

Being a specialist tactical firearms commander

Published on 19 August 2020 Written by a firearms officer as told to Going equipped

Spotlight on a role: The skills and experience needed for this fascinating operational duty

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Authorising a firearms entry into premises where a hostage is being held, or where a terrorist cell is planning an attack, is at the highest end of the police use of force. In my role as a specialist tactical firearms commander, I was responsible for the planning and command of complicated and high-risk firearms operations.

The rank required for the role varies across the country (being inspectors in the Met, and generally more senior elsewhere). Assessment via the Specialist Tactical Firearms Course requires commanders to conduct a detailed review of a complex firearms operation based on the National Decision Model. Commanders must carefully consider probing and exploring the available intelligence, the threat and risk, and the range of tactical options and contingencies in order to inform a working strategy, while taking appropriate powers and policies into account.

In the real world, this can translate into the rapid deployment of significant overt and covert firearms officers in response to rapidly changing information about a terrorism or crime threat. This involves working closely with senior investigating officers in some of the most fast-moving and challenging operational environments. The role requires in-depth understanding of the capabilities of different firearms officers and teams, and the ability to weigh up intelligence from potentially covert and secret sources to prevent serious crimes.

So how do you progress to this role? A broad experience of managing critical incidents is essential, so that you can calmly make decisions in pressurised operational environments where your approach could save lives. As well as quick decision-making, this role requires the ability to assimilate large quantities of intelligence and match that with the tactical options available to you. A calm, professional and experienced operational police officer in command of the highest end of police use of force may have to justify their decisions for years later, particularly where failing to act could lead to loss of life. A fascinating role.

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