



ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: [GSAF 1981.10.01](#)

DATE: Thursday October 1, 1981

LOCATION: The accident took place in the Atlantic Ocean at Playalinda Beach, Cape Canaveral National Seashore, Brevard County, Florida, USA

NAME: Scott Armstrong

DESCRIPTION: He is a 24-year-old male, a former lifeguard who works at a diving shop in Titusville.

BACKGROUND

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 75 yards

NARRATIVE: "I was lying on my board and the shark came from in front of the board, and it grabbed from front to back," said Armstrong. "[The shark] got my leg in his jaws and I couldn't move my leg at all. He was just anchored in the bone. He yanked my off my board before he let go. I thought it was going to hit again. It swam under my board pretty fast, like it was still interested. But then it swam off."

INJURY: His right leg was "badly cut".

SPECIES: Not identified but the surfer estimated the shark's length at six feet.

SOURCE: St. Petersburg Times, Saturday October 3, 1981, page 17 (see next page)

He saw a splash, and then a 6-foot shark attacked

United Press International

TITUSVILLE — Ex-lifeguard Scott Armstrong has been surfing for six or seven years. He knew about shark attacks on Florida's coast, including two this week in Brevard County.

"But I never thought it would happen to me," he said Friday.

Thursday evening it did, and Armstrong, 24, has a badly cut right leg. His doctor is uncertain whether he suffered tendon damage.

Armstrong, who works at a diving shop in Titusville, had been out with his board for about an hour in the surf off Playalinda Beach at Cape Canaveral National Seashore. He was about 75 yards from shore.

"I saw a large splash and it looked like there were bait fish in the area," he said. "I immediately started paddling out of there.

"I was lying on the board and the shark came from in front of the board, and it grabbed from front to back. That may have saved my foot.

"It's really unbelievable how much power a shark has. He got my leg in his jaws and I couldn't move my leg at all. He was just anchored in the bone. He yanked me off of my board before he let go.

"But I was still pretty scared. I thought it was going to hit me again. It swam under my board pretty fast, like it was still interested. But then it swam off.

"I looked over my shoulder while it was there wallowing with my leg in its mouth. It was about 6 feet long. I don't know what kind of shark it was."

He said the shark left his leg "pretty well mangled up. It got some tendons and stuff.

"My mother and everybody else think I'm

crazy for going out there, and now they're all going to say 'I told you so,' " he said.

When his leg heals, Armstrong said he would probably be back on his surfboard. "It's going to make me paranoid when I go out there for a while, but it's hard to give up something you've been doing for six or seven years."

Biologist George Burgess, senior ichthyologist at the University of Florida, said water temperatures along the coast in Central Florida had been higher than normal this year. That has resulted in schooling near shore of the types of fish sharks eat. The sharks, which have poor eyesight, follow the schools of fish and mistake the hands and feet of swimmers for fish.

Burgess advised swimmers who saw schools of fish in the water to stay out of the ocean until the fish were gone. If they are in the water when the schools appear, he urged swimmers to leave the water immediately.