

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr John Gibson, at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Rushcutters Bay, on Wednesday, the 27th of January, 1999. Also present seated to my right is Senior Constable Dave Upston, from New South Wales Water Police. Time by my watch is now 6 minutes past 3.00. As I already explained to you, Mr Gibson, Senior Constable Upston and myself are currently conducting inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and our job is to interview a number of people who were involved in the race and that's what we're doing here today. For the purpose of the record could you please state your full name?

A My name is John Hope Gibson.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A The 20th of February, 1934.

Q3 And your current address?

A 52/6 Wyargine, I'll spell that, W-Y-A-R-G-I-N-E, Street, Balmoral.

Q4 And your occupation?

A I'm a solicitor.

Q5 O.K. Basically, if I could just get some background in relation to your sailing experience first.

A As a young man I was sailing skiffs, 18 footers, then I raced vessels in partnership from about 21 footers up to 36 footers with the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club. I

did a small amount of Sydney Pittwater Races, but I have very little offshore experience.

Q6 O.K. Would you care to tell me how it came about that you became a member of the Winston Churchill crew?

A Approximately two years I took a vessel which I then owned in partnership from the, in the Sydney/Coffs Harbour December race with the CYC and at that time John Stanley was a friend of one of the girls who was sailing with us and John, at my request, ran the boat, for the purposes of that race, and which I participated in with myself and my wife. That was my first CYC offshore race of any distance at all.

Q7 O.K. Can you tell me what your position was on the boat itself during the race?

A Well, perhaps, I should go back, because I don't think I answered the question. Following the introduction to John Stanley we became friends and in about November of last year, I met John at a sailing function at the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club where I asked him if he was doing the Hobart race and he indicated he was and he said, "Do you want to come?". And at that stage I was not too sure whether I did or I didn't but I was very excited that he'd asked me. I knew he was taking Winston Churchill down there and I knew it was a very prestigious vessel and to be invited in the crew of that nature to me was a great honour and subsequently I replied that I would love to go, which is the answer to your question as to how I got onto Winston

Churchill.

Q8 Right. O.K. Now, what position did you fulfil on board the boat?

A I was a crewman.

Q9 Sorry?

A I was a general crewman.

Q10 O.K. And what does that involve?

A That involved assisting in a watch with sail trim, be available to undertake any work on the vessel. I wasn't asked to helm the boat but I was part of a watch and I would do what ever was required on that watch.

Q11 Right. And that, and that involved all sorts of taskings on board the boat?

A That's right.

Q12 O.K. Had you been on the boat previous to this race?

A Yes, I had. I'd been on the boat on three occasions, two of which were training sails we conducted on the weekends offshore, where a series of sails were set, including spinnakers and we had sail drill on those occasions.

Q13 So how many, so to speak, practice runs were done with the Winston Churchill?

A Approximately two.

Q14 Right. O.K. Now, as far as you're aware, the remaining crew were fairly experienced yachtsman?

A To my knowledge at least three of the crew, to my knowledge at least three of the crew were extremely experienced. I was aware that Bruce Gould had,

together with the late Jim Lawler and John Stanley, had, each personally, in excess of 10 Hobart and considerable offshore experience.

Q15 Right. O.K. Are you able to tell me what sort of life rafts were available on the boat?

A I can't tell you the name of the life rafts in question. I can tell you that there were two life rafts which were launched. One of the life rafts was a circular raft which was occupied by four of the crew and another raft of which I was a member was a rectangular raft which I understood to be a six man raft, which was occupied by five of the crew.

Q16 Right. O.K. I'd like to take you to around 1300 on the 26th of December. Would you be able to describe for me in your own words from that time to the time that you were rescued, about what happened?

A We departed Sydney Harbour in magnificent conditions, we tacked to a position off the heads and subsequently set a spinnaker, we ran for most of that day and that evening under spinnaker in magnificent sailing conditions. The crew was in excellent spirits, we maintained watches, we ate meals and it was quite exhilarating, a beautiful sailing experience, with the vessel travelling under control and did very, very good time, I think we averaged over ..... in excess of 11 knots which for a vessel of that length in those conditions was very good time and I believe we made excellent time down the coast. On the evening of the

26th I think we continued with spinnaker, it wasn't until the following, later that evening, I believe, that as the wind freshened we lowered the spinnaker and I assisted in that, the dousing of the spinnaker, was quite a difficult process, it was a fairly fresh wind and during that process I lost one of my corneal lenses which caused me some concern but otherwise I was in good shape. I'm extremely myopic without lenses but I had one lens in and I was O.K. We put that spinnaker down and then we continued and a decision was made then to set a staysail, that is a small headsail as a spinnaker and that was subsequently done and I assisted in that process. My job during those manoeuvres was basically to assist on halyards and work winches. Both manoeuvres were carried out with a great deal of concern but the boat at all times remained in control and maintained its course, which I understand was approximately 180 degrees and we were travelling, I suggest, within sight of the coast, possibly, 15 to 20 miles off the coast, I recall that we had passed well towards Eden and that evening we continued under very fresh conditions. I recall that there was storm activity. The following morning the wind continued to freshen and we subsequently doused the staysail which was set as a spinnaker and we continued under two headsails, as I recall, there was a staysail and, what we call a jib, with full main. The wind continued to freshen and I believe that we subsequently went down to

the staysail only and we subsequently pulled in a reef. I think the wind then lightened off and that would have been during the early hours of 27th and I think we might have shaken out a reef. But the wind then freshened again and I think we subsequently ran to two reefs and finally dowsed the mainsail altogether, and that was done on a watch on which I was not on, but I recall that it happened because the sail movement and the noise of that change and when I subsequently came on deck on the morning of the 27th it was overcast with very heavy torrential rain, the boat was travelling with just a headsail, I think it was the staysail, and a decision was made at that stage to change to a storm jib. I assisted in that manoeuvre as I understand and we then continued under storm jib only and I think our direction was approximately 180, 160, 180, the boat appeared to be handling very, very well, ..... start to become motion. I recall that we were still in sight of the coast and I recall someone saying that we, in the distance could see Mount Imlay, which is south of Eden and that would place us about 15 miles off the coast in my reckoning if we were able to do that. The rain continued and there was no point in me going on deck, although there was one of my watches, and I recalled I spent the better part of the day attempting to doze down below resting on a sail and I think there was a watch change at that stage. During that day at about lunchtime I recall being seasick, to my surprise,

