SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Senior Constable David Upston of the Sydney Water Police and Cecilia O'Leary at Number 10 Squadron, R.A.A.F. Base, Edinburgh on Tuesday, the 22nd of the 4th, '99 and the time on my watch is now 11.23am. And also seated to my immediate right is Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray of Bega Detectives. Celia, for the purpose of the interview, could you please state your full name?

A Yeah. Cecilia ..... O'Leary.

Q2 And your date of birth?

A 27th of March, '74.

Q3 And your address?

A Number 50 First Avenue, St Peters.

Q4 And your occupation?

A I am a navigator for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Q5 O.K. As I have already explained to you, Detective Senior Constable Gray and myself are making inquiries into the 1999 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and one of our taskings is to talk to the rescue crews and, in search and rescue for the yachts that were in difficulty throughout this, the 27th, 28th of December, last year, and part of your role in that was as a R.A.A.F. navigator was to assist with AUSAR in their search and rescue abilities. Is that correct?

A That's correct.

Q6 O.K. Could you tell us what your role as a navigator is and how you went about that role from the 27th or the 28th when you were first tasked to do so?

A Sure. Basically there's two navigators in the aircraft. You've got a junior navigator which is a navigator communicator, which is what I do, and you've got a senior navigator which is the tactical co-ordinator who basically runs everything operationally on the aircraft. The captain has the final decision, but the taco really runs the computer and all the information and everything that's gathered in, he runs it. From basically when I was informed there's a few different duties I need to do, obviously, getting a bag packed and getting into work as soon as possible is highly among them. We got, I got a telephone call at 11 o'clock at night and we were told we were launching at 2 o'clock in the morning. We were the first aircraft to be informed, we were told there was going to be another aircraft but they hadn't scraped together a crew for that yet and, as you can imagine - - -

Q7 What date was that on?

A That was on the Sunday evening which I gather was the 27th. What was Christmas, a Friday?

Q8 Mmm.

A Yeah. So the 27th of December.

Q9 Yes?

A And I think I made it into work at 12.00 and from there I believe my taco had already grabbed some charts for

me and chucked them in a pile and said, Right, this is where we're going, rough area. And I had topographical charts of the whole of the eastern seaboard right down to, well, obviously covering in between Sydney and Hobart because we thought that's where we're going to be.

Q10 Yeah.

A But then, did various things, grabbed some more cryptographical equipment, yeah, I took some things so that we can encoded messages back to our bases ..... was quiet. Basically I don't believe we all got a brief, we just read bits and pieces from the green and tasking and information as it was basically coming through, it was a bit haphazard as you can imagine, the need for urgency. One big question that I had from a P3 point of view is that the, are long range aircraft really good for open sea rescues but for things closer to the coast you really want your ..... light craft because we go pretty quick.

Q11 Yeah.

A The chances of really seeing something, I mean when you're going 240 knots or whatever, is not, not excellent. I mean we slow down as much as we can and we do have a lot of other sensors like, you know, ... infra red and stuff like that, but really everyone was a bit dubious of why we were being called in but we thought, the original briefing I remember being told that we were probably going to be a communications

platform, we were going to sit, say 4,000 feet above everyone else and basically provide a relay because, you know, we can stay airborne for up to, you know, 12 to 13 hours if we really conserve fuel.

Q12 Mmm.

A And that way when all the other different aircraft come on and off task we can talk to them, say this is the message you've got from AUSAR, this is what you're going to be doing. Marking in we were very poorly tasked because we were slotted in with light aircraft like we seen the signs of a Petrie, we seen the signs of a Cessna and we were slotted in the same area basically doing track searches back and forth. I think I've basically covered preparation before we went. We ended up launching at 2.30. I think we got tasked about 4.30 in the morning. It was still dark by the time we ..... and we got then basically tasked to go and search haphazard areas. We were basically given, like, 2 or 3 legs I believe, it's a while ago now and I don't have a log with me or anything so now, I think we were given some north-south legs first and then we were given some east-west legs that were further to the north and they were only about 2 miles apart. And it's just, it was, it wasn't very bright tasking I don't think, but we did question it in the end and we also had very, a very big problem with crew fatigue. If you can imagine, most people had been up since 8 o'clock that morning and fighting through when we were trying

to fly an aircraft, you know, it's like when you are driving a car and if - - -

Q13 Mmm.

A - - - yeah, it was, we were very, very, very tired, but as a result I do believe some of the performance was diminished, not that we were given, you know, really difficult tasking in the first place. But I know definitely from my point of view, I was looking across at the taco sometimes and he was looking across at me and we were just sort of nodding like this and we were saying, Look, we've got to set a time that we know we're going home so that we can fight through to that time instead of leaving an indefinite point. When we actually got away from there I think we were getting up to the 28 hour mark without sleep and once we'd landed and finally got to bed it got up to about 32 hours.

Q14 Mmm.

A So it was a big, big day for flying and actually on task my job navigator communicator is basically like, yeah, central points of navigation. I put in the fly to points, run the inertials, ... navigation systems. The G.P.S. we had that day wasn't working at all, basically it wasn't getting enough information on it to fix, so compared to everyone else we had degraded navigation for the area we were searching, but we notified people of that. And that was definitely put in the purple after the search, a reporting form made after the search, you nominate what your navigation

accuracy is and so that we're told about that afterwards. And also communication's where you keep communications with, on long range radios with land based area comm centres and we were keeping our guard that day, like, communications guard, it's like so that if you crash someone's looking for you, I guess. We weren't really keeping with the civilians because they were obviously extremely overloaded even though we were talking to them all the time, but we kept it with our military, like, following anyway so I was taking care of a lot of that. As a result, I spent a lot of time getting messages from them and from Maritime, AUSAR, whatever, through A.A.C.C, that's the land based people in Sydney, and I was getting a lot of messages on HF and the big problem with HF is it's very staticky and when you listen to that radio you can't listen to anything else, so there was a lot of stuff going on. Basically every radio was working, we've got, you know, six on the aircraft, six different radios, so it was very noisy and we were trying to co-ordinate a crew of 12 people as well. There was definitely lots of stuff happening. I don't think that really degraded what we actually did. I think our searches were very secure. We had, you know, at least six people at all times looking out windows from the aircraft and I think even if you are going 240 knots that does cover, not as well as an aircraft that can slow down, or a helicopter that can hover but yes, we did cover our areas. It's just

strange that they had other aircraft that were small enough but couldn't stay out for as long up doing communications and doing the relays from the different people. I think, is that now enough coverage of what we did and coverage of my job?

Q15 Yes. Yeah. What actually is your experience in navigation and, and also with the Air Force?

A O.K. Would you like a run down of what you actually do for your training, as well, as a navigator or a taco?

Q16 Oh - - -

A I've just been on the Squadron for a year.

Q17 Yeah. Yeah. No. No. That's O.K.

A ..... operational.

Q18 So you've been operational for 12 months?

A Yeah.

Q19 O.K. So obviously you're very experienced and you've moved on, on to this role as a navigator?

A That's right. ..... experience, yeah.

Q20 And how many search and rescues have you been on?

A I think every time I'm put on standby I get called out, I'm an unlucky person to have on your standby crew. About four, we did a, just trying to think, yeah, three or four before this one.

Q21 O.K. When you get your latitudes and longitudes and your search areas - - -

A Yeah.

Q21 - - - who gives you your sweep widths? Are they given to you by AUSAR or are they determined by what you, the information you give to AUSAR?

A They're usually determined by AUSAR. They have a general understanding of what each aircraft is capable of, that's my, this is my understanding anyway, and they usually promulgate of what they want you to do or it's promulgated from authorities like ..... they talk with AUSAR on the phone and say, Yeah, well, how about we do this? And usually it's promulgated before you go, exactly what they want you to do. Sometimes when you get out there the conditions are different, you might have degraded capability for some reason or another and you usually report back to them straight away so they've got the information to work with and they'll adjust your search accordingly.

Q22 O.K. What time did you get out to the search area?

A It was before sunrise, I'd say about 4.30. I remember taking off at 2.30 because we were half an hour from what we wanted to be from aircraft delays here. As I said I can go and find out for you.

