



ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1994.03.23.a

DATE: Wednesday March 23, 1994

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean 300 miles east of Easter Island and 30 nautical miles from Sala-y-Gómez Island. Sala-y-Gómez, a small uninhabited island, is the easternmost point in Polynesia. The tiny island belongs to Chile and is part of its Easter Island Province. It lies 3,220 km west of the Chilean mainland.



The 303-ft NOAA research vessel *Discoverer*

NAME: Phil Buffington

SHIP: The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 303-foot white-hulled NOAA research ship *Discoverer*.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was cloudless and the air temperature was between 85°F and 90°F.

MOON PHASE: First Quarter, March 20, 1994

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was warm, about 80°F. The sea was vivid blue and clear, underwater visibility was 300 feet, and there was a gentle swell.

ENVIRONMENT: There were nine other swimmers in the water. One of the women had her menstrual period and several people were using floatation devices.

DISTANCE FROM BOAT: 10 feet

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Unknown

TIME: 11h58

NARRATIVE: Nine of the crew were taking a break from their shipboard duties on that hot day, an open ocean swim in a balmy sea. Most had been in the water for 90 minutes when the shark approached the swimmers.

The first strike was directed at Phil Buffington. He was in the water next to his girlfriend who was menstruating. The shark bit Buffington's thigh but released him when he struck its

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head.

Next, the shark turned its attention on 19-year-old Heather Boswell who was about 25 feet away and slightly isolated from the group. The shark came from behind and made two strikes. On the first strike, the shark grasped her right ankle and leg, pulling her beneath the water and shaking her violently before releasing her. As Boswell's shipmates approached her in a skiff, the shark made a second strike, grabbing her left leg. One of the shipmates tried to drive away the shark by beating it with a stick while two shipmates grabbed her arms. Boswell felt her left leg pop. "I thought it was my hip dislocating," she said. Only when she was pulled into the skiff did she realize that her leg had been severed by the shark.

Then the shark headed for another person dangling in the water from a ladder, but disappeared after shots were fired at it by crew onboard the research ship.

INJURY: Buffington sustained numerous puncture wounds to his lower extremities. Boswell sustained a traumatic amputation of the left leg at the level of the proximal thigh.

TREATMENT: Buffington's wound required 50 stitches to repair.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, about 15 feet [3.6 metres] total length.

CASE INVESTIGATORS: Marie Levine and Dr. Erich Ritter, Global Shark Accident File.