

# The tattered man with only one shoe

*Gill Farrington*

Just after 4.30am on Thursday 7 July, I got into my car and turned on the radio. It wasn't a typical morning for Five Live's *Up All Night* programme. They were taking a live press conference from Singapore. Lord Coe was answering questions about why he thought London had been awarded the 2012 Olympics. He spoke about the vibrancy of the city, its diversity and the importance of getting young people involved in sport. He'd finished speaking by the time I reached north London to pick up my colleague, Judy Fladmark, a researcher for Five Live. Most of the time reporters for the station operate alone with a satellite dish to provide good live sound quality. But Judy had spent the past three days in Stratford, east London, and had become something of an authority on the Olympic bid.

We headed to Stratford to take part in a full outside broadcast for the *Breakfast* programme. Nicky Campbell was huddled under an umbrella as rain lashed the square next to the bus and Underground station. His co-presenter, Shelagh Fogarty, was not far away on the top floor of a tower block with a panoramic view of the site of where the Olympics complex will be built. I was there to interview the owner of a building company, one of 300 businesses that will have to relocate to make way for the Olympic park. He felt they were getting a raw deal. It was a straightforward job. The guest was confident, interesting and succinct. Judy corralled him into the car park where I had rigged the dish on my car roof. After a short live interview we thanked him and left, heading back to Television Centre in west London.

The traffic was terrible. At 9.15am we were crawling to the lights at Shoreditch High Street, listening to Five Live of course. Then Matthew Bannister flashed that Liverpool Street station had been closed because of "an incident". It was half-a-mile away and diverting certainly seemed far

better than sitting in a muggy car in traffic. So we turned left towards Liverpool Street instead of right to the office. I know the area relatively well and remembered an underground car park at Broadgate. As we approached, it was obvious something was wrong. We couldn't see emergency vehicles, but we could hear them. The sirens were echoing off the walls of the glass office blocks. We parked, grabbed the kit, then headed towards the rear entrance of the station. The satellite dish and the mixer, which we need to broadcast, are heavy. Judy grappled with one plastic box while I slung the sat bag – similar size to a laptop – over my shoulder. There was no one on the streets near Broadgate, which seemed odd. It was only later that we realised the police cordon had been erected while we had been parking and that the car park was inside it.

We soon reached the rear of the station and a City of London policeman was less than happy to see us. We explained we were from the BBC, produced our passes and asked what had happened. He looked confused, then said he didn't know and suggested we speak to his superiors. He pointed in the direction of Eldon Street at the rear of the station. We headed that way. Hundreds of people were crowded behind police tape sealing off the station at the end of Blomfield Street. I overheard several irritated commuters on their mobiles telling colleagues they were going to be late for work. One rather smart woman was particularly vociferous in bemoaning the state of the Underground. She blamed Ken Livingstone and PFI. Behind the cordon, dozens of emergency service personnel were swarming in and out of the Underground station. There appeared to be more firemen than police.

### *Policeman was visibly stressed*

The office called to say a power surge on the Underground system had derailed a train and some people had been injured. Judy disappeared among the crowds with a mini-disk to vox-pop passengers while I tried to find a friendly policeman. It didn't take long. An extremely patient officer from British Transport Police was dealing with a queue of increasingly annoyed people asking questions. I told him I was from Five Live. He told me to wait there and beckoned over a colleague. "Has there been a power surge?" I asked. "What's going on? Are people hurt?" The second officer was visibly stressed. "There's been an explosion – a series of explosions across the network. We don't know what's happened."

Within a minute I was on my mobile on air describing the scene to

Matthew Bannister and reporting the officer's words. This was the first report of the possibility of more than one explosion. While I was speaking the same officer was shouting to the crowd to move back from the cordon. He told them there had been an explosion – they had to move for their own safety. The change in the crowd's mood was instantaneous. From my vantage point at the top of some marble steps I watched a couple of hundred people reaching into their pockets and bags for their mobile phones.

After my two-way, I briefly listened to output. A producer from the Derbyshire programme was describing how he'd been stuck for more than half an hour on the District Line on his way to work. That was the other side of the city. Would an incident at Liverpool Street so quickly affect trains in West Brompton? My phone then cut off. I tried to re-dial but the network was down. My mobile didn't work for the rest of the day. Judy returned with five minutes of interviews. Passengers spoke of being evacuated from the station and seeing people covered in soot being helped by ambulance staff.

We had to get the audio back to the office, but there were too many people around to use the satellite dish safely. We also needed to find a phone. We ducked into a cellar wine bar nearby. At the bottom of the stairs we crossed paths with a builder who had come in to see if the bar was serving. It wasn't. He was pale and looked upset. I asked him what was wrong. He said a colleague had just called him. He'd been on a job renovating a hotel in Tavistock Square and had just seen a bus explode. I looked at him. Was he winding me up? "Are you sure? Can I speak to your mate?" I asked.

His mobile was still working and as he called his boss I first started to suspect there had been a terrorist attack. Until then I'd not really allowed myself to think seriously about the possibility of bombs. It had crossed my mind, but I'd focused on what was happening at Liverpool Street and reporting information as we found it. The idea that London was under attack was too chilling. The builder came off the phone telling us his colleague was too upset to speak to me. He did, though, give us the name of the hotel.

I asked the bar staff if I could use their phone and called the Five Live desk. A senior producer answered and I told her about my conversation with the builder. Nothing had dropped about the bus incident on the wires. She said she would phone the hotel, told me to stay where I was and asked me to call back in 10 minutes – my boss, planning editor Robin Britten, needed to speak to me. We'd heard rumours of badly injured passengers being pulled out of Aldgate East station and I wanted to move there. Robin said no.

The bus story had checked out and reports of more explosions were

coming in. Matt Morris, head of news, had taken the decision that we were to stay at Liverpool Street for our own safety. We took the kit to a small park a minute's walk from the station and managed to get a strong enough satellite signal to file. This became our base. I left Judy there and walked to the other side of the station. A church had become a sanctuary for the walking wounded and ambulances were taking other passengers away on stretchers. Witnesses with blackened faces spoke of seeing a flash and hearing a bang. The next thing they saw, they said, were bodies on the floor of an adjacent carriage. An enduring image was of a man sitting on a kerb. He looked like a City trader. His suit jacket and the briefcase propped by his side were pristine, but his trousers were hanging in rags and he was wearing only one shoe. His expression was blank.

The next few hours were a blur of two-ways every hour for Five Live, recording more witness statements, filing them back to the office and trying to get updates from the police. By 1.30pm the satellite dish and mixer were running out of battery. Someone in the pavilion next to a bowling green in the middle of the park agreed to let us plug into the mains. More importantly they had a television, which meant we were able to see the bigger picture for the first time. Only then did it occur to me to ring my husband, Tim, who works in Farringdon. I asked to use the restaurant phone but couldn't get through and for a few minutes started to panic. Then I called a friend of ours who told me everyone was okay.

### *Almost total silence*

By mid-afternoon British Transport Police officers told me they hoped to have the mainline station open by 4pm, which seemed incredible. But they managed it by 3.45pm and hundreds of people started filing down London Wall into the station. There was almost total silence as the crowd on the forecourt scanned the services displayed on the departure board, trying to find a way home. Just after 4pm I dialled into Television Centre to do my first hit for the *Drive* programme with Peter Allen and Jane Garvey. Before I went on air the producer came on the line to tell me 33 people had been confirmed dead. I felt sick, sad and incredibly tired. Judy's face crumpled.

All but one of the dozens of people I spoke to condemned the bombings outright. The exception was a young woman of about 20, listening to her iPod as she queued to get into the station. I asked her for her thoughts about the attacks on the Underground. Her reply was ambivalent. "It's just another

day in Baghdad,” she said. By 6pm the desk told me they wanted us to start making our way home. The streets were full of people walking, while cars were stuck in miles of jams. Two hours later I was home in Shepherd’s Bush, where my husband was watching the news. I joined him, but after 30 minutes had seen enough and went to bed. The *Breakfast* programme had asked me to be back at Liverpool Street by 6am.