

PRESS OFFICE

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CUMBRIA
CONSTABULARY
SAFER STRONGER CUMBRIA

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

PRESS RELEASE

Issued at 4.37pm on Friday 4 June to support press conference held in Whitehaven Civic Hall

Statement from Chief Constable Craig Mackey:

Today we are going to focus on the detail of WHAT we now know took place during Derrick Bird's journey across West Cumbria on Wednesday 2 June.

Our officers have been working tirelessly to piece together the sequence of events that led to the tragic deaths of twelve innocent people and have been meticulously investigating the three phases of the shootings.

Phase 1 began with the murders of his twin brother David and his solicitor, Kevin Commons before departing on a 45 mile rampage. We now know that Derrick Bird started his killings at his brother David's house in Lamplugh in the early hours of Wednesday 2 June. However his body was not discovered until 11am that morning.

We then believe Bird travelled to Frizington to seek out his solicitor, Kevin Commons. The first call to police came in at approximately 10.20am on Wednesday 2 June, reporting shots fired in the Frizington area. Armed officers were deployed immediately and on arrival, located the body of Mr Commons in the driveway of his home.

The second phase of his shootings took place between 10.30am and 11.35am while Bird was on the run. In this phase, his shootings began in the Whitehaven area at around 10.30am and he went on to kill ten other innocent people. A call came into police at 10.33am reporting shots fired on Duke Street in Whitehaven where sadly, Darren Rewcastle was shot dead at the taxi rank. As soon as the call came in to us, every armed officer in the county was deployed to the area from across the force – 42 armed officers in total. Our officers were on the scene within minutes but due to Bird's knowledge of local roads, he had fled in his vehicle and was travelling south through the town firing shots along his way.

Police and RAF rescue helicopters were drafted into the area and a massive land and air search began. Crucially in this period, Bird was firing shots out of his vehicle moving from place to place, and was not in any one area for a significant length of time.

Our overarching focus during this period was protecting the public of Cumbria and locating Bird. We warned our local communities, community networks, schools and shops, which in turn helped us to get a clearer idea of where he was heading. A photograph of Bird was also circulated warning the public not to approach him and to stay indoors.

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The third and final phase of his route took place approximately between 11.35am and 12.30pm. Bird began using back roads to drive through rural hamlets before entering the Eskdale Valley. He was travelling along single track roads in an extremely isolated area and discharged his weapon several times.

At approximately 12.30pm the last eye witness saw Bird alive. We discovered his vehicle abandoned near Boot with a firearm inside and know that he went to ground on foot. By this point, we were incredibly close to him and officers surrounded the local area and blocked off all escape routes.

There was a countywide containment operation in place with armed police and helicopters. From what we know, at no stage did any police officer have the chance to end this any sooner.

Bird entered the hamlet of Boot and had headed into very rough, wooded terrain. Officers on the ground believed that he was armed with a .22 rifle with a sight and a silencer – and knew that he had travelled uphill.

A number of firearm officers and dog handlers were deployed into the woodland and the dogs located Bird's body and weapons at approximately 1.30pm.

Let me now focus on what resources we had available:

- Cumbria Constabulary has 97 highly trained firearm officers.
- Every available armed officer - 42 - were deployed to the scene.
- Additional armed officers from Civil Nuclear Constabulary were also deployed
- An additional 10 armed officers were ready for deployment from neighbouring forces (Northumbria, Lancashire and North Yorkshire)

We are part of a large policing family across the UK. We support our neighbouring forces and in return, they support us. I have already mentioned the assistance that we had in the initial stages from other forces during the investigation – when we received crime scene investigators and family liaison officers to supplement our teams and other agencies including MRT and Fire and Rescue.

Our focus throughout this has been supporting the families that have been affected and ensuring a comprehensive investigation takes place.

This has been the most tragic and complex incident I have experienced in my 25 years as a police officer. We do not underestimate the effect that this will have on us all. Cumbria Constabulary is a local force made up of officers and staff who live and work in the community. We are also part of the tight knit communities that have been left devastated and the shock and grief that we all feel is very real.

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Twelve innocent people - mothers, fathers, partners and friends - were brutally murdered as they went about their daily lives and I am 100 per cent committed to getting to the bottom of this investigation and finding out WHY.

The true spirit of Cumbria is in the strength of our communities and now we must call on this once again and work together to support one another through this tragedy.