

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1968.12.02 / SA-0200](#)

**DATE:** Monday December 2, 1968

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Indian Ocean off the Union Whaling station on the Bluff, about two kilometres from the entrance to Durban Harbour, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**NAME:** Chris van Niekerk

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 28-year-old male, and he was clad in a full neoprene suit.



*Union Whaling Station*

**BACKGROUND:**

**WEATHER:** The day was warm and humid, and there was a slight south-westerly breeze.

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, December 5, 1968

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was about 23°C at the surface, but there was a distinct thermocline at a depth of nine metres and the tide was incoming.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Hammerhead sharks had moved into the area; the previous day four hammerheads weighing 30, 89, 99 and 111,5 kilograms were caught off the South Pier at Durban.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 550 metres

**TIME:** 12h30

**NARRATIVE:** Habits are not easy to break; although Chris van Niekerk had witnessed the attack on Jones 20 months earlier, his catch was attached to a stringer clipped on his belt. Van Niekerk and 22-year-old Konrad Stutterheim were had entered the water at noon and swam out to the reef. The divers were well beyond the breakers; they were over a flat sandy bottom about a hundred metres from a rocky reef that reached, in some places, within 12 metres of the surface.

After 30 minutes Stutterheim had not shot any fish, but Van Niekerk shot a beaked galjoen, *Oplegnathus conwayi*, and attached it to his belt. The two divers had drifted off the reef with the current, Stutterheim slightly ahead of Van Niekerk. Van Niekerk was on the surface when he felt a stiff blow on his elbow and flank. Looking down he saw a large hammerhead shark swimming directly below. He screamed and pushed the shark away with both hands. The two divers came back-to-back and warded off the two sharks which swam in close circles around them for about four minutes. Then Van Niekerk removed the head from his spear (detachable on a trace) and shot the larger shark just above the gill slits at point blank range. The spear passed through the body of the shark, emerging on the opposite side above the gill slits. The shot was either fatal or stunned the fish; it immediately began sinking with its pectoral fins quivering but rigid. The spear pulled free and the smaller shark disappeared.

**INJURY:** The diver had a stiff elbow; he sustained no significant injury.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The divers reported that the incident involved two hammerhead

sharks, thought to be *S. lewini*, about 1,6 and 1,8 metres in length.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Alan Heydorn, Oceanographic Research Institute



*Chris Van Niekerk*

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