

VIP Protection Unit

EASTERN Region's Close Protection Unit has gained a reputation for providing a high standard of protection over the years and many past and present members have been commended by those VIPs provided with their services.

The Unit is located in the Commonwealth Offices building near the International Terminal at Sydney (Kingsford-Smith) Airport. The nominal staffing is two sergeants and 16 constables, two of whom are allocated to the Temple Court Family Law Courts complex in the city.

The Unit is well equipped and trained to respond to a range of protection tasks. To supplement staffing, a register of other members who have received training or who have protection experience is maintained to meet unusual workloads.

This was the case during the Gulf War in 1991, when the Region provided additional close protection to the Consuls-General of the US, the UK and Egypt.

VIP protection has been an important function in Eastern Region for many years. The only Regions to have members assigned full-time to this task are Eastern and Southern. Eastern Region's Unit has two permanent tasks: the provision of personal security to the Consul-General of Turkey and the Consul-General of Israel. In addition, the Unit provides assistance to members of Protection Division engaged in the security of the Prime Minister, the Governor-General, Federal ministers, ambassadors and overseas visitors. Assistance is also provided to members of other Regions involved in close protection and a particularly good liaison is maintained with Southern Region VIPP Squad and Protection Division.

The expansion of Eastern Region's VIP Protection Unit resulted from the assassination of the Consul-General of Turkey and his bodyguard at Dover Heights, Sydney, in December 1980. Prior to



The US Consul-General presented Eastern Region VIPP members certificates of appreciation for protection work done during the period of the Gulf War. L to R: D/Const Chris Noble, D/Sgt Ian Hill, Constables Andre Lenz and Steve Martin, Consul-General Phillip Lincoln, and D/Const Jemmy Cooper.

this event, the permanent VIPP unit comprised two sergeants, whilst uniformed members conducted patrols of the various consulates in Sydney.

Following the assassination, Turkish Consular staff were provided with escorts to and from their work, but this was discontinued after a period of time. In June 1982, as a result of an updated threat assessment, a permanent squad was formed to undertake protection of the Turkish Consul-General and Consular staff. As a result of the bombings of the Israeli Consulate in Westfield Towers and the Hakoah Soccer Club at Bondi in December 1982, the role of the VIPP Unit was expanded to provide protection to the Consul-General of Israel.

The security work at Temple Court, and previously at the Paramatta Family Law Court, arose from the murders of Family Court Judge, Mr Justice David Opas, in 1980; and Mrs Pearl Watson, the wife of Family Court Judge, Mr Justice Ray Watson, in 1984; as well as the bombing of the Paramatta Court in 1984.

The working day of a VIPP officer is varied. The officer goes where the VIP goes. It may be an audience with the Queen one day and watching a truck racing meeting the next, as happened recently when the Turkish Consul-General was invited to the event. Travel,

both intra and interstate, is the norm. An officer arriving at work for the day often doesn't know just when the day will finish.

At times the Unit is required to provide full protection to nominated VIPs where it is not practicable to allocate a member from Protection Division in Canberra. On numerous occasions the Unit overlooks the movement through Sydney Airport of arriving, departing, or transiting royalty, heads of government, and foreign ministers. In particular, travellers from the Pacific Island nations are required to transit through Sydney to connect with flights to other countries. The location of the Unit at the airport considerably assists its ability to meet this commitment.

Obviously, the job is a sensitive one. Officers in the Unit need to be aware of protocol relating to their VIP; they need to be discreet whilst still performing their security role; and they need to be flexible and accommodating in attitude. The job also demands high dress standards.

Regular liaison is maintained with the NSW Police Special Branch, as well as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, COMCAR, consulate staff and security staff of the large hotels to ensure the efficient provision of protective services. The Unit also relies heavily on information from the Special Intelligence team in Eastern Region's Intelligence Division.