Q23 Yeah. No. No. That's O.K.

A Yeah. It was - - -

Q24 But basically you were out there before search, first search light?

A ..... first light, yeah.

Q25 And what sort of instrumentations were used in a, to search or in that hours of darkness?

A Radar - - -

Q26 Yeah.

A - - - and infra red.

Q27 O.K. And then after search light appeared you, everybody was, you said six persons then went - - -

A At least.

Q27 - - - visual?

A Yeah.

Q28 Yeah.

A At least.

Q29 Did you perform any visual searching yourself?

A When I can, that's the thing, because I've got to, I've got to carry on every other job I do and I do have a window, when I'm not doing anything I look out straight away - - -

Q30 Yeah.

A - - - even if I'm talking on the radio and not having to write whatever I'm saying down - - -

Q31 Yeah.

A - - - which is usually not the case because I have to write everything down.

Q32 Yeah.

A So, yeah, generally I was looking out the window of the - - -

Q33 Yeah. Yeah. And could you see anything at all, any vessels?

A I saw vessels when we were coming to do the rigging run. There was a lot of vessels in some areas once it

became first light, there was a lot of vessels under way, they'd have put their sails up but obviously been pushed way out to sea to the east and they were making their way back. And generally once we got through all of those, we were calling them up on channel 16 and just basically saying, Yeah, are you O.K? Are you O.K? And then we'd just make the point that it was taking so much time ..... these people that once they were obviously under sail and on the way in and not, you know, not flashing any beacons or anything like that - - -

Q34 Mmm.

A - - - then that was fine. What we also have besides our radar and infra red is a transport measure so we can basically pick up beacons and track them, get fixes on them - - -

Q35 O.K.

A - - - and find out where they're coming from.

Q36 Do you do that yourself?

A No.

Q37 O.K. There's another person that does that?

A Yeah.

Q38 All right. Do you, being the comms officer as well, do you speak to the yachts on channel 16?

A Usually you leave that up to the captain.

Q39 O.K.

A Yeah. I did all sorts of communications but, yeah - - -

Q40 O.K.

A - - - the captain or the taco.

Q41 Now are you listening on VHF, correction, are you listening in on the HF frequencies?

A HF frequencies?

Q42 Yeah.

A I'm listening to all of the radios.

Q43 Yeah.

A But if I'm transmitting on a different one chances are that I'll miss any transmissions that are coming in whilst I'm - - -

Q44 All right. Did you hear any distress calls from the yachts over the HF frequencies or the VHF frequencies?

A Not distress calls - - -

Q45 Mmm.

A - - - beacons definitely. There were so many beacons going off - - -

Q46 Mmm.

A - - - that it was absolutely insane, but the problem with that was I think a lot of the people who were getting rescued weren't turning off their damn beacons - - -

Q47 Yeah.

A - - - when they were out of strife.

Q48 Yeah.

A So, you know, you, you know, you had a beacon every, what, 10 miles or whatever, so that was a bit useless. Distress calls, no, not that I can remember.

Q49 All right.

A Not that I can remember at all.

Q50 What, what frequencies of the beacons you were listening to?

A 121 to small 5.

Q51 Mmm.

A There's the main one on 243 for small ..... I checked both of them.

Q52 Right. You don't have the 406 capability, listening to that?

A Um - - -

Q53 To home in on that?

A I think we can at sets of four and it's not actually a DF homing, I'm pretty sure, it's actually, you get a fix. Using the equipment you get a fix on where it is - - -

Q54 Mmm.

A - - - and basically go and investigate that area.

Q55 Right.

A And it's better to talk to a sensor four about it, I think, or a taco even.

Q56 A sensor four?

A Down the back end of the aircraft you've got two pilots .....

Q57 Yeah.

A Two navigators.

Q58 Mmm.

A Down in the back of the aircraft you've got four sensors and a sensor employment manager, the officer who .....

Q59 So a sensor four is a position that somebody holds?

A Mmm.

Q60 It's not an instrument?

A No. All of these terms ..... station that we call sensor four and the personnel phase is also called sensor four.

