



Clive Chamberlain, chairman of Dorset Police Federation

Local focus

Greater Manchester's DC Stephen Oake - from all accounts was like so many other heroes; unassuming but extraordinary in that as an ordinary "bobby", he gave his life. He did so selflessly and bravely, saving his colleagues and preventing the escape of an extremely violent man. He died protecting all of us and sadly became another casualty of the international war against terrorism.

Here in Dorset, and throughout the world, having read tributes on the GMP Federation's website, we felt his loss personally. We never met him and geographically are miles from Manchester but Stephen was a colleague who had one day set off to work and never returned home.

We followed reports of the investigation and public accolades led by our Prime Minister, Tony Blair who said he was "shocked and very saddened. His death and the injuries to the other officers underline the dangers that our police and security forces face in these times".

David Blunkett, then Home Secretary, said: "I commend the bravery and commitment of this police officer in defending us, not only against dangerous criminals but against those threatening the safety of our country".

In sentencing Kamel Bourgass to life imprisonment, the trial judge told the killer that his violent attempt to escape 'was foiled only because of the professionalism and bravery of a number of police officers; bravery which cost Stephen Oake his life'.

Sadly, the finely worded sound bites by some of our country's leaders have not been matched with action, as anonymous Home Office bureaucrats do not consider Stephen's sacrifice worthy of an award - the Prime Minister has even refused to ask for a review of the decision.

When this was challenged in the House of Lords the following statement was read: "All members of Her Majesty's government were deeply saddened by the tragic circumstances of DC Oake's death. The sacrifice he made in the line of duty is appreciated by us all. His courage will inspire officers young and old for years to come."

The failure of this government to truly recognise Stephen's bravery is an insult to both to him, his family, friends and colleagues and will be an irremovable stain

on the Prime Ministership of Tony Blair. It demonstrates a complete lack of understanding for what he gave and I believe those responsible for the decision should be named.

This is a gross injustice and it is clear that there is no willingness to reconsider. I know that I will no longer feel proud or comfortable wearing my Long Service or Jubilee Medals and so have decided to send them to the Prime Minister as a mark of my disgust.

As my friend Paul Kelly, chairman of the Greater Manchester Police Federation, recently said: "Stephen, we salute you, regardless of a piece of tin or a ribbon we will never, never forget you."

The finest most moving tribute that I read, one that I would value above any honour, was from his wife Lesley - who said: "Steve was the most wonderful father to our three children and a fantastic husband to me. He loved us all so much and brought so much joy and fun into our lives."

What do you think?

If you have any comments about issues raised, write to the letters page in *Police*.