

**ACTIVITY:** Diving

**CASE:** **GSF 1892.00.00**

**DATE:** 1892

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Torres Straits, probably near Badu Island.

**NAME:** Mr. A. Rotaman

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a male, a 'dress diver'.

**NARRATIVE:** "He was bitten in two by a shark which he molested with a knife.

He was buried at Badu Island in the Torres Straits."

**INJURY:** Fatal

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Not identified, but the incident did not involve a grey nurse shark as stated by Rendel in the New York Times article; a grey nurse shark lacks the dentition to bite a human in two.

**NOTE:** This was a provoked accident.

**SOURCES:** Gilbert P. Whitley (1940), page 259; John Rendel, New York Times, December 30, 1944



# WOOD, FIELD AND STREAM

By JOHN RENDEL

Corp. George D'Elena of Brooklyn, now with the Army in the Southwest Pacific, presents some observations on sharks in Australia:

"You've heard a lot about the man-eating sharks in Australian waters and how they eat surf bathers. Well, there seems to be some truth and a great deal of misrepresentation about the sharks in these parts. While man-eating has been a peccadillo of Australian sharks for more than a century, actually there are more shark-eating men than man-eating sharks. Fillet of shark is becoming a much-sought delicacy. So far I haven't been hungry enough to buy any—our good old Army rations will do, thank you.

"Getting back to the man-eaters, we have no less an authority than L. A. d'Alpuget, a former Australian surf-boat rowing champion and shark expert, who quotes official Government figures to prove that only 202 shark attacks on humans have been recorded in more than 100 years, and that during that time 400,000,000 swimmers have risked Australia's unenclosed waters. So the odds against being nibbled by a shark are, roughly, 2,000,000 to 1.

## Some Big Ones Harmless

"There are lots of sharks here and some of them, especially the really big ones (forty-five footers), are harmless. But the blue pointers, gray nurses, whalers and tiger sharks, ranging in length between eight and eighteen feet, will eat anything from your grandpa's carpetbag to a hammer.

"Sharks are not natural surface swimmers, living, rather, close to

the ocean floor. Few venture into shallow waters, then only when following the schools of salmon, mullet and bream that move along the Australian coast in the latter part of the summer. So comparatively few surf bathers are attacked. Since 1897 there have been thirty-three surf attacks on the Australian coast and seventy-five in still water.

"Now, from the deep-sea anglers' angle, the shark is great sport. Half-day battles with the big brutes are common. But it is dangerous sport. Even when the big fish are brought up to the gaffing point, one doesn't dare take risks. There have been many attacks on boats even after the sharks have been 'pumped' on lines for hours.

## Shark Stories Exaggerated

"I have often read stories by American writers of the scorn with which Australian swimmers treat the man-eaters; how they sight the shark 'preparing for the charge,' unsheath the knives they always carry and, with a speed equaling that of the monster, dive beneath and slit its belly end to end.

"Bunk! The one authenticated record—at least in Australia—of a human attacking a shark in this manner ended disastrously for the human. This was way back in 1892, when a Thursday Island diver attempted to knife a gray nurse and was promptly bit in two.

"I have just had a marvelous three hours of swimming and I didn't see any sharks, but I thought of them and that is why I write."

This department is glad you wrote, Corporal D'Elena. Many thanks.