

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

- Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Senior Constable David Upston of the Sydney Water Police and Craig Escott of the Hobart C.I.B. on Sunday, the 8th of May, 1999. The time on my watch is now 3.25pm. And also present and seated directly opposite me is Guy Robert Lewis and to my immediate is Detective Senior Constable Gray of the Bega Detectives.
- Q2 Craig, as I mentioned to you earlier, Detective Senior Constable Gray and I are making inquiries into the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, the Coronial inquiry, and we have been tasked by the Coroner to speak to people that were involved in the race and experienced some form of knock down or roll over, and I understand you are the, were the master of the vessel, T42 Solandra, is that correct?
- A Yes.
- Q3 O.K. For the purpose of the interview, Craig, would you like to mention your full name?
- A My full name is Craig Andrew Escott.
- Q4 And your date of birth?
- A 9th of the 8th, '60.
- Q5 And your address?
- A 1 Esmond Street, Glenorchy.
- Q6 O.K. And your present occupation?
- A My present occupation, I'm not working ... I've finished, and I haven't got any occupation now.

Q7 O.K. Guy, could you for the purpose of the interview please state your full name?

MR LEWIS

Yes. My name's Guy Robert Lewis, born 16th of March, 1965.

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Q8 And your address?

MR LEWIS

My address is number 18 Garth Avenue, Sandy Bay.

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Q9 O.K. Craig, I understand that you sailed as master on the vessel Solandra in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart yacht race and the vessel, whilst travelling down the east coast of, of New South Wales, encountered a, a storm. Is that correct?

A Yes.

Q10 O.K. As the storm approached could you tell me what happened and where you were stationed at the time?

A Well, before it happened we had a report that there was a storm up ahead so, to the safety of things, they put me off watch down below just in case it was going get really rough and the seas were going to get up to 8 metres, 8 feet high, 80 feet high. So they put me down below with a safety near the life raft, and so we went through all the things we had to do if an emergency happened.

Q11 Right. And the, so you went below from that time on?

A Yeah.

Q12 And what was your role as, when you went down below, as far as a crew member was concerned?

A My role there was, there wasn't really much for me to do except for making any final decisions.

Q13 Right. So, Guy, that's when you came in and you were assisting Craig as, as sailing master - - -

MR LEWIS

Yes, that's right.

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Q13 - - - to any decisions to be made on the boat?

MR LEWIS

That's right, yeah.

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Q14 O.K. Well, at that time that Craig went below, did you then secure Craig and then go on deck?

MR LEWIS

Mmm. I personally didn't secure Craig on that occasion but it was, it was the responsibility of one person per shift, the shift that was down below, to do that and to look after Craig's welfare - - -

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Q15 O.K.

MR LEWIS

- - - whilst down below.

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Q16 All right. Well then, from that time if I can then now cut across to you, Guy, and if you can explain what happened as the storm approached?

MR LEWIS

O.K. On, on the morning of the 27th, the weather was reasonably steady blowing 30 to 40 knots which we thought was the predicted front, and we were sailing comfortably throughout the, throughout the morning and through to lunch. Then we received the 2.30 sched in which, at which time we were given information that there was, that conditions were going to become more severe and that the wind strength was going to increase to, to a force 10 on the Beaufort scale and that the seas were going to increase also. And I cannot recall what height they predicted the seas were, were going to be. So at that point we were ready for conditions to, to get worse. After, after that sched, we changed our sails down to a more appropriate rig for the time, a more comfortable rig and we kept sailing along, sailing along comfortably and I believe the wind was up to, this is after the 2.30 sched, I believe the wind was up to 40 to 50 knots at the time and we were comfortable at that time. The sea height would've been ranging from 7 to, let me repeat that, probably 6 to 10 metres. At about 4 o'clock the wind strengthened again up to, ranging from 60 up to 80 knots and the sea height also increased to ranging, it felt like 10 plus metres, anything up to 15 metres. And that's when we were no longer comfortable and we were, we no longer felt totally in control. We changed down to a storm rig with a number 5 storm jib and a, a storm trisail and we

were very hard pressed but still relatively comfortable. We weren't having any major problems at that time. This is, this is after 4 o'clock, after the conditions had become more severe. And then we went through a patch of weather where the waves started breaking on top of us and this started causing, causing major problems. The boat was getting knocked down and the crew were getting thrown around the boat, the crew on deck and the crew down below. And it was, I believe, at around 6 o'clock that we had a major, major knock down and roll which caused, caused a dismasting, at which time we had to recover ourselves, get our composure and let the, let the mast go. We set about cutting the mast free. And after that, that took about 15 minutes, after that we turned the boat around and, pursuing ahead in which we thought was the quickest course to get us back to Eden, we headed back to, proceeded back to Eden.

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Q17 O.K. And then you, then you went back into Eden and effected repairs?

MR LEWIS

Yes, yeah.

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Q18 Did you - - - - -

MR LEWIS

No.

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Q18 - - - oh, well, you couldn't rejoin the race 'cause you, you were dismayed.

MR LEWIS

That's right.

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Q19 O.K.

MR LEWIS

And we lost, sorry, we lost radio contact at that point because the radio equipment became, was saturated.

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Q20 O.K.

MR LEWIS

Yeah. So we lost contact.

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Q21 How did you inform the race control that you were going to retire?

MR LEWIS

Yeah. Sorry about that, I, I should've added that. When the, immediately after the dismasting, Tim Jones, a crew member who was off shift, proceeded to send out a pang pan and I believe he reached a merchant vessel and I think he, I couldn't work out the accent at the time but it was, it was, it was a very un-Australian accent, un-English, and I think it might've been Russian, I thought it was Russian, so that we, we were able to let out a pang pan and that was received and we asked if that vessel could pass onto the Telstra Race

Control that information that we had lost our mast,
that we were O.K. and we were going to retire.

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Q22 O.K.

MR LEWIS

Yeah.

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Q23 Do you know if that, in fact that message was passed
through?

MR LEWIS

No. No.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q24 So when you got to Eden then, did you reconfirm to
Telstra Control that you were there and, and you
retired from the race?

MR LEWIS

We didn't have the ability to do that without any
radio. We, I honestly can't recall what we did on
shore at the time. Everyone was totally exhausted. I
cannot recall. Sorry. Yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q25 So you can't recall then - - -

MR LEWIS

Oh - - -

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Q25 - - - how your vessel was accounted for - - -

MR LEWIS

I'm sorry, I - - -

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Q25 - - - after being back in Eden?

MR LEWIS

Yeah. No, I believe David Goodfellow, the navigator, did make, he had a mobile phone. I believe he made a phone call, it may have been done via the C.Y.C.

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Q26 Mmm.

MR LEWIS

And into, to the Telstra Control, I, the details of that, I can remember him doing something like that afterwards, but as I said, I was, I was absolutely exhausted.

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Q27 Yeah.

MR LEWIS

So it's a bit, it's a little bit hazy, that, recollection of that event.

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Q28 O.K. Craig, could you just give me some of your sailing background, please?

A Well, I've been sailing all my life. I started when I was four and my background was that it was my 13th Sydney Hobart. I started off through the smaller, through the dinghies and then I started sailing in Rainbows and Fireballs and then after that I then went into keel boats so that was my 13th Sydney Hobart that I've sailed.

Q29 Right. So you've been sailing most of your life?

A Yeah.

Q30 O.K.

MR LEWIS

Well, a, a pertinent point there would be that you're a professional yachtsman, you're a professional delivery skipper - - -

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Q31 Right.

MR LEWIS

- - - delivering yachts all over the world.

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Q32 O.K.

A I used to yacht in Greece and Turkey - - -

Q33 O.K.

A - - - for 3 years.

Q34 As well?

A Yeah.

Q35 All right. Guy, could you give me some of your experience, and would you prefer to give me now some background of Craig's and the reason why he's sailing today?

MR LEWIS

Right, O.K. Which, which order would you prefer?

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Q36 Well, some of your background first.

MR LEWIS

Mine first, O.K. I've been sailing for just on 18 years and mostly keel boat experience. That was my fourth Sydney Hobart. I've completed three. I've been part of a line honours winning crew. I've been across Bass Strait I think a total of 10 times, that includes races, so I've done a few deliveries as well. I've done a delivery trip from Fremantle to Darwin and I've done a lot of one design racing as well - - -

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Q37 O.K.

MR LEWIS

- - - from shore.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q38 All right. Did you and Craig, O.K. And now you're here, a part of this interview for what reason?

MR LEWIS

I'm here to support Craig's actions, because Craig had a car accident 4 years ago - - -

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Q39 Right.

MR LEWIS

- - - which caused a left side brain injury.

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Q40 Right.

MR LEWIS

And so in the last 4 years, part of Craig's rehabilitation has been focused around sailing.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q41 Right.

MR LEWIS

And we've had a 4 year plan since that time - - -

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Q42 Yeah.

MR LEWIS

- - - to, to do a Sydney Hobart, and so in the last 2 years in earnest we've been campaigning towards - - -

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Q43 Yeah.

MR LEWIS

- - - doing a Sydney to Hobart.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q44 O.K.

MR LEWIS

And it was through my support and encouragement that we were able to get the whole campaign together.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q45 All right.

MR LEWIS

So my role has been fairly central, I guess.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q46 O.K.

MR LEWIS

Yeah.

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Q47 Well, that's good, that's good. Now you mentioned earlier about you receiving a force 10 - - -

MR LEWIS

Mmm.

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Q47 - - - storm warning.

MR LEWIS

Mmm.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q48 What can you, can you explain what the force 10, as far as the Beaufort scale is? Do, are you aware of, of what the rating is for the force 10?

MR LEWIS

I believe that's 50 knots plus.

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Q49 Yeah?

MR LEWIS

Yeah.

A It's over a gale.

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Q50 Over a gale?

A Yeah.

Q51 That's correct?

MR LEWIS

Yeah. Yeah. Storm warning.

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Q52 Yeah. Now did you attend the, the, this is to Guy, did you attend the C.Y.C. weather C.Y.C. briefing on the weather by yourself or did you go with Craig?

MR LEWIS

 There was myself and Craig and the navigator, David Goodfellow.

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Q53 So you all attended - - -

MR LEWIS

 Yes.

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Q53 - - - the C.Y.C. weather briefing?

MR LEWIS

 Yes.

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Q54 Was that conclusive with the weather pattern that you received, the weather that you actually received on the day?

A No.

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Q55 Right.

MR LEWIS

 Definitely not.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q56 All right. Had you expected to see those sorts of weather conditions?

MR LEWIS

No. No, we expected, you know, in the vicinity of maybe 40, 50 knots - - -

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Q57 O.K.

MR LEWIS

- - - and up 6 to 7 metre seas, but hardly doubled.

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Q58 All right.

MR LEWIS

The, certainly the charts didn't suggest it.

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Q59 O.K. At the time of the knock down and roll over, would you say that the vessel was inverted 180 degrees?

MR LEWIS

That's hard for me to establish, I was down below in the bunk. I was, it felt like the boat was virtually, it was, it felt like the boat was past 90 degrees, so we may have been very close to 180 degrees. I was virtually thrown out of the bunk. I had lee cloths strapped right over the top of me so it could well have been, but it was very disorienting, down - - -

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Q60 Right.

MR LEWIS

- - - down below.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q61 Craig, with your experiences do you believe the vessel was inverted upside down at 180 degrees?

A I'm not really sure because I was very disorientated.

Q62 Mmm.

A I couldn't really say that. I don't know.

Q63 O.K.

A It felt like it was but, 'cause I was hard up on the side of the bunk - - -

Q64 Yeah.

A - - - and I was all in a sort of roll.

Q65 Yes.

A So I figured that it was over a long way.

Q66 Yes. How long do you think, Craig, the vessel was in that position for? Do you think you could put a time limit that the vessel was overturned?

A Oh, well, I can't really say. I would say 10 seconds, maybe.

Q67 Right.

A That's just a guess , though.

Q68 Right. And, Guy, would you be able to give some further information on that?

MR LEWIS

Pretty hard from down below. It felt like the boat righted itself pretty quickly. It's got a very heavy keel - - -

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Q69 O.K.

MR LEWIS

- - - which may have been why the mast broke.

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Q70 Yeah.

MR LEWIS

Yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q71 I show you a document. Craig, do you understand what the, the, the category of race that you were involved in?

A Yeah.

Q72 Was it under the I.M.S. division?

A Yeah.

Q73 O.K. Are you familiar with this certificate, an I.M.S. rating certificate for the vessel Solandra?

A Yes.

Q74 O.K. I show you a, a stability rating, a stability index - - -

A Yeah.

Q74 - - - of 133.8 degrees. Do you agree with that?

A Actually I'm not really sure on that bit.

Q75 O.K. Guy, have you, have you got any thoughts on this?

MR LEWIS

Not really, no.

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Q76 No?

MR LEWIS

No.

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Q77 O.K. But you, you, you will agree that this is the
I.M.S. rating - - -

A Yeah.

Q77 - - - certificate - - -

MR LEWIS

Yes.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q77 - - - for the, for your vessel?

A The main things I follow of this - - -

Q78 Yes.

A - - - is what a handicap's going to be.

Q79 Right.

A So that's the, like, the maximum length and the water
line length.

Q80 Yes.

A And the weight of stability and how big the mast is,
everything to do with the handicap of the boat, I
understand.

Q81 O.K.

A But these other little angles, I don't really
understand

Q82 Right. O.K. Well, if I was to tell you that the
stability index of the vessel, this figure here, the
133.8, equates to how far the vessel will - - -

A Yeah, tilt.

Q82 - - - tilt beyond 90 degrees to 133.8 degrees and come
back upright.

A Mmm.

Q83 O.K?

A Yeah.

Q84 And if it goes beyond 133.8 degrees - - -

A O.K. yeah.

Q84 - - - it'll, it'll go fully inverted - - -

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q84 - - - until such time as it's knocked back - - -

A Yeah.

Q84 - - - by another force, O.K?

MR LEWIS

O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q85 I'll now show you another document which is headed, Telstra Sydney to Hobart Race, 1998, Mandatory Crew List. The names that you can see on the list there - - -

A Yeah.

Q85 - - - is that the entire crew that you sailed with?

A Yes.

Q86 O.K. There was no alterations to that?

A No.

Q87 O.K.

A That's the crew list.

Q88 All right. Thank you. Senior Constable Gray, any questions?

SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

No.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q89 O.K. Craig, I'll give you the opportunity firstly to say, is there anything that you would like to say that would assist us in our inquiry?

A Um - - -

Q90 Any improvements that you feel that might be possible or anything that may want to be changed?

A I don't think we had good enough forewarning about what we were goin' to get.

Q91 Mmm.

A I think they could've improved on that.

Q92 Mmm.

A 'Cause I don't think anyone really expected that it was going to be like 80 knots of wind - - -

Q93 Mmm.

A - - - and 80 foot seas. We thought maybe like 40 or 50, but not 80.

Q94 Mmm.

A I think the weather forecast wasn't very accurate.

Q95 Mmm. All right. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A No, that's all, that's it.

Q96 Right. Guy, is there anything you'd like to add?

MR LEWIS

The only thing that, I don't consider myself an expert as far as, you know, reviewing a race like has happened, but I think that it would be good in future if weather information such as, such that was, that was

given at Wilson's Promontory 4 hours before it actually hit the fleet, that would've been good for the fleet to have known that, and some other decisions may have been made.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q97 Mmm.

MR LEWIS

Because there is a rule that stipulates that you can't have outside assistance and I think that should be changed if it's, if the conditions are going to be threatening. And the other thing that I believe should be reviewed is the harness technology, basically the strength of harnesses, 'cause I believe that lives were lost as a result of harnesses breaking. That's, that's all.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q98 All right. With, talking about harnesses, how many harnesses are on, on the Solandra?

MR LEWIS

We had eight, yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q99 O.K. And they are all the harnesses that are supplied by the boat?

MR LEWIS

Yeah.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q100 Craig, do you know what brand they are?

A

Q101 Mmm.

A Berkeley, I think they are, local ... brand.

Q102 O.K. And they all comply with the Australian standard

- - -

A Yes.

Q102 - - - that you're aware of?

A Yeah. Mmm.

Q103 O.K. And, and, Guy, when you said that they should be, the strength should be increased, if they comply with the Australian standard do you think that that standard should be then improved?

MR LEWIS

Possibly, yeah, if, if - - -

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q104 Is that what you're saying?

MR LEWIS

Yeah, if the, if the harnesses that did break, if they complied, then maybe the compliance needs to be changed.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q105 Mmm. All right. Guy, is there anything else you'd like to add?

MR LEWIS

No, thank you.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q106 O.K. Nothing else? All right. The, the time on my watch is now 3.46pm. This interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED