

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** GSAF 1986.07.00.a / SA-348

**DATE:** July 1986

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Indian Ocean in front of the Sea Belle Hotel, off Naidoo's Launch, at La Mercy, 28 kilometres north-east of Durban on the KwaZulu-Natal coast of South Africa. 29°35'S, 31°09'E



**NAME:** Ludwig Gericke

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver, a 26-year-old male, is 1,78 metres tall and weighs 78 kilograms. He was clad in a blue five-millimetre double-nylon wetsuit with attached hood, a yellow-rimmed black mask, black cotton and rubber gloves, black weight-belt, and black swim fins. He carried a speargun but wore no jewelry and had no injuries before the incident.

### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was overcast and the temperature was estimated to be 22°C.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was blue-green with 7,6-metre visibility. It was calm with 1,5-metre swells and colder than normal for the time of year. A slight south-to-north current was flowing and no channel was observed by the diver.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Two fishermen were on the beach but they had caught no fish and the diver noticed an absence of fish on the reef near the shark nets.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** The incident took place 10 metres seaward of the shark nets, about 350 metres from the beach.

**DEPTH:** 10 metres

**TIME:** 17h15

**NARRATIVE:** Ludwig Gericke was spearfishing alone. As he swam through the backline of breakers he saw a 1,2-metre dusky shark, which followed him to the shark nets. The diver swam beyond the nets, but found no fish and returned to the reef. He had been in the water for 30 minutes when he shot an 11-kilogram couta, *Scomberomorus commerson*. He was on the surface, facing shoreward, reeling in the fish when he noticed a dusky shark swimming close by. Within minutes the shark was joined by five smaller sharks. One shark hit him on his back twice and the other sharks kept darting toward him from the side and front. He struck back at the sharks, hitting them with the handle of his speargun, forcing them to keep their distance. Gericke was rammed approximately five times by the sharks and had begun using his hands, in addition to the handle of his gun, to protect himself. Only one shark caused any injury; a small shark came at his face and, as he attempted to ward off the shark with his hand, he was bitten:

*"I did not know how badly I was bitten but there was a lot of blood in the water. In my panic I swam, thinking I was heading for shore, with the sharks following me. When I looked up I realized that I was headed out to sea. I turned and swam back towards shore, passing the sharks which had suddenly become quite motionless. They did not try to attack. I had the gun and the fish in my hand but they did not appear to be at all interested. Just before I reached backline the sharks left me."*

**INJURY:** Gericke sustained a minor injury; he was bitten on his left hand at the base of his

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index finger. The injury consisted of four lacerations spaced 1,5 millimetres apart, the longest of which was eight millimetres in length.

**FIRST AID/TREATMENT:** First aid was administered by the two fishermen on the beach who wound a cloth around Gericke's hand. Two hours after the incident, Gericke drove to the office of Dr Ridley Spies for further treatment.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The diver identified the shark as a juvenile dusky shark, *Carcharhinus obscurus*.

**COMMENT:** The shark nets do not form an impenetrable barrier; about half the sharks caught in the nets are headed seawards. Nor is it unusual for a shark to attempt to appropriate a spearfisherman's catch.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Levine

