

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Angus Cameron at Moorabbin Airport on Thursday, the 1st of July, 1999. Also present, seated to my right, is Senior Constable David Upston from New South Wales Water Police. The time by my watch is now 25 to, 10, 10.35am. For the purpose of the record, Angus, could you just please state your full name?

A Angus Cameron.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A 27th of August, 1975.

Q3 Your current address?

A 12 Nott Street, East Malvern, 3145.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Pilot.

Q5 O.K. As I've explained to you Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and in particular, your role in search and rescue during that incident, and in particular a, an incident which occurred where the, a vessel was misidentified as, as possibly being the Winston Churchill when a position was given? O.K. Do you understand that?

A Yeah.

Q6 O.K. Now if we could just start by, if you could explain what your flying qualifications are?

A My flying qualifications are that I'm a commercial pilot, grade 1 flight instructor with full instrument qualifications.

Q7 O.K. How long have you been flying for?

A I've been flying since 1992.

Q8 O.K. And how long have you been employed here?

A This is my third year of service.

Q9 O.K. And what's the name of the company that employs you?

A General Flying Services.

Q10 Right. Now if I could take you back to the 27th, 28th and 29th of December, were you in fact involved in all 3 days?

A No, I was only involved on Sunday, the 27th.

Q11 O.K. I'll take you back to the 27th of December, 1998. Can you explain to me what your role was on that aircraft?

A My role was drop master.

Q12 O.K. What does that entail?

A O.K. Drop master is, basically it's the chief of the back of the aeroplane, if you like, responsible for looking after the other crew member and if there's any despatching of, of supplies or provisions from the aircraft, that's my job to coordinate with pilots - -  
-

Q13 O.K.

A - - - on that front.

Q14 Now what sort of things can be dropped from the aircraft?

A We can drop S.A.R. . . . . buoys, we drop smokes, we drop rafts and well, at the moment we use pad systems and we also use heliboxes.

Q15 O.K. Now on that particular, or during that particular incident how many crew were in the aircraft?

A There were four crew.

Q16 Right.

A Being two pilots, one drop master and a dispatcher.

Q17 O.K. And what was the serial number or the, or the registration of that vehicle - - -

A That was - - -

Q17 - - - that aircraft?

A - - - Sierra-Alpha-Romeo.

Q18 O.K. And that was set into action by AusSar?

A Yes.

Q19 O.K. Now I believe that you had some, a fair bit to do with communications during that sail operation?

A Yes, I was on the marine radio.

Q20 O.K. Now can you tell me of any communications you've had with any yachts that you recall?

A With any yachts?

Q21 Mmm.

A The only yacht that I had communications with directly was Sword of Orion - - -

Q22 O.K.

A - - - who we were tasked to, to find, and we only found him when he was within his immediate locality and I received a Mayday call from him.

Q23 O.K. And did you have direct conversation with someone on board that vessel?

A I did, yes. I was able to establish the number of people on board, the nature of the injuries and the nature of their distress. We were able to establish that while there was one person overboard, there were no, there was no imminent danger of the vessel sinking at that time.

Q24 Right.

A We also established that there was nothing on board that we could drop to them that they didn't already have. They already had provisions, they had life rafts. We had nothing on board that we could drop to them.

Q25 O.K. Were you aware of a man overboard situation on the Sword of Orion?

A Yes, I was aware of it.

Q26 And do you recall any conversation in relation to that?

A Not directly, except establishing the fact that he was overboard and he'd gone overboard some time previously that I wasn't able to determine at that time.

Q27 Right. Now was that information, or did you send any of that information on to AusSar?

A That information was passed directly to the pilot in command of the aircraft.

Q28 Right.

A And what he did with that information, I don't know.

Q29 O.K. Now if I could take you to a situation where you were tasked to search for the Winston Churchill, is that correct?

A That's correct, as I understood.

Q30 Can you go through that for us?

A Well, I was told by the pilots that we were to be tasked to a position where there was a possible sighting of the Winston Churchill or the last report of the Winston Churchill, that wasn't made explicitly clear to me. When we were, when I was told that we were at that location, I was informed by the pilot in command that there was in fact a target there.

Q31 Right.

A And I was told to vector a tanker that was in the area to that target.

Q32 O.K.

A Now I believe that the tape has, is a record of me saying that that's the Winston Churchill.

Q33 Right.

A I, as, as we arrived at that location where the Winston Churchill was meant to be, we had no description of what the vessel was meant to actually look like. I couldn't see, at this point I can't see out the front of the aircraft - - -

Q34 Mmm.

A - - - so I couldn't see the target or anything like that. I was told that the target was there - - -

Q35 Yeah.

A - - - and the assumption that we made as a crew was that it was the target we were looking for. So I may have used the words, Winston Churchill, when I did vector that tanker.

Q36 O.K. Did you in fact see a vessel, a yacht - - -

A No, I - - -

Q36 - - - in that location?

A I only probably saw something fleeting out the side of the - - -

Q37 Right.

A - - - the, ... in the back of the aircraft I was fully harnessed, well, I had the life, the full suit on, full helmet, there's fairly restricted - - -

Q38 Yeah.

A - - - visibility back there. Visibility was extremely low, the turbulence was extremely high.

Q39 Mmm.

A It wasn't really my specific job to be looking at that vessel at that time.

Q40 Right. So it was just an assumption that you made - - -

A It was - - -

Q40 - - - in the circumstances?

A It was an, it was an assumption that was - - -

Q41 Based on information that you'd been given?

A - - - based on information I had been, I'd received from the pilot of the aircraft, yeah.

Q42 And you weren't in the position to make, you know - - -

A I couldn't make a positive identification of the vessel, no.

Q43 That's right. For a number of reasons, that includes information on the boat itself - - -

A That's .....

Q43 - - - that that's where it'll be?

A Yeah, we didn't, well, I wasn't aware.

Q44 Yeah.

A I don't know whether the pilots were, I wasn't aware that we were even looking for a wooden boat - - -

Q45 Yeah.

A - - - which I believe it was.

Q46 That's fine. O.K. Now how many, how many hours were you involved in the incident, flying, so far as take off, you know, for the whole day? I mean, were you in the aircraft for 8 hours - - -

A Oh, I was - - -

Q46 - - - at a time or 20 hours or - - -

A We were in the, we launched out of Moorabbin, it would've been mid afternoon and we arrived back late evening, 9.00 or 10.00 o'clock back at Moorabbin. The actual search time, I, I was involved in the, in the entire search that day.

Q47 Right.

A I was never not, well, I'm sure it's a matter of record  
- - -

Q48 Yeah.

A - - - how long the aeroplane was up that day - - -

Q49 O.K.

A - - - and I was in the aircraft for all the time that  
it was up that day.

Q50 Did you at any stage pilot the aircraft?

A No.

Q51 O.K. Now so far as searching equipment, binoculars and  
that sort of thing, are they the only things available  
to sort of look for vessels and - - -

A As far as visual searching goes - - -

Q51 - - - visual searching?

A - - - binoculars were available, but they were next  
useless - - -

Q52 Right.

A - - - because of the turbulence.

Q53 Right.

A It was impossible to put them up physically to your  
eyes because they would, you know, take your eye out,  
just about.

Q54 Yeah.

A Once you actually we're looking through it, obviously  
the shaking of the aircraft would've been much  
magnified as well, so it was impossible to - - -

Q55 Right.



A - - - to actually make any sort of effective search using binoculars. And as far as other visual searching methods goes, we use a sort of a sawtoothed secatic sort of eye motion to try and catch - - -

Q56 Right.

A - - - any targets out there at all.

Q57 Right.

A There was nothing else available to us in the back. The pilots would've had the homer.

Q58 Right. Now how many search and rescue operations have you been involved in?

A Oh, approximately somewhere between 12 and 20, some, over, over 12, I would think.

Q59 And is this the first time you've been involved in a multi target type situation?

A Yes.

Q60 O.K.

A It would be, yeah.

Q61 As far as the turbulence, can you describe that to us, what it was, I mean, can you relate that to sort of the layman, so far as being in the aircraft?

A Yeah, it, I'd probably even suggest that it might be worth your while looking in the back of the aircraft - - -

Q62 Yeah.

A - - - if you hadn't already done that to see where my station was. The turbulence itself was fairly severe at times. We weren't, it's a fairly congested little

situation in the back of the aircraft. I was wearing a, a full helmet and a number of times I would've, I struck my head on the, the, both sides of the fuselage.

Q63 Mmm.

A I was trying to keep some sort of log of positions and informations, information that was coming through from the pilot.

Q64 Mmm.

A That was almost impossible to do. I ended up, pieces of paper were useless. I had to end up writing on a, a rigid helibox, rigid cardboard box about that big.

Q65 Mmm.

A Even that was impossible at times. So written logs were, were very difficult. I had information coming through from the, the flight deck back to me from, through the crew intercom as well, also trying to monitor the marine radio, so communications were also very difficult. Even just staying in the locality of my station, just keep talking on the radio was, was very difficult.

Q66 Right. Now so far as searching in those conditions, you would say very difficult?

A The most difficult I've ever been involved in. Mmm. I've probably been on three or four oceanic based searches and that was the most extreme sea, sea state -  
- -

Q67 Mmm.

A - - - I've ever been involved in.

Q68 Mmm. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q69 When you're looking out of the aircraft is it, and, and trying to view from your station, did you at all see any life rafts that were away from yachts, just drifting freely?

A I don't recall seeing any, no.

Q70 With the, in those conditions, how did feel that, picking up any type of life raft? Do you feel it would be difficult under those conditions?

A It would depend very much on the colour of the life raft itself. It was extremely difficult to see any hulls, full stop. I would rate the chances of seeing probably a bright orange life raft as not likely but not impossible - - -

Q71 Mmm.

A - - - but very difficult, certainly.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q72 Now have you got any suggestions in relation to future Sydney to Hobart from a search and rescue point of view, from your point of view as a pilot and - - -

A I, as a search and rescue pilot I couldn't really say anything 'cause I, I'm not really involved in that side of things.

Q73 All right.

A As a drop master, look, the only, the only thing I think that, well, I mean, obviously it would've made things easier if we'd known right from the start a, a

good description of the target we were searching for in Winston Churchill. Another thing that was, was difficult was searching for multiple beacons with, there were so many beacons going off, things like that. And, I, well, while I've got no actual suggestions of a solution, it was very difficult coordinating the, what, the information I was getting from the aviation radio - - -

Q74           Yeah.

A             - - - and correlating that with what I was receiving on the marine channel, a lot of radio congestion and things like that, you know, tie all those things in together. It was difficult, while I can't see any immediate solution to that problem, it's just one of those things.

Q75           Did you at any stage hear the Mayday from the Winston Churchill - - -

A             No.

Q75           - - - on the radio?

A             No, I did not.

Q76           O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q77           Just, just rehashing on one, on one question, with the, the communications that you had with the, with a person on the Sword of Orion, the captain of your aircraft has, has given us a position where you dropped two, two beacons.

A             Two S.A.R. . . . . buoys.

Q78 Two S.A.R. . . . . buoys. And in your conversation with the skipper of the Sword of Orion, you can't recall any time that he said that the person went overboard?

A I didn't, no, no, I did not note. He, he certainly didn't give an actual time that he went overboard - -  
-

Q79 All right.

A - - - that I can recall.

Q80 Mmm.

A That I can recall. No, I, I can't recall him - - -

Q81 Mmm.

A - - - giving a time.

Q82 O.K.

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Q83 All right. Anything, anything further you'd like to say? Any ideas, views, anything else you'd like to tell us about?

A No, not at this stage.

Q84 O.K. That's fine.

A O.K.

Q85 The time is now 10 to 11.00. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED