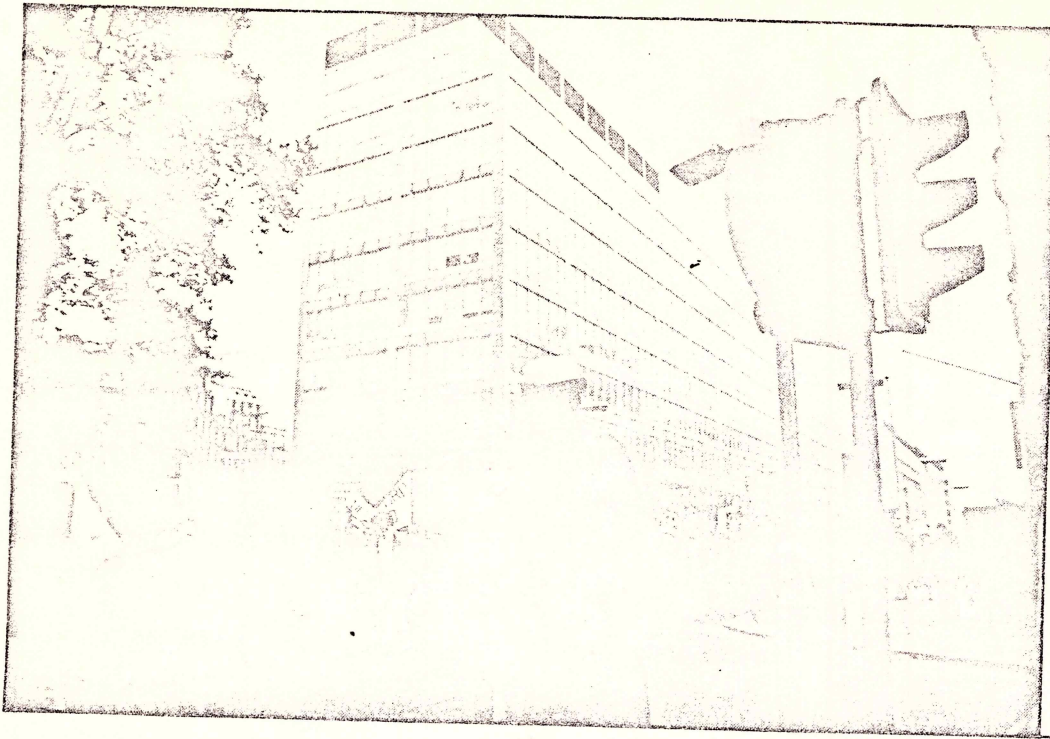
THE Metropolitan Police uses a purpose-equipped control room to supervise the many large processions and public meetings that are held in central London. BRIAN HILLIARD visited 'GT' (the wireless code for the control room) during the recent CND demonstration which attracted 150,000 supporters

The other arm of the 'V' is used by the civilian catering officers who ensure that all serials are fed at reasonable times, and that the particular halls used for refreshments don't get over or underused.

The positions to the right of the staff officers are manned by two officers who direct traffic patrol units on a separate RT channel, and by three WPCs who answer routine telephone calls into and out of the control room. The positions on the left are perhaps the most crucial in the whole room. The officers here control the three separate personal radio channels in use for the demonstration, and the two RT channels that are used by vehicles. They also liaise with Information Room which continues to operate its normal eight channel RT transmissions to the rest of the Met not involved with the particular demonstration.

Behind the staff officer's complex sit the controller, normally a commander, and his assistant, normally a chief superintendent. Behind the controller is the Back Plot, an enormous map of central London upon which police and demonstrators' movements are constantly marked. The controller and his assistant are the only officers in the room with a complete view of the television monitors





*THE second procession passing the front of New Scotland Yard. The decision to start a second procession was taken when it was realised that the enormous numbers arriving for the CND rally would mean that the meeting in Hyde Park would have ended before the end of the procession had left the starting point on the embankment.*

suspended from the ceiling. The pictures on the monitors come from cameras fixed on buildings in central London and from the Met's helicopter, and focus on the beginning and end of processions as well as potential trouble spots or obstructions along the route.

To the left of the controller's desk were two TV engineers who operate the fixed cameras and who changed the logos in front of each screen, 'Head of Procession', 'Rear of Procession', 'Hyde Park', 'Victoria Street' and 'Heli Tele' for the helicopter picture.

The controller for the CND march was Commander Douglas Cree who emphasised the need for his staff to have practical experience of public order events.

'Of course we want people who can transmit messages calmly, and answer units on the ground without getting excited. We want people who can make their own decisions, but who know when to ask for advice, but the best officers are those who have been through it all themselves. It's a mistake to think that everyone in the Met has plenty of public order experience.'

One of the control room staff was Trevor Wilson, a former SPG officer injured in the infamous incident at Grunwick when he was knocked unconscious by a milk bottle thrown from the crowd.

'We sometimes get a bit edgy when we can hear and see our colleagues in trouble,' he told me, 'but it would be disastrous to let your feelings affect you in any way. One mistake here can mean a hundred men being sent to the wrong place, or 20 of them being asked to deal with 2,000 hooligans. Luckily it's nothing like that today, everything seems to be going well, and we can feel a little more relaxed than we sometimes are.'

The atmosphere of good humour and co-operation on the demonstration was confirmed by the officer in charge of the day's operation, Deputy Assistant Commissioner George Rushbrook. Mr Rushbrook has a reputation for seeing things for himself, and had already walked to the beginning of the march and along its route twice.

He had come back to control room to discuss with Commander Cree the advisability of starting a second march. They decided that the mood of the crowd and the fall-off in traffic in the area made a second procession feasible.

'There are now so many people arriving to join in the march,' Mr Rushbrook told me, 'that keeping to the original route would mean that the meeting in Hyde Park which is supposed to start at four o'clock would be over before the end of the procession got there.'

'It's not all that simple to start a second procession, particularly if there's any anti-police element among those taking part. Some agitators seize on it as an attempt to split

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up support for whatever cause is being advocated, they try to present it as police provocation. Even a peaceful march can become bad tempered if there's a suspicion that people are being diverted down uninteresting back streets. And two simultaneous processions can produce a huge isolated traffic jam with a horde of impatient motorists in the centre.'

Between them Mr Rushbrook and Commander Cree organised the start of a second procession, and gave instructions to the chief superintendents in charge of each sector to allow cars to cross the procession at natural breaks.

Two more television monitors now focused on the head of the second procession, and the continuous traffic of PR messages audibly increased. Serials were moved from reserve to accompany the second procession, two serials were sent to Oxford Circus where a group of Mods had detached itself from the main march with some unidentified objective of its own. A mounted serial was despatched with apologies for belated refreshments, and given a route which would keep it clear of the procession.

A detective superintendent from south London asked for assistance in obtaining emergency lighting to search a derelict house in which a body had been found; most of the Met's portable floodlights had been sent to Hyde Park for use at the meeting. The barrier serial which had put out metal barriers to guide the procession across certain junctions asked for instructions on the second procession's route.

Each message was written on a different coloured card, each colour corresponding to the channel on which the message was transmitted. The cards came to the staff officer on a moving belt and those of unusual importance he passed behind him to Commander Cree.

The last of the demonstrators entered Hyde Park at five minutes past four, and DAC Rushbrook started to estimate the numbers involved.

'Certain chief superintendents have hand-held counters to count the numbers in a particular section. We also carry out an independent assessment based on past experience of the numbers likely to be in each half mile of the procession, and the time it takes to walk the known distance of the route. We have a further estimate in Hyde Park on the actual area covered by the meeting, and we make a fairly generous allowance for people attaching and detaching themselves from the procession after the start and before the finish. On this basis I made today's total to



*SOME of the 150,000 protestors in the largest and most peaceful of the 1981 demonstrations.*

be 150,000. The probability is that the organisers will take a more optimistic view, in an endeavour to equal the numbers at the similar demonstration in Germany.'

As the CND meeting in Hyde Park started, Mr Rushbrook held a brief conference with the four commanders who were directly responsible to him for the policing of the march. The only problem remaining to him was the orderly dispersal of the demonstrators from Hyde Park when the meeting was over.

This was tasked to Commander Mitchell who had dealt with a similar problem on the night of the fireworks display preceding the Royal Wedding. In the event, the dispersal was in keeping with the mood of the demonstration — good humoured, orderly and peaceful; with compliments shared between the organisers and the police for the manner in which each had managed their responsibilities.

## FORCE CHANGES

### HERTFORDSHIRE

**Promotion to**  
Insp Francis M Clarke, Hemel Hempstead

### METROPOLITAN

**Death of pensioners**  
PC 115339 Charles Hayden, ret'd 1951, W  
Sgt 112931 James Dungey, ret'd 1954, N  
Sgt 124320 Donald Ridge, ret'd 1965, C  
PC 106403 Bernard Stubbings, ret'd 1945, P  
PC 125892 Warrenne Young, ret'd 1963, Y

PC 140475 Ernest Goodsell, ret'd 1979, V  
PC 110012 William Ward, ret'd 1953, X  
Sgt 119764 Reginald Brown, ret'd 1981, S  
PC 100103 Joseph Hewett, ret'd 1936, P  
PC 130788 Alfred Horsted, ret'd 1972, R  
Insp 104217 Sidney Butler, ret'd 1942, G

### SUFFOLK

**Death of pensioners**  
Sgt A N Shenstone  
Sgt L A R Pugh  
PC W A Goode

PC N C Parsons

### SUSSEX

**Promotion to**  
D/Supt Gordon Harrison, Hastings  
D/Chief Insp Bill Cooke, Chichester

### THAMES VALLEY

**Promotion to**  
Insp Stuart Jones, Bletchley  
Sgt Jeremy Hedley, Reading

**Retirements**  
Insp Brian Titmuss, Reading  
Sgt Walter Slack, Banbury

PC Kenneth Whiteman, Aylesbury  
PC John Burt, Buckleberry

### WEST MERCIA

**Promotion to**  
Insp N P Graham

**Retirement**  
PC Frank May

### WILTSHIRE

**Promotion to**  
Sgt Christopher Thomas, Amesbury  
Sgt Michael Franklin, Chippenham