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Courage on the cliff's edge

It was a quiet evening at home with their families or a risky negotiation job on a clifftop. Two NT cops took option two, which almost cost them their lives. Their reward was the National Police Bravery Award.

By Brett
Williams



It had taken seven intense hours of negotiation on the edge of a Darwin clifftop above croc-infested waters. Two Northern Territory Police negotiators appeared to have resolved a serious case of threatened suicide.

The determined young man they had negotiated with since early the previous evening seemed finally dissuaded from jumping to his death.

Throughout the previous hours, he had either sat or stood on a rock of less than coffee-table size protruding from the top of the cliff face.

And negotiator Mark “Tiny” Turner had seen the folly of any attempt to grab him. “With him on that rock, there was no way we could’ve got him without risking him jumping,” Turner explains.

But Quinn (not his real name), dressed in only his underwear after burning his clothes, had now stepped back from that insanely dangerous position.

Indeed, he had knelt beside plain-clothed Turner and Linda Farrand, both senior constables and seasoned members of the NT Police Negotiation Unit. Farrand, 44, had acted as the primary negotiator throughout the preceding hours of dialogue.

Outwardly calm but running on adrenaline, she and Turner covered the shivering Quinn with a blanket. And, at that point, after all those hours, they thought they had at last made some serious headway.

"We'd got something out of nothing," Turner says. "We'd got that physical contact with him, and he wasn't pulling away. He had now gone from zero to probably about seven out of 10 in the trust level he'd given us."

But, after only "a matter of seconds", Turner could see that "something just changed about his (Quinn's) demeanour".

It was a critical observation, and entirely accurate. Turner, who had served in three different police forces in two hemispheres, could tell from Quinn's body language that "something was wrong".

And, sure enough, without warning, and seeming to have made the decision to end his life, Quinn went to jump. His frighteningly sudden move left Turner and Farrand just a fraction of a second to react.

Quinn was so close to the edge of the cliff in Bicentennial Park that he needed neither a run-up nor a single step to launch himself.

But Turner did react in that fraction of a second. He grabbed the solidly built Quinn around his waist and fell deliberately backward with him at the cliff edge. Farrand grabbed him as well and yelled for help from GD (general duties) cops stationed on nearby cordons.

Turner – called Tiny because of his massive frame – faced an overwhelming challenge to restrain the squirming Quinn, who was wet and slippery. That was the result of sprinklers which had activated in the lawn just north-west of the Darwin Cenotaph during the negotiation process.

So Turner, 36, had to produce Herculean strength to maintain his bear hug on the tattooed, 80-plus kilogram Quinn. And, to brace himself, he planted his foot against a rock he had noticed sticking up out of the ground at the cliff edge.

But it was crucial that he not lose, or even loosen, his grip before the back-up police reached the imperilled trio. Were Quinn to break free, he might just have been able to roll himself straight off the cliff.

"There was just no margin for error,"

Turner says. "At that stage, it was that moment of: 'Now we need help!' Linda was calling for help and trying to control him as well.

"I was trying to hold him as tight as I could. He was trying to fight against us. My biggest worry was that all he had to do was be able to roll, and then we'd have just gone (over the edge)."

Quinn was certain to take Farrand with him if he did manage to break free of Turner and body-roll off the cliff. In fact, Farrand was already thinking: "Tiny, don't let go of him because I'm the first one to go."

The risk of all three plunging to their deaths was extreme. From the cliff edge, the drop was around 20 metres into the croc-infested waters below.

To Farrand, it seemed – as it usually does in critical incidents – as if it was taking forever for the GD cops to get to her and Turner. "Come on, guys," she thought. "Where are you?"

"But, in reality," she says, "they were there in a split second."

Those officers, Todd Lymberry and Mark Creighton, had bolted from their position near the cenotaph, jumped a barrier and charged directly toward their colleagues. Once there, they grabbed Quinn and dragged him backward, away from the cliff edge.

Territory Response Group members had been standing by at the scene and helped carry Quinn over to his distressed mother and a waiting ambulance.

As close calls go, that dramatic ending at the cliff edge was, to most observers, off the scale. Indeed, for Turner and Farrand, it was the closest call of their police careers; and neither would ever again see or interact with Quinn.

"After the job finished, I went and had a dry retch," Farrand recalls. "I gave Tiny the biggest hug because, not only did he stop that young lad going over the cliff, but he stopped me going over too.

"Then, in the days after, you think: 'Who would've suffered if we went over (the cliff)?' But that's cast to the back of my mind, and I can't think about it."

Turner watched footage of the incident recorded on a body-worn camera. What he saw put the risk he and Farrand had faced into its proper perspective.

"That's when I went: 'Oh, f--k! That was close!'" he says. "It was one of those where you think: 'It could've gone horribly wrong.' But you don't have time to think about that at the time."

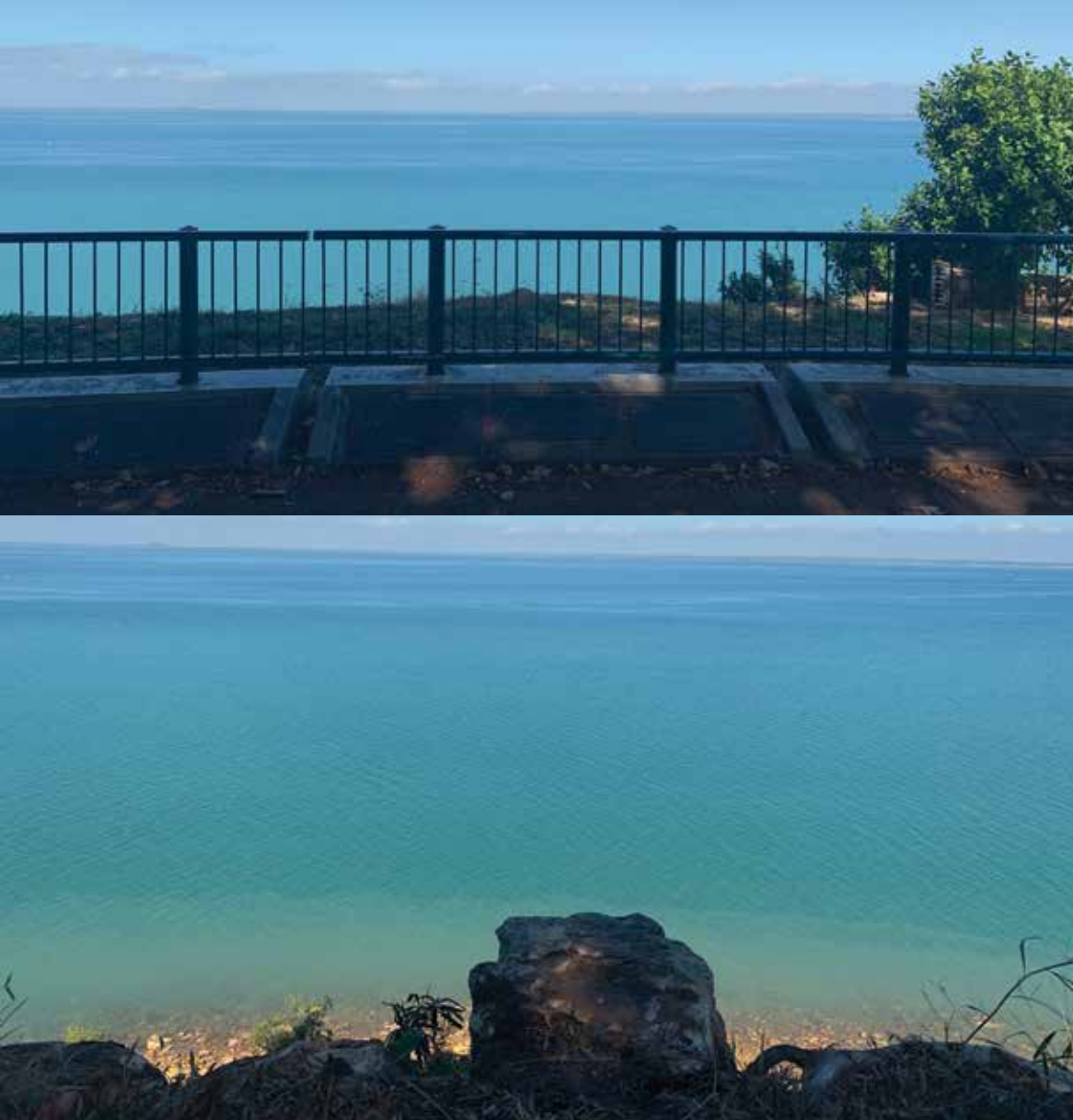
“I was trying to hold him as tight as I could. He was trying to fight against us. My biggest worry was that all he had to do was be able to roll, and then we'd have just gone (over the edge).”

Nor was there much think time available to Turner and Farrand after they got WhatsApp messages around 7pm on Tuesday, June 11. The on-call police negotiators were at their respective homes, deservedly whiling away the hours with their families.

To them, however, an after-hours message to request that they respond to a job was never a surprise.

Farrand had served the NT Police Negotiation Unit for 10 years, and Turner for five. And that was in addition to their day jobs – Turner an investigator with the Domestic and Personal Violence Command and Farrand a school-based officer.

The message they got, and responded to, that evening came from on-call police negotiator Sergeant Renae McGarvie. She



Above: Daytime images of the scene showing the fence (above) and the rock which jutted out from the edge of the clifftop.

had herself received an after-hours message and was to end up acting as not only the team leader but also the incident controller.

At the scene, where GD officers had been the first to respond to the job, the three negotiators wisely got some info about Quinn from his mother. She (the mother) had alerted police to the incident with a 000 call before GD officers found her son at the clifftop.

The story was that mother and son had arrived in Darwin from interstate a day or two earlier for a break. Quinn, aged in his twenties, had apparently had some difficulty with substance abuse and a relationship breakdown.

With at least some knowledge of the man they would set out to save, and an ambulance crew standing by, Turner and Farrand got to work. They had

decided that Farrand would take the primary negotiator role.

“We didn’t want to scare him off with me being a big lump who was capable of trying to grab him,” Turner says.

“We wanted a softly, softly approach, and then to let him get to know me, calm down, and see where we’d go from there.”

So, the pair walked “very passively” toward Quinn, as McGarvie kept a line of sight on her two negotiators from around 50 metres away.

They could see that Quinn had stripped off his clothes and jewellery. He had burnt them with a cigarette lighter.

Says Turner: “With this chap, we both immediately picked up on the same thing: ‘He’s committed to doing

this.’ There was an immediate sense of urgency from his body language, what he was saying, and how he was acting.”

Farrand, who could see that Quinn was not armed, went about her first attempt to engage him from behind the fence just back from the cliff edge.

“At first,” she says, “he didn’t want me getting too close. He was totally reluctant about me coming over the fence, so I had to gauge whether I was going to do that or not.

“I decided I was going to, and I let him know. I said: ‘I’m going to come over but I’m not going to grab you. There’s no way I can grab you.’”

Farrand assured Quinn that she and Turner were not some “fantastic talented team” which would swoop in and save him. That was a means of making him “understand and relax”.

And McGarvie saw her negotiators’ actions, then and later, as entirely correct.

“It was impossible for them to engage with him without approaching him in that manner,” she says. “I trusted in their risk assessments and their safety assessments of the situation.”

Of course, Farrand regulated the tone and pitch of her voice and the speed of her speech, directly in line with her training.

She drew on those skills to explain to Quinn that, were he to jump, he would not necessarily die but might instead end up seriously injured.

One of many complicating factors was plugs he had in his ears. When Farrand asked him if he could hear her, he responded: “Yes, I can hear you, but they’re too loud.”

She suspected his nonsensical answer was the result of either auditory or visual hallucinations, or both.

A critical move early in the incident was to get the okay from Quinn for Turner to join Farrand on the cliff side of the fence. It was important to afford him that measure of control.

And, without an “immediate negative response” from him, Turner jumped the fence and sat next to Farrand.

“When we started at 8:00 in the evening,” Turner says, “the tide was out so, if he had gone over, he would’ve hit the rocks. It wouldn’t have been a search and rescue. It would’ve been a body recovery.”

But, the focus for Turner and Farrand, from the moment they turned up, was to establish a connection with Quinn. And, with their vast experience of suicide attempts, the two cops got him talking, through the evening and into the next morning.

“We talked about travel, about the moon, the sky, and what we could see at the cliff,” Farrand remembers.

“I asked him where he wanted to travel to, and he told me he had some photos that he put on Instagram. He told me that he loved animals.

“So, it was just little by little. But I never had the sense of being fully connected with him so that I could change his mind (about jumping).

“I was close enough to touch him, and I did touch him at times just to try and get that connection.

“He’d fallen asleep on one occasion, so we let him rest. And we were able to rest ourselves because we were just running for hours on pure adrenaline.”

One point at which their adrenaline truly surged had come earlier, about halfway through the incident. Quinn stood up on the rock, wobbly and shaking. Farrand, still outwardly calm, thought: “This is it!”

As he looked out over the cliff, he asked her: “Why isn’t it happening?” In her best effort to keep him calm, Farrand responded: “It’s not your time yet. It’s not going to happen tonight. It’s not your time. Come back from the cliff.”

But more hours would pass before Quinn would voluntarily step back from the rock beneath his shaking body.

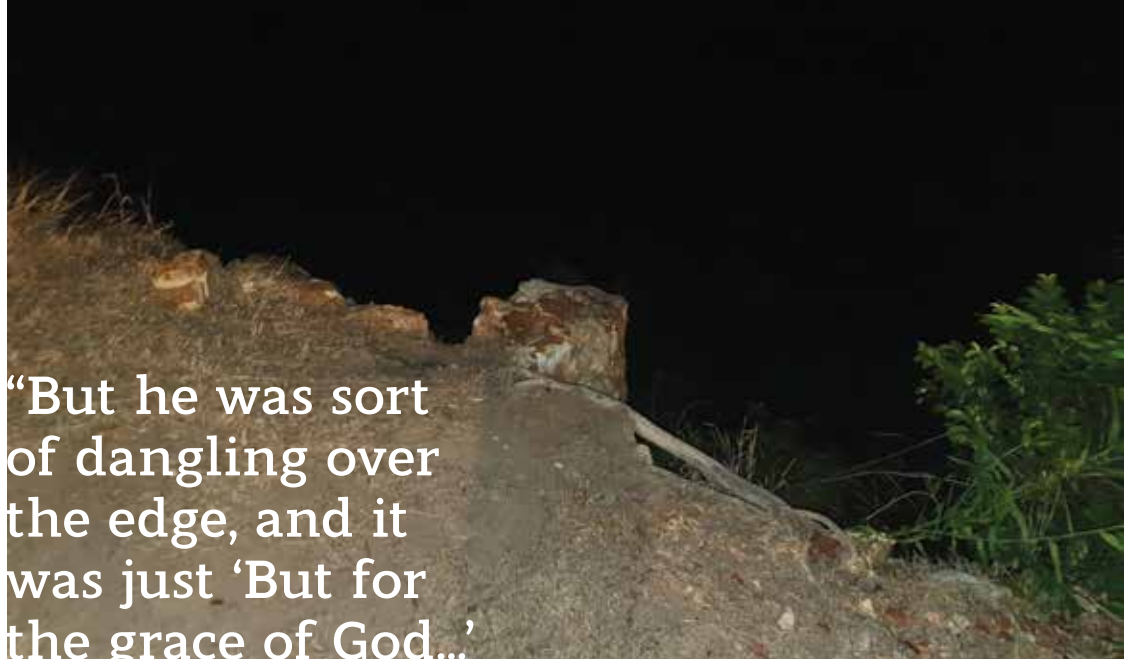
Throughout the ordeal, during which he had smoked cigarettes “almost continually”, he never specifically outlined the reason he wanted to die.

“There were some general, fleeting comments about pain and suffering,” Turner recalls. “But there were never words like: ‘I’m going to jump now,’ or ‘I’m going to do this because of X, Y or Z.’”

One moment which struck fear into Turner came when Quinn undertook to burn his already burnt clothes. The two cops watched him pile up leaves, trash and bits of fabric into a heap.

“He was sitting on the rock but had positioned himself around a bit to set it all on fire,” Turner says.

“But he was sort of dangling over the edge, and it was just ‘But for the grace of God...’ If he’d slipped, it would have been all over.”



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Top: The fence Turner and Farrand climbed over to position themselves closer to Quinn; **above:** the rock (centre) on which Quinn positioned himself.

And some of the circumstances of the incident made the working environment even tougher for Farrand. Heights made her “very uncomfortable”; she struggled with sleep deprivation; and she had a dislike of “small critters and animals”.

The involvement of a small but wild animal that evening might have seemed unlikely. But, after around five hours on the cliff edge, an apparently fearless possum appeared out of the night and joined the three humans.

As uncomfortable as it made Farrand, the creature gave her and Turner a minor breakthrough. It sparked a response from Quinn, who tried to feed and generally interact with the animal.

“Suddenly, we had interaction,” Turner says. “We just needed something



“As soon as I could see that they had him in hand, there was the reality of what could have happened, and the shock of how close it was.”

to connect with him (Quinn), and this certainly gave us that ability.

“We’d spent so long fishing for different things, and he just wasn’t giving up anything.”

In a move to capitalize on the positive input of the possum, Turner fetched some dry food from the Negotiation Unit van. Equipping Quinn to feed the possum helped keep that connection in play.

“Linda was doing her best not to jump out of her skin with this possum wandering around her ankles,” Turner says.

“If she hadn’t managed to take a deep breath and deal with it, or if she had shooed the thing off, we’d have lost the opportunity.

“It just goes to show that random things will pop up and you’ve just got to seize the opportunity when you can get it.”

As useful as the possum connection had been, it was still not enough to get Quinn to step back from the cliff.

That was to come two hours later, when he was shivering and accepted the comfort of the blanket Turner and Farrand wrapped around him. Then, of course, came his sudden

attempt to throw himself off the cliff.

Says McGarvie: “I heard the scream from Linda and ran over at the same time that TRG and the two GD officers ran over. I helped grab him with the others.

“As soon as I could see that they had him in hand, there was the reality of what could have happened, and the shock of how close it was.”

And, if not for the massive risk at which Turner and Farrand placed themselves, Quinn would almost certainly have died. That was clear to McGarvie and others acquainted with the incident.

Around 4am, as dawn drew near, the work of the two heroic cops was done. Although they could finally draw breath without the pressure to connect, the risk of falling, and the bursts of adrenaline, each was still “so wired”.

Both headed to Darwin police station to attend to paperwork. After that, Turner went out for coffee. Farrand headed for home, where she showered and changed into uniform and went back to work for day shift.

“There was no way I was going to sleep,” she says. But, by lunchtime, her superiors had stood her down.

Above:
The view
of Darwin
Harbour from
the clifftop.

Police Negotiation Unit sergeant Michael Budge considered that Turner and Farrand had acted so courageously that he nominated them for the National Police Bravery Award.

“In the end, they put themselves in that danger to get a result, to save his life,” Budge says.

From an Australia-wide field of around 70 nominees for the bravery award, Turner and Farrand emerged joint winners. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton presented each of them with the award at a gala dinner at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra last month.

The humble recipients felt somewhat embarrassed but deeply flattered by such high-level recognition.

“It’s a very complex set of emotions,” Turner says, “because this is our bread and butter of what we do.



“This award was created by police, for police and is from police.”

“To have this attention, especially when there were 70 other nominees, it just makes you realize what we do (in policing).”

The Police Federation of Australia conceived and inaugurated the peer-nominated award last year.

PFA president Mark Carroll saw the actions Turner and Farrand took on that cliff as “perfectly aligned with the award”.

“I’m sure it makes some people shudder when they picture the scene and think of the extraordinary risk to Tiny and Linda’s lives,” he says.

“What saved the day was obviously their bravery but also their quick thinking and competence as police negotiators.

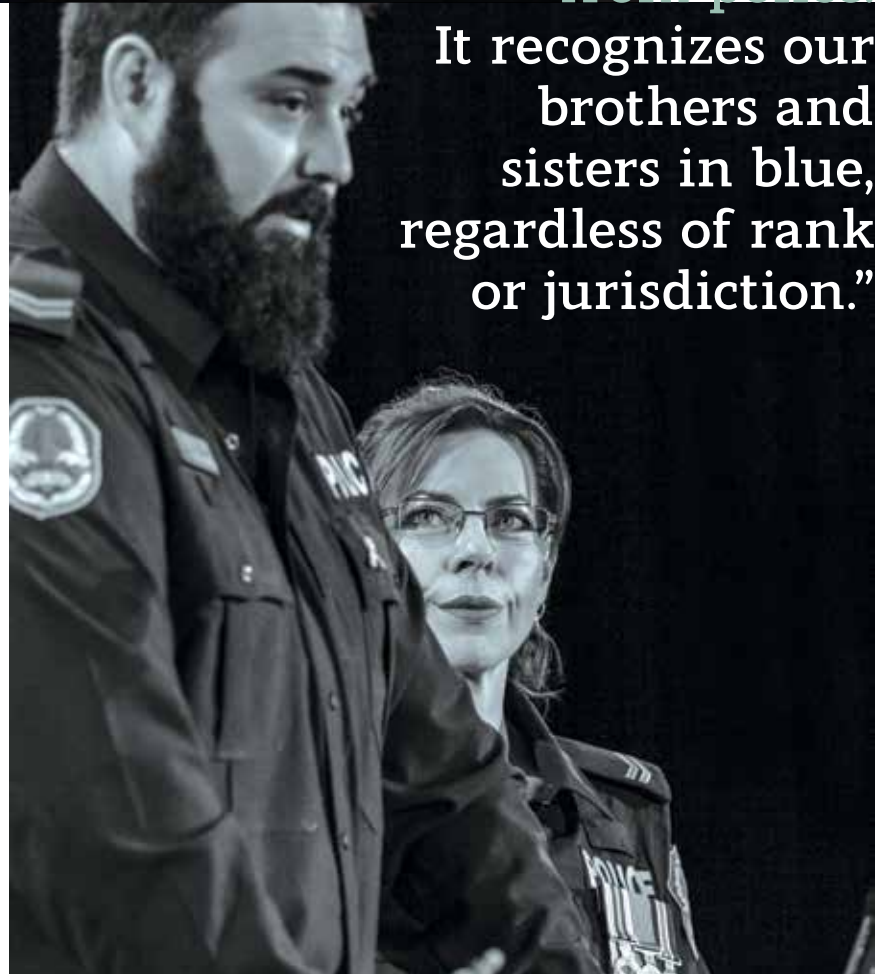
“It was exactly their kind of courage we wanted to reward when we conceived the National Police Bravery Award.”

And that the PFA was the source of the award meant a lot to Turner.

“The PFA has taken the lead on this,” he says. “This award was created by police, for police and is from police. It recognizes our brothers and sisters in blue, regardless of rank or jurisdiction.

“So, this (award) means more to me than any other one could.” PJ

Above: Mark Turner and Linda Farrand, with Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and Police Federation of Australia president Mark Carroll, after receiving their awards at the National Museum of Australia; **right:** Turner making an acceptance speech.



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