

Police say death was an accident

An official report has found that the late Prime Minister, Mr Holt, who disappeared while swimming off Cheviot Beach on December 17, died accidentally.

The report, a joint inquiry by Commonwealth and State police in Victoria, says that during an exhaustive investigation there was no indication that the disappearance was anything other than accidental.

The 95-page report was released by the Prime Minister, Senator Gorton, yesterday.

The report is based on statements from 19 people.

Senator Gorton said last week that there would be no Commonwealth inquiry into the tragedy.

● Statements

The persons who made statements to the police and which were obtained in the report are:

Mary Edith Lawless, a housekeeper for the Holt family who normally resides in St Georges Road, Toorak, but lived with the Holt family at Canberra and Portsea. She went with Mr Holt from Canberra to Portsea during the last weekend of his life.

Alan Cameron Charles Stewart 28 company director of Elm Grove, Armadale, who was house guest of the Gillespies and went with Mr Holt and others to Cheviot Beach.

Marjorie Pamela Gillespie of Lansell Road, Toorak, who was at her home at the Perroona Estate, Nepean

who was at her home at the Perroona Estate, Nepean Highway, Portsea, during the weekend. Mrs Gillespie was a friend and neighbour of Mr Holt and was also on the beach.

Vyner Gillespie 20 arts student at Monash University, daughter of Mrs Gillespie, who was also at the beach.

Robert Martin Simpson, 19, a medical student at Monash University, of Lorraine Street, Hampton, a friend of Vyner Gillespie, pending the weekend with the Gillespies and was among the beach party.

Peter William Morgan, an army private, who was on duty at the main gate to the Portsea Officers' Cadet School on December 17 and was the first person to be told of the disappearance.

Peter John Schuman an army captain stationed at

Peter John Schuman an army captain stationed at the Portsea Officers' Cadet School, and the duty officer on December 17.

Neville Woods, an army corporal attached to the Portsea Officers' Cadet Schools.

In charge

Inspector L. J. Newell superintendent of police who was in charge of police arrangements associated with the search.

Malcolm Thomas Shepherd, of Darling Road, Sorrento, a professional fisherman in the area for 10 years and an amateur fisherman for 25 years.

Robert William Hutchins of Newbury, Nepean Highway, Sorrento, a professional fisherman in the area

way, continuing a professional fisherman in the area for 40 years.

Marcus de Laune Faunce, of Canberra, personal physician to Mr Holt.

Dr B. C. Edwards of Tideways, Nepean Highway, Sorrento, a friend of Mr Holt who played tennis with him on December 17.

Johnathon Scott Edgar, 23, real estate agent of Myrning Crescent Toorak, who was at his parents' Portsea home near the Holt's house for the weekend, and a spearfishing companion of Mr Holt.

Theo Raymond Scales, a director, of Caroline Street, South Yarra, a close friend of Mr Holt.

Nicholas McDonald Holt, a stepson of Mr Holt, a solicitor of Millicent Avenue, Toorak, who was at Mr Holt's Portsea home during the weekend.

at the time of the disappearance during the weekend.

Arthur H. Lucas, supervising engineer of the Department of Public Works, hydraulic and soils research branch, of Manly Vale, NSW, who conducted a survey of currents and tides at Cheviot Beach during the search.

Brian Edward Moloney, a licensed surveyor, at the office of titles, Melbourne, who conducted a survey of Cheviot Beach.

Report

James Henry McNamara, a doctor and senior Government pathologist for Victoria who made a report on the probabilities of the average length of time that Mr Holt's body might have been expected to have been recovered.

The following is the full text of the police summary on Mr Holt's death. Evidence of witnesses is excluded.

1 On Monday, December 18, 1967. Inspector 1st

Class Jackson of the Commonwealth Police Force commenced enquiries into the disappearance of the Rt Hon Harold Edward Holt then Prime Minister of Australia whilst surfing at Cheviot Bay Beach, Portsea. On that date Inspector Grade 2 J. Ford of the Victoria Police Force joined forces in the investigation.

2 This report deals with the information gained during the investigation and in the main the following aspects are dealt with:

- (a) The circumstances of the disappearance and the events leading up to the occurrence.
- (b) Search and rescue operations.
- (c) Local surf and tidal conditions and knowledge of the area.
- (d) Conclusions.

3 In dealing with the occurrence and the events leading to the occurrence, enquiries have shown that an ordinary domestic pattern was disclosed from the time

an ordinary domestic pattern was disclosed from the time Mr Holt departed Canberra on Friday, December 15, 1967.

4 On that day, Mr Holt left Canberra by VIP RAAF aircraft, in the company of Mrs Mary Lawless, his resident housekeeper at The Lodge, Canberra, and who was also an old family retainer.

5 Normally Mrs Lawless resides at 112 St Georges Road, Toorak, but at times, also is in residence at Canberra.

6 On arrival at Melbourne at about 11.30am Mr Holt first visited his office for a short period, and then went to his home in St Georges Road, Toorak. He had a light meal there and at about 1.15pm left to travel in his own private car to his beach residence at Portsea.

Mrs Lawless travelled by separate vehicle to Portsea and on arrival at the house at about 5pm. Mr Holt was already there, she described his demeanour on her arrival as being jovial and jolly. Dinner was taken at the Portsea residence with Mr Holt and Mrs Lawless present. During dinner normal domestic matters were discussed including a proposed return trip to Canberra on the following Tuesday with the grandchildren for the purpose of attending a Christmas party.

7 Whilst en route from Melbourne to Portsea, on Friday, December 15, Mr Holt stopped at Johnson's Fish Store in Sorrento to purchase fish. There he met a friend, Mrs Marjorie Pam-



Mrs Holt talks to leaders of the search squads at the beach.





The Cheviot Hill Beach area

standard. Dr Edwards felt that this was due to a minor shoulder complaint from which he had suffered over a short period and from which he had not completely recovered, and for which he had received treatment, from a Dr John Cloke of Spring Street, Melbourne.

9 At about 5pm on Saturday, December 16, Nicholas McDonald Fell Holt, a stepson, arrived at the Portsea home with his wife and baby daughter Sophie, and at this time Mr Holt had just arrived home after playing tennis with Dr Edwards and others.

Visit

At about 6.30pm on that date Nicholas Holt and his wife went with Mr Holt in separate cars to the home of Mr Steve Martin at Portsea. The visit was in connection with a wedding anniversary and there were about 30 guests present. The visit was of short duration and the Holts returned home in their respective vehicles where they entertained about 14 guests to dinner.

10 The dinner was of an informal nature and the visitors consisted in the

visitors consisted in the main of neighbours and their families. Mr Holt was in very good spirits and evidently enjoyed the dinner after which Nicholas, his wife and Mr Holt visited

spent some time in the garden with his grandchild Sophie, and he had some discussion with a Jonathon Edgar, the son of his neighbour in relation to spearfishing and specifically some crayfish they had speared the previous weekend together.

They made arrangements to go spearfishing at about 4pm that afternoon at Cheviot Beach which is also known as 'Back Beach Quarantine Station'.

13 During the morning of Sunday, December 17 Mr Holt phoned his near neighbour, Mrs Gillespie, and informed her that he was going to the old fort (which is located in the area of the Officers' Cadet Training School at Point Nepean Head at the entrance into the Bay from Bass Strait) and he asked if any member of the Gillespie family or their guests wanted to go with him, and later to the Quarantine Back Beach.

Arrangements were made for him to call at the Gillespie house at about 11am

lespie house at about 11am he arrived a little late at about 11.15am. At about 11.30am the party, consisting of Mrs Gillespie, her daughter Vyner Gillespie, and young man called Martin Simpson, Mr Alan Stewart, and Mr Holt left for the Quarantine Back Beach. They travelled in two cars and were grouped as follows:

Alan Stewart drove one vehicle containing Vyner

upon they then entered their respective cars and followed Mr Holt back along the roadway to a point where a clearly defined dirt track branched off to the right.

Both vehicles travelled down this roadway which is fairly steeply inclined towards the sand dunes of the ocean sea front and after travelling as far as possible, a distance of about 300 yards, both vehicles then returned and drove back about 100 yards where Mr Holt drove his vehicle just off the road and the second vehicle parked immediately behind it.

Route

16 From this point is the usual way on foot down to Cheviot Beach which is reached by traversing a foot track through the undergrowth to a point where a steep sand dune gives access to the beach and the rocks.

17 The group alighted from the cars and they were all dressed in swimming costumes and with towels with the exception of Martin Simpson who had long jeans and who was barefooted. The womenfolk wore bikinis with top shirts or blouses and Stewart wore a light windcheater.

Mr Holt wore blue walk shorts, a navy blue tee shirt and a green cloth sun hat. He wore sand shoes believed to be without laces. He carried a long string bag containing canned drinks, a bottle of drink, drinking glasses, a pair of spectacles in a case, a large beach

glasses, a pair of spectacles in a case, a large beach towel, two small packets of salted peanuts and a newspaper.

18 Before leaving the car Mr Holt handed Martin Simpson a pair of sandals to wear and the party then commenced to make their way along the foot track towards the beach. After travelling a short distance Mr Holt remarked that he had forgotten his swimming trunks and he placed the string bag alongside the track and went back to the vehicle to get the forgotten article, he returned carrying two pairs of swim trunks, one blue pair and the other of green patterned material.

Water

19 The party then moved off again with Alan Stewart carrying the string bag. On arrival at the rocky foreshore the water's edge was then about 10 yards out and both Alan Stewart, Mrs Gillespie and Vyner Gillespie have stated that at this point they noticed that the water was very high and that a great deal of drift wood of varying lengths and sizes was present in the water and along the water's edge.

20 The group picked their way along the beach with Mr Holt in front and drawing ahead a distance of

about 50 yards away from the main group. This distance was accentuated by reason that the group stopped to place their towels in a bag carried by Mrs Gillespie.

About two thirds of the way along the beach from the point of entry is a rock outcrop protruding from the sand dunes. Mr Holt disappeared behind this out-

crop and evidently changed into his swim trunks before the arrival of the main

into his swim trunks before the arrival of the main party, as on their arrival, he was dressed only in tight fitting dark swim trunks and sand shoes apparently minus laces. The party walked in a group to a point about 30 yards past the outcrop and placed their belongings together on the sand. They chatted for some little time

about ordinary things which included the condition of the beach and the surf at the time.

Mrs Gillespie says of conditions, "The surf was higher than I had even seen it, and it was a full tide, but not unduly rough at this stage. The sea beyond where it was breaking appeared to be calm".

Mr Stewart says, "I not-

iced that the tide was very high and the surf was very turbulent, in fact the biggest I have seen on that beach".

Martin Simpson said, "I went into the water almost knee deep and there was a fairly strong undercurrent, so I just splashed around without going in too far".

21 Mr Holt at this stage did mention in conversation "I know this beach like the back of my hand" and he then went on to say how the tide was unusually high.

22 The group then commenced to break off with Mrs Gillespie strolling along the beach towards the end in the direction of Portsea. Alan Stewart went to the water's edge to test the temperature of the water and returned to the remaining group quite quickly.

Mr Holt, Martin Simpson and Vyner Gillespie then walked away from Stewart and parted company as they did, Simpson and Miss Gillespie going to the left towards the direction taken by Mrs Gillespie, and Mr Holt to the right towards the water. He went diagonally towards the water and entered without any apparent hesitation and

water and entered without any apparent hesitation and commenced to swim in the area away from the beach.

23 Mrs Gillespie returned later after Mr Holt had already entered the water. Stewart went to the water's edge and then returned to where Mrs Gillespie was sitting alone in the sand where the belongings had been left.

Undertow

He said to Mrs Gillespie, "If Mr Holt can take it, I had better go in too".

He then entered the water, but did not venture out beyond a point where he felt a deep pool and a tremendous undertow around his legs. He continued to swim in this vicinity and during this time, he could see Mr Holt further out to sea swimming quietly. He noticed that Mr Holt was swimming in the midst of what he considered to be a dangerous turbulence, and which had built up very suddenly from the time that he felt himself on the edge of the deep pool and whilst

he was swimming in the vicinity.

24 Stewart stated that at all times he was in shallow water and could stand up, in fact he did stand up, and he saw Mrs Gillespie at the water's edge looking out towards where Mr Holt had been. He joined Mrs Gillespie in the shallows and also looked out to sea towards where he had last seen Mr Holt. He states that Mrs Gillespie may have said "Where is he?" and he immediately joined her in searching for Mr Holt.

25 They remained occupied in this manner for a short while without results and he then left the water and went towards a large rock in the centre of the beach and he climbed this rock as a point of vantage to continue his observation.

He was joined by Mrs Gillespie who was on a lower projection and later by Simpson and Vyner Gil-

lower projection and later by Simpson and Vyner Gillespie. They continued to search in this manner for a few minutes and became increasingly alarmed to the stage where a short discussion was held and it was decided that he should go immediately for help.

26 He wasted little time, due to the urgency of the situation and he ran along the beach to the point where the vehicles had been left and he drove his vehicle to the front entrance gate to raise the alarm.

27 Mrs Gillespie stated that shortly before Alan Stewart left the water to join her when she was looking out to see whether she could see Mr Holt, she had noticed Mr Holt was still swimming well out and seemed to be getting further away all the time. She had watched Mr Holt continuously from the time he had entered the surf, and she saw the water become very turbulent around him very suddenly and appeared to boil and these conditions seemed to "swamp" on him. He was not seen again.

28 Vyner Gillespie and Martin Simpson, who were together continuously on the beach, have stated that they did not see Mr Holt in the water at any time as they had not noticed or paid any attention as they were strolling along the beach.

29 After the departure of Stewart from the beach

Continued on next page

“ The tide was very high and the surf was very turbulent — in fact the biggest I have seen on that beach ”

Mr Alan Stewart

ela Gillespie, who was also buying fish and they chatted for some time, during which arrangements were made for Mr Holt to visit the home of the Gillespie

made for Mr Holt to visit the home of the Gillespie family which is located on the same estate and within a few yards of Mr Holt's home at Portsea, at about 6.45pm that evening for drinks. This appointment was kept, and he remained only a short time after which he returned home, had dinner with Mrs Lawless, and he retired to bed at approxi-

with Mrs Lawless, and he retired to bed at approximately 9.30pm.

8 On Saturday afternoon, December 16, Mr Holt visited the home of Dr Bruce Condell Edwards at Tideways, Nepean Highway, Sorrento and played tennis in the company of Dr Edwards, Winton Gillespie, Walter Pistarman, Marie Griffin, Lois Nephthine and other people.

Dr Edwards was seen and has stated that Mr Holt played about two sets of tennis during the afternoon. During this time Mr Holt was happy and apparently enjoyed the tennis although not playing up to his usual

their friend and neighbour next door, Mr John Edgar, where they enjoyed stereo music for the remainder of the evening. Nicholas and his wife left before Mr Holt who was not late in arriving home.

11 At about 6.30am on Sunday, December 17, Mr Holt visited the kitchen and spoke to Mrs Lawless, the housekeeper. He requested his breakfast which consisted of orange juice, toast and tea. This was served to him in his bedroom. Mrs Lawless described him as being in good spirits and quite his usual self.

Sweet

Later, at about 9am he had a bowl of rhubarb and cream. He remained at home and informed Mrs Lawless that he would later go to see the arrival, through the heads, of the Englishman Rose in the vessel the Lively Lady.

12 Mr Holt, after speaking to his stepson Nicholas, then obtained the Sydney Sunday papers from Portsea and returned home. He

Gillespie and Martin Simpson. This car belonged to a Mr John MacIntosh and was

son. This car belonged to a Mr John MacIntosh and was a white Holden station wagon. Mr Holt travelled in his own vehicle a maroon coloured Pontiac with Mrs Gillespie as a passenger.

14 The vehicles travelled in convoy to the main gate of the Quarantine Station and Mr Holt spoke to the military guard, Private Morgan, announced his identity and so cleared the way for the passage of both vehicles into the area. Both vehicles travelled along the bitumen roadway inside the area and followed this road to a point near the fort where they were stopped by a road block from driving on to the headland proper. The purpose of the visit to this point was to observe the Englishman Rose sail through the Heads in the vessel Lively Lady after sailing from England.

15 The group alighted from the cars and took up a point of vantage and watched the entrance into Port Phillip Bay of the vessel, they remained in a group and were together for only a short time, where-

The Holt Report

DOCTOR TELLS POLICE OF SNORKEL INCIDENT



Continued from previous page

area Mrs Gillespie, her daughter and Simpson continued to search by observation for some 10 minutes. They then collected their belongings and those of Mr Holt and gradually made their way back along the beach still making visual search.

30 On arrival at the cliff top they waited for Stewart to return for a period in the vicinity of about one hour, during which time people commenced to arrive as the search got under way.

31 On arrival at the front entrance gate Alan Stewart informed the Military Guard on duty, Private Peter William Morgan, of the occurrence and requested him to contact his duty officer in a hurry. He then spoke to Captain Schuman who was the Orderly Officer of the day and explained the position and through this medium he was put in touch with D.24 Victoria Police Communication

Centre.

The position was explained and in this manner a search and rescue operation was set in motion. Three skindivers who were at the entrance gate overheard the conversation and offered their services. Two of the men, John Haywood and Neville Lynch hurried to Sorrento to obtain diving gear whilst the other man Corporal Neville Woods went to the hill overlooking Cheviot Beach and using binoculars made a search of the beach without any sign of Mr Holt.

Unset

32 He was at the cliff top when Mrs Gillespie and the remainder of the original party arrived. He stated that they were all very upset but after a little time they were able to describe what Mr Holt had been

they were able to describe what Mr Holt had been wearing and also to indicate the area where Mr Holt was last seen.

Haywood and Lynch then arrived with diving gear and the three men then hurried to the immediate area to conduct an underwater search where possible, where Corporal Woods found on arrival that the conditions and the water turbulence made it impossible to dive to any extent.

He stated, "The water was dirty, it was difficult to see and the undertow was extremely strong, we were just getting pushed backwards and forwards by the waves and the undertow was trying to pull us into the channel and out to sea. It was too rough to be able to search properly, the tide had only just gone on the turn".

33 After some time the three men left the water and went to the big rock in the

went to the big rock in the centre of the beach, climbed it and used it as a point to scan the water with the assistance of binoculars. Captain Schuman then arrived with other personnel and they all searched along the beach. Captain Schuman went to the cliff with the binoculars to get a better view. From that point on, the search for Mr Holt

built up with the arrival of local personnel, police divers and service personnel and the setting up of a Police Communication and Co-ordination Centre.

34 All members of the original beach party are emphatic that no food or drink was taken by Mr Holt or themselves from the time of leaving Gillespie's to the time of his disappearance.

35 Statements were taken from members of the beach party in the company of Mr Holt, and from parties arriving initially on the scene as well as other relevant persons.

Call

36 Following the telephone call by the eye witness, Alan Stewart, to D.24 Communications Centre, Victoria Police Force, at 12.45pm on Sunday the 17 December 1967, the police duty officer at the time, Inspector L. J. Newell, was notified and he went immediately to the scene.

Eventually Superintendent G. W. Hill, Victoria Police arrived and an urgent application of a search and rescue plan was put into effect.

37 At the time of the disappearance of Mr Holt the Officer Cadet Training School had closed down for the Christmas vacation period and all cadets had disbanded as had the permanent college staff with the exception of essential staff of about 6 to 8 persons.

38 Search and rescue operations were directed and co-ordinated by Superintendent Hill and Inspector Newell from a mobile police communications

police communications van located strategically in the area and it is estimated that underwater divers namely, Corporal Woods, John Hayward and Neville Lynch were at the beach and conducting an underwater search as far as weather and surf conditions would allow within 40 minutes from the time the alarm was raised.

39 Prior to the arrival of the advance party of police skin divers at 2.45pm a life-saving party from the Portsea Life-Saving Club and local area personnel mustered for the purpose by Captain Schuman were in attendance at Cheviot Beach and were actively engaged in a search in whatever manner possible at that stage. Helicopters were then also active in an air search over the immediate area.

Search

40. With the arrival of the police skin-diving party, rescue operations were rapidly built up to the stage where by night fall it is estimated that some 190 personnel were actively engaged in the search drawn from the following authorities:

Department of Air, Department of the Army, Ansett-ANA, Department of Civil Aviation; Commonwealth Police Force, Coast Guard, Commonwealth Lighthouse Service, Civil

Ambulance, Flinders Shire Council, Marine Board of Victoria, Department of the Navy, Postmaster-General's Department, Portsea Surf Lifesaving Club, Prime Minister's Department, Press, Radio and Television, Queenscliffe Life Boat Quarantine Services Personnel, J. Rose Motors Pty. Ltd., State Police, Department of Supply, St John Ambulance Brigade (Search and Rescue Units), Sorrent Volunteer Fire Brigade, Trans Australia Airline, Department of Works Sydney.

41. In accordance with the pattern of the search and the limitations of the prevailing weather and tide conditions the search was continuous over the 24 hours of the 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 December 1967. From the latter date a gradual run down of activity occurred in relation to land and underwater activity. However, a substantial air land and surface sea search continued, building up to a maximum of 300 personnel until termination on Friday 5 January 1968.

42. Official advice from the Weather Bureau shows that the forecast issued for Sunday, 17 December was as follows:

7am — fresh and gusty north westerly winds, moderate seas.

9am — North westerly winds expected to gradually strengthen to 25 knots, seas moderate to rough and heavy, south west swells in exposed waters. (This forecast applied to all coastal waters west of Wilsons Promontory.)

Tides

43. Official tidal measurements taken at Point Lonsdale on Sunday, 17 December were as follows:

High water — 0014 hours — 4 feet 10 inches, 1132 hours — 4 feet 0 inches; Low water — 0543 hours — 2 feet 7½ inches, 1750 hours — 0 feet 10½ inches.

On December 18, 19, 20 and 21 the readings were:

High water — 18-12-67, 0104 hours — 5 feet 2½ inches, 1240 hours — 4 feet 5 inches; low water — 0640 hours — 2 feet 8 inches, 1814 hours — 1 foot 0 inches.

High water — 19-12-67, 0142 hours — 5 feet 4½ inches, 1305 hours — 3 feet 7½ inches; low water — 0723 hours — 5 feet 3½ inches, 1900 hours — 0 feet 1½ inches.

High water — 20-12-67, 0210 hours — 4 feet 6½ inches, 1350 hours — 3 feet 6 inches; low water — 0805 hours — 1 foot 5 inches, 1955 hours — 0 feet 2½ inches.

High water — 21-12-67, 0255 hours — 4 feet 6

High water — 21-12-67,
0255 hours — 4 feet 6
inches. 1435 hours — 3 feet
6½ inches; low water— 0840
hours — 1 foot 3 inches.
2025 hours — 0 feet 4
inches.

44 As will be seen the
pattern of tides together
with continued high winds
over the ensuing days im-
mediately following Sunday,
17 December hampered
underwater search opera-
tions. In this regard it was
not possible until 23 De-
cember when conditions in
Bass Strait were extremely



The eye-witnesses of Mr Holt's death, from left, Mrs W. Gillespie, her daughter, Vyner, Mr A. Stewart and Mr A. Simpson.

TERRIFIC POWERS

FERRIFIC POWERS OF ENDURANCE

calm and also as was the case on the following day for the police diving team to completely eliminate as far as possible the possibility of the body being lodged in an underwater crevice or cave at Cheviot Beach.

45 In all there were 8 helicopters used in the search and from Saturday, 23 December 1967, were reduced to 2 which are still patrolling and an approximate of 200-250 flying hours were logged over all.

46 The area covered by the search pattern is as follows:

Eastern section — approximately 10-15 miles; From Point Nepean to Cape Schank — 10 miles; From Cape Schank coastal to Flinders Naval Depot then Western Port Bay to Phillip Island to McHaffies Reef. Coastal to Pheians Bluff and the waters enclosed in that area.

Western side — approximately 7 miles; Point Flinders coastal to Point Lonsdale, Queenscliffe, Swan Bay to Indented Head; Coastal to Rosebud and triangle of sea bounded by Rosebud, Mud Island and Edwards Point on Mud Island.

Details

47 The co-ordinators of the search operations also submitted reports containing the essential details and overall pattern of the search activity.

48 In this regard quite apart from the use in search and rescue operations of local knowledge, enquiries were conducted independently from local professional fishermen of long

sional fishermen of long standing, local police and personnel on the quarantine area.

Also information was solicited from professional fishermen in the Queenscliffe area. By this medium the factual conditions at the time of the Cheviot Bay area, the surrounding bays and inlets, tides etc. were explored.

49 In this direction it was ascertained that the nearby Portsea Ocean Beach was declared unsafe on the particular day on Sunday, 17 December, by the life-saving patrol due to the prevalence of high westerly winds and the resulting rough waters. These westerlies were prevailing on the day over the peninsula area which includes the area of the disappearance at Cheviot Bay Beach.

50. Due to the conditions the normal activity of the laying of lobster pots along the Cheviot Bay and surrounding inlets was cur-

tailed as is the usual case in a high westerly.

51. Mr Malcolm Thomas Shepherd, who conducts a retail fish shop and is also a professional fisherman, was interviewed and he relates his knowledge of the conditions on December 17 as "there would be a strong flood tide travelling through the Heads due to the high westerly winds".

Rip

He went on to say "that on the presumption that there would be a strong rip

in Cheviot Bay due to the conditions and the rock formation, that any body caught in the surf there, would, with a flood tide and carried out say 400 to 500 yards, continue to be carried out into the Heads or even Port Phillip Bay".

52. He said, "In the event of any body being carried out say 400 or 500 yards on an ebb tide, I feel that there is a possibility of the body travelling on the ebb tide towards Cape Schank".

Mr Shepherd went on to say that he can recall a number of years ago when three cray fishermen were lost from Rye ocean beach, which is some six miles from Cheviot Bay, and in this instance one body was found some time after, half a mile away caught in kelp and one was found some weeks later at London Bridge just on the Portsea side of Cheviot Bay washed up on shore. The remaining body was not found.

53 In all he was of the opinion that Mr Holt's body could well be found up to three weeks after his disappearance. This opinion was based on 25 years' fishing experience in the area.

Interviewed

54. Mr Robert William Hutchins, a professional fisherman residing at Newbury Hill, Nepean Highway, Sorrento, was interviewed and he stated that he was a third generation professional fisherman in the area, with a son also engaged in the industry locally.

He stated that he can recall Sunday, December 17 1967 and on that date the weather conditions were

1967 and on that date the weather conditions were very bad. There was a high westerly wind blowing with gusts which he estimated at 30 to 40 miles per hour; these winds were the main cause of very rough seas and surf in the Sorrento, Portsea areas and the coastline inside the Quarantine Station area.

55 Mr Hutchins is quoted as follows, "I know of Cheviot Bay Beach and I feel that any body in the surf off the beach would have been carried out on an ebb tide in an easterly direction along the coast. Under these conditions a body could float along the coast for some considerable time and there is no guarantee that it would be washed ashore because of the surge due to the adverse weather conditions over the past week. It was a flood tide at the time that the Lively Lady was passing through the Heads into Port Phillip Bay, and I understand Mr Holt viewed this passage through the Heads. It would have been the last of the flood tide and with the passage of time to when Mr Holt was taken out in the surf, it would have been an obvious ebb tide at Cheviot Beach".

56. This opinion based on 40 years' of active professional fishing coincides with the opinion expressed by Mr Shepherd and is indicative of further opinion expressed by local identities in a position to know the tides, weather and local conditions.

57. These opinions were solicited in both the Portsea and Queenscliffe areas, and in all cases show no great diversity.

58 Enquiries from the Portsea-Sorrento Police reveal that to this authority the area inside the Officer Cadet Training Establishment is restricted and as such is not policed from the



The Prime Minister's press secretary, Mr Eggleton, and Mr Holt's stepsons, Sam (in the dark jumper) and Nicky, talk to rescue workers at Portsea.

point of view of safety of the public or swimmers.

59 Enquiries from the Officer Cadet Training College area personnel show that Cheviot Beach, as are all other beaches within the area, is restricted to the public due to the restriction placed on the overall area and the subject beach is used only by area personnel and limited authorised visitors which includes some local skin divers.

Opinions

60 Corporal Neville Woods is fairly indicative of the opinions expressed by persons authorised to surface swim and skin dive on the beach and he is quoted

as saying, "I have dived for cray fish and other fish in that area for about 5 years. The undertow at the turn of the tide is tremendous. I would estimate that at times you would get a 10 knot undertow. The only days you can get into the area with safety is when it is flat calm and a north wind blowing".

61 It was also established through this source and by persons acquainted with the underwater terrain of Cheviot Beach, that in the area where Mr Holt disappeared, underneath the rock formation which is visible at low water are numerous caves running under the rocks, of varying lengths. Some are considered to be very extensive in area. The bottom of the sea

area. The bottom of the sea bed is rocky and sandy with

prolific growths of sea kelp in the channels. Also in this rocky formation are abnormalities in the formation which cause the water to be forced through fissures and are known locally as blow holes.

62 In the course of this investigation it has been clear that Mr Holt followed a normal domestic pattern in relation to his movements from Canberra to his residence at Portsea and his movements at Portsea up to the time of his disappearance, together with his proposed movements for the remainder of his stay.

63 His intention, as disclosed by his housekeeper Mrs Lawless prior to his

closed by his housekeeper Mrs Lawless, prior to his departure from Canberra was to return on Tuesday, 19 December with his grandchildren to The Lodge, Canberra, to rejoin his wife at an annual Christmas party in the grounds. This arrangement was confirmed in a conversation with Mrs Lawless over the evening meal on Friday, 15 December.

64 On Saturday, 16 December he continued his normal behaviour in meeting and fraternising with his local friends and in arranging and attending his usual sporting activities.

65 Doctor Marcus Faunce, of Canberra, who was Mr Holt's personal physician, has been seen and he indicates that he last examined Mr Holt on Friday, December 15 and from

examined Mr Holt on Friday, December 15 and from his prior knowledge and the result of this examination, he is of the opinion that

there was no reason either physical or mental that could cause or contribute to the death of Mr Holt under ordinary circumstances.

66 Doctor Edwards, of Sorrento, a legally qualified practitioner and also a personal friend of Mr Holt, was in the company of Mr Holt on Saturday afternoon December 16, during which time they both played tennis together and with others. Doctor Edwards has stated that Mr Holt's demeanour was normal, he appeared happy and well, and enjoyed the tennis activity although not playing up to his usual standard. Doctor Edwards attributed this lapse of tennis form to be due to a minor shoulder ailment and which he indicated was of no consequence.

Incident

67 Doctor Edwards relates a prior incident which came to his knowledge in May 1967, when Mr Holt informed him that whilst swimming underwater his snorkel had become defective and he had swallowed some sea water and on coming to the surface he had "over" breathed after which he felt extremely weak and had to be helped from the water.

Both men had discussed the effect of "over" breathing and the doctor had explained the effect it had on the level of carbon dioxide in the blood stream. The condition arising out of this incident was of a purely temporary nature.

68 Mr Jonathon Scott Edgar, who was a next door neighbour at Portsea to Mr Holt, was an underwater swimming companion of Mr Holt and he was questioned in relation to these activities. He stated that occasionally he went skin - diving with Mr Holt, the last occasion

he went skin - diving with Mr Holt, the last occasion being on Sunday December 10, when they brought back about 23 lbs of cray fish from the area at Cheviot Beach from which Mr Holt disappeared.

Mr Edgar indicated that the last occasion that he had spoken to Mr Holt was at about 10am on Sunday, December 17, when they had made arrangements to return to Cheviot Beach for more spear fishing at about 4pm that afternoon.

69 Mr Edgar stated that he knows the area on Cheviot Beach which he described as a "Y" shaped run-out and he feels that Mr Holt would possibly have been caught in a strong ebb tide and would have been swept seaward very quickly and would have vanished in broken water and in the turbulence.

Endurance

70 A long - time friend and associate, Mr Theo Raymond Scales who resides in Franklin Street, Portsea, considers Mr Holt to be just an average surface swimmer but with terrific powers of endurance. He has been in the company of Mr Holt both in surface and underwater swimming during the past seven years. He considers that Mr Holt was ever conscious of the limits to which he could subject himself and he did not at any time act in a fool - hardy manner. He was not a man to take risks. Further he considered that Mr Holt had a more detailed knowledge underwater of Cheviot Beach than any other swimmer he knew.

71 Mr Scales goes on to say that from the time Mr Holt took to underwater swimming he was fascinated and rapidly became most proficient at this sport. He considered that on the day of the disappearance Mr Holt would have entered the water where it was

reasonably calm and as

reasonably calm and as was high tide it would have been hard for him to judge the depth even close to owing to the rock formation.

There would have been a strong undertow and he considers that Mr Holt would have been taken or rapidly into heavy broken water where he could not possibly have coped with the conditions.

72 Corporal Nevill Woods was interviewed independently and he confirms the opinions expressed by Mr Scales and Mr Jonathan Edgar, in relation to conditions at Chevit Beach.

73 Enquiries from neighbours and social contacts of Mr Holt in the Portsea area and of members of his family and household tend to emphasize that the disposition of Mr Holt at the time of his arrival over the weekend was normal and happy.

74 In seeking reasons for the failure to locate Mr Holt's body, enquiries were made from local professional fishermen in the Portsea and Queenscliff area and they consider the two possibilities present themselves.

(a) The possibility of the body being carried out to sea or away from Chevit Beach by the tides or lodged in rock crevices or other situations, or

(b) The possibility of attack on the body by marine life in the form of sea lice, crayfish, etc.

75 In relation to (a) local fishermen, who are expert on tides in the area, consider that the body in any case would have been washed away from Chevit Beach either in an easterly or westerly direction depending on the tide from Chevit Beach at the time (ebb tide or flood tide). If the body was suspended in the sea bed or under a crevice the possibility exists that it would eventually be free to rise to the surface and then be carried out by the tide.

Expert

Expert

76 Mr Arthur Lucas of the Department of Public Works, Sydney, who is recognised as an expert in the movement of tides, conducted experiments in the area and a map which is self-explanatory prepared by him, together with a survey report is attached for information and guidance.

77 Mr Lucas formed the conclusion from his tests that the most likely direction in which the body of Mr Holt would be found would be westerly towards Phillip Bay.

78 In relation to (b) the effect of marine life on the body has been enquired into and from a practical point of view fishermen in the area feel that in the event of the body falling to the sea bed it would be attacked by sea lice and crayfish, etc. and their experience is that all life would be removed within 14 hours. The remains would deteriorate over a longer period by continued attack by the subject marine life.

79. In this regard also the opinion of the Victorian Government Pathologist Doctor James Henry MacNamara, was sought and he agrees that —

(a) In the event of the body being suspended it would not be attacked to any great extent by marine life for some time at least and

(b) That in the event of it being lodged on the sea bed it would deteriorate rapidly by reason of attack by marine life.

80. Doctor MacNamara has made a study of drowning and the deterioration of human remains recovered from the sea and has prepared a report for information.

81. During the course of this enquiry there has been no indication that the disappearance of the late Mr Holt was anything other than accidental.

82. Photographs have been taken of the area at high tide in an effort to simulate the conditions on Sunday, 17 December 1967 and also at low tide

Sunday, 17 December 1967 and also at low tide as a comparison of local conditions.

83. In an effort to place on permanent record by photography, the local scene at the beach, members of the initial beach party and eye witnesses to the disappearance of Mr Holt gathered on the area and a continuous movie film was taken in the form of an enactment of the circumstances. This film is available and is being held at the Victorian Police Forensic Science Laboratory, Melbourne.

J. R. Ford, Inspector Grade 2

A. T. Jackson, Inspector First Class

[The remainder of the report was taken up with the full texts of statements by witnesses and others called on for evidence.]