

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: GSAF 1981.03.24

DATE: March 24, 1981

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean at Singer Island, Riviera Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, USA. 26°46'N, 80°06'W

NAME: Robert W. Thomas

DESCRIPTION: The surfer was a 24-year-old white male. He was 6'2" tall and weighed 172 lbs. He was clad in a half wetsuit; it was black with a dark blue crotch and zipper panel. He wore no jewelry and had no injuries prior to the incident.

SURFBOARD: Pink and white tri-fin



BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a sunny, clear day. Air temperature was about 68°F.

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was dirty and rough. Estimated water temperature was 67°F. High tide was at 11h15, low tide at 16h19

ENVIRONMENT: The surfer stated that he observed spinner and/or blacktip sharks (*C. maculipinnis* or *C. limbatus*) jumping from the water several hundred feet from shore. He did not see any sharks in the immediate area. He also stated that he believed the shark bit the bottom of his surfboard at the same time it bit his thigh, the teeth of the lower jaw hitting the surfboard, the upper teeth his leg. There is nothing unusual about this incident site except that there have been several incidents in the same area over the past few years.

The bottom is generally sandy with spotty light vegetation. At this distance from shore both *C. maculipinnis* and *C. limbatus* are quite common. Closer to shore other species are numerous.

The sand build-up is a temporary condition, probably due to rough water. There is a sandbar in the channel but it does not extend as far out into the ocean as the build-up. A channel several feet from and parallel to the shore does not appear to be a significant factor in incidents on surfers and others at 150 to 200 feet from shore.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 150 to 200 feet

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: >6 feet

TIME: 17h30

NARRATIVE: There was one other person in the water near Thomas. He had walked along a sand 'build-up' to about 100 to 150 feet from shore, then paddled to the shorebreak. He was lying prone on his board, facing north into the current when he felt a "dullish-pain" high on his upper right thigh. Although he felt as though he had been bumped or scraped along some barnacles, he realized that he had been bitten by a shark. The surfer immediately caught a wave and rode his board to shore. The entire incident, from the time the surfer first entered the water to the time he was bitten occurred within a span of four minutes.

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INJURY: The surfer's posterior and lateral upper right thigh was bitten. The injury consisted of four large (each about ½ inch in length) deep alternating puncture wounds (one edge flat, the other edge rounded), on the posterior thigh. Slightly below (lateral thigh) were four additional smaller puncture wounds in a more or less alternating pattern. The surfer had very little pain and although he bled through holes punctured in his wetsuit. The surfer did not feel the injury warranted immediate medical attention.

DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT: There were 13 punctures of various sizes in the wetsuit. The punctures formed a nearly oval pattern and corresponded to the punctures on the surfer's thigh. Inspection of the surfboard failed to reveal any punctures or scratches that could be attributed to a shark's teeth.

TREATMENT: At St. Mary's Hospital in West Palm Beach, the surfer received a Betadine scrub and Neosporin ointment.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The surfer believes the incident involved either *C. maculipinnis* or *C. limbatus*. The pattern and shape of the puncture wounds suggest the upper teeth of either species (one side flat, the other rounded; alternating punctures). Both species are commonly present in the vicinity of the incident.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Morris M. Vorenberg, GSAF