

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing

CASE: GSAF 2005.06.04

DATE: Saturday June 4, 2005

LOCATION: The attack took place in False Bay at Miller's Point, Western Cape Province, South Africa.
34°13'S, 18°28'S

NAME: Henri Murray

DESCRIPTION: He was a 22-year-old male from Durbanville, a fifth-year medical student at the University of Stellenbosch. He was wearing a red wetsuit.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a warm and sunny day, and there was a southerly 10-knot wind.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, June 6, 2005

SEA CONDITIONS: There were half-metre swells, and the water was clear with good underwater visibility. The attack took place during a spring low tide.

ENVIRONMENT: It was thought the shark may have been drawn to the divers by their catch.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 to 200 metres

DEPTH OF WATER: Six metres

TIME: 15h45

NARRATIVE: Henri Murray and a fellow student, 23-year-old Piet Van Niekerk, entered the water in front of the Black Marlin restaurant. About an hour later, Henri speared a galjoen, *Coracinus capensis*. Van Niekerk was 10 metres away when Henri shouted, "A great white is here; we have to get out!"

"While we were trying to get ashore, the shark jumped out of the water next to us. He disappeared under the water again," said Van Niekerk. "At first, he snapped at Henri twice, but was unsuccessful because Henri fought him off. The third time the shark pulled him under the water. I dived beneath the water and I saw Henri's arms in the shark's mouth."

Van Niekerk shot the shark, but apparently without effect, and the shark swam off with Murray. Van Niekerk swam to shore and ran for help. Some fishermen came to his assistance, used their boat to search for Murray, and called for help. Emergency services – including the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI), Metro rescue, and Simon's Town police and fire services – were contacted and arrived at the scene within 20 minutes.

Dave Estment, a member of the local boating fraternity, was sitting at the edge of the jetty looking out over the sea when the attack took place. "It was incredibly fast. Suddenly a huge shark surged from under the water taking the one diver up to his arms in its jaws. It must have been massive to have done that. Then the shark and the man just vanished."



Henri Murray



Piet Van Niekerk shot the shark that attacked Henri Murray.

Photo: Rogan Ward, Sunday Argus

Grant Munro also saw the attack from a bungalow in the caravan park: "The shark was a massive thing, probably five metres long. It lifted the man out of the water and disappeared within seconds."

INJURY: Fatal. A Metro Rescue Red Cross helicopter and an NSRI boat scrambled to conduct a search for the missing student. A civilian catamaran craft also assisted with the search, as did the Metro Emergency Medical Services, local South African police dive unit and other police. PJ Veldhuizen of the NSRI's Skymed division said they found a speargun and a rubber swimfin about a metre below the surface as well as some fish which were on Murray's stringer [on which spearfishermen hook their catch] attached to his buoy. Police divers also recovered the spear-gun, a flipper, a mask and snorkel and part of a weight belt belonging to Murray. A witness said the weight belt appeared as if it had been cut through by a knife.

The shark was seen next day (Sunday) at Roman Rock Lighthouse in Simon's Town and in Kalk Bay harbour by fishermen. The spear fired by Piet van Niekerk was still embedded in the shark's body, and the shark was towing his speargun and buoy. The same day a member of the public found a piece of Murray's wet suit with his car keys in a flap pocket about seven kilometres from where the attack took place. The search for Murray by the Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service, police and the NSRI continued until 15h30 on Sunday afternoon.

"People often go overboard after a shark attack, but there are far more dangerous sports than water sports," said George Murray, Henri's father. "It's safer to dive than to drive a car. I was always a lot more worried when Henri went rock climbing."

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack involved a white shark. The press reported that Jeremy Cliff of the Natal Sharks Board speculated this incident may have involved the same shark that killed Tyna Webb last year.

SOURCES: News24, http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_1716474,00.html;
SABC, http://www.sabcnews.co.za/south_africa/general/0,2172,105884,00.html; Howard Steele; Cape Times, 6 June 2005

NOTE: Murray was free diving. Some local news reports incorrectly stated that he was using SCUBA. It is illegal in South Africa to spearfish or remove game from the sea while on SCUBA.