

ACTIVITY: Boogie Boarding
CASE: [GSAF 2002.03.25.b](#)
DATE: Monday March 25, 2002
LOCATION: The attack took place in the Pacific Ocean at Brennecke Beach in Po'ipu, on the south shore of Kaua'i, Hawaii, USA.
Latitude: 21.87611
Longitude: -159.45417



NAME: Hokuanu Aki
DESCRIPTION: The body boarder is a 17-year-old male, a Kauai High School senior, track athlete, fire dancer and a musician.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It had been raining at Kauai for the previous 24 hours. The sky was overcast and it was raining very heavily at the time of the attack.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, March 28, 2002

SEA CONDITIONS: Although the attack took place at mid-day, the low visibility was caused in part by the weather, and the sea was described as "brownish", turbid and murky.

ENVIRONMENT: A freshwater stream flows into the sea nearby. "During a heavy rain sometimes there will be dead animals that wash down the streams and into the ocean," said John Naughton of the state Shark Task Force. "That's what attracts tiger sharks during these areas."

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 150 yards

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Six to eight feet

TIME: Just after 12h00

NARRATIVE: Hoku Aki had been in the sea about five minutes. He was one of only five people in the water and was waiting for a wave when he was pulled beneath the surface by the shark. "I opened my eyes and I could see the shark. It was just tossing me all over the place. I tried to force the shark's mouth open. I remember hearing my leg break. I heard the bones snap," said Aki. "I grabbed the shark's eye and ripped it, and then [the shark] let me go." As Aki swam to shore, people on the beach saw the shark swimming just beyond the breakers.

INJURY: Aki's left foot was severed just below his ankle, and much of his calf muscle was missing. "I had a look at my leg and I just noticed the skin was all torn up," he said. "I didn't notice my foot was gone until I was in the ambulance."

FIRST AID: Brian Hanson and David Roberts helped Aki out of the water. Nancy Roberts, a trauma nurse on vacation from Littleton, Colorado, wrapped a towel around the stump of Ali's leg, applied pressure and stopped the bleeding with a tourniquet. Roberts said Aki was having difficulty breathing and she asked him questions to keep him alert. She asked Aki for his name and phone number. Hanson wrote the information in the sand to contact Aki's immediate family members.

TREATMENT: Aki was transported by paramedics to Wilcox Hospital in Lihue and was in

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surgery within 15 minutes of arrival. Dr. David Rovinsky, the orthopedic surgeon who performed two surgical procedures on the teen at Wilcox Memorial Hospital noted, "If Hoku had any less presence of mind or was any less fit, he wouldn't have survived the initial attack. That he was able to fight off the shark and make it to shore is a testament to his will, his courage and his fitness."

The patient was flown to Honolulu for medical treatment, first at Queen's Medical Center and then Shriners, where he was provided with a temporary prosthesis. His hospital stay was 10 days.

Aki had lost his left foot and much of his calf. When he was transferred to Queen's Medical Center, orthopedic surgeon Dr. Bryon Izuka felt that "fitting a proper prosthesis device was not possible without his calf muscles." As result, Aki's leg was surgically amputated above the knee.

While in the hospital, Aki was visited by Mike Coots, a body-boarder who lost his lower right leg to a shark at Kaua'i in 1997. Coots said that his visit was as much for Aki as his parents; he wanted to assure them that their son (one of nine children) would recover.

A couple of weeks after he was discharged from the hospital Aki was back in the ocean, and was soon surfing and bodyboarding almost every day.

When Dr. Rovinsky learned that Aki was back in the water, he said: "When I see a patient who had a catastrophic injury, one that is forever life-changing and then carry on with their heads held high ... wow, that's a hero. That's a strong hero. That's an inspiration to everybody." Dr. Izuka shares Rovinsky's sentiments. A photo of Aki with the Queen's Medical Center staff who took care of him is displayed in his office. He kept the photo all these years to give perspective to other patients whose orthopedic condition is vastly less serious than Aki's. "Here's a kid that went through an ordeal that should have floored him, but it didn't," he said.



More than a year after losing his left leg in a shark accident at Brennecke Beach, Hokuano Aki spends his days back in the water at Honoli'i on the Big Island. He says returning to the ocean makes him feel whole again.

Photo by Kevin Dayton,
Honolulu Advertiser

If the attack had not occurred, Aki said he would probably have pursued fire-knife dancing. While at Kauai High School, he was a member of the Tahitian dance halau and performed at luaus. "I was really into that. ... I just think things happen for a reason. Since the shark attack, I'm way more focused on the music," he said.

Aki maintains the same zest and drive in all aspects of his life and wears a prosthesis to stay mobile. In 2009, he graduated from the Institute of Production and Recording in Minneapolis where he studied audio production and engineering. In 2012, he had a

recording studio in Hilo and was working on a second studio.

EQUIPMENT DAMAGE: Aki's board was not damaged by the shark.

SPECIES INVOLVED: "It was a big animal," said Naughton. "It hit [Aki] once and actually rolled over him, dragging him under." Local authorities believed that this incident probably involved a tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, about nine feet in length.

SOURCES: Gary Kubota, Anthony Sommer, Gregg K. Kakesako and Rod Antone of the Honolulu Star Bulletin
Rosemarie Bernardo, The Honolulu Star-Advertiser, March 5, 2012, et al.

