



**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1983.08.20.a](#) / SA-316

**DATE:** Saturday August 20, 1983

**LOCATION:** The incident took place at Seal Island in False Bay. Seal Island is 116 kilometres from Table Bay in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.

*34°08,2'S, 18°35'E*

**NAME:** Attie Louw

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver, a 29-year-old male, is 1,69 metres tall and weighs 81 kilograms. He was clad in a black full wetsuit and carried a black speargun. He had no injuries before entering the sea. Louw is extremely fit; he was a former provincial butterfly swimmer and a Western Province Spearfisherman.

**BOAT:** The divers were using a five-metre white-hulled ski-boat.



John Stockwell

## **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was overcast and there was a light north-easterly breeze which created a slight chop on the water's surface.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** Water temperature was 12°C, there was no current and visibility was between four and six metres. High tide was at 07h58, and it was a spring tide.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Seal Island abounds with seals which are favored prey items of the great white shark. The area is regarded as having one of the highest populations of these sharks along the entire South African coast. Unconfirmed reports state that a fisherman had hooked and lost a large shark in the area some days before the attack. The shark escaped by breaking a six-millimetre wire cable trace. No fish had been shot by Louw or his companions before the attack. Seals were plentiful and many had dived into the water as the divers approached.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** Louw was attacked a hundred metres from the island.

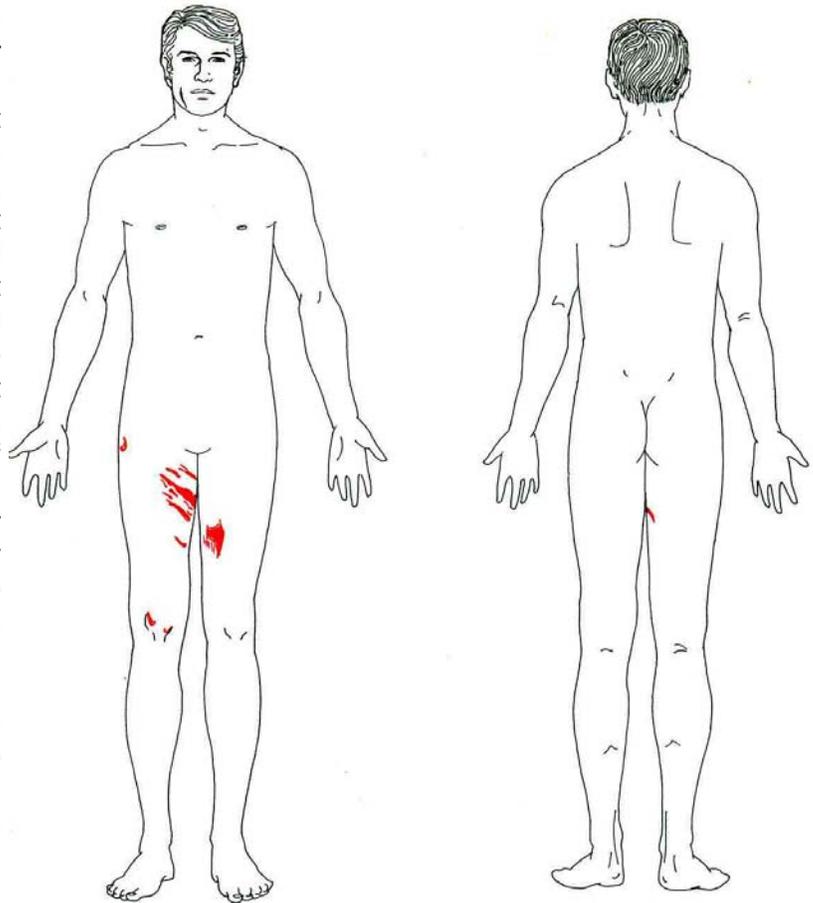
**DISTANCE FROM BOAT:** Six metres

**DEPTH:** Eight metres

**TIME:** 10h00

**NARRATIVE:** Attie Louw, Peter Strydom, Don Goodinson and Keith Ascot-Evans were diving. Louw and Strydom had been in the water for four minutes and did not see the shark before the incident. Louw was unloading his speargun at the surface with his legs hanging vertically in the water. He believes that the shark approached from his left, coming from below and to the front. The shark hit him with considerable force; the animal was seen to break the surface by its entire length and appeared agitated. At no stage was Louw held by the shark's jaws. Immediately after the incident, Louw sank back into the water and rotated 360° looking for the shark. The shark swam slowly past Louw but moved out of range before he had the opportunity to shoot it. Then, according to press reports, the shark circled Strydom three times and swam away.

