

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q1 The time now is 11.17am, on Sunday, the 6th of June, 1999. This electronically recorded interview between Plainclothes Senior Constable Jason Woods and Mr Mark Delf at Queanbeyan Police Station. Mr Delf, as I've already explained to you, I'm making inquiries in relation to your involvement during rescue operations conducted for the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, 1998. I intend to ask you some further questions about that matter. Do you understand that?

A Yeah.

Q2 Do you agree that prior to the commencement of this interview, I told you that I intended asking you further questions about this matter?

A Yeah.

Q3 Do you agree I also told you that my questions and any answers given by you would be recorded electronically on audio tape as the interview took place?

A Yeah.

Q4 Do you agree that I also told you that at the conclusion of the interview, you would be given an audio cassette copy of the interview.

A Yeah.

Q5 For the purpose of this interview, what is your full name?

A It's Mark Anthony Delf.

Q6 Your date of birth?

A 23rd of the 1st, '61.

Q7 And your current address?

A Is unit 5, 139 Port Jackson Circuit, Phillip, ACT.

Q8 O.K. And you're currently employed?

A Yeah.

Q9 And who with?

A Lloyd Helicopters.

Q10 Lloyd Helicopters, and where's that based?

A In .....

Q11 .....

A .....

Q12 And you're, where are you based in Canberra?

A At Canberra Airport.

Q13 O.K. And can you just outline to me what your position is with Lloyd?

A I'm an air crewman.

Q14 And how long have you been with Lloyd?

A Nearly two years.

Q15 O.K. And what's your relationship, then, to the South Care helicopter operations?

A Lloyds is contracted to the ACT Ambulance Service and the ..... to provide the helicopter and the flight crew, which is the pilot and air crewman.

Q16 O.K. And how long have you been with Lloyd?

A Nearly two years.

Q17 O.K. And in relation to your experience as a, as a crewman, what, can you just detail for me what your experience is?

A I was a crewman in the navy for about 14 years.

Q18 M'mm.

A Then I left the navy and went to Coast Watch. I flew as an observer in fixed wing aircraft, then I came to Lloyds.

Q19 O.K. And then, as your duties as a crewman, what's your general role?

A Assist the pilot with navigation, communications, operate the rescue winch and just manage the rear cabin area.

Q20 O.K. I've been informed that, by yourself, that you were involved with a Southcare helicopter during rescue operations on the 27th and 29th of December, 1998, to assist the rescue of yachtsmen from the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Just in relation, I'll take you to the 27th of December. Can you just, take as long as you want, give me the details of your involvement on the, on the 27th?

A On the 27th, we were on a, on the way back from another mission we'd just completed, which was taking a guy who fell off a balcony in Vincentia, I think it was, to Sydney and we were on our way back to Canberra. And we got the radio message to say that we'd got to go to Merimbula, so we flew back to Canberra, landed on, refilled the aircraft, the crew got all their gear, then we took off and headed for Merimbula.

Q21 And who's "we"?

A As in the pilot, Ray Stone, and myself and the two paramedics.

Q22 And who are the - - -

A Michelle Blewitt and Kristy McAlister.

Q23 O.K. And what time was it that you reached Merimbula?

A Probably about, well, probably about 4.00-ish, 4.30, can't quite remember.

Q24 O.K. And that was flying the Lloyds Southcare helicopter?

A Yeah, flying the Southcare helicopter.

Q25 O.K. And what information were you given prior to attending Merimbula?

A Well, we already thought that we were going to back-up another aircraft that was there already, Helimed, we weren't actually told what we ..... we were going to be winching off a boat, we didn't know really what we were going to be doing.

Q26 O.K.

A We were just told we were going to back-up.

Q27 And during your flight to Merimbula, what were the conditions?

A Very windy, very bumpy, the girls were airsick. Quite uncomfortable.

Q28 O.K. And ..... sort of an estimation of wind speeds and - - -

A They probably ..... probably been about 40, 50 knots at the time - - -

Q29 O.K.

A - - - we were heading out there.

Q30 And what happened when you got to Merimbula?

A At Merimbula, we landed on. We refuelled while we kept, kept the aircraft going, girls got changed into their wetsuits, and then once we refuelled, we took off for the, for the search area.

Q31 O.K. And who was it giving you communications?

A Mainly Air Traffic Control and AUSSAR on the phone.

Q32 And Air Traffic Control, where?

A In Melbourne.

Q33 In Melbourne. And AUSSAR?

A Canberra.

Q34 And AUSSAR is, who, what's that?

A Australian Search and Rescue, they call out all the maritime and air and sea rescues.

Q35 O.K.

A .....

Q36 So, you were taking note of the communications, is that correct?

A Yeah.

Q37 And who was the bulk of this operation being co-ordinated, to your knowledge, by whom?

A By AUSSAR.

Q38 O.K. And they gave you certain, certain instructions at Merimbula?

A Yeah, once we were at Merimbula, they told us to go and help Helimed, and they gave us a lat and long position. And told us the yacht.

Q39 And "lat and long", you mean, what, co-ordinates - - -

A Latitude and longitude.

Q39 - - - location co-ordinates?

A .....

Q40 O.K. And what happened then?

A We took off from Merimbula.

Q41 M'mm.

A Headed out to the position. We got there and saw one yacht, and, but that wasn't the right one, that was, there was another yacht that was helping the Stand Aside, it was just standing off. So we saw them first, but obviously they weren't in trouble 'cause they were still sailing away merrily. And then we kept going and we come across Helimed, which is the other 412 out of Sale which was winching survivors off the Stand Aside already, out of the raft. So we called them up.

Q42 And this position, it was where? You said the co-ordinates that you were sent to it was, do you know whereabouts it was?

A I couldn't tell you off the top of me head what the actual position, co-ordinates were, but it was about 80 miles off the coast.

Q43 Yeah. So about 80 miles off the coast - - -

A Yeah.

Q43 - - - from where?

A From Merimbula.

Q44 From Merimbula, O.K. And, and what were the conditions that you noticed upon reaching this position?

A Winds were about probably 60, 70 knots, and it had probably 70 to 80 foot waves or swell, with occasional

90 foot one coming through.

Q45 O.K. And how was it that you can give that sort of estimation?

A We were hovering, once we were hovering at 80 feet  
- - -

Q46 M'mm.

A - - - and ..... we had to climb up to miss a wave.

Q47 And, and how big would the boat, Stand Aside, have been?

A I think it was about, about 21 metre, maybe 20 metres.

Q48 O.K. And what sort of effect, could you see how big the waves were in comparison to that yacht?

A Because the yacht was demasted, it was just rolling and surfing down the waves and, like a little surfboard. So, they were certainly large waves.

Q49 O.K. And have you seen conditions worse than that?

A No, never.

Q50 O.K. And that's, even through 14 years' navy experience?

A Yeah. We went through the Bight with, we've had hull damage. I've been round the Cape of Good Hope, but I've never seen waves that big.

Q51 O.K. And upon coming on site then, or on, to where this was - - -

A Yeah.

Q51 - - - the Stand Aside, what was Helimed doing?

A They were winching some people out of the life raft which was trailed behind the yacht.

Q52 O.K. Can you just explain for us then, how this life raft was in comparison with the yacht?

A It was on about, probably, 50 metres of line, that's 50 metres behind the yacht, just sitting in the water with the guys in it. And the Helimed was just winching the guys straight out of the raft into the aircraft.

Q53 And are you familiar with life rafts at all?

A Yeah.

Q54 And so how big was this life raft?

A I think it would be about a, it'd be a 6-manner, or a 9-manner, round with a roof.

Q55 How, how heavy would they be, the sort of raft?

A ..... it would probably be about up to 90, 100 kilos.

Q56 And what sort of influence did the conditions have upon that?

A While we were watching the Helimed one, it was sitting quite happily in the water. It wasn't turning over or anything, it was just sitting quite happily.

Q57 And were there persons in that life raft?

A Yeah, there was people in the raft, two or three people in the raft. And ..... were still sitting on the boat.

Q58 And Helimed did what?

A They winched, while we were circling, waiting, they winched three more people out of the raft. Then they had enough, they were full, had to go back.

Q59 O.K. And that left how many persons?



A Four.

Q60 And that was all four in the raft?

A All four at the time were on the boat, still, they had to pull the raft back in, once everyone was out of the raft, to put four more people in there. Actually, only two people in there.

Q61 And once that raft was empty, what sort of effect did the conditions have on it?

A Still just sitting quite happily in the water.

Q62 O.K. And your observations of the yacht, what condition was it in?

A It was demasted, the cockpit looked like it had been smashed in ..... it was still, still sitting in the water quite, quite nicely, it wasn't ..... the water or anything, but you could tell it had no cockpit, had no mast, so I don't think it would have gone anywhere.

Q63 And, to your knowledge, was there any signs of power or communications from the - - -

A No.

Q64 Nothing at all?

A No.

Q65 You had no communications?

A No communications with the yacht, whatsoever.

Q66 O.K. All right. And what happened then? Helimed left and then what?

A Helimed left, so we set up for our first winch. We came in on to the, on to the ..... on to the, I

think three people into, into the raft.

Q67 M'mm.

A And ..... let the raft out, and at that time the sun was starting to come through, you could see showers just up the country and the wind changed a bit, so we came up to the raft and the raft tipped over straightaway, and the guys got thrown out.

Q68 And with respect to the change that was, what?

A Probably more of a wind change and ..... showers.

Q69 And when, when you say a change, a directional change or a speed change, or -?

A Probably a bit of both.

Q70 Bit of both.

A Yeah.

Q71 And, and so conditions got worse?

A Yeah, conditions got worse.

Q72 O.K. And, and just with respect to the helicopter, it's what type?

A Bell 412.

Q73 And that has, holds a capacity for, to carry how many persons?

A It could seat 15, but we only had three seats so we could carry three in seats and ..... on the floor.

Q74 Right. And, and you're familiar with that type of aircraft?

A Yeah.

Q75 And what sort of winch is it?

A It's a Lucas Weston, so, a trolley winch.

Q76 And it was functional?

A Yeah, fully functional, yeah.

Q77 Works well?

A Yeah.

Q78 And you've worked with that same winch before?

A Yeah, worked the same winch before.

Q79 And I take it you're trained in those sort of operations?

A That's right, yeah.

Q80 And, and then, what happened then? You commenced to winch.

A We commenced to winch. The raft flipped over. One guy surfaced right next to the raft, was hanging on to the raft, and the other bloke surfaced about, probably 10 metres away from the raft, and he was getting blown away from the raft, so we went for him first.

Q81 O.K. And, so just explain for me from the start of this winching operation, from the time you prepared. What happened and who did what?

A So what happened, Kristy went down first, so she got all the ..... assignment and over the winch, and she connected herself all up.

Q82 Mm.

A And put the strop on, and then I just checked her out, made sure she was all connected properly. Then she just sits at the door and waits till we're in the right position to start her winching down.

Q83 And you observed everything she did?

A Yeah.

Q84 And what's your role then, while she's down?

A I, I, I've got to, I tell the pilot where he's got to fly. The pilot looks straight ahead, he's not looking at the winch, he get his directions from me and I just talk to him, tell him where to move, left or right, up or down, or, then what's happening on the winch. What's happening in the water.

Q85 And what could you see was happening to Kristy?

A Kristy entered the water, a huge wave went through and she went underneath and tumbled around under the water for, it seemed like about 30, 40 seconds and as I was winching in to get her out of the water, then she popped up again.

Q86 So when you say she was under water, fully submerged?

A Yeah, fully submerged, yeah.

Q87 All right. And how long would she have been under water?

A Probably about 20 to 30 seconds.

Q88 O.K. And what happened then?

A Then she popped back up out of the water again, and we just moved her over to the guy, and she started, put the strop over the top of him.

Q89 And did she seem to have any trouble with that?

A No. For the first one, no, not much at all. It seemed to go quite well.

Q90 O.K. What happened then?

A Then, because the waves were so high - - -

Q91 Mm.

A - - - one minute she might be, say, 20 foot below the aircraft, the next minute she might be, say 90 foot below the aircraft, so you've got to have like a winch cable out, so that when, when she comes down, she doesn't get winched out of the water all the time, 'cause she can't get the guy, so there's a fair bit of winch cable just sitting in the water, so you've got to get all that back up again. .... to make sure they're not tangled in their feet or their arms, or -

Q92 And so what you mean by that is just slack.

A Yes, slack of the cable.

Q93 Just to allow for her to drift up and down in the in the waves.

A Yeah, for her to go up and down in the waves, 'cause the winch is not quick enough to keep up with the waves.

Q94 O.K. And, and what happened next? She got this person in the strop?

A Yeah, got in the strop. Gave us thumbs up, we went over the top of her and winched her out of the water and brought them both up to the aircraft.

Q95 O.K. And did you assess the condition of this person that came in?

A Not really, I'm only first-aid trained, I'm not really - - -

Q96 All right. But what condition was he in generally?

A He seemed to be in quite good condition.

Q97 O.K. And how was he attired?

A He had a suit on, ..... suit, life jacket and his boots and, quite bulky.

Q98 O.K. And, and what happened then?

A We dragged him into the aircraft, ..... with a seat and then Kristy got set up for the next, second winch, went to pick up the second guy who was hanging on to the side of the raft.

Q99 O.K. And how was Kristy after that first effort?

A She was a bit physically shaken a bit, I think. Well, she couldn't ..... she probably hadn't done it before.

Q100 Mm.

A She looked a bit nervous. But she seemed quite happy to go down the second time.

Q101 O.K. And are you aware of what sort of experience she's had in the past?

A Yeah.

Q102 What, what was that?

A Pretty much none.

Q103 Really, O.K.

A Just ..... Lake Burly Griffin.

Q104 Right. And, and then you commenced on the second?

A Yeah. Asked her if she was O.K for the second one, she said yes, that she's fine. So we went down on the second one and went to pick up the guy off the, who was hanging off the side of the raft. So, I had to put Kristy a bit away from the raft so we didn't get the

..... tangled up with the raft, then she swam over to the guy.

Q105 M'mm.

A And then, I think, actually Kristy said, yeah, when we first got there, the guy, the second one, not the first one, put the strop around him, went to winch up and the cable got caught around the raft.

Q106 M'mm. Do you know how that happened?

A Because there's so much slack cable going up and down.

Q107 Yeah.

A And the guy was hanging on to the raft, it just, I think the raft ..... we couldn't, couldn't avoid it.

Q108 O.K. And when you say it hooked on, how did it hook on?

A I'm not too sure. It might have got caught around the oxygen cylinder or around one of the ..... that fills up with water, keep it from flipping over.

Q109 Yeah.

A And so I started winching the raft so it would come up with it, so I gave it a couple of big shake, and the raft came off it.

Q110 It did?

A Yeah.

Q111 O.K. And, and what was Kristy doing at that time?

A She was just hanging on to the guy and waiting for me to start bringing her up.

Q112 Did she have him harnessed at that time?

A            Yeah, she had him harnessed.

Q113        O.K.

A            And all ready to come up.

Q114        And how many persons were at that raft at the time?

A            I think there was only him.

Q115        O.K.    And where were the others?

A            Still on the yacht.

Q116        O.K.    And, and so there was just this slight fouling of  
              the raft to the cable?

A            With Kristy, there was just a slight ..... we tried  
              to shake through with my hand.

Q117        O.K.

A            And the raft just came off.

Q118        All right.    And what happened then?

A            So then I brought Kristy and the second guy up into the  
              aircraft.    And strapped him in and Kristy said she  
              didn't want to do any more, she was too exhausted.

Q119        M'mm

A            So then Michelle ..... for her to go down.

Q120        O.K.    And Michelle being Michelle?

A            Blewitt.

Q121        Blewitt.    O.K.    And then, so just outline for me the  
              third winch, what happened?

A            Third winch.    In the raft again, ..... flipped over  
                  again.    Went over to the raft to pick up the first guy.  
              As she got the strap on him, and gave the thumbs up to  
              winch in.    As I was winching the slack, the wave came  
              and hit, picked up the raft and it looked like to me,



threw it at Michelle, hit her on the side of the head with a, with an oxygen cylinder.

Q122 M'mm.

A And also took hold of the cable and pulled it really tight, which because I was hanging on to the cable, pulled me out of the aeroplane and I was lying on, just beneath the door - - -

Q123 Mm.

A - - - harness on. And then I got back in the aircraft, Kristy helped me back in. All during that time, we were just trying to move right, keep, keep, try to get the cable to go slack, and once I got back in the aircraft, we got the cable slack and then you could tell that the, the line from the, life raft just wrapped around the cable a fair few times.

Q124 And how would it have done that?

A Just, just from the raft's probably hit the cable, just spun over it and - - -

Q125 Just spiralling in the wind?

A Mm.

Q126 And, and you say the raft hit Kristy?

A Michelle.

Q127 Michelle, that's right.

A It hit Michelle on the side of the head.

Q128 And did that seem to have any effect upon her?

A Not from where I was looking at her, I couldn't really tell. But she didn't stop what she was doing or anything, she, she told me she just asked the guy,

'cause she didn't know what hit her, "What hit me?", and the guy said, "The oxygen cylinder from the ..... hit you on the side of the head".

Q129 And was she harnessed to this male at this time?

A Yeah, she was harnessed to him at the time, yeah.

Q130 O.K. And, and you say you nearly got pulled from the aircraft, how, how did that happen?

A 'Cause I'm holding on to the cable - - -

Q131 M'mm.

A - - - and when the, when the raft grabbed the cable, it pulled it out to about a 45 degree angle, so I was hanging on, it just pulled me out of the aeroplane. It was the angle the cable went out.

Q132 And you're harnessed to the aircraft?

A Harnessed to the aircraft, yeah.

Q133 All right. And how does that sort of work?

A You've got to have enough cable, you've got to have enough harness on there so you can ..... people ..... but not enough, if you fall out, you dangle so far you can't get back in.

Q134 Right. And you managed to get yourself back in?

A Yeah.

Q135 All right. And what happened then? The raft is fouled to the cable?

A The raft's fouled to the cable. I couldn't shake it free, ..... wrapped around too many times, so Michelle got her knife out and I could see she started moving up the cable, cutting it off, with the guy

following her, still in the strop.

Q136 And what's your, what's the protocol for a fouled winch line generally?

A Generally. It's up to the crewman who is, if it looks like it's going to endanger of the aircraft, you normally cut the cable.

Q137 M'mm.

A Like, if it got caught on the yacht, I would cut the cable straightaway, but because it's a life raft and it's fairly light, and it's not under power. I decided not to cut it.

Q138 And cutting the winch cable means what?

A There's, I suppose, a guillotine in the winch head, and it shears the cable at the top, and the cable just drops into the sea.

Q139 And that would mean, what, to, to Michelle?

A Well, she's stuck in the water then, can't get back into the aircraft.

Q140 O.K. And did you consider that at any time?

A Not really, no. 'Cause the aircraft wasn't in any danger as such from it being wrapped round on the raft, not at that time anyway. 'Cause if we could keep stationed about the raft, so it wasn't putting any influence on the aircraft at all.

Q141 O.K.

A I could see Michelle was getting the line off.

Q142 It seemed the most logical thing to do in your mind

- - -

A            Yeah.

Q142        - - - what she was doing?

A            Yeah.

Q143        A good bit of thinking?

A            I think the guy tried to untangle it for her with his hands, but Michelle just .....

Q144        Mm.

A            She got the knife out and started cutting it off.

Q145        Yeah. O.K. And what happened then?

A            She freed the raft from the, from the, from the line.

Q146        M'mm

A            The line, the raft wasn't attached to the boat any more, so it just flew off into the distance. Just tumbled away in the wind.

Q147        So the conditions were such that they were now having an effect on the raft?

A            Yeah, they were, yeah.

Q148        And have you ever seen conditions that would have an effect upon a life raft like that?

A            I have, yeah. In the navy, like, we used to fly what they call a Seahawk helicopter which had a lot downwash and they used to always blow rafts upside down and tumbled and - - -

Q149        Whilst persons are in it?

A            While people are in it.

Q150        O.K.

A            People in the raft.

Q151        Mm. All right. And, so what happened then? The raft

took off?

