

# How we handled a crisis that shook the nation

## A round-the-clock response

When three terrorist bombs exploded on the island resort of Bali shortly after 11pm on Saturday October 12, the Australian public's sense of isolation from the global reach of terrorism was shattered. The AFP, having extended its counter-terrorism capabilities following the events of September 11, 2001, was well placed to respond quickly as the scale of the disaster became apparent. Here's what happened in those first few days.

### **SATURDAY, October 12:**

**11.08pm Bali time**, (Sunday, October 13, 1.08am AEST): Bomb explodes at Paddy's Bar in Kuta, Bali, followed a short time later by a second blast at the nearby Sari Club. About 45 to 60 seconds later, a third bomb explodes near the US Consulate (all times AEST unless otherwise specified.)

The incident triggers federal government response, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with the AFP taking a leading, hands-on role from the outset. It will involve thousands of Commonwealth public servants, federal and state police, defence force personnel and volunteers.

The range of federal departments and agencies involved includes Prime Minister and Cabinet, Defence, the Australian Defence Force, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Federal Police, Australian Protective Service, Immigration, Customs, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Health, Family and Community Services, Centrelink, Parliament House, Transport and Regional Services, Emergency Management Australia, Treasury, Finance and AusAID.

### **SUNDAY, October 13:**

**2am:** Several members of the public contact AFP's National Assessments Centre (NAC) providing

information about an explosion in a hotel or nightclub in Bali. Each caller states they have been contacted by a friend or relative in Bali. Some callers report massive confusion and some bodies could be seen. All callers are referred to DFAT Consular Operations to obtain latest information and assistance.

**2.15am:** Australian Consulate General, Bali, receives reports of bomb blast – seeks to confirm reports.

**2.39am:** Federal Agent Glen McEwen phones AFP Headquarters from Bali. Says that he and Federal Agent Mick Kelsey are in Bali, that there had been an explosion and that they are enroute to investigate.

A short time later, Federal Agent McEwen reported on the extent of damage at the blast site. He described seeing burning buildings, burning motor vehicles with occupants still inside and a relatively large crater in the street outside the Sari Club. He reported chaos, with people running from the scene and emergency services attempting to extinguish fires. He also advised that Paddy's Bar and the Sari Club were known to be frequented by Australian and other foreign tourists and that, because of the extent of the damage he could see, Australian casualties were likely to be significant.



Photo by Sgt Troy Rodgers, 1 Joint Public Affairs Unit, Department of Defence

**3 - 3.30am:** All appropriate agencies advised by AFP Headquarters after reports of explosions in Bali officially confirmed by federal agents at the scene.

**3.47am:** PSCC is activated – Watch Office duty manager and staff called in.

**3.48am:** PSCC contacts ASIO, DFAT, APS, AFP, EMA and PM&C. Attorney-General's office is notified.

**3.50am:** Copies of CNN reports obtained.

**4.13am:** Federal Agent Jeff Caldwell calls to advise that at least five AFP personnel are on leave in Bali. Federal Agents Tim Fisher and Nicolle Haigh are on leave from UN Contingent, East Timor. Fisher is injured (category 2, serious but not life threatening). Haigh is missing.

**5am:** PSCC Watch Office staff begin to gather information about incident.

DFAT is established as the lead Commonwealth agency with Australian Defence Force, AFP and ASIO having principal roles.

DFAT crisis centre activated to coordinate information flows to relevant government agencies, and the whole-of-government response.

**6am:** DFAT Emergency Call Unit activated to handle calls. Details of the bombings and help line numbers are posted on the DFAT web site.

**By 6.30am:** Incident Coordination Centre (ICC) set up and operating at AFP Headquarters.

**6.40am:** Prime Minister John Howard advised of the Bali incident at Kirribilli House in phone call from senior staffer. Receives updates throughout day. Stays in touch with DFAT crisis centre.

**By 7am:** AFP Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, GM International, GM National Operations and others convene at AFP Headquarters to formulate initial AFP plan.

Throughout the morning, AFP Headquarters in contact with Police General Chief, Da'i Bachtiar of the Indonesian National Police to offer assistance. He indicated that AFP assistance would be welcome.

**9am:** DFAT Crisis Centre meeting called. AFP attend.

**10am:** Two RAAF Hercules leave for Denpasar, each with seven specialists including ADF doctors (an anaesthetist and surgeons) and nurses.

**11.49am:** Commissioner Mick Keelty circulates all-staff email message confirming bombings in Bali and urges patience and calm while the fate of colleagues remains unknown. He also advises that Federal Agent Tim Morris will head a joint AFP ASIO investigation team located in Canberra and that Federal Agent Graham Ashton will lead the joint team heading to Bali as soon as Indonesia confirms the scope of assistance required.

By this time, AFP's Police Realtime On-line Management System (PROMIS) case has been created.

A victim of the Bali bombings is disembarked from an RAAF rescue flight in Melbourne



**11.50am:** Visiting Indonesian official formally requests Australian assistance – specifically AFP and ASIO.

**Noon:** Meeting of the Commonwealth's Special Incident Task Force (SITF) called for 3.30pm in Canberra. PSCC Watch Office switches to 24-hour operation to assist the DFAT Crisis Centre by coordinating and responding to security agency issues. Keeps in constant contact with relevant Commonwealth, state and territory agencies.

**12.30pm:** National Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) commander contacts AFP offering assistance.

Commissioner Keelty contacts state and territory police commissioners to ensure coordination of the national/international law enforcement response.

AFP announces joint investigation team from ASIO and AFP is on its way to Bali to assist Indonesian Police. Team includes forensic and investigative officers, and experts in disaster victim identification and bomb-blast investigation.

**2pm:** Second DFAT Crisis Centre meeting convenes.

Prime Minister Howard, in Sydney office, speaks by telephone with Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

**2.30pm:** Prime Minister Howard holds press conference.

**3.30pm:** SITF meets, with representatives from AG's, ASIO, AFP, Defence, EMA, Transport and PM&C.

**3.35pm:** AFP receives first call from possible witness.

**4pm:** GM National Operations Ben McDevitt briefs members of AFP contingent to be deployed to Bali.

**4.05pm:** Situation report from Federal Agent McEwen advises that forward command post has been established at Samid Raya Hotel.

**4.27pm:** Commissioner Keelty releases second all-staff message. Reports that all AFP, state and

territory police in Bali have been accounted for, although there are casualties – Federal Agent Nicolle Haigh the most serious.

**6.30pm:** RAAF Orion carrying AFP Initial Assessment Team and consular officials leaves for Bali. AFP team includes disaster victim identification, forensic, investigation, intelligence and bomb-blast experts.

**9.15pm:** Prime Minister Howard meets ASIO and other security agencies at The Lodge.

**10.15pm:** Prime Minister Howard receives phone call from British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

**11pm:** First questionnaires handed to passengers departing Denpasar.

**Midnight:** Fourth Hercules departs Richmond for Darwin, to be on standby.

**Within first 24 hours:** 20 government officials, nine DFAT and 14 AFP staff from Canberra and Jakarta on the ground in Bali. Operation headed by the Australian Embassy's Deputy Head of Mission from Jakarta. Staff placed at Denpasar international airport to facilitate departure of Australians and arrival of victims' relatives. Major Incident Rooms (MIRs) established in all capital cities.

#### **MONDAY, October 14:**

**2.30am:** First Hercules arrives in Darwin carrying 15 Australian evacuees – three in intensive care, five on stretchers and seven walking.

First commercial and charter flights begin to arrive in Australia with passengers interviewed by AFP personnel at all major airports – a massive logistical exercise. Over the next two weeks, AFP will take statements from all passengers on 19 flights from Bali. In all, 7340 passenger questionnaires will be completed, leading to 450 relevant leads.

**By 7am:** Forensic MIR operational in Canberra.

**7.10am:** Second Hercules arrives in Darwin carrying 22 Australian evacuees – two in intensive care, 19 on stretchers and one walking.

**8am:** Orion arrives in Darwin from Bali carrying less seriously injured patients.

Prime Minister Howard receives phone call from United States President George W. Bush

**11.10am:** Guidelines for recording Bali-related entries on PROMIS issued.

**12.35pm:** Third Hercules arrives in Darwin carrying 15 casualties.

**12.50pm (Darwin time):** Federal Agent Haigh arrives by air and is moved to Darwin Hospital. She is later reunited at the hospital with her mother.

**1.05pm:** Fourth Hercules arrives in Darwin carrying 12 casualties, nine on stretchers and three walking.

**1.54pm:** Operations Management Centre advises name of operation – Operation Alliance.

Forensics specialists and local volunteers sift through rubble in Kuta, Bali, in the days following the bombings

To date, 64 evacuees transported by the ADF from Denpasar to Darwin.

A fifth Hercules, carrying medical supplies, due in Darwin later in the evening from Richmond.

Small number of ADF members reported on leave in Bali – two confirmed injured.

**5:30pm:** Hercules arrives in Darwin with two stretcher casualties – fifth Hercules trip from Bali to Darwin.

**6.02pm:** Commissioner Keelty releases third all-staff update. Advises that at 12.30am tomorrow, two Australian Bomb Data Centre (ABDC) members, four investigators and four forensic members, together with five disaster victim identification experts from state and territory police will leave for Bali to supplement existing AFP/ASIO team already on the ground. Announces his imminent departure for Bali with Ministers Downer and Ellison.

Two ADF flights leave Darwin with 15 casualties Perth bound and 20 for Brisbane and Sydney.

Another flight takes 15 AFP officers to Bali.

Additional Hercules, carrying medical supplies, expected in Darwin from Richmond.

**7:50pm:** Sixty-six evacuees have been transported from Denpasar to Darwin

**Between 5.30am and 8pm** the Department of Health and Ageing has:

- liaised with state counterparts, EMA and Defence to organise evacuation of all serious casualties from Darwin and their reception in other states;
- attended briefings with DFAT and other agencies;
- detailed liaison with medical authorities in Darwin re injuries to evacuees;
- organised Careflight evacuation of two casualties from Darwin to Sydney;
- liaised with Australian and New Zealand Burns Association and New Zealand Health re whether assistance is needed.

**Also on October 14:** Prime Minister Howard addresses House of Representatives. Says, so far, advice is a total of 181 dead. Thanks all those agencies and people involved in the rescue and medical evacuation. Says no expense will be spared and no limit placed on government provision of evacuation facilities for Australians and others. Announces ministers, Alexander Downer, Foreign Affairs, and Chris Ellison, Justice, to go to Bali and Jakarta with AFP's Commissioner Keelty and ASIO head Dennis Richardson. Says National Security Committee of Cabinet has asked for review of domestic terrorist legislation. Says intelligence highlighted general threat environment, "But was at no time specific about Saturday night's attack in Bali". Supports Leader of Opposition Simon Crean's suggestion for national day of mourning.



Photo by Brian Hartigan

Defence Minister Robert Hill addresses the Senate. Says counter-terrorism alert remains at Special.

**Within 36 hours:** all Australian injured have been returned to Australia. AFP is playing a front-line role in dealing with victims' families, many of whom are traumatised by their loss and frustrated at perceived delays in releasing bodies. DFAT staff have conducted a second full search of all hospitals in Bali for additional Australian injured. DFAT has received more than 15,000 calls from concerned Australian friends and families.

**Within 48 hours:** five refrigeration units have been despatched to Bali. Priority task is DFAT and AFP's active pursuit of negotiations with Indonesian authorities to improve conditions of local morgues and stabilise the remains of Australian dead.

#### **TUESDAY, October 15:**

Four Hercules begin support for EMA casualty distribution plan within Australia.

**Midnight** (local time): First Hercules departs Darwin with 11 casualties; arrives Perth 4am local time.

**2am:** Second Hercules departs Darwin to arrive Adelaide 7.20am local time.

**5am:** Third Hercules departs Darwin to arrive Brisbane 10.20am local time.

**By 6am:** Total of 66 evacuees have been transported from Denpasar to Darwin and six trips by Hercules from Bali to Darwin have occurred. Two casualties have died enroute.

**9.10am:** Fourth Hercules departs Darwin – arrives RAAF Base Richmond at 3pm.

**1.03pm:** Commissioner's staff advise that Federal Agent Haigh has been moved to Brisbane and that Federal Agent Tim Fisher is back in Canberra receiving treatment on his right hand.

Royal New Zealand Air Force Hercules departs with 22 AFP officers – due in Bali at 8am.

GM National Operations Federal Agent Ben McDevitt faces an information-hungry media scrum at National Headquarters



Photo by Bonnie Warn

ABOVE:  
A Western  
Australian police  
officer examines  
fingerprint  
evidence on the  
ground in Bali

BELOW: A  
forensics scientist  
takes notes while  
sifting through  
post-mortem  
evidence at  
Weston Creek

Defence says it has provided five medical teams including full-time and reserve members to assist in patient treatment and care, prioritisation and coordination of transfer to Darwin. Also involved in the Aero-Medical Evacuation Team shuttling between Bali and Darwin.

Defence has 43 members in specialist teams on AME flights, 13 doctors (including anaesthetists and intensive care specialists), 16 critical-care nurses, 12 medical assistants and two chaplains.

Evacuees include foreign nationals from South Africa, Hong Kong, Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, Canada and Britain.

**6am:** First aircraft arrives Perth with 12 injured and two next-of-kin. Aircraft to return to Bali.

**6.30am:** Five storage refrigerators and support equipment arrive Bali; sixth unit to arrive later in

the afternoon. Two ADF personnel to remain to operate equipment.

Defence lists its flights from Darwin to other Australian cities:

**7.50am:** Second aircraft arrives Adelaide, then to Melbourne (arrives 10.40am). One injured disembarks Adelaide; seven go to Melbourne.

**10.50am:** Third aircraft arrives Brisbane with seven casualties on board.

**5.05pm:** Fourth aircraft arrives in Sydney.

**Also on October 15:** Foreign Minister Alexander Downer announces emergency humanitarian assistance through AusAID to Bali health services, worth \$300,000, in addition to medical supplies provided in first airlifts. Thanks volunteers and Indonesian medical workers.

Humanitarian assistance directed to Bali hospitals and Indonesian Red Cross.

Family and Community Services Minister Amanda Vanstone says victims and families will receive streamlined access to any payments or services they are eligible for. Announces special Centrelink hotline. Says some may qualify for special benefit.

#### WEDNESDAY, October 16:

AFP has 21 members in Bali assisting the investigation with a further 19 departing today – three others to arrive tomorrow.

AFP calls for videos and photos from witnesses to be handed in – will be copied and returned.

#### THURSDAY, October 17:

Prime Minister Howard announces he will leave for Bali today with Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson and Opposition Leader Simon Crean.

AFP says it now has 25 Disaster Victim Identification response members in Bali and will send another 18 specialists today.

RAAF delivers forklift to Denpasar airport in preparation for replacement refrigeration unit.

Four RAAF air-movement staff established at Denpasar to help manage and prepare personnel and material for transportation on service aircraft.

Health Minister Kay Patterson announces new shipment into Australia of Transcyte (product for treating burns).

Department of Family and Community Services is tasked to set up an interdepartmental taskforce to handle domestic aftermath.

#### FRIDAY, October 18:

RAAF delivers larger 6 metre refrigeration unit to replace previous five containers.

Four ADF psychologists travel to Jakarta to counsel embassy staff. A second psychologist team to arrive in Bali to support consular staff.

Four more AFP forensic staff arrive in Bali.



Photo by Brian Hartigan

Commissioner Keelty advises staff he has signed an MOU with Indonesian National Police to establish Joint Australia-Indonesia Police Investigative Team.

**3pm:** RAAF Hercules departs Darwin to evacuate four Indonesian nationals to Perth – departs Bali 7.50pm (arrives Perth Saturday 1.30am).

#### **SUNDAY, October 20:**

National Day of Mourning.

PROMIS entries reach 20,000.

AFP reminds families of missing to provide DNA samples (hair brushes, unwashed clothes, used razors, lipstick, etc) to assist in victim identification process.

#### **MONDAY, October 21:**

Commissioner Keelty says evidence suggests two devices used in Kuta. Says 400 AFP personnel working in Australia with colleagues from other Australian police jurisdictions. Another 109 Australian officers in Bali – more than 50 involved directly in victim identification.

#### **TUESDAY, October 22:**

Commissioner Keelty visits Forensics Major Incident Room in Canberra where experts are working around the clock to help identify victims.

#### **WEDNESDAY, October 23:**

Emergency amendment to the Crimes Act passes the Senate, allowing CrimTrac DNA database system to be used for disaster victim identification.

Commissioner Keelty issues another all-staff update: announces major staff shuffle to cover Operation Alliance. Says he is proud of the effort of staff in “a very difficult and complex environment” thus far and encourages continued commitment.

#### **THURSDAY, October 24:**

**10am:** National Memorial Service for Bali victims held at Parliament House.

Prime Minister Howard announces results of review of counter-terrorism arrangements. Says his department will, in future, coordinate policy – Attorney-General’s to continue coordinating operations.

#### **FRIDAY, October 25:**

Prime Minister Howard says Australia will give extra \$10 million over four years to assist Indonesia build counter-terrorism capacity.

#### **SATURDAY, October 26:**

Mr Downer announces United Nations Security Council has added Jemaah Islamiyah to its consolidated list of al Qaeda related entities.

#### **SUNDAY, October 27:**

PROMIS entries reach 30,000.

AFP announces forensic examination of crime scene is largely complete.



*Photo by Sgt William Guthrie, Department of Defence*

**Based on a list compiled by Verona Burgess, Public Service Reporter for *The Canberra Times*, and published in the November issue of *The Public Sector Informant*. Amended to reflect AFP focus. Reprinted with permission of *The Canberra Times*.**

Victims families mourn their loss at a national memorial service at Parliament House, Canberra – 24 October