Q61 O.K. And you've been, your G.P.S. - - -

A Mmm.

Q61 - - - you said was inoperable? Can you tell us why?

A Am I allowed to say? The G.P.S's are crap.

Q62 Yeah.

A It really is, absolute crap. They work when they feel like it. This is my experience with them. Often when you have situations where they'll take them back in, use them somewhere else, kick it twice, and say, Oh, no, that's working. You go, Well, no, it's not.

Q63 Mmm.

A 'Cause we're not getting any beacons in and I believe there's only one, one G.P.S. available for this anyway. You wouldn't believe it, a multimillion dollar aircraft, a $400.00 G.P.S. and they can't even get another one.

Q64 Mmm. So the pilot's using one?

A No.

Q65 He doesn't have one either?

A No. They follow whatever I tell them.

Q66 O.K. So you can get them lost if you wanted to?

A Yeah, I could.

Q67 No. I was only joking. O.K. Well, if that's the case then all of your plottings were done - - -

A From two inertials.

Q68 Mmm.

A Mmm.

Q69 And can you explain those?

A O.K. Basically we've got inertials which measure the aircraft's movements. So they measure drift, ground speed.

Q70 Mmm.

A So you're ..... sorry, you can't pick up ..... on this but basically I translate that into how far the aircraft's been in a certain time, computes it, represents it as latitude and longitude. Now usually before you can start a search you get a very accurate fix, try and get 'em on top visually or a place or if you're in cloud, getting it on top of the NDB which is our navigational beacon.

Q71 Mmm.

A And that's before you start the search. You do not update during the search because otherwise you can imagine you started plotting along here, it updates, and so you keep down here instead of going there.

Q72 Mmm.

A If you can imagine, right? So you make it to the end of it. When you fix at the end of the search you'll go, Mmm, O.K. during the whole time we drifted 2 miles, let's say, and the difficulty is that inertials have their own sort of drift rate within the cells and they'll go in and out of drift with something called the ..... cycle. So when you've got two inertials it's like having one up your sleeve 'cause you can compare the two and go, Ah, I reckon that one's been drifting this much and this one there I'd say that's going to do this and this is going to do that, document all of that.

Q73 Mmm.

A Time permitting of course.

Q74 Yeah.

A And, if not you just do it, and work it all out from there.

Q75 So when, when you get your, your aviation charts - - -

A Yeah.

Q75 - - - and you're given a, a search pattern, a grid, a grid pattern - - -

A Yeah.

Q75 - - - you obviously plot all those or do you plot one at a time where you're coming along and then give the pilot a position to head to - - -

A What - - -

Q75 - - - or do you give them the course and the heading and - - -

A We've actually got a computer - - -

Q76 Mmm.

A - - - that does all that ..... those things for us.

Q77 It does all that for you?

A Yeah. And that's what the tactical co-ordinator does 'cause he's got the tactical picture basically or the sail picture or whatever you want to call it - - -

Q78 Mmm.

A - - - and has the luxury, even though it's more like a Commodore 64 than anything else, has the luxury of putting up all these fly to points and basically can draw a search pattern on his screen. A limited amount of information because of the, can be passed through to the pilots 'cause it is a Commodore 64 type thing and they basically follow that. So I keep the system accurate in the sense that the latitude and longitude shown should be as real as it can be - - -

Q79 Mmm.

A - - - given, you know, what we're doing and where we can fix and where we can't because obviously over water you've got nothing to compare it to.

Q80 Mmm.

A But the taco is the actual person who puts the screens up like that. If we have a failure, yeah, then it's all back onto me.

Q81 Mmm.

A Computer fails, yeah, I've got to do everything and draw it all out, but I draw it anyway and we've got to

clear each point that we fly to and make sure there's no ..... like, oil rigs, anything like that - - -

Q82 Mmm.

A - - - and we've got safety procedures so that if we're flying in cloud basically we're not going to ..... into anything.

Q83 Have you got the ability to, to take star sights and sun sights?

A No, they took that out of my course just before I went off unfortunately 'cause I would have liked to learnt that.

Q84 All right. Now you mentioned putting something into the purple. Is that what you said?

A Navigation accuracy. The purple's a report that you put out, promulgate at the end of the flight which is basically the taco writes it, so your navigator, and basically it explains everything that's happened, it's got different things in there, like what worked, what didn't work, what time you took off, why you were late, all the information, it's just a general .....

Q85 So it's just a form, it's a report - - -

A Yeah.

Q85 - - - that you've got to submit - - -

A Called purple.

Q85 - - - and it's just called purple.

A Yeah.

Q86 ..... Detective Gray?

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q87 Yes. As far as visibility, how was it out there?

A When we first got out there once we'd descended the visibility was O.K. It was still, we could see where the front had moved on, from memory. We could see where it had moved on, that there was definitely bad weather further out, but we weren't required to search there. So it was probably about a 2 metres swell, 2 or 3 metres swell by the time we got there. It wasn't anything extraordinary. It was, we could see it had been bad.

Q88 Mmm.

A But it was calming down, and definitely to the, further to the east we could see it was really ugly but it wasn't that bad when we first got there.

Q89 How about the wind speeds out there?

A Tropical fish.

Q90 Eh?

A Tropical fish.

Q91 Yeah?

A If I could get a log I could tell you.

Q92 ..... As far as the radio communication support, do you ever record the radio comms at all?

A Yeah. Everything's recorded on their .....

Q93 Is it? O.K. That's it.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q94 How long do you keep the recordings for?

A The recordings for the sail would definitely not have been disposed of. You have to keep sortie records for at least 3 or 4 months, but I believe that every, I don't know how long they keep it for, but I believe every single sortie is changed from the standard tapes that we record on into easy, more easily storable tapes and I believe they almost keep it forever.

Q95 Mmm.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q96 Mmm.

A You know, they, that's with every maritime flight.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q97 Is there sensitive information on those tapes?

A Shouldn't be for this sail, no.

Q98 Would it be possible for us to obtain those through your commanding officer?

A I - - -

Q99 If we need to?

A Yes. I believe it would be.

Q100 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q101 All right. I have no further questions. Is there anything you'd like to add that you feel may assist us in the inquiry into the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race that, with, obviously you would certainly like to have some working G.P.S's which would assist you greatly in doing search and conducting searches as far as the - - -

A It helps.

Q101 - - - locating - - -

A But we're getting an aircraft update very shortly and that's the thing, that's what everyone's holding out for. It's just like if your washing machine breaks down and you're about to get a brand spanker - - -

Q102 Mmm.

A - - - if it still works and does a reasonably good job, do you fix it?

Q103 Mmm.

A It's not broken, there's nothing wrong with what we're doing. We can still get a navigation accuracy within, you know, 2 miles, but it does help having a G.P.S. when everyone else out there is using a G.P.S. trapper - - -

Q104 Mmm.

A - - - and we're using something else.

Q105 So the, what you're saying is that your inaccuracy is up to 2 miles?

A That's actually very good accuracy, that's actually quite good. For, if you're not fixing for an extremely long period of time that's actually good. So if you keep it down to that, that's great, but - - -

Q106 What were your sweep widths at that, during that search?

A Mmm.

Q107 It varied?

A It varied, but we did have one that was about 2 or 3 miles, yeah, which was extremely wide in tasking us to do this.

Q108 Yeah.

A So we did question ..... that tasking, but we actually had an incident out there where someone was basically in the same area that we were and we saw them coming. .....

Q109 Straight at you?

A Yeah, because we were meant to be doing it at a different altitude, but we never got the information, so the tapes have already been gone through with a fine tooth by - - -

Q110 O.K.

A Yeah. ..... investigation, so that's - - -

Q111 So that's been addressed?

A That's been addressed already, that sort of gear and the G.P.S. stuff and all that sort of gear. So really I don't think there's - - -

Q112 No.

A - - - very much extra you could do on that.

Q113 Yeah.

A On that point, but it really gets back to, yeah, we have got a new aircraft coming so - - -

Q114 Mmm.

A Yeah. Delays there. They're the couple of things to say ..... about that.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q115 Yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q116 Yeah. Certainly. O.K. The time on my watch is now 11.46am. This interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED