

New South Wales Police

STATEMENT in the matter of:
Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Investigation

Place:
Tasmania Police
Marine & Rescue Services,
Hobart
Date: 12 December 1999

Name: Gilbert Dudley PEARCE

Address: Police Marine and Rescue Services, **Tel. No.:** (03) 62302476

Occupation: Police Officer

STATES:-

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence which I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in Court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable for prosecution if I wilfully state in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 48 years of age.
3. My full name is Gilbert Dudley PEARCE. I am a Constable attached to the Marine and Rescue Services, Hobart. I am the Master of the offshore Patrol Vessel 'Van Diemen' and hold current U.S.L. Code Masters qualifications, Master Class 4 and Marine Engine Class 1, endorsed for both trading and fishing vessels unrestricted.
4. On Sunday the 19 September 1999, Constables J. PRATT, R. STACEY, L. STANLEY, P. ALLAN and D. BIDGOOD and myself attended the Australian Maritime College Complex at Newnham, Tasmania, and performed duties, as directed, by Detective Senior Constable S. GRAY and Senior Constable D. UPSTON, who are attached to the New South Wales Police Service.

Witness:



Signature:



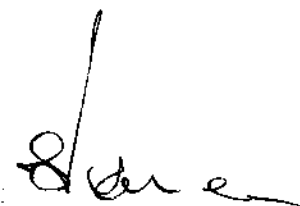
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5. The tasks related to a series of pool exercises with a group of, firstly, 15 trained persons who were required to each swim 50 metres unaided and fully clothed in appropriate yachting type wet weather gear. Each person was then required to climb into a 10 man inflatable RFD life raft with the assistance of each other, then with Constable STACEY and myself acting as exhausted survivors the pair onboard the raft were then required to recover ourselves unaided into the rafts. The only provision on the raft was a throwing line and quoit. Each person chose his own recovery method. Some using the throwing line and quoit. Some instructing their assistant to swim ourselves to the raft.
6. Difficulties were experienced with all parties when attempts were made to recover ourselves (acting as unconscious) back into the raft. Each person again chose different methods with different degrees of difficulty. Some persons chose to recover their "unconscious person" via the accepted methods. Some chose to try different variations with mixed results.
7. Further exercises were required of the 15 trained persons. These included the use of a smaller 6 man R.F.D. type inflated life raft which was inverted. They were required to enter the upturned raft, exit same and right the raft, make their way to the upturned 10 man raft, right that raft, enter and exit same. Most persons experienced some difficulty in this exercise mainly due to the upturned raft and its physical size.
8. The second segment of the exercise was carried out on the afternoon of Sunday the 19 September. This exercise involved 15 untrained persons who were required to conduct the same trials and exercises. Their methods of recovery and general ability to achieve the required results differed from the trained crew. It was evident that experience and previous training were of great advantage. Those who lacked that previous training found difficulties in all aspects of raft entry and righting etc.
9. On Monday 20 September 1999 exercises were again carried out in the Australian Maritime Pool which related to the use of a 6 man raft upturned. The purpose of this was to measure the carbon dioxide levels in the raft at given intervals. Constables STACEY, PRATT, STANLEY and ALLAN and A.M.C. Consultant Mr. T. BOYLE, entered the raft. Myself and Constable BIDGOOD acted as Safety Divers to assist where necessary.

Witness:



Signature:



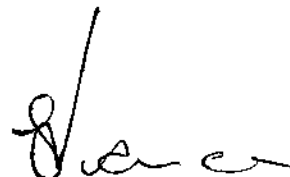
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10. Safe level alarms were activated after 4 minutes, which indicated that the CO levels in the upturned raft were at a dangerous level and the occupants were then removed. This exercise was repeated several times with the same results.
11. Further tests were carried out on Monday 20 September on different types of life rafts. One type, a round older type raft and the other a smaller latter made type, square in shape. Tests were carried out with each raft upturned, partially swamped and with a different number of persons onboard. Attempts were made to right each raft with persons onboard. Each raft reacted in a different manner. It was again evident that to the untrained occupants of the upturned raft, difficulties would be experienced and expected in adverse conditions.
12. Several tests were then carried out on different types of safety harnesses and safety lines. These tests were carried out by Constables STACEY and BIDGOD. During these tests I, along with Constables ALLAN, PRATT and STANLEY, acted as standby divers and assisted in the evaluation of each test. Again it was evident that persons lacking in experience would find difficulty in freeing themselves from their harness/safety lines.
13. On Tuesday the 21 September sea trials were conducted using both square and round type rafts. The trials were conducted North of Low Head in Bass Strait. The P.V. 'Van Diemen' was used to transport the gear and personnel to the area.
14. Unfortunately weather conditions at the time were not conducive with those expected and the 'Van Diemen' was used to create sea conditions to enable basic tests to be carried out on the rafts.
15. Several trials were carried out using the different rafts. These tests were conducted by the Police Divers and Mr. T. BOYLE from the A.M.C. The trials included upturned, swamped and damaged rafts. Wherever possible the wake from the 'Van Diemen' was used to swamp and upturn the rafts. Each raft suffered various degrees of damage and the personnel used, although experienced and dressed in wetsuits etc., found various levels of difficulty in staying with the rafts.

Witness:



Signature:



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16. Each raft suffered various levels of damage during the trials. The square raft was noted to lose its shape with a damaged floor. The round raft collapsed with a damaged roof and floor. These trials, as stated, were carried out in good conditions. In adverse conditions the results would be greatly different giving an inexperienced crew a degree of shock and anxiety in cold weather conditions etc.

Witness: 

Signature: 