



ACTIVITY: Spearfishing

CASE: [GSAF 1954.09.04](#)

DATE: Saturday September 4, 1954

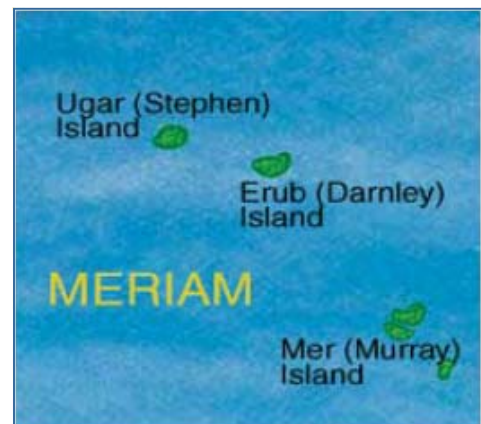
LOCATION: The accident took place near Darnley Island (Erub Island) in the Meriam Island group of the Torres Strait, Queensland, Australia.

NAME: Kapua Gutchen

DESCRIPTION: He was a native diver, a 35-year-old male from Darnley Island.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: First Quarter, September 5, 1954



NARRATIVE: He was spearing crayfish with a companion when he was bitten by a shark.

INJURY: Fatal

TREATMENT: The 85-foot trochus vessel *Toorah* had put into Darnley Island for water when a nursing sister told them about the accident. The *Toorah* was on a mercy mission to bring the patient to Thursday Island for medical care when she ran into heavy seas, wrecked on a reef, 65 miles from Thursday Island, and was a total loss. The patient's wounds reopened and he died of exsanguination.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified. The shark was said to be nine feet in length.

SOURCES: Courier Mail, Monday September 6, 1954, page 1; The Mercury (Hobart, Tasmania), Tuesday September 14, 1954, page 20; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), page 245

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GROUNDED HOBART MERCY VESSEL NOW TOTAL LOSS

A **D**VICE was received from Queensland yesterday that the well-known Hobart fishing vessel **Toorah**, which went aground in Torres Strait a week ago, is now a total loss.

The **Toorah**, which was one of the best equipped fishing vessels to trade in South-Western Tasmania, was owned by Roche Bros., of Hobart.

She ran aground on Long Island reef, more than 3,000 miles from Hobart, and about 85 miles from Thursday Island, while on a mercy mission.

The vessel put into Darnley Island for water and a nursing sister asked the crew to take a native spear fisherman to the Thursday Island hospital. He had been badly mauled by a shark.

Shipping does not normally operate in these waters at night, but in the hope of reaching medical assistance an attempt was made to get to Thursday Island that night.

However the native died shortly after the **Toorah** went aground at 1 a.m. on Sunday week.

Hopes of recovering the vessel were maintained until a rescue boat returned two days ago and reported her a total loss.

Mr. M. Roche said last night that the **Toorah** had undergone a complete structural overhaul and conversion from steam to diesel power in 1947.

She was an outstanding boat in the history of cray fishing in the waters of South-West Tasmania, having pioneered a technique of long lining pots and tank holding of fish, which differed from the earlier methods used by well boats.

Mr. Roche said that the regulations restricting the use of

more than 30 crayfish pots had caused the abandonment of the system and this, together with similar restrictions in the trawling and scalloping industry, induced the owners to try new fields of operation.

This was the reason the vessel was sent to the Barrier Reef on treac fishing operations.

The **Toorah** figured in many rescue and lighthouse trips.

Only a few months ago she took the first bulldozer, and a number of prefabricated houses to Port Davey

RECORD YEAR BY G. J. COLES

RECORD sales, profit, and expansion, had made the financial year ended June 30, 1954, the greatest in the company's history, the directors of G. J. Coles and Co. Ltd., state in their annual report.

The report will be presented at the annual general meeting of the company in Melbourne on September 28.

Sales reached £28,502,425.

and the dividend on 3 p.c. cumulative preference stock which took £12,000

Also in the amount is a payment of £369,841 for a final

Spear fisherman killed by shark

THURSDAY ISLAND—Kapua Gutchen, 35, of Darnley Island, about 100 miles north-east, was so badly mauled while spear fishing on Saturday that he died at 2 am yesterday.



*The Courier-Mail (Brisbane),
Monday September 6, 1954, page 1*

Gutchen and a companion were spear-fishing on a reef when a 9ft shark attacked.

Darnley Island radio was out of action, but the 80ft vessel Toorah, which was trochus fishing nearby, volunteered to bring Gutchen to Thursday Island.

Vessel stranded

A call was made at Yorke Island, and a radio message sent for assistance before continuing the voyage.

At Long Island, 50 miles from Yorke Island, however, the Toorah struck a reef.

Gutchen's relatives, who were on board, and most of the crew of 10, were sent ashore on the narrow mangrove beach which constitutes Long Island. They have food and water for two days, and food is being sent from Thursday Island.

The lugger Pelican brought Gutchen's body on to Thursday Island.