



ACTIVITY: Pearl diving

CASE: GSAF 1937.07.16.R

DATE: Reported July 16, 1937

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Arafura Sea off Elcho Island which lies off the coast of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia.

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: He was a Japanese hardhat diver.

BACKGROUND

DEPTH OF WATER: 35 fathoms [210 feet]

NARRATIVE: The diver had been down 20 minutes when the crew of the lugger felt a violent tug on the airhose and lifeline, and began to haul the diver to the surface. "The lines floated to the surface without the diver and no trace of his metal helmet and boots could be found."

INJURY: Presumed fatal.

SPECIES: It was speculated that the diver had been taken by a white shark.

SOURCE: The Mansfield News-Journal, Friday July 16, 1937, page 11

'Killer' Sharks Attack Divers On Pearl Beds

SYDNEY—(UP)—A mysterious sea monster is spreading terror among the crews of the Japanese pearling luggers operating near Elcho Island, North Australia. One diver was attacked and killed on the sea bed.

Marine zoologists say that the only known monster capable of such an attack is a "white death" shark, which are usually about 40 feet long.

The lost Japanese diver had been working in 35 fathoms of water and had been down 20 minutes when the crew of the lugger received the first hint of sudden trouble—a vigorous tug on the air hose and lifeline, which they began to haul in.

The lines floated to the surface without the diver and no trace of his metal helmet and boots could be found.

Crews of the luggers in the neighborhood said that at least seven Japanese divers have been lost within a few weeks. Most of them have been victims of diver's paralysis.

The account below refers to the death of a diver (wearing "standard gear", his name/nationality not provided), listed as occurring in August 1937 at a depth of 210'.

"Pearling lugger out of Darwin, diving to 35 fathoms of Elcho Island, had been down 20 minutes when there was a vigorous tug on the lines they floated to the surface, no sign of diver, helmet boots etc. Reported that a few fragments of clothing were seen floating on the surface the day after. Presumed to be an attack of a 'white death' shark. Same article refers to this being the 7th diver fatality in the previous few weeks with the other fatalities being put down to 'diver's paralysis'. (This list has reference to just one other fatality in the previous 8 months, guess there is a bit of under-reporting? Earliest shark attack on a diver that I know of and that was some dive - 20 minutes at 210' and still working. TC) The Milwaukee Journal "

SOURCE:

<http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/Legislation/PublicComment/Documents/Model%20work%20health%20and%20safety%20public%20comment%202010/Public%20submissions%20A/850%20Australian%20diver%200accreditation%20scheme%20%28ADAS%29.pdf>