A The raft took off, then I could see that the winch cable was clear, so, I brought Michelle and the guy up into the aircraft and into the cabin. And then at that time, Michelle wasn't too happy going into, down for the third, for the last one, but as I explained to her, the guy was going to jump in the water, so there was no chance it was going to foul on anything, 'cause he was just in the water by himself, so, she was quite happy then. Then we had a quick look at the cable 'cause it had quite a bad shock waving on it.

Q152 So she seemed quite, how did she seem to you, herself, Michelle, after that first encounter?

A She said she didn't want to go down again.

Q153 M'mm.

A I just, I just explained to her what was going to be happening the second time, that the raft wasn't going to be there and the guy was in the water and she really, are you happy to do it, she ..... she said, "O.K, I'll go down the last time".

Q154 O.K. And did she seem injured at all from that encounter with the raft?

A No, she had that flying helmet on, so that took all, most of the impact.

Q155 O.K.

A Didn't seem injured at all.

Q156 All right. And then you commenced on a fourth winch?

A Yeah. .... shattered the winch cable. It did

show some signs of damage from the shock waving.

Q157 So what was that, what was the effect on the cable?

A It just had a slight kink in it.

Q158 And what does that mean?

A Just means that the, a couple of the inner .....  
inner strands, inside that cable, they may be weakened.

Q159 O.K. And so you made an assessment of the cable?

A Yeah. Michelle and I talked about it and we decided it  
was O.K to do one more winch.

Q160 O.K.

A If it had been to the other, to the, to the raft, I  
wouldn't have done it, it wouldn't have taken another  
shock waving like that. Because it was just to a guy  
in the water, it was a fairly straightforward winch, I  
decided it would be acceptable, acceptable to do it.

Q161 And how had the winch been functioning prior to that?

A Perfectly.

Q162 O.K. And so what were the problems you assessed with  
the winch prior to that fourth winch?

A The only problem would have been the, the actual cable  
that hooks into it would have been a bit, been weakened  
by the shock wave.

Q163 O.K. And so then you, you've assessed that and you  
commenced the fourth winch?

A Yeah.

Q164 And what happened with that?

A Winched Michelle down. She was in the water for about  
five seconds. Put the strop on and straight up.

Q165 O.K. That was relatively straightforward.

A That was the most straightforward winch of the whole four.

Q166 O.K. And, and, looking at the crew, did they seem appropriately attired?

A The last guy just had jeans and a shirt on.

Q167 O.K. And - - -

A But I think that's because when the ship rolled, he, he was on the, he was downstairs, I think, and he lost, he couldn't get his gear, it was all gone. I think, if I understand, that's what happened.

Q168 O.K. And is there anything you think that they could have done to have made your job easier?

A If we had communicated to them we would have told them not to go in the raft. We would have made them jump in the water. It would have been a lot easier on us.

Q169 Individually.

A Individually, and it would have gone a lot quicker. But because Helimed was there before us and told them to get into the raft, and we didn't have any comm with them, they just kept going as they were told by the previous helicopter crew.

Q170 And what's your experience with respect to recovery of persons from boats in a similar position?

A In the navy, we used to always try to get them out of the raft into the water before we'd winch them up. That's a whole lot easier.

Q171 And so is there any sort of set standard operating

procedures that you know of for that sort of thing?

A Not ..... we don't have ..... written down anywhere.

Q172 O.K. So it's just more so, what, people just do what they see fit at the time, or -?

A Yeah, well, normally, we'll, normally we have communications with a boat, so we'd tell them what we want them to do.

Q173 And what would you normally want them to do?

A Normally we'd ask them just to jump over the side and connect to a line and then we'd winch them out of the water.

Q174 Right.

A Instead of in the raft. There's too much stuff get snagged onto and if it rolls over and, especially in those conditions.

Q175 And is there anything that occurred during that operation that day which you think should have been done better, or any sort of recommendations you think should be made?

A Well, I think they could use better life rafts. There are life rafts around that have got a special skirt underneath so they don't roll, they don't spin, they don't turn over and, that'd be a lot better.

Q176 Regardless of any condition?

A Yeah, pretty much, they're pretty good. Apart from that, not really.

Q177 And what were your personal fears during all of that,



during that operation on the 27th?

A I was a bit hesitant about the water conditions, probably not winched in that sort of sea state before.

Q178 M'mm.

A But I was quite confident in my abilities, 'cause I've been doing it for a few years now. I was just a bit more worried about the girls, they haven't done it before.

Q179 And do you think that at any time there was, that any of you had your lives placed in danger?

A I'm sure the girls did. Definitely Michelle when she got hit by the raft and if we hadn't been able to untangle it, we may have got problems. It may have, may have had to cut her off.

Q180 O.K. And upon the completion then of these four winches, what happened?

A We got all the guys in the aircraft, then we headed back to, where did we go? To, I don't know the name of the place now.

Q181 Just from previous interviews, would it have been perhaps Mallacoota?

A Yeah, Mallacoota, that's right. Took them back to Mallacoota. Landed there on the muddy, dirty, plus we had a fairily, we were ..... fuel because of the wind, so we got to Mallacoota, shut down, went and, unloaded the patients. The ambulance tried to, tried ..... to grab the two girls thinking they were two out, off the boat, I was ..... said they

were never going to go in the aircraft again. They'd had enough.

Q182 They were quite shaken up by the experience?

A Yeah. They don't want to do it again.

Q183 And what happened then?

A Once the, once the guys ..... ambulance to take them away, we started up again and went back to Merimbula to refuel.

Q184 O.K. And, and so what time, what happened after that? Did you have any more involvement that day?

A We refuelled and then we got, got asked six million questions by the media. We didn't get out of there till about 12.30, 1 o'clock in the morning, by ..... all that was over. Another crew came up from Canberra to relieve us.

Q185 And - - -

A And the engineer came down to replace the cable ..... portion.

Q186 Right. And what sort of information do you recall receiving with respect to weather conditions and, in relation to the operation in general, what sort of information were you getting?

A We didn't get hardly any at all, really.

Q187 So you were given an initial, what, mission to attend a .....

A Yeah, we were told to back-up the Helimed aircraft who was out there taking people off the yacht, that's all we were told. So we assumed we were going to go there,

shut down and wait and see what happens. We weren't told anything about the sea conditions or the winds, or, we knew it was fairly windy from what we were flying in anyway, but, we weren't aware of the sea conditions or the wind, ..... be out there when we got there.

Q188 O.K. And from your experience and the conditions, was it safe to fly?

A It was safe to fly, but it was ..... us to winch out of.

Q189 And why's that?

A Just the sea conditions and the, I had to keep going up and down to miss the waves, and - - -

Q190 Yeah, it would make it hard for you.

A Just, you know, ..... to actually do the winch because it's, so much slack cable and such high waves.

Q191 What was the visibility like?

A It was good when we started, but it just got worse and worse as, as the front came through as we continued on, and, the last winch, if we'd taken much longer, we wouldn't have been able to do it.

Q192 And why is that?

A There would have been no visibility. Showers were coming through ..... wouldn't be able to see.

Q193 And so as far as conditions to make it dangerous to fly, it's more so dependent upon visibility?

A That's right.

Q194 Would that be correct to say?

A That's right, yeah. Wind don't really make that much of a difference.

Q195 O.K. And do you think the pilot had any difficulty then that day?

A Not that he told us. He seemed to go, seemed to be holding it pretty good. Didn't seem to have too many problems with the winch in, as in the pilot side of it.

Q196 O.K. All right. And with respect to the 27th, again, is there anything you'd like to recommend, or would, or any sort of commendation you'd like to put forward for any of the other crew or yourself, or with respect to, again, recommending anything should happen to prevent things happening in the future?

A Not really. I know, the Stand Aside crew, they only rolled over once, they started turning back trying to get into port.

Q197 Mm.

A They may have been better if they'd just kept going, I don't know. I think they needed more information.

Q198 Do you think it was conditions, like, what sort of knowledge do you have of weather conditions?

A A little bit.

Q199 And do you think it was conditions for sailing in?

A Definitely not.

Q200 And what sort of notice do you feel that they would have had?

A Well, probably, it wouldn't be more than a couple of hours, I would say. Not as much, not as much notice as

it would take them to sail back into port from where they were.

Q201 And so, have you given it any sort of thought as to, like, you know, how all this came about, this, what happened in this race, do you think it was .....

