

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

- Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Geoff Bascombe at the Port Lincoln CIB on Tuesday, the 29th of June, 1999. The time by my watch now is 1.30pm. Also present and seated directly opposite me is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police. For the purpose of the record, Geoff, could you just please state your full name?
- A My full name is Geoffrey Robert Bascombe.
- Q2 And can you spell Bascombe for me, please?
- A B-A-S-C-O-M-B-E.
- Q3 Your date of birth?
- A 7/1/47.
- Q4 Your current address?
- A 1 Kemp Avenue, Port Lincoln.
- Q5 And your occupation?
- A I'm a yachtsman. I, I'm retired, I'm retired and I deliver yachts for the fun of it.
- Q6 O.K. Now, as I've already explained to you, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, and in particular some information we received about some caulking that was missing from some planks on the Winston Churchill. We're informed that on the 26th of December you were doing some diving, we'll get into that very shortly, and you came across this particular problem. Now, firstly, if we could start with your

sailing experience?

A I started sailing when I was about 9 years old. Sailed up until I went and joined the navy at 17. Didn't sail for 20 years. Came home in 1984, '83, '84, and have been sailing full time since then. Since about 1990 I have been doing deliveries for, mostly for Adelaide or South Australian people, just delivering their boats wherever they need to, and over that period I've done somewhere between 100 and 150,000 miles.

Q7 All right. O.K, and your experience in the navy?

A In the navy I was a clearance diver, which is the diving branch in the navy that deals with everything from salvage to hull maintenance, through demolitions and all that other stuff, which is not relative.

Q8 Right, and you in fact taught dive classes at some stage?

A Probably for the 12 of, 12 of the 20 years I was in the navy I was somewhere in the instructing role, yes.

Q9 Right, O.K. Now, is it the case that you deliver yachts from Adelaide and, and various other places to Sydney on Sydney to Hobart Yacht Races?

A Yeah. Usually before the Sydney to Hobart I get phone calls from people in Adelaide, could I deliver their yachts because they can't get time off from work to do the race and deliveries as well, so - - -

Q10 Yep.

A - - - I deliver them up there, and then they look after me.

Q11 Yep.

A Take me to Hobart and then I take them home again.

Q12 O.K. Now, is it the case last year you delivered two yachts from Adelaide to Sydney?

A Yeah, I delivered the yachts Rager and Secret Mens Business to Sydney, and part of what I also do is, I do rope work for them and any diving jobs.

Q13 Right, O.K. If I could take you to the date that you left Adelaide to deliver the boats and then your stay in Sydney and then down to Hobart. If you could take us through that.

A Right. I left Adelaide and delivered Secret Mens Business to Sydney. Flew straight back, picked up Rager, delivered it to Sydney. Got there about four days, four or five days before the race.

Q14 Yeah.

A Just spent time working on boats and messin' around down the, down the club. On the morning of the, of the race I went down there early in the morning, probably 7.00, 7 o'clock or something like that. Got my diving gear together and jumped in the water at Secret Mens Business and give their hull a wipe down, smooth, to make sure it was smooth, there was nothing caught on it, no weeds growing or anything like that. From Secret Mens Business I swum up the row of boats up to Rager and scrubbed them, and then went around to Helsal and give them a check out as well.

Q15 O.K.

A They were the, they were three of the four South Australian boats that were there.

Q16 O.K.

A And then that completed my - - -

Q17 O.K.

A - - - my work for the morning.

Q18 Now, if I show you, prior to the interview you did a sketch, plan of the CYCA and the birthings that you indicate here one is the Secret Mens Business?

A Yeah, Secret Mens Business was about half way up. I think that's called B, B arm.

Q19 O.K.

A And I dived there, I then swum up the sterns of the boats till I got to Rager.

Q20 Yeah.

A And then crossed over to the, the next, next arm over - - -

Q21 Yeah.

A - - - where Helsal was, and gave them a - - -

Q22 O.K.

A - - - gave them a rub.

Q23 Right, and it was your intention after cleaning Helsal to, to exit via the slipway?

A Yeah, to get out of the water.

Q24 Yeah.

A The slipway has a nice even slope.

Q25 Yep.

A And I swum down, I left my diving gear down at the,

down at the boats and I swum down to, down to the slipway just with, with, just with the fins. I didn't have a mask or, or any diving equipment with me.

Q26 O.K. If I can just stop you there. Could you just sign and date that particular document?

A

Q27

A The 6, '99.

Q28 O.K. Yep, carry on.

A O.K, and as I swum down that put me swimming past, past Winston Churchill, which was on, on the side of the slipway wall.

Q29 M'mm.

A Where the mast, where the mast repairs are all done. As I swum past I noticed a black line three or 4 inches back from the bow, and just swum over, curious to have a look at it. The colour of the hull was a beigey, light brown colour as I remember, and a light, light colour, and the line stood out as a black line. When I swum over and had a look at it, it was like caulking had fallen out of the, the hull, where the planks joined the stem post. The gap at the end of the planks where it joined the post was probably three eighths of an inch and the depth of the hole was probably three eighths of an inch. This covered an area of approximately three planks. The planks were about 4 inches wide, three to 4 inches wide. The other thing that was visible was from this caulking back towards

the stern of the boat for six to 9 inches was at, at least two, maybe three cracking, small pieces of cracking in the paintwork, just where you could see the planks had moved and the paintwork hadn't. It wasn't a gap at all and the paint wasn't missing, it was just cracking in the paintwork. At that stage there were people standing on the boat and on the wharf. I cannot remember, I'm sure there were three people, but I can't remember whether there was two on the boat, one on the wharf or the other way around. I then yelled out, "This doesn't look too good for a boat goin' to Hobart". Somebody said, "Oh, well, that's just Winston Churchill". Whoever was on the bow of the boat, I said to them, "You should tell your boss about this", and that was basically the end of the conversation. I'm sure the comment about, "That's Winston Churchill", came from the wharf.

Q30 All right.

A It didn't come from the person on the boat.

Q31 M'mm.

A I then swum up the slipway, got out and went and carried on with my own business. Didn't think any more about it.

Q32 O.K, and then it was some days later you went down to Hobart?

A Yep, I went down to Hobart a couple of days after the, after the race started to await the boats, and then down there, of course, I heard what was going on. At

that time it crossed my mind that, gee, maybe I didn't put enough effort into telling people there was something wrong with it.

Q33 Right. So, from your experience do you feel that there is some, some significance between this caulking missing and what happened to Winston Churchill? Is that what you're saying or -?

A No, I, I - - -

Q34 Do you feel bad about - - -

A I, I don't feel, I don't feel that, that I can make a snap judgement like that.

Q35 Yep.

A All I can say is that if it's, if it's a, that it is a possibility - - -

Q36 Yeah.

A - - - that a, that a plank that's exposed like that, with the seas that they obviously had, that we all saw on television, yes, it's quite possible that, that that is what happened.

Q37 Yeah.

A Ah -

Q38 And that would be because the boat pounding?

A With the boat pounding, the amount of water rushing past.

Q39 Yep.

A Just gets in every little corner and starts to work on things.

Q40 Right.

A And, yes, it's, it is a quite possibility. It can start to peel out more, more, more caulking.

Q41 Yep.

A The bigger the hole, it's like a snowball effect, the faster it gets, the bigger the hole the faster it gets, just keeps on going. So, yes, it is a possibility.

Q42 Yep.

A Ah -

Q43 Was that, was that your immediate thought?

A That was my immediate thought when I'd heard that - - -

Q44 Yeah.

A - - - when I'd heard that she'd filled with water and gone down, yes.

Q45 Yeah.

A And then the next reports were that it had lost, on the television and everything, that it had lost its windows and the, and the, and all the water had, you know, and the water had come through the windows. At that stage I felt a little - - -

Q46 Yeah.

A - - - a little bit better about it.

Q47 Yep, O.K. From your experience, what, obviously when you saw that on that day - - -

A M'mm.

Q47 - - - you were inquisitive about it?

A Yeah.

Q48 You checked it out.

A M'mm.

Q49 Did you have a look around the other side?

A I looked at the other side and there was no, there was no, no disturbance of paint or caulking or anything on the other side.

Q50 So it concerned you?

A Yeah, it did concern me.

Q51 O.K. Now, could you just sort of explain, for the record, what caulking is?

A Caulking, in this modern age can be two or three different ways they can do it. Caulking originally was a hemp fibre or a coir fibre - - -

Q52 M'mm.

A - - - that was pressed into the cracks between planks and, and then followed, usually with white lead.

Q53 M'mm.

A And it was belted in with a special tool, shaped something like a, like a cold chisel, a blunt screwdrivery type thing, and they're belted into the gaps, and as I say, there was a stuff called white lead that they used to use. When this boat was built it would have been done that way. But the boat's had many overhauls since then, so what they've, what sort of caulking they've used - - -

Q54 M'mm.

A - - - these days, solastic is used, but usually, usually with some sort of fibre compound as well. They use cotton, a white cotton is sometimes used. There

are many different - - -

Q55 Right.

A - - - types of stuff. What, when this boat was last caulked, I don't know and who did it - - -

Q56 Yeah.

A - - - and what he used, I don't know.

Q57 What would cause that caulking to come out, do you know?

A Usually, usually movement of some sort.

Q58 Right.

A Plank movement of some sort.

Q59 Right.

A Maybe just not put in as, as tight as it should have been.

Q60 M'mm.

A It's really, it's really conjecture. You can't really - - -

Q61 Yeah.

A - - - say what caused it to come out.

Q62 O.K.

A But once it, once the paint comes off the top and the water rushing in there, it'll always, it'll always get worse.

Q63 Yeah.

A It'll always get bigger.

Q64 Now, did you have a look underneath the water line?

A No, I didn't. I didn't have a dive mask with me.

Q65 Right.

A I didn't look under the water line at all.

Q66 O.K.

A But the - - -

Q67 There was - - -

A But the gap that I saw finished above the water line.

Q68 O.K. So - - -

A So it didn't carry on - - -

Q69 Didn't carry on.

A - - - down below the water line.

Q70 O.K.

A The, the gap that I saw was, probably finished three or 4 inches above the water line.

Q71 Right, O.K. Now, when you got out and you went and got, retrieved your diving gear, did you tell anybody else about this on that day, apart from the people on the wharf or, or on the boat itself?

A I don't remember.

Q72 O.K.

A I may have. I don't think so. I don't think so.

Q73 Right.

A I may have, but I don't think so.

Q74 O.K, and then after the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race you told some people about it?

A Yeah, I told a couple of people about it, mostly South Australians.

Q75 Right, and why did you tell them that, and why did you tell them

A I told them that I'd seen caulking falling out of there

and I hope to hell it had nothing to do with it.

Q76 Right, O.K. Now, this drawing here that you've, you've drawn, would you be able to just date and sign that for me as well? That indicates the side of the boat and also looking down on the planks - - -

A Down on the stem post, right. The 29th of '99.

Q77 Dave?.

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Q78 Did you run your hand actually over the, the alleged damaged portion of the boat?

A I would've, yes. I, I'm - - -

Q79 You would?

A Yeah, I would.

Q80 You, you went up to it?

A I would've, yeah. I, I, yeah, I touched it.

Q81 O.K.

A I, I run my thumb, my finger or thumb down it. Yeah, I'm sure I did. Yeah.

Q82 O.K. Have you worked on timber boats before on slipways?

A Yes, here, here, not yachts much. Like I've, I've burnt paint off yachts and things like that, but as far as repairing, no. But fishing, fishing boats and such like would have been on the slip down there and I have done caulking under water for boats that have been, fishing boats that have been leaking, two or three different times.

Q83 So the principle of the, the building of this, this

particular vessel, Winston Churchill, is in fact similar to the, something that you have worked on before?

A Yes, yeah.

Q84 Right.

A Yeah.

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Q85 Now, Winston Churchill itself, do you know much about its history or -?

A Not really. Only that it's, that it did do an Adelaide to Port Lincoln race, I think it did about three of them in the mid 60s.

Q86 M'mm.

A It's been around a while. It was a grand old lady of the sea and, yeah, it's, it's been re-rigged. It's been re-furbished many times.

Q87 M'mm.

A And kept going, yes.

Q88 In your recollection, what were the riggings before to its present rigging?

A Well, it was rigged as a yawl and as a ketch and now as a, as a single mast. We actually have a photograph at the yacht club of it when it came over here in the, in one of the first Melbourne to Adelaide, Melbourne to Port Lincoln yacht races, and you had the after mast taller than the forehead mast. Then they changed it to a ketch and, and then they brought it down to a single sticker.

Q89 With your experience do you feel that rigging the vessel or re-rigging the vessel in different methods of rig would ultimately alter the, the, the vessel in its sea-worthiness?

A I wouldn't think so, no. I wouldn't think so, provided that the, the mast, mast steps and everything were, were all right, yeah. There shouldn't be any, shouldn't be any reason why you can't re-rig a boat for different types of rigs.

Q90 M'mm.

A Provided you didn't go overboard, add an extra 30 feet to the mast or something stupid like that, it shouldn't be a problem.

Q91 M'mm.

A The boat would have been originally built to take the strains of masts in different positions, but when they, when they re-design boats these days they usually take that into account.

Q92 Now, you mentioned earlier about the people that were standing on the Winston, on the bow of the Winston Churchill and, and that, also standing on the wharf. How close do you think you were to these people?

A Well, I was, I was up to my neck in water.

Q93 Yep.

A So, the tide was, well, from the Winston, to the person on the Winston Churchill I was within arm's length of the Winston Churchill and the person above me, the deck was probably a 3 foot 6 to 4 foot clearance.

Q94 M'mm.

A Plus his body height. The people on the wharf were probably, I suppose, 10 feet further away from me than that.

Q95 All right. Do you think you would be able to recognise these people again?

A No, I've wracked my brains, I can't think that, I can't think who, who it was that, that I was talkin' to. Two of them I know for sure that I didn't know, the third one I've seen around some, I've seen around the club somewhere but I, like, well, I don't know him, I don't know him and I'm not even sure it was the right, no.

Q96 Do you recall what time it was approximately?

A I would say, at a guess, it was approximately 9 o'clock.

Q97 O.K.

A About that time.

Q98 M'mm.

A Maybe, somewhere between, somewhere between half past 8.00 and half past 9.00, I'd say.

Q99 All right.

A The boats usually leave the wharf around about 11.00 and I was well out of the water and havin' a goodbye drink with a, a couple of the South Australians.

Q100 M'mm.

A Well before then. So it had to be in the 9 o'clock area.

Q101 Right. Now, when you said that you saw the paint

cracking - - -

A Yeah.

Q101 - - - did that indicate to you movement up/down, up -?

A Yeah.

Q102 Or that way? You know, from front to rear - - -

A Yeah, I know what you mean.

Q102 - - - and up and down.

A I know what you mean. Gee, I don't really think I could - - -

Q103 Yeah.

A - - - I could tell you that. Nuh, I couldn't really tell you that, but I would - - -

Q104 Surmise?

A - - - surmise, I suppose, it'd be, it'd have to be up and down movement.

Q105 Yeah. As like the boat going - - -

A Yeah.

Q105 - - - pounding?

A Yeah, yeah.

Q106 O.K. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

A No, no, there's nothing else I'd like to say. I've, I just wish that I'd have made the position, in hindsight - - -

Q107 Right.

A - - - more, more forcefully that morning.

Q108

A No.

Q109 M'mm.

A Ultimately, he had to know his boat so -

Q110 Sorry, you just mentioned before that you've had some dealings with caulking yourself, underwater doing caulking and, and, and supervising or watching repairs or conducting repairs in caulking situations. What's the need to get it repaired?

A Why, why do you need to get it - - -

Q111 Why repair it?

A Why you need to get it repaired?

Q112 That that insignificant three eighths of a - - -

A Well, any exposed area like that, with the amount of water rushing past - - -

Q113 Yep.

A Number one, it indicates that something was loose.

Q114 Yes.

A Or it indicates that something possibly was loose.

Q115 Yep.

A And number two, if the caulking is open like that, water rushing into that area there, where it should be nice and smooth, it just start to work on it, as you see crevices in rocks.

Q116 Yes.

A Soft patches will wear.

Q117 Yeah.

A And if it's open at all like that and it'll just keep gettin' bigger and bigger and bigger until something's done about it.

Q118 Now, will that, over time, cause a plank to, to spring?

A I couldn't say that, it'd have to be - - -

Q119 What can it do?

A Well - - -

Q120

A It's - - -

Q121 Is that a possibility?

A Yeah, it's a possibility, I suppose. But it's, it's more along the lines of if it's open - - -

Q122 Yep.

A - - - and if it's like that for a long time, of course water gets into the wood, wood gets rotten.

Q123 Yeah.

A Nails get, - - -

Q124 Yeah.

A - - - nails get loose, bolts get loose - - -

Q125 And it's a possibility.

A - - - and it springs, yeah.

Q126 Amongst other things?

A Who knows how - - -

Q127 Yes, that's right.

A Who knows how long that was. I don't know what the quality of the wood was.

Q128 Yeah.

A As far as I'm concerned - - -

Q129 O.K.

A - - - the boat was in immaculate condition to look at.

Q130 Yeah.

A Obviously, it was loved and well looked after. You

would expect that it would be, that the timber would be
in good nick.

Q131 Yeah. O.K. Anything else?

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No, I've nothing further.

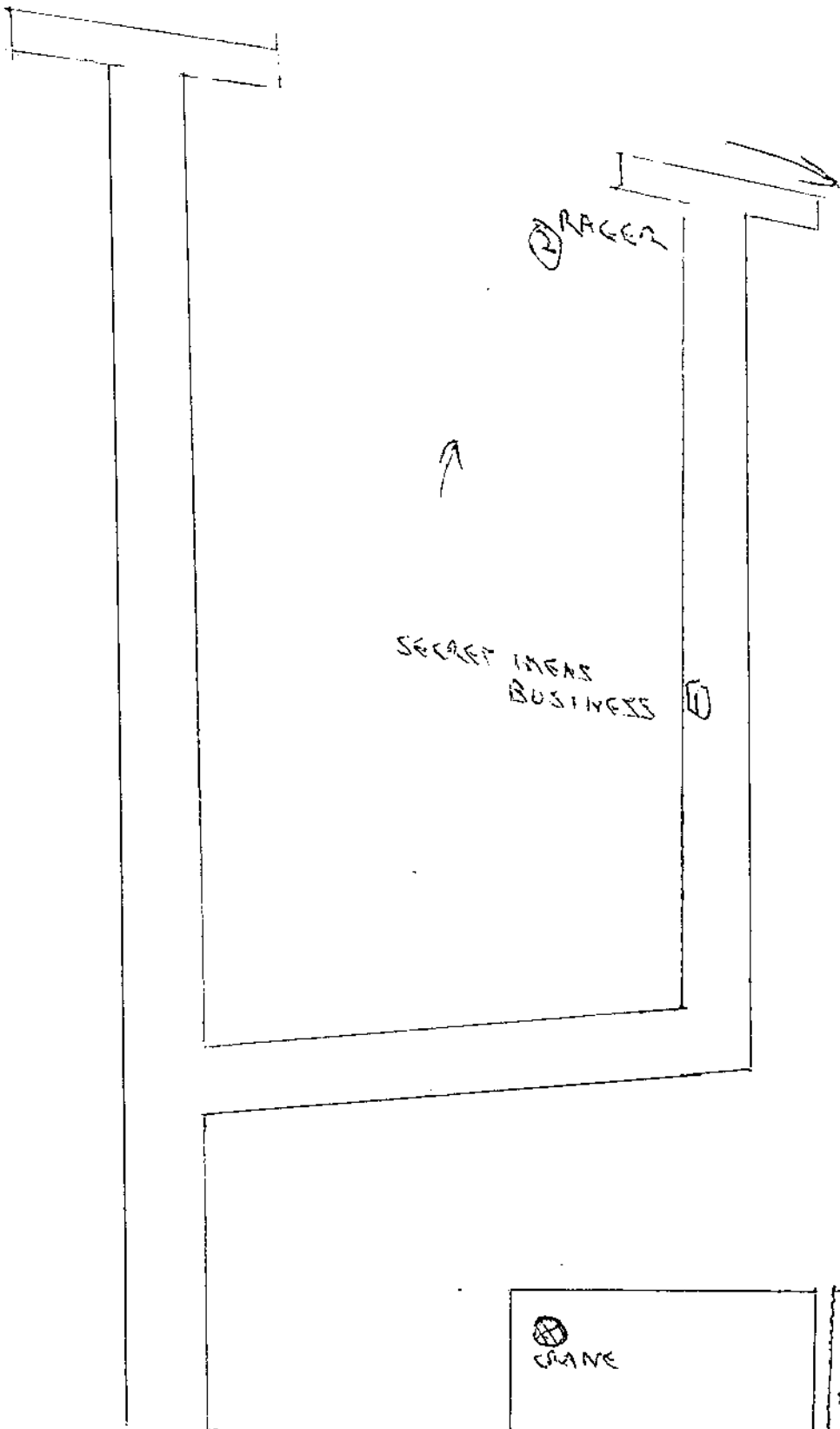
DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q132 Time by my watch, anything else, Geoff?

A No, no, I'm right, thank you.

Q133 O.K. Time by my watch is now 1.56pm. This interview
is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED



② CRANE

SECRET IDEAS
BUSINESS

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③ CRANE

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CHURCHILL

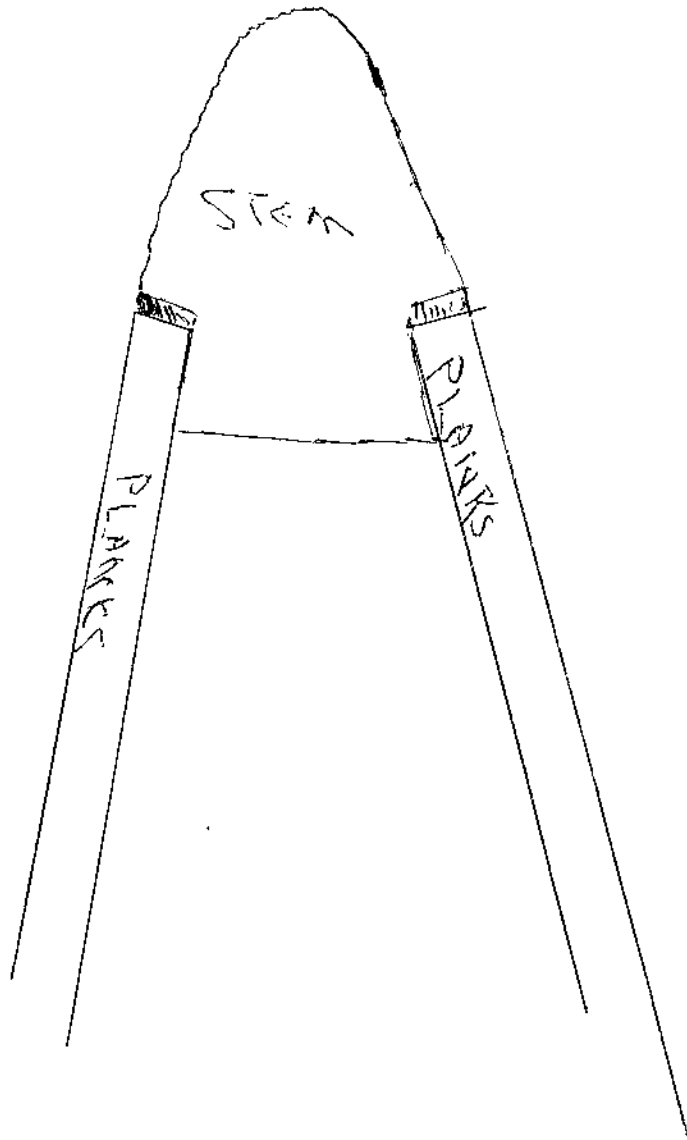
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