SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and flight attendant, Richard Wold, at number 10 squadron, RAAF Base, Edinburgh, on Thursday, the 22nd of April, 1999. Also present seated to my right is Senior Constable David Upston from New South Wales Water Police. Time on my watch is now 12.10pm. Richard, just for the purpose of the record, could you please state your full name?

A Richard Wolf.

Q2 And your date of birth?

A 10th of October, 1963.

Q3 And your current address?

A 8 ..... Court, Golden Grove.

Q4 And your occupation?

A I'm a navigator in the Royal Australian Air Force.

Q5 O.K. Could you tell us how long you've been in the Air Force for?

A I've been in the Air Force for almost two and a half years.

Q6 All right. Prior to that?

A I had 15 years in the navy.

Q7 And in what capacity was that in the navy?

A Again, as a navigator or what, but they call them observers, mainly flying Seahawk helicopters.

Q8 O.K. And how long have you been with 10 squadron?

A Almost two years.

Q9 Right, O.K. If I can take you to the 27th, 28th of December, 1998, in relation to your involvement with the search and rescue.

A Yeah, we basically got called out just before midnight and we were told of the situation, we'd seen it on TV so we had an idea of what was going on. We came in and got ready to launch and basically were airborne, I think, by about 2.30 in the morning, so the time between call out and launch was fairly short. At that stage, when we did go down to the aircraft, we had little detail as far as, normally we'd get told what we're looking for, how many people, what they're wearing. Being a fairly publicised or popular yacht race, we expected there would be numerous craft and we would envisage that most of them would be wearing decent gear, life preservers, possibly have radios, that sort of stuff. Quite often if you're going out and you're looking for a single yacht, you'd have no idea what they've got and some are very well kitted out as far as rescue equipment goes, or search equipment goes, and some are not. But as far as the numbers that we were looking for and the exact locations, we didn't know that. We were given a rough area to go to, and the tasking we expected at the time was to, we knew there were other aircraft on the scene, and we were expecting to go out there and be a high level coms relay, 'cause I think they, also they added that the search was going to be anything out to 70 or 80 miles

off the coast at that stage. When we've gone into the area, we found that there were a couple of aircraft out there but they gave us a specific area to search, I think it was a track search between two points that they were, they were missing a particular, or one or two particular yachts. At that stage, the other information as far as who else was out there, was very sketchy. We gave our own or assigned ourselves our own ..... which we relayed back to ..... through Melbourne Flight Service and, yeah we basically went straight into the search once we got into the area.

Q10 O.K. Now, your position on the aircraft is a senior navigator, is that right?

A Yes.

Q11 And you have a junior navigator with you, is that right?

A That's right.

Q12 So far as, you know, communications with yachts, did you have any communications with yachts at all?

A Yes, we had the, the civil, I can't remember what the, what the proper frequency is now, but there was a VHF frequency that we had that we were listening to, and we could hear on occasions yachts talking. When we did locate a yacht we, at one stage, no, on the second day we actually did drop a small cheap radio down to one of the yachts, the Solo Globe Challenger.

Q13 Right.

A And they, at that stage, didn't have any communications with anybody, we did a couple of passes with them at one stage and they held up a sign on a piece of cardboard or paper but because we were going so fast it was barely, it was unreadable basically.

Q14 Yes.

A It said, "No", something, and we found out later, it was "No radios".

Q15 Right.

A And they also had "Need help", or "Need tow", I think it was.

Q16 Right.

A But, yeah, we dropped a radio which had a fixed, it was, you basically just turn it on, it was on a fixed frequency and we managed to talk to them. But we did hear numerous boats was out there, either giving reports, if we came across a vessel, because we had no idea, and I think at this stage it was still, when we first ..... it was still just dark but even during the day, it was very hard to tell who was who and we basically would have to fly around somebody calling on the radio hoping that they'd reply and it was mainly on channel 16.

Q17 All right, now did you hear any distress calls from any of the yachts at all, during the .....

A There were, I don't think I heard any Maydays.

Q18 All right.

A It's now quite a few months ago and I'm just concerned

what the shows on TV as well, and I have seen those. I'm pretty sure we didn't hear any mayday calls, we heard a lot when we spoke to people, particularly the second day, they asked us for assistance.

Q19 Yes.

A But I don't recall ever hearing any mayday calls or pan equivalents.

Q20 Right, now so far as communications with ..... were you, yourself personally in communication with them?

A No, we tried a couple of times to get direct communications through the HF radio system going back through ANCC, the RAAF system, on both occasions it dropped out and we weren't able to maintain, we could hear them but they couldn't hear us, the majority of our communications was through, either directly through Melbourne FIS or through another aircraft which then went to Melbourne FIS and a phone call to .....

Q21 All right. Now, so far as on an aircraft in the area, did you guys encounter any problems with that?

A Yes, we did, we had a, a fairly close call with one aircraft, we had been assigned an area to search, basically from the coast directly out to the east distance, I think it was 120 miles, and we were given a 10 nautical mile wide area to search which we went backwards and forwards at one mile spacings, and I think on about the third or fourth league of that, we encountered another aircraft going the opposite direction, and we weren't aware that that aircraft was

in the area at all. We knew there were a lot of aircraft out there and we, we thought they were more to the south than where we were.

Q22 So is that a tasking problem?

A I think it was, we normally are given an area and we know there's not going to be anybody else in there. And if there are people near us then we would expect to know that they are there and also be given some sort of height separation as well, you know, or there has been another investigation going by the Air Force and I think by ..... and we believe that we were supposed to have been given a height to fly at, we weren't told that, that wasn't passed and we, we just flew the best height which would've given us the best visual detection which was about 800 to 1000 feet, I think. We were supposed to have been given 500 feet but we ..... that.

Q23 All right.

A At the time that it occurred, the captain had gone out of the seat and there were two co-pilots flying and they had taken us up to 1200 feet so at the time that it occurred, the ..... aircraft passed slightly below us and down the left-hand side. But yes, we had to take avoiding action when we did see it.

Q24 Now, as the tacho, is that the right term?

A Yes.

Q25 Apart from, obviously that aircraft's being flown by the pilot, but are you basically the man who's in

charge of telling everybody where to go, what to do - - -

A Yes.

Q25 - - - and that sort of thing?

A Yes, that's right, the, the information as far as where to search and what we're looking for, all comes to me, I plot that out on my screen and then ..... or the navigator would ..... plots that on, on his chart as well, and basically I, I assign ..... points to the computer which is then displayed to the pilots and the pilots basically fly it. They're more like bus drivers really.

Q26 Yes.

A And they, they just fly us between the points as decided by, by me.

Q27 All right. And so far as vessels are concerned, your role was obviously to locate them?

A Yes.

Q28 Communicate with them if you can?

A Yes.

Q29 And then send something back to - - -

A Send something back to ..... if there are other vessels in the area that can help.

Q30 Yes.

A Then we can call them in.

Q31 right.

A If there is someone in extreme need of assistance, then we can drop a life raft to them which also contains

water, food, radios as well, as the case with the Solo Globe Challenger, all we needed to drop to them was a radio.

Q32 Yes.

A And we have a small, cardboard box that's about two and a half feet high and probably a foot in diameter, with some wind veins or blades on the side of it and it acts more like a drogue.

Q33 Right.

A We put a radio in that with a little bit of padding and we can just throw it out the door and they, you know, hopefully we'll get that, I think we dropped it within about 15 or 20 metres of them anyway.

Q34 Right.

A They were able to manoeuvre and pick that up and use that.

Q35 Right. Now so far as the life rafts are concerned, you can drop them, but what type of life rafts are they, do you know?

A They're ..... life rafts, I think they are, we carry two sets, each set contains two life rafts and two bags of provisions and they're all attached by rope so there's a life raft at each end and in the centre, is the two bags with, again, more cable and provisions, and basically the way we do the, the way we drop that, is we fly upwind and lay it across, they're positioned in one position, we've gone upwind and dropped the life rafts either side so as the life raft is blown down

onto them, they can just catch the rope which joins them and pull themselves to one life raft or the other.

Q36 Right.

A It's ideal if they're in a, in the water by themselves or in something which has a drogue because the wind will then blow the life raft onto the vessel, but if they're floating at the same rate as the life raft then it may take some time, it may never get to them.

Q37 Now, those life rafts open on deployment?

A Yes, they do.

Q38 Right, O.K. Now, can you tell me if the life rafts that you send out, have ..... in them?

A Yes, they do.

Q39 So the routine would be that you would deploy or dispatch a life raft, ensure that people get into it, and then go about your business?

A Yes.

Q40 O.K. Now, so far as the weather conditions on those days, are you able to sort of give us an insight in relation to the wind speeds, wave heights and general weather conditions?

A Yeah, it has, it was all recorded on the logs so to be more specific you'd have to check those.

Q41 Right.

A From memory, we got out there and it was, I think it was still just dark or was coming up to dawn, the weather was quite bad, winds, I think were 40 to 50 knots, sea state was quite high but within a couple of

hours of us getting on station, it abated quite a bit. Towards the coast it was a lot less vicious, further out to sea, when you get to, I think, probably about 50 to 60 miles out to sea, it was quite bad. So in the forenoon it did abate quite a bit, I think in the afternoon or in the evening, no, sorry, in the second day, it was a lot better than the first day but even in the time that we were there, it started off quite hard, quite harsh, then abated and I think it got a bit worse but that might have been just because we were spending more time further off shore.

Q42 Right.

A But definitely close in to shore, it was reasonably calm.

Q43 And you obviously saw some yachts?

A Yes.

Q44 And how were they being affected by the weather or the waves?

A The majority of the yachts had either no sail or very minimal sail.

Q45 Yes.

A So I think they call it a storm - - -

Q46 Jib?

A Storm jib, yeah. We saw some yachts with damage either masts broken or fully pulled down. Yeah, they were making it quite hard to, to get to a certain place, although on the second day, the Solo Globe Challenger that we encountered, they were making very little

headway because there was no wind and you know, we asked them for an estimate of when they were going to get to either Merimbula or Eden, and they couldn't give us one, they said, look, you know, we're only making a couple of knots here, so it was quite different between the two days.

Q47 Yes. David?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q48 I understand you use various types of navigation equipment?

A Yeah.

Q49 And one of them being the GPS?

A Yes.

Q50 Did you experience any, any difficulties with your instrumentation at all?

A Yes, we did, we had a lot of problems with the GPS. The, the equipment itself is I believe, or I've been told, reasonably reliable, but we're susceptible with the fact that the positioning of the antenna affects how many satellites we can receive and therefore how good the equipment is. We have, have been trying the modification to that, to get a better position for the antenna and the one time that I've seen that modification used, has worked very, very well. We had two INS commercial navigation systems as well, on a good day they can both be working within a couple of miles of each other, on a bad day you can get five or 10 miles difference. I think on the day, which was the

first day, they were working reasonably well and probably within two or three miles of each other. Normally what we do if we're out on a search is update the system by referencing ourselves to a known land point and do an update there. That was done at the beginning of the sortie and it was done on the end of the sortie. It probably could have been done a bit more often, the weather conditions, when we got close to shore, although the seas had abated, there was a lot more cloud and it was, it was more difficult to do it when there is cloud about.

Q51 All right, so the, so basically what you did, you had a reference point on land, and you also did DR?

A Yes.

Q52 Dead reckoning, so as far as that was concerned. Would you find that using the instrumentations that you've got and also given a search area and search pattern, would the sweep widths be as small as two miles, maybe a mile either side, that you found it quite difficult to navigate with those sweep widths?

A Looking back on the sortie records, and after backplotting it, I say yes, it was.

Q53 Right.

A But we can, we can maintain within the two miles or even a one mile spacing as far as the aircraft thinks it is, but when you have drifts of maybe two miles an hour, then that takes an affect on it, so unless we were regularly checking exactly where we are in the

real world, yes, we can introduce errors there.

Q54 So it's not the case where an exact position can be given and the aircraft can track to that position by autopilot coupled with the GPS?

A No, no, the GPS is a stand-alone box, it's, it's a hand-held GPS which we use as a back-up only, it's not integrated and we are not to rely on that wholly and solely unless that is the only form. If we lose all the INSs or both INSs then we can use that but it is not recommended.

Q55 So really would it be fair to say that the accuracy of conducting a thorough search in a, in a given area by, by an authority, namely ..... is, can be miss and hit at times?

A It shouldn't be miss and hit, we should know where we are and we can do a fix at the beginning of a search to very good accuracy and do a fix at the end of the search to again, good accuracy, and work out what our error was and apply that and that's what we normally do.

Q56 O.K.

A But, and that, that will be up to more likely a, the ..... people to say, well, O.K, they started here, they ended there, this was the drift they've had so this is the area they have or have not covered. And again, when doing a search I noticed particularly the first, when we first got on station and we were given two points to search between and we ended up doing

three legs, so the main leg and then one either side of that, but during that search, we come across a contact, we'd have to break off our search, identify the contact make sure it was all right, get back on to track, so that can take some time and increase your errors as well.

Q57 With the EPIRB that you mentioned were in the life rafts that you deploy, are they only just short range locating beacons or are they the 121 and 243 frequencies?

A They're - - -

Q58 .....

A No, there is a, each life raft has its own frequency so if we had two life rafts that separate, we could pick one or the other, we know the frequencies of those and it has a hand-held EPIRB and there is also another 1215 243, I don't think it's a 406 satellite frequency .....

Q59 O.K. Have you got any comments you'd like to make in relation to the exercise or search and rescue, you know, from your point of view?

A Yeah, I guess, well, it was, look, from my perspective it was a very big task. When we went out there we knew that there would be numerous vessels in distress, we were a little bit surprised that we didn't have many details at that stage but we expected that by the time we got on station, well, even though that was another two and a half hours later, that we would have more

details and were probably a bit surprised when those details didn't come through. Normally we, we would expect a briefing sheet, possibly not, I mean, obviously it depends on the details that ..... got at the time, you know, possibly listing the vessels, type, colour, all that sort of stuff, but if they don't have that detail, then maybe we can't get that as well. Another thing that, on the second day, when we did come across the Solo Globe Challenger, the way we did identify it because we couldn't even read the name on the back, was that it had a sail up with a, a number on it. Now, we didn't have a list of numbers and we actually went through the navy, HMAS Newcastle was there, and we said we've got this yacht and it's got this number on the sail and they were able to identify that for us as well. But, you know, having a briefing sheet with as much detail as you can on the vessels that we're looking for, obviously is the ideal situation. But if there's multiple vessels, anything up to, you know, 40 or 50 vessels and they don't know who is accounted for and who isn't, then maybe that's a bit impractical and maybe I was expecting too much. As far as the rest of the time out there, there were a lot of aircraft out there, we didn't, basically the only way we knew that aircraft were out there was either by Melbourne Flight Services telling us or by listening to the aircraft as they come on station and go off station, reporting into the, we call it the

controlling authority, but another relay station who's holding ..... through Melbourne FIS and writing down the call signs and saying, yeah, O.K, we've got another aircraft out here, O.K, now we've got another one, now we've got another one. But as far as an exact number of who was out there at that time, it was very difficult to gauge and was a bit of a concern for us and I think at one stage we were, we were very concerned and possibly considering go high level just to, to get out of their way because it's a lot easier for small low speed aircraft to avoid each other than it is for a P3 doing, you know, even 180, 200 knots, it's difficult for us to get out of the way particularly if we're down at the same heights. And that was a big concern for us. Particularly on the second day when they'd managed to get a lot more aircraft involved and I think they had, you know, at one stage, probably 20 other aircraft all doing searches .... and they'd, they'd been allocated two or three or four mile strips as well.

Q60 So how can we improve that from your point of view?

A I think by having someone in the air that is aware of all the aircraft and having a procedure where if an aircraft comes out here, they are told who is going to be out there looking after them and being able to provide the minimum detail of, you know, POB, endurance, on-task, off-task and know where they're going to be searching. And then having a, so that if

somebody does call up and say, well, look, we're here, we're going to this area, then that person who is maybe controlling or overseeing, maybe not controlling 'cause controlling means you know, I'm telling you where to go and that might be somebody ..... does, but an overseeing to say, well, you're going to this area, and by the way, to the north of you is him, to the south of you is her.

Q61 Is her.

A Doing it that way and just having a little bit more positive feedback to the people that are involved there, particularly when you've got something like 20 other aircraft out there. It can be a bit of a nightmare and again, putting like aircraft in a similar area not dis-like aircraft, so putting, you know, helicopters and large fixed wing aircraft in the same area, unless you've got positive separation like an altitude separation, makes it very difficult for us. And I guess makes it very difficult for them 'cause they, not only have got to be looking out for survivors, they've got to look out for other aircraft as well, and we're in a little better situation that we have probably 13 to 15 or even 17 people on board and the pilots can maybe, you know, dedicate themselves to looking out for other aircraft so we've got other searchers, but if you're in a helicopter with maybe two or three people, then it makes it hard on them as well.

Q62 O.K. Are you aware of how ..... operates as

far as the search and rescue techniques are concerned with aircraft?

A No, I haven't been given very much exposure to that at all, I've never visited any of the ..... or the previous organisations' area.

Q63 Do you think you would benefit by that?

A Yes.

Q64 If you - - -

A Definitely.

Q65 So that would be a recommendation - - -

A Yes.

Q65 - - - that you would like us to take up, that further instruction be given - - -

A Yes.

Q65 - - - with search crews?

A Yes, and also get the ..... people over here and - - -

Q66 .....

A - - - and find out what the P3 is capable of.

Q67 Is that right, yeah?

A And they might give us an, you know, a task of, O.K, go out and search at, you know, three or four thousand feet, but you know, it's, same thing applies to us, if we're looking for a person in the water which at one stage we were looking for, yeah, you've got to be down around six to eight hundred feet to do that and going as slow as you can.

Q68 Do you think you'd see somebody in the water at 600

feet?

A A lone person, no. If they had a bright orange vest on.

Q69 Or a dye-marker?

A Or a dye-marker, definitely, yeah. Something that we're looking at the moment, dye-markers, once they're used they're gone and they can dissipate fairly quickly. Just on the side, something that we're looking at is a ribbon, it's a fluorescent ribbon, it trails out about 20 metres and you just tie it yourself, it comes in a stick and some of them are, I think, 6, 9 and 12 inches wide and it's basically about the size of a big torch that you can hang on yourself and when you're in the water you just splay this thing out behind you, it just drifts in the water and it's there, and it never goes away.

Q70 Yes.

A I mean, it's not, it's no good at night but it's, it's a brilliant cue during the day, you don't have this pin-point of orange, you have this long, you know, 20 foot mark which I've, I've seen photos of it and it is very good.

Q71 What colour's that?

A Fluorescent orange.

Q72 Right.

SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q73 Is this a locally made product or is it something that you designed yourselves -?

A No, no, it's a locally, I believe it's a locally made product, I don't know whether it's Australian made, I think it is Australian made and, I can't remember, I, I saw it about four years ago, cannot remember the name of it, sea, sea-safe or sea-vee or sea, something like that. But it is available and I don't think they are all that expensive either, probably, you know, $50, $60.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q74 Anything else?

A No, the, one of the other things that we did notice is that there were, there was a lot of debris in the water.

Q75 Right.

A And a couple of times we spent a fair bit of time, well, we saw something, O.K, we marked it, we came back around and spent some time trying to identify what it was or either regain it or identify what it was, a couple of times we got a rescue beacon which we knew was in a particular area we were just, we got it, ... it coming back round on top, on top, on top, and didn't see it and we think it might've been just a, you know, somebody's hand-held beacon that got washed overboard and ended up in the area. That's just an observation, there's probably nothing you can do about that but there definitely was a lot of lost stuff and everything had to be identified as well.

Q76 Yeah, that's right.

A 'Cause you never know, it might've been a person without a life-vest or with dark coloured clothing in the water.

Q77 Do you operate the direction finding instruments yourself or is that another task?

A No, no, that's a pilot - - -

Q78 .....

A We have a dedicated electronic ..... station.

Q79 Yes.

A Electronic surveillance station which can detect those, and all of our radios are, they can detect 232 or 1215 so if we detect that then the pilots can select DF and can actually get that as a secondary indication, but the best way of doing it is through ..... electronic support station and we had that, both those frequencies up all the time.

Q80 O.K. Right. Now.

A No, that's it.

Q81 O.K. The time is now 12.39. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED