

Investigation into the attempted suicide of Mr L D at Pentonville Prison on 27 December 2001

Date of Interview: 11 July 2006
Name of Interviewer/s: Ali McMurray, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's Office
Name of Interviewee: Officer P Richards
Also Present: Stephen Shaw, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Female: Today is Tuesday 11 July 2006 and the time is eleven thirty seven. Present in the room are Stephen Shaw, Pete Richards and Ali McMurray. Stephen Shaw the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is carrying out an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the attempted suicide of Mr L D at Pentonville Prison on 27 December 2001. I am assisting him. Pete would you please confirm that you have received a copy of the letter inviting you for interview, the Notice of Investigation and the Notes for Interviewees and that you have had an opportunity to read them ... You haven't received anything?

Pete Richards: No.

Ali McMurray: Okay, in that case, can ... pretty much the letter explains what the letter of the notes explains what we are doing here, which is what I explained to you just before the tape started. Importantly, it also explains that the report and any evidence on which the report draws might be made public, will be made public in the future, so once your interview has been transcribed it could appear in the public domain. The other important thing to note is that you can of course have a trade union rep or colleague with you if you would like?

Pete Richards: No I am alright.

Ali McMurray: That is okay, those were, I am sorry that you haven't had a letter ...

Pete Richards: ... No probably still somewhere ..

Ali McMurray: Probably waiting for you somewhere, get it when you go out. But as I say those are the main points that the letter makes. In light of that I will scrub the rest except to say that could you please confirm that you understand that if during the

course of the interview you wish to have a break for any reason you may do so.

Pete Richards: Yes okay

Ali McMurray: Okay, thanks. Right Pete, if we may, can we start with the incident where Mr D was found hanging on the 27 December and what you recall of it. Can you remember for example how the alarm was raised?

Pete Richards: I can't. I think there was an agency nurse, someone flagged it up that there was something going on in the cell. I can't really recall, so many other incidences but I think that was what that one was. There was two that day, one after it.

Ali McMurray: Yes, that is right, somebody was mucking about. And when ... were you first in the cell after the alarm went off, were you the first?

Pete Richards: I think I was the first one in there because I unlocked the door and he was suspended from the ceiling like with a, I think it was a bedding sheet around his neck. So as soon as the door ... see through the observation flap, dark, but I have gone in there, holding up his legs and the staff came in supporting the rest of his body, then started working on trying to cut the ligature, or undo the knot or whatever.

Ali McMurray: Right, so the first thing when you arrived at the cell first thing is to look through the observation flap to see what is there?

Pete Richards: Yea, it was open I could see him suspended, that was it.

Ali McMurray: And then straight in to the cell. Okay, you are there first, so you go in ...

Pete Richards: Yea, supporting his body weight.

Ali McMurray: Was he a big man?

Pete Richards: Yea, slim guy but he was tall, about five nine, five ten, something like that, I think.

Ali McMurray: And how many officers came in with you?

Pete Richards: There were two or three that came in eventually, all at different stages in those few seconds of it arriving, so yea Mr Leane and that, he was the only one I could remember because he was above trying to take the noose off, that was it.

Ali McMurray: Right and were you part of the Hotel 9 response team, or were you just the nearest officer ?

Pete Richards: Yea, I was just working on that landing. Hotel 9 staff are normally on that landing anyway. If it happens in some other part of the jail we are then deployed as we were working there we have the equipment is available on that landing.

Ali McMurray: Right, so you are member of the team?

Pete Richards: Yea I was then.

Ali McMurray: Yea, but you just happened to be there anyway?

Pete Richards: Yea, yea, working there.

Ali McMurray: And the ligature itself. I have seen the transcript of the interview you had with Carol Draper at the time and you refer to it being very difficult to get the ligature undone - that the knot was very tight.

Pete Richards: Yea I think he used the ... what do you call it ... the hem of the sheet, bed sheet it was like a double and it was quite tough, really tight, done it really tight, so I can't really recall the ligature much because like I say I was more underneath, it was the guy who was trying to get it off and I could see by looking up that this was a tight thing, it was very hard, well made, it was doing the job.

Ali McMurray: Yea. Do you carry scissors or knives round on you to ...?

Pete Richards: ... Yea when it is that tight in the neck, we have fish, I don't know whether we had the fishes back then, but they call it a big fish, I will show you one, you can work it underneath, a gap, but if it is that tight in you ... it is very hard to get it in there, same with the bull nose ... bull's nose scissors we used, very hard to get off, so you try and loosen it somehow. I think they pulled it off, I don't know, I don't think I did though.

Ali McMurray: Right, so got Mr D down, lie him on the ground or ...?

Pete Richards: ... Yea straight on the ground, I think it was, supported his neck all the way down and it was a matter for checking for vital signs, things like that, we could see he was gone quite blue in the face, urinated, things like that.

Ali McMurray: So do you think you had lost him at that point?

Pete Richards: Yes, because we had a defibrillator in there straightaway as well thinking that, if anything, you know if anything the heart has gone. It looked like he stopped breathing now, so we just tried working on him, trying to get some oxygen into him. Then we fitted an airway, sure there was an airway fitted into him, as I say, I can't remember quite who done what in the end but I know we were just all there, hands on sort of thing, trying to do it, someone has called the ambulance, everything is happening.

Ali McMurray: And it being actually in the healthcare centre did the doctor turn up?

Pete Richards: I can't recall. I can't remember, don't even know what time of day it was, I think it was late afternoon was it ...

Ali McMurray: ... Yea about ten to four something like that.

Pete Richards: Yea, evening sort of time, I can't remember it ... what doctor turned up, or if the doctor turned up. I remember the HEMS helicopter, I think it was HEMS who turned up in the end and managed to get the airway in and attempted to defibrillate and that wasn't happening and then it was getting lines in and then using drugs to stimulate his heart, and then that worked, managed to put him on to a spine board and then we moved him onto the pool table, a bigger area to work on and he

Ali McMurray: ... yea, that was just outside the cell?

Pete Richards: Yea just outside the cell and he regained slight consciousness, coughing and rejecting the airway that was put in. The doctor put him out as it were, anaesthetic, knocked him out, he could tolerate it because he was obviously been deprived of oxygen for however how long they wanted to check him over, that was it, went out in the ambulance.

Ali McMurray: Yea, yea, okay, thanks for that. Now you said that it is difficult to remember because there are so many similar incidents, how often were you faced with those sorts of situations do you think?

Pete Richards: Back then I used to work in the healthcare then, not many that serious. I mean they were all serious, they were doing it for one reason or another, but not many actually did it like the way Mr D done it, thank God they are few and far between really. You deal with a lot of them. I mean I can't even think how many I dealt with in those few years I worked in the healthcare but it was very often, you know, even either cutting themselves or just using a shoelace or getting more bedding and tying it to their foot into their neck, hiding behind the bed and doing it that way, a lot of the time it was because they want some more tablets or they want some cigarettes or they want some other form of attention seeking, sort of thing, that is how they did it.

Ali McMurray: I mean it was happening often enough that you weren't sort of phased by it, you weren't sort of ...?

Pete Richards: ... Oh you were because he was quite a character D , so he was always there about, for him to actually do something that ... it looked like he done it properly as I say, he managed to feed it through the light fittings, took time, well not time, planning. I mean imagine he could have looked and seen how he was going to do and then actually thread it through there. No one would see it initially and then it only takes a few seconds to put his head through the noose and that was it. Obviously he couldn't have been there for very long, got to the stage where we intervened, as I say it only takes a couple minutes I would have thought for that to happen.

Ali McMurray: Okay, now you sort of mentioned a little bit there about what Mr D was like, you said he was quite a character, what sort of man was he?

Pete Richards: Oh he would be happy one minute and then he would be, from what I can remember, got on quite well with him really, every now and then he just used to blow up, not wanting to go here, not wanting to go to normal location, he didn't want, ... he wanted more medication, wanted cigarettes, wanted a different cell, wanted someone opposite to him to be

different, he wanted to be located ...he was just persistently, always, nothing was ever right. So very much like that, quite a drain on the staff resources really at the time. That was about it, you know.

Ali McMurray: And was he a fairly chatty character or ...?

Pete Richards: Yea, sometimes he was, yea, sometimes he was very chatty or sometimes he would just be throwing things all round his cell and not a lot you could say to him, appeal to him, he wanted, you can't give it, there was nothing else you could do.

Ali McMurray: No. And did he mix much with other prisoners?

Pete Richards: What I can remember in the healthcare he did, yea, other than that I don't know, because I know he spent some time on normal location. I remember seeing him on C Wing and he was happy, ... walked through but yea he no problem mixing.

Ali McMurray: And did you personally have much conversation with him?

Pete Richards: I did but just to, because the course of my duties and the way that he used to do ... talk to him all the time whenever you can. Because when you were talking to him you know they are alright. I can't recall anything significant, you know, about any of the conversations.

Ali McMurray: Yes, absolutely, so ... did he talk about family on the outside or ...?

Pete Richards: Not that I can recall, no to be honest.

Ali McMurray: Because there was some stuff around his girlfriend and his girlfriend getting pregnant by his best mate and ...?

Pete Richards: ... Conversations like that

Ali McMurray: ... Ten a penny

Pete Richards: ... Yea, you are getting that every day, all day long from every single person. Their child has just died, sister has died, all lies, their cousin, their brother is on A Wing, this one and that one and his family is so and so has died and they have got to do this, got to do that, just talk, you just have to

... you look into it, you observe it, you might note it and that is about it. If you think it is genuine you let them have a phone call. Well phone up yourself and find out whether it is true and if you need to get the Chaplaincy involved ... but as I say you only do that when you know .. when you feel in your heart that it is genuine, if you get this all the time, which you normally see it with someone when it is like genuine and I can't recall anything there, I can't even recall him suggesting anything otherwise or you know, I don't recall our conversations of that type. Like I say there are too many of those type of things, whether he did or didn't, I don't know.

Ali McMurray: Okay, I mean he was considered to be a suicide risk, can you remember any particular instructions you were given about him?

I think I am going to turn this tape off actually, excuse me.

(PAUSE)

Ali McMurray: Okay, the tape has restarted after a gap of about 20 minutes I should say after we lost the power. I was just asking Pete about the use of the gated cells on the old healthcare centre.

Pete Richards: There was only one

Ali McMurray: Oh there was just the one?

Pete Richards: Yea.

Ali McMurray: Oh okay and it was mainly used for prisoners considered to be at risk of self harm or more for dangerous prisoners that were acting up?

Pete Richards: Both, as there was only one you would use it, whatever need was more important at the time or as I say, it wasn't always used.

Ali McMurray: And could you as a discipline officer say, "Right I have had enough of you, I am taking you to that cell"?

Pete Richards: No.

Ali McMurray: How would that, what would be the process?

Pete Richards: Well you only move somebody in there if the segregation unit wouldn't have them and ... because of their violent conduct, whether they have assaulted somebody and you are actually in the middle of moving them somewhere. You would be directed to move them to a safer cell and that you be done there, that would be done by the duty doctor or the Governor, yea you would be moving those people into those areas from a higher authority.

Ali McMurray: Right and you were saying before we switched the tape back on, they tended only to be there a short while but it might be overnight sometimes but the expectation would be that it was ...?

Pete Richards: Yea from what I recall.

Ali McMurray: And I mean what was that cell physically like, was it quite bright, was it clean, was it well lit?

Pete Richards: No not really, no, normally quite dark because it was not well lit. There is no window bars and the windows are blocked in by window bricks, so there is no ligature points in the whole cell, even the light fittings are inside the ceiling, so there is nowhere for harm to be done other than they used to tear the lino up and things like that, but other than that the cell was very basic. It was basically a room, a safe room, put them in there while ... to cool off.

Stephen Shaw: Can I just clarify the gated cell is that the same one AS3 we saw, the semi furnished or is it different?

Pete Richards: I .. it is such a long time ago, I think actually the gated cell at the time Mr D was there it was no longer being used at all, it was being used as the clinical room, medications was put in there, at the time I think all we had was AS2 and 3 I think it was, or 3 or 4, can't remember their numbers, there was only two AS cells in the end

Ali McMurray: Right, did they have (?) on?

Pete Richards: I think it was anti suicide but they were labelled up a long time ago.

Ali McMurray: Right, okay and the environment generally over on the wing, I mean what, is it, was it nice and bright and airy, well ordered?

Pete Richards: Yea bright, yea it was quite well ordered. Just trying to recall, so many different stages I was over there for, things change, you know, but yea it was always very bright down there, you had pool tables, you had TV down the end there, had association where everyone would come out and sit down and watch the telly at that end or play pool or table football. Yea it was well organised, cell cleans in the mornings, the chance to use a razor for ten minutes to shave with, the razor would be collected, things like that.

Ali McMurray: And prisoners would spend quite a bit of time out of their cells if they wanted or ...?

Pete Richards: The majority of the day really in the healthcare, yea, it was once their basic cell check had been done, and the cleaning of their cells had been done, some of them regard it every single day or three times a day, they just seem to shred litter wherever they walk without anything on ... but yea, after that was done they would be out playing pool and stuff like that. Unless somebody was quite violent or had altercations with other guys there or their behaviour was ... just not right for them to come out with the rest they wouldn't be out with the rest of them because it would just disrupt the whole process of association time for the rest of the guys. But then they would have their time a bit later, they would be showered and maybe given the opportunity to sit down for half an hour and watch the telly or play pool with staff.

Ali McMurray: And what was there by way of organised activities?

Pete Richards: Such as? Gymnasium, education, there was but I don't know about at that time, can't recall.

Ali McMurray: Okay and what were the staffing levels like at the time, were they ...?

Pete Richards: I think we used to have five staff on that landing was detailed, was profiled to but whether or not we always had five, but we normally had five or four.

Ali McMurray: And that was looking after how many prisoners?

Pete Richards: Probably about 17 maximum, that would be a full house down there, I think. Because we used to have two wards down there as well, was closed, they used to hold five in

each. I can't remember they both got closed eventually anyhow, it was just, guys were in there for years and ... run it.

Ali McMurray: And erm when staff, I mean did you have formal handovers or was it ..?

Pete Richards: ... Yea in the morning you would have the staff would come in down there and would have the handover the ... whatever happened during the night in the course of the evening, and if there were any upsets or any incidents that happened in the night, anything to be aware of. Some of it would be logged in your observation book or the night report.

Ali McMurray: Right, okay and that was just sort of a formal occasion when everybody coming on duty all got together was it?

Pete Richards: Yea, we would normally have one coming on duty, find out if everyone is in and we used to all go into the hut sort of thing, on the H1 landing and the senior, the nurse, F Grade nurse would normally give the handover.

Ali McMurray: Right and that was all quite effective and you felt that ...?

Pete Richards: Yea, quite effective, just had a landing board so you were able to see every, you know, which cells they were in, which ones were out of order for that day, the cleaning officer would be told, "Oh get the works onto this John, blah, blah". Yea it was good.

Ali McMurray: And what was, I mean you got incidents like that going on all the time like the one involving Mr D , what was staff morale like at the time?

Pete Richards: I just ... myself, job is not like what it used to be back then I enjoyed it more, I think morale was a little bit down the fact of dealing with that incident, and other incidences, then the following day died, he was another big character there, I mean it was ... funny guy, a shame that he died so dealt with two of these serious incidences ... when you come back onto duty you seem to be short of staff then as well, like I say I was designated somewhere sitting on me own looking at some other guy who is gonna commit suicide or wants to, the other officer is sitting in a ward with eight of them, looking after them, all day long, you had the hour break and you go and have a kip or whatever and then you come back,

you are doing it again and then you are off home and you probably don't see each other again for the next few days. When you do you are working in different areas. There was only about five officers working there at the time I think, yea. That used to knock morale because you could never really put your point across but from then until now, I think ... work, so that is the ... everybody's personal view of how morale is I suppose, I don't know, but I don't think (inaudible)

Ali McMurray:

And we were talking a little while ago, you said you had been asked to do a search for Mr D 's records, how was paper keeping at the time, I mean was it unusual for papers to go astray?

Pete Richards:

I really don't know. I come up from the segregation unit, worked there for about four years, we were pretty meticulous with the paperwork we used to deal with down there and we used to store these and then take them to 'dead records' as it were called and they would be stored in box files, segregation unit from this year, that year. With regards to when I moved over and come to work for the healthcare, fish out of water regarding their paperwork. I really had no clue where they stored things, or where they put things, so for whatever reason I was given the task because it was something I wanted to try and do it, nominated to go and have a look for some of this paperwork. I remember spending near enough, nearly a whole day down there going through records but finding just bits and bobs, nothing was put in a kind of order, nothing was easy to find, you know from that year or from that month or anything like that.

Ali McMurray:

Okay, thank you very much. I would just move on if I might now to suicide and self harm prevention and to ask you first of all, what training, if any, you had in suicide prevention?

Pete Richards:

I can't recall but I know I had. It is one of those things that they do it as a running programme. I can't remember the last time I had it done or whether I recently had it then or not. I really can't recall it. A lot of it is common sense and when you are dealing, being in this environment and you are used to working in an environment like this, it is a normal ability that you have when you are dealing with these people you can sense or just, it is an automatic reaction with you know, a lot of things, you can see the tension is rising and you are not even in the room with people and you know that it ...

something is going to go off so it is ... and you just speak to people a lot of the time, speak to the guys.

Ali McMurray: And the sort of mechanical side of the process, the raising of the F2052SH and keeping records on a daily basis of observations that sort of stuff, you were comfortable with all that, you knew what you were doing?

Pete Richards: Yea.

Ali McMurray: Case conferences were you ever involved in case conferences, is that something that discipline officers got involved in?

Pete Richards: Not, no not really, not very often but if we had an input to put in or we felt the need to do whatever, we would give it to the nurse or whoever was going in, and let them know, highlight this one. I am pretty sure when I was ... give an observation book in, and say, "Look here are the details, a lot of the officers have noted, get that looked at as well".

Ali McMurray: And was communication coming from the other, did you find out what they agreed at case conferences and what the support plan was?

Pete Richards: Rarely because you would end up dealing with something else, too busy, too intransigent, "... is now leaving", "Oh alright, okay", you know, or he is going home tomorrow, you know. It is the way this jail is, in and out, in and out, in and out.

Ali McMurray: Right okay, and some of these suicide prevention management meetings, did you ever get any feedback from them telling you about trends or new policies or ...?

Pete Richards: ... I can't recall, no.

Ali McMurray: The Hotel 9 team that you were part of, are you still part of that?

Pete Richards: I think I am out of date on it, yea.

Ali McMurray: Are you?

Pete Richards: Yea. But it was very good though, I think

Ali McMurray: Yea, people, talking to people have spoken very highly of it, but it was very much orchestrated and depended on Mr Hayward, is that right?

Pete Richards: It did but for training purposes, he seemed to have brought it to the Prison Service, thought it was a brilliant thing. And you trained staff up, specially officers who are like from the normal wings coming over to healthcare to actually get some knowledge on how to deal with certain scenarios or events, you know and using certain equipment, life saving equipment, brilliant. Then we used to use it quite a lot, but it used to be Hotel 9 and it would be two staff designated daily for that task, one would be working where the bag and everything is situated on the healthcare unit on the 1s landing and you could grab anyone else who is working in that area who is trained as well, you just ... hear the alarm, grab them, grab the bag and attend any scenario anywhere in the jail. It was great.

Ali McMurray: Right, good, and the training was it ... Mr Hayward has now moved on I understand it, I mean are staff still trained?

Pete Richards: No they haven't been for about two years I don't think other than recently, the last few months there has been some training programmes going on again for it. And I don't know why it stopped and Hotel 9 then became a different thing altogether, it wasn't like a two person designated for that day it was palmed out wherever they could find staff that could probably carry the radio, it used to be ... an alarm would happen and you used to have the call sign, Hotel 1, alarm response would attend the incident, any incident in this prison, basically medical member of staff would attend, and if they require further treatment or it is serious or whatever an ambulance would be called and Hotel 9 would be called, so they would be on the scene they could get them ready to be moved, shipped straight to hospital but they would hopefully be stabilised there and then, had the equipment to do certain stuff.

Ali McMurray: And was there a way of communicating to you what the nature of the emergency was or was it a case of turning up and finding out when you got there?

Pete Richards: Well when ... back then you would have an idea, yea of what it could well be, but there was normally two of you then and you could carry the equipment quite easily.

Ali McMurray: Right, I think we are almost there Pete you will be pleased to hear. Right I think that covers it from my side ...

Stephen Shaw: ... I think it might be helpful if you don't mind just to rewind just a couple of things for the benefit of the tape. The first thing was about the entries in the healthcare log ...

Pete Richards: ... Hmm observation book.

Stephen Shaw: ... Yea the observation book, sorry, I beg your pardon, what you said off the tape was that these things were happening all the time and you couldn't remember the particular events that are referred to then. I wonder just for the purposes of the tape, you could confirm that was what you said?

Pete Richards: Yea that is right. A lot of the things happened a lot of the time.

Stephen Shaw: And secondly those things that where you were describing Mr D which was all new information for us, in your own words perhaps this time, perhaps you could again say a bit about what sort of chap he was, how he compared to others, his behaviour so then pen portrait, I know for you the second time but for the benefit of the tape, it will be the first time?

Pete Richards: I .. the right ..

Stephen Shaw: ... Start from scratch ..

Pete Richards: ... Like I say he was an up and down character, very young, immature, immature the way he behaved. I am trying to think now ... a bit more about him ... he was just, I just know he was always, you know you could have a conversation with him, he could talk, he was quite articulate when he wanted to be, but he never had many discussions about his personal life or anything like that, it was mainly his immediate needs, there and then, you know, cigarette or something like that and if he didn't get it he would throw a little bit of a strop and that was ... quite immature that way.

Stephen Shaw: And you also said that it was likely that when he was moved from ward 3 he would be unhappy at that ...?

Pete Richards: ... Oh right, yea regarding the incident in the observation book where he moved, yea.

Stephen Shaw: Can you explain why you would think he would be unhappy to have been ...?

Pete Richards: ... A lot of characters such as Mr D who is quite articulate, going into a situation like ward 3, the guys, it was an eight bedded ward and a lot of the guys in there were very very vulnerable chaps, and easily manipulated and someone a bit more lively could go in there and coerce them to be, you know to be their best friend and get their bits of tobacco off them and their biscuits and get it shared as it would be a lot easier to get some bits and bobs to make your life a bit comfortabler.

Stephen Shaw: But you don't know that D behaved in that way?

Pete Richards: I don't think he would behave like that, no, I had no observations of that whatsoever but I ... the scenario is in there happened quite regularly and certain individuals were moved out of those areas because they were, you know .. strong arming, but subtly.

Stephen Shaw: Right that I think, is very helpful, thank you for repeating those things but I think that may mean that we don't have to come back and repeat any of that.

Pete Richards: Okay.

Ali McMurray: That is you done?

Stephen Shaw: That is me done.

Ali McMurray: That is certainly me done as well Pete, so unless there is anything you ..

Pete Richards: ... all done.

Ali McMurray: (LAUGHTER) Unless there is anything you would like to add that you know, you think, "Oh blimey they didn't even ask me about whatever ..."

Pete Richards: No. No. Nothing I can think of, came in here cold ... it is alright, it wouldn't have mattered anyway I have had no access to information or ... you know, I can't ... even the staff who I was with, I just about remember because they

have all left the job now anyway, two of them I was there with.

Ali McMurray:

In that case I will turn off the tape. But before you dash I need to seal it in your presence ... is that right ...

1. I agree that this is a true and accurate record of my interview with Ali McMurray and Stephen Shaw on 11 July 2006.

Signed.....

NAME IN CAPITALS.....

Date.....

2. I have read the above transcript and have placed amendments in the margins as shown.

Signed.....