# Episode 13 - Missing Person - v1.mp3

**John Pratt:** [00:00:04] Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's brand new podcast, This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania. And before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respect to elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**John Pratt:** [00:00:48] Welcome to another episode of This is Tas Police. Today, once again, we're looking at the work that goes into a long term missing persons case. We'll be chatting with Detective Inspector Troy Morrisby about missing person Ian Nichols, who was last seen at Tasmania's Lake Sorell in 1989. We'll hear from Troy about the challenges that come with historical cases like this and we'll get an update on where things are at. Thanks for joining us today, Troy.

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:01:11] My pleasure.

**John Pratt:** [00:01:12] Before we talk about the missing person case, let's start with a bit about yourself. Can you give us an overview of your time within Tasmania Police, where you started and how you ended up working in investigations?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:01:22] Yes, certainly. So I'm a product of joining Tas Police as an 18 year old back in 1994, so this is coming up to my 29th year will be next year. I started at the end of school and wasn't really sure what I was going to do in life. And so I wrote down a number of things that I wanted to do in my career, and police tended to tick most of those boxes. So after I joined, I graduated to Glenorchy Police Station and I did a little bit of time in traffic for a few years and also went down and did some work at Clarence Plains Police Station, which is just here near the Academy. And it was from there that I started getting an interest in investigations and wanted to move to that area. And probably around the early 2000s, I worked at Bellevue CIB for about four, four and a half years and I loved my experience there and I thought it was fantastic. And from there during my career, I've probably spent equal time between investigations and traffic policing throughout most of my career, which are probably two rather different areas, but two areas that interest me nonetheless.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:20] And you've progressed through the ranks, obviously starting as a constable, and now you're a detective inspector.

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:02:24] Yes. So I was a constable for about 13 years and then I was a sergeant at a Bridgewater police station, which I loved. It was fantastic and a fantastic career out there. And then I went back to Traffic as a sergeant and then was promoted approximately five years ago. And around three years ago I was transferred to the Glenorchy Criminal Investigation Branch, which is, I can say with my hand on my heart, a job that I absolutely love.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:50] And I'm guessing that since 1994, through until today, you've seen some incredible changes in the way Tasmania Police operates and undertakes its investigations.

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:02:59] Yes, definitely. I remember graduating and we had one computer that was in our big muster room and I was deemed to be a lucky young constable because I had access to an electronic typewriter.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:12] Ian Nichols went missing in September 1989 from Lake Sorell. He was 51 years old at the time, and he had gone up to the lakes with a group of associates to help with the construction of a shack or a retreat in the area. Mr. Nichols decided to stay behind when the others returned to Hobart and he was later reported missing by his family. In 2012 a coronial inquest was held into the disappearance. Sadly, the coroner made a finding that Mr. Nichols is presumed to have died.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:39] As a detective inspector, your tasked with investigating some very interesting cases, including long term missing persons cases like the one we're going to discuss today. Troy, can you tell us a bit about how long you've been working on this investigation and give us a few more details about the case involving Mr. Nichols?

**Speaker2:** [00:03:55] Yeah, So certainly, I suppose to go back. Tasmania Police effectively had the case open since 1989. During those periods, it doesn't remain what we would call an active investigation for the best part of 32 years. But what we do is we look at it at different stages. So obviously a lot of effort went in back in 1989 and around the initial investigation and then again around 2012 when the coronial inquest was held, there would have been a number of investigations and inquiries made. Then more recently, we've probably undertaken the investigation for the past, I would say, 5 to 6 months, and that's been around some information that we received and we do receive information on historical cases from time to time. But with this one in particular, we'd receive some information that had probably been getting around for a little while, which we thought warranted closer investigation. So in effect, we had a team of three very competent and experienced investigators in our team at Glenorchy and Bridgewater CIB, and they were taken offline to really look more closely at this case, both from the initial historical point of view and also based on the current information we had. You've got to remember back in 1989, a lot of our records in Tasmania police were paper-based. And so when you go back to records that are over 30 years old, and you're going to paper-based records, sometimes it can be difficult to get all the records or everything in fantastic condition. And so it was quite an effort for those investigators to look at the material from 30 years ago and try and paint a picture of where the matter was at up to this stage now.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:30] You mentioned paper-based records as one of the challenges in investigating an older case like this. Can you describe a few of the other challenges that you faced?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:05:38] The passage of time? Sadly, I say, a number of people that were witnesses or had knowledge of the events of 1989 have since passed away. And another challenge is with time, people's memories aren't once what they used to be. And so that when you often revisit people that had knowledge of this case from back in 1989, and it's fair to say that recollections can not change but potentially not be as good as they were clearly 32 years ago when police may have originally dealt with them. So there's some of the challenges that the investigators have to deal with and sort of balance out when looking at these matters.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:16] Police investigations are never closed, and revisiting historical cases such as the Nichols case is considered part of the job. We owe it to the families to find the answers when someone goes missing. Tasmania Police have recently been in the Lake Sorell area, revisiting Mr. Nichols last known movements, including speaking with people who either saw or spoke with him in the days before he disappeared.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:38] So given those challenges, how do you go about finding clues, leads and evidence on an old case such as this?

**Speaker2:** [00:06:44] Yes, I'd say overwhelmingly we really have a heavy dependence on the public. Our relationship with the public from investigations generally, if you look over time, we have very competent investigators. But normally those clues, those leads would more often than not stem from information that is supplied to us from members of the public. So we'll get that as well. In these historical cases where it might be a piece of information someone's been holding on to for a number of years, something that someone may have heard as part of a rumour and not paid any credit to or something. That was a bit of a legend or they thought that police already knew about. And so we will often get information that comes through from time to time and we always assist them and we always look at them. And in some cases, and often in many cases, we can dismiss that information as not being credible or we've ruled out that information through previous investigations and inquiries. But there are occasions that occur. And some of the best breakthroughs we have is, is when we look at some of that information, and we find that there is actually something to it, and it's something that we didn't know before, and that can lead us down a whole new rabbit hole that we hadn't previously been exposed to. So from an investigative point of view, that's exciting. It's interesting for us, but it can also potentially bring answers for families.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:02] I know, for obvious reasons, in cases such as this and other investigations, you have to be careful about what you say. But are you able to describe some of the finer details of what the latest parts of this investigation has involved?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:08:14] Yes, certainly there are aspects I can't speak to, but certainly we received some information with regards to potential site where remains may have been. And so we were very interested in looking at that site. So it was something that the advancement of technology in a forensic sense allowed us to do some non-intrusive investigations at a site and they showed some anomalies of things of interest. And that allowed us then to work with landowners and site owners to make some further inquiries at that time. So we did a lot of work around that to make sure that we were obviously not causing undue damage. But the fact was we wanted to try and get to the bottom of the fact of whether there were any remains at a particular location. I can indicate that that took a lot of work, that went into that. And we did undertake that inquiry recently. And look, sadly for the family that resulted in, we didn't find any remains. We did find anomalies that would explain what those forensic testing results came back with. But for us, it was about at least we were able to give some form of an answer to family members in regards to that information, because that had been getting around for some time, some anecdotal information that remains were at a particular site and it was of interest. And whilst it wasn't the result in the sense of providing an answer to the families or providing remains to a family, which you would imagine is a vitally important thing and what any family would want, we were able to at least dispel that information that had come through and able to give them some answers, at least to that aspect of it.

**John Pratt:** [00:09:49] Now, you mentioned the families of Mr. Nicholls. How hard is it for families to go through investigations like this?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:09:54] Oh, it's incredibly hard. We have a number of historical matters that we manage from a Tasmania Police point of view and I can only talk from a Glenorchy criminal investigation branch point of view. Some of the more high profile ones we would talk of Eve Askew and Lucille Butterworth, that from time to time I mentioned in the media and we do appeals for public for all of those families involved as well as Mr. Nicholls family. It's a very traumatic thing. I can only imagine and I say I can only imagine that what it would be like for the families not to have answers as to what occurred to loved ones and not know the exact circumstances of the disappearance and of their passing.

**John Pratt:** [00:10:32] So you've covered some of the things that you have to deal with when you're actually dealing with the investigation itself. But is part of your job to update the families regularly with the information that you uncover and the way that the investigation is unfolding?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:10:45] Yeah, and that's a really fine balance because the first thing for us is always the integrity of the investigation. So there are sometimes there are things we can't tell family members about our methodology and about the way we investigate crimes. But it may not always be me, but it will always be a member of our team. So in this case with Ian, where our investigators are in close contact with the family and we make every effort to keep the family updated with what we can tell them. And our ethos is to share as much information as we can. And in this case, look, we've been able to be pretty upfront and honest in regards to what we have investigated and what we have found at the moment. So I think it's really important that the families know what we can do and what we can't do, and we continue to have those conversations with them about where these things are at because it's just horrible for them not knowing.

**John Pratt:** [00:11:37] Are you able to give us a bit of an indication as to what the status of the investigation is now and where it may be heading?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:11:43] Yeah, so for us, it remains as what I would say as an open investigation. We don't have clear answers still in regards to Mr. Nichols and the circumstances of what occurred to him. That's not for me to say that his death is being treated as a suspicious one. But what we are after is what are those circumstances of him going missing? It could have been by misadventure, it could have been self-inflicted, it could have been by suspicious circumstances and foul play. As an investigator, our mind has to remain open to any one of those situations and scenarios. So at the moment, for us, we don't have those answers. For us, I think it's important for us to work for the family to get those answers. And more importantly, if we could somehow get information that led to finding his remains, I think that would be a really important step as well in providing closure to family and loved ones. So at the moment, it remains open following the last information we just had. It probably won't move into or remain an active investigation for the time being.

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:12:46] But again we will speak with family about that. But what I would say is that we always welcome information from members of the public on any platform. And so if there's anyone that's listening to this and they know anything about the Ian Nichols matter or they've spoken with someone that might know about it or they've heard some information, no matter how insignificant you believe it may be, no matter how trivial you think it might be. I'd encourage you, please contact us. And that can be done obviously through the normal lines of 131444 or through Crimestoppers and through Crimestoppers as well can be done anonymously and just pass that information on and do it with the confidence of knowing we will look at it. It doesn't go into a bucket. It doesn't go into a drawer, someone's drawer. We do actively look at that information, and we do assess it for its credibility. And again, it was that sort of information that led us to our current efforts, which had the potential to provide the family with some answers.

**John Pratt:** [00:13:47] You've just explained to us one specific investigation that you've been involved in. I was just going to ask, what's the most rewarding part of being a detective?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:13:56] Oh, look, for me, I think I think it's the ability to assist people when they're at their worst. For a lot of our major investigations and our major crime, the irony and the sadness of that is it often revolves around all the serious injuries or often deaths of people. And I think when you're looking at suspicious or deliberate deaths of people, I don't think there's much greater privilege you can have as a police officer thank investigating the circumstances and providing answers or closure to a family. And that's why these sort of historical matters are taken so seriously, because that's what we want. We want to provide closure to a family. We want to provide that support and answers to a family. So I think a rewarding part is being able to provide answers and closure for family, whether or not that's sometimes and often for us as investigators, that is with suspicious death, charging someone, finding those responsible and charging them. And so that's a pretty rewarding part of the job. And can I say, as well as an investigator, as tragic as those circumstances are, it is the most motivating to be an investigator. It's really easy to be motivated to come to work and work on those sort of jobs, to help families, to try and hold those who are responsible to account. And that really is what drives a lot of people to work in the investigative fields.

**John Pratt:** [00:15:17] So as somebody that joined Tasmania Police in 1994 and has worked your way through to being a detective inspector. Do you have any tips for people who might wish to join Tas Police and work towards becoming a detective?

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:15:28] Yeah. So first step is apply. Apply, join, be a police officer. I can honestly say after 29 years there, not every day is the best day, but I've had far, far more great days than bad days. I still love the job. I still love getting up and coming to work. So it is a fantastic job, which I would recommend anyone. If you're interested in investigative fields, best thing to do is and we say this to all, to a lot of the newly graduated constables that come out to specifically for us to Glenorchy station, we encourage them to be really mindful about getting to know their local offenders in their area, being really vigilant about the way they go about their duties, being really proactive with the way they engage with the public and being very thorough with their investigations that they might have at uniform level. And then what we do is we encourage them to come and do a period of comment to our office where we can give them some guidance and training. And we also have courses at the academy that specialise in investigative training and we try and identify those people that have got a keen interest and we try and lead them onto those courses and then normally really good pathways to them move into the CIBs. Once you're in the CIB, that is the ultimate in moving into that investigative field.

**John Pratt:** [00:16:43] It's great to hear that after the amount of time that you spent with Tas Police, that you still love the job and you still love coming to work. And I've got no doubt that's because of the variety that you undertake in your work from day to day. Thanks for taking the time to chat with us today, Troy. It's always interesting to hear about other areas of Thames Police and how you're helping the community as part of your career.

**Troy Morrisby:** [00:17:01] Thanks for having me.

**John Pratt:** [00:17:06] So far on this is Tas Police, we've chatted to our former Commissioner Darren Hine, and our new Commissioner, Donna Adams. We've also heard from our recruitment services team and some new recruits. There have been some interesting and inspiring conversations from people who have experienced everything Tasmania Police has to offer, and this is just the beginning.

**John Pratt:** [00:17:25] If you like what you heard today, please subscribe on your favourite podcast app and while you're there, consider leaving us a review or a rating to let us know how we're going. You can also stay up to date with podcast episodes on our website at recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.