
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : SARAH HELEN LINTON, DEPUTY STATE CORONER
HEARD : 14 AUGUST 2024
DELIVERED : 14 AUGUST 2024
FILE NO/S : CORC 3248 of 2023
DECEASED : RODIER, FRANK EDWARD

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable C Robertson assisted the Coroner.

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

Nil

Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Sarah Helen Linton, Deputy State Coroner, having investigated the death of **Frank Edward RODIER** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 14 August 2024, find that the identity of the deceased person was **Frank Edward RODIER** and that death occurred on 25 May 1975 in the waters of the Indian Ocean off Quobba Station near Red Bluff, Carnarvon, in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

1. Frank Rodier was last seen alive on the morning of 25 May 1975. Frank was 16 years old at that time. He had gone fishing that morning with two older friends/work colleagues, Donald McLeod and Roy Ducas. They were fishing off rocks in an area known as ‘the Caves’ near Red Bluff, 75 miles north of Carnarvon. One of them caught a fish and the fish and fishing line became tangled on the rocks on a lower ledge. Frank and Mr Ducas went down the rocks to try to untangle the line and retrieve the fish. While still down on the lower ledge, a wave came in and hit the rocks where they were standing. Mr Ducas managed to retain his footing, but Frank was closer to the edge and was washed off the jagged rocks and into the sea. His two friends on the rocks tried to help him back on to the rock ledge, but they were unsuccessful. It appears Frank succumbed to either injury or drowned in the water and he disappeared from sight. Despite a search being conducted, Frank’s body was never recovered.
2. In my capacity as the Acting State Coroner, I determined on the basis of information provided by the WA Police in August 2023 that there was reasonable cause to suspect that Frank had died and that his death was a reportable death under the Act. I therefore made a direction to the Commissioner of Police, pursuant to s 23(1) of the *Coroners Act 1996 (WA)*, that the suspected death be investigated.¹
3. On 11 October 2023 the State Coroner received a report prepared by Detective Acting Sergeant Ellie Wold from the Homicide Squad Missing Person Team. In the report, Frank was confirmed to be a long term missing person, with his disappearance first reported to police at about 10.25 am on 25 May 1975. In 2006, a review by police had determined Frank’s disappearance fell into the category of a non-suspicious death. Later enquiries by members of the Missing Person Team in 2015 and 2023 confirmed that Frank’s family had not seen or heard from him again after he disappeared on 25 May 1975 and ‘proof of life’ checks found no record of him in Australia from that time. Det A/Sgt Wold submitted that the evidence supported the conclusion that Frank was deceased and his death likely occurred as a result of drowning on the morning of 25 May 1975.²
4. As required under s 23(2) of the Act, I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner’s Court on 13 August 2024. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled through the police investigation conducted into Frank’s disappearance, as well as hearing evidence from Detective Senior Constable Wold.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

5. Frank was one of six children to his parents Adelene and Leonard Rodier. His parents were still alive at the time of Frank’s disappearance, but they have both since passed away. Frank and his twin brother Terry were the youngest of six siblings: Marion, Joan and John (twins), Geoffrey, Terry and Frank (twins). Frank was generally fit and healthy, other than some slight impairments, such as a speech

¹ Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of A/SC Linton dated 30 August 2023.

² Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

impediment, associated with events at the time of his birth. He had no known medical conditions that would have shortened his life span.³

6. Frank was very close with his family. They lived a full and active family life, going camping and beach fishing together and playing lots of sports. Frank was particularly devoted to the sport of Judo and it was through Judo that he met Mr McLeod, who had been his judo instructor. The family were members of the local Presbyterian Church and also supported the local community as volunteers, which gave them a strong sense of belonging to the local community.⁴
7. Frank completed all of his schooling in Carnarvon, finishing his education in Year 10. After leaving school, Frank had begun working as a gardener and general maintenance worker for Mr McLeod, who was a local contractor. Mr Ducas also worked for Mr McLeod, which is how Frank came to know him.⁵
8. Frank's older brother John remembered him as a pleasant young man who was always smiling, with a bubbly personality. At the time of his disappearance, his four older siblings had moved out of home, so it was only Frank and his twin Terry still living at home with their parents. Frank was described as a 'stay at home' son, who was very close to his mother. He liked listening to music and being around family in the comfort of his family home.⁶
9. The evidence indicates Frank was a happy, settled young man who grew up in a close knit, happy and loving family. He was also happy in his work and well established in his local community.

LAST SIGHTING

10. Frank would often work at the Texada Mines managerial residential units, which were located near the home of John and his young family in Carnarvon. Frank would visit regularly when working in the area and had a good relationship with John, John's wife Karen and their two young sons. He would also visit his sister Joan, who also lived nearby.⁷
11. On Sunday, 25 May 1975, while their mother and Frank's twin Terry were away visiting family in Port Hedland, Mr Ducas came to Frank's house and asked Frank's father for permission to take Frank fishing. Frank had been fishing with the men before and had loved it. With his father's permission, Frank set out on another fishing trip with Mr Ducas and Mr McLeod that morning.⁸
12. The trio went to a place known locally as 'the Caves' on Quobba Station, near Red Bluff in the Carnarvon region. It is a remote location on a rugged stretch of coastline. While they were fishing on the rocks, one of the group caught a fish. The fishing line became tangled on a lower ledge, so Frank and Mr Ducas went down the rocks to

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 and Tab 4.

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

untangle the line and retrieve the catch. Possibly because he was younger and more agile, Frank went further down the rocks and closer to the edge. While they were still in the process of disentangling the line, a king wave came through and struck both of them. Because Mr Ducas was higher up the rocks, he was able to prevent himself from being washed over the edge, but Frank was not as fortunate and was washed off the rocks. He was wearing jeans, a shirt, a jacket and thongs at the time he was swept into the water, but lost his thongs as he was swept in.⁹

13. There was no rescue rope or life ring in the area to throw out into the sea to help Frank keep afloat. Mr Ducas and Mr McLeod called out encouragement to Frank, who was seen trying to get back on to the rocks. Unfortunately, the rock edge was sharp and jagged and the swells were large, so it was very difficult and dangerous. Frank appears to have been pushed into the rocks and he then become frightened and possibly was injured, so he stopped trying to climb back onto the rocks and was then seen either swimming or floating on his back. He took off his jacket at some stage while floating in the sea, presumably as it was making it harder to float. The two men tried to encourage Frank to try again to climb the rocks, but they were unsuccessful. He was last seen drifting out to sea in a lifeless condition before he eventually disappeared from sight.¹⁰

THE SEARCH

14. Frank's father was informed of Frank's disappearance by police after Mr Ducas drove to the Texada Mines ship loading facility at Cape Cuvier so he could make a phone call reporting the incident. It was close to nighttime when the family were first informed. Mr Rodier was understandably deeply distressed and, sadly, it appears he blamed himself in part for giving his permission for Frank to go, although it could not have been anticipated that this would occur. The information about Frank's disappearance was passed on to Frank's mother, and she immediately travelled back to Carnarvon, arriving in the early hours of the following morning.¹¹
15. Police launched boats and searched the area on foot. Family members also assisted the police to search for Frank along the coastline near where he disappeared. At that stage, the family still held out hope that he might be found alive. John assisted in the search and recalled the coastline in the area was extremely rugged and dangerous, with king waves, high cliffs and jagged limestone rock formations. They searched all day on 26 May 1975, but no sign of Frank was found. Frank's family, particularly his mother, continued to hold out hope for some time that he might still return home, but they eventually came to accept that Frank had died on the morning of 25 May 1975 and was never coming home.¹²
16. Mr McLeod and Mr Ducas have since passed away, but there was never any suspicion or blame cast upon either man and Frank's family held no resentment towards them for the sad turn of events. Frank's mother remained steadfast in her Christian faith and now that both Mr and Mrs Rodier are buried together in Carnarvon Cemetery, one can only hope they have been reunited with their son.

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Tab 5, Tab 7 and Tab 11 .

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

IS DEATH ESTABLISHED?

17. As is clear from the above, I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Frank Rodier is deceased and that he died on 25 May 1975 in the sea after he was washed off the rocks while fishing with friends.
18. In terms of the cause of death, it is most likely that he died as a result of drowning, but I cannot exclude the possibility that he died from injuries he sustained from the rocks, or that injury at least contributed to his death. Accordingly, his cause of death must remain unascertained. As to the manner of death, I am satisfied he died by way of accident.

CONCLUSION

19. Rock fishing was, and remains, a popular but dangerous pastime in Western Australia. In the many years that have passed since Frank’s death, things to mitigate the risks in the sport have been put in place at many popular rock fishing locations in Western Australia, such as life rings and tether points. However, the Caves fishing spot on Quobba Station remains a picturesque but remote and challenging fishing spot to this day, in a generally dangerous part of the WA coastline.¹³
20. Frank Rodier lived a short but happy life in Carnarvon with his family. On the day he died, he went fishing off ‘the Caves’ rocks with friends. Sadly, Frank fell victim to the inherent risk involved and was washed into the sea by a king wave while trying to untangle a fishing line and was lost at sea.



S H Linton
Deputy State Coroner
14 August 2024

¹³ <https://www.quobba.com.au/fishing?lightbox=dataItem-kdwv3hr31>.