

# AFP helps with Middle East evacuation

The AFP provided considerable assistance in the evacuation of more than 5000 Australian citizens from the Middle East war zone to safety in July.

AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty said the AFP's Senior Liaison Officer in Beirut, Richard Stanford, played an integral role in the evacuations.

"Five days after hostilities commenced, he led two bus convoys of Australians to the Syrian border, ensuring their safe passage to Jordan," he said.

"This was the first group of Australian evacuees from Lebanon and was undertaken during trying conditions where shell fire was encountered and roads were less than passable due to continual bombing," he said.

Other AFP staff in Lebanon at the time included Federal Agent Ken Ross and Federal Agent Elias Farah, who is undertaking language training.

Both members joined Federal Agent Stanford in assisting the Australian mission in the marshalling and evacuation of Australian citizens from Beirut. AFP efforts led to the facilitation and processing of more than 5000 evacuees in eight days.



Commissioner Keelty said the AFP also liaised with its foreign police contacts and arranged the passage of 200 evacuees on a Greek warship. "Once again, Federal Agent Stanford escorted these evacuees to Cyprus and safety. He commented that it was a satisfying experience knowing he was able to

The Australian Federal Police, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Australian Defence Force worked side by side to board evacuees on the *San Gwann*.

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AFP member Tony Shearer stands watch as evacuees and their luggage are prepared for boarding the *San Gwann* in Beirut.

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assist in safely removing these people from the hostilities," he said.

AFP resourcefulness was also evident when Federal Agent Farah was able to negotiate access to scarcely available diesel fuel for vehicles and embassy generators.

Federal Agent Ray McDonald, AFP Liaison Officer in Beirut, who was in Cyprus on holidays at the commencement of hostilities, remained there and played a key role in assisting the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Emergency Response Team. He was greatly assisted by Federal Agent Brendan Withers who was deployed from Australia to Cyprus as part of the operation.

Other AFP members assisting the DFAT Emergency Response Team in Turkey were Federal Agent Dave Dalton, SLO Belgrade and Federal Agent Jeff Sundin, LO London.

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In addition, AFP staff seconded to the UN in Cyprus, led by Deputy Contingent Commander Col Speedie, assisted in the reception of evacuees from Lebanon as well as providing escorts on the many ferries between Cyprus and Beirut. Many spouses of these members also volunteered to assist the DFAT Emergency Response Team in the marshalling and reception of evacuees.

Commissioner Keelty said that at its height, the AFP effort to assist the evacuation of Australians from Lebanon involved 31 members and their families. "To that end I would particularly like

to thank the partners and families of the AFP members who not only supported our efforts, but also actively involved themselves in the evacuation. This reflects well upon the spirit and camaraderie of AFP members and their families."

Throughout this time, critical support was also provided by Fay Eid, AFP Locally Engaged Staff, to the Australian Mission in Lebanon.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the AFP and families involved in this evacuation effort," Commissioner Keelty added.

