

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

- Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Anthony Hughes at AusSAR Headquarters in Canberra on Tuesday, the 20th of July, 1999. Time on my watch is 2.35pm. Also present seated to my immediate right is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police, and to his right is Mr John Young from AusSAR. For the purpose of the record, Anthony, could you please just state your full name?
- A My name is Anthony John Hughes.
- Q2 And your date of birth?
- A 13th of April, 1946.
- Q3 Your current address?
- A 49 Jenning Street, Curtin, A.C.T. 2605.
- Q4 And your occupation?
- A I'm a senior search and rescue officer with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.
- Q5 O.K. As I've explained to you, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Part of our tasking is to speak to people from AusSAR in relation to what role they played during the actual search incident. Now I believe that you were involved in briefing the yachtsmen prior to the race and then went down to Hobart at some stage after that. Is that correct?
- A That's correct.
- Q6 O.K.

1 R no dots
in ph bk

A My, my role during this race was to attend the, the race brief on the 24th of December together with another officer from A.M.S.A. where we conducted a short brief on some safety aspects. For this particular brief, I decided I would talk about the new communications arrangements within the maritime community and how that affects the, the small boats, the G.M.^D.S.S, the new communications set up. Excuse me. Sorry. Sorry. My colleague, Mr Shane Johnson, then briefed the, the audience on aviation techniques, particularly dropping stores from fixed wing aircraft. We also briefly outlined what resources would be made available to the fleet along the New South Wales coast on their journey south and indeed the whole of the route, what, what things we had on alert or had alerted for the race. So basically that was our brief, just a safety brief, nothing specific, more of a general overview on certain safety aspects.

X

Q7 Were there any handouts given to the yachties at all from you?

A Yes. We, we, we normally, and I'm sure we have this time, we make up A.M.S.A. pack brochures - - -

X

Q8 Mmm.

A - - - covering such things as the ship reporting system, AusREP, and that, advice for them when they're returning home from Hobart.

Q9 Right.

X
A E.P.I.R.Bs, that, that sort of, you know, search and rescue in Australia.

Q10 Right.

A It's general pamphlets for people to read in their spare time.

Q11 O.K. Now during that briefing, was that well attended as far as you're concerned?

A Yes. It's always a good audience the, the briefing. It's for skippers and navigators.

Q12 Right.

A In the small confines of the C.Y.C.A's function room -
- -

Q13 Right.

A - - - it was pretty well packed.

Q14 All right. Were there any, do you recall any, any questions or any concerns that were raised by the people there on, on, on any subject?

A No. No, I don't.

Q15 Now you said you then moved to Hobart the next day. Is that correct?

A Yes. One of my functions on assignment from A.M.S.A. to the race is to act as the search and rescue adviser to the race organisation. I, I stay with the, the race headquarters as it's established, which starts on Boxing Day actually, with the race start at traditionally 1 o'clock. In the evening we, from the C.Y.C.A. in Sydney, listen to the first radio sched of the fleet and then first thing the following morning

we, this is we the group, including C.Y.C.A. members and myself, we fly to Hobart where we control the race from the Royal Yacht Club at Tasmania's facilities in Hobart.

Q16 All right. Now in relation to the, the organisation, that is, the C.Y.C.A. and that you stay with their sort of headquarters, so to speak - - -

A Yeah.

Q16 - - - and, and travel down south, do you in fact have, give that organisation a briefing separate to the yachties - - -

A No.

Q16 - - - so to speak?

A No, ~~we don't~~.

Q17 There's nothing different there?

A No. We, we here to examine the, the sailing instructions for the race and make sure we're happy with what ^{safety}~~exact~~ instructions there are.

Q18 Right.

A And generally speaking they're always well covered and well done, and we've had input in the past, minor amendments like, you know, maintaining certain watches on certain scheds, that sort of thing, which the C.Y.C.A. have taken on board - - -

Q19 Mmm.

A - - - and amended their as they go.

Q20 Mmm.

A So the sailing instructions, as far as I was concerned, were, you know, covered the race quite well.

Q21 Mmm. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q22 You've attended the C.Y.C. on, on a number of occasions in previous years?

A I have, yes.

Q23 And nothing has really altered from those years compared to this particular year because of the size of the fleet or anything in particular there?

X A We've, ~~A.M.S.A.~~ first got involved with this race in a direct way for the 50th anniversary race, when there was something like 370 boats. It was decided that we should take a, a closer role with the race organisation, particularly following the, the 1993 race which was severe conditions. So we commenced our, our cooperation with the C.Y.C.A. from that day and I've gone down each year bar one, when one of my other colleagues went down. The briefing pattern is, is of the same, the same order, it, it follows a standard procedure. My particular role in what I brief, I decide in consultation with my colleagues what's current at the time, what's, what's appropriate to talk about. I think the previous year I talked about keeping a good lookout, actually have your man overboard procedures clear in your mind, what you were going to do, that sort of thing. It, it, it's a, it's a means of, I think the whole exercise is a means of

general alerting the, the participants of their safety requirements.

Q24 Mmm.

A And nothing specific to the race, that's covered in sailing instructions. And indeed the race management highlight those areas of safety which they, they want the fleet to listen to and, and adhere to, rather.

Q25 Mmm.

A Yeah.

Q26 In Hobart with the, as far as the race organisation was concerned and this particular incident took place when the disaster started to roll in, was there anything unusual that, that you could tell us that, that the C.Y.C. race organisers made any decisions about? Were they involved with the decision making as far as the rescue, how the rescue was being conducted? Any communications between the C.Y.C. Race Control and the yachts in distress?

A Yes. O.K. I, I guess the best way to, to, to explain this is to sort of stage through as the events led up.

X And, ^{to} Yeah, the day one, on the 27th, the first I, first I really became aware of potential problems was when one of the, the staff at the Royal Yacht Club in Tasmania, the, one of the managers of the operations room, said to me that it was blowing 70 knots at Wilson's Promontory and I thought, well, you know, that's, we're in for something here. In fact I think I said, Well, Jeez, I hope it's, it's not right, you know, that's a

Q27 Who ultimately made those decisions? Was there somebody in particular who was calling the, for want of a better word, calling the shots as, as far as the race organisation was concerned and the particular instances that were occurring?

x
A Well, the, the Race, the Race Control is really, really sort of controlled by the, the sailing officer for the club, Mr Phil Thomson. I see myself working for him as his adviser. So it's to Phil I look to or give advice to, rather. But he would, of course, take advice from, from the Commodore of the club, if I understand the hierarchy of the organisation. The Commodore was, at course, at sea as a participant so I should imagine the Vice Commodore then took over from him. And I'm not sure what communications they had between themselves, I don't know, I wasn't involved with that - - -

Q28 Mmm.

A - - - as I guess that's the honest thing to say.

Q29 Was there any direct conversation that you were aware of with the race director, Phil Thomson, and was calling off the race, and did he seek any advice from you in relation to that?

A No. One of my own, one of my own colleagues, a duty search and rescue officer, suggested to me at some early hours of the morning of the 28th that he was recommending that we call off the race. I discussed this with, with Phil and the response was well,

it's, you know, virtually that it was too late, I mean the, the damage has been done, it was now up to the skippers to, to look after themselves, which was an understand, understood thing to do, it was just too late at that stage to call off the race. It had gone beyond the calling off stage. I answered my colleague that it's, you know, it, it, it was too late. I guess I reflected what Mr Thomson said to me and, to my colleague's credit, he said, Oh, I think you really should think about it more. And, and I said, Well, I, I suggest you take it up with the general manager 'cause you just don't call off the Sydney to Hobart Race lightly, and that's where it stopped.

Q30 What are your thoughts on, perhaps expanding on that, on, on calling off, off the race?

A It'd have to be done early. At that stage it, I would agree, fully agree, that it was just too late to do, to call off the race.

Q31 Yeah.

A I've, I've got no problem with that at all. If the race is going to be called off, it's got to be done in good time for people to make safe and wise decisions on the movement of their boat and the safety of their crew. And that's the only, only suggestion I would have, is, is it's got to be done early enough and, and that's a matter of, of the process of decision making taking into account all factors, but significantly the weather at the time. I mean, you could set standards,

..... We were still really in the stages of setting up our race headquarters at that stage and the first sched was at 14.00 from, from our position in Hobart. And by 14.00 it had become quite clear that things weren't going to be very comfortable. The first alert we got was from Stand Aside with her first distress calls. I think it was Young Endeavour who alerted us to that, I can't remember now. But that was the first incident. And then it just snowballed on from there. We did, we, we handled things as we came, we, we set up a little ops room which was in the boardroom of the yacht club as best we could to handle the situation. Our communications with the fleet was via the radio relay vessel, Young Endeavour, where we were pretty well on top of what was happening, as confused as the picture was at times, particularly on the night of the 27th, there was lots of flare sightings and it was hard to keep track of those. I was visually trying to plot them to try and make sense of it all, but it was a difficult task. There was no, we hadn't really thought consciously in our little group in Hobart of making any dramatic moves like calling off the race. The race was continuing, so from, from Race Control's involvement, if that's the question you're asking, we had, we hadn't consciously even, even if we probably had time to think about it, thought about terminating the race. It was still a race.

you can say races will be called off at 60 knots. Yeah. I think most people would probably willingly retire if it's goin' to get over 60 knots anyway, so I don't think that would be a problem, but it just, to our, to my knowledge that wasn't being forecast at the time.

Q32 Mmm.

A So I didn't really think much about calling off the race either.

Q33 Were you privy to any conversation had with the race controller or Mr Thomson, the race director, Mr Thomson, and the Young Endeavour where a particular rule was discussed to broadcast to all the vessels in regards to - - -

A

Q33 - - - either continuing on?

A No, I don't remember that. I know the radio officer on board Young Endeavour, Lou Carter, broadcast that, but I, I either wasn't part of the conversation

Q34 O.K.

A - - - but I agree with it but I the ^{process.} ~~premises.~~

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q35 Just surmising here, if your colleague had mentioned that to you some 18 hours before - - -

A Yes.

Q35 - - - about, do you think we should discuss cancelling the race, would that have been a, a different situation, early enough?

A Well - - -

Q36 In the big picture?

A - - - in the big picture I don't, I don't think search and rescue officers necessarily have that - - -

Q37 Mmm.

A - - - experience to be, they can advise it - - -

Q38 Mmm.

X A - - - but they need to have good ^{solid} ~~sort of~~ grounds for advising - - -

Q39 Sure.

A - - - to call off any race.

Q40 Mmm.

A Now I don't necessarily think we in Canberra have that experience - - -

Q41 No.

A - - - to do so, but full credit to my colleague for thinking of it.

Q42 Mmm.

A It was just too late in the day.

Q43 Mmm.

X A And I think, speaking from my, my own point of view, I think ~~A M S A~~ would be loath to be offering - - -

Q44 Mmm.

A - - - suggestions to any race organisation to call off the race - - -

Q45 Mmm.

A - - - unless they, in their professional opinion, could see it, it's going to be quite dramatic.

Q46 I'm not trying to put you on the spot here.

A No, no, no, no. I'm trying to answer what I would do, and I would, I would be seeking advice from the, the Bureau of Meteorology, for instance, before I would go to any race organisation, ~~of~~^p experienced people.

Q47 Are you aware if the racing committee or Mr Thomson or yourself made any communications with the Bureau of Meteorology on the 27th?

A No, I didn't, but I'm not aware if Mr Thomson did or not.

Q48 Did you make any communications with them?

A No.

Q49 O.K. When you mention the word early, I recall that on the, I think it was the, 9.00am on the 27th, there were, there was a wind reading at Wilson's Promontory of 71 knots.

A Yeah. It was early on the 27th, in fact it would have been after 10.00, maybe 11.00am. I didn't arrive in Hobart until 9.30.

Q50 Mmm.

A I left my hotel at 10, 10 to 10.00 and said, Look, I'll be back shortly. I didn't sort of get back til the next morning some time - - -

Q51 That's fine.

A - - - so it was after 10.00, before 1400, but I can't remember. I certainly observed flying down - - -

Q52 Yeah.

A - - - the condition from, I think we, we went down to about 12,000 feet, the aircraft pilot decided we we'd go down to see if we could see the lead yachts. I think we got down to about 12,000, it didn't look good. The Commodore of the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania was on the same aircraft, and I think I remarked to him as we were leaving the aircraft that it didn't look too good, but that's just a - - -

Q53 Mmm.

A - - - personal observation, not a professional observation.

Q54 Mmm.

A Yeah. No, it didn't enter my mind to, to go through the, to start the process of ^{turning} off races.

Q55 What are you ^(f) oh, I think you've covered that, that's fine.

A Yeah.

Q56 What, have you since the actual Sydney to Hobart been contacted by the C.Y.C.A. and have you been interviewed by their review committee at all or - - -

A As a group.

Q57 As a group?

A Yes.

Q58 O.K. That's fine.

SENIOR CONSTABLE ~~UPSTON~~
^{stet}

Q59 No, I have no further questions. Mr Young, have you got anything you'd like to add to this conversation?

No.

MR Young
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DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q60 O.K. Anything else?

A No. That's fine.

Q61 O.K. The time by my watch is now 2.55pm. This
interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED