

SENIOR CONSTABLE STEVENSON

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Senior Constable Jason Stevenson and Robert Clive Matthews at the Eden Police Station on Monday, the 28th of December, 1998. Also present sitting to my left is Detective Senior Constable Gray. Now, Mr Matthews, do you agree there is no one else present in this room?

A Yes.

Q2 Do you agree the time now according to my wristwatch is about 1.43pm?

A Yes.

Q3 Do you agree that I informed you prior to this interview we wanted to talk to you about your involvement in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race?

A Yes.

Q4 And do you agree that I told you that the questions that I ask you and anything you say will be recorded on these three tapes by this machine, and that you'll get a copy of one of the tapes at the end of the interview. Do you understand all that?

A Yes.

Q5 just wait till that goes overhead. Now, before we go any further, I'll just get you to read to yourself this paragraph here I put in front of you which is a, a lead-up paragraph to any statements that people make to police. I'll just get you to read that to yourself, if you don't mind. All right. O.K. Now can you tell me your age, please?

A I'm 46.

Q6 Can you tell me your full name?

A Robert Clive Matthews.

Q7 Can you spell your surname, please?

A M-A-T-T-H-E-W-S.

Q8 And your home address?

A 27 Ecclestone Road, Riverside, Tasmania.

Q9 And who do you live there with?

A My wife Carmen and my eldest daughter.

Q10 And you're employed?

A Yes.

Q11 Can you tell me what you do for a living?

A I'm a public servant with the Tasmanian Housing Department.

Q12 Now can you tell me what the name of the boat was that you were on?

A Business Post Naiad.

Q13 Are you able to tell me the dimensions and specifications of that boat?

A Roughly 40 feet by around about 14 feet, with about a six foot draft.

Q14 Now in your own words, I'd just like you to go back to when you left Sydney, at the commencement of the race, and just tell me the basics of what happened from then to your rescue today, as best you can?

A All right. Well, we got a good clean start out of Sydney Harbour, without hitting anybody.

Q15 Yeah.

A We reached out mark, put our spinnaker on, had a good spinnaker run down as far as Point Perpendicular at Jervis Bay, when we out a number one headsail, heavy headsail and then hard all night with that. Pretty easy conditions, good, fun sailing.

Q16 Yeah.

A The south-wester was forecast and not being the navigator and not really being in on the, on the weather forecasts, I understood that it was supposed to come in at about 40 to 45 knots, which the boat was more than capable of handling.

Q17 Yeah.

A And that didn't worry us and apparently the weather forecast changed to 45 to 55, something like that, and they put out a storm warning.

Q18 Yeah.

A And from what I could gather, it looked like it was only going to last about 10 to 12 hours, this blow, and we thought we could ride that out quite comfortably, the boat's been through that sort of stuff before, all the crew have handled it quite capably before.

Q19 Yeah.

A Then the, the breeze came in at about 40 knots, and we had a triple reef mainsail, number 4 Genoa, and we changed that down to a storm jib, and then pulled the, wait a minute, the number 4 came off first and then we decided to pull the mainsail off because it was flogging about too much, and just put a storm jib on,

and a couple of times we got almost out of control surfing on our side down the face of waves and so we thought it prudent to slow the boat up a bit and take the headsail off it, so we had no sail at all, and we were just going to lie there, the, wait for the storm to go through - - -

Q20 Yeah.

A - - - which as I said was supposed to be about 10 to 12 hours at that stage.

Q21 All right.

A And it's still going out there now.

Q22 Yeah.

A We nearly got rolled while we had the jib on, actually that's one of the reasons why we took it off and we thought it had settled down nicely, but it was just one wave that came out of nowhere, hit us beam-on - - -

Q23 All right.

A - - - and there were four of us on deck at the time from memory. There was myself, Tony Guy, I think Jim Rogers was there, and Phil Skeggs, and when the boat came back upright, it went over very quickly, I helped hoist Tony on deck, and then he helped me up through the rails, we were down aft - - -

Q24 Yeah.

A - - - and about midships Phil was in the water with, with Jim, and they got out fairly quickly too, we had to drag Phil up, he was pretty heavy.

Q25 Yeah.

A Then we winched the broken bit of mast up on to the deck, so we cleared the propeller, cleared the, got all the ropes and everything out of the water, cleared the propeller, and made sure that there was nothing in the water that was going to hit the propeller and then tried to start the motor. It took a bit of starting but it actually started.

Q26 Mm.

A There was only about six inches of water in the boat after that roll but there was quite a bit of structural damage to the, to the cabin roof, which had cracked the windows - - -

Q27 Yeah.

A - - - busted the windows out of it and there was other bits of minor damage to the bulkheads and things like that, furniture. The stove broke out of its retainers, there's special retainers on the boats, so that if they do invert, they're not supposed to jump out, but it smashed

Q28 O.K.

A Anyway we didn't look as if we were in too bad shape apart from not having a mast. The navigator was pretty concerned, he put out a Mayday - - -

Q29 Yeah.

A - - - and we later coursed to come back towards Gabo Island, which was the closest bit of land where we could get some shelter. Having seen the chart since, we were obviously getting pushed out to sea.

Q30 Mm.

A Not really making much headway at all. Funnily enough, our HF aerial, our HF radio still worked, even though the aerial was attached to the back - - -

Q31 Mm.

A - - - and, and it was laying from one length, one of the end of the boat to the other, so it was still operating, it was a bit fuzzy, but we could get out to a couple of the other boats who were again relaying to the Young Endeavour.

Q32 Yeah.

A I was down in the cabin by this stage, trying to find out what was going on, and having a bit of a trauma attack, I think the shock was setting in - - -

Q33 Yeah.

A - - - I couldn't move my arms all that well and I was freezing cold.

Q34 Yeah.

A So I laid down in the cabin for a couple of hours while the other guys into these, these big seas. It nearly got rolled, I don't know, 20 or 30 times.

Q35 Mm.

A Then it, it got to the stage where I was just going to have to go out there and give them a hand.

Q36 Yeah.

A They were just getting too weary, it was a complete white-out, I could only see about a length a half, two boat lengths in front of the boat.

Q37 Yeah.

A And the spume and spray was hitting my face that hard that I couldn't see half the time, I had the brim of my hat pulled down over my eyes and that normally fixes it but not with one. And it got dark, at one stage I was motoring, heading towards the moon, I can remember the moon coming out between the, the clouds.

Q38 Yeah.

A And that was really good because it brightened everything up and I could see the boat, I could see the waves approaching so I knew when to get to the top of the crest and pull away.

Q39 Mm.

A It was still very hard to see. Phil Skeggs was up on the deck with me at that stage, we both had our safety harnesses on.

Q40 Yeah.

A Phil was harnessed near the, the companionway, steps, where you go down inside the boat, and I had my harness attached right at the back of the boat.

Q41 All right.

A And the, the moon disappeared and it was just as black as the inside of God-knows-what.

Q42 Yeah.

A And I steered it like that for about, I don't know, 10 or 15 minutes and one just came out of nowhere, and bang, over she went again.

Q43 Yeah.

A It didn't go all the way over - - -

Q44 All right.

A - - - it just inverted with the keel and rudder sticking up in the air.

Q45 Yeah.

A I was trapped under the, the back of the cockpit, luckily outside the lifelines but at the end of my safety harness and I managed to, I was under there for a long while, I was under there too long.

Q46 Mm.

A I was out of air and the boat got thrown up in the air by another wave and a little pocket of air appeared and I just took a last gasp, I managed to get my harness undone and slipped at the back of the boat, when I grabbed hold of the, the runners which are - - -

Q47 Yeah.

A - - - the ropes that hold the mast up.

Q48 All right.

A Which wasn't there anymore but the ropes were still there.

Q49 Yeah.

A And I could see the rudder sticking up in the air and I had pictures in my mind of, I think it was Thierrey Dubois down in the southern ocean - - -

Q50 Mm.

A - - - hanging on to his rudder, and I thought that's where I'm going to be, and I'm hoping Phil will swim out one side and the crew inside the boat are going to

be O.K.

Q51 Yeah.

A And I swam around the back a bit, trying to work out how I was going to get up to it, and I swam round to the, it was actually the starboard side of the boat, it was portside - - -

Q52 Yeah.

A - - - 'cause it was upside down, and I bumped into the boom, which I found out later had broken, and it was sticking out under the side of the boat. So I actually sat on that to get my breath back - - -

Q53 Yeah.

A - - - probably for a minute and a half, maybe two minutes, hoping to stand up on it and jump up and grab hold of this rudder - - -

Q54 Yeah.

A - - - but I was sodden with water and absolutely whacked, so I just sat there for a few minutes, and then another big roly wave came through and it got the boat back upright again - - -

Q55 Yeah.

A - - - and because I was sitting on the end of the boom, I actually ended up in the place that I had started off, plonked back in the cockpit.

Q56 All right.

A Nice and neat by the end of my harness, which I needed to clip back on and started to try and steer the boat away from the waves, yelling at the guys downstairs if

they're O.K, and realised that Phil was, it, it looked like Phil had been trapped under some stray ropes and he was, he was pinned down that hard, right next to the helmsman's seat, so he was right at the end of his harness tether, probably six feet after where he'd started - - -

Q57 Mm.

A - - - and just wrapped up in ropes, as if he'd been trying to get out - - -

Q58 Yeah.

A - - - scrambled to get out from the ropes and I - - -

Q59 need to take a break?

A No, I'm right.

Q60 You're right.

A I then started yelling for somebody to come up and try and do CPR on him.

Q61 Yeah.

A And I couldn't get anyone else to come on deck for a little while. Then they raced out on deck with, with a raft and inflated that and put it over the side.

Q62 Yeah.

A And then I didn't understand at this stage why I couldn't get anyone out from downstairs to - - -

Q63 All right.

A - - - do the CPR on, on Phil, but I felt for a pulse and there was no pulse even when the boat rolled back.

Q64 Yeah.

A He was probably under the water for, it's hard to say,

anywhere between two and five minutes I'd say, and if he was trapped like that, I know, you run out of air very quickly - - -

Q65 Mm.

A - - - you don't get a chance to take a breath.

Q66 Yeah.

A Then Shayne came running out on deck and we managed to, he, I think he cut a few ropes, he might have even cut his harness strap to roll him over - - -

Q67 Yeah.

A - - - we managed to roll him over and Shayne did mouth-to-mouth and CPR but there was no pulse at that stage, and I kept steering the boat for probably 15 minutes and I said to, I forget who, which guy it was, I said, "Where's Bruce?" And they said, "We put him in, in the bunk downstairs", and I thought he must - - -

Q68 Yeah.

A - - - have hurt himself.

Q69 All right.

A And I didn't actually find out until this morning. I said, "Why isn't Bruce coming out?" And they said, "Bruce is dead".

Q70 O.K.

A So I didn't even know.

Q71 Yeah.

A I thought he was asleep in the bunk on the other side of the boat when I was - - -

Q72 Yeah.

A - - - down there resting. The water in the boat was about waist deep, after it reinverted from the roll.

Q73 Yeah.

A There was nothing we, we could do, I latched the helm to one side, and hoping it'd just help try to steer, I think the waves were to keep myself from rolling again.

Q74 Yeah.

A And we just dragged some ropes and sails and things off the bow to keep the bow around a bit, and then we baled about, probably two-thirds of the water out of the boat and Steve and I thought that's probably enough - - -

Q75 Yeah.

A - - - leave the, the rest of it in the boat, 'cause obviously it wasn't taking any more water, but it wasn't, it was less likely to roll - - -

Q76 Mm.

A - - - it just felt firmer in the water.

Q77 All right.

A Less to get rolled and it certainly turned out to be the case. We, we got close a couple of more times - - -

Q78 Mm.

A - - - but it didn't happen. We tried a few other tricks to calm the waters - - -

Q79 Yeah.

A - - - polluting the waterways out there, putting oil over the side and stuff like that.

Q80 Yeah.

A That worked, but -

Q81 I'm just trying to, through a couple of things
I just want about. The first roll - - -

A Mm.

Q81 - - - do you know where you were when that happened?

A I was steering.

Q82 Well, sorry, where the boat was, where your position in
relation to how far out and what area, do you know?

A No, I, I don't. You'd have to talk to the navigator
about that.

Q83 O.K.

A It would, from my, I, I think we were about 45, 47
miles south-east of Gabo Island.

Q84 And do you know what time that was?

A I don't really, again, it's hazy, but I think it was
about 9 o'clock, something like that.

Q85 And you were on deck when that first roll occurred?

A Yes, I was on deck during both of them.

Q86 And you describe being harnessed, I assume that's your
safety harness?

A Yes.

Q87 Can you describe for me the procedure, what that
harness is made of and how it's used as a safety?

A Well, the harness is made of two-inch webbing and you
put it on like a jacket - - -

Q88 Yeah.

A - - - but it's just straps. It's got a, the one that

I wore, yeah has got a stainless steel clamp in the centre - - -

Q89 Yeah.

A - - - that you put one end harness hook close to your body and there's a hook on the other end as well.

Q90 Yeah.

A And if I hadn't had that I'd still be under, under the boat - - -

Q91 Yeah.

A - - - because I, there's no way that I could have ducked under the lifeline and got the other end of the harness hook out because it would have been six feet away.

Q92 All right.

A So -

Q93 Are they a standard thing used on racing?

A They are, yeah, they're mandatory.

Q94 All right.

A You don't go to sea without them.

Q95 O.K.

A They're not mandatory to wear them - - -

Q96 Yeah.

A - - - but they're mandatory to - - -

Q97 To have.

A - - - to have, yeah.

Q98 But what about life jackets?

A Yes, we, after the first roll we all decided to put life jackets on.

Q99 Yeah.

A Again, mandatory safety equipment.

Q100 Yeah. O.K. And you said earlier that the navigator made a Mayday call.

A Yes.

Q101 That was last night, I assume?

A Yes.

Q102 O.K.

A That would, that was just after the first roll.

Q103 O.K. You're not sure of the time of that?

A No, that, that should have been recorded by whoever took the Mayday call - - -

Q104 Yeah.

A - - - I think it was Telstra, race control or on the Young Endeavour.

Q105 Can you tell me, what, what is the name of your navigator, who is that?

A Peter Keats.

Q106 Peter Keats. Do you know how he spells Keats?

A K-E-A-T-S, I think that's how he spells it.

Q107 Now on that first roll, have you any idea how long the boat stayed under, like, capsized?

A The, it went straight over, it would have been a matter of, of 10 seconds at the absolute maximum for it to go a complete 360.

Q108 All right.

A It just went straight over and it came up, and I can remember looking up, hoping the rig was going to be

still in it - - -

Q109 Yeah.

A - - - and looking up, and just saying, am I allowed to swear on these things?

Q110 Yeah.

A Yeah, mate, just remember saying, "Fucking".

Q111 All right, yeah.

A I knew we were in deep shit.

Q112 Have you been involved, involved in something like that before a roll-over?

A No, never. I've been, I've been ocean racing now for about 30 years - - -

Q113 Yeah.

A - - - and I'm 46, so, and I've never ever seen anything like that, I've, I've been in Bass Strait gales with - - -

Q114 Yeah.

A - - - stronger winds and around Australia race, strong winds, lots of strong winds - - -

Q115 Yeah.

A - - - but never seas like that.

Q116 Yeah.

A They were just, well, the, the number of boats that I've seen in the paper, read in the paper that are that have rolled over, it's quite staggering.

Q117 Yeah.

A It just doesn't normally happen.

Q118 So it's not, not a common occurrence in racing?

A No, no, no, no, it's the first time it's ever happened to me, well, second, first and second time - - -

Q119 All right.

A - - - and it's going to be the last, I can tell you that now.

Q120 Have you been in the Sydney to Hobart before?

A Yeah, this, this was my 10th.

Q121 And you completed it on all other occasions. Is that right?

A Yes, I have, yes.

Q122 Can you tell me who owns the boat?

A Bruce Guy.

Q123 And is it correct to say that he was the skipper as well. Is that right?

A Yes, that's right.

Q124 O.K. Just going to the second roll-over, how long were you capsized for, would you know?

A As I said before anywhere between two and five minutes. It was very hard to tell.

Q125 Yeah.

A I, I was probably under the boat for, it would have been more than 30 seconds because I can hold my breath under normal circumstances nearly for a minute - - -

Q126 Yeah.

A - - - and, mind you, I didn't get a chance to take a breath but, so, and then I was at the stern for probably a minute wondering how to get up to the rudder and then I went round to the side - - -

Q127 Yeah.

A - - - and it took me a little while to get up on the boom, and then I probably sat there for another couple of minutes before and suddenly flipped back over

Q128 All right. I've got a few names here, Tony Guy, yourself, Jim Rogers, Phil Skeggs, Shayne Hansen, Peter Keats. Can you name the other members of the boat?

A Bruce Guy and Phil Skeggs, Phil Skeggs.

Q129 I've got his name.

A All right.

Q130 I've got you, Tony Guy, Jim Rogers, Phil Skeggs, Shayne Hansen, Peter Keats, Bruce Guy, that's seven.

A You've got me there.

Q131 Yeah, you're the first one, Matthews, Steve Walker.

A Steve Walker.

Q132 Can you think who the ninth one is? That's eight that I have there?

A One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, Tony, Shayne, Matthew Sheriff.

Q133 Matthew Sheriff. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about, any detail?

A Nothing that I can think of.

Q134 Stuart?

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q135 Robert, how many were on the deck the first roll?

A Four.

Q136 That's yourself, Skeggs?

A Yes.

Q137 And who else, who?

A Jim Rogers and Tony Guy.

Q138 O.K. And how many on the deck in the second roll?

A Two.

Q139 Just yourself and Skeggs?

A Yes.

Q140 O.K. And the rest were all battened down - - -

A Yes.

Q140 - - - cabin and - - -

A Yes, downstairs.

Q140 - - - vessel.

A Seeing as we were motoring there was no need to have the whole - - -

Q141 Crew.

A - - - crew on deck.

Q142 Well, that's a normal standard operating procedure to have sort of -?

A We normally run with four on watch - - -

Q143 Yeah.

A - - - when we are sailing.

Q144 Yeah.

A Most jobs can be done around the boat without waking the other watch.

Q145 All right.

A But when we were motoring, and it was so cold, and people were getting cold because they were so wet - - -

Q146 Yeah.

A - - - we just decided to put some people downstairs,
'cause there's nothing you can do - - -

Q147 Yeah.

A - - - except sit out of the rain.

Q148 Yeah. O.K.

A Yeah.

Q149 Are you able to tell me the size of the waves,
approximately the size of the waves in the first roll?

A I'm hopeless at describing waves - - -

Q150 O.K.

A - - - but I'd say they were at least the height of the
mast of the boat which close to be 55 feet.

Q151 All right.

A They were pretty big waves, some of, the really big
ones were, were absolutely huge.

Q152

A It's worse than that, 'cause you're actually on a
.....

Q153 O.K. Terrible. So when she rolled the first time she
come up within about 30 seconds, rolled - - -

A

Q153 - - - quickly back.

A No, it just went straight over, like - - -

Q154 Yeah.

A - - - you didn't even need to take a, you didn't even
need to think about taking a breath.

Q155 Yeah, yeah, it was so quick.

A Yeah, yeah, and, because we were at the end of our

harnesses and the harnesses were in the middle of the boat, we were actually sort of perched there like on the side of the boat - - -

Q156 Yeah.

A - - - with only about six inches of free harness.

Q157 Yeah.

A To try and swing a leg over the side, and then get full of water and wet weather gear and - - -

Q158 Yeah.

A - - - clothes and stuff.

Q159 So is the tether on the harness, can you move the tether on the harness to bring you closer to its, its locking point or to its fixed point? Do you know what I mean, like, is the tether that you got from the harness to the locking point, 'cause you connect on to a jack or something, don't you or -?

A Yeah, there's laser jacks that run up each side of the boat.

Q160 O.K.

A For and people like that to move - - -

Q161 All right.

A - - - up and down in the boat. What the helmsmen usually do is move to the back of the boat carefully and lock onto a strong point, there's U-bolts and - - -

Q162 All right.

A - - - and various things you can just hook your, the outer end of the harness to, they're, I think they're

about a standard six foot length.

Q163 O.K. So you can't shorten or lengthen that?

A No, no.

Q164 O.K.

A They're, they're made to stay - - -

Q165 Your stuck with what you got.

A Yeah, they're Australian Standard.

Q166 All right.

A Made to Australian Standard, and they work.

Q167 Yeah. Could you, or, or would you know why the boat stayed over longer on the second occasion, was that because of waves keeping it over?

A I've got absolutely no idea - - -

Q168 Mm.

A - - - why it, it started inverting. I really - - -

Q169 Does that seem strange to you or -?

A It does, yes.

Q170 Does it.

A It, it has, it has happened - - -

Q171 Yeah.

A - - - I can remember the Fastnet race in 1979, I think it was, there was quite a few people killed in that race and they found that some of the boats inverted and stayed inverted and they changed the, the regulations regarding, regarding stability - - -

Q172 Yeah.

A - - - to make, so that boats were stiffer and this was part of the new breed of boats which is stiffer.

Q173 Yeah.

A I've never heard of one of these sitting on a

Q174 So it should have really come back over?

A It should really have come back over, yeah.

Q175 And it should have really come over fairly quickly?

A Reasonably quickly, yeah.

Q176 Yeah.

A Sort of like you said before within about 10 or 15, maybe 30 seconds.

Q177 Is it the case then if, if the boat, 360, well, not 360, well just stayed over - - -

A Mm.

Q177 - - - and there were lots of waves, would it still right itself and then keep going over as a wave catches it?

A What happened was, when it, when the next wave, big wave came along and actually did right the boat - - -

Q178 Yeah.

A - - - I thought it was going to go again - - -

Q179 Yeah.

A - - - into, another roll.

Q180 Another roll, yeah.

A - - - but it just slid down the face of the wave, sideways at whatever speed the wave was doing, like a, like a toothpick in the bath analogy.

Q181 Yeah.

A You know, you just slid sideways I don't know 100 metres or so, and all the time, I wasn't even

harnessed back on at that stage, I was just sort of flipped into the cockpit and it's upright, and I'm thinking, God, where do I go from here?

Q182 Yeah. Now when you were rescued this morning, what happened to Bruce and, and Mr Skeggs, were they secured on the, on the vessel?

A Bruce was still in the quarter berth that Steve told me he'd put him in - - -

Q183 Yeah.

A - - - and Phil was loose, floating, floating free in the cockpit but they put a, I don't know whether Steve put a harness on him or lashed him down - - -

Q184 Yeah.

A - - - before we got off the boat - - -

Q185 All right.

A - - - because there was a bit of water coming into the back, the cockpit, and we didn't want him washing out the stern. I don't think he would have washed out - - -

Q186 Yeah.

A - - - the stern, but if the boat rolled again - - -

Q187

A - - - we didn't, we didn't want to lose him, no.

Q188 Yeah. And you were rescued by military aircraft were you this morning?

A No, we were rescued by, is it health, not healthcare -?

Q189 care, Child Care Flight, was it?

A Careflight.

Q190 Careflight.

A Mm.

Q191 Now I believe you've got a couple of injuries on your hands.

A Yeah.

Q192 And that's a couple of lacerations and that's been caused from the first roll? Just trying to - - -

A No, this was caused from the second one.

Q193 All right. O.K.

A When I was hanging on to, to the rudder box at the back of the boat.

Q194 All right.

A But I didn't even realise I'd done it for 20 minutes, half an hour.

Q195 O.K.

A You don't feel that sort of thing.

Q196 Had the rudder itself, when you were looking at the rudder, was that damaged at all?

A No.

Q197 Damaged at all?

A No.

Q198 It was, it was intact?

A No, the rudder looked intact and the keel looked intact. It was, it was, it was dark but I could still see the keel - - -

Q199 Yeah.

A - - - sticking up there.

Q200 It's a fibreglass hull?

A Yes.

Q201 There was no cracks evident that you could see in the hull or anything?

A No, no, they, well, I was, at water level - - -

Q202 What you could see, yeah.

A - - - looking up, yeah, what I could see but it appears that the boat was quite intact and the fact that it hasn't been taking any water since they baled it out last time.

Q203 Yeah.

A I think that it was the safest to place to be rather than in the life raft.

Q204 Yeah. How many life rafts were on, on the vessel?

A There were two - - -

Q205 All right.

A - - - two six-man harnesses.

Q206 All right. And they're inflated by pulling the -

A Yes, from the CO2 canister.

Q207 Yeah. O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE STEVENSON

Q208 Do you have anything further?

A No.

Q209 Well that'll complete our interview. Do you agree the time on my watch is now about 2.11pm?

A I do.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED