

Bali trauma:

Customs smoothes homecoming

All around were faces disfigured by shrapnel and bruising, stained with blood and scarred from burns," said Mark Wilson, Customs officer at Perth Airport. "It was the most traumatic experience of my life. I have never seen anything like it before."

with marshalling and processing duties so that the other passengers could go through clearances without delay.

"We boarded the planes quickly, assessed the situation and got out of the way of the medics, who were lined up with ambulances on the tarmac.

"Inside the planes was a sight I will remember for a long time. I expected a few passengers with cuts and bruises but instead I saw burnt and bleeding people covered in blood-soaked bandages, faces disfigured by shrapnel and bodies laid out on stretchers between the seats. A young girl had what I thought were bandages around her shoulders; when I got closer I saw it was just burnt skin.

"It hit home even more when one of my colleagues said that he remembered processing one of the now injured girls when she had left for Bali a couple of days earlier.

"We finished this jet within three minutes, but it seemed so much longer."

Customs officers around the country have received praise from the passengers returning from Bali for their professionalism, consideration and compassion.

Many of these compliments have been verbal, but one published example read:

"I don't know how they did it, but we were the only people at the airport. No queuing to get passports processed, bags already waiting on the carousel, offers of counselling if required and it was lovely to be welcomed. To those responsible for arranging this special treatment - thank you, it was very much



The Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison (left), and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, during their visit to Bali after the bombings.

For all the Customs officers tasked with clearing the Bali bomb survivors, the experience was highly emotional.

Mark, a member of Customs Air Cargo Team at Perth Airport, was one of the officers assisting the Passenger Processing Team with passengers from Bali on the Sunday following the bombings.

"My task was to clear the injured passengers while allowing the medics to do their work," he said. "Others in the Air Cargo Team also volunteered to help

appreciated." [Page 8, *Sydney Morning Herald, Weekend Edition*, 2/3 November 2002]

National Manager Passengers Tim Chapman said that it was critical that Customs officers combined compassion with efficiency to quickly and gently clear passengers during this national emergency.

"Under extremely emotional circumstances, Customs officers showed common sense to best expedite people and relief supplies, and provided support to other agencies," said Tim.

The first night following the bombings, Customs catered for extra commercial, military and private flights to and from Bali.

Briefings were organised to keep everyone up to date, specific channels were set up to best facilitate the injured and extra Customs officers were called in on overtime.

"Our officers who worked the first shifts did a marvellous job," said Tim.

"Some passengers were quite affected. They couldn't say their names and in some cases it was difficult to conduct face-to-passport checks.

"Still, clearances were given very quickly and sensitivity was shown to returning travellers."

Mark remembers that some passengers could fill out a passenger card but others were unconscious or unable to speak so staff used other methods, such as checking with the Balinese medics on board, who sometimes had details.

"We tried to comfort passengers as we wrote down their names," said Mark. "For some injured passengers we only got first names."

Tim said, "Border protection was, however, maintained. Risk management still applied and a careful watch was kept for high-risk people who might have taken advantage of the situation.

"All airport staff in their various tasks had an emotional task but their combined efforts assured a swift clearance for those returning home."

Communication between Customs at airports and central office was also

effectively maintained.

"In Canberra, we didn't have to deal with the same emotional issues that the airport staff had," said Tim. "However, operations here were also vital.

"The Passenger Analysis Unit gathered information, marking names off the missing list by finding out whether they had actually gone to Bali, or whether they had already come back.

"Customs was able to provide information about passenger numbers to the Australian Federal Police which was then able to have the right number of officers deployed at the airports.

"The nature of Customs job involves needing to make decisions quite quickly in difficult situations. And I think, under these circumstances, Customs worked very well during an issue of national significance."

Bali spurs further border security measures

"The Bali bombings were a personal tragedy for Australia," said the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison.

"Even though the attacks happened on foreign soil, we must now be prepared for attempts to violate our own country. We must continue to protect our borders at the highest level to make sure terrorism is unable to strike at home.

"In addition to the money provided in the Budget, Customs has been allocated \$15 million over four years by the Federal Government to purchase and install new document readers which will enable Customs to detect fraudulent passports at the border. This will further strengthen our efforts to stop terrorists from entering Australia

"Customs is on the top of the game already, with its trial of state-of-the-art face-recognition systems at our airports.

"The announcement by Prime Minister John Howard in October of further funding for new counter-terrorism measures will only build on Customs technology for border protection."