and I recall that I wasn't uncomfortable, I was retching but keeping fluid going and I felt annoyed that I was seasick but apart from that it wasn't a problem and I was very conscious I maintained fluid. I stayed down below because of the conditions that were such there was no need for me to on deck. The helmsman at the time I think had been Bruce Gould and he came down from his watch and was relieved by Richard Winning. John Deane was on the watch with Richard and he was on deck, close to Richard, and the time at this stage is approaching 1600 hours. The vessel was travelling, from the time that I went up the companionway and was mainly retching fluids, but had an opportunity to look around, the boat appeared to be travelling well. Richard seemed to be very comfortable. My estimate of the speed was between 5 to 6 knots maximum and we were travelling across the seas. I don't recall that the boat was becoming airborne or any violent thumping or noise which indicated to me that we might have been travelling too fast. Water was coming on board and being washed down but of no great concern and in my estimate we seemed to very, very comfortable. John Stanley I believe was in the navigator's cockpit, which was situated towards the aft of the boat, I think he was resting and the rest of the crew, with the exception of Richard Winning and John Gould were below decks and all snoozing in various parts of the main saloon. The main saloon itself was

in fairly tidy situation, a couple of sails were down below but spread out so as not to interfere with progress, there was plenty of cold fluids and drinks available in the icebox, there were a couple of boxes of muffins and provisions if you wanted something to chew and to eat and, although I was feeling somewhat uncomfortable, the conditions were quite O.K. At about 1600 hours I recall, for some reason, I was moving around the main saloon and I think to the best of my recollection I may have been attempting to locate the trysail, for the purposes of bringing it on deck, when I recall that I was taken violently, without warning, through the air and thrown across the main saloon. I was thrown from the starboard side to the portside, the vessel at that time was tacking, although I would describe it, as not being hard on, I think I, we weren't reaching but we certainly weren't hard on, I think the storm jib had been slightly eased, so, I suppose we were sort of tacking to windward with slightly eased sheets on a starboard tack, so that meant that I was moving on the portside of the main saloon as most of the crew were either sleeping or the gear had been moved to the starboard side, which was down to leeward as the boat was on a slight angle, I suppose an angle, whatever we were tacking on but there was certainly a considerable angle there, and I was projected across the main saloon, which is quite a large saloon in Winston Churchill and slammed my head



against the leeward lockers. At the same time I heard the most horrific crash, I would describe it as if we had been struck by another vessel, it was as if we had hit a brick wall, it was a deafening crash, it was noises all around me, and the vessel continued to lay over at an angle of possibly 60 degrees and I was thrown in a somersaulted position of my head down and my body on top of myself with a lot of gear on top of me and around me, and it took me a little time to extract myself from that position and try and sort of what on earth had happened. I looked around and observed that all the floor boards, on which sails had been lying, had been lifted and I could actually see the bilge of vessel exposed, 'cause the floorboards had been thrown up, a lot of lockers had opened, there was a lot of gear lying around and I observed that we were making water. The vessel righted itself, the rest of the crew that were down below were moving around and I was aware that the crew on deck were also moving around and I generally tried to assess the situation. The vessel seemed to sailing all right, the companionway steps had been moved and I helped reposition the companionway steps. The rest of the crew had been sleeping, they were sort of moving around and there was some discussion as to what the position was. I recall that I went up the companionway and looked around and I observed that approximately 6 to 8 feet of the bulwarks was missing or damaged. The bulwarks I

describe as being a portion of the side of the boat which continued up and above the deck level. On the Winston Churchill, the ribs of the boat continued up clear of the deck for a distance of almost 18 inches or more and the external planking then continued, so that one had the protection of a raised section of decking which ran the whole length of the boat and it is that section which was missing. That in itself was quite remarkable because we're talking about ribs which were approximately 9 inches apart and made of, I assume, Tasmanian hardwood, as I understood the vessel was built by an expert boatbuilder in Hobart and I understand was constructed of Huon pine, so, whatever forces it was that caused this had in fact destroyed the ribs and planking on a distance of 6 feet or to 8 feet, also including the capping, which was another section of timber which lay across the ribs and on top of the planking and it was that section which carried the track which was heavy reinforced model metal which acted as a housing for the various pulleys which took the sheets from the spinnakers and jibs. The vessel itself otherwise I didn't observe damaged, except that the dodger to the main saloon had also been twisted out of shape and I also subsequently recall that the aft navigator's cockpit seemed to be in some sort of a mess. I was subsequently that told that three of the armour plated reinforced port holes had been smashed in also on the starboard side, which was the situation

where John Stanley was down below, but the force of water according to John, and you'd have to go to his statement, throw him across that area where he was down below resting. At that stage Bruce Gould was at the wheel, having come up from down below, and John Stanley had, was assessing damage, and had gone down below to the main saloon. We were making water at that stage, the water was at battery level, and an attempt was made to start the motors. The motors kicked and then stopped. A further attempt was not successful. A decision was made to make a Mayday and I heard Richard Winning's voice call the Mayday. The exact words that Richard used, I don't wish to quote because that would be subject to a recording, but to the best of my knowledge, it was, Winston Churchill, Mayday, Mayday, Winston Churchill, which was acknowledged. I was subsequently advised that the Mayday was in fact made using, not the single ..... band radio, which apparently was out of order, but was made using a VHF radio, which in itself was remarkable given the limited range. The conversation between Richard Winning and the person responding, which I understood was the Endeavour, was as to the number of persons, and I recall the response being nine, that we had two life rafts and I don't recall any other information, I don't recall a latitude and longitude being given. The vessel continued on to my recollection with the storm jib being used and a decision was made to ease the

sheets in that storm jib and subsequently lowered. That was done. And we then continued under bare poles. It was clear that the vessel was continuing to make water and would ultimately sink. I assisted in retrieving the two life rafts which were stored in the main saloon and these were passed up to the deck where they were stowed near the navigator's saloon or coachhouse on the windward side of the vessel. The vessel at that stage as I understand was travelling possibly at three-quarters to the sea and wind under bare poles and the vessel was gradually slowing down as we gradually filled with water. Life jackets were issued and all members stayed on deck, donned life jackets, with the exception of John Stanley, who continued to try and identify the source of water and generally review the situation down below. Subsequently, John came on deck and the boat gradually lost speed, several large waves passed over the back of the boat and ran water across the deck and I would describe that as being pooped, I think it's P-O-O-P-E-D, is the nautical expression, as a wave came behind the stern of the vessel and a large volume of water then ran across the vessel. The decision was made to launch the life rafts, once the vessel was very low in the water and we had minimum forward movement, I recall retrieving a knife from the boom vang in order that, if necessary we had a knife to cut the life rafts clear once we launched them. The life rafts were taken by

some other members of the crew to the starboard side of the vessel, I'm sorry, it'd be the, it'd be the portside of the vessel, they were taken to the portside of the vessel, which was the leeward side on that occasion and in fact it was the leeward side throughout the whole, the portside was the leeward side from the time of the knockdown, till we the time we actually left the board. At that stage the decks were almost awash and the decision was then made to launch the life rafts. Both life rafts were launched almost at the same time and both inflated. The life rafts were attached to the vessel by lines and the smaller life raft was occupied by four of the crew and I think I would've been one of the last of the crew members to leave the vessel. I recall that I hadn't taken the knife that I'd placed in a sailbag prior to that manoeuvre as I assumed that whoever had tied the life rafts would have tied them in such a way that they'd become undone. As I left the vessel I launched myself in the water and I found that my mobility was extremely impeded by the device I had on which was a life vest which reduced one's ability to swim considerably, I became aware that the vessel was at that stage, that's the Winston Churchill was sinking at the line between the Winston Churchill and the life raft, to which I proposed to hop into was tight and pulling the raft down with the vessel. That caused me extreme concern but there was little I could do about it. There was a

large bang or a bang sound, like a tyre bursting and that I felt the line, which was underneath my body, go slack and the life raft, the line had obviously broken off from the life raft. I had great difficulty in getting aboard, I think I was one of the last members aboard the life raft, I, I recall that I wasn't able to scramble in by myself, no matter how hard I tried, and I had to be assisted in, and this was the six man raft. The problem with getting into the raft was that the sides of the raft were quite high physically for me to get into and I was impeded by the life jacket which had a large area on the chest, so the jacket itself almost stopped you from getting into the raft. I was sort of pulled and pushed into the raft and the two rafts then with five in my raft and four in the other, drifted off the Winston Churchill, which had disappeared. The two life rafts were secured by a line together and both life rafts had their own drogues attached to them, as I understood it. The conditions inside the life raft were comfortable and very, very reassuring, the five of us were in there, we were sitting in a star formation with our feet towards each other, our heads resting on the side and positioned around the circumference of the raft which was square. Shortly thereafter the line between the two rafts broke or snapped for some reason, by reason of the rafts moving at different speeds across the seaway. We attempted to bail the raft and we inspected the equipment on the raft and noticed,

took an inventory of what was in the bag, we made various attempts using seaboots and a little bailer which is applied to empty water out of the raft, there was a considerable volume of it in the raft. The canopy of the raft had been activated and we were protected by a canopy from the elements. We were not in a position to observe the sea state because we were virtually enclosed inside this canopy. We would have been in the raft, I suppose, for best part of three-quarters of an hour, when a very, very large wave took us and threw us around quite violently. As a result of that our bodies were thrown on top of each other and the end of the quite horrific movement of the raft when we came to rest and this was associated with the sound of a very, very large wave, the raft was still upright and we were jumbled on top of each other and John Stanley was in significant pain and for a man that doesn't complain I was aware that he was in very, very significant pain. He informed us that he had injured his hip and his leg and I was not aware that at that time that he had in fact had torn the tendons in his hip. And I was aware that John had artificial hips and also he had fractured his ankle. As I understand this injury arose by the fact that the bodies were thrown around and he was caught underneath other persons' bodies by the movement in the floor of the raft and the way we were thrown around. A decision was then made that we should all lie parallel with each other and that position was

subsequently adopted and I recall that I was lying next to John Deane with Michael next to me and the other crew members also spread along like a little row of sausages in the raft. We continued in that way, we continued in that way for maybe, it's very hard to give the description of time, but we were aware that there was a lot of movement in the canopy, lot of high velocity wind and spray, but the raft seemed to be moving quite quickly and we were able to observe the other raft in the distance. I recall then a very loud rushing of water, sound of a huge movement of water and the raft again being taken very quickly and we travelled at considerable speed and I'm not too sure whether it was on this occasion that we were actually tipped but I think not, I think we had at least two more experiences where the raft remained upright, but again very violent movement. This time the bodies, we were able to brace ourselves and again the raft filled up with water and we started to bail it. It was completely dark, I recall looking at my watch and I recall it was approximately 12.30 or thereabouts. I recall that we were in good spirits and I recall that we had to brace ourselves as these, the sound of the rushing water came towards us. Sometime I would say after 12.30, I recall another quite violent, it might have been before 12.30 but another violent movement of water and again the raft being thrown and our bodies going everywhere and when we came to rest, the raft was



upside down. The canopy, what was the floor became the canopy, and it was pressing on our heads and we physically pushed it up to remove the water which had formed in a dish. We were all still intact, the canopy of the raft became the floor of the raft and in that section of the raft which acted to hold the canopy in place we used to sort of stand on and support our weight. I think we all had on, possibly with the exception of John Stanley, our buoyancy vests and again we were in good spirits. I think at that stage the bag of flares and other material which had been in the raft had gone and the reason for that being I recall that we may have attempted move that bag and the line attached to the bag may have been undone. The raft remained upside down and appeared to be quite stable, several large waves hit us and we seemed to travel all right. However, it was quite clear that we had a problem with oxygen and air and we were in a sealed situation. There was a discussion as to what we should do and I recall that it was a calm discussion, I recall that Michael Bannister suggested that he should go outside the exit and attempt to right the raft. I recall that it was pitch black, I recall that I was extremely concerned that he should attempt this and I recall saying to him, "Michael, it's death out there, I wouldn't recommend it". I think at that stage we all decided that the raft was travelling as it was upside down in a comfortable fashion and perhaps more stable

than it was in the other way and if we were to make hole in the bottom of the raft to get air that would be the way to go. We had torches available, I had a small torch and we selected a section which we thought was reinforced in the floor and we cut a small incision there and using that incision we were able to get air into the area where we occupied. In my opinion there was not more than 10 minutes then passed before there was another large explosion of water and we were again thrown a considerable distance and spun in the raft with bodies going everywhere and ended up right way up. At that stage we became that a section of the floor had ripped and it was continuing to rip, the canopy had also started to disintegrate. We remained inside the raft and the remnants of the raft in that position and was struck by several other large waves with similar results of being thrown around and on each occasion the floor of the raft further disintegrated as did the canopy. We reached a stage where we were still inside the raft, it was dark and we were mainly supporting ourselves on the pneumatic section, which would either be in the upright position, which is the position the raft would be, had we had a floor and the canopy section would make the roof, or otherwise the raft had turned over and it would then become a bottom section, either way it really didn't matter very much. As I recall in a decision sometime after 12.30 and certainly before 2.30 and closer to 2.30 than 12.30, we was in

this position, we were all in good spirits, I was aware that John was in pain, we were bracing ourselves for these waves as they came and I recall saying to Jim Lawler that I thought I would attach a life harness which I had taken with me, which I looped back on itself onto my safety harness, around the pneumatic section which formed the support for the roof. I recall Jim replied, Well, that can't do any harm, Gibbo" or words to that effect. Whereupon I, I did just that. I think it was that action that saved my life. We continued in this manner for some time, again with very big seas striking us, the raft being thrown around and bracing ourselves, with little or nothing to hang onto in the raft and I recall that it had settled down, we were all more or less, I think, dozing, that's not perhaps the right word, I think we were each reflecting on the situation, I don't know that anybody had any real concern about it, except that the water wasn't freezing cold, it was cold but it wasn't unpleasant. We were all O.K, as ..... as we all felt, then without warning I felt a tug on my harness and I was taken, without any warning at all, without any even sound, at terrific speed into what became tumbling white water, it was an extraordinary experience, I, I was travelling very vast speeds, it was if I'd cracked the biggest wave of my whole life. And I continued on this manner, it was just a rushing, tumbling noise deafening experience - - -

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q17 It's 3.49, we'll just suspend this interview and change the tapes.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q18 3.51pm Wednesday, the 27th of January, 1999. This interview between Gibson and Gray continued.

A I'd just like to recap a few things that I recall, firstly, when I was thrown across the saloon of the Winston Churchill I cracked my head, not that I think it affected my judgement but I was bleeding profusely from a large scalp wound and I also believe at that time, one of my, my, I only had the one contact lens in, that may from time to time become unfocused. By the time I actually got in the raft I believe that the second contact lens had become misplaced so that my vision was extremely myopic, though I don't think it made any difference to the situation. I suppose I could best describe myself as being a Mr Magoo in the middle of a hurricane, but I know enough going on to realise exactly what was going on. I most certainly could read my watch and I could somewhat myopically assess situations, so I really don't think it made any difference to my position, except it made me feel somewhat more vulnerable than I would've otherwise felt. I recall that as we just finished that last tape, I was describing what happened when I was

suddenly taken by my harness and carried down a wave. I believe that at the time of this event the raft had probably risen on the face of a very high wall of water and been tipped and then came into the breaking wave. I believe that we didn't hear anything on that occasion was that perhaps the wave itself hadn't broken and only subsequently started to break when the raft came down the face of the wave. The subsequent experience was that of moving in a very, very large surf, in a very, very large wave, at high speed over a considerable distance. I don't recall that I had problem with breathing and I recall that the pressure on my harness subsided and I found myself inside the raft in white water. I recall looking around and there was no-one else in sight. I heard a voice, which I recognised to be John Stanley, and he enquired who's there, or words to that effect. I replied, "It's Gibbo" and John subsequently emerged inside the raft and I assumed that he had in fact been hanging on and thrown outside the raft. I didn't observe how John managed to maintain contact with the raft but he subsequently advised me and you'd have to refer to his statement, that he'd taken a handhold of the pneumatic section which was the same section to which I fastened my life harness. Looking back on what happened I can only conclude that the raft was taken at great speed and tumbled in white water over considerably distance with considerable force and unless one had actually a handhold on, as did

John Stanley, or was fastened by a life harness as I was, that there was no way that anybody could have maintained contact with the raft. We were then in the position we were in white water which was astern, and I was aware of that, because it was extremely luminescent and I could see it and I heard voices, at least two voices, and I don't recall the words they were using but to the best of my recollection was, "Who's there" and "Where are you", or words to that effect. I recall seeing a strobe light being activated, which I immediately recognised to belong to Jim Lawler, because I recall that we had discussed these small strobe lights that we both carried an identical type of instrument. I recall that I activated my strobe light and I estimate that we were at least 100 yards apart, maybe not as much but certainly 75 yards. I recall John Stanley saying, "Gibbo, we can't do anything for the boys, the raft is moving" or words to that effect. I recall that I had already assessed that situation, the wind had taken the raft and we were moving and I was aware from my own experience of attempting to swim and climb into raft how restrictive the life vests were and not even a champion swimmer could have caught up with the raft. The raft at this stage, as I said earlier, was basically a rubber ring, in the shape of square, with the one pneumatic section going across it. This configuration was unstable and tended to twist if one

put one's weight on any section of it and the wind would then get underneath whatever section was raised and flip it over. John and I had this experience on several occasions. I recall that we were tossed during that night until dawn broke, possibly 18 or more times by very large seas in which the raft was spun and twisted. I recall on those occasions that we both maintained a hold onto the pneumatic section. We found that we could, in fact, turn the raft over ourselves so that the pneumatic section, which was the roof support, was on top as it gave us better buoyancy, as it was naturally shaped to be in the air, so we were able to hang onto it, whereas if it was upside down, it'd be under the water and be of little assistance. We also worked out that by bracing our bodies against each other, from opposite sides of the square, we could hold some form of shape to the raft which gave it better stability. John was unable to stand any weight being inserted, being applied to his body, and the only way we were able to position ourselves was by him putting his foot in my crutch or groin, which he proceeded to do for the next 24 hours. He was in extreme pain and we continued with his foot inside my groin, our bodies braced against each other, and our shoulders pressing against the inflatables in the raft. By manoeuvring ourselves we were able to maintain our shoulders or part of our shoulders clear of the water and brace ourselves when a wave came. From time to time we'd be

thrown out of this position and then we'd re-arrange ourselves and climb back in. The dawn came and with the dawn the conditions gradually moderated. We spent most of the day in this position, there was very little conversation and I recall that my major concern from that dreadful feeling when I realised the three other members, Jim, John and Michael were separated, was that unless we were found very, very quickly they were at grave risk. As the dawn came John and I anticipated an early rescue. Our hopes were buoyed by the fact that we knew that an EPIRB had been taken on the second raft. We knew the EPIRB had, the EPIRB had been activated prior to us leaving the Winston Churchill. We had no reason to believe that the EPIRB wasn't with the second raft. And that even if they had experienced similar problems that we had, the EPIRB would be with the raft and with any sort of luck they would be located and then we would be located. The day went on and we constantly asked ourselves the question as to what was happening and my concern for the missing crew members increased as the hours went by. The water was coolish, I believe I was very fortunate in that I was wearing thermal underwear, a Snug, an S-N-U-G, which is fleece lined vest. I also had on a Henry Lloyd buoyancy vest, I had a Henry Lloyd state of the art full jacket and pantsuit on and over that I also had the Mae West jacket. The Mae West jacket on the occasion of the big wave was swept off my body but



remained attached around my waist ..... John Stanley had also lost his Mae West jacket altogether on that occasion. Physically I felt very comfortable, I had no concern that I was going to die. I had great personal distress for the safety of my colleagues but I had no physical apprehension that our situation was beyond hope and I was very confident that sooner or later we would be rescued. The day continued and we continued in this position, I think I hallucinated and saw a lot of ships that weren't there, a lot of vessels came past that weren't there. I recall at one stage a beautiful white albatross alighted and looked at us both and John Stanley remarked that that was a sign of good luck. It wasn't until that afternoon that I recall that we actually heard any aeroplane activity and that was about 4 o'clock. From about 4 o'clock onwards there was a lot of aeroplane activity and we attempted to attract attention and there was one small plane which appeared to pass in our direction, but not directly overhead and it would've been probably 1700 hours I guess at that stage. We attempted to signal it by waving my yellow Mae West because we were very conscious of the fact that the only colours which were available to the air was the top of our wetsuits and that we were in a black rubber ring, that would not be very conspicuous. We were very conscious of the fact that we would be rescued eventually at that stage and our spirits were very high. The afternoon wore on with

more aeroplane activity but nothing in our location. We became aware that there was a vessel, which appeared to be a commercial fishing boat somewhere near us which spotted and we also became aware of an aeroplane which we thought might have been associated with that vessel, but, again nothing eventuated. The evening came on and a helicopter, or was it, no, I think a light plane made a pass over us and appeared to illuminate its starboard lights, I think, by flashing them green at us as we, as he went over and we assumed that that was a sign that he had in fact sighted us. We continued in high spirits but the hours seemed to be indeterminable and there were some very long hours put in. It wasn't until my recollection around about 2000 hours that we were aware that we had been spotted because a helicopter came over, towards us with its lights shining and eventually came overhead. At that stage I had illuminated my personal strobe, it was quite dark, and John was flashing a quite bright handheld torch, so we assumed that between the two of us we caught their attention. The helicopter floodlit us with it's lights, it was a remarkable experience, it was something like Close Encounters of the Third Kind, with this huge ring of light over us and the officer from the helicopter arrived in the water wearing a frogsuit and flippers and he landed in the water within about 10 feet of the raft, immediately swam and sort of leaped over the side of the raft like porpoise and stood up to

announce his appearance and went straight through the bottom again to his surprise. He had a very short conversation with John Stanley, which I think was basically to the effect, "Take Gibbo he's hurt his hands". I forgot to mention that shortly after getting into the raft, after we left the Winston Churchill, we decided we'd put out a drogue, which was part of the equipment, because the drogue attached to the raft itself had failed to function. We put out this drogue which was on a long piece of nylon line and we then observed that when it was activated it became ..... tight and it appeared to be the very real risk that it would cut the vessel in half. I volunteered to retrieve it and I started to retrieve it hand over hand, which I was doing without any problems at all, when the raft apparently caught a wave and the nylon line was taken through my hands at high speed. As a consequence I had very deep lacerations in four of my fingers. My hands were not immobilised, though they certainly were numb, and they continued to bleed throughout the whole of the experience. The condition of my hands was such that it prompted John Stanley to suggest to the winchman from the helicopter that I should go first and so I donned the harness with the officer next to me and we lifted clear of the raft and then to my amazement we were then dragged for about 40 yards through the water, like a big trout on the line, with him on top and me under the water, that was an

experience I wasn't quite ready for. But eventually we broke free and I was taken on board the helicopter and sat down inside. The noise in the helicopter was quite deafening, it was very difficult to make oneself heard, I recall that John Stanley was then winched to safety. I recall I was very, very concerned to advise the crewmen of the helicopter of the position with the three missing raft members that was Jim, John and Michael. To that effect I desperately tried to strike up conversation with the boys who were pretty busy handling gear and it was very difficult to get someone in my opinion, but it was probably only a matter of minutes, to actually take down the details that I was trying to get across. Eventually I found someone who I was able to describe that we had in fact lost the boys at about 2.30am the previous morning and if they were to calculate the position where they found both rafts and back track, given wind directions they should be able to get a very good approximate of where the three boys were still in the water, so that was my concern. I'd felt that I'd got that message across and someone had taken some notes and we continued into the base where I alighted from the helicopter.

Q19 Then you were taken to Pambula Hospital that night?

A We were taken by ambulance to Pambula Hospital.

Q20 And treated for your various injuries?

A Treated, treated for injuries and the following day, I think late, early, early that morning in fact airlifted

to Canberra Hospital.

Q21        Yep.

A        From Canberra Hospital I was subsequently airlifted to Royal North Shore Hospital.

Q22        O.K. Just a couple of things to clarify a few things. Can you tell me if the Winston Churchill had previously been in the Sydney to Hobart, the boat, the boat itself. Are you aware, that's all.

A        Yes, I think the Winston Churchill had been in at least 12 Hobarts.

Q23        O.K.

A        From, almost the inaugural race, I think.

Q24        Right. Are you aware of the age of the Winston Churchill approximately?

A        I think the vessel was built in 1942 but John Stanley would certainly know.

Q25        O.K.

A        It was either 1942, I think the first race was in 1945, or '43. I think it's 1945, 'cause I think the 1995 race was the 50th anniversary, that's three years ago, so it was, I think it was built 1942.

Q26        O.K. Now so far as winds, are you able to estimate the winds when the boat sunk in the seas? The speed of the winds.

A        The wind speed I would say was, I was aware it was 50 knots at least.

Q27        All right.

A        As far as the seas were concerned I can only judge by

experience with the life raft itself and from what happened to the vessel.

Q28 Yes.

A I have no knowledge of the size of the wave that hit us.

Q29 Yes.

A Which Winning informs me it was higher than the mast of the vessel and the vessel was 52 feet long. I assume the raft, the mast was at least 70 feet, so, I think we're talking about waves in excess of 12 to 13 metres.

Q30 Yes. And so far as supplied in the life raft, medical supplies, flares, food, water, were there any supplied in the life raft?

A Yes, there was a, there was a kit bag with gear in it.

Q31 Right. Are you able to tell me what gear was in there?

A Well, I was aware that there were some flares - - -

Q32 Right.

A - - - there was a mirror - - -

Q33 Right.

A - - - there was a packet of fish hooks.

Q34 Right.

A - - - and I'm not really aware of the other gear.

Q35 Was there any fresh water on board do you know?

A There was very some small capsules of water. I recall that we opened several of those.

Q36 O.K.

A Very, very small. I'm talking about almost test tubes.

Q37 Right. Now, are you able to tell me the type of

batteries that were in the Winston Churchill.

A I should imagine, I don't know, but they were heavy duty.

Q38 Right.

A Possibly three.

Q39 Now, in your life raft there was yourself, John Stanley, Mr Bannister, Mr Lawler and Mr Deane, is that correct?

A That's correct.

Q40 Are you able to tell me when the last time, approximate date and time, that you last saw Mr Deane?

A Yes, I last saw Mr Deane on the occasion of the wave I described earlier - - -

Q41 Yep.

A - - - which I put between the hours of 12.30 and 2.30. I'd say it was closer to 2.30 than 12.30.

Q42 And that was the date of the 28th?

A That's right.

Q43 27th.

A 28th. That was the morning of the 28th.

Q44 What was the, you mentioned the small incision, how was that made in the raft?

A That was made using a knife.

Q45 O.K. Now, is it the case, how small was that incision, do you recall how small that incision was?

A Yes, I, I don't think it was more than 6 inches.

Q46 Right. Now, when you say that the raft overturned and the the canopy became smashed or whatever and there was

a bigger rip in the base of the life raft, do you recall that? Was that as a result of that incision becoming bigger?

A I can't answer that.

Q47 Was there an EPIRB in the actual life raft, are you aware?

A No, no.

Q48 Now, with regards to the life raft, are you able to tell me if they are a sort of permanent fixture on the Winston Churchill or are they a hired vessel?

A Can't answer that. They were stored in the main saloon.

Q49 Right.

A You'd have to speak to Richard Winning.

Q50 Yep, that's fine. Can you tell me sort of approximately how much time it would've been from the first time you saw water coming in through the boat to the time that she actually sunk?

A Maximum 20 minutes.

Q51 O.K. Now, are you able to tell me what type of life jacket you had on, sort of describe it to me?

A Well, I had a Henry Lloyd buoyancy vest on, which is a waistcoat which has pockets of material incorporated or, sections of material incorporated in it, which in itself is a buoyancy vest. It's similar to the one that was used by a Hobart yachtsman that was rescued by a tanker, I think, several Hobarts prior to that. He survived.



Q52 Right.

A On a similar, he was in a similar vest. In addition we all had a yellow buoyancy vest which is similar to that one sees on ferries.

Q53 Right. O.K.

A I think you describe them as a Mae West.

Q54 So far as harnesses are concerned, can you describe the harness that you mentioned to us that you tied - - -

A Yes, the harness I used was a harness which actually comes with the Henry Lloyd gear.

Q55 Right.

A So the actual body harness is incorporated into the jacket and the two, the actual two sections of the harness clip together in the front of the jacket and it's to that unit that you can then attach the actual line itself which has a hook or a fastening on each of the line. The line itself is about probably two metres in length.

Q56 Right.

A And it was that attachment, that extra line, that I believe I was the only person on the raft that took their's in the raft with them. I imagine that some of the other crew members had a similar safety harness incorporated in their jackets but I don't recall that anybody actually had taken the harness on the raft.

Q57 Right.

A I had the two ends of the harness secured together so they were just a loop which I didn't consider

constituted any danger to myself and for whatever reason I took it I don't know but it was a lifesaving decision in retrospect.

Q58 Could you explain to me what, "douse the staysail" means?

A Yes, it simply means that we lowered it.

Q59 Right. O.K.

A The staysail, I should comment, is the smaller of two sails.

Q60 Right.

A Winston Churchill was what we call a cutter rig, where the four triangle V boat has an outer stay and an inner stay. The outer stay carries the larger sail and the inner stay, which can be dismantled, carries the inner sail. It's that small inner sail on the inner triangle which we call a staysail.

Q61 Right. O.K.

A The storm jib, in fact, is attached to the main shroud, so we, we had dropped the staysail and set the storm jib, which was smaller again than the staysail.

Q62 Right. Now, can you describe the weather, the seas and the winds at the point of rescue?

A Yes, they were considerably abated. I think they were probably in meteorological terms probably better than slight, I don't think there was a, there was a swell running, there was a little breaking water but very little and relatively speaking they were, they were, one wouldn't say calm, but they were, compared with

what we'd been through, it was, it was, there was no concern whatsoever.

Q63 Right. So far as Mr Bannister, Mr Lawler and Mr Deane, the last time you saw them were they in, in life jackets?

A Yes they were.

Q64 Right. O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q65 Just a couple of quick questions. Have you participated in any way in life raft drill at all, or have you in fact deployed a life raft prior to going out and seeing the operation of them at all?

A No.

Q66 With the particular life rafts on the Winston Churchill when they came up on deck, were they in fact in a valise or were they in a hard fibre glass casing? That you can recall?

A I can, I think one was in a valise and the other one was in a hard casing. But I wouldn't like to be a 100 per cent. Richard Winning can answer that, he can identify the type and make.

Q67 O.K. And you're saying that the construction of the raft was made up of a number of tubes, pneumatic tubes as you, I think were your words, which, the, the walls on the, the sides on the, on the raft, a square section of the raft, how many tubes or how high was that, would've been off the surface of the water, once inflated?

A Well, to the best of my recollection over 18 inches, possibly two feet.

Q68 And was that a single tube or was that made up of a number of tubes?

A Well, it couldn't have been a single tube I doubt it, to look at it was a series of tubes but I don't believe that they were separate, I think it was, it had corrugated appearance and I suggest it probably was corrugated.

Q69 O.K.

A I'd be very surprised if they were single tubes. To the best of my recollection they were corrugated, there were probably about three or four corrugations. Each corrugation being about, say, 6 inches to the next corrugation and maybe four of those would make up two feet.

Q70 So could you say it was made up of a number of tubes which were all either sewn or glued together?

A Well, I wouldn't say that. I'd describe it as basically a tyre, square in shape, with corrugated walls to it. That's how I'd describe it and part of that enjoined by a pneumatic tube which had a, I guess a diameter of no more than perhaps 6 inches, which formed the support for the roof canopy, so it came from the walls from the opposite sides of the square at an angle of about 45 degrees and then there was a flat section, so, it was shaped like the roof of a house but instead of coming to ..... at the top it, it

started to ..... on each side and then there was a flat section.

Q71 And that was the section that you in fact attached your lifeline to?

A That was the section I attached my lifeline to. That was the section on which we supported ourselves once the raft had disintegrated. That was the section which John Stanley secured a hold. I'm not aware that there was any other part of the raft on which one could secure a hold.

Q72 Now, with, with the floor of the raft can you recall the make up of that. Was there any supports or was it a single sheet of rubber or was it a dual rubber?

A The floor was a single sheet.

Q73 And once that started to disintegrate as you were saying through either the cut and the force of the tumble, did you find that that had any bearing on the structure of the raft at all?

A Yes, the raft lost its integrity, the floor obviously provided some stability for the outer circle and without the floor it became more flexible. As I described to you before, if one put the body weight on one section, it would have a tendency to twist and in fact the air would get underneath the other section and flip the whole thing over.

Q74 That's as a result of the floor being disintegrated?

A Exactly.

Q75 Right. So, you, you feel that if the floor would be in

one piece that maybe that might not have been so that the raft could possibly have been still maintained its integrity and shape?

A I think the raft would have maintained its integrity and shape if the floor remained intact. In answer, however, to where I think you might be leading me, you can stop me if you like.

Q76 No, go on.

A The problem with the raft was once it became upside down, I was not aware, and I don't think any, that John Stanley as a survivor is aware, of any way in which in those conditions we could've righted it. The harness line between the vessel and the raft had snapped and obviously that system was designed so that at a certain pressure that line would in fact tear off and in fact that worked, otherwise the raft would've gone down with Winston Churchill.

Q77 Yes.

A So that system worked but once that line had gone, I'm not aware that there was any other line which one could've used when one exited from the inside of the raft, in order to right the raft. In order to exit from the raft, one would've had to abandon one's buoyancy vest, it would be quite difficult and dangerous in my opinion to attempt to manoeuvre the raft with the buoyancy vest, because it restricted mobility and in fact if a wave caught you it would take you away from the raft, so, whoever was going to go

outside would have had to abandon their buoyancy vest. Once they got outside the raft they would have had to have something to hang onto, there were scantling lines on the raft, I assume around the raft and I think that an inspection of the raft will probably verify that's so. But to my knowledge they were not heavy lines in terms of heavy I mean they were not in heavy diameter, they were fairly thin. In my opinion if anybody had gone outside the raft and one of those large waves had taken the raft, and one had had hold of one of those scantling lines in your hands, in my opinion, it is highly unlikely that you could've maintained the hold, because the forces were extreme and I think you would've either ripped your hands apart or lost it altogether. Had he gone outside the raft and we discussed this, there was, there was a discussion of, we were upside down, in my opinion for at least three-quarters of an hour, we assessed it, there was a debate about it, we knew that we had to do something and the obvious thing to do was to right the damn thing. But the mechanics of righting it, because it was rectangular, it was large, and I wasn't aware that there were any lines in which one could, first of all climb up on the side, then secure some sort of grip and I would've thought from my experience from righting skiffs and catamarans, you actually need a line to the other side to pull and I'm not aware that there was any such line. There was no hand hold and the bottom the

floor, that's the bottom of the raft, was a sheet of rubber which was wet and slippery with no handhold. I don't know, but it's my educated guess that it is possible to right this type of raft from the outside in possibly anything but the smoothest of conditions, if you are lucky, but I would have to see it demonstrated.

Q78           Yeah.

A           And it was for those reasons that this very experienced crew, with John Stanley, with literally a lifetime of sailing experience, probably one of the most experience sailors in Sydney and a world champion in his own right. Jim Lawler, with some 15 years Hobart, a registered surveyor with the American Board of Shipping, surveying ships of unlimited size, these are the guys appraising the situation. This, this was not a, this was not a group of amateurs - - -

Q79           No, no.

A           - - - this was a highly experienced educated decision that we had to do something and my very inexperienced situation was, assessment was that to go outside that raft in those conditions was extremely life threatening and that was the statement that I made.

Q80           Yep.

A           And it seems to me that the decision to do what we did, did not have an alternative, I am very confident of that in those circumstances, I don't think there was an alternative available to us.

Q81           And you're talking about the cutting of the floor of



the raft?

A The actual decision to get air into the raft.

Q82 yep.

A Had there been a one-way valve in that raft that we could've unscrewed, I think the five of us might have got out of it alive, because once the conditions abated, I feel that we could've perhaps righted it. The people inside the raft were not in a position to exert any righting momentum.

Q83 Mm.

A One actually had to physically hop out and climb onto a wall of the raft, in some way to lower that section and raise the other section so that perhaps the wind would flip it over and the people inside just remain in a neutral buoyancy situation not to impede it. And my opinion would be that possibly because the raft was square and not circular that the problem was compounded. I think a circular raft, as I understand the other raft was, and that raft in fact, Richard Winning, did in fact right not less than three times by himself, and I think the reason he was able to do it, I frankly don't know, ..... circular too, it was of a smaller dimension.

Q84 Mm.

A But I think the physical size and dimensions of this particular model was such that was just not on. That's my understanding.

Q85 And the, and the, the canopy of the raft you say also

just started to disintegrate?

A That's correct.

Q86 And do you think that was caused by what?

A Well, I think the fact was that once the raft was tumbled in these waves and there was water moving through the floor, or through the roof, the forces I'm talking about were the forces that dislocated John's hips, cracked his ankle, that took me with my harness over a 100 metres at speed. I mean the forces were quite difficult to comprehend.

Q87 Yep.

A But they were such that material would just be blown apart and that the five of us stayed together in the raft for the time we did, is something remarkable.

Q88 Yep. When, when the five of you were standing in the canopy when the raft had turned over the first time and you were all standing up on the canopy, obviously there's an entrance and exit from the raft, where was that in position to the body of water, was that outside, to the side, to the left, to the right, was it in fact where the ocean was, in fact, was, or was it open to the elements?

A Is this with the raft upside down?

Q89 Upside down.

A With the raft upside down it was quite irrelevant as to where the opening was, because it really didn't matter. The raft in fact was being moved through the water as the wind and waves hit, because it was square, it was

rotating, so the - - -

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q90 The time is now 4.34. This interview is now suspended for change of tapes.

A .....

Q91 Sure. No problem.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q92 4.43pm this interview between Gray and Gibson continued.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q93 O.K. Mr Gibson, what I'm basically trying to establish is when the raft was inverted and you five fellows were, were inside the raft, what condition was inside the raft at that particular time?

A The conditions in the inverted raft were that we were basically in the nature of a swimming pool, which was enclosed by the floor of the raft, so that there was there a section of air of possibly 18 inches and possibly two feet of the outer walls but the section dipping into the floor of the raft which was collecting water as the waves broke over it and forming a external puddle compressing down and the inhabitants, the five of us were floating around in that area, there was some support for our feet from the pneumatic section, which in the righted position held the canopy clear of the raft, which I described earlier, and so, that is that

U section of rubber that I described which then became the bottom of the raft. The actual canopy itself which was bright orange and of light construction and clearly used as a spray protection gave no support. The raft itself being square was drifting and at the same time rotating in the wave conditions. The aperture in the righted position was situate in the middle of one of the sides of the raft, like the entrance to a tent, and it, it was obviously on the bottom, it was of no consequence in our current position, because it was well underneath our feet and to one side and made no impact at all on the stability of the raft or of our situation, it was just a non-event.

Q94 O.K. Well, that, that covers my questions fully, thank you.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q95 Is there anything you'd like to say, any opinions, any ideas you've got in relation to the event or situation you were in?

A Well, as you gathered, have some concern about the raft.

Q96 Yep.

A Five men got into the raft in extreme conditions and I believe that Jim, John and Michael - - -

Q97 Would you like to stop, John? Interview suspended at 4.47.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q98 4.48pm. Interview recommenced between Gray and Gibson.

A The, what I was saying was that looking back over the events, I believe that Winston Churchill can lie on the bottom of the Bass Strait in peace. It was an immensely solid vessel. It was probably one of the sounder vessels that went in the race. I believe the forces that broke up the vessel would have broken up practically any other vessel in a similar situation in the race. The damage that I observed to the bulwarks was consistent with us being rammed by a vessel of similar size amidships. It was quite inspiring. The mast I observed and particular the tension on the forestay when we continued sailing indicated to me that the mast itself had not moved in any way through the bottom of the vessel and the amount of water that I observed in the bilge did not indicate to me that there was a, although we were making water, that there was actually a hole as such. My understanding of mechanics and expert opinion would have to consider this, would be that the process of forcing those ribs in at the top sent forces down through those ribs to the lower sections and that are planks ..... towards the bottom of the vessel which caused us to make water. In my opinion, the amount of water we were making was such that the chemical means or bucket means would not have been able to cope with it and the vessel was ..... In my very inexperienced opinion all

crew members including the three deceased showed extreme seamanship and I have subsequently discovered that we were not in a position to give latitude and longitude by reason of the destruction of the maps and logs and also the single side band radio equipment. I've been told that a personal EPIRB, which was activated also malfunctioned. I'm also told that the EPIRB on the second raft, that is the small one, the aerial snapped during a roll of that raft and for those reasons that EPIRB did not function. These estimations will come from the other members of the crew but they all add up in retrospect to establishing that in my opinion the actions of all crew members and the way in which we left the vessel was carried out with great seamanship and skill and my last recollection when we were in that upturned raft of the five of us were that we were in a situation which was forced upon us by the design of the raft, where there was no alternative but to make the incision, and it may well be that experts will say that that was the wrong decision and there was an alternative. But in those conditions at that time of night with our limitation and knowledge, I believe that was the correct choice. But that will be a matter for expert opinion. In my opinion the whole question of rafts has to be reviewed, that three men have died having got into the raft, and having survived what we did survive in those conditions for a period of from, say, 4.30, when we got in the raft, to my estimate,

which is closer to 12, 2.30 than 12.30, but certainly we survived for not less than eight hours, until we were separated indicates to me that the raft did it's job, the crew did it's job, the seamanship was there, and we would have eventually been found the following morning. The reasons why an aerial on the EPIRB was constructed so that it could snap and limit its effective range is something that the manufacturer should have to take on board, that an aerial on an EPIRB would not be of a ..... connection and capable of withstanding any form of flexibility is just to my absolute amazement.

Q99 Mm.

A The fact that the EPIRB in that situation was not effective and I understand there was some 17 or more EPIRBs activated during that occasion, which again caused concern and that the resources were being stretched to the limit. But in my opinion the sad truth is that in all probability, notwithstanding the mountainous seas and not withstanding the conditions, in all probability Michael, Jim and John may have, if my estimates are right of, say, from 1.30 to 2.30, they may have made it till dawn and if the EPIRB on the second raft had been transmitting they may have been fished out of the water. The water temperature was 18 degrees. My body temperature after 30 hours was 34 degrees and I had thermal gear and I swim all year round, so it wasn't the water temperature that was

likely to be fatal. My understanding is that John Deane, Michael Bannister and Jim Lawler had all grown up in skiffs, where we're used to being upside down in boats. They were all good swimmers and they have all had experiences young men in the surf, and with their lifejackets I would be very surprised and the coroner would have to tell you, from an examination of Michael and John's bodies as to whether or not death arose by reason of drowning or for other reasons. But I would be very surprised if they drowned during that period but they may well have because the seas were quite horrific. I frankly don't know. But I think what beat them was the elapse of time and there was so many factors going ..... that although we weren't able to get a latitude and longitude away, we knew we had activated the EPIRB which in my simple understanding was almost the same because that was transmitting to a satellite our position.

Q100 Mm.

A And if that was being picked up as I assume it was it didn't matter very much what we'd given our latitude and longitude which may or may not have been out there, because the EPIRB was on the second raft and we were never more than possibly two kilometres further away.

Q101 Mm.

A The amount of drift that took place should be noted by you, but I understand that we drifted in excess of 50 kilometres and I think our position when we went down



was possibly 20 miles due east of the coast in the area of Mount Imlay and certainly south of Eden and I think it's called, a position I've called, Green Cape where we actually went down and I think we were picked up some 90 miles east of Eden, so that'll give you some idea of how much speed the raft was making through the water. So that once anybody became separated from the raft for any reason it was likely to give rise to a fatality. Now to my knowledge the raft had no internal mechanism for securing bodies. Now, we now know that John Stanley tore the tendons in his hip and fractured an ankle during the very early stages of the raft and that in itself was extremely life threatening and disabling. We know the bodies were tumbled around but nobody was tumbled through that canopy that you describe and lost in itself is a miracle. So I would say that in those conditions, whatever the design of the raft will be, there will be a tendency for it to roll because they were surf conditions and whoever designs a raft in those conditions can assume that it will roll and what has to be put in place is that it's designed to do just that, that the encumbrance in the raft should be secured or be able to secure themselves, that they should realise that in fact if it rolls it's O.K. and I think it's ... starting points that you'll be looking at. But where the raft became lethal, as I described earlier, was that it put you in a position where if we hadn't had a knife to make an aperture we

would've been forced outside the raft and again I don't know with what consequences.

Q102 Yes. Where, just one very quick question is, when you went to retrieve the drogue initially, I don't think we mentioned actually whether you got it back on board or not because it was released and cut through, the line cut through your fingers. Can we just go back to that briefly and what happened with the drogue?

A Yes, well, this is a drogue that was part of the equipment in the kit bag and when we realised that the drogues on the raft itself appeared to have malfunctioned, a decision was made to employ that. When it was engaged it became bar tight across the body of the raft and there was some concern if we swung or twisted, we had a, like a very, very dangerous piece of equipment that could cut or damage the raft or people.

Q103 Yep.

A Did we retrieve it. I attempted to retrieve and was doing so, obviously without allowing for the fact that if we got caught in another wave, whatever slack I'd maintained would be taken away.

Q104 Taken away.

A So I received very deep rope burns to my hands as a consequence of that, it was, in retrospect a bloody stupid thing to do and we should have cut it, but, you know, that's how it was.

Q105 Yeah, but, the drogue was then still attached to the raft?

A The drogue was attached to the raft - - -

Q106 Yep.

A - - - the drogue was cut through my hands, it then released, it then took up tension, and then itself snapped.

Q107 O.K.

A And it took off.

Q108 Yep.

A We didn't cut it.

Q109 O.K. Thank you.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q110 O.K. The time is now 5.00pm. This interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED