

A Special Trip to the Black Forest

Paul Lewis and Tom Hacker are colleagues and keen photographers. They had planned a peaceful relaxing break in the Black Forest, but as Paul explains in his story, fate had other things in stall.



Jo Kühnl, Tom Hacker, Paul Lewis, Christian von Malchus

Like many photographers, I look for places of great beauty and interest when I plan a holiday. I don't necessarily want night-clubs and drunken brawls, as I see enough of those when I police the streets of my home town – so for me, a tranquil relaxing holiday fits the bill nicely (so to speak). So, along with a colleague from my own section, Tom and I planned a 10 day holiday to the Black Forest in southern Germany – our main aim for the trip was to stimulate our passion for photography – but also to have a great time. Neither Tom nor I are strangers to Germany, or the language, so booking it on-line was an easy process. It then occurred to me that the International Police Association may have a contact with whom we could meet during the holiday. After a little research I soon discovered that Baden-Württemberg is one of the few German States to have a Volunteer Police force (Freiwilliger Polizeidienst), so it seemed appropriate to try and make contact with them so I sent an email to the Waldshut-Tiengen IPA section to let them know of our intended arrival. Within a few days, I heard back from Markus Schaaf, who is the Head of Liaison for the Waldshut-Tiengen IPA district and Christian Malchus, a Volunteer Police Officer based at the Dog Section in Tiengen. Christian advised us that they would like to meet with us and invited me and Tom to accompany him and his commanding officer on a night-shift as civilian observers.

So on Sunday 18th May, we started out on our driving holiday. The three hour journey across the south of England to Dover was more arduous than the two hour ferry journey or the eight hour drive across France into Southern Germany. After my 'TomTom' decided to send us on a two hour unnecessary detour we arrived in Germany and began our holiday with a two hour hike down, then up the side of a mountain. Perhaps, in hindsight, this wasn't the best

thing to do after travelling for 13 plus hours, but it certainly meant I slept well on our first night.

Eventually Friday night came. The evening to travel down to Waldshut-Tiengen and meet Christian. After getting lost following some diversion (Umleitung) signs we finally made it to Tiengen and met our hosts for the night – Jo Kühnl and Christian von Malchus. Jo is a senior full-time officer who works for the dog section and Christian, who is a long-serving and experienced volunteer assigned to the dog section.

Like many Special Constables, Christian has a full-time job and squeezes his policing in between his work and home life. Christian explained that the biggest difference between his status as a police officer and that of a regular officer is that he cannot bring himself on duty – he must be called on duty. He therefore has to notify in advance when he is available. Christian must therefore leave all of his weapons and uniform at the station when he goes off duty. Christian also explained that he receives compensation of about seven euros for each hour he works. This isn't payment for work, and is thought of as a compensation for his personal-time which he gives to the police and is mostly tax-free. Jo and Christian gave us a tour of their police station, which they share with the "traffic police", and showed us their vehicle – a Mercedes Vito Van with rear-facing passenger seats and a cage for the police dog. Jo explained that the Police dog's are generally used for both public order and are also trained as 'sniffer dogs'. In Waldshut-Tiengen they are still using analogue radios, like those seen in the 1980's TV show "Juliet Bravo". They generally carry two radios - a 2 meter radio and 40meter radio which they draw from a pool of radios –

and a duty mobile phone. From what I could hear through the hiss and squeals, it made me very grateful to have a personal issue tetra radio back home. Equipment wise, there were no great surprises. They all carry hand-guns, a baton, chain-link handcuffs (which also made me think of Juliet Bravo) and a canister of pepper spray. This is of course, not forgetting – the Police dog, the machine gun and the fire extinguisher sized can of pepper spray for use in quelling public order. After a quick safety briefing about not standing in front of snarling police dogs we were in the back of the dog van. Well, not quite the back, but when you are separated from the front cabin by an internal wall, and you are sat facing towards the back of the van, it did feel quite unusual.

The district (according to Wikipedia) is about 1131 km² and has a population of approximately 166,521 people. Jo suggested there was probably around 12 officers on duty overnight across the whole district. Christian and Jo gave us a tour of a few of the district's larger police stations and showed us the Communication room that deals with despatch and police emergency calls for the district. We had a tour of the cell block, which housed 3 cells. This is not a staffed custody unit like we have in the UK and interestingly, detainees who are arrested and brought to a police station will be billed for their overnight accommodation and for the cost of transportation to the police station and will not be given a lift back from where they were arrested. Perhaps for this reason, the cells were all empty on our arrival.

We were soon dispatched to the first job of the night.

A road traffic collision involving an animal, which turned out to be a van versus a wild-boar! The driver of the vehicle had collided with the animal on a dark but relatively quiet road and was particularly upset as he was driving a company van, and this was the second time he had crashed a company vehicle – both times with a wild-boar! The usual checks of the driver and vehicle were made by Jo, whilst Christian hauled the dead animal from the carriage way and returned the traffic flow to normality whilst we awaited for a tow-truck.

Our second and only other job during the night was that of a disorder outside a Casino. We attended to back-up another unit which had already been sent. When we arrived Jo took the dog from the cage and whilst Tom and I stood back he and Christian (who was holding a large baton not dissimilar to our police riot batons) approached the other officers who appeared to be in a



The unfortunate RTA casualty

standoff with an enraged woman. The officers gave her a breathalyser machine to blow into which showed she was not intoxicated by alcohol. Jo returned his dog to the police vehicle and after a short while the lady whipped off her trousers, underwear and began dancing around in just a t-shirt (which she was stopped from removing).

Christian told us that they thought the lady might be mentally unwell or intoxicated on drugs, and they were waiting for a doctor to arrive. We resumed shortly after an emergency doctor, a first responder unit and an ambulance arrived at scene. After taking a break in the staff room at a nearby police station (which all have bean-to-cup coffee machines) we went out to join another unit doing traffic stops. As in most European countries it is an offence to not be in possession of your vehicle and driving paperwork and this therefore forms the opening questions from any police officer following a traffic stop. Tax and the equivalent to our annual road test can be checked by inspecting the discs being displayed on the vehicle registration plate and Christian took the time to show us what the discs represented and how to check they were current. These traffic stops were being done by pulling cars into lay-bys using illuminated



Christian wearing his tabbard

torches with wand attachments on the end.

A few drivers that were stopped and warned regarding speed or insecure loads and several were breathalysed but were found to be under the legal limit.

Interestingly, those stopped all seemed very compliant and somewhat less hostile at the inconvenience than the average British motorist. Christian explained that when approaching a driver, the 'safety officer' (him) would position

himself in a ready-stance at the opposite side of the vehicle and would have his weapon hand ready to draw his firearm if needed.

Perhaps this stance was the reason for the apparent compliance? As the tour of duty came to an end, we returned to our starting point. Christian and Jo were both very friendly and very informative and I am pleased we had the opportunity to meet with them and to shadow them for a night-shift. Jo and Christian both spoke English very well (much better than my German), and gave me a very interesting insight into the differences in policing in Germany compared with England.

I hope that one day Christian and Jo will get the opportunity to come to England and see for themselves how the UK police compare - I think they might be surprised.