DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Tery Summers at Care Flight Headquarters at Westmead Hospital on Saturday, the 3rd of April, 1999. Also present seated to my left, Senior Constable David Upston, from the New South Wales Water Police. The time on my watch is now 4.12pm. As I explained to you, Tery, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, in particular we've been tasked to speak to people involved in rescues during the race itself. And we'd just like to speak to you today about your involvement in the actual race of last year. Before we start, if I could just get you to identify yourself by placing your name on the record?

A Yes, Tery Summers.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A 16/12/1949.

Q3 And your current occupation?

A Current occupation is a check and training pilot with Care Flight, NRMA Care Flight at Sydney.

Q4 O.K. If you can give me some background in relation to your flying?

A Well I stared in the military in 1969, a military pilot for 10 years with the Australian Army, flying mostly helicopters including instructors course, overseas training, and after the 10 years went on to further

training and checking and training in the civil industry at Bankstown. I started my own checking and training consultancy, and I am contracted to Care Flight on a permanent basis. I have been contracted for the last seven years on a permanent basis with Care Flight.

Q5 O.K. Now if I could just take you to how yourself and Care Flight actually got involved in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race?

A Well I actually went down with the remaining crew members for our crew, that's the paramedic and doctor, to swap over from the Care Flight crew already on scene who were basing out of Merimbula. And that was the, on the morning of the 28th, that involved cross hiring a, a fixed wing twin to get us down to Merimbula, and relieve the existing crew who had been diverted to Merimbula very early that morning at about 3.00am, from Canberra, and they had been the, the previous day crew who, who were, who had been flying the whole time, they needed a crew change and we arrived there at about 10.30, that morning.

Q6 O.K. Now can you take me into any rescues that you were involved with and how you were tasked for those rescues?

A Yes, the, obviously the main tasking centre was set up at Merimbula, and soon as we arrived there, Dan Tyler and the remaining of the Care Flight crew returned, had returned from a position approximately 50 odd miles

east of Merimbula, from I believe the Naiad with seven survivors and we then took over and went straight back into the search area looking for, and tracking down other beacons and other, other boats, including the, Milintinta, which we located 47 miles east of Merimbula, and the Naiad, 45 miles south east of Merimbula. And we were looking at, in fact extracting two remaining bodies off the Naiad, outside of 40 miles the conditions still quite severe with the swell and the, the wind strength, and out crewmen who had still been on duty for the previous 24 hours, looked at the situation and decided that, the risks didn't warrant sending a, a paramedic down on a wire to extract the two bodies in the, in the existing conditions with the mast, halliards and, and wires still swinging around and creating quite a hazard to get somebody onto the, onto the Naiad. So, we re-positioned, we reconfirmed the location and, and then proceeded onto other locations searching for other vessels.

Q7 O.K. Now as so far as the, the Naiad's concerned, do you say that you, did the extraction on the Naiad before the Milintinta or -?

A We did, the first one was a search, and location of the Milintinta.

Q8 Yeah.

A 47 Miles east of Merimbula, my records show me here, that was a launch out of Merimbula at 14.00 hours, and mission complete at 16.11 hours. We took off in the

second sortie, that, I should say that first sortie did also include confirmation of Naiad's position and, and the fact there were two bodies still on the, on the deck. The second sortie was 17.00 hours, completing at 19.46 was an expanding line ahead search which was a tasking from Canberra as the tasking became more organised they were putting us in with other helicopters into grid searches and this was expanding line ahead search from, a bit towards the north, from 20 miles east to 46 miles east of Merimbula.

Q9 O.K. Now, with the extraction of the survivors on the Naiad, there were seven taken off the boat?

A There were seven taken off the boat earlier that morning by the previous crew, that was Captain Dan Tyler.

Q10 All right.

A And that particular flight took place at 07.20 hours airborne, landing at 9.02, in fact my records here show two sorties, the second one was 10.00 departure and landing 12.44, I believe it was the second sortie that they actually winched off the, the crew off the Naiad.

Q11 O.K. Now, with your involvement, did you have any, and winching to be done from your aircraft when you were - - -

A No, we actually didn't have to winch at all, for, for people off any of the ships in, in the days work that we did there, we were mainly locating beacons, tracking beacons down, we found a major problem was we were,

quite a number of time relocating the same beacons, we would be given advice as to search an area where there was a beacon heard, and we would go and locate the same boat that we'd located three or four hours before. Or someone else had already located.

Q12 Mm.

A So this was a major logistic problems and, in the fact that the, it was very difficult, with all the confusion on at that time for Canberra to give us good positive directions as to what beacons should be looked for and what shouldn't.

Q13 All right.

A And furthermore there were some rafts I believe in the water which we ended up, the relief crew the next day, went out and was sinking rafts because the beacons on them were, were just a distraction to the main effort of finding remaining bodies or remaining people in the water.

Q14 All right. Now are you aware of any difficulties which experienced by crews so far as winching was concerned?

A The, I think the, that obviously the, from what I hear and certainly what I've seen on the footage that it was particularly difficult conditions, the previous late afternoon, and, of the 27th, and the, and very early morning of the, of the 28th, because of the extraordinary conditions and so, anybody who was trying to winch onto the decks it was extremely hazardous, and so invariably people we winching to people in the

water, asking them to get into the water, which is a technique we use - - -

Q15 M'mm.

A - - - for them to get into a lift raft tethered to the ship, or the boat, and we'll extract them off the raft, and this is by far the most hazardous way ..... the least hazardous way should I say, to extract people out of the water, in those sorts of conditions, because once you've got a person on the ship, and you've got those sorts of swells, you've got hard object that he's going to bounce off and you've got lines he'll tangle in and, and it's just far too risky to warrant it.

Q16 Mm.

A So, we have spent some time in the last few years working, you know training on this sort of technique, obviously not in those conditions.

Q17 So it's the case that they deploy a liferaft and they hop into the liferaft and one by one they come out into the water

A Yes. One at a time, and that can add a lot of time to, to the, to the search.

Q18 Right.

A On the upside of those sorts of winds, you do have hover power capability that is improved so helicopters not designed to take an extra seven or eight people can in fact take seven or eight people because they're literally flying at 40 or 50 knots or more.

Q19 Mm.

A Which is a much lower power demand on the helicopter when you're flying at the hover at - - -

Q20 Yeah.

A - - - 40 to 50 knots because of the headwind.

Q21 Yeah.

A So you can effectively, you couldn't hover without wind, with those seven or eight extra people on board, but you can because the wind is, is usually out there fairly laminar, it's going around mountains and, except for the swells and that sort of thing it, it can be actually indirectly an aid to getting more people on for, for still having a, a flying power.

Q22 Right. Now what, Care Flight is, correct me if I'm wrong, is it a sort of a critical care type organisation so far as - - -

A Care Flight is a multi role organisation in search and rescue and hospital and primary transfer of patients for the New South Wales Health, and New South Wales Ambulance service, as well we are contracted obviously to, to AUSAR as they require us.

Q23 Right.

A It's a ..... 12 helicopter, 11 seat capability in the back but normally we would have just the, the two medical crew and two flight crew on board and we have stretcher patients capability of four, four patients on a stretcher, and depending how critical those patients are as to whether we'd usually only carry two patients between hospitals, we've got an

intensive care capability for each patient.

Q24 Right.

A So we have two full medical teams, maybe four people for those two patients in the back of the helicopter.

Q25 All right.

A That's about 50 per cent of our work, the other 50 per cent is primary roadside or winching-type rescues and, and this sort of search and rescue offshore for AUSAR?

Q26 So, it would've been the case that AUSAR would've instigated your involvement?

A Yes, AUSAR and they cut alongside ambulance in regard to priority if we, as happened to me only a week ago, was involved in a beacon search and at the same time got a, a Health Department request for a, a secondary tasking for them and we continued with the beacon search because that's, we were already tasked for it so we went away and did it.

Q27 Right. How many machines have you got at this - - -

A Care Flight only has the one ..... 12 helicopter, other tasks are done by air ambulance, ... where we'll take, send out medical teams to, say Broken Hill or somewhere via air ambulance or by road ambulance for local tasking.

Q28 O.K.

A And we have our own road ambulance for that sort of work.

Q29 All right. Now what sort of homing equipment do you have on board the, the chopper itself?

A Standard VHF homing, this is for the, the 243 and 121.5, should I say, megahertz distress, international distress frequency, we find that most by far the majority of beacons are transmitting equally on 121.5 and 243 megahertz and there's gradually a growing number that are transmitting also to the satellite on 406 megahertz, which is obviously a preferred beacon for accuracy of location as far as getting us accurate latitude and longitudes from, from Melbourne.

Q30 Right.

A Sorry, sorry, should I say from Canberra, from AUSAR in Canberra.

Q31 Right. Now, did you have any cause in your sorties to have discussions with any boat crews, any yacht crews by your radio or by - - -

A No. We didn't, not, on, on our particular sortie, by that stage, as I say, when we relieved the other Care Flight crew, the co-ordination in Canberra had got to the stage where we were taking tasking direct from them, sometimes communications were difficult so we've resorted quite successfully to the telephone, direct tasking via telephone on scene from, from Canberra.

Q32 And that's an analogue phone, is it?

A That's an analogue phone.

Q33 Now when you say there was communication difficulties, what, can you expand upon - - -

A In so much that we were working back through the, the radio link aircraft but we were finding that there was

a heck of a lot of traffic there and there was a heck of a lot of confusion obviously on, on, on the radios and so to get clarification on our tasking priorities we'd create a direct conduit by telephone back to Canberra on a couple of occasions and that helped us, as we just sorted out the whole thing from our point of view.

Q34 Yeah. And so far as the conditions are concerned, the seas and the, the, the winds, have you experienced that type of weather before, conditions before?

A No, I haven't, once we got offside 40 miles and I must stress that it was dropping by the hour, the conditions, so it was, it was tolerable but, but risky business, I, when we got there in regard to the, the washing machine effect that the winds and the swell were creating, fighting against each other, the swell was quite substantial but certainly it was suddenly choppy and suddenly there were bigger waves than the previous sets, that's what I noticed on that particular occasion, but again, as the day progressed, I watched each hour go by and it was slowly abating, that was on the morning of the 28th, so it obviously had been quite horrendous the previous night.

Q35 Yeah.

A And that, that particular day it was becoming more manageable but still quite unpredictable for crewmen had to watch out carefully for the people on the wire to, to cater for that, and that's why you would not

risk putting people close to, to boats in those conditions, they had to, they had to go into a, a liferaft tethered to the back of the boat.

Q36 Mm. Mm. Did you at any stage have fears for yourself, the crew and the aircraft itself during - - -

A No. No, we have a, it's, it's a, it's a group effort in regard to these things and we will stand off, in those situations you can always stand off in good laminar air flows up a bit, where you're not trying to do night work over the water and you've got reasonable good visibility at that stage, you can stand off and re-assess the whole thing.

Q37 Right.

A At the end of the second sortie, I was, I'd been doing low level circular expanding searches on response to a request that a fixed wing had seen what they thought was a body wrapped in debris, just under the surface and they got a rough lock, GPS lock, and we did a, what is typically an expanding box or expanding circular search, which our GPS is programmed to cater for with a quite accurate over, overlap of about 200 metres and it took about two hours to do a three mile grid expanding search. This, this pattern low level ingests a lot of salt and moisture into the engines and on the last few minutes of that, this was at 80 miles east of Merimbula, I suffered a, a ..... failure on number 1 engine, it was a gradual failure, it was managed after debating the issues and talking with the

engineer by telephone, I put it into manual fuel flow and it actually stayed intact so I still had that engine on a manual fuel flow and then we flew back to, to Merimbula with one engine in manual fuel, that was the only hazard and in a worst case scenario, that could've resulted in a uncontrolled fire which could've resulted in a ditching, but even in that case we had a top cover above us and we had other helicopters nearby so, plus we were all trained with our own, own gear, so really, the best case, as it turned out, there was no real problem, we just had a governor failure.

Q38 Right.

A And due to massive ingestion of the amount of salt from the mist and the spray of those conditions, we think contributed very much to the governor failure.

Q39 So what actually is the governor?

A The governor is a fuel governor, it just governs the, the engine turbine speed at a set speed.

Q40 Right.

A And it's quite a sensitive item, there's two governors a, on each engine and they both are individually indispensable but we do, in this aircraft, have a manual fuel control ability as well and so that's another way out, rather than have to shut the engine down.

Q41 All right. Pardon me, Tery, you mentioned earlier about the sinking of the liferafts that were floating out there, obviously causing some confusion - - -

A Yes.

Q41 - - - over the period of the search period, did your crew, in fact, sink any of those liferafts?

A No, the second crew after us, which was the following day - - -

Q42 What date was that?

A That was that night actually, Richard Ness was the captain, that was later that night, 28th, 20.00 hours he took off at night, landed back at 2140 and he went out with the express task of locating some of these rafts and sinking them, which I, I'm not sure of the outcome there but I believe the practice is just to drop a paramedic down on a wire and he'll knife the, the rafts.

Q43 O.K. Are they, those positions logged, could you tell me, for those liferafts on, on the paperwork that you have?

A I don't have it on this paperwork, no. I could check with Richard but, no I don't have that here.

Q44 O.K. That's all right. Now the, the radio link aircraft as you mentioned earlier.

A Yes.

Q45 Do they have a dedicated frequency and you mentioned that there was some congestion on that, have you got any other thoughts on that?

A Yes. I, ... is the ..... frequency, and my crewman normally manages that whole side of it and we were also talking on the local VHF

frequencies because we had sometimes us working not above 300 feet and fixed wing working above us at 500 feet and so we were having a lot of, a need to mutually separate for safety, over this one area and so we do that on the local front service, the air traffic control frequencies and then the AUSAR frequency was being used, we were told to report on that, out of Merimbula each time and stay on that one, which we did, but we found there was a heck of a lot of talk along the frequencies, at times it became difficult to get a confirmation of, of what was required from the Canberra via the top cover co-ordination ship.

Q46 Right.

A I found the little bit we had to do with the fellow who was on that aircraft was very professionally done, he was certainly extremely professional how he managed some of the more difficult situations but by and large we found it easier to go by telephone on a couple of occasions.

Q47 Mm. Not being too critical, but do you think a lot of the, the, the chatter was unnecessary?

A Yes. Yes, it was although I, I, when I say unnecessary, there was no superfluous chatter, or, or totally irrelevant chatter, it's just that discipline in it wasn't probably as good as it could've been in a perfect world, but you get people who are fighting to work out what's up and down, what's required, what's the priority as the priorities were changing and every

time we, we would be getting a retasking to go from one area to another because of a sighting, that suddenly creates a whole different prioritising of the resources and it's a challenge for the best of people to cope with that, when you've got all these aircraft upwards of 80 mile out to sea with all their fuel flow problems and their endurance problems and the conditions problems, so in the big scheme of things from my observation, I wasn't phased by it because I thought, well, by and large, they're handling it pretty well.

Q48 Mm.

A A lot of aircraft out there.

Q49 Mm. Would it be the analogue phones that you were using and the subsequent switching off of that system in December, 2000, do you think that that may jeopardise future communication problems?

A I'm not sure, I believe this, this interim system that Telstra is putting in to, to fill the gap there for a lot of the rural people, for instance, on the analogue system, I'm not sure how well that's working. We, ourselves, are holding off for another year, probably, before we get the satellite phone system installed here, maybe in 9 months anyway in our aircraft and the government radio network is fulfilling a lot of our requirements here with their remote transmitters located around New South Wales, but by and large, there's going to be a bit of a grey area for some jobs until we get utilising the ..... system in the next,

possibly, less than 12 months.

Q50 M'mm.

A And, and it's not being helped by the analogue system going offline, no, 'cause really that's a very good system for us.

Q51 Mm. You mentioned earlier in relation to a, a beacon, was it, that was put on the Naiad?

A Yes, a, a, an AUSAR location beacon and that was put on by Dan Tyler's crewman, who was my crewman, to, he came straight onto my shift, Graham Fromberg as the last of the seven people were winched off, as an afterthought he said, "Well, I'll shove that on", and just literally lobbed it into the, into the deck, I think, and that was the last he could do with the view to using it to relocate position.

Q52 Right. Now in relation to weather, were you happy with the weather information you received in your operations?

A Well, we did all our own research pretty well.

Q53 O.K.

A And the way it is now we can bring up pretty accurate weather at any point we want it so we can get a pretty good picture of what it's likely to be like. Merimbula area has it's own local weather, it's quite, quite particular to that area with low cloud and mist on a daily basis.

Q54 Yep.

A And that was a problem on the first day becoming less

on the second day but certainly we watched the early mornings and the late afternoons is when you can be caught with very low visibility, poor visibility and low cloud, but it wasn't a real limitation from the cloud point of view for the search is just the wind and the swell, sea state.

Q55 Mm. Now when you say you get your own weather information, do you get that from the Bureau of Meteorology?

A Yes, from Bureau of Meteorology and we can, we're obviously, we can uplift it from here by fax, get it sent by telephone or by radio as an update for, for the local area down there and there was no real feeling that we didn't have good weather available, mind you, we, we're quite often down in that part of the world and ..... helicopter is all the time getting intimate with actual weathers, so we felt comfortable, we knew the situation with what the weather was going to do.

A Mm.

Q56 So, how would you, from your experience down there, how would you describe the weather conditions, you know, when you were there, I mean, did you ..... - - -

A Well, the sea state, that was on a scale of one to 10, that was up there around the seven and eight, from your limits of undesirability for a, for winching and obviously, out, we ruled out any chance of night winching over water, we won't night winch over water

unless it's a brightly lit vessel that's a substantial size and we have night winched and landed on decks, but invariably they are bulk carriers or container ships, we do that as a common practice at night, but for evacuation of priority patients that's usually the reason, out, to the worst has been 110 miles out to sea, that, that actually was day time but night time it is not possible without ..... auto hover, to safely, we, we don't feel, for our operation to safely to night winches over water but the navy can, they have some very nice equipment, excellent training, we will do it to a brightly lit ship.

Q57 Mm.

A And that's, it's safe in that environment.

Q58 When you say that the scale was on a six/seven, how is that determined, is that determined by your crewmen?

A No, that's a subject, it's assessed on my part

Q59 On your part?

A Yes.

Q60 O.K, then, what's the situation then if, if you have people that require rescuing and you make an assessment that the sea is in fact nine, eight/nine?

A Yes.

Q61 What's the action that you would take then?

A We would proceed to that area, would stage, we'd proceed ..... at Merimbula.

Q62 Right.

A ..... a lot of our marked work and

some of the day work involves going to a reconfiguration point - - -

Q63 Right.

A - - - when the conditions are unknown at the scene.

Q64 Mm.

A Might be a winch in the mountains or wherever and we'll go to where other authorities, police, or whoever are already established there.

Q65 Mm.

A And then we will reassess the, especially for night work.

Q66 Mm.

A From that position, so you're more on-hand to weigh it up and respond in a more timely fashion ..... when conditions improve.

Q67 Right. Now, do you have any comment overall in relation to, you know, from your side of things, or any views that you have or ideas, future?

A From the point of view of making it safer for people who, who take to the sea, I think it's easier for us to find them if, obviously, if they are wearing life vests and wearing good, good colour clothing that's bright, in those conditions it was quite pronounced to us that we couldn't hope to see anybody or rescue anybody unless, a, they were in a liferaft and we could see that fairly sizeable bright red or orange liferaft in those sea states, or they had a EPIRB that was working and we can actually hover, home into within 10 or 20

metres down around 100 feet hover height to an EPIRB so if they don't have either of those things going for them, it's impossible to expect to be able to see them in, in, in the froth and foam and, and poor visibility that's whipped up by these winds and, and that sort of sea state. So I'd recommend strongly that they, they all guarantee they have EPIRBs on their vests as well as the main EPIRB in the, in the ship or the yacht and they carry spare batteries and EPIRBs, they only last 24 hours maximum and, and some distances out to sea, it's not until day two or day three that people are in a position to be, to be found. We've been advised don't activate more than one EPIRB in a group because it sends confusing signals and I can believe that so that also has the advantage of giving a group, who hopefully are still tethered together in the water if they're not at least in a liferaft, extra endurance of their EPIRBs by having one at a time on.

Q68 Mm.

A But certainly, from all of our dunking, water dunking training et cetera, that I've had overseas and that we have here, Care Flight, you, your chances of survival are increased five to ten-fold in these sea conditions if you get in the liferaft because of thermal heat loss, exposure and that's, has to be a priority for them to try and get into that liferaft at all costs.

Q69 So far as, were you required to identify any boats at all in any of your sorties?

A Yes. In particular the Milintinta and the Naiad, I can remember, there was several others, I have the, the details on here, which we identified but in both cases I think they were re-identified.

Q70 Right. Did you have difficulty identifying those boats?

A Yes, in one particular, we were hovering, literally, right down beside it to read fairly small name, I forget the name, one in particular that was, it has masts cracked and, and halyards just floating around et cetera and we had to get quite close to be able to read it.

Q71 Right. So would, it'd be obviously helpful in the future to have some sort of identification on the side of the boat which can be seen from people like yourself?

A Yes.

Q72 When sails are down.

A Yes, definitely on the side of the boat, just, just in larger writing, I think, or on the rear, some, some of those ..... are sort of flush, almost horizontal so you can see vertically down quite easily, you don't have to hover down beside them to see them on the side of the, side of the hull.

Q73 Mm. Mm. O.K, anything else?

A No, I think that's about it.

Q74 O.K. Time is now 4.42. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED