

**ACTIVITY:** Helmet diving

**CASE:** [GSAF 1938.07.12](#)

**DATE:** Tuesday July 12, 1938

**LOCATION:** The incident took place off Bathurst Island in the Torres Strait, Queensland, Australia. 18°23'S.

**NAME:** Okada

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 25-year-old male, diving naked apart from a diving helmet and corselet.

**SUPPORT BOAT:** The Japanese pearling lugger *Reiyo Maru*.



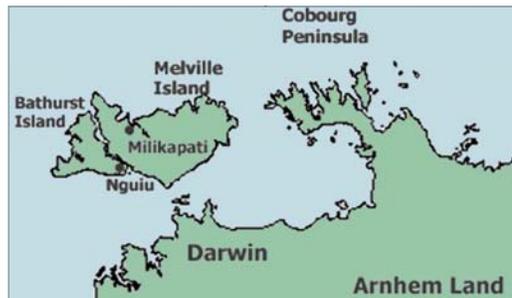
*Japanese pearl divers in the Torres Strait*

### **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, July 13, 1938

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 120 feet

**NARRATIVE:** When a diver in full diving dress (hard hat) surfaced with paralysis (decompression sickness with central nervous system symptoms), Okada was sent down in his stead. Twenty minutes into the dive he signaled, frantically, to be pulled up. He also surfaced with paralysis and was sent below to be "staged". The lifeline went slack and when pulled in, only the helmet and corselet were found. Some 21 divers searched the area. It was thought that a shark or giant grouper seized Okada and dragged him out of the helmet.



**INJURY:** Presumed fatality due to shark attack.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Not identified

**SOURCES:** Northern Standard (Darwin, NT), Tuesday July 12, 1938, page 9

Sydney Morning Herald, July 12, 1938

G.P. Whitley, page 264

Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 244 and 245

## DIVER DISAPPEARS

Another death has been added to the long list of pearling fatalities with the mysterious disappearance yesterday of a 25-year-old apprentice named Okada from the Japanese pearling lugger *Reiyo Maru*.

Okada was working on the pearling beds off Bathurst Island in helmet and corselet. These were found dangling from the life line, but although more than 20 divers from boats working in the same area searched the vicinity under water for more than an hour, no trace of him could be found. It is believed he was swallowed by either a shark or a groper.

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