**INJURY:** Teeth of the shark's lower jaw inflicted injuries to the diver's inner thighs, and the upper jaw teeth caused small abrasions on the lateral aspect of his right thigh. There were four incisions on the medial aspect of his right thigh; the lowest two and the uppermost one were relatively superficial and exposed only adipose tissue, but the other incision lacerated muscles of the thigh. There were also some incisions near the right patella and on the lateral thigh, upper third. A small area of adipose tissue was debrided on the left inner thigh and the doctor who treated Louw thought this may have been resulted from the impact with the shark, rather than the teeth of the shark.



**EQUIPMENT DAMAGE:** The wetsuit was damaged during the incident, however, it had been repaired soon afterwards and thus revealed little on examination.

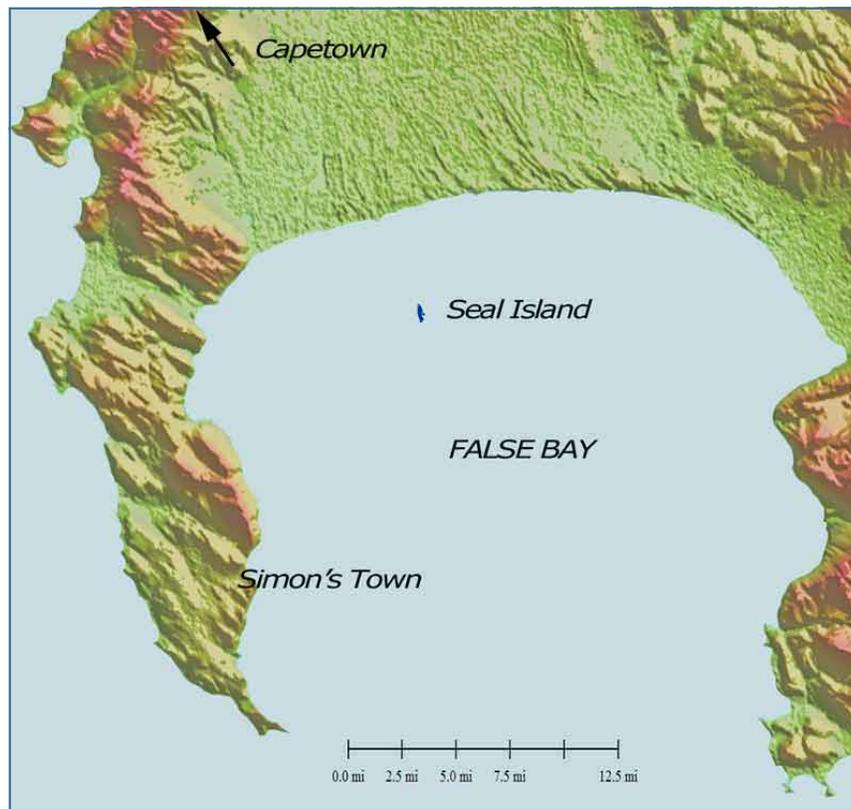
**FIRST AID:** Louw was helped back on the boat where, lying on his back, his legs were wrapped with all spare clothing. The ride to Simon's Town took 30 minutes and the ambulance took another 20 minutes to transport Louw to False Bay Hospital. Blood loss was minimal and no treatment was given in the ambulance.

**TREATMENT:** The wetsuit was removed at False Bay Hospital and an IV administered. At 14h00, four hours after the incident, Louw underwent surgery. He remained in the hospital for six days and made a complete recovery.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** According to Louw, this incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, approximately five metres total length. The pattern of parallel incisions was caused by V-shaped serrated teeth and the large distance between the incisions (four and seven centimetres) indicate that a shark of at least four metres standard length was involved in this incident.

**COMMENT:** It should be noted that the shark made no attempt to bite Louw and yet it hit him with considerable force.

**CASE INVESTIGATORS:** Marie Levine; Jeremy Cliff, Natal Sharks Board



# Shark attack victim won't stop diving

CAPE TOWN — The Springbok diver who was attacked by a five-metre Great White shark off Seal Island in False Bay on Saturday has no intention of giving up diving and would probably dive off Seal Island again.

Speaking from his bed in False Bay Hospital, Mr Attie Louw said he

bore no grudge against sharks. "They are an occupational hazard for divers," he said.

"You can't wrap people up in cotton wool. It's totally unnecessary to kill sharks to protect humans," Mr Louw said.

His diving companion, Mr Peter Strydom, said he had been "paralysed with fear" in the water when he saw the shark.

"But Attie was very calm. He did not panic for a moment. When the attack was over, he swam to the ski-boat and remained calm on the half-hour trip back to Simons-town."

## Wounds

Although he had wounds on both thighs, he had not been held in the shark's jaws.

"The visibility was about six metres. I did not see the shark before it hit me and I thought at first it was a bull seal," Mr Louw said.

"It turned and came back towards me and I turned to face it. I knew it was a Great White as soon as I saw it.

"I pointed my spear-gun at it, looking for its eye, but it did not attack."

He said he hoped to leave hospital within a week. — Sapa.

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