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**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** GSAF 1982.02.28

**DATE:** Sunday February 28, 1982

**LOCATION:** The attack took place at South Cape Bay on the southern tip of Tasmania, Australia.

*43°36'09.52"S, 146°47'13.31"E*

**NAME:** Geert Talen

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 32-year-old male, a customs officer. He was wearing a wetsuit and using a mask, fins, snorkel and handspear.



## BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** It was a perfect summer day.

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, February 24, 1982

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was flat and the tide was upcoming.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The attack took place over a sandy bottom. One of the crew of a fishing boat, the *Pisces 5*, was a few hundred metres away and saw a five-metre white shark a few minutes before Talen was attacked.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 10 metres from the rocky shore.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Five metres

**NARRATIVE:** Geert Talen was in a party of five women and four men, all members of the Reform Church in Hobart, on a wilderness walk. Between them they had a mask, snorkel, a pair of fins, handspear and a one-piece neoprene wetsuit which they planned to take turns using. The group camped at the South Cape Rivulet, and the spearfishermen decided to dive about 50 metres from the rivulet mouth in water about five metres deep. The first to dive was 18-year-old Philip Van der Niet who speared some fish and was washing them in a rockpool while Talen was diving. When Talen, the oldest member of the group, swam out quite a distance the others became concerned and beckoned him back. He turned and began swimming shorewards. Jody-Anne Wanders was standing 50 metres away on the beach and saw two fins next to Talen, then she saw a splash and the man disappeared.

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“There were four of us watching at the time and then all of a sudden [the shark] was just out of the water ... and Geert was gone,” said Jacqui Van der Niet. “It was black. We didn’t know what it was, but it was huge and black, and then it just left blood dispersed in the water, and that didn’t even last very long either. It just came up ... and the fact that it took a man down in a split second ... Philip said, ‘Oh no, it’s a killer whale.’”

“The shark essentially came up behind Geert — he was facing the rocks and didn’t see it — and as the shark went down again, it took Geert with him,” said Philip. “Geert didn’t really know what hit him.”

Two abalone divers, James Mison and Geoff Harper were hookah diving and spearfishing in 50 feet of water from Harper’s 6-metre catamaran, *Pisces II* on the opposite side of the bay. Harper confided to Mison that he had caught a shadowy glimpse of a large animal during his dive, but when it didn’t return he had pushed it from his mind.

Meanwhile, Philip raced around the bay, signaled to the divers and told them Talen had been attacked by a killer whale. Knowing there were no killer whales in the area at that time of year, Mison realized the man had been attacked by a white shark. The divers brought their boat to the attack site and began to search for the missing man.

“We looked down and there’s his handspear on the bottom ... and absolutely nothing else,” said Harper. “We hung around there for a quarter of an hour. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed all the birds [seagulls] were working out on the sand edge — heaps of them and you don’t often see that unless there’s food there. There could have been a connection there.” He marked the location of the handspear with a buoy and then he saw the shark. “Next thing this huge shark came off the sand edge, cruising like a jumbo jet along the bottom ... It came around in a big circle and back underneath the boat ... and it was hanging out both ends of that.” As the shark went up the tunnel [of the catamaran] they knew it was at least 18 feet in length. It was heavily scarred and had a white rectangular scar within 18 inches of its tail — a big white patch. The shark matched the description of the shark encountered by abalone diver Ray Johnson two weeks earlier at Whale Head 10 kilometers from South Cape Rivulet.

After a search of the beach, the divers took the female members of the party to Dover in their boat and radioed the police, informing them of the attack. By 15h00, the swells were beginning to build making it impossible for the police launch *Vigilant*, with divers on board to reach the area. Next day a media helicopter arrived, conducted interviews, but was unable to take aboard any of the campers or their gear. “I was annoyed because we had to walk in and out twice to get all the gear out,” John Van der Niet.

**INJURY:** Fatal. His body was never recovered.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** A 5.4-metre white shark.

**COMMENT:** The south coast of Tasmania has a history of white shark sightings dating back to the days of colonial bay whaling and is frequented by large white sharks on a regular basis. The area is an ideal white shark hunting ground; it is rich with sea life and there are

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nine seal colonies along the coast between Friar Rocks and East Pyramid rocks, as well as Pedra Branca Island 10 nautical miles off shore. The party were spearfishing only 50 metres from where a freshwater outflow enters the sea, and it is well-known worldwide that the risk of encountering a shark in such locations is increased. Sharks often enter these areas to feed on carrion, debris or dislodge parasites. It is also possible the shark was drawn to the area when it scented blood and visceral fluid from the fish that had been speared and sensed vibrations of fish impaled on the spear.

**SOURCES:** The Frederick Post, Monday March 1, 1982  
Chris Black (2010) White Pointer South, pages 159-163

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Chris Black, Global Shark Accident File



**MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — A 35-year-old man was killed by a shark Sunday at South Cape Bay in Tasmania, an island state south of the Australian mainland.**  
**The man, who was not immediately identified, was attacked while diving off rocks south of Dover, authorities said.**

*The Frederick Post (Frederick, Maryland), Monday March 1, 1982*

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