

## MEET THE MANAGEMENT



# DAVID TAYLOR- SMITH

**REGIONAL PRESIDENT & CEO  
G4S SECURE SOLUTIONS,  
UK AND IRELAND**

**PROFILE BY KEITH BLOGG**

# ACTION MAN WITH A PASSION FOR NATURE

**THE PATH TO** the top has not been an orthodox journey for David Taylor-Smith, who has responsibility for all G4S's secure solutions businesses in the UK and Ireland. Interestingly, in addition to covering those two countries, his region also includes G4S's work in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia. Its turnover has now topped £1.2 billion and the workforce is over 35,000.

But in a hectic career which, he admits, could at one time as easily have put him in charge of a pizza business or a hotel chain, David Taylor-Smith has played many roles. Now 48, he has been a man of action all his life.

"I have been fortunate to do jobs which have taken me to places most people can only dream of," he says. "I have been lucky to live and work in some of the most beautiful and remote parts of the world."

For a man destined to become a major player in the security industry, David's start was itself unusual. His time at Southampton University, where he read geography, brought him two major benefits which were to remain with him throughout his life.

One – as full-time president of its Students' Union – was the ability to lead, organise and work in a diverse team, a skill that he now puts to very good use. The other was a fervent love of nature and of the wilder areas of the world, which influenced his early career.

David Taylor-Smith's involvement with G4S dates back to 1998, when he was in Hong Kong. By 2002 he returned to England to become divisional managing director of G4S Justice Services, with companies in the US and UK.

A major reorganisation in the UK and Ireland swept David to his present job. "It was decided to bring all the UK-based businesses, except cash solutions, into one coherent organisation with a strategy to grow the business to £1 billion turnover. Through acquisitions and good organic growth every year – including during the crunch years – we have exceeded our target and now turn over in excess of £1.2 billion.

"We have achieved this thanks to a very clear strategy with each of the eight businesses enjoying autonomy while not being totally independent. I don't run things like a small family business: I would kill myself with stress if I tried to control everything – and I might be killed by others before that."

The division includes G4S's Care and Justice Services, Risk Management, Integrated Services, Utility Services, Secure Solutions (UK), Offshore



Islands (Guernsey, Jersey and Isle of Man), Technology, and Secure Solutions (Ireland) businesses.

"There is a really good managing director at the top of each business and my job is to provide support and occasionally control. It involves everything from helping with acquisition or making a bid, to meeting customers and the provision of additional resources if there is a need."

He adds: "Because we have expertise in handling big, complex issues and working across boundaries we have become global product champions in areas such as event security, justice, consultancy, private finance initiatives, and kidnap and hostage negotiations. It was our involvement in event security which helped G4S to win the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix contract.

"I spend 80 per cent of my time out of the office, seeing things for myself, meeting colleagues and clients and working with our partners from other walks of life. For example, I recently attended a conference on post-conflict Afghanistan with senior figures from politics, the Army and the diplomatic service."

So how did David get from studying geography at university to being a strategic manager in G4S?

His first career step was a commission with the Royal Dragoon Guards tank regiment and the start of a life of adventure, which was to take him literally to the ends of the earth.

As a young officer, he served in Northern Ireland, England and Germany and was part of a team which helped train the Namibian Army when the country achieved independence. He also served with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus before leaving the Army with the rank of captain.

David had several offers of work when he left the Army, including acting as assistant to leading Tory politician Michael Heseltine, but the call of the wild took him, instead, to Operation Raleigh, the expedition charity established by Prince Charles for the development of young people.

The job led him to run conservation, community and adventure programmes in Zimbabwe, Panama, Chile, Alaska and Botswana with often hair-raising

**David Taylor-Smith (third from left) with the G4S Iraq Management team in front of the Swords of Victory in Baghdad.**



adventures along the way. "I have been charged by a rhino, rafted previously unnavigated rivers, walked across the Kalahari Desert, climbed active volcanoes and visited the ice caps of Northern Patagonia," he says. "At one point I was held hostage at gunpoint by Cubans in the jungles of Panama."

In 1994, David was appointed as Hong Kong director of Project ORBIS, an international, non-profit sight-saving organisation which runs the world's only "flying eye" hospital. Its aim is to eliminate avoidable blindness in the developing world. "We set up eye banking schemes in Burma and ran medical programmes in China and India," he recalls.

"ORBIS grew to be the biggest international charity in Hong Kong. Seeing someone who is bi-focally blind having their sight restored is one of life's great thrills and experiences."

The Hong Kong link provided his next career stepping stone. Jardine Matheson, a large Hong Kong conglomerate founded during the Victorian era, was adjusting to the transfer of the colony to China and needed to project a new image for the future. David became its corporate communications chief, dealing with businesses in 30 countries.

"Jardine was a company that believed in moving its executives from one job to another to widen their experience. Perhaps because I had been in the Army they decided I could work in security, and I was appointed as managing director of its Hong Kong joint venture, Jardine Securicor, in 1998.

"I could as easily have been appointed to another part of the company and finished up making pizzas or running hotels."

Securicor, which bought out its partner's 50 per cent share in 2001, was soon to become G4S, through its merger with Group 4 Falck, and David Taylor-Smith was soon offered new challenges.

"I believe you get only one life and you should seize opportunities when they arise. Life is not a dress rehearsal, it is the real thing. When you are given opportunities you should take them or, where possible, you should create them."

So, in 2002 when David had to choose between a new job in Jardine Matheson or take the job of divisional managing director of G4S Justice Services, with companies in the US and UK, he knew what decision to make.

"This was a chance to return to the UK to run my own business in an area of great personal interest," David explains. It also had huge potential in the newly outsourced provision of prisons and control of offenders.

From an £80 million turnover in 2002 the business expanded rapidly and by the time David moved on in 2006 it had doubled its turnover and substantially increased its profits.

While he drives the business forward in his new role, David is busy with his other love – nature and wild spaces. He is a trustee of WWF UK, which helps protect the natural world, and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, of which he founded an offshoot in Hong Kong. He was awarded an MBE in 2003 for his charitable activities overseas.

David's wife, Jacqueline, a teacher specialising in helping severely handicapped young people, whom he met at university, has also been made an MBE for her charitable work. They have two daughters, aged 10 and 12, and David – himself one of five sons – is as enthusiastic on the family as he is on his other roles.

"The family is the bedrock," he says. "They are always there for you and never let you down. We provide each other with love, support, encouragement ... and fun."

Spare time is precious, but David does not waste a second. He paints, fishes and, although he has now given up demanding sports such as bobsleighbing, parachuting and rugby, the love of the wild is still there.

"I have always enjoyed walking," he says, "and a few months ago I walked across the Serengeti. Before that it was Hadrian's Wall and Mont Blanc."

David Taylor-Smith is clearly still a man of action. ■

David Taylor-Smith, regional president and CEO, G4S Secure Solutions (UK & Ireland), second right, at the opening of G4S's state-of-the-art monitoring centre in Northern Ireland with (from left) Jørgen Philip-Sorensen, former G4S chairman, David Gavaghan, CEO, Strategic Investment Board, and Doug Hewitson, group managing director, G4S Secure Solutions (UK).

