

SENIOR CONSTABLE DAVID UPSTON

- Q1 This is an electronic record of interview between Senior Constable David Upston of the Sydney Water Police and Mr John Young on Tuesday, the 20th of the 7th, '99, at AusSAR Headquarters in Canberra. The time on my watch is now 12.55pm. John, for the, and also seated on my immediate right is Detective Senior Constable Gray from Bega Detectives. John, for the purpose of the interview and transcription could you please state your full name?
- A John Young.
- Q2 And your date of birth?
- A 4th of April, 1950.
- Q3 And your address?
- A 66 William Wilkins Crescent, Isaacs, A.C.T, 2607.
- Q4 And your occupation?
- A I'm currently the Acting Operations Manager in the Australian Search and Rescue Centre.
- Q5 O.K. Now, John, prior to conducting the interview we, we explained to you that Detective Senior Constable Gray and myself are making inquiries into the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race.
- A Yeah.
- Q6 And as a result our inquiries lead us to AusSAR in Canberra to talk to you about your role in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and basically where you fit in and your procedures. Do you understand that?
- A Yes.

Q7 O.K. Firstly could you give us an idea of your experience in the Search and Rescue role.

A Personally, you mean?

Q8 Yes, your, your personal experiences.

A O.K. I'm ex-Navy and while in the Navy got involved in one search and rescue action up in Darwin when I was in command of a patrol boat. So I saw it at the coalface, if you like. I was recruited from Navy with, with a significant operations background, not particularly search and rescue. In May, '98 I then spent through until March, '99 as the analysis officer for AusSAR. So I was looking at, at events, post event, if you like, taking all the information and putting it together, producing reports and recommendations, and then on the 8th of March I was, I was asked to be the acting operations manager when the previous incumbent departed at fairly short notice, and I've been learning on the job.

Q9 O.K. Let me now take you back to December - - -

A Mmm.

Q9 - - - of last year and the start of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and in particular a date on the 27th where a storm had approached and caused serious implications on the participants - - -

A Yeah.

Q9 - - - as a result of rollovers, damaged yachts and, and the like. Now what is your role basically in the

search and rescue organisation as far as the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race is concerned?

A AusSAR's involvement in, in a technical sense is governed by the, the State Commonwealth Agreement on who will respond to particular kinds of incidents. That's, that agreement says that responsibility for responding to an incident involving a pleasure craft, and any of the yachts in the Sydney to Hobart would qualify there, belongs with the State Police that the yacht is closest to, I guess. But there is a, a rider on that, that when an incident becomes beyond the capacity of, of State Police to deal with, they can ask AusSAR to assume coordination for it. In the case of the Sydney to Hobart in fact we, we didn't go through that formal process. What happened was that, that the first indications we got here were in fact beacons going off, because beacons can either be detected by the satellite detection system, the, the management which is done in AusSAR in the rescue coordination centre, or they can be detected by aircraft and reported through Air Services air traffic management system and they sent them, the reports to us. In either case, when a beacon goes off AusSAR is the first group to, to really get hold of that information. And so we accept coordination of a beacon incident automatically from the start. We'll then prosecute it until we determine what the, the distress really is or if it's inadvertent and then, depending on what we

find, sometimes we'll take it to completion, sometimes we'll hand it to the, the State Police if they're in a position to, to assume responsibility for it. So on that particular day, while you could say yachts are the police's responsibility, the initial indications coming in were, to AusSAR were of beacons, therefore we started to respond naturally, and then I guess the thing, it, it, it escalated so quickly - - -

Q10 Yeah.

A - - - that it became blindingly obvious there was no point in trying to hand it over to the New South Wales police, so AusSAR simply remained with it and responded as the incident developed. Does that - - -

Q11 Yes.

A - - - answer the question - - -

Q12 Yeah, yeah.

A Yeah.

Q13 So it was just a natural progression? Because of the information that came in, you assumed responsibility immediately?

A Yes.

Q14 O.K. And, and then what happened after that?

A It, it, the incident escalated in a, in a number of different ways. We started getting information, I guess I'm speaking secondhand to an extent here, we started getting information from a variety of sources. The, the beacon information, as I say, was coming directly into the, the R.C.C. and we were assuming

responsibility for it. As I recall it though, we started to get information coming in from, I think, Race Headquarters and through Air Services too. I think that if I recall correctly, there was an A.B.C. helicopter out covering the race - - -

Q15 Mmm.

A - - - and he, he started to hear distress messages which he then relayed back through Flight Service and to here. He had a mobile phone so in fact he was calling us directly at times as well, if I recall correctly. So information started to come in in a variety of different ways, so we had a, a situation where the sources of information were diverse, the incidents that were actually occurring out there were diverse, there were a number of them all happening at the, the one time. And as I say, it escalated very quickly to, to a point where the picture was very difficult to determine what it was that was actually going on out there.

Q16 Mmm.

A We had some names but, because the, well, the beacons didn't correlate with yacht names, there were a number of incidents that were simply unknown.

Q17 Mmm.

A We knew there was something going on but we didn't know what it was.

Q18 Mmm.

A And that really was, I guess that was the case for the first, first 18 hours or so, I suppose you would say. It'd had been that very rapid escalation into we knew there were a number of events, we didn't necessarily know which yachts were correlated with which events. We knew the Winston Churchill had become a problem very early in the piece and most of the first night actually was taken, taken up with responding to the individual events, really not knowing what was going on out there.

Q19 Mmm.

A We knew that there was a beacon, we'd send a helicopter to it, we'd find out what was there, deal with it. It, it wasn't in a position really where we knew before we sent an aircraft what it was that was - - -

Q20 Yeah.

A - - - that was on.

Q21 When, when you assumed coordination - - -

A Mmm.

Q21 - - - through the response of the initial beacons going off, who did you contact directly then?

A Um - - -

Q22 Is it normal procedure that you in fact contact somebody along the lines?

A It, it - - -

Q23 With Air Services perhaps?

A Yeah, it depends on the nature of the particular incident. We do go through a period of what I would

phrase as intelligence gathering about this, this beacon.

Q24 Mmm.

A In the case of the first beacon detected, it in fact belonged to a merchant ship, Thor Sky. Because it was a 406 megahertz beacon, it had an identification coded into it, so we could actually get to the merchantman directly on INMARSAT. The subsequent ones were 121.5 megahertz beacons and therefore didn't have any identification associated with them but the, the satellite detection system was clearly showing them out over the water, so there was no, there was no ambiguity about whether or not they were maritime incidents or, or coastal or - - -

Q25 Yeah.

A - - - anything else. So we pretty quickly concluded that it was Sydney/Hobart yachts that were, was in trouble here with the other information that was going, going on. As, as I indicated earlier, the, the primary response from AusSAR was to get aircraft out there to deal with the problem. So we, we would have been talking to Air Services naturally as part of that, we would have been talking to the, the air operators that we wanted to task to get out there. The maritime end of the operations room would have been starting to make contact with Water Police. I understand that they went to Sydney in the first instance rather than local police - - -

Q26

Mmm.

A

- - - so these things would have been starting to happen at that stage, but more, in a more difficult environment than would normally be the case because it was a multiplicity of incidents - - -

Q27

Yeah.

A

- - - and, and a very difficult picture to sort out.

Q28

But contacting the Water Polices in Sydney is, is normal standard procedure anyway, is that not correct?

A

It, yes, we normally bring the police into an incident nice and earlier.

Q29

Mmm.

A

Again a, a normal response to a beacon is to, to look at where, where the indications are that it's coming from and draw in all, as much information as we can about the beacon before we launch a response ASAT.

Q30

Mmm.

A

Some of them were easy, but for instance if you get one in the Sydney area you wouldn't know if it was coming from Sydney Airport or from Bankstown or from any one of the hundreds of marinas or it was genuine.

Q31

Mmm.

A

So you do try and drag in as much information as you can but we, as a general rule if, if we, if we can't, can't make ourselves certain that there is no distress fairly quickly, and I'm talking about the order of 15, 30 minutes or so, we'll be getting a, an air ASAT up to

home on the beacon and, and determine whether it's a distress situation or not.

Q32 Mmm.

A So I mean that would be our normal response to a beacon. But I stress again that with the Sydney/Hobart case, that because there was so much of it going on, it was, and because it was unequivocally at sea, we were much more inclined to go directly into the response - -

-

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Mmm.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q33 Mmm.

A - - - and get air ASATs, get them out there.

Q34 Right. Now you mentioned the, the 406 E.P.I.R.B. beacon off the ship.

A Yeah.

Q35 Was that resolved?

A Yes, very quickly.

Q36 What was the situation with that?

A It, it, as I understand it, it had been washed overboard from the ship in the heavy weather. It had automatically gone off. Because it was, because it had an identification, we could say it was Thor Sky, we could get an INMARSAT message through to the ship that told us what had happened, so we knew that we could disregard - - -

Q37 Right.

A - - - that one.

Q38 So that was purely coincidental between the ship and the correlation, or there was - - -

A Yeah.

Q38 - - - no correlation between the ship and the yacht race?

A No, no.

Q39 No.

A It was, it was the first indication - - -

Q40 Mmm.

A - - - that the lousy weather was causing something to happen - - -

Q41 Yes.

A - - - out there.

Q42 Mmm.

A And it sort of raised heart rates in the R.C.C, I guess.

Q43 Mmm. All right. Well, then can you tell me, follow on from that and, and can you fill us in more on, on what your role was then and, and the area and the, the proceedings?

A Are you talking about AusSAR's role?

Q44 Yes.

A Organisationally?

Q45 Yes.

A Well, as I've indicated at, excuse me, a, a number of beacons started to, to be detected. AusSAR'S role is to sort out in, in each case is this a distress

situation or not, to start managing the response and then, depending on the circumstances, hand it over to the State Police if, if appropriate.

Q46

All right.

A

As I've said, I, none of that, that process was short circuited on the 27th of December, because unequivocally something serious was going on out to sea, unequivocally State Police were not going to be able to deal with it, light would be starting to go in about 3 or 4 hours' time, so getting a response during daylight was important. And, and AusSAR would naturally move immediately to the next step, which is to get hold of rescue helicopters and get them out there. So that in fact would be what the bulk of the activity was during that period of time. The mariners down the far end of the ops room from here would have been trying to sort out the picture and work out what it is that was going on from all the information that they could gather. The aviation end of the ops room would have been about getting hold of aircraft like Heli-Med 1 and Southcare and, and the Westpac helicopter, ringing around to these operations and saying, What aircraft do you have available? Can we have it now? If it's available, grab it, take it and get it into the area and then dispatched to go and home on a particular beacon, find out what the problem was and deal with it from that point. So my recollection is that the first evacuation was Midnight Special.

The, the procedure that would have happened there is that we would have got the distress beacon indication, we then went out looking for helicopters. If I recall correctly, the first one that we, we got hold of that could get there was Heli-Med 1, from Latrobe Valley. He was tasked, I can't remember if he went directly to the, the yacht or not, he might have gone through Merimbula for fuel. But when he got there, what he found was a yacht that was in distress and he started winching people off.

Q47 Mmm.

A And that was very much the pattern of the, the event, oh, for the first 18 hours or so. It, it was about, you've got these aircraft available, these helicopters available that can actually respond to an incident. We've got these beacons out there, let's match them up, get the aircraft out to - - -

Q48 Mmm.

A - - - to where we think the distress is, see what we find and then pilots in command on the spot really make decisions based on what they found.

Q49 Mmm.

A So some winched survivors, Polair 1 from the Victorian Police, when it got out there actually was directed by another yacht to Kingurra, as I recall it.

Q50 Yeah.

A And then having got to Kingurra he was directed from, from there to a man overboard, picked him up in about 40 minutes, I think - - -

Q51 Mmm.

A - - - the man was in the water, and then moved on to the next event.

Q52 All right.

A Which was the next beacon he could hear. That, that really was very much - - -

Q53 Mmm.

A - - - the pattern of it. Communications through Air, Air Services or Flight Service in Melbourne. Some time during that day, I can't remember when, we'd have started trying to get hold of a top cover aircraft that could ease that communication problem so that Flight Service in Melbourne had a, a definite aircraft to talk to and that top cover aircraft at high level, could then get good V.H.F. communications with everyone at low level. At some stage I think that became an aircraft from V.H. here in Canberra. I'd need to go back to the records - - -

Q54 Mmm.

A - - - to get the details. But that's basically the, the pattern of it. Helicopters getting out there as soon as we could - - -

Q55 Mmm.

A - - - and then, as the scale of the thing became evident and that this was going to be a long running

operation, we knew that we were going to have to do a search for Winston Churchill's survivors. We knew that there was a man overboard from Sword of Orion. There was, there was another search there, so the escalation to start getting fixed wing aircraft that could search the next day - - -

Q56 Mmm.

A - - - then started to come into, to place as well. Once the operations started to spin up like that, then issues like getting someone down to Merimbula for the forward field base, getting hold of a top cover aircraft that could help command this operation started to become more important.

Q57 Mmm.

A What else would be going on? During those last couple of hours before daylight, before dark, we'd have also been going out to Navy or to Defence, in particular looking for Navy helicopters that were capable of doing night winching operations - - -

Q58 Mmm.

A - - - 'cause the civilian helicopters aren't, and looking hold, to get hold of a P3 for the sort of excellent command capabilities that they've got. So all those things were happening at once between, oh, I guess around about 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock on the, in the afternoon of the 27th, really for the next 18 hours. After 18 hours or so, the pattern started to change because all of the, those crisis beacon distress events

were being dealt with or had been dealt with and we were then moving in search mode, searching for the Winston Churchill survivors in, in, you know, clearly defined search areas.

Q59

Mmm.

A

With lots of aircraft tasked into them, and the same for the man overboard from Sword of Orion.

Q60

Mmm. With the, the Polair from Victoria, can you recall any incidents where there was a delay time or was there a problem associated getting the Polair, aircraft out, do you know?

A

As I understand it, because in my analysis role I actually started listening to the, all the, the telephone calls off the word net voice recorder, I do recall that there was some doubt about whether Polair could be released. I'd have to say that's not an unusual event, in, in the sense that all of the rescue helicopters that we deal with have a multiplicity of, of loyalties if you like, responsibilities. There was one, one that we couldn't get hold of at all because he was already tasked with the New South Wales Bush Fire Brigade who, of course, were in a crisis situation as well with the, the weather conditions at the time. So as I recall it, Polair wasn't released immediately but it was because of the, the prospect that it was being held for emergency tasking in Victoria. As I recall it, once the gravity of the event started to become evident and we then got through to the, the senior

management in, in Victoria, we got the aircraft released. Yeah, but - - -

Q61 Mmm.

A - - - not, not a totally unusual event.

Q62 O.K. Now with the, the 121 E.P.I.R.Bs - - -

A Yeah.

Q62 - - - was there a problem associated with so many of those coming in at the one time as, as, so that they could be pinpointed and, and accurately determined who they were from?

A Yes. It caused two problems, I guess. One is that, I need to organise my thoughts here. Because we have the satellite detection system and the, the, theSAT system is capable of, I, I don't want to use the, the wrong words here to give the wrong impression. At each pass of a satellite, the satellite will pinpoint, within about 20 kilometres or so, each of the beacons. And it will tag it because it will know precisely what frequency that beacon was operating on and it will know what piece of geography it was in. The next time a satellite pass comes over, which might be 20 minutes later or it might be 6 hours later, it can remember those characteristics and has a very good chance of correlating a previous satellite detection with a current one. So a number, well, let's say for argument 8-9-1-3, might be a detection that's made on a particular satellite pass. The next time the next one comes over if it recognises it as the same beacon, it

will tag it with the same number. So from the view point of knowing how many beacons were going on out there, things started to clarify reasonably quickly. We believed that we had nine on the, the afternoon of the 27th developed during the afternoon, and it was quite feasible to, to take that unique identifying number and say, all right, number 8-9-1-3 is in a particular position and we know we have to respond to that one. We wouldn't know which yacht it was, but at least we had that position. The situation becomes different when you then launch a, a search aircraft because all the search aircraft has is a 121.5 megahertz homing signal, it's a home on, and of course there were many of them out there. Now because they were quite, they were separated enough for the aircraft to work this problem out. There were a couple of the aircraft, I think, had problems in mutual interference, but in the main they tended to be able to get hold of one and go to it. But it's not as simple a management problem as when you have only a single beacon, 'cause you can say to him, There's a beacon in such a such a position, go and find out what it is. We couldn't ever be certain that the beacon that, that, that an aircraft had home to and the distress that was being described there was necessarily number 8-9-1-3, for instance. So correlating what we were hearing back from the coalface with what we were getting on the satellite detection system was difficult in the early, early parts. That,

again, overnight that tended to clarify itself as we got more and more information, and it cleared up very quickly the following morning when we could next get the civil helicopters out there in daylight - - -

Q63

Mmm.

A

- - - to do something useful. The other problem that goes with that is the fact that the yachts themselves were quite densely packed in the area. So not only did you, did, did we have the problem that an aircraft could go out there and find multiple beacons, when it got into the vicinity of a beacon it could find multiple yachts.

Q64

Mmm.

A

And that also made it difficult to, to resolve what was going on. Yeah, I mean does that answer your question

Q65

Yes, it does. Do, do you think that can be resolved with the use of the 406 beacon?

A

Yes. That, that would go a long way towards resolving the problem. The 406 beacon firstly has a smaller footprint, we can say within about a 5 kilometre circle rather than 20 kilometres. So there's just less uncertainty about which beacon is which and, because it has an embedded call sign in it, we can identify who it belongs to, much of the problem is resolved anyway. You could actually go out there and be looking for a particular yacht - - -

Q66

Mmm.

A - - - rather than simply a distress event that you don't know what it is yet.

Q67 Is it the fact, though, that with a 406 E.P.I.R.B, it doesn't have homing capabilities?

A No. It does have a 121.5 megahertz element which can be homed on - - -

Q68 Right.

A - - - in the same way as a, a 121.5 megahertz beacon. The 406 element is, it's a digital message that's passed from the beacon directly to the, to a satellite, so it's in addition to the normal 121.5 megahertz facility.

Q69 O.K. So it does have that, that - - -

A Yes.

Q69 - - - built in element - - -

A Yes.

Q69 - - - of homing?

A Yeah.

Q70 O.K.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q71 So is that safe to say, is that safe to say that you could read a, a system of 121.5s, because of the 406 now with the 121.5 facility within it?

A I could which, sorry?

Q72 Well, does that mean if you've got the 406 which has a 121.5 facility - - -

A Yeah.

Q72 - - - with it - - -

A Yeah.

Q72 - - - does that mean that you could now get rid of the
1.1, the 121.5s alone, or as they are by themselves?
Do you know what I mean, like - - -

A Yeah, yeah.

Q73 Could that overtake - - -

A Yes. 406 - - -

Q73 - - - that existing system?

A 406 could completely overtake 121.5.

Q74 Take, right.

A Excuse me, and there is some discussion in the, in the
international circles that deal with these issues as to
when 121.5 megahertz processing by the satellites ought
to be phased out.

Q75 Mmm.

A And there are various discussions about when that might
be. It's still 5, 8 years away, but we're already
looking to the next generation.

Q76 Yeah.

A There are other things coming along as well, so you can
now get 406 megahertz beacons with G.P.S. embedded, for
instance, so that they will not just signal up their
identification, they'll signal up their exact position.

Q77 Mmm.

A That would make life even better still for us, because
we could send a helicopter to a specific - - -

Q78 Mmm.

A - - - position rather than saying, home on the 121.5.

Q79 Mmm.

A So yeah, those developments are coming along. Having said that, there are hundreds of the things out there, thousands of 121.5 beacons.

Q80 Yeah.

A They're still being produced, they're, they're much cheaper than the 406 beacons so I would expect them to be carried around for a very long time yet. The advice that we gave to the C.Y.C.A. on this subject was that we would prefer to see a 406 megahertz beacon carried in every yacht - - -

Q81 Mmm.

A - - - so that we could get this identification issue resolved.

Q82 Mmm.

A Having said that, that our preference is 406, if it's a case of trying to find people in the water or people in a life raft I would far rather they had some beacon rather than no beacon.

Q83 Mmm.

A I'd far rather put up with the, the mess of the number of them out there than just have, have to do a wide area search to find them.

Q84 Mmm.

A And so there's, there's a bit of a balance there.

Q85 Mmm.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q86 O.K. With the, the controller at Merimbula that you, you tasked - - -

A Yeah.

Q86 - - - from AussAR, what was his role down there?

A His role was to, the role of a forward field base is to facilitate the operation by giving you feedback directly from the, well, closer to the coalface, anyway, by being able to do communal briefings of pilots. Briefing is quite a labour intensive business, particularly remotely from here. In a small search or a beacon search, for instance, we'll send them a fax with a, a briefing form in it and then get on the phone and, and give a pilot an individual briefing. And that means if you want a 10 aircraft search, 10 faxes, 10 individual phone calls, whereas if you have someone on the spot, you could send all that to the forward field base rep - - -

Q87 Mmm.

A - - - who can then brief all the pilots at the same time.

Q88 Yeah.

A If there are any questions, they'll be resolved at the same time, and in particular the person on the ground there can, can actually start to make some determinations about what the quality of the search effort is going to be - - -

Q89 Yeah.

A - - - 'cause he can see the kind of aircraft, he can see the, the, the pilots, talk to them about their qualifications. He can also see the quality of the observers that are being put into the aircraft and since, yeah, since any search basically comes down to visual search at the end, the observers are just as important as the aircraft or the pilot.

Q90 Mmm.

A So it gives you a chance to know what's actually going on out there and, and make determinations back in AusSAR about the, the quality of the search effort, not just the quantity of the search effort.

Q91 All right.

A That's, that's its real benefit for us.

Q92 O.K. Was there an incident between search aircraft, in particular a P3 Orion and other aircraft?

A Yes. Excuse me. That came to light for AusSAR some days after the event. The RAAF P3 rendered what they know as a form purple, it's a posting, a post event, post mission debriefing form. And in that they reported that they'd come close to civilian aircraft in a search area off the east coast. The RAAF Director of Air Force Safety then came through to AusSAR, which was the first we heard about it 'cause it hadn't been reported to us at all, and asked to investigate it. We, we got out all the charts, the briefing charts. As the analysis officer at the time, I got hold of the, the four or so telephone calls that were relevant to

this and provided them, provided them to the Director of Air Force Safety. They then went away to investigate it. My understanding is that the, the, the P3 was tasked into a particular area, that because of the, they, the uncertainties of the, the initial navigation system that they were working with, they weren't navigating as accurately, accurately as the civil aircraft on G.P.S, and the P3 strayed into his area.

Q93 Mmm.

A I also understand that we had planned to have an altitude separation between the two aircraft and that, in the briefing process, that altitude separation wasn't made, so they were actually both nominally flying at 1,000 feet.

Q94 Mmm.

A It, the P3 in fact briefly was flying off his altitude because the captain was out of the seat and their standard of operating procedures require that they be above, I think it's 1200 feet when the captain's not in the, in his chair. So they in fact quite inadvertently established a vertical separation between the two of them.

Q95 Mmm.

A As I understand it, now having talked to BASI and Air Force Safety, that Air Force has asked for a joint investigation with BASI, which BASI agreed to. I've been interviewed on, on that front by the BASI

investigator, Bernie Rogers, and we're hopeful that a, a report on that will be forthcoming in the next sort of, in the next few weeks.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q96 O.K. John, in relation to search patterns, are they all devised here - - -

A Yes.

Q96 - - - at AusSAR?

A Yes.

Q97 And so everybody knows their area to search and that sort of thing?

A Yes.

Q98 O.K. Now the role of the P3 in, in last year's Sydney to Hobart, was it a role of a sort of a communications platform or as a searching unit?

A As I, as I understand it - - -

Q99 Yeah.

A - - - the P3 was launched for a command function.

Q100 Right.

A When he was first tasked - - -

Q101 Yes.

A - - - that was, that was what was envisaged would, would be done with the P3.

Q102 Yeah.

A By the time he got into area, the search for Winston Churchill or Winston Churchill survivors had, along with the Sword of Orion man overboard, assumed pretty

much the highest priority. Those were the people that were most at risk.

Q103 Mmm.

A And the P3 is a good visual search platform as well and happened to be on the spot, and so he was actually put into a, a visual search along the, the predicted drift line for life rafts.

Q104 Mmm.

A He was then subsequently employed into another visual search pattern because we, well, I think at that stage had a civil aircraft in that top cover command role.

Q105 Mmm.

A In subsequent discussions with R.A.A.F, I mean their view is that the P3 should have been used in a command role throughout.

Q106 Right.

A I wouldn't - - -

Q107 Do you agree with that or - - -

A Yeah, I wouldn't disagree with that as a matter of principle, but when you're looking - - -

Q108 Mmm.

A - - - for eyes to look for life rafts you - - -

Q109 Mmm.

A - - - you do what you have to do.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q110 Mmm. Now so far as your experience in, in this position here at AussAR, have you ever had a similar situation with a number of beacons at all?

A To the Sydney/Hobart? No. No, no, it's a totally left field kind of incident.

Q111 Yeah.

A I mean, having said that, every time a bunch of yachts go out together - - -

Q112 Yeah.

A - - - there's a risk that weather will do this.

Q113 Yes.

A I don't think anything other than weather could produce the kind of - - -

Q114 Yeah.

A - - - result that we saw.

Q115 Mmm.

A But yeah, every time there's a yacht race there's a, a chance of something like that happening. But it's, it's quite out of AusSAR's experience.

Q116 Yeah.

A And I suspect it's, it's out of the experience of the organisations that preceded AusSAR.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q117 Mmm. Now in your position as the operations manager do you feel that everything went according to plan, so far as that operation was concerned?

A Can I say again, I wasn't at the time.

Q118 O.K. Post?

A As, as the analysis officer I, I'd, I would need to caveat what I say by, by saying that the whole process that we go through, with - - -

Q119 Mmm.

A - - - hot debriefs afterwards and analysis, is intended to find where you didn't get it right.

Q120 Yeah.

A And therefore we always tend to look for the lessons learned - - -

Q121 Mmm.

A - - - rather than what you did well.

Q122 Mmm.

A Having said that, on balance I think it was a magnificent effort from the - - -

Q123 Yeah.

A - - - the guys in the R.C.C. I came in on the afternoon of the 27th, I was on leave but it was quite clear to me something was happening, and as the analysis officer I wanted to watch.

Q124 Yeah.

A Well, I got pressed immediately into service - - -

Q125 Mmm.

A - - - and every, everyone that was in the, the R.C.C. simply worked flat out for however long it was that they needed to, to work.

Q126 Yeah.

A So you know, there were a number of them that were in here for 12, 12 hours or so, completely exhausted at the end of it. And I think from that viewpoint AusSAR gave, gave absolutely everything that it had to give -
- -

Q127 Yeah.

A - - - to the incident. I also think that, while we will hoped to have learned how to do, how to have better data base, better disaster recovery plan for the next one, what the guys came back to at, at every turn, they, they went back to basics at every turn. There's a distress in progress of some kind, get an ASAT to it.

Q128 Yeah.

A They, I vividly remember on the, on the, around about 9.00 or 10 o'clock at night the, the first night, Brian, Brian Willey was the, the senior search and rescue officer, maritime one, at the time, and he was trying his best to get all these beacon detections with the numbers 8-9-1-3, 8-9-1-7 sorted out and he got to a point where he simply had to establish priorities, because not everything could be done - - -

Q129 Mmm.

A - - - at the same time. And he walked over to the whiteboard, he called everyone over for a brief and he said, Here it is, men in the water, people in life rafts, yachts that are in danger of sinking, yachts with injuries. This is it, this is the priority list, guys - - -

Q130 Mmm.

A - - - and, and then sent everyone out to their, their business again. And it, it, it really was, it wasn't until the following day, when daylight came and you

could get more aircraft out there to do useful things,
that you could actually get down past the first - - -

Q131 Mmm.

A - - - couple of them, so AusSAR was really doing
everything it possibly could.

Q132 Mmm.

A So yeah, I think they did very well.

Q133 Mmm. Now previous to the interview we spoke about
information provided to you prior to, you know, ocean
races like the Sydney to Hobart. Have you got any
comments to make on that?

A Yes, I, I, I think that's something that we could do
better next time. I, I think having a, a common data
base of information that allows you to talk on the
phone without having to pass information but just refer
to what you all know - - -

Q134 Yes.

A - - - would make life a lot easier.

Q135 Yeah.

A Correlating that information with 406 megahertz beacons
is probably the one thing that we could do that would
most improve the next - - -

Q136 Yeah.

A - - - the next event of this type if it happens again.

Q137 Yeah.

A I would have to say that having that common data base
of information would be very useful. As long as they
have 121.5 megahertz beacons out there and we don't

know which yacht they belong to, life is going to be difficult, and there will always be difficulties in managing that, so those two things together - - -

Q138 Mmm.

A - - - a better data base, 406 beacons, together would make the, the difference.

Q139 Mmm. O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q140 We also mentioned earlier about lessons learnt and we just touched briefly on it at the moment. Is there anything that you feel that you could add to this interview as far as the lessons learnt from AusSAR?

A Yes. I, I think, I think next time, if there, if there's a next time that takes the same kind of format, we would actually start spinning things up earlier. We, we didn't make anything of what I would call a precautionary deployment in order to, to see the weather pattern developing, anticipate what it might mean and start getting assets into the area.

Q141 Mmm.

A We, quite frankly we're not funded to do that.

Q142 Mmm.

A We, we're only funded to provide a response to a distress - - -

Q143 Mmm.

A - - - not to position aircraft in the area in anticipation that something might happen.

Q144 Mmm.

A I, I would like to think that we'd move faster on that. That, that we would have a better understanding of what those weather conditions in Bass Strait really meant for the, the yachties and anticipate it a bit, bit more than we did. That, that's one, one lesson that's, it's difficult, they're difficult judgements to make, but we've - - -

Q145 Mmm.

A - - - got a bit more experience now.

Q146 All right.

A I would want to get the forward field base out earlier - - -

Q147 Mmm.

A - - - 'cause I think that would be useful, and I guess the third area that we've been learning and not just through Sydney/Hobart but through other major searches that we've done in recent times, excuse me, is the benefit of having better contacts with, with S.E.S. and police, particularly through the State Police - - -

Q148 Mmm.

A - - - and if I can point to the fact that the Sydney/Hobart operation happened on the 27th and 29th of December. We then had another major search on the 4th and 5th of January, I think, 3rd to the 5th of January, for an aircraft that went, went missing between Merriwa and Walgett. That search was every bit as intense, arguably more difficult to manage because it was over land rather than over water - - -

Q149 Mmm.

A - - - than the Sydney/Hobart one, although it was only looking for one - - -

Q150 Mmm.

A - - - one target. We had a New South Wales policeman come in for that one, and it made a very significant difference to the way that we dealt with the, the ground effort - - -

Q151 Mmm.

A - - - and coordinated with the, the hospitals and bringing fuel trucks in, and all that sort of logistic base was much easier simply because we had the Queanbeyan based New South Wales Inspector in the, in the ops room here.

Q152 Mmm.

A We've done it for two subsequent major searches of the type, and that, that is a clear lesson learned. If we'd brought a, a police officer in here on the 27th of December, things, I suspect we'd have had better liaison on to the ground as well.

Q153 Mmm. Mmm. O.K. All right. Is there anything that you feel that you'd like to add now that would assist us with the, the inquiry?

A Only that, that we have a lot of information here but, because we haven't produced our own report, the best way we can help you is if you have a specific question, tell us what it is and we, we can burrow in and find the bit of information that you're looking for.

Q154 Mmm.

A But to provide you a sort of polished overall answer is very difficult.

Q155 Mmm. O.K. That's fine. All right, John, the, the time now on my watch is 1.37pm. This interview is now concluded.

A Thank you.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED