

ACTIVITY: Jumping

CASE: GSAF 2000.07.07

DATE: Friday July 7, 2000

LOCATION: The attack took place in the Gulf of Mexico at Mustang Island, Corpus Christi, Texas, USA.
27.7°N, 97.2°W

NAME: Robby Doolittle

DESCRIPTION: He was a five-year-old male.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was partly cloudy and air temperatures ranged from 88°F to 90°F throughout the afternoon.

MOON PHASE: First Quarter moon, July 8, 2000

TIME: Afternoon

NARRATIVE: The Doolittle family had taken a break from the vigil for their youngest member of the family, 14-month-old Joey who was awaiting a round of cancer chemotherapy at an area hospital.

Robby was jumping in the surf an arm's length from his father and older brother. "One minute we're playing in the waves, and the next minute ... he's gone. I was scared to death," said the boy's father, Tom Doolittle, "If the shark had pulled Robby the other way, into the deeper water, there's a good chance I never would have seen him again." Doolittle, then a Border Patrol special agent, yanked his son to the surface and wrapped his arms around the shark gripping his son's left leg. With the shark's dorsal fin under his armpit, Mr. Doolittle says, he raised the shark's head out of the water.

"The only thing I wanted to do was get that thing the hell away from my kid. When it finally let go and I scooped Robby out of the water, I looked over at Tommy [the older brother] and just said, 'Run!'". As Mr. Doolittle stumbled to shore, he cradled the near-severed foot, fearful it would fall into the surf.

INJURY: The boy's lower left leg was severely bitten and his foot was nearly severed. Skin, tendons and tissue were stripped from his lower leg, but the scrap of tissue remaining on the lower leg contained an artery that, while punctured, kept blood flowing to the boy's foot.

FIRST AID: A medic-trained Army warrant officer, who was vacationing on the beach with his family, applied direct pressure to the wound. Dr. Rodrigo Mejia, director of the pediatric intensive care unit at Driscoll Children's Hospital pulled into a nearby parking area for an early evening outing with his family when he heard screams and rushed to assist. Using Mr. Doolittle's shirt, Dr. Mejia applied a tourniquet and borrowed beach towels to bundle the boy against shock. As they waited for an ambulance, the doctor alerted Driscoll hospital to have vascular surgeons, orthopedic specialists and anesthesiologists standing by.

TREATMENT: Surgeons repaired Robby's leg using steel pins, rods and more than 3,600 sutures, as well as skin, veins and nerves grafted from other parts of both legs. A year later

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Robby Doolittle, one year after he was bitten by a shark.

he was out of his wheelchair and walking without crutches.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack involved a seven- to eight-foot lemon shark.

SOURCE: Karen Hastings, The Dallas Morning News, September 2, 2001.

