

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q1 The time is now 3.52pm. This is an electronically recorded interview between Plainclothes Senior Constable Jason Woods and Kristy McAlister at the Queanbeyan Police Station on Saturday, the 5th of June, 1999. Also present is Detective Senior Constable Walpole. Kristy, as I have already explained to you, Detective Walpole and I are making inquiries in relation to your involvement during rescue operations conducted for the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. I'm going to ask you a number of questions about that matter. Do you understand that?

A Yes, I understand.

Q2 Do you agree that prior to the commencement of this interview I told you that I intended asking you further questions about this matter?

A Yes.

Q3 Do you agree that I also told you that my questions and any answers that you gave to those questions would be electronically recorded on audio cassette as the interview took place?

A Yes.

Q4 Do you agree that I also told you that at the conclusion of the interview you would be given an audio cassette copy of the interview?

A Yes.

Q5 For the purpose of this interview, what is your full name?

A My full name is Kristy McAlister.

Q6 And just for the record, can you spell your surname?

A M-C-A-L-I-S-T-E-R.

Q7 O.K. And your date of birth?

A The 24th of the 7th, '68.

Q8 Your current address?

A Number 9 Gratwick Street in Gowrie, ACT.

Q9 O.K. And can you just detail for me your occupation?

A I'm a paramedic with the ACT Ambulance Service.

Q10 And with that, what qualifications do you hold?

A Paramedic qualifications. Sorry, what do you mean by the question?

Q11 What studies have you undertaken to obtain that - - -

A Sorry, I have an Associate Diploma in Bachelor of Health Science as an ambulance officer, and three years training to become a paramedic.

Q12 O.K. And where are you currently based?

A With the ACT Ambulance Service, we don't have set stations, yeah.

Q13 And do you have any relationship to the Southcare helicopter unit?

A Yes, I'm one of 13 paramedics employed on the Southcare helicopter.

Q14 O.K. And can you just detail for me then your qualifications with respect to that?

A Well, basically I just work as a paramedic doing aero-medical retrievals, which is patients between, from one hospital to another hospital, and what we call

primary admissions, which is doing our normal on-road duties, except that we fly to the drop instead of driving to the drop. It's just your normal paramedic work.

Q15 And you've received some sort of specialised training to conduct those aero-medical - - -

A Yes, we undertook four weeks training of which three weeks was in a classroom learning medical procedures that we had to undertake to work on the helicopter and one week of winch training.

Q16 And how long have you been employed in these duties?

A I've now been employed on Southcare for just over six months. It became operational on the 1st of October, 1988.

Q17 O.K. And how long have you been a paramedic?

A I've been in the ambulance service for eight years and I've been a paramedic for five years.

Q18 O.K. O.K. I'll just take you now, it's my understanding that you were involved in rescue operations conducted over the 27th, 28th and the 29th of December, 1998. I'll just take you now firstly to the 27th of December.

A M'mm.

Q19 Are you able to just, for the record, explain what happened on that day from the moment you started your shift and where, right through till when you stood down?

A We started our shift at 8.00am at Fyshwick station, it

was our first day shift from a four day break. We started the day as we normally do by checking our car. We then went out to the Southcare base where we undertake the procedures of checking our gear and the helicopter equipment. At some stage, I can't tell you times, I'm sorry, but we were out there doing our check and at some stage we got called to go to Jervis Bay to a gentleman with spinal injuries, so we flew to Jervis Bay, treated that particular, or met New South Wales Ambulance officers on the scene, helped treat and transport an elderly gentleman to Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney, with spinal injuries. We were then flying back from Sydney to Canberra and got put on standby for a major prang at West Wyalong, and we were some 20 minutes out of Sydney by that stage. It was really, really strong headwinds, I remember that, 'cause it was taking quite some time to get back to Canberra. And Alpha Alpha called us up, which is Air Ambulance in Sydney, and stood us down from the prang in West Wyalong, and we called them back and said, well, why. And they said because we're sending Careflight, and we responded by saying, well, we're 20 minutes out of Sydney, Careflight's still in Sydney, why. And they said, disregard, we're sending Careflight. So, we thought, O.K, no worries. And then we were having a bit of a joke in the plane about, not plane, helicopter, the pilot will kill me. We were having a bit of a joke in the helicopter about, well,

yeah, they can go to the prang in West Wyalong, we'll get something in the Sydney to Hobart, thinking we're very funny, and about 10 minutes later we got called up by our comms to say that they wanted us to go pick up all our wet water gear from the base in Canberra refuel and head to Victoria, because, this was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, because there was a yacht in distress in the Sydney to Hobart. We landed at Canberra Airport, I can't tell you what time, I mean, it is all recorded.

Q20

Mm.

A

But I, I don't have that information with me. We landed at Canberra Airport. Michelle and I got the gear that we had to grab and the pilot refuelled and helped the pilot refuel, I suppose, I'm not quite sure. And Michelle and I were doing our thing and I had to have some Maxilon and so did she, because we were quite sick, we were all feeling a bit ill from the flight back from Sydney because it was really rough. Anyway, we got back in the helicopter, started flying down to Mallacoota, which was where they told us we were going. About, sometime into the flight they called us up and said disregard, we don't want you to go to Mallacoota anymore, we want you to go to Merimbula, do a hot refuel at Merimbula and head 70 nautical miles off the coast, there is a yacht there VC Stand Aside. Helimed are also being responded. There are 12 people on that yacht that need to be winched

off. So, we landed at Merimbula and did the hot refuel. Michelle and I got changed into our wetsuits while the pilot or the crew was refuelling, yeah, the crew refilled, because the pilot the helicopter was still going. So, Michelle and I got into our wetsuits in the back of the 'copter then and once we refuelled, we took off. When we got out to the Stand Aside, Helimed were in the process of winching. We waited, somewhere in the vicinity of 10 to 15 minutes, just doing tight circle work, waiting for them to finish winching however many people they could get. In that time I became really sick again because it was just so rough and we were doing really small, tight circle work, and by the time Helimed had finished there was still four people remaining on Stand Aside that needed to be winched.

Q21 All right. And what happened then with respect to, Helimed was winching?

A M'mm.

Q22 And what happened the after that? They finished their
- - -

A After they finished theirs, they then took their eight people back to Mallacoota. Delphy, our crewman, gave me a brief on this is what you're going to do, this is how many people we've got. As he was giving a brief about what was going to happen, a huge set of waves came in and flipped the life raft over and one of the gentlemen ended up in the water, so he was obviously

our priority winch, because he wasn't hanging onto anything, he did have a safety vest on but that was all. In fact, he was the first person I winched out of the water, yeah, because he was our priority winch and he was the only one out of the four people left that wasn't wearing wet weather gear, but he did have a personal vest on. So, anyway, we had the talk, he was our priority winch. I went down. As soon as I hit the water, one of the huge sets of about 20 metre waves actually broke on top of my head, so it seemed like I was under the water for ages, but I just lay there looking up going I know I'll get out of here eventually, I'm attached to the helicopter, but anyway, and eventually, you know, I did get pulled up out of the water. And then I made my way over to where the sailor was, and it took a little bit of time getting the strop over his head, but eventually I got it done and we went up into the helicopter. Once he was safely inside, Delphy the crewman asked, "Are you ready to go back down again?" And I'm going, "Yeah. Yeah. No worries", give him the thumbs up signal and I went down again. And once again, it's very hard to explain, but once again the waves were that big that they were just flipping the life raft over all the time and there was two men in the life raft, by the time I got down onto the water they were both hanging onto the side. I went to one gentleman to put the strop over his head and as I was doing that, the other bloke's going, "No, no,

don't take him, take me up. I can't hang on anymore", you know, very distressed this bloke was. And I said to him, "Look, I'm sorry, tough luck", you know. You're gunna have to wait, we're not gunna leave you here, but this is who I'm taking, I've made up my mind, I've got the strop half on him. You're just gunna have to hang on. And with that, I continued doing what I was doing and another set of waves came in, and somehow or other, I don't know, the winch cable got caught, I don't know, around my neck. Not around my neck, but all up, just flung around and I dunno, yeah. And then we started to winch up and the winching cable got caught on the life raft because another set of waves came in and actually flipped the life raft around the winch cable as the crewman was winching us up into the helicopter. We were put straight back down into the water and as I was going towards the raft another set of waves came in and unflipped it from the cable, so from that we went straight up into the chopper. And after that winch I said, "Michelle, do you want to", 'cause I was a bit scared shitless by that stage, I thought, I mean, you know about the vest, but it's because, it's like, if they cut this cable, I'm fucked basically, because I didn't have a vest on, we're wearing black wetsuits, we didn't have our EPIRBs, no-one would ever have found us.

Q23 Mm.

A Yeah. But anyway, everything went well.

Q24 All right. Well, just before we go any further, I'll just get, can you just describe for me what the conditions were that day?

A They were extremely rough. By the time we got there from the time that we started winching, Helimed left, the conditions had actually got worse. Everything was black, the sea was black, the clouds were black, there was heaps of rain, I mean, it was just, it was miserable. The waves were huge. I did not know that they were 20 metres until I got back into the helicopter and was looking down when Michelle was doing her winching, just how, how big it actually was, yeah.

Q25 And have you experienced conditions like that before?

A No, no, that was the first sea rescue that Southcare had ever done.

Q26 And what was the wind, did you have any sort of gauges as to the wind speed or anything like that?

A I think the pilot said the wind was 60 knots, yeah, 60 to 70 knots, 'cause that's what he told, well, yeah, I'm sure that's what he told us.

Q27 And I'll just take you, what was your first observation of this yacht Stand Aside, the condition it was in and you know, where the crew et cetera all were?

A O.K. When we first got there - - -

Q28 M'mm.

A - - - there was, I don't know how many men still on board the yacht and several people inside the life raft being winched out by Helimed. By the time Helimed had

left, there was one person remaining on the yacht and three people that were in the life raft, but one got thrown out just as I was about to winch.

Q29 And what was the condition of the yacht? Could you see damage sustained to it or -?

A The yacht, it had no mast and it had no cabin, I mean, there was nothing left of it basically except the deck, yeah.

Q30 Did there appear to be any lighting or anything like that?

A Not that I can recall, no.

Q31 Do you recall any radio communications coming from the yacht?

A No. We were speaking with the pilot from Helimed, but not with people from the yacht.

Q32 So, to your knowledge there was no power, there was nothing?

A To my knowledge, no.

Q33 Coming from that yacht?

A No.

Q34 O.K. And can you explain to me then the, how the yacht and the raft were positioned and how that was all set up?

A The raft was tethered off to the yacht by probably, I don't know, a 20 metre piece of rope. I mean, it wasn't, it wasn't an overly big distance. And what they were doing was pulling it in, people were jumping in and then it was floating out, yeah.

Q35 And with respect - - -

A Sorry, with the raft, it was, after I had trouble with it getting caught round the cable, when Michelle did her first winch and she had all her trouble with the same thing, the raft getting caught around the cable, she actually cut the raft off so it went and the last gentleman, he actually tied himself off to the boat before he jumped in the water and she got him.

Q36 O.K. Yeah. We'll come to that. And then as far as, you were the first person to be winched down?

A Yes.

Q37 You were the first?

A Yeah.

Q38 O.K. And what was the case, was there a set priority of persons you sort of, like, you assess the persons there to work out a priority for who should go up first et cetera?

A The priority, as I've said, was the gentleman that was in the water because at least the other two were attached to the boat - - -

Q39 M'mm.

A - - - and they were in a life raft, or hanging onto a life raft. The gentleman that got winched up first was the one that wasn't attached to a life raft, he was floating in the water. His only piece of safety equipment on was a buoyancy vest.

Q40 And then for the second winch?

A The second winch it was either, either, I mean, they

both had wet weather gear on, they both had buoyancy vests on, they were both hanging onto the raft. The wasn't, medically, one wasn't injured and the other one was, I mean, all the four people remaining, none were injured, so, yeah, when it came to the next, second and third person, it was just whoever you got to first. yeah.

Q41 Yeah. And so the person that you winched up second
- - -

A M'mm.

Q41 - - - would have been of equal priority to the person that was requesting to be winched, is, that was your assessment?

A That, yeah. It just happened, like, to get to where they were, like, I wasn't placed right beside the raft.

Q42 Mm.

A You actually had to, I mean, the conditions were that rough that you'd get plonked in the water. One minute you'd be in the water, the next minute you'd be above the water and then the next second you'd be under the water because it just depended on the waves and that sort of thing. So, when you came up and orientated yourself, it was just a matter of getting to where the life raft was and this gentleman happened to be the one, 'cause they were sort of on opposite sides of the raft and I came up and went to the one which was closest to me.

Q43 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q44 And you mentioned before, you were being dunked under the water. Do you recall the period of time that you, you found yourself submerged?

A Even though it felt like quite some time, Delphy the crewman said it was only about 10, 15 seconds.

Q45 And it was distressing?

A No, that wasn't particularly distressing 'cause I knew I was attached to the helicopter, so I thought they will pull me out again eventually, I know they will, yeah.

Q46 And you mentioned also with respect to the two winches you conducted, you have a piece of equipment called a strop?

A M'mm.

Q47 Is that right?

A Yes.

Q48 Can you just explain how that works and the difficulty you had with that?

A The strop comes in two sizes. On our helicopter we've only got the smaller sized strop, so that if you've got a large person, and especially in the case of sea rescues where they may have one buoyancy vest on, I think one of the gentlemen that, Michelle did or one of the boys did, had three vests on, like, one on top of the other, and so the strop goes through their arm, over their head and on the other, through the other arm. There are several ways that you can get it onto

them, I chose to do it that way. And you can get them to lift their feet up and bring it up under their body that way, or you can actually unclip it and then clip it back up around them. Given how rough the conditions were, I think that would have been quite difficult to do. Michelle found it quite easy to do it the way she did it, and even though it might have taken a little bit longer on my first winch, it was quite easy the second time around, or easier the second time around, because the man was actually hanging onto the raft while I was doing it, he wasn't floating around in the water.

Q49 So, any difficulties you had, it was attributed to the bulk of the jackets they were wearing. Is that correct?

A Yeah. But like I said, there is a larger size strop
- - -

Q50 Mm.

A - - - but we weren't carrying it on our helicopter at that stage.

Q51 Is it available to you?

A It is available, but we still don't have it.

Q52 O.K. And as for then, just going back to the gear these persons were wearing.

A M'mm.

Q53 Well, firstly, do you have any experience with what sort of gear they should have been using or -?

A Given that I get incredibly sea-sick and have

absolutely no desire to go sailing, I would have no idea what sailors would normally wear, no.

Q54 O.K.

A But I should imagine that they would wear wet weather gear and have buoyancy vests on, particularly in a race like that.

Q55 O.K. And so, did they seem adequately fitted out for what they were doing?

A The first person that I pulled out of the water didn't have any wet weather gear on, but the other three all did. They all had buoyancy vests on and, I mean, if I was them I would have had personal EPIRBs, because in the case of the man that got thrown out of the raft or flipped out of the raft, he wasn't attached to anything. If he'd have got dragged off and he was our priority winch, you know, unless you've got some way of

Q56 Mm.

A - - - of tracking them, he would have been lost very easily. I mean I, I don't know what the requirements are on, on boats in terms of personal EPIRBs, I've got no idea.

Q57 O.K. And during your two, the two winches you conducted, the, was there at any stage that you feared for your own personal safety, or you, your life?

A Yes. During the second winch when the cable became fouled on the life raft, because I thought if they cut this cable, then I will probably die, because I didn't have my own buoyancy vest on which carries our own

EPIRBs, sea-dye, night and day flares and our, at that stage our wetsuits were all black, so there's no way they would have found us.

Q58 O.K.

A Well, but as it turned out the, the cable did become un-entangled and, yeah.

Q59 All right. Now, you then stated that after the two winching, the winches you conducted, did there seem to be any problem with the winch at all, other than the fouling of this line, is there any other winch problems?

A At that stage we didn't notice any problem with the winch. Michelle then took over and I went back on to the wander lead in the aircraft and I sat at the door watching her do her winches. On the first winch that she did the cable became, the winch cable became fouled around the life raft again. And I was like, like, sort of leaning out the door watching all of this happen, and she got hit in the head, I didn't know at that stage it was with the cylinder that keeps the lift raft afloat, but she got hit in the head and sort of, I don't know, I can only tell you what she's told me, sort of, shook her head and, and said, you know, "What happened?", and then the, the bloke that she was rescuing said, you know, "You've just been hit in the head with the, the cylinder that keeps the life raft afloat". And, and she wasn't as lucky as I was in that the life raft flipped back over and disentangled

itself, she actually had to cut the life raft free of the winch cable because it got wrapped around quite a few times, and when she came up from that winch the cable was quite kinked from that happening and at that stage we only had one bloke to winch, and, we couldn't leave him there - - -

Q60 Mm.

A So, so he tethered himself off, jumped into the water, tethered himself off to the boat, jumped into the water and she went down and did the remaining winch.

Q61 O.K.

A And then after we flew back to Mallacoota, we dropped everyone off and we were met there by New South Wales Police and New South Wales Ambulance. They then asked us to fly back to Merimbula to get more fuel. When we were flying to Mallacoota with our four people that we'd just rescued, there was the distress call from, I think it was the Sword of Orion with the man overboard. And when we were flying also back to Mallacoota the distress call from the Winston Churchill also came through over our, the helicopter radio. So, we knew that there was at least two other boats that were in trouble and had people, Winston Churchill stated they had nine people getting into life rafts and I, I, I think it was the Sword of Orion that said they had the man overboard. But, anyway, at that stage there were two other yachts calling up as we were flying back to Mallacoota. So, we dropped these people off and they

said, there was no, there was no fuel, refuelling availability at Mallacoota, so we had to fly back to Merimbula. When we were at Merimbula they wanted us to refuel and go straight back out and do more SARs. Given the fact that Michelle and I didn't have our own buoyancy vests we were not happy, we were happy to do SARs but not to winch again, given what had happened but, upon checking the winch cable when we landed at Merimbula, it was decided that it was US it wasn't capable of taking any more winches, so our engineer was called and he was sent down to replace the winch cable, which he did.

Q62 So, are far as any problems with winches it was just more so that, an unfortunate incident with the raft, or there was a general mechanical fault, fault or - - -

A It wasn't a mechanical fault, the winch was working, working perfectly, it was the fact that it had become kinked - - -

Q63 From that incident with the raft?

A - - - from the incident with the raft. And that broke strands which of course weakens the - - -

Q64 All right. And are you aware of - - -

A - - - the cable - - -

Q64 - - - the, the procedures, or have you been trained in the procedures for getting people off yachts? Or was it more - - -

A Yeah.

Q64 - - - say, youse assessed it as you got there?

A Mm. We had been trained to do that, sorry, I have to have a drink, as part of our training for the training for the helicopter, we practise doing water winching out of Lake Burly Griffin, which of course, there's no resemblance to the conditions that we were doing it in, but that's just the way it goes. The basic training even though it was on flat water, is exactly the same for, as you would do it in the sea, so the basic training did get us through it, it got us through really quite well. We also as a part of training did high line transfers which is from helicopter onto a boat, so, yes, we have been trained in getting people off boats as well. That was all covered in our training.

Q65 O.K. And so, the procedures as you saw it there of attempting to winch a person from a yacht to a raft, and raft to the helicopter, that would be the preferred method, method, you'd say?

A I think you have to weigh it up on the day.

Q66 Mm.

A Yeah. I, I, I mean I, it's not, I don't think there is a preferred method, you have to weigh up what's going on on the day.

Q67 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q68 And you've covered then the fact that Michelle made two winches herself after you - - -

A M'mm.

Q68 - - - and Michelle being Michelle Blewitt?

A Michelle Blewitt, yes.

Q69 Yeah. I'll, and actually I might have been amiss to cover this before, but onboard your helicopter at that day was yourself, Michelle Blewitt and - - -

A Ray Stone was our pilot and Mark Delph was the crewman.

Q70 O.K. And then what were the medical conditions of the persons you winched?

A None of them had any medical condition, I mean, one of the, I mean they were certainly exhausted and, and probably feeling quite cold by that stage, but they didn't have any cuts or breaks or, the people that were injured got winches up first with Helimed.

Q71 O.K. And so you've, you've told me that you flew back to Mallacoota and then to Merimbula - - -

A M'mm.

Q71 - - - and it was there that you, you were stood down for the evening for the winch repair?

A No, what happened was, we were waiting for our replacement crew to come from Canberra, which consisted of a fresh pilot, crewman and two fresh paramedics. In the meantime we had been tasked to do a SAR, because they were still looking for the Winston Churchill and I don't, they were definitely looking for the Winston Churchill - - -

Q72 A SAR being the search and rescue?

A A search and rescue. As I said, our winch had been made US so our, the engineer was being sent down to

replace the winch cable. This was at about, I don't know, 7.30, 8 o'clock at night, so, we don't do night time winching anyway. And just as we were more or less getting back into the helicopter our replacement team arrived, thank God. And they jumped on the helicopter and did the SAR.

Q73 M'mm.

A They, excuse me. That was, consisted of Simon Lovell, the pilot, Matt Smith was the crewman, and David Dutton and Steve Mitchell were the paramedics. They didn't find anything on that particular SAR. Michelle and I were sent back to Canberra with Ray and Delphy on a fixed wing plane. And we got back and were stood down at midnight that night. We were then back on the plane at 8 o'clock the next morning to go back to Merimbula to continue on from what the boys had done that night. At 5 o'clock that morning apparently they came across the Midnight Special of which they winched five people off.

Q74 O.K. We'll come - - -

A Um -

Q74 - - - to the 28th shortly. Just in relation to the 27th, is there anything you wish to ask, Detective Walpole?

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE WALPOLE

Q75 Were you injured, Kristy, as a result of the two rescues you effected or the, were, were you injured? You - - -

A The only - - -

Q75 - - - mentioned something to your neck?

A Yeah. I had a, it looked like a burn mark on my neck, but I - - -

Q76 And it wasn't something that needed any treatment?

A It wasn't something that needed treatment and, yeah, no, I was fine.

Q77 And, I'm just curious, how, how far from the, from the yacht was this first fellow that was in the water, the first bloke winched out? How far had he drifted from his boat?

A At all times, it, it wasn't that far, because at all times the yacht and the life raft were in my eyesight.

Q78 Yeah.

A Yeah.

Q79 Have you ever seen weather conditions like these?

A No. No, not at all.

Q80 And was there anything with the benefit of hindsight, is there anything that could have been done better on that day? Is there anything that the sailors themselves could have done that may have made your task easier or was it simply too many variables in with the conditions?

A I, look, I don't know the experience of these sailors that we rescued. Given the conditions on the day, I think that they probably did everything they could have done. The last sailor that we winched, who was the one that was left on the boat, he had no life raft to get

into, I mean he remained calm the whole time, he was, he was a really, you know, level headed bloke. The gentleman that I left in the water in preference to taking up the one that I did that was just lucky that day, I mean already the gear half on this other bloke before this other one started saying take me, take me, and stuff, it's like well, you know, look I can't, I'm sorry. Yeah, you just make up your mind and do it. They, as I said, that other than the first gentleman that I winched up they were all wearing their wet weather gear. They all had personal safety buoyancy vests, I, I don't know what other gear they carry in their yachts to be able to answer that effectively.

Q81 Right. That's all.

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q82 All right. Well, I'll take you now to the 28th.

A M'mm.

Q83 And I'll just get you to run through for me what your involvement was that day.

A We started work at 8 o'clock that morning. Out at the airport they flew us down on a fixed wing aircraft to take over from the boys that had flown down the night before to take over from us. We got there I don't know, 9.00-ish in the morning, something like that. I, I don't know what time we got there. Anyway, we got there, they boys were just cleaning up the gear in the helicopter because they'd winched five people off the Midnight Special. Michelle and I got changed into our

wetsuits and thereafter we were sent on a search and rescue because at that stage there were still a number of boats and people missing.

Q84 O.K.

A The first part of our search took, I think three hours, and the second leg of the search, we came back, had lunch, took two hours, something like that, yeah.

Q85 And when you say a search, and how were these searches conducted?

A AUSSAR gives the pilots a designated area for which they want searched. The pilots have a variety of search patterns that they use and to be perfectly honest, I can't tell you what that is because - - -

Q86

A I'm, I'm there to look, not to fly. I think on sea stuff they go like this, but I'm not, but not that that helps you because it's on a tape, but there is a word for it

Q87 But there was in, we were informed earlier that being like a creeping line search - - -

A Yeah. That's - - -

Q87 - - - is that what you're looking for?

A - - -

Q88 And - - -

A I, I don't know if that's what it's called, yeah.

Q89 And, and just to the first one of those you conducted, you said that was for three hours and that was for what, do you know what the mission of that was?

A

With the amount of EPIRBs that were going off, like, we came across several life rafts and the EPIRB would still be going off but there'd be no-one in them. So, there was that much activity out there that you couldn't really have a pinpoint or AUSSAR couldn't pinpoint where it was all coming from and, and if in fact someone had been to whatever EPIRB was going off or not because there was that much activity out there no-one knew. That's why they had designated areas for each particular aircraft to search. On our search we came across I can definitely recall one empty life raft that we came across, and we came across the Business Post Naiad in the morning, and there was a body on the deck, at that stage, 'cause we had no idea that people had already been winched off that boat, and so we were flying around and there was a person lying on the deck and Michelle said, "There's someone on the deck, someone on the deck, I think I saw his hand move, but he's just lying there", and so they, the pilot circled around again and in the meantime was calling up 'cause we'd got the name of the boat, the Business Post Naiad, Ray, our pilot called up and said, "We've come across the Business Post Naiad, there is a person lying on the deck", and the, whoever it was came back and said, "No, negative, that boat has already had people winched off it, the person on it is dead", you know, "Disregard, keep going on your search". It wasn't until later on that day when, when we were

talking with the Careflight crew that Michelle mentioned that, you know, she'd seen the body on the Business Post Naiad and she thought that his hand had moved and they said, "Well, we did the winches off the Business Post Naiad", and Michelle said, "Well, you know, that's O.K, then, you know, you, you obviously went down and made sure that he was dead", and the, they said, "Well, no, we didn't, we took it from the word of the people that we winched up that he was dead", and, and then there was quite some discussion with Michelle and myself about how we didn't necessarily approve because they'd been out all night and if somebody's hypothermic, which they would have been, given the circumstances that you were in, it's quite possible that they could look dead but not be dead, so Michelle was just, you know, saying, "Well, I, I personally think that they should have put hands on and made sure that he was dead instead of just taking it from the word of the crew that they winched up", but also having said that, we don't know the experience of the crew and, and, and who was on the boat.

Q90 And what were the conditions that day, the 28th?

A The storm had lessened somewhat. It was actually the skies were quite clear. The seas were still rough but not as big. Yeah.

Q91 Was the wind still blowing?

A (NO AUDIBLE REPLY)

Q92 Or was it more so like a, just a rolling sea - - -

A It just - - -

Q92 - - - or was it a breaking sea

A It seemed quite choppy, yeah. That's what I would have described it as, I couldn't tell you how big the waves or anything were that particular day.

Q93 But it was calmer compared - - -

A It was - - -

Q93 - - - compared to the day before?

A Absolutely. It was much less than the seas had dropped, I mean the wind must have dropped because it was, in terms of flying there was no turbulence like there was the day before, it was really smooth flying so it was much calmer.

Q94 All right.

A The, I mean the sun was shining, the day, the day before it was black, it was - - -

Q95 And you, and you state that during this first search you conducted you come across a number of rafts or just one raft?

A I, we definitely came across one, but, that I can remember, but I actually think that there might have been two that we came across.

Q96 And you said that they were empty in your - - -

A Yeah. 'Cause we got down quite low and had a look inside - - -

Q97 O.K.

A - - - and I mean they were empty, yeah.

Q98 All right. And in relation to this body from the

Business Post Naiad, it would be correct to say that you're, yourself and Michelle are distressed with respect to this lack of confirmation?

A I think Michelle was probably much more distressed about it than I was. When, when AUSSAR came back and said, "No, disregard", that, yeah, in fact what they said was, "Disregard, there are two dead bodies on that boat, they, they've already winched off that particular yacht", and I was quite happy with that, because we didn't know any different until we got back to Merimbula and were talking to the Careflight people that afternoon and Michelle had mentioned that we, you know, we'd come across the, the Business Post Naiad and, and with the man on the deck and she thought she'd saw his, his hand moved, and, and the Careflight gentleman then said, "Well, we were the ones that winched off the - (Tape beeping) - is that O.K. O.K?"

Q99 Yeah. I'll just note the time being 4.35pm. We'll just suspend this interview for the purpose of changing tapes.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q100 The time is now 4.37pm, on the 5th of June, 1999. This is a continuation of an interview between Senior Constable Jason Woods and Kristy McAlister. Now, I'll just take you back, you were just relaying to me some

information in relation to the conversations you were having with the Careflight personnel at Merimbula.

A Yeah. Michelle was talking to them about the body that we'd seen on the Business Post Naiad and, and they had said, you know, we were the ones that winched off that particular yacht, and Michelle had said, "Right, so you, you confirmed that this person was dead?", and they said, "No, we took the word of the people that we'd winched up that he was dead". That did cause a lot of concern and distress for Michelle because and rightly so, I mean - - -

Q101 Mm.

A - - - I, I personally think it was a very game move. I, I, given that it is our job to do that and to pronounce people dead, I mean that's what we're there for. And, and I would have personally put my hands on and, you know, felt for a pulse, and that sort of thing just to check, I mean if he was hypothermic chances are you might not have felt one anyway, but at least it would have been better than taking the word of people that you winched off the yacht.

Q102 Mm.

A I mean I don't know if there are any doctors who sails on that yacht or, or, but you don't, I don't know the circumstances behind it, all I know is that they never, they took the word of the, the sailors from that yacht.

Q103 O.K. And then I'm told then that you had, you conducted this first creeping line search, you've had

lunch, which is when this conversation's taken place with the Careflight staff - - -

A No. This conversation with the Careflight people didn't take place until our second search was finished in the afternoon.

Q104 O.K. All right. So, then you, so I'll stand corrected. You've had lunch and then you've conducted a second creeping search?

A Yeah.

Q105 And what happened during that?

A We did come across another boat, but they weren't in trouble and I don't actually even know if they were involved in the race, I think they just might have been out on a joy sail, I'm not sure, but they certainly weren't in trouble. And then actually, I don't think that the second search did take all that long, I mean I said two hours but it might have in fact been much shorter than that. Anyway we didn't come across anything on the second search other than one boat which didn't need our help that I can recall. And we flew back in and that was when we were talking to the Careflight people.

Q106 Do you remember the names of those staff that - - -

A No.

Q107 No?

A No. I can't.

Q108 And that would be Careflight based where?

A In Sydney.

Q109 The Careflight crew and it's a Sydney based - - -

A M'mm.

Q109 - - - helicopter, is it?

A Yes.

Q110 O.K. And, and what happened then, had they finished off that day?

A What happened then was they were, AUSSAR was deciding to scale down the search for the remaining bodies that haven't been found. Just as we were leaving that afternoon, there were reports that they'd found survivors from the Winston Churchill in their life raft. That was the first spot that had been found not the second ones, they were found later on that night. So, anyway, we were going to fly back to Canberra in the Southcare chopper, but our pilot needed to get something fixed by one of the engineers so he drove down from Mallacoota and fixed what needed fixing on the helicopter and then we flew back to Canberra at about 8 o'clock that night or something like that I think.

Q111 O.K. Then you finished your duties for that day?

A Finished our duties for that day and they sent another crew back down that morning, like at about, I don't know, on that night shift they sent another crew down.

Q112 Yeah. And just to clarify one thing. Who's AUSSAR?

A AUSSAR.

Q113 Yeah.

A The Australian Search and Rescue Council.

Q114 O.K. And that's - - -
A They, they control all maritime searches.
Q115 Right. And it's, it's basically just a co-ordination
radio unit - - -
A In Canberra.
Q115 - - - is it?
A Yeah.
Q116 From Canberra here?
A Yeah.
Q117 O.K. And then I'll take you to the 29th of December.
A M'mm.
Q118 Actually, before we do, in relation to the 28th, is
there anything you wish to ask, Detective Walpole?
DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE WALPOLE
Q119 Did, on, on that particular day would it be
correct then to say that there was no use of the, no
use made of the winching equipment on the helicopter?
A There was on - - -
Q120
A - - - not by Michelle and myself.
Q121 No, on - - -
A But by the night crew there was.
Q122 Yeah. But during the course of your shift?
A During the course of our shift, no.
Q123 Have, have you had a personal experience where a live
person has displayed deceased symptoms? As in, have
you personally encountered that where someone has been
presumed dead and then found to be otherwise?

A Yes.

Q124 That's all.

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q125 Just on, on the winch issue. You've been winched before in the past?

A In training?

Q126 Yeah. With the, no, with the Southcare helicopter you've been winched before, like, you've been winched down and up, et cetera?

A Yes.

Q127 And on a number of times?

A Only during our training.

Q128 O.K.

A That was, that particular job was the first job where I had performed winching on a particular, well, it was my first real live winching, and it was the Southcare's first water rescue winch.

Q129 Right.

A Since then the Southcare helicopter has gone down to Merimbula to do winch training of which I was a part of.

Q130 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q131 But to your knowledge the, the equipment supplied to the Southcare helicopter is, it, it works?

A Yes.

Q132 O.K. And it works well, it - - -

A It does.

Q133 O.K. And so, any issue with respect to problems with the winch on the 27th or the 28th was more so caused by the conditions it faced on that occasion, was it?

A Yeah. With the winch it wasn't a mechanical failure, it was the fact that the cable had got caught in and then kinked - - -

Q134 O.K.

A - - - and that broke strands.

Q135 And - - -

A Mm.

Q136 Aside of those two days, did you have involvement in the search on the 29th?

A I -

Q137 Of December?

A No, I commenced work at 6.00pm, on the 29th of December, and by that stage they had called everything off.

Q138 O.K. So, to total, to summarise your involvement it was for the 27th and 28th of December?

A Yes.

Q139 O.K. Is there anything further you wish to - - -

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE WALPOLE

Q140 And you were happy not to go out on the 29th, no doubt?

A

Q141 No?

A

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q142 Actually, just one other thing, just to - - -

A By the, by the 28th I was quite happy to go 'cause they'd bought all our gear.

Q143 O.K, then. Just with, with the wisdom of hindsight
- - -

A M'mm.

Q143 - - - is there anything that you could see with, in relation to any, anything over those two days which could be improved or is there any issue that you wish to mention here today?

A All issues in relation to Southcare and the ACT Ambulance Service, they've been resolved and they're the issues that affected me, so, and that's in terms of not having the appropriate gear. I mean, that's all been resolved now, so, in terms of how things could go better for us, I mean, everything's been fixed. I, I've recently read a report from the Cruising Yacht Club giving its recommendations, I'm not a sailor I, I don't, I, I, think there was some good things that have come out of it.

Q144 And just touching upon those issues with Southcare
- - -

A M'mm.

Q144 - - - it, it's, it started when? Its operations?

A It became operational on the 1st of October, 1998.

Q145 And so, and you've mentioned before that this would have been your first, or its first sea rescue?

A Southcare's first sea rescue, yes.

Q146 and so, any deficiencies that's been noted would have

been more so put down to - - -

A They have been - - -

Q146 - - - teething problems, is that right?

A Yeah. Teething problems, yeah, yeah.

Q147 And they've been addressed?

A They have been rectified.

Q148 They have?

A Yeah.

Q149 O.K.

A I mean there was several things that came out of that and ultimately it was a huge learning experience for everyone involved and, and certainly one I will never ever, ever forget, but, what came out of it was really valuable in terms of bettering the Southcare Service because it certainly got a lot of benefit out of the things that were missing and, and as I said, it's all been rectified now.

Q150 O.K. And in relation to your observations of those others that you were working with, is there any sort of commendations or anything you'd like noted for the record with respect to them?

A I mean, I, I can only comment on, on Ray and Delphy and Michelle, I mean everyone did a fantastic job. But, when it's all said and done I mean, you know, you arrived and I was absolutely petrified, and our crewman was looking out the window at the helimed people going (DEMONSTRATES VOCALLY) you know, making all these noises and in the end I said to him, "Look, would you

shut up, you're scaring the shit out of me", and he did, he just shut up. But, I mean if it wasn't for the fact that we had a really experienced pilot and, and crewman, I mean it certainly made our job a lot easier, they were very encouraging, despite the fact that, like I said, I was absolutely petrified and quite airsick as well. Yeah, when it's all said and done you can't go there and knowing that Michelle and I were not wearing the appropriate equipment knowing when you got down in the water thinking things like, if this happens if the, you know, if but maybe, so what, but when you're actually down in the water and you're faced with the position of shit, if they cut this cable I'm going to die, that's when it becomes a reality, and I mean nothing could have changed the fact that we didn't have our gear, it was, it was our choice to go down the wire, and nobody made us do it, and, and given our, our inexperience at the time, I'm not sure that if I was put in that position again whether I would do it, but, I couldn't answer that. But, having done circle work, watching somebody else winch eight people from the seas and knowing that if you don't do it then four people are going to die, it puts an awfully big burden on you even if you know you haven't got the right gear and you're placing yourself in a very - - -

Q151 Mm.

A - - - vulnerable situation which the, Michelle and I did because things did go wrong. And be it luck of the

day, I don't know, we were very lucky to have got out of it they way that we did. And, and as a result of that four, four men survived and that's a really good thing, but, yeah.

Q152 As I said, a good job. Is there anything further?

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE WALPOLE

Q153 Have you got any complaints about any of the sailors?

A No. No. I mean they, given the circumstances that they were in, then one of them was absolutely petrified, that was the guy that Michelle pulled up that I said, you know, "Sorry, you're going to have wait", the other three were very calm, very level headed blokes. No, I don't have any complaints, I mean, and the third one, the one that was distressed, well, that's the situation

Q154 to be expected?

A Yeah. I'm surprised they all weren't like that.

PLAINCLOTHES SENIOR CONSTABLE WOODS

Q155 Anything else?

A (NO AUDIBLE REPLY)

Q156 O.K. The time is now 4.50pm, this interview is concluded.

A

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED