



OFFICE OF THE STATE CORONER

FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION

CITATION: **Non-inquest findings into the death of William Roger BOYLES**

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

JURISDICTION: Southport

FILE NO(s): 2013/326

FINDINGS OF: James McDougall, Coroner

CATCHWORDS: Motorcyclist, flooded road, swift water, drowned

REPRESENTATION:

Counsel Assisting

Ms Rhiannon Helsen

William Boyles was 65 years of age at the time of his death.

For a number of days prior to Mr Boyles' death on 27 January 2013, Queensland experienced some extreme weather conditions, which involved the flooding of many major roads, particularly in the Greenbank area. Members of the Greenbank Rural Fire Brigade were on standby due to the severe weather conditions.

At around 8:30pm on 27 January 2013, a member of the public advised firefighters from the Greenbank Rural Fire Brigade that Spring Mountain Drive at Greenbank was becoming flooded and a lot of vehicles were still driving through the water. Accordingly, First Officer, Fabian Stangherlin, Crew Leader, Andra Lovett, and Fire Fighter, Graham Randall, attended the intersection of Spring Mountain Drive and New Beith Road, which is upstream from Goodna Road. As they approached the intersection, it was observed that the water covered approximately 150 metres of the road and was at a depth of 500mm. There were a number of vehicles stopped on the western side of Spring Mountain Drive. First Officer Stangherlin instructed his crew to close the road to prevent any vehicles from crossing. He also contacted Fire Communications and requested Logan City Council to attend and erect road closure signs. Members of the Logan Council also attended to assist.

Whilst assisting a member of the public to travel home safely, Officer Lovett observed that the Edwards Bridge on Goodna Road was flooded. There was approximately 700mm of water over the road. He was instructed by First Officer Stangherlin to close the road and remain in attendance, which he did. At around 11:00pm, the driver of a semi-trailer which had travelled through the flood waters advised Officer Lovett that there was a motorcyclist who was stranded in the flood waters. He subsequently travelled to Edwards Bridge. From the water's edge he observed what appeared to be a person holding onto a motorcycle, which was completely under water. Using 30 metres of flat fire hose tied to the front of the bulbar of the fire truck, two civilians waded into the water to attempt to throw the hose to the stranded motorcyclist. During this time, further assistance was requested by Officer Lovett.

Video of the attempted rescue shows the flood waters to be at least 700mm high and flowing incredibly fast. The conditions were extremely dangerous and obviously not suitable to cross. Although the rope was thrown to the motorcyclist, he was unable to keep a hold of it and was washed downstream and out of sight.

Due to the severe weather conditions, communications between the firefighters were hampered. Through the broken messages received, First Officer Stangherlin believed that Officer Lovett required assistance. As such, they travelled to Edwards Bridge, Goodna Road, under lights and sirens. Upon arrival, it was observed that Edwards Bridge had been restricted to one lane due to road works. There was at least 400mm of water on the road, which seemed to be flowing very fast. After speaking to Officer Lovett, First Officer Stangherlin contacted Fire Communications and requested Swift Water Rescue and a Rescue Helicopter. He was advised by Fire Communications that the helicopter was unable to attend due to the weather conditions. Attempts to locate the motorcyclist were subsequently made using the spotlight on the fire trucks, however, these were unsuccessful due to the raging water and darkness. First Officer Stangherlin instructed his crew not to enter the water due to concern for their safety, as they were not trained in swift water rescue and the water current was very fast. Urban fire crews from West Logan were called to assist. Attempts were then made to locate the motorcyclist using a thermal imaging camera, however these were unsuccessful.

Police were subsequently called to attend the area. Upon arrival, police noted that Edwards Bridge was not visible due to the amount of water flowing, which appeared to have an extremely strong current. It was still raining heavily at the time. They were unable to locate the motorcyclist.

The following morning, Mr Boyles' body was located by the two civilians who had attempted to assist him the previous evening. Police crews and swift water rescue were called to retrieve the body as the conditions were still extremely unsafe.

Autopsy

On 30 January 2013, an external and full internal post-mortem examination was conducted by Pathologist, Dr Nathan Milne. A number of histology and toxicology tests were also undertaken.

The external post-mortem examination showed some minor injuries, mainly on the right hand side of the head and face. The internal post-mortem examination showed no significant injuries. The lungs showed features of both severe emphysema and drowning. The heart was enlarged and there was moderate narrowing of the arteries (coronary atherosclerosis). There was also a large amount of fluid in the stomach, which may have been indicative of drowning. A CT scan conducted showed fluid in the sinus over the head, which is non-specific but can be seen in drowning. The lungs showed signs of severe emphysema. Vascular calcification was also present.

Histology of the lungs showed areas consistent with drowning on a background of severe emphysema.

Toxicology testing showed no drugs or alcohol present in the blood, however there was a low level of alcohol in the urine.

The cause of death was found to be drowning. Other significant conditions noted were emphysema.

Conclusion

Mr Boyles was 65 years of age at the time of his death. He drowned after being washed away attempting to cross a heavily flooded road on his motorcycle, despite road closures in place.

Based upon the material obtained during the course of the coronial investigation, I am satisfied that the circumstances surrounding Mr Boyles' death have been sufficiently examined and there are no further matters which require investigation.

James McDougall
Coroner
31 March 2015