

CASE: GSAF 2001.09.30.a

DATE: Sunday September 30, 2001

LOCATION: The incident took place off Sovereign Beach at the southern end of Moreton Island, northeast of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

NAME: Matt George

DESCRIPTION: He is a 31-year-old male, a sport fisherman from Brisbane.

BOAT: Inflatable boat

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, October 30, 2001

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 200 metres

TIME: Afternoon

NARRATIVE: The shark smashed into the side of Matt George's inflatable boat (rubber duck), the force of the charge destroying and partially sinking the craft, and propelling it across the surface of the water. "The whole side of my boat exploded and the shark was pushing the boat back in towards the beach. [The shark] finished having a bit of a chomp on the boat and kicked his tail up in the air and disappeared, then the boat started sinking and I didn't know what was going to happen next," he said. "There was no way to know if it was going to come back." George hung on to his damaged rubber duck and dog paddled. "Every now and then I'd stop and look around, then I'd give myself enough time to have a paddle and enough time for a shark to come in, then I'd have another look," George said.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service officers said they spotted George from the island and, when he got close, used rope to help drag him in. But George's vessel became wedged on a sandbank and he had to carry the vessel out of the water.

INJURY: George was not injured by the shark. However, carrying his vessel from the water resulted in damage to his back, and he has been unable to work since the incident.

SPECIES INVOLVED: George said that at first he thought it was a four-metre tiger shark, but a ranger told him the bite marks were more likely to be from an adult white shark which



Matt George and his damaged rubber duck

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may have traveled by habit into the area, which once housed a whaling station. University of Queensland shark researcher Michael Bennett said little was known about the white shark in the "northern extent" of their travels, and he said there were recent reports of a lone individual in the Moreton Bay region.

NOTE: Sovereign Beach was apparently named for the wreck of the *Sovereign*. During the 1840s the fastest means of transport between Brisbane and Sydney was by paddle steamship. Steamers such as *Sovereign*, carrying goods, livestock, passengers and the mail, could make the journey in three days. On March 11, 1847, the *Sovereign*, returning from Sydney, entered Moreton Bay during a storm.

As the *Sovereign* navigated the passage near the south end of Moreton Island, she struck the bar and capsized. Of the 54 crew and passengers on board, only ten survived. They owed their lives to the efforts of a group of men from the Nunukul and Ngugi people of Moreton Bay who braved the treacherous conditions to swim out to the wreck and drag the survivors back to shore.

The wreck of *Sovereign* was the lead story for the March issues of the colonial newspaper, the Moreton Bay Courier in 1847. Its initial coverage of the event, however, completely ignored the efforts of the Aboriginal rescuers. It wasn't until April 3 that the paper acknowledged any involvement by the Nunukul and Ngugi people, when it reported several "natives from Stradbroke Island" had assisted the police magistrate of the colony, Captain Wickham, in the search for bodies on the beach near Cape Moreton.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Terry Peake, Australasian Shark Attack File