

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing / free diving

CASE: **GSAF 1967.08.19**

DATE: Saturday August 19, 1967

LOCATION: The attack took place at Jurien Bay 275 kilometres north of Perth in Western Australia.
30°30'S, 115°03'E

NAME: Robert Bartle

DESCRIPTION: He was a 24-year-old male, clad in a black neoprene hooded knee-length suit, black face mask. He was short but strongly built. His dive buddy, 26-year-old Lee Warner wore a black neoprene hooded full-length suit. Both men carried single-rubber spearguns and towed floats with blue and white divers' flags.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a light hazy day.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, August 20, 1967

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was cool and there was a smooth winter swell. Underwater visibility was poor and the sea had a green-yellow tinge.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took place during a practice for a spearfishing competition and other spearfishermen were in the vicinity.

DEPTH OF WATER: 25 feet

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 700 metres

TIME: 11h00



Robert Bartle

NARRATIVE: The sea floor was barren for some distance from shore, and the divers searched for the limestone ledges and caves where large jewfish could be found. They located such a structure and while Lee Warner remained on the surface, Bob Bartle dived down to investigate. Finding no fish, he was ascending when the shark hurtled under Warner's fins and struck Bartle with tremendous force. The shark seized him between hip and shoulder and shook him violently. Warner dived to the shark and Bartle, and fired a spear into the top of the shark's head. "It sort of shook its head and then rose up towards me," said Warner.

As the shark rose to within a metre of Warner, it bit Bartle's body in half. "[The shark] kept circling around me with the body of Bob still in its jaws. I could see the terrible wounds which had been inflicted. I felt helpless. I could see Bob was dead . . . It kept circling about three metres from me. . . Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bob's gun which was still loaded and floating just below the surface. I grabbed it thinking, here was another chance! Swinging it around I tried to belt the spear into the shark's eye." Warner fired the gun, but the spear passed above the shark's head. As the shark continued to circle it became entangled in the float and spear lines, and a small bronze whaler shark began darting around. Warner, defenseless with no spearguns, began swimming backwards and finally



Lee Warner

reached shore.

Unable to find the keys to Bob's car, Warner found keys in a car belonging to one of the spearfishermen who was still in the water. He raced to the small fishing settlement at Sandy Cape, 10 kilometres away, and found Harry Holmes, skipper of the 13.5-metre *Gay Jan*. The small boat sped to the headland and plucked divers from the water. They also found the shark, still tangled in the floats, and Bartle's torso. As they tried to pull the shark toward the boat, the lines snapped and the shark swam away.

INJURY: Fatal

SPECIES: White shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*

SOURCES: The Canberra Times, August 21, 1967, page 1; The Gleaner (Kingston, Jamaica), Sunday September 17, 1967; Hugh Edwards, pages 35-42; et al.

