

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Christopher Hewitt at R.F.D. Cheltenham in Victoria on Wednesday, the 30th of June, 1999. Also present, seated directly opposite me, is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police. Seated directly behind me to my left is Senior Constable Paul Stefanu from the Victorian Water Police. The time on my watch now is 4.43pm. For the purpose of the record, Chris, could you just please state your full name?

A Christopher Robin Hewitt.

Q2 Your date of birth?

A 2nd of the 6th, 1969.

Q3 Your current address?

A Number 10, Craig Court, Cheltenham.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Is life raft serviceman.

Q5 O.K. As I've already explained to you prior to the interview, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, and in particular a life raft which was forwarded from the manufacturer in Europe to R.F.D. Melbourne and then to Quinn's, and which was subsequently sold to the vessel, VC Stand Aside. Basically today we'd like to speak to you about the process which

was carried out in packing that life raft and forwarding it to, to Quinn's. If I could just start with your qualifications in the field of life raft packing?

A Yeah. I have a certificate - - -

Q6 Yeah.

A - - - as a life raft serviceman under the approval of R.F.D. Limited - - -

Q7 O.K.

A - - - in the U.K. - - -

Q8 O.K.

A - - - which is our head office - - -

Q9 Right.

A - - - and have been employed for close to 5 years.

Q10 At R.F.D. here?

A At R.F.D. as a life raft serviceman.

Q11 O.K. And the registered number on this particular certificate is 48 - - -

A Number 48, yeah.

Q11 - - - and date of issue is the 12th May, 1998?

A Yeah.

Q12 O.K. How often are these - - -

A Every 3 years.

Q13 O.K. And how long does it take to, to do the course to get the certificate?

A It's a 4 day course.

Q14 O.K. And that's conducted here?

A The first, your first certificate - - -

Q15 Yes.

A - - - that you get when you're new - - -

Q16 Yeah.

A - - - is, well, mine was 3 months' training.

Q17 Yeah.

A And a re-certification course every 3 years is 4 days.

Q18 Right. O.K. Now could you just tell me what exactly your role is as a life raft technician or surveyor?

A Yeah. What we do is, basically a life raft comes out of, comes out of Europe - - -

Q19 Yeah.

A - - - and is sitting in the store and upon order, we take it out, take the life raft out of the store, blow it up on our stage, inflate it on our stage - - -

Q20 Yeah.

A - - - and it's set on a certain test pressure for half an hour for stretch, and then we adjust that for an hour, which is a pressurised test as per the manual. And then after that, we check the relief valves which is another test, run valves for another half an hour. During this time we fit retro-reflective tape if it, if it hasn't got it, and we also attach the components that are required for it, and also inspect it and make sure that everything is working, you know, some rafts

have zippers around the buoyancy chambers, some don't, so we inspect everything tooth by tooth and make sure everything's up to scratch. And at the end of the test pressures, we also do, pack the equipment bag, which is all the equipment, and that goes into, into a bag in a special way and then the raft is then, I think, the raft is then deflated once it's passed test. All the, everything is down, is written in that test report.

Q21 Yeah.

A And then from there it's deflated and then folded up and put into its case or vacuum bag and vacuumed down and so forth. The firing lines are either hooked up as it's folded down with a cylinder attached, or after it's folded, after it's deflated we hook the cylinder up. And then when it's in its vacuum bag, it goes into the container, then the firing line's hooked up. From there it gets bands on it or it gets a glued strip around the edge, depending on the raft.

Q22 Yeah.

A And basically into a box and then sent out with stickers attached to the, the canister itself.

Q23 O.K. And now the unpacking of the life raft and, and checking the cylinder and that sort of thing and its contents and, is that a standard operating procedure for any life raft

A Yeah. When we service the life raft, that was for a new life raft that I just explained, but for a service raft we undo the canister, you know, we clean the container down, we basically run through all that system again. We weigh the cylinders and, to check that it hasn't lost any pressure whatsoever.

Q24 O.K.

A And, and then back to the packing again.

Q25 Right. What's the case then, as far as your protocols or guidelines are concerned, if a life raft came from say Quinn's to a client here and it was in a, a container or a valise - - -

A Yeah.

Q25 - - - and it had to be transferred to another container or valise, depending on how it arrived?

A Well, what - - -

Q26 What were your procedures?

A Basically you would only check if the life raft was operationally intact and they had signed a certificate - - -

Q27 Yeah.

A - - - to do so, the servicemen over there. It would come over here, it would, if it went straight to the customer in the box, we wouldn't touch it.

