

DEBRIEFING HELD AT EDEN COURT-HOUSE RELATING TO OPERATION INVOLVING THE RESCUE OF CREWS & RECOVERY OF DECEASEDS IN IN THE 1998 SYDNEY TO HOBART YACHT RACE

PRESENT: Superintendent AMBLER, Inspector MAWDSLEY, A/Inspector SWILKS, D.E.M.O. Tony CALLAN, Sergeant TILLMAN (O.I.C. Eden Police), Andrew BARR (Nursing Manager Pambula Hospital), Arthur HEATHER (AUS S.A.R.), Catherine SHANDS (Pambula Hospital), Allan BOLTON (S.E.S. Eden), Tony CRIDDLE (S.E.S. Bega), Philip BROTHERTON (Ambulance Service), Greg HALLS (Cruising Yacht Club of Aust.), Ian BAKER & Ron FINNERAN (Merimbula Airport), George CHRYSS & Greg WHITER (Eden R.V.C.P.), Doug MEIN (L.E.M.O.), Glen VARDY (Public Works & Services) & David SHEPHERD (D.O.C.S.).

TIME COMMENCED: 9.05 A.M.

TONY CALLAN

Meeting chaired by D.E.M.O. Tony CALLAN who explained reasoning behind debrief & submitted apologies on behalf of Superintendent AMBLER & Sergeant BUCKLEY (Sydney Water Police) who were involved with receiving yacht BUSINESS POST NAIAD.

D.E.M.O. indicated that he was first notified of the operation AT 10.15 a.m. on Monday, 28.12.98 by Area Health Manager advising Pambula Hospital required some assistance. Appeared that there was a communication breakdown.

Each agency then requested to comment on involvement in operation. Questions allowed at the end of each presentation.

INSPECTOR MAWDSLEY - BATEMANS BAY POLICE (FAR SOUTH COAST CRIME MANAGER

From the outset management of the situation was difficult to determine the actual Police role, outside of its normal investigative function. The rescue co-ordination etc. was difficult to establish due to lack of knowledge of the magnitude of the situation and the numerous agencies involved with differing lines of communication.

Police involved initially with search and rescue. Sgt. TILLMAN of Eden Police relied on local vessels as there were limited vessels (including Police) available that were able to handle the conditions. Eden Police vessel used in Twofold Bay and worked with Ambulance.

Inspector MAWDSLEY arrived A.M. on Monday 28.12.98 and had to organise an Operations Centre with communications. Contact was made with the Bega Valley L.E.M.O. and arrangements made to utilise the Public Works Building, Main Wharf Eden. Access was arranged by the Harbour Master. Insp MAWDSLEY thanked Glenn Vardy for his co-operation and use of his facility.

Contact was made with Telstra to provide additional telephones to the Operations Centre. No response was received within 3.5 hours and as such the request was cancelled. Telstra HELPDESK contacted the Operations Centre A.M. on 29.12.98 to establish if the additional services had been provided and were advised that nothing had happened.

At no time was co-ordination obtained in relation to the local response. Difficulties experienced in Disaster Victim Registration. Yachts were entering and leaving the bay without notifying their movements with Coastal Patrol or any other agency. In this regard, Greg HALLS was thanked for his input and considered a tremendous asset in following up these yacht movements.

Little information was received from AUS S.A.R. and a Police liaison was established with them at Merimbula Airport. Problems identified with communications at this time that most of it was second or third hand and unreliable. Repercussions reflected in our ability to give timely/accurate information to other agencies and relatives.

Good co-operation between Health, D.O.C.S., Public Works and ongoing liaison with Region Commander and Local Area Commander.

It was not deemed necessary to have an Ambulance liaison at the Operations Centre, due to their limited staff, and information was given to them relating to injured crew etc as it became available.

Basically we fell down with the 'larger picture' in relation to communications. Planning was not possible due to the failure in communications and Police were constantly playing 'catch up.'

#### PHILIP BROTHERTON - AMBULANCE SERVICE

Problem highlighted where they did not know where the Operations Centre was located. They assumed that Merimbula Airport was the Operations Centre and they had limited access to information. They then relied on their own sources which proved to be unreliable.

Also expressed concerns regarding crowd control at the airport and control of the media. Perhaps a separate area should be set aside for a Command Post isolated from external influences.

INSPECTOR MAWDSLEY

Acknowledged there was a misunderstanding as to the location of the Operations Centre.

ARTHUR HEATHER - Aus SAR

Provided an outline of Aus SAR, which was formed 18 months ago as a result of the merging of the aviation and maritime operations centres. Their focus is purely on search and rescue and acknowledge the points raised by Inspector MAWDSLEY re the need to work closer with other agencies, in particular the Police who have greater responsibilities.

Arthur was not involved until Monday morning and when he arrived at Merimbula airport there was confusion at the site and break down in communications between aviators and mariners. Peter and Sue FISH (AIR SAPPHIRE) were particularly helpful and handed over their facilities etc to the detriment of their business.

Identified that forward field base should be established and Police Command should revolve around aviation Command Post where usually the first information becomes available. AUS S.A.R. communications were confused and often not being completed but improved as the operation progressed onto Tuesday.

Identified the need for regular briefings and debriefings as the operation continues.

Identified also the need for a formal handover from AUS S.A.R. to Police of vessels or aircraft, once AUS S.A.R. responsibility has ceased with a vessel, hand over details to Police for follow up and Disaster Victim Registration/Identification.

Identified difficulties with moving the Command Post once it has been established and the operation progresses. We must be flexible and use available resources.

INSPECTOR MAWDSLEY

Although AUS S.A.R. did their search and rescue function Police have other responsibilities which exceed these functions and should be considered by AUS S.A.R. These responsibilities include Disaster Victim Registration, welfare, preparation of coronial reports etc. It became apparent that the level of Police accountability was not appreciated and other agencies, although doing their roles, were interfering with the Police role. Once a yacht and crew was located AUS S.A.R. seemed to have

finished with their involvement with that yacht/crew but this was where Police needed to know who the crew was, their condition and the yacht's destination. Inspector MAWDSLEY explained Police responsibilities relating to coronial enquiries.

ARTHUR HEATHER AUS S.A.R.

Agreed with observations of Inspector MAWDSLEY and indicated that he would take back these for future planning and incorporation in S.O.P.S. Also identified a need to go further with Police to consolidate interaction and understanding of each other's roles/functions.

GEORGE CHRYSS - R.V.C.P.

Indicated that a plan had been in place over the last 3 years and believed that this plan was not followed. Sgt. TILLMAN was the only officer to appear to follow the plan.

Indicated that Police liaison should be established at R.V.C.P.

Appeared that the preparation of this race was not as good as experienced in the past.

IAN BAKER & RON FINNERAN - MERIMBULA AIRPORT

Their first contact was 1.30 a.m. on Monday 28.12.98 from Police radio who requested them to open the airport for Navy aircrew. AUS S.A.R. or others did not contact airport authority re the magnitude of future aircraft (or other) operations. Identified the need for security, especially with media and onlookers. Communication as far as the airport was concerned was zero and they took their own initiative to activate S.O.P.S.

In future Police and other agencies should meet at least one week prior to the commencement of the race to update on developments and ensure preparations.

SGT. TILLMAN - O.I.C. EDEN POLICE STATION

Right from the start the first information he had of any yacht experiencing trouble was at 3.30 p.m. on Sunday, 27.12.98. This is not unusual for the area. He had no idea, or communication regarding any greater emergency occurring. This vessel, was not in trouble in fact and about 4 p.m. Sydney Water Police called for a vessel to assist yacht TEAM JAGUAR which was in trouble about 60 miles south of Eden, in Victorian waters. Victoria could not assist and by 4.30 p.m. assistance had been arranged. Then another call received regarding another vessel 40 miles south east in trouble. All this information was second hand and related to ONLY TWO YACHTS IN TROUBLE. No indication of magnitude of emergency.

Biggest problem was that communication was not fully passed on.

Further concern raised regarding Sgt. TILLMAN's lack of authority to arrange vessels to assist. Indicated that to go through Sydney Water Police is time consuming.

Indicated that the reason he went to the R.V.C.P. was to maintain communication with this second vessel in distress (40 miles south east).

GREG HALLS - CRUISING YACHT CLUB

Greg was the past race director from 1987 to 1994. He was not officially involved with this race's organisation. At 4 p.m. on Sunday 27.12.98 he contacted the C.Y.C. and told Peter BUSH that race was going to experience severe difficulties and was assured 'they'll be right'. BUSH called back 3 hours later and requested his assistance. Attended R.V.C.P. at 2.30 am 28.12.1998, where he had no background as to race documentation or competitors. In the past these details were supplied as were pre race briefings conducted with related agencies along the coast. He did foresee what would occur whereas the C.Y.C. apparently did not.

Experienced trouble in getting adequate information from the C.Y.C. in particular, the next of kin list only listed telephone numbers. At the time of this meeting, one of the missing crew's relatives has not been officially informed.

Also indicated that although S.O.P.S. existed for the notification of relatives in these types of circumstances, the C.Y.C. appeared to not follow same.

Should extend training to include Tasmanian and Victorian agencies.

ACTING INSPECTOR SWILKS - BEGA - FAR SOUTH COAST DUTY OFFICER

Indicated that the request for relatives to be notified was faxed to Interpol and awaiting reply.

Also highlighted need for crews to be briefed prior to departure regarding the release of information to the media and relatives. At this time one relative has been informed by a crew member that her husband had been located deceased and identified. When contacted by Police and told that he was still missing, this caused undue hardship to the relative and her family. Need for information to flow through one channel where it can be confirmed prior to release to interested parties.

SUPERINTENDENT AMBLER - COMMANDER FAR SOUTH COAST LOCAL AREA COMMAND

Identified the need for a media point to be established although we were suffering from a lack of information and were not aware of magnitude of problem until A.M. on Monday 28.12.98. Inspector MAWDSLEY requested to open an Emergency Operations Centre and the response from the

Local Emergency Management Officer was disappointing. Local Emergency Management response needs to be addressed by the Emergency Management Committee.

Communication was inadequate and it was not until later Monday afternoon 28.12.98 that sufficient information was available regarding the extent of the operation. We had no crew lists, what tactics yachts would adopt in these weather conditions in order to assist with rescue response. As it was launch NEMESIS was returning on one engine, in order to conserve fuel after commencing a tow 160 kilometres out to sea.

Yachts were not using communications responsibly and not informing the R.V.C.P. of their movements in or out of Twofold Bay.

Consideration was being given to winding down the operation P.M. on 28.12.98 and it was not until a Police liaison officer was established with AUS S.A.R. that appropriate information was available as to the extent of the emergency.

Local Emergency Management Committee to address the control of those who assist Police with D.V.R. as apparently there was confusion as to who had responsibility for this aspect. Control of D.V.R. was poor and should have been maintained at the airport and Twofold Bay.

TELSTRA should have boosted mobile network and S.O.P.S. and contingency plans will be in place for future races.

Cross border interaction has all ready commenced and meeting has been arranged with Bairnsdale managers at Eden in second week of January 1999.

#### PHILLIP BROTHERTON - AMBULANCE SERVICE

Managers should be involved in exercises to check their responses, plans etc. rather than focussing on the testing of assets.

#### CATHERINE SHANDS - PAMBULA HOSPITAL

Was first alerted late P.M. on 27.12.98 of this operation when they were requested to provide accommodation for pilots and aircrew. Ambulance notified hospital and declared DISPLAN and it was then that the magnitude of the operation was appreciated.

Acknowledge the information flow between Police, Ambulance and D.O.C.S. but unfortunately their sources were limited which affected how the hospital planned its response and availability of resources. They needed to know the number of injured so movement of patients (which is very time consuming) could be organised. Used patient transport vehicle to alleviate stress on Ambulance

Service.

Media was a problem and had to field numerous calls to the hospital and refer to the publicity officer at Queanbeyan.

Bega and Pambula Hospitals can only cater for two deceased at each location and local contractors had to be considered for use as temporary morgues.

Trouble encountered with determining which patients belonged to which yacht. Fortunate that injuries were relatively minor and the facilities could adequately cope with the demand.

DAVE SHEPHERD - DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Notified by Police radio about 5 a.m. on Monday 28.12.98 to arrange accommodation for aircrews. Received call then from Navy and then commenced to organise accommodation. Did not receive any notification of the magnitude of the operation and used own initiative in beginning his S.O.P.S. Identified a need for proper callout protocol to be followed.

Identified apparent lack of appreciation of the scale of this emergency and appropriate resources not mobilised.

BREAK FOR MORNING TEA 10.45 A.M.

DEBRIEF RESUMED 11.10 A.M.

GEORGE CHRYSS - ROYAL VOLUNTEER COASTAL PATROL

Identified problems with C.Y.C. using R.V.C.P. facilities in that they clogged the one telephone line with enquiries from relatives/family etc which affected R.V.C.P. operations.

Identified that there were 3 helicopter landing pads in the Eden area however some were being used by media helicopters.

GREG WHITER - R.V.C.P. & LIAISON WITH C.Y.C.

Identified problems with wharf space. Where yachts tied up outside trawlers, they had to be moved when the trawlers put to sea.

Commended Ambulance for their liaison at the R.V.C.P. and giving medical advice over the air prior to yacht arrivals at Twofold Bay.

Identified need to separate C.Y.C. operations from the day to day R.V.C.P. operations. Maintained constant contact with C.Y.C. radio relay ship, Young Endeavour.

ARTHUR HEATHER - AUS S.A.R.

Have detailed maps and co-ordinates of airfields.

GREG HALLS - C.Y.C.

In response to query from Phil BROTHERTON of the Ambulance Service regarding silent telephone lines at various agencies, indicated that pre-1994 the C.Y.C. used to put personnel into these locations with silent telephone numbers.

TONY CRIDDLE - STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES

Indicated that other incidents were also impacting on emergency services during this operation.

He was first called at 7 a.m. to feed approximately 1,000 persons at Eden. The S.E.S. does not have the facilities to cater for the size of this request which was in the area covered by D.O.C.S. S.E.S. personnel are available to assist in the Operations Centre.

BRUCE SUMMERILL - VOLUNTEER RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Called out 1.30 p.m. Monday 28.12.98 to assist as observers on rescue aircraft. Briefings by pilots were good. Training being organised for V.R.A. as drop masters.

SUPERINTENDENT AMBLER

Indicated that he was not aware of V.R.A. response to act as observers, and believed that they should have first consulted with Police prior to becoming involved in this activity as they are the primary rescue response for the Bega area.

DOUG MEIN - LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICER

Believed he did not have much of a role to play in this operation. He was called at 1 p.m. on Monday 28.12.98 for assistance in establishing an operations centre and made suggestions in this regard.

Also made enquiries later in the day regarding the use of TELSTRA for extra lines.

TONY CALLAN - DISTRICT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICER

Indicated that the L.E.M.O. probably underestimated his response to this operation and could have been of greater use at the operations centre. (SENTIMENTS ECHOED BY SUP'T AMBLER & INSPECTOR MAWDSLEY.)

Highlighted factors that impacted on the operation:

- \* Initially no idea of scope/magnitude of incident or timely flow of information,
- \* Busy time of year and agencies were stretched responding to the increase in calls.



Summary of recommendations based on the debriefing are:

1. Clear understanding of control structure must be relayed to all involved in order to reduce confusion and assist in communications,
2. That the operations centre be isolated and a dedicated facility,
3. Information needed regarding yachts, their crews and condition for Disaster Victim Registration,
4. Better communications between services,
5. Cruising Yacht Club to disseminate appropriate information and provide liaison to the operations centre,
6. Establish one media point of contact,
7. Improve systems and response with TELSTRA,
8. AUS S.A.R. - conduct field exercises with managers,
9. AUS S.A.R. - need to be mindful of emergency management arrangements that exist in each State,
10. Operations Centre staff to be selected and trained at the local level,
11. Prior to next yacht race conduct pre race briefing and operations briefing involving local agencies.

SUPERINTENDENT AMBLER, INSPECTOR MAWDSLEY & D.E.M.O.

Expressed acknowledgement and appreciation of professionalism and conduct of all personnel and agencies involved.

Although the debriefing focussed on the negatives, plans are now being prepared to improve systems, training and management of responses to future yacht races.

Superintendent AMBLER indicated that arrangements have been made to adopt these recommendations. First meeting planned to commence mid January, 1999.

Also recommendations will be carried forward for review by the next meeting of the Bega Valley Emergency Management Committee.

DEBRIEFING CONCLUDED - 11.50 A.M.

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