A Only what I seen on the television and what people have been saying, that they didn't get the right weather reports and - - -

Q202 And what's your thoughts on it?

A It's probably true.

Q203 Just, what, just bad luck with the weather changing or - - -

A I think some guys just got caught out with bad luck, they tried to do the right thing and just didn't make it back.

Q204 O.K. All right. And then now I'll bring you to the 28th. What did you do on the 28th?

A Nothing, I don't think. The 28th I was back here.

Q205 In Canberra?

A Yeah.

Q206 O.K. And so what was your next involvement?

A On the 29th, we just did a search, we didn't actually find anything, though.

Q207 And that was on the 29th, was it?

A Yeah, when they were looking for the guy that fell off the Post Naiad was it, when they found the two, the navy found the two guys in the water? They were looking for the raft, we were looking for them, but we

didn't see anything.

Q208 O.K. So just explain to me how that all come about?  
You started duty up here, did you, or what happened?

A Yeah. Started in the morning, flew down in a civilian  
aircraft back to Merimbula.

Q209 M'mm.

A And relieved the crew there. Then we took off for the  
search, looking for the guys in the raft.

Q210 And who was with you working that day?

A That was Simon Lovell and the paramedics were, just  
think, ..... and John Wood, I think.

Q211 O.K. And so obviously you were given a mission?

A Yeah.

Q212 And what was that?

A We were given a search area to search, and the distance  
between each ..... we needed to do, ..... we  
needed .....

Q213 All right. And how big an area would that be that you  
had to search?

A I think it was about, it would have been about 50  
square kilometres.

Q214 O.K. And that's utilising, what? I think it's been  
mentioned before, a creeping line search?

A Yeah, a creeping line ahead search. .... GPS.  
..... search.

Q215 O.K. And what did you see that day?

A Nothing, just sea.

Q216 And what were the conditions like?

A Not as bad as on the 27th but still fairly rough, but the wind had died down a lot. It was a lot more clearer, bit of sun sticking out.

Q217 With reference to land and just being general, what was the location of this search that you were doing?

A Probably, well, it wasn't very far off the coast, it only took us about 10 minutes to get out there, so it would have been no more than 20ks off the coast when we started and probably about 60ks off the coast at the top end of the search.

Q218 That's just, like, in an easterly position, sou'-easterly position - - -

A Yeah.

Q218 - - - from Merimbula?

A Yeah.

Q219 O.K. And then what happened? You finalised that search.

A Finalised that search, came back and then we flew back to Canberra.

Q220 And that was it?

A Yeah.

Q221 All right. With respect to your observations for the operations involving helicopters, is there anything that you wish to say with respect to that?

A (NO AUDIBLE REPLY)

Q222 Like, looking at things like co-ordination, was it well co-ordinated, or -?

A Yeah, for us it was, 'cause we got, we were doing the

standard ..... we had a fixed wing aircraft flying in front of us relaying all our transmissions to AUSSAR, letting them know what we were doing, so that's really good. Then we had ..... sea chopper next to us for a while, then he had to leave, didn't have enough fuel. He was giving us a hand, so it was quite good.

Q223 Are you critical of anything?

A Navigation-wise?

Q224 Anything, anything to do with that whole operation.

A Probably the biggest thing was the lack of information, but we didn't get any information about what we were going to be doing, that was probably the worst thing.

Q225 And that was on that first day?

A That was on the first day.

Q226 And do you know why you weren't?

A I don't know why.

Q227 And what sort of information would you have liked?

A Probably the weather conditions, the fact that we were actually going to be winching off a yacht, what the yacht was, how many people we'd be needing to winch, and information, what the yacht looks like, what it was called.

Q228 And as far as you're, the Southcare operations, you're all trained and prepared for that sort of operation?

A Yeah, pretty much, yeah. Basically, we try and prepare for those type of conditions.

Q229 You do?



A Mm.

Q230 Yeah. O.K. So, it would be correct to say that you were conducting a role even though it was in extreme conditions, but you were conducting a role that you're trained to perform?

A That's right, yeah.

Q231 O.K. Is there anything further you wish to say?

A That's about it, I think.

Q232 That's about it, O.K. Well, the time is, what's that, 11.54am, this interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED