

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 2001.09.03.b](#)

DATE: Monday September 3, 2001

LOCATION: The attack occurred at Avon, a remote town on the Outer Banks barrier islands, Hyde County, North Carolina, 135 miles south and two days after the attack on David Peltier. The site is in Cape Hatteras National Seashore which is administered by the U.S. Park Service. The beaches do not have lifeguard stands; guards patrol the area with all-terrain vehicles.
35.4°N, 75.5°W

NAMES: Sergei Zaloukaev

DESCRIPTION: He was a 200-lb. 28-year old male, a Russian national and computer programmer.



BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a warm day. The sky was clear, visibility was 10 miles [16.1 kilometers] and there was a light north-northeast breeze at 8.1 mph [13 kph]. At 18h00, the air temperature at Hatteras Island was 77°F [25°C], dew point was 66.9°F [19.4°C], humidity was 71% and the sea level pressure was 30.00 inches [1015.8 hPa]. David Griffin, director of the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island, felt the weather and sea conditions may have influenced shark activity. “The winds move warmer, clearer water on shore. When that happens, the food sources – the bait fish – move closer inshore and the sharks follow the bait fish in,” he said.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, September 2, 2001.

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was murky. Mean high tide occurred at 19h44, mean low tide at 13h26.

ENVIRONMENT: Pete Viele of Virginia Beach and Sue Bader of Bethesda, Maryland, were on a sightseeing airplane ride just as the attack was occurring, and reported that they saw “plenty of sharks” near the beach. “We saw lots of sharks – big sharks,” said Viele. “I don’t care if it hurts tourism,” Bader said. “Let people know [the sharks] are there so they can make their own choices.” The attack occurred in a channel a mile south of the Avon fishing pier, North Carolina.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 30 to 40 feet

DEPTH: Six feet

TIME: 18h00

NARRATIVE: Sergei and Natasha had rented a cottage in Avon for the Labor Day weekend with three friends: Josh Granger, Yana Gorbalenya and an unidentified person. All five had been swimming in the ocean, but their friends had gone ashore when the incident took place. The couple had been swimming for five to ten minutes and were in a channel seawards of the inshore sandbar. Sergei and Natasha were about two feet apart when the shark grabbed Natasha’s left buttock and pushed between the two swimmers. Sergei shouted a warning, and the shark wheeled around and attacked him. Bystanders heard screams, but thought the couple were playing. It was not until Sergei and Natasha reached the shallows and bystanders saw blood in the water around them, that people responded to their shouts for assistance and pulled them from the water.

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INJURY: Fatal

FIRST AID: Both Sergei and Natasha were conscious when they were pulled from the water and bystanders applied pressure to their wounds. According to Skeeter Sawyer, Dare County Public Safety Director, when EMS arrived six minutes afterwards, Sergei was in cardiac arrest.

TREATMENT: Both patients were transported to a small medical facility in Avon that had a doctor on duty, but Sergei was dead on arrival. The facility had no blood available for transfusions and so Natasha was taken by helicopter to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital in Virginia.

SPECIES INVOLVED: It was speculated that a three-metre tiger shark could have been involved. However, the nature of the injuries and behavior of the shark is also suggestive of a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*. Marine mammals, such as seals, are favored prey items of adult white sharks, and it is not unusual for them to swim very close to shore; they occasionally beach themselves when going after prey. White sharks pass along the North Carolina coast in the summer months. On July 27, a large white shark was filmed by divers on the wreck of the *Caribsea* ten miles from shore, and a very large white shark was filmed by divers on another North Carolina shipwreck 48 hours prior to the attack.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine, GSAF

