

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** GSAF 2003.10.31.a

**DATE:** Friday October 31, 2003

**LOCATION:** The attack took place in an area known as Tunnels, a quarter-mile off Makua Beach near Haena, on the north shore of Kaua'i, Hawaii, USA.



Jack Harter

*Tunnels, Makua Beach*

**NAME:** Bethany Hamilton

**DESCRIPTION:** The surfer, a 13-year-old female, is a competitive surfer who already had secured sponsorships and was expected to go pro. She won the explorer women's division of the National Scholastic Surfing Association's Open and Explorer event on Kauai in August. In May, she won the women's division at the Local Motion-Ezekiel Surf Into Summer contest at Ala Moana on Oahu, beating out older surfers. "She is probably the best young surfer I have ever seen," said Bobo Bollin of the Hanalei Surf Company. "She was going to be the women's world champion and I think she still will be."



*Bethany Hamilton*

## **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was crystal clear.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** A quarter-mile [nearly a kilometre]

**DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE:** Five feet, dropping to 20 feet at edge of reef.

**TIME:** 07h30



*Bethany and Alana Blanchard*

**NARRATIVE:** Bethany Hamilton was surfing with best friend, 13-year-old Alana Blanchard, and Alana's father, Holt Blanchard. Bethany was lying on her board. "My arm was hanging in the water, and [the shark] just came and bit me." She said the shark pulled her back and forth, "but I just held on my board, and then it let go. You know how you eat a piece of steak? It was kind of like that," Hamilton said. "I looked down at the red water. Right away I knew it was a shark and I knew my arm was gone." Then she decided she "wasn't that scared. I didn't think I was going to die or anything." She admitted that one of the thoughts that flashed through her had was, "I wonder if I'm going to lose my sponsor."

Nobody saw the shark, she just yelled, "A shark bit me". Witnesses said the teen never panicked.

**INJURY:** Hamilton's left arm was severed four inches below the shoulder. "It was a very clean amputation," Dr. David Rovinsky said. Hamilton's background in competitive surfing

helped her survive, he said. "This is a woman who is a highly trained athlete, and because of that she was able to handle a huge blood loss really well."

**DAMAGE TO SURFBOARD:** The shark removed an arc of fibreglass from Hamilton's surfboard which measured about 16 inches across and eight inches deep.

**FIRST AID:** Holt Blanchard immediately applied a tourniquet to the patient's arm using a rash guard while she was still in the surf. Blanchard tied the tourniquet while balancing on a reef after paddling for three or four minutes after the bite.

**TREATMENT:** The patient was transported to Wilcox Memorial Hospital where she underwent two surgical procedures and was discharged on November 6.



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**SPECIES:** Tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, about 12 to 15 feet in length.

**COMMENT:** Hamilton says she knows her life has been changed forever. "I can't change it. That was God's plan for my life, and I'm going to go with it."

A foundation has been created to assist with this remarkable young surfer's medical expenses at: [www.bethanyhamilton.com](http://www.bethanyhamilton.com).

On September 4, 2004, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that a book about her experience, *Soul Surfer, A True Story of Faith, Family and Fighting to Get Back on the Board* hasn't hit the stores yet, but it has already been snapped up by a production company that plans to make it into a feature film.