

CHRISTMAS DAY

ON THE JOB

By Peter Kowalick

- Christmas Day for most people is an occasion for enjoying the real pleasures of life with family, friends and neighbours. What of those who have to spend part of the special day on the job?

Those who have never had to work on Christmas Day can't appreciate what it means to give up part of a very special day to routine matters.

AFP members, like those in most other police organisations find the day of peace can be a quiet one on the job or it can be just the opposite. Like the Christmas of 1974 in Darwin, when Cyclone Tracy struck with all its devastation.

Far-flung operations from Hobart to Darwin provide AFP members with a much more varied range of tasks than in most Police forces.

In the National Capital, Canberra, the day is generally quiet, but the community policing presence must still be evident.

Normal services are provided, with accent being on safety on the roads.

In the Regions, most of the activity evolves at the airports, where international travellers seem to be less affected by the import of the day.

Sydney

Sydney Airport members find that Christmas Day is no different from any other.

Acting Inspector Bob Crocker, OIC, said the same number of aircraft as normal used the airport on the day.

"This year it will be 26 incoming flights and 31 outward, all of which need the presence of AFP members," he said. "The only change might perhaps be in the number of people who

have celebrated unwisely on the flights. But other than that it's business as usual.

"Most members would prefer not to be working on the day, but it's part of the job and they do it just the same," he said. "It's a matter of discipline." He said some form of celebration is arranged in the period up to Christmas but it depends on just when people are available to attend.

At Sydney City Station, two shifts look after any eventuality on the day. Said Sergeant Bill Williams: "We handle a considerable amount of Family Law matters and these can cause some extra problems in the Christmas period with children spending time with one or other of their parents.

"Last year, one of our officers was required to accompany State Police to apprehend a man who would not give up a child in contravention of a Family Law Court order," he said.

Where possible, arrangements were made by members to bring in special food for the occasion.

Melbourne

At Melbourne Airport, the work pressure eases a little with fewer flights from overseas.

But as OIC Inspector Alister McDougall says: "There are usually more people worse the wear for drink and they can mean extra attention.

"Sporting teams arriving from overseas can also create more work for those on duty," he said.

Brisbane

Brisbane Airport members may be busy on Christmas Day this year. Thursday is normally a big day and with 12 overseas flights in and the same number out, it's a case of business very much as usual.



"AND MY PRESENT IS A NOTE FROM SANTA SAYING I CAN GO HOME."

"Just a normal day, with normal shifts," OIC Acting Station Sergeant Dave Storey said. "The only change is that we may have a few extra domestic flights to worry about.

"But as for troubles, it usually turns out to be a fairly peaceful day," he said.

Adelaide

At Adelaide Airport, the period up to Xmas Day is the busy time.

"We frequently have plenty of action in this period with irate passengers rushing to get where they want to go before the day," Senior Sergeant Ray Elphic said.

"But generally, Christmas Day is respected by most people in Adelaide, even if they may be a bit more cheery.

"Each year members on duty are paid a visit by their Commander, Superintendent Ken Thompson, who makes it a Christmas Day practice to talk and have a little light refreshment with them," Ray said.

"The members really appreciate it."

Perth

Perth's busiest time is on Christmas Eve.

Airport OIC Acting Station Sergeant Peter Salter said it was the worst day of the year for them.

"Flights start at 7am on the day before Christmas and from then on it's just a rush of people leaving for the Eastern States or Western Australians coming home to Perth," he said. "This rush goes on until about 2am on Christmas Day. We then have a break until about 6am when the flights begin again.

"During the day we have four international flights in and the same number out. Domestic flights usually are restricted on Christmas Day.

"All in all, it very often turns out to be a fairly quiet day. In fact I don't ever recall anyone being arrested on Christmas Day at Perth Airport," he said.



Darwin

In Darwin, the Christmas period can be a busy one up to and after Christmas Day. However, the day itself is usually a quiet one, with two international flights in and one out. Security checks are carried out on each of them.

Acting OIC Station Sergeant Ray Jacques said the problems usually arose before and after Christmas Day.

"Many people are either flying out of Darwin for holidays south, or flying in to spend time with their families," he said.

"We get up to 25 domestic flights a day in and out. At this time of the year many of them have earned the name 'drunk flights'.

"But generally Christmas Day is a quiet one. We maintain full communications both for general operation and Coastwatch."



Jervis Bay

At Jervis Bay Station, it is duties as usual, but with a difference. As a three-man station, one member will be on duty and the others on call.

Senior Constable Paul Hewson expects to be the chosen one this year. He said it was not unusual for a number of people to get into difficulties during Christmas Day.

"They drink a little more than usual and soon find themselves in trouble," he said. "Most of our work usually is in general duties and sea rescue."

The three members there find that a combination of festive fare and a sudden unexpected deterioration in weather can play havoc with their Christmas.

As their responsibility also extends to the local camping facilities, it can mean a hectic period for them.

Hobart

Hobart's Airport once was a very busy place for part of Christmas Day.

"As a non-curfew airport it used to be the arrival point for many flights, especially between 12 midnight and 5am," OIC Sergeant John Jennings said. "Today, with the wider and longer bodied aircraft in use, this rush has been reduced considerably.

"Now we can expect something between two and three flights, but we don't know for sure until close to the day."

He said Christmas Day in Hobart was considered a family day and everything was done to see that members had as much time as possible with families.

Coastwatch

The Coastal Protection Unit's Coastwatch duties go on as usual, with the free telephone reporting service to Canberra (062-47 6666) operating 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Regional activities vary with the location.

Broome members are rostered on as normal. As the only representatives of the AFP in the area they must be at the ready to meet operational demands.

Air activities from Broome depend on the climatic season. Normally between November and March each year, some Coastwatch littoral surveillance flights are curtailed because of the cyclone season. This applies only to flights west of Darwin.

In Darwin itself, CPU members are stood down on Christmas Day but are on call. The AFP Regional Operations Centre remains operating and acts as a reporting centre.

In Cairns, where AFP Regional members again are on duty, the CPU members are stood down.

Apart from the restricted West of Darwin flights, all Coastwatch littoral surveillance flights are programmed as normal over the Christmas period, including Christmas Day.