

Diary of a bronze commander for the Coronation

Published on 29 November 2023 Written by Inspector Sarah Sanderson, Thames Valley Police

Inspector Sarah Sanderson shares her experience as bronze commander for Operation Golden Orb – the Coronation of King Charles III

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I am a response inspector in Reading. I have served for 15 years in Thames Valley Police (TVP) and have been public order trained for 13 years. I became one of TVP's bronze commanders in 2019 and am one of two qualified women in this role.

This is a diary entry of my role as a bronze commander for the Coronation of King Charles III in 2023, for which my geographical responsibility was the west of Windsor Castle and the entrance to the Coronation Concert.

Wednesday 5 April

Today was the first of three planning meetings. I skipped breakfast to find parking in Windsor before rush hour. Silver started the meeting, setting expectations and making it clear that we needed to be ready for all eventualities. I had a list of questions which I tried to ask as each bronze gave their update. As expected, the breaks involved catching up with departments and partners over coffee. I started to formulate my deployment plan in my head and that night I put a rough draft on paper. It would go on to have several versions before I was ready to present it on the 25th.

Tuesday 25 April

I headed to Microsoft in Reading early in the morning to attend the assurance day for all policing commanders and key persons to present their plans to the gold commander and the Cabinet Office. As I listened to the plans, I checked they would fit with mine, making sure not to make too much noise in the auditorium where you could hear a pin drop. I gave a short presentation, providing details of ingress, circulation and egress and protection of the Salisbury Tower and Queen Victoria statue from protestors. I answered questions, mostly on officer welfare and contingency plans. It was a long day with lots to take in.

Friday 28 April

I got my steps in during the 'walk through'. Police support unit inspectors and sergeants came to the station for a pre-brief. I led a tour of the event footprint, pointing out areas of risk where I wanted a presence for them to plan deployments and calm their nerves. As we came up the Long Walk which leads to the gates of Windsor Castle, I saw the Metropolitan Police Service bronze walking their troops around the other way. I smiled to myself as we were dressed in comfortable clothes whereas their team was in blacks, with hats – and it was very hot.

Thursday 4 May

A busy schedule of two command briefings and a stewarding meeting. At the stewarding meeting I identified the company covering my area and started to discuss the plans and brief them. I realised that we are good at cascading messages up and down our own police structure, but this didn't always work the same for stewarding companies, who operate differently and may be staffed through agencies.

Friday 5 May

Final preparations. One short meeting today from the public order department about the new Public Order Bill. We discussed groups who may protest and talked about the policing response and tactical considerations. This is our bread and butter but was welcome as the pressure was on. I rechecked my plan, made a couple of changes and signed off.

Sunday 7 May

The day arrived. We received confirmation the King and Queen and family were heading to Windsor and the concert was ready to go. It was surreal to be policing this historic event. The briefing was at Windsor Racecourse. As the chief entered, (and everyone stood up a little straighter) the buzz settled. Our mutual aid colleagues arrived. I started my walk around the town centre, ensuring everyone was in place. The atmosphere was positive and the crowds were in good spirits. The bad weather was a challenge. A number of people came to our notice and we met and interacted with them discreetly.

As the pre-event concluded and the concert entrances opened, we had gate issues because of ticketing problems. I moved more officers to the gates and briefly put some loose cordons on to slow some of the public. Due to large crowds and high foot traffic, the bronze sergeant for hostile vehicle mitigation barriers suggested we close the roads at that point, which I agreed was the safest thing to do. The night passed safely as crowds left the castle.

As I went to bed that night, I felt proud about our achievements and reflected on being a part of national history. I received personal thanks from the silver commander who commended our planning and delivery.

If you're interested in public order policing, speak to your public order department about opportunities.

- This article was peer reviewed by Inspector Vicky Hebborn, Norfolk Constabulary.

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