



Detective Sgt. S.Page,
Rose Bay Area Command,
ROSE BAY NSW

14 August 2001

Dear Detective Page,

Re: Death of John Alan RUSSELL
Case No. 89/2125

I am writing to you in relation to the death of this 31 year old man. His body was found on rocks below an 11 metre cliff on the South Bondi rock platform in November 1989. Dr Sylvia Hollinger performed a post mortem examination on his body, and she has indicated the time of death to be some time around 23 November 1989.

I am in receipt of 30 colour photographs and digital photographs of same images. These photographs depict the body of Mr Russell *in-situ* on the rock platform and of the general area around the body. I have also received a 7 page letter from Detective Sgt Nicholas in relation to this matter, including a 4 page post mortem report.

10 questions have been asked of me and I set out answers below:

- (1) Accompanying this letter are diagrams depicting injuries described.
- (2) There are many injuries to the left side of the body, and this might indicate the deceased's primary impact was to the left side ie, he landed on his left side. From the autopsy report, there do not appear to be multiple directions from which the injuries arose.
- (3) There is a bruise below the right eye, however it is brown-yellow and therefore may be old. The injuries to the left eyebrow, nose and lower lip might have arisen due to the fall. I do not see other injuries which are more likely to be assault-related.
- (4) The injuries described in the report are unsurvivable. I do not believe there was any significant period following the fall where the deceased was able to move, speak etc. There are multiple fractures of the skull, ribs, a torn aorta and a lacerated left lung. These injuries in combination would lead to immediate incapacitation of the deceased and subsequent death. These injuries are unsurvivable.
- (5) The deceased would have been immediately unconscious.
- (6) The deceased would not be mobile at all after the fall, given the number and severity of injuries present.



- (7) The deceased would not have been able to move himself following the fall, for reasons explained above.
- (8) Possibly the left side impacted first as most of the injuries are left sided.
- (9) The deceased was alive when he fell or was possibly pushed over the cliff. The fractures and injuries described are associated with haemorrhage (bleeding) and this implies a beating heart when the injuries were sustained. I cannot say if he was unconscious prior to the fall, but if he was, I am not able to say what the cause for this would have been. Even if he was assaulted on the cliff, the injuries to the face are not severe and would not by themselves necessarily result in a period of unconsciousness.
- (10) (i) Falls from heights such as 11 metres can result in injuries to ribs, vertebral column, pelvis, skull, long bones of upper and lower limbs. There also may be soft tissue and organ injuries such as lacerations to heart/aorta, lungs, liver and spleen.
- (ii) There may be abrasions, bruises, lacerations on both sides of the body.
- (iii) Bodies may bounce after a fall, but a fall of 11 metres is not particularly great, so the amount of bounce may be zero to possibly several feet.
- (iv) The distance horizontally a body may travel from the base of a cliff can vary markedly. A person who accidentally falls (no velocity at the time of the commencement of the fall) may still travel several metres from a cliff. A person who runs and jumps off a cliff has velocity and therefore, depending on the cliff height, may travel many metres from the cliff.

OPINION:

The position of John Russell's body, as depicted in the photographs, is unusual in a case of jumping or falling from a height. The body is facing towards the base of the cliff, which is unusual given the small height of the cliff, implying if the deceased acted alone, he has been able to twist his body 180 degrees to rest in the position depicted. I do not believe he would have been able to move at all following the fall.

The red jersey is creased to expose the back and lower abdomen of the deceased, suggesting it had been pulled up prior to the fall. I would not expect the clothing to have that appearance had it been in the standard or usual position at the time of the fall.



There are some brown head hairs on his left hand near the base of the index finger. It would be unusual to find hairs on the hands of a person who has jumped. This finding is suggestive the deceased might have pulled them from the head of another person at the time he fell, implying the presence of another person or persons at the time of the fall. This raises the possibility of foul play in relation to this man's death.

There are clearly injuries which have been inflicted as a result of the fall, however the cause of the fall remains unexplained. I cannot exclude foul play based on the scene photographs and description of injuries in the post mortem report. I am not aware if there was any evidence to support suicide. The blood alcohol level and the presence of other drugs are not detailed in the report, and would be of relevance in this case. The injuries to the hands are relatively non-specific in nature and could have been occasioned in a number of different ways. They are not obviously assault-related. Although there are no injuries which indicate definitely the deceased was assaulted prior to the fall, there are some injuries to the face and hands which are suggestive of an assault.

In summary, John Alan Russell appears to have died from multiple injuries, consistent with a fall from a height. There are several unresolved issues in relation to this man's death, which I have mentioned above, some of which raise concerns that another person or persons were with him at the time of his death. The possibility still exists that this man has been met with foul play and might have been forcibly thrown off the cliff.

Yours,

Allan D.Cala
FRCPA
Staff Forensic Pathologist