

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing
CASE: GSAF 1987.10.11 / SA-359

DATE: Sunday October 11, 1987

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean off Seal Island, False Bay, Western Cape Province, South Africa. 34°08,2'S, 18°35'E

NAME: Dawid Smit

DESCRIPTION: The diver, a 21-year-old male, is 1,8 metres tall and weighs 75 kilograms. He was clad in a

black neoprene three-millimetre full wetsuit, hood and vest, black and red face mask, white snorkel, black swim fins, and carried an aluminum slide rail speargun. He wore no gloves and had no injuries before the incident.

BOAT: The ski-boat, *Machusla*, is a red-hulled 4,6-metre craft. Speared fish were on board.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The temperature was 18°C. There was 6/8 cloud cover and a gentle seven-knot south-westerly breeze.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, October 7, 1987. Third Quarter, October 14, 1987.

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea surface temperature was 15°C, estimated. The sea was blue, underwater visibility was seven metres, and there was a slight north-to-south current. A 1,5-metre swell was recorded at Cape Point but the water was flat in the bay. Mean low tide was at 11h08.

ENVIRONMENT: Seal Island is a rookery of the Cape fur seal, *Arctocephalus pusillus*, but there were fewer seals on the day of the incident than were normally seen at this time of year. A few seals were swimming on the reef east of the island and only one was observed on the northern side.

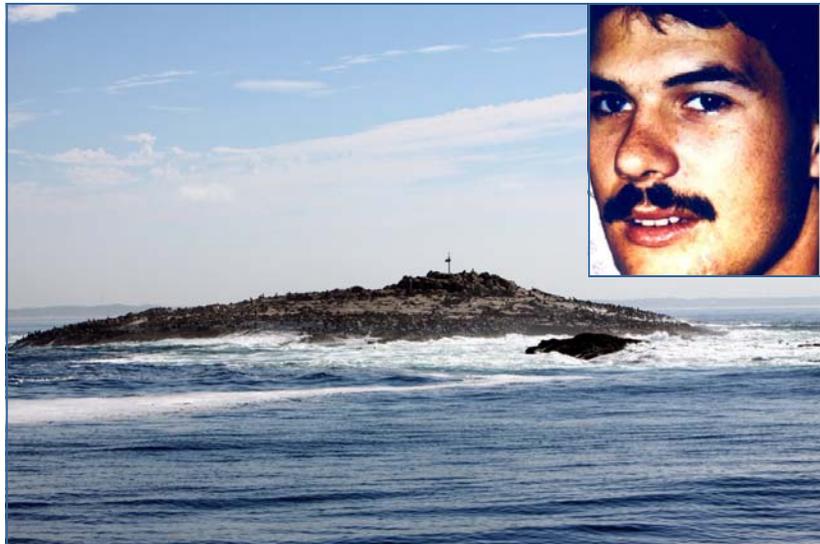
Before the incident, Dawid and his brother had been diving in 18 metres of water on the northern side of the island, but the water visibility was less than a metre and three white sharks were seen. George J. Smit, the divers' father and a Western Province spearfisherman since 1963, saw two of the sharks on the surface (both about 3,5 metres in length) and considered that with the limited visibility it was prudent to move out of the immediate area.

The divers were on the southern side of Seal Island when the shark bit Dawid. As George Smit was hauling anchor (after his son was bitten), he saw a line-fishing boat about three kilometres away and directly up-current of the incident site, but it is not known if the anglers had chummed the area.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: The incident took place about 500 metres from Seal Island.

DISTANCE FROM BOAT: 10 metres

DEPTH: Six metres



TIME: 12h15

NARRATIVE: Dawid Smit and his brother, Paul, had been in the water for about 45 minutes. Seven fish had been shot and Paul returned to the boat with his catch. "I shot a John Brown, *Cymnocrotaphus curvides*, just as Paul reached and boarded the boat 40 metres away," said Dawid. "As I came up with the fish I lost the mouthpiece of my snorkel so I started swimming back to the boat with the fish and my gun in my right hand."

No one saw the shark before it bit Dawid; it approached from beneath and behind the diver and grasped his left leg when he was ten metres from the boat. "As I turned I saw blood and realized that a shark had me. I hit the shark with the speargun and my left hand, then it let go," said Dawid.

Meanwhile George Smit started the engine and released the anchor, but he was unable to put the motors in reverse because he had a float line in the water, however, Dawid was a short distance away and he swam to the side of the boat.

INJURY: Dawid sustained lacerations to his left thigh and lower leg. There were numerous 45-millimetre lacerations on his thigh and the tibial artery was severed in his calf. The ring and little fingers of his left hand were severely lacerated as he tried to push the shark away.

FIRST AID: Paul Smit stopped the bleeding and closed his brother's wound with a T-shirt, then he used his hand to hold the edges of the wound together.

At 12h45 George Smit radioed Gordon's Bay National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) and asked to be met en route. At 13h25 they were intercepted by NSRI Gordon's Bay (R9) rescue craft, the *Pearl van Riet*, in front of the Strand. When Pvt L. Powell and J. Boyce of the NSRI boarded the *Machusla*, the diver was fully conscious. They recorded his vital signs, applied additional dressings to his injuries, strapped him to a trauma board and transferred him to the NSRI rescue craft.

The *Pearl van Riet* was subsequently intercepted by an NSRI craft from Simon's Town Base (R10), the *Caltex Star*, with paramedic Luke Collins and Dr Pieter Landsberg on board. When they boarded the *Pearl van Riet*, Collins and Landsberg found the diver conscious but in severe shock with a pulse of 120. The pressure bandage applied by his brother was left intact.

The rescue craft arrived at the harbour at 14h15 but Dawid remained on board for 90 minutes; he continued to receive intravenous supportive therapy until his condition stabilized. Afterwards he was taken by ambulance to Hottentots Holland Hospital, and then transferred by ambulance to Tygerberg Hospital.

TREATMENT: The diver was treated by Dr Absalom at Tygerberg Hospital.

SPECIES INVOLVED: According to Dawid Smit, the incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*.

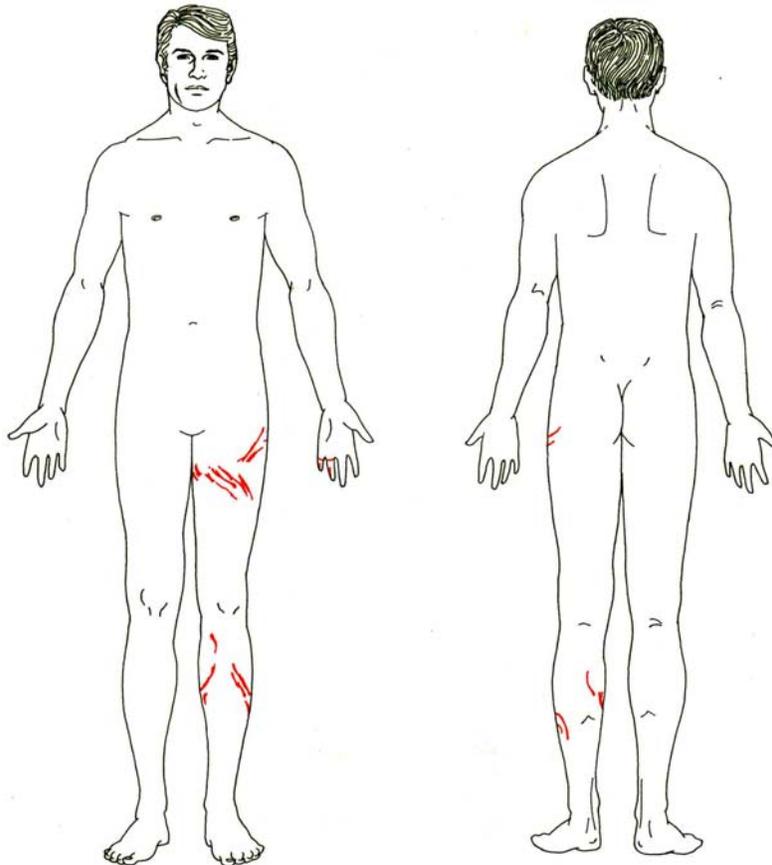
COMMENT: The absence of seals in the water at the rookery suggests that the shark or

sharks were hunting the seals, and diver, swimming awkwardly on the surface and carrying a bleeding fish, may have appeared as easy prey. Alternatively, the shark could have been after the diver's fish and sought to make him discard it, or the shark could have viewed the diver as a competitor for a food source and was attempting to chase him from the area.



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CASE INVESTIGATORS: Dr. P. Landsberg and Marie Levine



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Daily News
Monday 12 Oct 1987 • 3

Cape dad tells of shark horror

Daily News Correspondent

CAPE TOWN: A horror attack on his 21-year-old son by a huge 3,5 metre shark while he was skin-diving in False Bay has been described by his Belville father.

Mr Dawid Smit (21) a dentistry student at Stellenbosch University, was bitten on his left leg as he surfaced with a speared fish north of Seal Island shortly after midday yesterday.

His 20-year-old brother Paul was with him in the water.

Their father, Mr George "Jackie" Smit, saw the attack from his skiboat, The Machusla.

Mr Smit, an electronics technician, said the "sea around Dawid was

transformed into a flurry of foaming bubbles and blood" as the shark sank its teeth into his son's thigh and calf and shook him before letting him go.

Mr Smit said neither of his sons, who were surfacing, saw the shark approach.

"Paul just saw the shark's fin disappearing afterwards and shouted to me that a shark had attacked Dawid.

"His leg was bleeding profusely and he was in a severe state of shock when he reached the skiboat. When we helped him aboard he was still holding his speargun and the fish he had shot.

Father sees skindiving son savaged by shark



Dawid Smit on his way to hospital.

Mercury Correspondent

CAPE TOWN—An 'enormous' shark savaged 21-year-old spearfisherman, Mr Dawid Smit, near Seal Island in False Bay yesterday, dragging him in its jaws through the blood-churned water while his father watched helplessly from a nearby ski-boat.

But Mr Smit, a third-year dental student at the University of Stellenbosch Medical School, escaped when the shark — which from the bite marks could have been large enough to bite him in half — inexplicably released him.

With the help of his younger brother Paul, 20, who was diving just a few metres away, Mr Smit managed to reach his father's ski-boat and clamber aboard before the shark returned for a second attack.

The attack, which left Mr Smit bleeding heavily from

deep wounds in his left leg and thigh, was the second near-fatal incident involving sharks along the coast near Cape Town in less than a month.

Immediately after yesterday's gruesome attack, two NSRI launches were rushed to the scene, one with a doctor on board.

The injured man was treated for shock and loss of blood on board an NSRI vessel while it raced to Gordon's Bay harbour.

Mr Smit received further treatment at the quayside in Gordon's Bay, mostly for serious loss of blood, before being taken to Hottentot's Holland Hospital by ambulance once his condition had been stabilised.

He was later transferred to Tygerberg Hospital where he underwent surgery late yesterday.

The doctor on board the NSRI launch who first treated Mr Smit said he had lost 'a great deal of blood' and had had to have four litres of intravenous fluid before being moved from the quayside.

According to Mr Smit's brother and father, who were with the injured man at the time of the attack, the shark was probably a blue-pointer, among the most feared of man-eating sharks.

Blue-pointers have been

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Father sees son attacked

★ FROM PAGE 1

known to grow up to 13 m in length and the larger specimens can bite a man in half. Mr Smit's brother Paul said it was a 'massive' shark judging from the size of its tail fin which cleared the water by almost a metre when the shark struck its victim and 'swirled him through the water'.

Mr Smit's father, Mr George Smit, of Bellville, said he could not identify the shark with any certainty but, 'judging from the teeth marks on his leg, which were about 35 cm to 45 cm across, it was an enormous blue-pointer — perhaps three to four metres long'.

'We had been spearfishing near Seal Island at about midday when we noticed a blue-pointer circling the boys. I was not in the water, but both Dawid and Paul were,' he said.

'This shark was very persistent — when a blue-pointer gets that close, it's definitely interested in making a meal of you — so we moved elsewhere'.

'A short while later, maybe half an hour, Dawid speared a fish and was making his way back to my 5 m ski-boat, swimming on the surface and dragging the speared fish'.

'The shark, which came out of nowhere, must have detected the blood in the water, seen this splashing object on the surface and gone straight in for the kill'.

Yesterday's attack came just four weeks after Fish Hoek Mr Peter McCallum narrowly escaped being bitten in two when savaged by a large shark, while surfing near Stillbaai.

DURBAN, MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1987

Natal Mercury



Dawid Smit onboard the *Pearl van Riet*

Photos by Dr. Landsberg



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David Smit onboard the *Pearl van Riet*

Photo by Dr. Landsberg



David Smit onboard the *Pearl van Riet*

Dr. Landsberg in yellow jacket



Dawid Smit onboard the *Pearl van Riet*

Photos by Dr. Landsberg





Tooth impressions of shark are evident in Dawid Smit's wetsuit