



**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1964.05.08](#)

**DATE:** May 8, 1964

**LOCATION:** The incident took place off Naviti, Viti Levu, Fiji.  
*17°08'S, 177°15'E (approximate location)*

**NAME:** Sailasa Ratubalavu

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver was a 35-year-old male from Kese Village. He was wearing khaki shorts.

### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** It was a bright sunny day and the air temperature was 84°F.

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, May 5, 1964

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was clear and the water temperature was about 80°F.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** Five miles

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Six feet

**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** A party of eight men were spearfishing on a reef, but and were a long way from their boat. Sailasa had just speared a saqa (jack crevalle) which was still thrashing on the end of his spear when the shark struck, tearing off his buttocks. Sailasa surfaced and screamed that he was under attack and had suffered a mortal wound. The shark struck a second time, tearing away his lower abdomen and genitalia.

All the other men, with one exception, made for their boat. Josateki Tunisau swam to Sailasa and hoisted him onto his back and started swimming towards their boat. The other men reached the boat first and started sculling towards the two men.

Although the actual distance traveled could not be ascertained, Josateki was swimming and supporting Sailasa for about 45 minutes.

Sailasa was conscious when he was taken onboard the boat. He asked the other to take care of his wife and children, and then he died.

**INJURY:** Fatal. The diver was severely bitten on his buttocks, abdomen and genitalia.

There was no doctor at the village but a former nurse measured the wounds and wrote a description of the injuries before Sailasa was buried.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** According to Josateki Tunisau the incident involved a tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*.

**SOURCES:** Captain S.S. Brown; San Francisco News Call Bulletin, February 3, 1965; H. David Baldrige, page 196, Clark, page 87

## **G.M. FOR RESCUE IN SHARK WATERS**

A Fiji villager who swam in shark-infested water for 45 minutes trying to save a friend who had been bitten has been awarded the George Medal. The British Empire Medal for gallantry goes to an Essex refinery plant operator who carried out rescue work after an explosion.

The Fijian, Josateki Tunisau, of Muaira Naviti, Yasaway Group Islands, was in a party of villagers who were spear fishing on a reef five miles off shore. One man was surfacing with a fish impaled on his spear when he was severely mauled by a shark. Josateki Tunisau took him on his back and swam back to the boat, a swim of some 45 minutes in bloodstained waters with every chance that the shark, or others, would return to the attack. The victim died.

The winner of the B.E.M. is Mr. Thomas Leonard Goodey, of Shell Haven Refinery, Stanford-le-Hope, Essex. An explosion in the ammonia plant resulted in injury to five men, three of whom died. Mr. Goodey, who was working on a platform 15ft. above ground level, jumped off, went into the pumphouse and carried out two men. To do so he braved steam, gas, and dust. The explosion had fractured a line carrying hot water at 400 lb. a sq. in. (440°F).

## **Britain Honors Brave Fijian**

SUVA—A former member of the Fiji military forces has been awarded the George Medal, Britain's highest civilian award for bravery, for rescuing a companion attacked by a shark. He is Josateki Tunisau, 39, of Nativi Island. He drove off a tiger shark that attacked a fishing companion, Sailasa Ratubalavu, 35, and swam for nearly 45 minutes with Ratubalavu on his back.

*The Times (London), Wednesday, February 3, 1965, page 13  
and Thursday, June 9, 1966; page 11?*