SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Flying Officer Matt Taylor, on Thursday, the 22nd of April, 1999, at number 10 Squadron, RAAF Base, Edinburgh. Time by my watch is now 10.55am. Also present, seated to my right is Senior Constable David Upston from New South Wales Water Police. Just for the record, Matthew, could you just please state your full name?

A Yep, my full name is Matthew John Taylor.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A Date of birth is the 27th of June, '71.

Q3 And your address?

A 5 Maxin Court, Modbury Heights, Adelaide.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Co-pilot for 10 Squadron in the Royal Australian Air Force.

Q5 O.K. As we explained to you Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. One of our tasks is to speak to those involved in the search and rescue and that's why we're here to speak to you today. So if you could just start by giving me some background so far as your flying and long you've been in the Air Force for?

A O.K. Myself, I was an ex-trooper in the Air Force, I joined the Air Force 16th of November, 1988. I joined as an electronics technician, got myself a trade, in '95 I was commissioned in the pilot category, I

underwent my training in 1997, graduated from 2FTS over in Pearce in December 1997, I was then posted to RAF Base, Edinburgh, to undergo Orion conversion at 292 Squadron, which is just down the road. That was a six month conversion, I then got down here at 10 Squadron, 1st of July, 1998, and I've currently been on strength here for almost 12 months now, at 10 Squadron, as a co-pilot.

Q6 O.K. Can you just give me some idea of the aircraft that you're flying, what its capabilities are so far as range and the purpose of the aircraft?

A O.K. The P3 Orion, its, its main role is basically to hunt submarines, so any submarine warfare. We also do any surface warfare, which is to do with supporting a fleet of ships, say, Australian ships, so we may do stuff called surface pictures and stuff like that, doesn't mean much to you guys, but that's the sort of stuff we get involved in. Our secondary roles include our fisheries patrols, we also do surveillance patrols up around New Malaysia and for South East Asian countries looking for illegal fishermen, drugs, et cetera et cetera. And I guess the other secondary role we do is search and rescue which we rotate, all the crews rotate through on a stand-by type scenario where we probably once every six weeks, I guess, we go on stand-by for a week and basically that means we go home, we're on a three hour stand-by so basically means we have to be up in the air within three hours, and,

yeah, that's about it, ...

Q7 O.K. Good.

A Do you want me to go into the aircraft .....

Q8 Yes, yes.

A O.K. Well, basically depending on, depending on what sort of exercise we're doing, I guess, we can stay up in the air for anything from, you know, 10 to 14 hours, 14 hours would be, definitely pushing it but I think it has been done before, but, sort of normal type sort of time that we're up in the air would probably be around 10 hours, 10 to 12 hours.

Q9 All right.

A And we can loiter engines to, to stay up longer, so basically we can shut down up to two engines.

Q10 O.K.

A To stay up there longer, and that's what we were doing for the, for the actual search and rescue for the Sydney to Hobart, we were loitering an engine so that we could stay up there for longer.

Q11 All right. O.K. If I could take you to the 27th of December, '98, you might want to take us through what you do.

A O.K. As opposed to what I was saying before, we were on a, we were on a 12 hour stand-by as the day before it was a volunteer type thing so we were, basically, put your name down, go on a 12 hour stand-by and that was over the Christmas period. At the time, I was spending Christmas up in a place called Loxton which is

about 250 Ks to the north east of Adelaide, that was just with my family. We got the phone call from our Ops Room on my mobile phone at about 11 o'clock saying that we were being called in to the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Yep, so from there we basically, from there I jumped in, jumped in my car and ran all the way back here, got here at about a quarter to 2.00, and we basically took off at about 2.30 local time, for probably a two and a half hour transit to get on, say, off the east coast. As I was saying before, as we've got three pilots, you only need two pilots to fly the P3, so I wasn't in the seats originally so what we try to do is, the guys that weren't involved in the transit, to try and get them to sleep so I was actually asleep for the transit, probably, it's like a two and a half hour transit, I think, so I was asleep for tha time, and until we got on task.

Q12 Right. And when you got out there, what did you do out there?

A O.K. Basically, we were tasked to do like a parallel track search which is basically we were given a, a certain area, it's just like a box that we're given that longs, and we were just tasked to track search the area, I think we had something like a ..... spacing between tracks. We were tasked to do that but I think it was between 500 and 1500 feet and yeah, so it was just basically going up, down, our main tasking was to, I think at the time, was to try and locate Winston

Churchill.

Q13 Right.

A And to try and locate any other ships that hadn't been located as yet so that was our main task into the first day, yeah, during that time, we found a lot of ships which seemed to be using their engine, I guess, instead of their sail, to get back into the coast but there was no-one that we actually found that was actually in difficulty, so -

Q14 Right, now, how did it go with Winston Churchill, any signs of it all, or -?

A No.

Q15 All right.

A No, not on the first day.

Q16 O.K.

A Yeah, no, we were listening to the radios while we were out there and it sounds like most of the, sort of action was happening a fair bit south than where we were.

Q17 Right.

A I'm not exactly sure where we were. You'd have to talk to our, our tacho or our nav - - -

Q18 All right.

A - - - to find out exactly where we were, yeah.

Q19 Now, tell me in the search and rescue capacity, do you deploy buoys or anything from the aircraft?

A O.K, yeah, on the first day we weren't asked to deploy buoys but the second day we were and that was basically

just to get the, the drift from the currents that was happening at the time so the first day we didn't, but the second day we did. Yeah, it's something again, it's better off talking to the tacho - - -

Q20 All right.

A - - - he knows more about that.

Q21 O.K.

A Yeah, basically it was just to get the drift rope of the actual currents in the area at the time.

Q22 Now, suppose the seas and the weather, the winds, are you able to sort of give us some indication what they were like?

A Yeah, when we first gone and tasked, probably about 50 miles off the coast, it started to get quite rough, the winds were anything up to, from memory, I think up around 40 knots at that stage, but the sea state was quite, was quite high, and we've got, I don't know if you guys rate the sea states like we do, but I think we had a sea state of about 6 or 7, we rated that, which was quite high, I mean, it was probably around anything from, yeah, 5 to 10 metres, still at that stage, I mean, that was the morning after, obviously. As you got closer into the, into the coast, within sort of 50 miles, it was quite calm.

Q23 Yes.

A Yeah, visibility was good, actually going back to 50 miles off, off the coast, once you got into that rough weather visibility was quite bad, you couldn't really,

a lot of sea spray coming off there, coming off the sea, so I think, yeah, viz probably wouldn't have been any better than probably, you know, 5 to 10 miles, which isn't very much at all.

Q24 And do you recall what the total flying time was on the first day?

A Yeah.

Q25 ..... in the air for?

A Telephone time was 8.6 hours, which approximately six of that would've have been on task.

Q26 All right.

A Obviously, we could have stayed out there for a lot longer than that but the way that we were called out at 11 o'clock was probably the worst time to be called out, and obviously you hadn't, sort of, slept all day, being on a 12 hour stand-by, you hadn't slept all day, guys were just preparing to go to bed and the next thing, we got the call out, so guys were probably, you know, been up for anything up to, sort of, 24 hours maybe and hadn't had any sleep, so basically what happened was, we're pretty flight safety conscious when we fly and guys were starting to get tired, the captain was extremely tired and we decided to knock off after, about eight and a half hours.

Q27 Right, so what sort of time can a pilot fly for, how long's .....

A Well, going back a couple of years ago there used to be only two pilot crews here, both squadrons and, you

know, the pilots would fly anything up to 12 hours, being well prepared, you know, but obviously that changes now. Well, in this case, it was a bit different, the other captain had been up for, I don't know, anything up to 24 hours, I'm not sure, you'd have to ask him how long he'd actually been up, so yeah. But I mean, normally a captain will stay in the seat for basically the whole sortie, so I mean, if we were 12 hour sortie, the captain's probably in the seat for 12 hours, I'm pretty sort of lucky at the moment, I guess, 'cause most of our crews are three pilot crews now, so we can swap the co-pilots around.

Q28 Right.

A So the co-pilots are quite fresh, we can do, sort of, two hour rotations so the co-pilots can jump in there and be relatively fresh, ... fresh.

Q29 O.K. David?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q30 What's the, the ability to identify the yachts at that height and speed, at what speed were you, you'd normally search at?

A O.K. We try and search at our slowest possible speed, when we're doing a visual search which I ..... yeah, go as slow as we can. Depending on how heavy you are, that depends on what sort of speed we can fly at, we have a thing called loiter speed which we try and fly at, we can fly sub-loiter speed which is 10 knots lower than that which still gives us a margin above our sort

of safety speed's that we have to fly above. Yeah, so I think on that day we were sort of flying from the, between 200 and 220 knots which is quite fast, really, for a, you know, to do a visual search. Of course, as the day went on, we'd start to lose weight, start to burn fuel and started to lose weight so we can step that down, again, I can't quite remember, I think we loitered an engine the first day, so, you know, once you're below 1000 feet for us, our minimum speed then is 170 knots, so we wouldn't have gone below 170 knots. Yeah, so it would've been, you know, on average around 200 knots, I guess.

Q31 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q32 And in those conditions that you were trying to search for these yachts, could you readily identify an individual yacht with the instrumentation that you've got on board or any of the, any of your electronic equipment?

A Yeah, again, probably you'd have to talk to the operators about that. Basically, I'm speaking from a visual sort of point, it was, it was, the visibility was quite poor.

Q33 Yes.

A And even with binoculars, we couldn't really pick out a name or anything like that off.

Q34 Mm.

A On the second day we actually flew over the, I think it

was the sonic light charger, they had a sign up for us which, you know, we had to pass over them probably three or four times to actually try and work out what they were saying, and even in the end we still couldn't work out what they were saying even with binoculars and stuff like that. You know, we've always stayed, I guess, at the best search platform, the search and rescues would be helicopters if you could get them, but of course, the Orion's obviously better for .....

UNIDENTIFIED OFFICER

Sorry.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q35 Right.

A Yeah, so, sorry about that.

Q36 It's all right.

A And, where was I, yeah.

Q37 You went to a visibility of - - -

A Yeah, visibility.

Q37 - - - and yachts holding up signs and all that sort of thing.

A Yeah, so basically to get a name, it was difficult, what we could get, I'm pretty sure we could get a name off the binoculars, again, I was, doing the flying part, I wasn't .... on the binoculars, but I'm sure we were getting names. We could get the, I think, is it the registration they have on the sails?

Q38 Yes.

A We could get that fairly easily, so in actual fact, with the Solo Globe Challenger, I think we actually got that, the registration, and called back to, I think it's flight service or whoever's organising it and we just asked them, you know, what registration is this, and they said, "It's the Solo Globe Challenger", "O.K, well, we just found them".

Q39 Right.

A So we did, we could get that O.K. Yeah, but with the, IRDS, IRDS is obviously infra-red, we were using it as well, that really hasn't got much of a better range than what eyesight has got, or binoculars has got, so it's fairly similar, but, of course at night-time it's a lot better because it's infra-red. Yeah, and with RESM kit and stuff like that, obviously we could pick up, we could actually pick the Solo Globe Challenger up on the ..... SM which is an electronic surveillance, sort of gear, yeah, so they picked the beacon up from quite a way, I think we were somewhere like 50 miles away.

Q40 All right.

A So we picked the beacon up and just went straight to there, just went down the bearing and found them straightaway. So, you know, long range stuff, it's good.

Q41 Yes.

A But, yeah, I mean, some stuff on the Orion's good, some stuff - - -

Q42 Yes.

A - - - it's pretty useless.

Q43 Were you operating the electronic surveillance equipment yourself, like, in the homing situations?

A No.

Q44 That's other crew?

A That's other crew members, you'd have to talk to the - - -

Q45 O.K.

A - - - AEOs for that sort of stuff.

Q46 Now you have been involved in a number of searches before?

A That was actually my first one.

Q47 O.K.

A As I said, I've only been six months down the squadron, so.

Q48 Right. Do you think in those conditions that it'd be prudent for yachts to have better markings on the hull that would make your job easier, to identify them?

A Yeah, with my level of experience, definitely.

Q49 Yes.

A If, ... I'm not sure what they could do, but need definitely, maybe better letters to get, yeah, for the names. Yeah, I'm not sure what else they could do, though. I mean, they were white so I guess the fact that they were white they tended to sort of blend in with the whitecaps so sometimes, you know, you wouldn't pick out, I mean, we'd get an actual paint on

our radar, a ship, and you know, it would be a couple of miles and we'd get within a couple of miles before we could actually pick it out between the actual whitecaps. And especially if they had their masts down and it was quite hard to pick them. So considering like, painting them like, day-glo orange or something like that, yeah, I'm not sure what else you could do.

Q50 Yeah, but some other type of recognition would assist you, though, would it?

A In a search and rescue sense?

Q51 Yes.

A Definitely, yeah.

Q52 O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q53 But you mention the term loitering the engines, could you just explain that to us?

A O.K. What we do is, we can shut down an engine to save fuel, basically what happens is you go through a heap of checks and it's all very, very process sort of thing that we do and what we're basically trying to do is just extend our endurance.

Q54 Right.

A So what we do is we shut down an engine, therefore the fuel burns lower therefore that we can stay up there for longer.

Q55 Right.

A ..... Obviously, we have more restrictions placed on us in terms of safety once we loiter an engine, there's

some things that we can't do. ..... For example, if we actually found survivors in the water and we had an engine loitered, we'd have to start that engine up and then come back to drop an ASRK or something like that.

Q56 Right.

A Lifeboat or whatever for them, so, you know, we wouldn't be able to do that on three engines.

Q57 All right.

A Yeah.

Q58 Now, so far as wave heights, are you able to give us a, a approximate height of the waves that you could see?

A Yeah, well, as again, from my level of experience, I would place them anywhere between sort of 5 and 10 metres, yeah.

Q59 And breaking?

A Yeah, yeah, like, quite a few of them had a, you know, big ..... of whitewash coming from behind which means that they were breaking.

Q60 Do you guys keep hard data on wind speeds and that sort of stuff, on the aircraft?

A Again, talk to the tacho, tacho or the nav ..... they, those guys have a record of just about everything that we do - - -

Q61 All right.

A - - - on a sortie, so some sort of hard copy, I'm not sure what they do with that, they put it in sortie records, I'm not 100 per cent sure where those sortie records go, but if you talk to those, those guys,

they'll be able to help you out.

Q62 O.K. Time on my watch is 11.11. This interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED