

**ACTIVITY:** Air / Sea Disaster

**CASE:** GSAF 1943.05.17.b.

**DATE:** May 17, 1943

**LOCATION:** Their plane went down 68 miles east of Wallis Island in the Central Pacific.

**NAME:** Arthur George Reading, a 26-year-old male and Naval Aviator.

**NARRATIVE:** When the engine of his S2N scout aircraft failed Lieutenant (j.g.) Arthur George Reading had to ditch the plane in the sea. He was knocked unconscious by the impact, but his radioman, ARMC E. H. Almond,

managed to lift him from the cockpit, put on, and inflate his lifejacket before the plane sank. Reading tells what happened next:



“After I came to, Almond told me the plane had sunk in two minutes and he didn’t have time to salvage the life raft. He pulled our ‘dye markers’ and had a parachute along side him. He did not have any pants on at all except for shorts. ... We soon lost the chute and began drifting away from the dye.” Within 30 minutes the sharks appeared. “Almond and I were tied together by the dye marker cord.

“An hour later we heard aircraft and I said, ‘Let’s kick and splash around to see if we can’t attract their attention.’ It failed, but suddenly Almond said he felt something strike his right foot and that it hurt. I told him to get on my back and keep his right foot out of the water, but before he could, the sharks struck again and we were both jerked under water for a second.

“I knew that we were in for it as there were more than five sharks around and blood all around us. He showed me his leg and not only did he have bites all over his right leg, but part of his left thigh was badly mauled. He wasn’t in any particular pain except every time they struck I knew it and felt the jerk. I finally grabbed my binoculars and started swinging them at the passing sharks. It was a matter of seconds when they struck again.

“We both went under and this time I found myself separated from Almond. I also was the recipient of a wallop across the cheek bone by one of the flaying tails of a shark. From that moment on I watched Almond bob about from the attacks. His head was under water and his body jerked as the sharks struck at it. As I drifted away ... sharks continually swam about and every now and then I could feel one with my foot.

“At midnight I sighted a YP boat and was rescued after calling for help.”

**INJURY:** Reading sustained contusions from many blows on legs and body by shark fins. Several days after his rescue, he noted that each time he used his jaw it “swung to the left. X-rays disclosed that he sustained a fracture dislocation of the left temporo-mandibular joint when he was struck by the shark’s caudal fin. Almond did not survive.

**COMMENT:** “Clothing and a pair of binoculars were apparently the decisive factors in the survival of Lieutenant Reading,” writes Llano

**SOURCES:** Extract from Lt. (jg) Reading’s Report 22 May 1943

Dr. Walton L. Jones; Llano, George Albert (2003) Airmen Against the Sea, An Analysis of Sea Survival Experiences. University Press of the Pacific: Honolulu (reprint), page 67.

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EXTRACT FROM LT. (JG) READING'S REPORT 22 May 1943  
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...From the time we crashed until I came to, ALMOND had put my life jacket on me, rescued me from the plane and held on to me until we were clear of the wreckage. ALMOND later told me the plane had sunk in 2 minutes and that he didn't have time to salvage the life raft. He had pulled both our "dye markers" and had a parachute alongside of him. He did not have any pants on at all except for shorts. I remember asking him to pull the 'chute so we could inflate it and help us keep out of sight from the sharks and at the same time we knew the planes would be able to pick us up if they saw the 'chute. We never could get the 'chute filled with air at all. We soon lost the chute and began drifting away from the dye. It was within a very short time (about 1/2 hr.) when sharks were quite apparent swimming around us. ALMOND and I were tied together by the "Dye marker" cords and it made it difficult to make any headway. We both set out to swim in the direction of land and hope that planes would soon come. Our first sound of the roar of engines came about an hour or so later - it seemed that long - and they flew straight over us. Within a short time 2 more flew in our direction and I saw (sic) to ALMOND, "lets kick and splash around to see if we can't attract their attention." It failed but suddenly ALMOND said he felt something strike his right foot and that it hurt - I told him to get on my back and keep his foot out of the water, but before he could the sharks

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struck again, and we were both jerked under water for a second. I knew that we were in for it as there were more than five sharks around and blood all around us. He showed me his leg and not only did he have bites all over his right leg, but his left thigh was badly mauled. He wasn't in any particular pain except every time they struck I knew it and felt the jerk. I finally grabbed my binoculars and started swinging them at the passing by sharks. It was a matter of seconds when they struck again. We both went under and this time I found myself separated from ALMOND. The jerking, bobbing movement of his body pulled the cord that held us together. At this precise moment ALMOND was still thinking of my safety rather than himself. After saving me from a certain death after the plane had crashed, again he came to my aid when he said: "Here, take my life jacket - you need it more than I do" Unquote. I told him it wouldn't be necessary, that we both were going to make it back to land together. If life had stayed with him much longer he would have handed me his jacket; as it was, he already unfastened the fastener, and tried to hand it over to me, knowing that it would help keep as much of my body away from the sharks as possible. I also was the recipient of a wallop across the cheek bone by one of the flaying tails of a shark. From that moment on, I watched ALMOND bob about from the attacks of sharks. His head was under water and his body was stuck with sharks like a "pin cushion". As I drifted away, every now and then I could

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see his life jacket and his head under it. Planes flew over that afternoon and at sunset I had given up hope. Sharks continually swam about and every now and then I would "feel one" with my foot. At midnight I sighted a YP boat and was rescued after calling for help. \*

\* There are two newspaper reports of this incident, one appearing in the Washington Post of July 13, 1943, the second, an article by Bill Cunningham appearing in the Boston Herald of August 9, 1943. They have been omitted as they add nothing of value to the above reports.

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