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**JURISDICTION** : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
**ACT** : CORONERS ACT 1996  
**CORONER** : PHILIP JOHN URQUHART, CORONER  
**HEARD** : 23 APRIL 2025  
**DELIVERED** : 9 MAY 2025  
**FILE NO/S** : CORC 3251 of 2024  
**DECEASED** : YUNGE, HANS JURGEN

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*Catchwords:*

Nil

*Legislation:*

Nil

**Counsel Appearing:**

Counsel Assisting : Snr Const. Craig ROBERTSON

**Case(s) referred to in decision(s):**

Nil

*Coroners Act 1996*  
(Section 26(1))

## **RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH**

*I, Philip John Urquhart, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Hans Jurgen YUNGE** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, PERTH, on 23 April 2025, find that the death of **Hans Jurgen YUNGE** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Hans Jurgen YUNGE** and that death occurred on **31 December 1969** in the vicinity of Millstream in the Pilbara region of Western Australia as a result of an unknown cause in the following circumstances:*

### **Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION .....	3
<i>Long term missing persons in Western Australia .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Legal principles that apply to this finding.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The loss of the police case file concerning Mr Yunge's disappearance.....</i>	<i>4</i>
MR YUNGE .....	5
<i>Mr Yunge's personal details .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>The move by Mr Yunge's wife and children to New Zealand.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>New employment for Mr Yunge .....</i>	<i>6</i>
MR YUNGE'S DISAPPEARANCE .....	6
<i>Mr Yunge's movements on 31 December 1969 .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>John Anthony's efforts to find Mr Yunge.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The police investigation.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Timeframe for survival .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Proof of Life checks .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>The reported sighting of Mr Yunge on 2 January 1970 in Roebourne.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Comments on the police investigations and subsequent search in 1970.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Has Mr Yunge's death been established?.....</i>	<i>13</i>
CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH .....	14
CONCLUSION .....	15

## INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes, when one person is missing, the whole world seems depopulated.”

Alphonse de Lamartine – French poet

- 1 On the afternoon of 31 December 1969, Hans Jurgen Yunge (Mr Yunge) left Roebourne to drive to a remote campsite where he worked. He was by himself and driving a utility that belonged to the company that employed him. A fellow employee also left Roebourne at the same time, driving a company truck. This was the last known time Mr Yunge was seen alive. He was 32 years old.
- 2 The inquest into the disappearance of Mr Yunge was held on 23 April 2025. Documentary evidence at the inquest comprised of one file that was tendered as exhibit 1. Senior Constable Isaac Watkins, a police officer with the Missing Person Team from Homicide Squad, gave oral evidence at the inquest.

### *Long term missing persons in Western Australia*

- 3 In 2017, the Coroner’s Court of Western Australia (the Court) identified a significant number of files relating to the long term disappearance of people who had been in Western Australia at the time of their reported disappearance.
- 4 Some of these disappearances had occurred at a time when there was no or limited jurisdiction for a coroner to examine the circumstances of an expected death.
- 5 Section 23(1) of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA) (the Act) allows the State Coroner to direct an investigation into a suspected death in certain circumstances where the body has not been found.
- 6 This investigation must be done by way of an inquest in an attempt to clarify how the death occurred and the cause of the death. This effectively brings the suspected death into the ambit of section 25 of the Act which allows a registration of the death to be made under the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998* (WA).
- 7 The large number of long term missing persons made it unrealistic for the Court to absorb these matters in a timely manner into an already large backlog of matters requiring inquests. A plan was proposed for a project to clear the backlog of these files once it had been determined the matters fitted the circumstances set out in section 23(1) of the Act. That is, the State Coroner had reasonable cause to suspect the person had died and that the death was a reportable death under section 3 of

the Act. By 2024, most of the outstanding files relating to long term missing persons had been resolved by way of an inquest. Mr Yunge's matter, however, was one of those that had not been finalised.

- 8 By way of a letter dated 11 December 2024, the acting State Coroner advised the Commissioner of Police that on the basis of the information the Court had, she had reasonable cause to suspect Mr Yunge had died and that his death was a "*reportable death*".<sup>1</sup>

### *Legal principles that apply to this finding*

- 9 Pursuant to section 23(2) of the Act, I must be satisfied that the death of Mr Yunge has been established beyond all reasonable doubt.
- 10 In making any other finding, I have applied the standard of proof as set out in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336, 361-362 (Dixon J) which requires a consideration of the nature and gravity of the conduct when deciding whether a matter adverse in nature has been proven on the balance of probabilities.
- 11 I am also mindful not to insert hindsight bias into my assessment of the actions by police in their investigation of Mr Yunge's disappearance that was undertaken 55 years ago. Hindsight bias is the tendency, after an event, to assume the event was more predictable or foreseeable than it actually was at the time.<sup>2</sup>

### *The loss of the police case file concerning Mr Yunge's disappearance*

- 12 The original "missing person" investigation by police and the resulting evidentiary materials that had been gathered could not be located despite extensive follow-up enquiries by police in the 1990s, and then more recently once the Court became involved. It would appear that the police case file had been destroyed in accordance with previous standard operating procedures. Nevertheless, Mr Yunge was still held on police records as an outstanding missing person.
- 13 The absence of the case file was overcome to some degree when the more recent police investigation was provided with 61 pages of valuable historical information held by Mr Yunge's family that was relevant to his disappearance. This included copies of correspondence that Mr Yunge's wife had had with police since 1970 detailing her efforts to find out what had happened to her husband. It also included

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the acting State Coroner to the Commissioner of Police dated 11 December 2024

<sup>2</sup> Dillion H and Hadley M, *The Australasian Coroner's Manual* (2015) 10

tape recordings from Mr Yunge before his disappearance that he had posted to New Zealand where his wife and children lived. In addition, there were recordings from Mr Yunge's brother-in-law that he had sent to New Zealand from Perth following Mr Yunge's disappearance.

- 14 Given the disappearance of the original case file, the Court was considerably aided by this material and I extend my appreciation to the surviving two daughters of Mr Yunge for the assistance they have provided.

## MR YUNGE

### *Mr Yunge's personal details*<sup>3</sup>

- 15 Mr Yunge was born on 16 July 1937 in Germany. When he was about 14 years old, his family migrated to the United Kingdom where he completed qualifications in coachbuilding and carpentry.
- 16 Mr Yunge met his wife, Joan, in the United Kingdom and they were married in 1959 on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.
- 17 In April 1965, Mr Yunge and his wife migrated to Western Australia. By then they had two daughters aged 4 years and 2 years, and their third daughter was born in Perth later that year.
- 18 Mr Yunge's family described him as a hard-working, kind, honest and family-oriented man. However, on occasions, he could be highly strung and impulsive.
- 19 Apart from arthritis in his right hand and left shoulder for which he was prescribed medication, Mr Yunge was in good health.

### *The move by Mr Yunge's wife and children to New Zealand*

- 20 In September 1969, Mr Yunge's wife and the three children moved to New Zealand as Ms Yunge's mother who lived there had fallen ill. Mr Yunge remained in Perth to continue working as he had purchased a car with a loan and needed to pay it off. He also wanted to save for a deposit to purchase a house in New Zealand. Mr Yunge planned to ship the car to New Zealand and join his family sometime in May or June 1970.

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<sup>3</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2, Report of Senior Constable Isaac Watkins dated 17 October 2024; Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Background information prepared by Mr Yunge's family; Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family

- 21 In the meantime, Mr Yunge resided with his brother-in-law and his wife at a house in Scarborough. For most months, he was able to send about \$200.00 from his wages to his wife in New Zealand.

*New employment for Mr Yunge* <sup>4</sup>

- 22 By the end of 1969, Mr Yunge work prospects in Perth had become limited after he was retrenched by a steel manufacturing company. However, just before Christmas 1969, he was offered the position of foreman by Goliath Construction Pty Ltd (Goliath). This company had been contracted to build concrete tanks and associated site works for a water pumping station at a remote location known as Millstream in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.<sup>5</sup>
- 23 In a tape recording to his wife made on or about 18 December 1969, Mr Yunge referred to his new employment with Goliath. He said Goliath's owner, Frank Frewer (Mr Frewer), would be driving him to the Millstream campsite where Goliath workers were accommodated (the campsite) on 20 December 1969.
- 24 On the information available to me, I am satisfied Mr Yunge had arrived at the campsite and commenced work as a foreman prior to 31 December 1969.

**MR YUNGE'S DISAPPEARANCE** <sup>6</sup>

*Mr Yunge's movements on 31 December 1969*

- 25 A worker employed by Goliath, Heinz Mezler (Mr Mezler), was with Mr Yunge on 31 December 1969. Mr Mezler's account made to police following Mr Yunge's disappearance was that he and Mr Yunge left the campsite to travel to the townsite of Roebourne at about 7.00 am on that day. Roebourne is located about 120 km north of the campsite.
- 26 The road from the campsite to Roebourne had very infrequent traffic, with an average of about two vehicles using it over a 24-hour period.
- 27 After arriving at Roebourne, Mr Yunge and Mr Mezler had lunch and consumed some alcohol before Mr Yunge directed Mr Mezler to return

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<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Statement of John Anthony dated 1 July 2024; Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family

<sup>5</sup> Millstream is about 1600 km north-east of Perth and located inland from the coast in a sparsely populated and very arid part of Western Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2, Report of Senior Constable Isaac Watkins dated 17 October 2024; Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Statement of John Anthony dated 1 July 2024; Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family

to the campsite in a truck that belonged to Goliath with drums of fuel. Mr Mezler left Roebourne at about 2.00 pm and he was the last known person to have any contact with Mr Yunge. The plan was for Mr Yunge to follow Mr Mezler back to the campsite in a Goliath owned Holden utility (the utility).

- 28 It was well known that by this stage there was a large degree of worker dissatisfaction at the campsite. There was a (and as it turned out well-founded) belief that the Goliath workers at the campsite were not going to get paid as the company was about to be wound up.
- 29 After arriving at the campsite at about 4.00 pm, Mr Mezler decided to quit his employment with Goliath and drive to Port Hedland (located about 250 km north-east of Millstream) to find alternative work. He left the campsite at about 5.00 pm in his own private vehicle.
- 30 About 22 km from the campsite, and just past the Dampier-Tom Price rail crossing, Mr Mezler saw the utility that Mr Yunge had driven from Roebourne by the side of the road. It was easily recognisable as it was the foreman's utility and had the company's name painted on its sides.
- 31 Mr Mezler noticed the utility had a flat rear tyre and that as Mr Yunge was nowhere to be seen, Mr Mezler assumed he had returned to Roebourne. He therefore continued on his way to Port Hedland which did not require him to go into Roebourne.
- 32 Consequently, Mr Mezler did not become aware of Mr Yunge's disappearance until about ten days later.

***John Anthony's efforts to find Mr Yunge***

- 33 John Anthony (Mr Anthony) was another Goliath employee who had been working at the campsite. However, he returned to Perth sometime close to Christmas 1969 as his brother had been involved in a serious car accident in Perth. Consequently, Mr Anthony had not met Mr Yunge.
- 34 Whilst he was in Perth, Mr Anthony became aware of some problems between Mr Yunge and the other workers at the campsite. These problems had escalated into an incident in Roebourne that had come to the attention of police. Sergeant Brady, the officer-in-charge of the Roebourne police station, had reported his concerns to Mr Frewer who was in Perth at the time. Mr Frewer then instructed Mr Anthony to return to the campsite to resolve the problems.

- 35 Given the timeline of events, I am satisfied the incident in Roebourne that involved Mr Yunge and the other Goliath workers took place before 31 December 1969.
- 36 Mr Anthony arrived in Roebourne on 2 January 1970. He attended the Roebourne police station and spoke to Sergeant Brady. Mr Anthony recalled that Sergeant Brady spoke in a disparaging manner about Mr Yunge and his behaviour when affected by alcohol.<sup>7</sup>
- 37 Mr Anthony then drove from Roebourne directly to the campsite. At the same location where Mr Mezler had seen it, Mr Anthony saw the utility by the side of the road. He stopped and saw that the utility had either one or two flat rear tyres and that two spare tyres had been discarded nearby, together with the car jack. Mr Anthony was aware that both these tyres were not the right ones for the utility as they were for another utility that belonged to Goliath. This other utility was from a different car manufacturer and had been involved in an earlier rollover.
- 38 Once Mr Anthony got to the campsite, he was advised Mr Yunge had not arrived at the campsite on 31 December 1969. As he had not returned to Roebourne, Mr Anthony concluded Mr Yunge must have come into difficulties attempting to walk back to the campsite after unsuccessfully trying to replace the flat tyre(s).
- 39 On the next day, 3 January 1970, Mr Anthony and other Goliath workers conducted a search for Mr Yunge in the vicinity of the utility. They were unable to find him or any sign of where he might have gone after leaving the utility.
- 40 At or about the time of this search, Mr Anthony notified Roebourne police that Mr Yunge was missing. In 2024, Mr Anthony recalled Sergeant Brady stating words to the effect of, *“he would not be looking for Yunge due to the trouble he had caused.”*<sup>8</sup>

### ***The police investigation***

- 41 On 5 January 1970, Mr Frewer reported Mr Yunge as being a missing person to the police station at Midland,<sup>9</sup> which in turn advised Roebourne police.

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<sup>7</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Statement of John Anthony dated 1 July 2024, p.5

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Statement of John Anthony dated 1 July 2024, p.7

<sup>9</sup> A suburb east of metropolitan Perth.



- 42 The Roebourne police station had no record of Mr Anthony reporting Mr Yunge's disappearance on or about 3 January 1970. I am satisfied to the required standard, that the explanation for that is because of Sergeant Brady's lack of interest (at least at that stage) to do anything to find Mr Yunge. Consequently, Mr Anthony's report was not treated with the attention that it clearly warranted.
- 43 However, there was an apparent change in police attitude when Mr Frewer attended the Roebourne police station from Perth seeking further information as to Mr Yunge's whereabouts. This took place on 12 January 1970. As a result of that visit, Roebourne police began making the inquiries that should have been undertaken when Mr Anthony made his report more than a week earlier.
- 44 On 15 January 1971, Roebourne police attended the campsite to investigate Mr Yunge's whereabouts. They spoke to two workers, Dirk Kardol and John Hayes, who said they had spoken to Mr Yunge in Roebourne on 2 January 1970. This is likely to have led police to hold the view that Mr Yunge had got a lift in a passing vehicle to Roebourne after he was unable to replace the flat tyre(s).
- 45 From the materials supplied by Mr Yunge's family, it is evident that aerial and horseback searches were conducted by police for Mr Yunge at some stage. These searches failed to find any evidence of what he did after leaving the utility. Although it is not clear precisely when these searches occurred, it must have been after police visited the campsite on 15 January 1971, and at a time when "*wind and weather had excluded any possibility of finding footprints.*"<sup>10</sup>
- 46 These searches by police also extended to the only source of water between the abandoned utility and the campsite, namely "*a well which is in heavy scrub country and difficult to find*". There was "*no trace*" of Mr Yunge having been at this well.<sup>11</sup>
- 47 There were also extensive media appeals seeking information surrounding Mr Yunge's whereabouts which failed to elicit any leads.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Timeframe for survival***

- 48 I am satisfied to the required standard that the most likely movements of Mr Yunge were accurately summarised by the police once they had

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<sup>10</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.29

<sup>11</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.29

<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.29

undertaken a more thorough investigation in 1970. Namely, that he decided to walk to the campsite as it was the nearest place where he knew others would be present.

- 49 Given the lack of vehicles that typically drove along the road leading to the campsite, I am satisfied that Mr Yunge elected to walk to the campsite in a more direct line through the spinifex, rather than using the road. That would have only reduced the distance by about 3 km.<sup>13</sup> It is not known whether Mr Yunge was aware of that when he began to walk to the campsite through the spinifex, instead of taking the safer option of remaining on the road.
- 50 I also note that had Mr Yunge walked along the road towards the campsite, then it is almost inevitable that Mr Mezler would have seen him as he drove back to Roebourne from the campsite later that afternoon. There is no evidence from the materials before me that Mr Yunge was even aware of Mr Mezler's intentions to return to Roebourne shortly after he had arrived at the campsite with the drums of fuel. However, if he was aware, then logically he would have stayed with the utility and waited for Mr Mezler.
- 51 The maximum temperature at Roebourne on 31 December 1969 was 47.6°C.<sup>14</sup> This was the hottest day in Roebourne for the month of December 1969.<sup>15</sup> I note that it is very likely to have been even hotter in the vicinity of Millstream, as this is further inland than Roebourne.
- 52 I accept the accuracy of the following passage from an undated report the Commissioner of Police provided to Mr Yunge's wife sometime before 29 June 1971:<sup>16</sup>

Without water and a hat, plus the after-effects of drink, medical evidence indicates a person on foot, in the prevailing high temperatures and rough country, would collapse in a very short time from exhaustion and would quickly lose any sense of direction. [Mr Yunge] could have become exhausted under these conditions within 5 or 6 miles and even if he had survived that day and camped for the night, it is unlikely he would have survived another day without water.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.29

<sup>14</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 11, Roebourne weather charts for the timeframe of Mr Yunge's disappearance

<sup>15</sup> Roebourne is regarded as one of the hottest inhabited locations in Western Australia. Its hottest day was in January 2022 with a maximum temperature of 50.5°C.

<sup>16</sup> That timeframe can be ascertained as Mr Yunge's wife cited paragraphs from this report in a letter bearing that date to the extended family of Mr Yunge.

<sup>17</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.29

*Proof of Life checks*<sup>18</sup>

53 The most recent police investigation of Mr Yunge's disappearance by Senior Constable Watkins obtained the following information:

- The Consulate General of Germany confirmed that Mr Yunge never applied for a replacement passport;
- Western Australian State Records Office advised that it had no record of Mr Yunge;
- The New Zealand High Commission to Western Australia advised that it had no information of Mr Yunge arriving in New Zealand;
- The WA Police Force had no records of Mr Yunge coming to its attention at any time since 31 December 1969;
- Similarly, no other Australian State or Territory or National Police Records have any information relating to Mr Yunge;
- Centrelink and Medicare had no records for Mr Yunge;
- A search of the Registry of Birth, Deaths and Marriages in all Australian States and Territories found no record of the death of Mr Yunge in their databases;
- Australian Border Force and Department of Home Affairs have no records for Mr Yunge; and
- A DNA review of Unidentified Human Remains in Western Australia and other Australian jurisdictions found no information relevant to Mr Yunge.

*The reported sighting of Mr Yunge on 2 January 1970 in Roebourne*

54 As referred to above, there was an alleged sighting of Mr Yunge on 2 January 1970 at Roebourne by two workers from Goliath. It is recorded that they saw Mr Anthony in the Roebourne Hotel on this day and told him that he had just missed Mr Yunge as he had only recently left in the utility.<sup>19</sup> However, I am not satisfied Mr Anthony was told

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<sup>18</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2, Report of Senior Constable Isaac Watkins dated 17 October 2024

<sup>19</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.27

this information when he arrived at Roebourne on 2 January 1970 for the following reasons.

- 55 First, Mr Anthony provided a statement to the Court dated 1 July 2024. It is clearly evident from the contents of this statement that Mr Anthony had an excellent recollection of the events surrounding Mr Yunge's disappearance. That was confirmed by Senior Constable Watkins in his oral evidence at the inquest. For example, Mr Anthony could remember the names of seven of the nine Goliath workers who were working at the campsite at the relevant time. Included amongst those names he identified was Dirk Kardol. Mr Kardol was one of the workers claiming to have seen Mr Yunge on 2 January 1970. As Mr Anthony said in his statement: "*I do not believe I spoke to Hayes and Kardol in Roebourne when I arrived back on 2 January 1970, despite the reports from the time stating I had.*"<sup>20</sup> I am satisfied this recollection of Mr Anthony is accurate.
- 56 Secondly, I am satisfied the undated report from the Commissioner of Police indicates it would not have been until 15 January 1970 (the date Roebourne police visited the campsite) that Mr Kardol and Mr Hayes informed police they had seen Mr Yunge in Roebourne on 2 January 1970 and that they had told Mr Anthony on the same day that Mr Yunge had just left in the utility. As the report noted: "*This information cannot be reconciled with other facts, and it could well be that Kardol and Hayes were in an alcoholic fog and not sure of the days.*"<sup>21</sup> I am satisfied that this explanation for the error made by these two men has merit.
- 57 I am therefore satisfied to the required standard that the last known time Mr Yunge was seen alive by anyone was by Mr Meltzer on the afternoon of 31 December 1969 at Roebourne.

***Comments on the police investigations and subsequent search in 1970***

- 58 By today's standards, the initial police response to Mr Anthony's report of Mr Yunge's disappearance and the subsequent delay in the search of the area where the utility was found, would be regarded as well below an adequate standard. However, it would not be appropriate to judge the actions of police in 1970 by modern day standards.

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<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Statement of John Anthony dated 1 July 2024, p.9

<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5, Information provided by Mr Yunge's family, p.27

- 59 I must also take into account the itinerant nature of the workforce in the Pilbara region at the time which resulted in a regular ebb and flow of that workforce from one townsite to another. In those circumstances, it is understandable why local police may have assumed, at least initially, that Mr Yunge had decided to find alternative employment elsewhere.
- 60 However, against that, were the circumstances surrounding the finding of the abandoned utility that Mr Yunge had been driving on 31 December 1969. Those circumstances were known to Roebourne police by about 3 January 1970 and should have alerted them to the fact that Mr Yunge's disappearance was a very serious concern.
- 61 I am therefore satisfied to the required standard, and being mindful not to insert hindsight bias, that the initial police investigation was less than satisfactory, even by the standards that would have existed back in 1970. It would seem that the personal dislike Sergeant Brady had for Mr Yunge impacted on what he did, or more relevantly what he did not do, when he was notified of Mr Yunge's disappearance by Mr Anthony on or about 3 January 1970.
- 62 Senior Constable Watkins made enquiries of Sergeant Brady's whereabouts and discovered that he had died in 1995. It has therefore not been possible to make any attempt to obtain Sergeant Brady's account of why he treated the report from Mr Anthony of Mr Yunge's disappearance in the manner that he did.
- 63 However, I must make it clear that even if a full scale police search of the area around the utility had taken place within a reasonable timeframe of Roebourne police being notified of Mr Yunge's disappearance by Mr Anthony, the prospect of finding Mr Yunge alive would have been extremely remote and bordering on non-existent. By the time a proper search could have been undertaken, Mr Yunge would have been exposed to the very harsh elements of a spinifex landscape with little shelter, been subjected to extreme daytime temperatures in excess of 40°C, and been without water for at least three days.

***Has Mr Yunge's death been established?***

- 64 I am satisfied that the available evidence establishes, beyond all reasonable doubt, that Mr Yunge died on or about 31 December 1969 in the vicinity of Millstream in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. In arriving at that conclusion, I have had regard to the following facts:
- (a) The circumstances in which Mr Yunge went missing;

- (b) There has been no credible information regarding Mr Yunge's whereabouts since 31 December 1969;
- (c) Given the harsh conditions, including severe temperatures and terrain, and lack of water supply, it would be virtually impossible for Mr Yunge to have survived for more than two days;
- (d) Despite his devoted love for his wife and three daughters, Mr Yunge has made no contact with them since December 1969;
- (e) Thorough police investigations over the decades have failed to uncover any information about Mr Yunge's whereabouts after 31 December 1969, with police concluding it is inevitable he has died;
- (f) Although Mr Yunge's body was never found, it is highly likely he died in harsh and remote spinifex with extreme temperatures which meant his body would have decomposed rapidly and/or been the subject of animal predation.

### **CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH**

- 65 In the circumstances where Mr Yunge's body has not been found, I am obliged to find that the cause of his death is unascertained. Accordingly, I make an open finding as to the manner of his death.
- 66 However, having carefully considered the available information, it is my view the most likely explanation for Mr Yunge's death is that he died from exposure while attempting to walk via the most direct route to the campsite from his disabled utility. In canvassing this possibility, I note that Mr Yunge had no water supply with him, the temperature when he commenced his walk would have in the region of 45°C plus, and that these conditions would have been compounded by the reports of alcohol he had consumed several hours earlier.
- 67 I am aware that Mr Yunge's two surviving daughters had raised concerns to police about suspected foul play in their father's disappearance; in particular, the view that Mr Frewer may have been involved. Although it is not possible to completely exclude any suspicious or criminal involvement with Mr Yunge's disappearance, the circumstances of his last sighting and the events of the abandoned utility simply do not align with violence having been committed against Mr Yunge by another person or persons.
- 68 With respect to Mr Frewer, I note that the comprehensive investigations undertaken by Senior Constable Watkins established that Mr Frewer

died in England in 1985. Those investigations included speaking to Mr Frewer's daughter and Mr Anthony, and the information obtained indicated that Mr Frewer was not physically in the Pilbara at the time of Mr Yunge's disappearance.

- 69 I am therefore satisfied that the evidence before me negates any inference of foul play on Mr Frewer's behalf. This conclusion was also made by Senior Constable Watkins.<sup>22</sup>

### CONCLUSION

- 70 Mr Yunge was only 32 years of age when he went missing after the utility he was driving became disabled due to at least one flat tyre in the remote location of Millstream in Pilbara region of Western Australia.

- 71 There were no known eye witnesses to Mr Yunge's final movements. However, it is my view that, when considered as a whole, the evidence leads to the inescapable conclusion that Mr Yunge died on or about 31 December 1969 somewhere within the area where the utility he had been driving was located.

- 72 I accept these observations expressed by Senior Constable Watkins.<sup>23</sup>

Despite a lack of contemporaneous investigative material, the known circumstances of [Mr] Yunge's abandoned utility, in the context of the fiercely inhospitable environment, leads to the strong implication that [Mr] Yunge has attempted to walk back to the [campsite]. Given that [Mr] Metzler did not sight [Mr] Yunge on his return drive along the Roebourne-Wittenoom road, it is highly likely that [Mr] Yunge attempted to take a shorter route back to the camp through the harsh spinifex country, inevitably collapsing and perishing in the heat.

- 73 Although the most likely explanation for Mr Yunge's death is heat exposure or something similar, in the absence of his body being located, the cause of his death must remain as unascertained and I have made an open finding as to the manner of his death.

- 74 The known particulars of Mr Yunge's death will be forwarded to the Western Australian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the formal closure of this matter and the registration of his death.

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<sup>22</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2, Report of Senior Constable Isaac Watkins dated 17 October 2024, p.11

<sup>23</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2, Report of Senior Constable Isaac Watkins dated 17 October 2024, p.12

- 75 I feel significant sympathy for Mr Yunge's family, particularly his wife and his three daughters who were all under the age of ten years when he disappeared. They were living in New Zealand at the time, which must have felt like it was a world away. The stress and anxiety experienced by Mr Yunge's wife was palpable from the letters she had written to the Commissioner of Police that simply wanted answers to what had happened to her beloved husband. Regrettably, what answers that are now in this finding cannot be provided to Mr Yunge's wife and eldest daughter as they are sadly deceased.
- 76 I extend my sincere condolences to Mr Yunge's family and loved ones, particularly his two daughters, Sandra and Laura, for their terrible loss. I cannot begin to imagine the grief and sadness that Mr Yunge's immediate family (who all loved him very much) experienced since his disappearance, particularly in the months and years that followed.

PJ Urquhart  
**Coroner**  
9 May 2025