Q28 Right.

A But if it was to be unpacked from a box and then

put into, you know, a customer that came and picked it up personally, then we'd just check the outside of it and make sure that everything was there, the paperwork was all there - - -

Q29 Right.

A - - - the stickers all matched and - - -

Q30 So it's not the case then that, well, there's, there's no protocol or guidelines to suggest that you'd have to fully check the life raft if it's already been certified by another company?

A If it's already been certified by someone else - - -

Q31 Yeah.

A - - - we'd have to unpack it and then we'd have to re-test it and everything and there's we do, we do the whole thing from scratch again.

Q32 Right. O.K. Now if I could take you to a life raft, specific life raft, six man, which in fact left R.F.D. around the 28th of November, sorry, around the 12th of November, 1998 and went to Quinn's and was subsequently sold to VC Stand Aside, the vessel, if I show you a component certification document, life raft test reports?

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q33 Now indicated on that document is a number of ticks.

A Yes.

Q34 And there's also a number of numerals and letters

and all sorts of things on it. Is that correct?

A Yeah. That's right.

Q35 On the, on, on one side. And on the other side is a inflation test record?

A Yeah.

Q36 And once again there are numerals and numbers and all sorts of things on the back?

A That's correct.

Q37 Now, and there's a signature on the back?

A Yeah.

Q38 And a stamp which is, R.F.D. 48, Australia.

A Yeah.

Q39 And that's dated - - -

A Yeah.

Q39 - - - 12/11/98. Now the signature which appears there, is that your signature?

A That is.

Q40 O.K. Now all the figures that are written in blue pen - - -

A Yeah.

Q40 - - - on this document on both sides, were you responsible for filling those in?

A Yes, I was.

Q41 O.K. What is the meaning of the red ticks - - -

A The red ticks - - -

Q41 - - - on, on the document?

A - - - are when it goes through the office here
.....

Q42 O.K.

A That's just, that's just for them to tick off.
See, I put an A - - -

Q43 Yeah.

A - - - and then 6, that means I've added that out
of the store.

Q44 Right.

A And then the lady in reception will take it, the
red tick means she's taken it and put it on the
computer.

Q45 So it's an administrative thing?

A Yeah. That's it.

Q46 O.K. Now the blue ticks which are in the columns
indicate - - -

A That it's checked.

Q47 That it's checked by you?

A Yeah.

Q48 O.K. Now you notice up here that there's a number
and it's, T.R?

A T.R, test report number.

Q49 O.K. You notice that there's a number scribbled
out, which is 4-4-6-0.

A Yeah.

Q50 And there's a new number, which is 4-4-5-9?

A 4-4-5-9.

Q51 That's a mistake made by whom?

A Made by me.

Q52 O.K. And is it, the requirement's that you check

the life raft with the blue pen?

A No.

Q53 O.K.

A Doesn't matter.

Q54 Doesn't matter?

A No.

Q55 On the back of the form you'll see that there's some numbers which are written in black pen.

A In black as well.

Q56 Are they your figures?

A Yes, they are.

Q57 O.K. Now the figures in the black were this P.R.V. reading which is - - -

A The pressure relief valve.

Q58 O.K. What does that relate to?

A The opening pressure of the pressure relief valve is 68 inches.

Q59 Yeah.

A As per stated in the manual.

Q60 Yeah.

A And then a 15 minute reading and a 30 minute reading afterwards.

Q61 O.K.

A Basically it has to sit in between a certain pressure and not, no lower than, which is another pressure which is about 57. So - - -

Q62 O.K. So there's a range, is there?

A There's a, there is a range in between opening and

closing. Yeah.

Q63 From 57 to - - -

A From 57 to 68.

Q63 - - - 68. O.K. So that's quite permissible - - -

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q63 - - - with the figure of 63.5?

A Yeah. That's a good one.

Q64 O.K. Now in relation to the inflation equipment -
- -

A Yeah.

Q64 - - - we have under, we have a cylinder, we have a
seal number of the cylinder - - -

A Yes.

Q64 - - - which is 2-0-4-9-7. We have a operation
head type - - -

A Yeah.

Q64 - - - which is a - - -

A Plastimo.

Q64 - - - Plastimo. We have a CO₂ weight.

A Yeah.

Q65 Now is that the weight of, of 1.96?

A That's the gas charge of 1.96 - - -

Q66 Kilos?

A In kilos. Yeah.

Q67 Right. And that's the way you received it?

A Yes.

Q68 You filled it to that?

A I don't, we don't fill it, but that's how we

received it.

Q69 Right, that's how you received it. O.K. And the N₂ weight is?

A The nitrogen weight, which is 0.15 - - -

Q70 0.15.

A - - - kilos.

Q71 O.K. Added those two figures together, or how do you get a full weight?

A Yeah. That - - -

Q72 O.K. That's your full weight - - -

A Yeah.

Q72 - - - including cylinder?

A Including the tare weight.

Q73 Right. 7.01?

A Yeah.

Q74 O.K. And from your experience, that's the correct cylinder for that life raft?

A Yes, it is.

Q75 O.K. Now from your experience, could you explain to me some of the reasons why a life raft wouldn't inflate on deployment?

A The only, the life rafts I've seen that may, may not with this system, is that either the firing line could be jammed - - -

Q76 Yeah.

A - - - or the firing line itself is not hooked up. I don't know how that happens, but, which is impossible to do.

Q77 Yeah.

A If the cylinder's not connected, it wouldn't inflate.

Q78 Mmm. And at the time that you packed this, obviously there's, it's an obvious one too if there was no ... if there was no air in the - - -

A No gas in the cylinder, it wouldn't go.

Q78 - - - no gas in the cylinder, that's an obvious one?

A Yeah.

Q79 Now from the day that you worked on that life raft to the day that it was sent out, you did all that work and you ensured that it was completed and everything was satisfactory?

A Yeah.

Q80 O.K. I wonder if you could tell me if any problems can arise where in fact this life raft went out in the valise - - -

A Yeah.

Q80 - - - and it went to Quinn's and it was, I'm not too sure whether you know about this, but it was removed from the valise and put into a container.

A Didn't know about it.

Q81 O.K. From your experience, is that a normal practice and procedure?

A No, it's not.

Q82 Right.

A A customer can request to have it in a container.

Q83 Yeah.

A And therefore, if you're taking it out and putting it into a container we'll, we'll do the whole procedure again.

Q84 So that, so that's the procedure you would adopt -
- -

A Yeah.

Q84 - - - if a customer said to you, We want it from valise to container?

A No, I don't want a valise, I want a container.

Q85 Right.

A Start again.

Q86 And you'd do the whole thing again?

A We'll do the whole thing again just to, in case it's got a hole in it through taking it out of its bag and putting it into the container, it might have caught on a - - -

Q87 Yeah.

A - - - something, don't know. So - - -

Q88 Would that be an additional cost? Or would that be part of the service?

A Not, not in a brand new raft, it wouldn't be.

Q89 Right.

A In a secondhand raft, yes, it would be because you have to also buy the container as well.

Q90 Right. O.K. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q91 With the, the gas cylinders, do they have a, a

life expectancy?

A Yes, they do.

Q92 And how long would that be with this particular one?

A The life raft actually gets hydro tested every 6 years and a life expectancy of the cylinder goes for the duration of the life raft, as long as it is tested for the first 6 years and then every 5 years after that.

Q93 O.K. Now with this particular cylinder that, that arrived from France and it was fitted to life raft 4-4-5-9, I understand that these come over empty?

A Yeah.

Q94 O.K. And, and when you receive them, do you then take them to a place?

A Yes, we do.

Q95 And whereabouts is that?

A It's called U.F.E. Supply in Kilpa Road, Moorabbin.

Q96 Right. And you're showing me here a document which is an invoice number 1-2-8-9-4. Is that correct?

A Yes. That's right.

Q97 And what is that document about?

A What this is, when the cylinders arrive here empty we collect all our cylinders together and we write in an order book the cylinders that are due to be filled with charges and how many of a

certain type of cylinder. The cylinders are then filled and written down when they are returned back to us that they have been filled, a number corresponding with that has been filled, invoice number of 74, which is in the order book number, and that's their number as well and the date.

Q98 O.K. And could you point out and mark which is this particular cylinder? All right. And would you just initial that and, and date it?

A What's the date, the 30th?

Q99 Right. O.K. So you've put a mark beside where it says, 1.96kg. Is that correct?

A Yeah. In CO₂.

Q100 In CO₂, which is carbon dioxide?

A Yeah.

Q101 And could you also, then it goes across the line which is N - - -

A N₂.

Q102 N₂?

A That's nitrogen.

Q103 Nitrogen, and that says - - -

A .15.

Q104 O.K. And then it goes across to - - -

A 8.

Q105 Now what does that mean?

A That means eight, eight cylinders of that size were, were filled on that day.

Q106 O.K. At \$21.00 per unit?

A Yeah.

Q107 Right. Now just to, to rehash on the particular life raft from the valise to, to the six man hard cover, right, is there any inherent problems when that is actually packed into that hard cover?

A No.

Q108 It fits quite comfortably and is - - -

A It's, it's exactly the same size as, as the valise.

Q109 Right.

A Just obviously hard. That's the only problems, that, you know, sometimes if, when you, when you try and pack them and they're in a vacuum bag, sometimes you'll vacuum down there, it might be a little large, but basically you just let the air back into the vacuum and then re vacuum the right size.

Q110 Mmm. All right. And there's no other traps or whistles that, that you may think about?

A The only thing that you have to do if you're packing from a valise into the container is you have to disconnect the firing line, then put the, put the pack in, put the, the raft, sorry, in the container, and then re-attach the, the firing line, the line correctly.

Q111 O.K. In the number of years that you've been a certified life raft mechanic for, have you ever known of a cylinder not being deployed properly,

with the gas being released? Has, have you ever had that, that that's ever happened to you?

A On an old life raft that hadn't been serviced for 14 years, but that's all. It, it only had half of its gas pressure in it, but that was 14 years.

Q112 O.K. What do you think would be the causes of a gas leak or a problem associated with the gas bottle that would cause a life raft not to inflate?

A The only problem that you would get would be probably an O ring, and there's only one of those there, I can't see - - -

Q113 And what do you mean by an O ring?

A Oh, there's little O rings inside the operating head, but I can't, I can't see how that would make it lose gas unless the cylinder was old and rusted, would be the only way that, you know, it would break down.

Q114 Are you talking about inside or, or outside?

A On, on the outside. If you, if the raft has been really wet - - -

Q115 Mmm.

A - - - it gets surface rust. If that rust is pitted right through, it could leak gas that way, become porous. But - - -

Q116 Have you ever seen that?

A No, we condemn them way before that.

Q117 Yeah.

A (DEMONSTRATES AUDIBLY)

Q118 Right. All right.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q119 With a life raft packed and, in this case it was in a container, sealed, we assume it was sealed, if there was a leak in the bottle after it had left here, what influence would that have on the life raft in the container?

A If it leaked out of the actual top of the cylinder in through - - -

Q120 Yeah.

A - - - the firing head, the raft would inflate.

Q121 Right.

A The raft would slowly blow up.

Q122 Right.

A The only other, other thing that could happen was if it leaked out between, through the ... outside.

Q123 Yeah.

A It would inflate the vacuum bag, so it would blow the lid off.

Q124 Eventually?

A Eventually it would blow the lid off. Yeah.

Q125 If it was still connected and, and the, the leak was going through the life raft - - -

A Yeah.

Q125 - - - would the release valves allow that little bit of air to escape?

A No. No. The - - -

Q126 Do they have to work under pressure?

A - - - relief valves, as you can see, work under 68 inches, which is a lot of pressure. The life raft will actually inflate up until 68 before the valve actually opens.

Q127 Oh, O.K.

A So by the time it's 68 you've - - -

Q128 ... should be out.

A - - - you've basically, yeah, the container's easily pulled away by then.

Q129 Well, we have no, no evidence to suggest that, that the life raft was part, you know, partially inflated.

A Mmm.

Q130 So bearing that in mind, we'd, we would have to probably look at a problem with the firing mechanism. Would that be a reasonable assumption?

A Well, every new raft that comes in, I inspect the firing systems.

Q131 So you, you, in this case you inspected that firing - - -

A Well, I pull it - - -

Q132 Right, O.K.

A - - - to make sure it is going to work.

Q133 Yeah.

A Make sure there's enough grease on O-rings 'cause, just to be sure.

Q134 And on this occasion, did you do that with this

life raft?

A I do it with every one.

Q135 Is that indicated on this, this form?

A No, it's not.

Q136 O.K.

A No.

Q137 So that's a thing, a personal type thing you do?

A We, we all do it.

Q138 Right. O.K. Just a protocol type thing?

A To make sure it's going to work.

Q139 Yeah. O.K. Have you got any ideas, views or any suggestions that you could give to us that we can
- - -

A Well - - -

Q139 - - - include in our inquiry?

A - - - you said that it was packed into a container.

Q140 Yes. At owner's request.

A At owner's request by another company. Well, if they didn't issue another certificate for that, there could be some problems there because that is something that you wouldn't do. If I've, I've packed this raft into a, a bag - - -

Q141 Yeah.

A - - - into a soft pack - - -

Q142 Yeah.

A - - - that's how that soft pack should be - - -

Q143 Presented?

A That's how that raft should be presented.

Q144 Yeah.

A If any way it's changed, even by, you know, something small, a bit of tape on the life raft or something, it's got to have a new certificate to say that someone else has actually approved it.

Q145 So it's true to say then if something, if, if a life raft is removed from a package - - -

A Yeah.

Q145 - - - it really should be, if it's going to be put into a new package, it should be - - -

A It should be tested.

Q145 - - - comprehensively checked?

A Done again, and also another person should sign it, because the problem is, O.K. this raft might have gone somewhere else, someone might have put it into a new box or something.

Q146 Mmm.

A It's still my signature on it.

Q147 Yeah. Sure.

A If something happens - - -

Q148 Mmm.

A - - - you know, that's not a good thing.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q149 I show you the, the, a pink document here - - -

A Yeah.

Q149 - - - which is headed - - -

A Copy of the certificate.

Q150 Right. Release certificate.

A Release certificate.

Q151 Whose signature appears at the bottom of that?

A That's mine.

Q152 O.K. That, that is your signature?

A That's my signature and stamp and the date.

Q153 And the date?

A Yeah.

Q154 So what you're saying is that once the life raft has been tampered with, and by saying tampered with, removed from its valise, in your opinion it should be re-packed and a new certificate should be - - -

A That, that certificate should be cancelled and a new one should be - - -

Q155 So that's basically null, null and void - - -

A Mmm.

Q155 - - - and the other one, the new one should be - - -

A Yeah.

Q155 - - - should be issued.

A Yeah.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q156 So can any weight be placed on your certificate after they took it out of the valise at Quinn's, really?

A It shouldn't be.

Q157 No?

A Because I signed that certificate - - -

Q158 Yeah.

A - - - in accordance with R.F.D. and - - -

Q159 Yeah.

A - - - Plastimo - - -

Q160 Yeah.

A - - - and this manual - - -

Q161 Yeah.

A - - - that Plastimo manual, as to how I packed that life raft and how it left basically our shop.

Q162 Does that manual explain that, about - - -

A It won't but - - -

Q163 Right.

A - - - an R.F.D. quality procedures manual will.

Q164 Do, do you have that here?

A Or a, or a service manual, I can hunt for it.

Q165 O.K. Well, we'll have a short break. The time on my watch is now 5.03pm. This interview is temporarily suspended.

INTERVIEW SUSPENDED

INTERVIEW RESUMED

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q166 The time on my watch is 5.09pm. This interview between Gray and Hewitt is recommenced. Do you agree we had a short break and you had a look for the manual?

A Quality assurance manual, just to, yeah.

Q167 O.K. And did you have any success with that?

A No, I didn't.

Q168 O.K. At a later date, perhaps you and management could get together and perhaps find the document for us?

A I'll have a look for it.

Q169 O.K. That's fine.

A It is

Q170 O.K. Is there anything further you'd like to say in relation to this interview or the life rafts? Anything you'd like to say?

A (NO AUDIBLE REPLY)

Q171 O.K. Oh, there's, yeah, there is one thing we'll just clarify.

A Mmm.

Q172 When you are packing a life raft here at R.F.D. -
- -

A Yes.

Q172 - - - is it a one man job or you have apprentices with you or - - -

A No, it's, it's a, it's a one man job.

Q173 Yeah.

A There's two of us working down the back. If, sometimes folding the life raft, it might take two people.

Q174 Right.

A But everything else is one person.

Q175 As far as the - - -

A Lifting and - - -

Q175 - - - all the checking, yeah.

A - - - all that stuff is - - -

Q176 Yeah.

A - - - two people.

Q177 So as far as the checking, it's yours?

A Checking is double checked by, just by the one person.

Q178 Right. O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q179 Is it ever the case that you'll have an offsider with you that you will oversight his work?

A Yes, sometimes.

Q180 Right. Is it ever the case that when your offsider is, and he's not certificated, that he will pack a life raft away from your operation and you'll go back and check his work?

A No, it's always in front of you. He only works in front of you.

Q181 O.K.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q182 The time on my watch now is 5.10pm. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED

RFD

RFD LIMITED

GODALMING

SURREY

ENGLAND

GU7 1LH

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL AND COMPETENCE

REGISTERED NUMBER 48 DATE OF ISSUE 12 May 1998

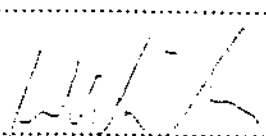
This is to Certify that Chris Hewitt

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