

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr William Riley at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in Sydney on Friday, the 29th of January, 1999. Also present and seated to my left is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police. The time is now 12.57pm. As I've explained to you, Mr Riley, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and part of our task is to speak to numerous crew members and other persons who were involved either directly or indirectly with the race. So, we'll just, if you could just give me your full name?

A William James Woodbine Riley.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A 15/10/1940.

Q3 Your current address?

A 7 Upper Road, Forest Lodge.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Pharmacist.

Q5 O.K. If you could just give me some background in regards to your sailing experience?

A I started sailing when I was kid at school in skiffs and dinghies, after school I was sailing in 16 footers briefly, then I started to build a Trimaran after I left university, then I took up harbour racing in 1960, 1970, went to ocean racing and I've done 21 Hobart

races.

Q6 O.K. Now, I believe you were a crew member on board
 the Margaret Rintoul?

A Margaret Rintoul II, yes.

Q7 Rintoul II, during the 1998 Hobart race. What was your
 role and position on that boat?

A I went as a helmsman.

Q8 Right. And that's a sort of specialist sort of area is
 it?

A Yeah.

Q9 O.K. Now if I could take you to the date of the 27th
 of December in which I can tell you if you don't
 already know, a flare or a number of flares were set
 off by the Sword of Orion and it's been alleged that
 the Margaret Rintoul II was in the area when those
 flares were set off. Are you able to explain to me or
 do you have any input insofar as that's concerned?

A Yeah. We'd, I'd, from my, best of my recollection we'd
 come under watch in, I think it was probably about half
 an hour before this happened. I was steering the boat
 at the time, Dave and Richard were in the cockpit,
 very, very strong wind at the time, we were taking
 heavy water on over the boat and Richard said he
 thought he saw a flare and a dismasted boat. I, we, we
 asked him where, he pointed in the direction, I looked
 around I couldn't see anything. I never saw, I didn't
 see the boat and I certainly didn't see a flare. Dave
 in the cockpit also didn't see, he couldn't see

anything either. Richard went, he called out to Col down below, Col, that's the navigator, that he'd sighted a flare and to get the, I think he said get the position or something like that, he considered our situation, he said that, he said that there was, we hadn't, we didn't have an engine at that stage, it had, it had gone out some hours before, so we were, we were without auxiliary power and he said under the conditions it would've been dangerous for us to attempt to do anything for the boat, steering the boat at the time, I thought about that for a while and I, I actually agreed that that was the right decision to make from the basis of my experience and that if, if we had attempted, I don't know whether we could've tacked in those conditions, at the time we were sailing with just a storm jib, we ran the danger of shredding the jib if we tried to tack, if you attempted to jibe around, you, you, you put yourself in a rollover situation, and the seas that were running at the time, we were taking very heavy water over the boat and so basically I agreed with the decision he had made. I think we would've been putting our boat in jeopardy had we, had we attempted to do anything. The other part of it, is that if we'd have tried to approach the other boat, I, I can't see how we could've got near them just under that sail that we had. We didn't have the manoeuvrability that was required to get close to them and the waves that were breaking were just closed out

sets and if we'd been approaching that boat and had been picked up by one of those waves we could've T-boned it, they could've landed on us, I just, you know, it was completely impractical for us to try to get close to the boat. The experience, the only experience I've had in this circumstance is, it would've been about '78, I was sailing on a boat called, a two tonner called Mattel II, and we doing a race to Bird Island and we sighted a flare in shore of us, we ran in and we actually picked up a crewman from an other yacht and it was only possible to pick that guy up because we were able to drop our sails and manoeuvre under the engine and why it sticks so clearly in my mind, apart from fishing the bloke out of the water, was the fact that the engine only that week had been, had been fixed up and we had the controls which were a constant problems had been rectified and we had full manoeuvrability, had we not had that, even in 30 knots of breeze, we would've been unable to pick that guy up, and, sort of that was, that was the basis for the experience that I put in to my decision that we couldn't go near them, which we certainly could not do, and we certainly wouldn't have been in a position to pick up any crew member.

Q10 Yeah.

A Just, you know, from the basis of my position. So basically that was it.

Q11 O.K. When the flare was reported was it day

or night, do you recall?

A It was afternoon, late afternoon.

Q12 O.K. Were you aware of the colour of the flare?

A It was red, that's what Richard said.

Q13 Now when did you become aware that the engine was US?

A In the afternoon, it would be some hours before.

Q14 Right.

A Because we'd run it in the morning and we tried to run it again in the afternoon, it wouldn't start.

Q15 And what's the purpose of running the engine?

A To recharge the batteries.

Q16 Are you able to sort of give me an estimation on the wind speeds at that time?

A Well, it would've been in excess of 50 knots and we were seeing, we were seeing gusts in well over 60 knots. Our instruments didn't tell us 'cause they just went on holidays, but the, when, the strongest gust we recorded was 58 knots and this was much stronger than that, the water was smoking at this time, so, I don't know, 65, 60.

Q17 Smoking, what do you mean?

A You know when you get the, when you just get spray blowing down vertically.

Q18 O.K.

A You know down the -

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Q19 Now, what about the size of the waves?

A Big waves, but very steep waves, they were, they were

breaking right over our boat, when, when, when we took heavy water it come right, it would come right over the boat.

Q20 Are you able to give a sort of a height estimation?

A I don't know, 20 feet or something like that. It's very hard to tell, I mean I'm not much good judging height. But all I know is they were breaking, that was, that was what made them so lethal is that they were breaking, there was a lot of broken water.

Q21 O.K. Now, so far as your experience in, if it was perfect conditions and the same situation, you were faced with that same situation, how would one in a yacht that you were in assist another yacht. What would be the procedure?

A What in, in perfect conditions, 20 knots or 50 knots.

Q22 Yeah. Perfect conditions, your motor going.

A Right. O.K. Well, you'd, I'd assume you'd, well, you'd certainly come round and standby them and you would, I don't know depending on what, what was wrong with the boat, you know, you could get, it's difficult to get beside each other in a sea way, but, you know, you could pick crew members off it or whatever, they could jump in and swim to you, in perfect conditions.

Q23 And those conditions obviously from your experience were not perfect?

A They were definitely not perfect on that occasion.

Q24 O.K. You mentioned the terminology in regards to the

waves being closed out sets. Can you just elaborate on that?

A Yeah, well, I'm sort of going back to my surfing days when I was kid and, you know, when, when you were surfing at the beach, a closed out set was a wave that would break right across the beach, it didn't have, you know, it was, it was a very, very wide broken water, not just a sort of a discreet 50 yards of broken water, these were 250, 300 yards of broken coming down on you.

Q25 If, if the case arose where actually your, you had to come about or you had to make a manoeuvre and your storm jib was damaged, what would be your next option if you were the skipper calling the shots

A Well, I'd suppose you'd put up the number five, it's not really an option to put the, to the put the storm trysail because of the way our boats are rigged now, I, we, we, you've got take all the, you've got to take the mainsail out of the cars on the track and then you've got re-thread those into the, into the, into the storm trysail to allow it to be hoisted. It's not like the old days where you just used to have a simple track and you just pulled one sail out and shot the other one in and pulled it up. It's a very complicated manoeuvre and quite difficult to do, it's sort of even hard to do it on the harbour. The other option would've been putting up a number five but we dropped the five some hours before because we were overpowered with it, so, that wasn't an option really.

Q26 And whereabouts is the number five situated when you're under, when you're under sail?

A The number five is set on the forestay.

Q27 Right.

A Into the forestay track. The storm jib which we were sailing under was on the, set on the inner forestay and hanked on.

Q28 And hanked on?

A Being metal hanks that are attached to the wire manually rather than just sliding up a track.

Q29 O.K.

A And it's a much more secure way of doing it obviously which is why you use it in storm conditions.

Q30 O.K. And you felt that maybe that, that sail change could have jeopardised the safety of the crew or the ship?

A Most definitely. When we, when we changed from the five to the storm jib, the conditions were nowhere near as bad as they were and we had extreme difficulty in doing that and the seas weren't as bad either.

Q31 So just to rehash in your mind you have no doubt that by continuing on was the best thing to do?

A In all the circumstances definitely.

Q32 I've no further questions at this stage?

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Q33 Anything you'd like to add? Do you have any views or, about the race itself?

A Generally, I just think that a lot of the boats that

got into trouble, I mean some old boats got into strife too, but a lot of the boats were of the, that did get into strife were newer yachts, obviously the boat we were on was an older style yacht and a very strong yacht. The materials that they use currently are very light, very strong and very fast but I think they're also very brittle and they're great until they really get, take a hammering and then, I think the failure rate's probably a bit higher than it used to be in the old days when you used to spring a plank or something.

Q34 O.K. The time is now 1.10pm. This interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED