

At war with the good guys

Chairman of Northumbria Police Federation, Russ Watson, shares his impressions of the events surrounding fugitive Raoul Moat as they unfolded

When you get the news at 2.30am on a Sunday that we have a gunman on the loose in Northumbria and one of our officers has been shot and is critically ill, his wife is on her way to hospital, and there may be welfare needs, your first reaction is to get in the car and go and help.

The fact that you know the officer and respect him as someone who is committed to the job, professional, always ready to challenge and caring about his colleagues, means it hits home that much harder.

The reality cuts in and you pause; there is nothing you can do at this moment in time so you try to sleep and don't really wake when the phone goes at 7.30am.

The news is not good, two rounds discharged at PC David Rathband from a shotgun at close range. He is critical but stable. You still fear the worst, and know the consequences of such a shooting are going to be life changing for the officer.

The whole picture begins to unravel. Northumbria Police are dealing with a known suspect, Raoul Moat. He has killed Christopher Brown and attempted to murder Samantha Stobbart. It becomes clear later that he randomly singled out our colleague, PC Rathband, who was on duty, protecting the public, but was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It could have been anyone of the police officers on duty that evening. This is a cowardly attack on an unarmed officer which will leave David disabled for the rest of his life.

Police officers in Northumbria are then made aware that they are all at risk as Moat has made threats to kill a



Exhausted firearms officers taking a break during the hunt for Raoul Moat

Northumbria police officer; he is at war with the good guys.

The media constantly report the search to locate a fugitive who is wanted for murder and attempted murder. I have never witnessed reporting on this scale, and the fact that mutual firearms aide is requested from 18 forces is also unprecedented, a word which would be used on many occasions to describe the uniqueness of the hunt as it moves into rural Rothbury.

With information imprecise and David Rathband's colleagues working tirelessly to locate his assailant, it is reassuring to know that the chief officers have identified at an early stage that fatigue will become an issue for our members. The way we conduct patrols is changed, double crewing becomes the norm, and security at police stations is increased.

Our members continue to police in a mentally challenging environment while having to reassure loved ones

that they will return home at the end of a shift. Officers in Northumbria and those who assist us with this massive manhunt should be proud to have played a part in maintaining day-to-day law and order, while also being successful in locating Moat.

The media continue to report events and the final moments are played out on national TV. The good Lord blew the final whistle and the IPCC are contacted. We await their findings and will learn from this experience.

Regardless of what the IPCC findings are, I remain immensely proud of our members and the professional way they have conducted themselves throughout. The feeling of helplessness has now gone, and the JBB – with the help of the Police Dependents' Trust and others – will begin to assist David in rebuilding his life. I wish David and his family well for the future, and finish in the knowledge that good triumphed over evil.