

Prison – Line of Duty (Lindsay Whitehouse)

February 2024

Lindsay introduced himself and remarked that he had visited Burnham U3a before, 15 months ago, when he spoke about his 'life in prison'. Many of the audience had remembered the talk.

A long serving Prison Governor at HMP Chelmsford, Lindsay's post was that of the Deputy, a role that meant his work was predominantly the day-to-day management of the prison. With barely a glance at notes, Lindsay held his audience with a very interesting and interactive talk "*delving into the hidden world of people who work in prison*".

As one can only imagine, many things kept him "awake at night". Firstly he spoke about the wellbeing of the inmates and how important it was to monitor mental health. Then he came on to the topic of corruption within prisons, this was the crux of his talk, the 'Line of Duty'. Fact or fiction? Studies have been done on corruption within prison service personnel; this figure is estimated to be about 2%. (We were asked what we thought it might be – suffice to say our estimates were a lot higher!! Perhaps we had all watched too much corruption television.) A very low figure (compared to what we thought it might be!) but with a work force of 400 this means that there could possibly be 8 'bent' officers. There are many reasons why some choose the '*dark side*' which we, the audience detectives, were quite good at naming: debt, coercion, addiction, power, greed – amongst others.

All the way through his talk Lindsay asked us, 'the audience', what we would do in many of the situations and scenarios he portrayed so vividly. In many cases we – the audience – had ideas that were 'overthought'. For instance, the simplest way to stop drones depositing drugs into prison is to net specific areas. We were all for 'jamming' signals which of course would have disrupted many houses, the prison and indeed police headquarters! Dogs are used within the prison service, different dogs for different deeds. German Shepherds are excellent patrol dogs but a bit too intimidating to search for drugs on the person. The very enthusiastic Springer Spaniel makes an excellent sniffer dog looking for items within the fabric of the prison but the best breed for drug searches on people is the ever-dependable Labrador. But be aware that whilst the dog is actively sniffing and wagging all is well – however, if the dog sits passively in front of you looking very pleased with life then 'you are nicked, sunshine.'

Each prison has its own Security Detecting Teams that meet regularly; knowledge being the best tool in detecting areas of concern. The team gathers and collates information about things seen and heard, observed body language, nick-names, the unusual – noticing patterns and then recognising the need to evaluate and interpret. If trends change – for example a drop in the number of fights breaking out – then prison officers need to identify the reasons why! Lindsay's presentation took us through the many issues surrounding drug use in prison. How do drugs get into the prison to be distributed, who is responsible and how can this be investigated, tested, proven and stopped?

LW ended his talk with a complex case study, a real-life scenario, with a highly successful outcome. An inmate of the prison was noted to have protected a very vulnerable prisoner whose life was being made unbearable. This "decent criminal" who had a moral conscience had quietly reported his concerns to prison officers thus becoming a 'precious resource'. I think we all hoped that 'Ram Raider' went onto lead a good and fruitful life.

Judi Embling



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