

Fluted Cape



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**ACTIVITY:** Hookah diving for abalone  
**CASE:** [GSAF 1975.07.30.a](#)  
**DATE:** Wednesday July 30, 1975  
**LOCATION:** The attack took place at Fluted Cape, South Bruny Island, Tasmania, Australia.

**NAME:** Bobby Ray Slack  
**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 37-year-old male, an American immigrant to Australia and one of the most successful abalone divers in Tasmania. He was wearing a wetsuit and home-made harness with 30 pounds (14 kg) of lead that rested on the diver's back as he worked.



Photo : The Mercury

The abalone boat *Shellfish*, designed by her skipper

**SUPPORT BOAT:** A 35-foot aluminum fishing boat named *Shellfish*.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** It was a chilly, grey day with blustery northerly winds, with periodic lashing rain.

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, July 31, 1975

**SEA CONDITIONS:** Offshore the sea was choppy but the boat was anchored in calm, dark water in the lee of the cliffs. The incident took place shortly before mean high tide.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The attack took place in an area where rocky reef gives way to widely-exposed expanses of sand that mark the border of the true seafloor, an area in which marine predators frequent.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 40 feet

**TIME:** Shortly after 13h00

**NARRATIVE:** "I worked in a small dinghy and used to tie the air hose to the dinghy and pull the hose up to keep the pressure off the diver," said his deckhand Tony Hitchens. "That day, Bob hadn't been in the water all that long. The water was calm and still, there was no tide, and the hose was just floating on the surface. All of a sudden the hose went really tight. I grabbed the hose and spun round to go back to him, about 50 yards probably, and when I turned around, a big shark was thrashing on the surface. From his dorsal fin back to the tail was all out of water, and it was at least 15 or 16 feet long [4.8 metres]. When I raced up to where it had happened there was a big pool of blood in the water with a green garden glove floating in it — and nothing else. Bob used to wear two sets of gloves: heavy red industrial gloves and a set of green garden gloves underneath those. It was all over in just a matter of seconds. I didn't pull the hose up straight away. After I'd seen what happened, all the blood and the glove, I thought, 'Jesus, what do I do here?' I raced back to the *Shellfish* and called Southport on the radio. I said, 'Bob's been taken by a shark.' They said, 'have you pulled his hose up?' and I said no because I was expecting only half of him to be in the harness. They said, 'you'll have to go and pull it up,' so I went back and pulled it up. All there was ... was his harness. The weight belt was still done up, but the regulator was gone ... everything was gone. There were serrated teeth marks in the rubber on the right hand side [of the harness] so you knew it was a white pointer. The harness was barely touched."

The seafood company Hitchens radioed contacted the police and by mid-afternoon the police launch *Vigilant* arrived on the scene and was joined by the *Seahund*, a fishing boat operating in the area. Both vessels searched for the missing diver without success. Next morning at first light three police divers continued the search and retrieved the diver's net catch bag. The search was called off when the weather deteriorated. No trace was ever found of the missing diver.

"A large shark attacked Slack with such violence that he was yanked out of his diving harness," said Hitchens. Talking about the shark thrashing on the surface, Hitchens said that without the weights, the wetsuit would have shot the diver to the surface.

**INJURY:** Fatal.

## Diver Devoured By Shark In Australia

**HOBART, Australia (AP) --** A large shark attacked an American immigrant to Australia with such violence that he was yanked out of his abalone diving harness and devoured, the diver's assistant said Thursday.

The only trace of Bobby Ray Slack, 37, was one green glove and a hand net, officials said. He moved from California about 10 years ago and is survived by his wife, Donna, and children, Robbie, 7, and Michelle, 2.

Slack was a "great bloke" and didn't worry about sharks, said Tony Hitchens, 22, the mate on Slack's abalone boat. The attack occurred Wednesday near South Bruny Island and news of it became widespread when Hitchens arrived here.

He said the attack was all over in "five seconds" and at first when he saw the fin and tail he thought it was a seal. Then he spotted blood, the glove and pulled up the empty diving harness with a broken air line.

**SPECIES:** The attack involved a white shark. Three months later a 5.4 metre white shark was accidentally caught in a commercial shark net at The Friars, 20 kilometers south of the attack site. There was no evidence that it was the shark involved in this attack, but its presence was indicative of the size of shark that swam in the area.

**SOURCES:** The Age, Friday August 1, 1975, page 2  
The Times (San Mateo, CA), Friday, August 1, 1975  
The Yuma Daily Sun (Yuma, Arizona), Friday August 1, 1975  
Daytona Beach Morning Journal, August 1, 1975  
Chris Black (2010) White Pointer South, pages 153-157

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Chris Black, Global Shark Accident File



*Deckhand Tony Hitchens aboard Shellfish with the net catch-bag found by police divers on the bottom near where Bobby Slack was taken. This bag along with Slack's harness and a single glove were the only items recovered at the attack location.*

*Picture : The Mercury*



*Sergeant P. Prestedge of the police forensic unit indicates where the rubber backing of Slack's weight harness was slashed by the shark's teeth. One of the lead weights also exhibited gouge marks. Incredibly, the buckle which secured the harness around the diver's body, was still closed when it was hauled to the surface by the diver's deckhand.*

*Picture : The Mercury*

## 3 Deaths Attributed To Sharks

**By The Associated Press**

Oliver Conger and his wife Grace were clinging to debris off the Oregon Coast. Bobby Ray Slack was diving Down Under. All three were shark victims.

Slack, 37, an American immigrant to Australia, was diving for abalone off South Bruny Island near Hobart, Tasmania, an Australian island-state when he was killed.

Conger, 64, and his wife, 62, of Morro Bay, Calif., had been fishing. Somehow their boat came apart. The Coast Guard says it doesn't know how it happened.

But they've found no indication of a fire or explosion.

Dr. William Brady, the Oregon Medical examiner, said Conger lost most of his right arm to sharks. Mrs. Conger's arms and legs were badly bitten. An autopsy showed that Conger died of drowning, his wife of the shark bites.

Debris from the boat was recovered Wednesday by the Coast Guard from the same area as the bodies.

"This is the first case like this I've seen in 10 years as medical examiner," Brady added.

A large shark attacked Slack with such violence that he was yanked out of his diving harness and devoured, his mate said Thursday. Slack was a "great bloke" and didn't worry about sharks, said Tony Hitchens, 22.

Hitchens said the attack Wednesday was all over in "five seconds." The only trace of Slack was one green glove and hand net, officials said.

Slack had moved to Australia from California about 10 years ago and is survived by his widow, Donna, and children, Robbie, 7, and Michelle, 2.

## Killer shark got him 'in five seconds'

HOBART. — Top abalone diver Bobby Ray Slack was definitely taken by a shark, his deckhand and mate said yesterday.

"There's no doubt," said Tony Hitchens, back from a fruitless morning's search for his friend.

Bobby Slack, 37, married, with two children, of Sandy Bay, disappeared on Wednesday afternoon, after diving from his 35 ft. aluminium fishing boat off South Bruny Island.

Mr. Hitchens, 22, of Sandy Bay, who was working with Slack when he disappeared, said yesterday: "I thought at first it was a seal. Then I saw the fin and the tail of a shark. Up came a billow of blood . . . then one of the green gardening gloves Bobby was wearing floated to the surface. It was all over in five seconds."

Hitchens said he was feeding out Slack's air hose from a dinghy. Slack was working in 40 ft. of water.

"I saw thrashing on top of the water about 10 yards away," Hitchens said.

He hauled up an empty diving harness and broken air line.

The 34 lb. of weights needed to counteract the buoyancy of Slack's wet-suit were still in place, and the harness buckles were unbroken.

"He was yanked out of the harness. He must have been hit with a terrific force to jerk him straight out. It is unbelievable," Hitchens said.

Police divers yesterday recovered Slack's hand net from the sea bottom.

A light plane and a police launch searched the area yesterday.

Mr. Slack and his wife Donna migrated from California 10 years ago.

He was a top diver there and took up abalone fishing after service as a U.S. Air Force pilot.



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