

ACTIVITY: Scuba diving

CASE: [GSAF 1984.02.17](#) / CASE SA-323

DATE: Friday February 17, 1984

LOCATION: The incident took place at Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It occurred in Durban's Oceanographic Research Institute's main fish tank the day before Cyclone Demonina slammed into the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

NARRATIVE: John Ballard and 33-year-old George Buckland, clad in black neoprene full five-millimetre wetsuits and wearing scuba gear, entered the tank at 09h00 to determine whether a yacht, to be featured as a sunken habitat, would fit inside the tank. The inhabitants of the tank included sparids, butterflyfishes, parrotfishes, wrasse, rock cods, sea turtles, eight stingrays and two sharks.

Buckland was two metres from the tank wall, holding a white line in his left hand and looking down, when the shark gripped his left arm. "Initially I thought it was a fish trying to get past," said Buckland, "but when I realized the shark was attempting to bite me, I held its head against my body, then pulled the shark off as I swam closer to a window."

Afterwards an eight-year-old boy who had witnessed the incident through a window in the tank said he saw the shark swimming above Buckland, watched it swim down below the diver, and then shoot upwards to his arm.

INJURY: Ballard, who was wearing swim trunks and a wetsuit jacket, was bumped in the centre of his back by the shark as he exited the tank. Buckland was bitten twice, his left arm was badly bruised but the skin was not broken. Two arcs of toothmarks were clearly visible in the wetsuit. The topmost arc of toothmarks measured five centimetres, the lower arc was four centimetres. There was also a 1,75-centimetre tear in the sleeve adjacent to the toothmarks.

SPECIES: The incident involved a healthy dusky shark, *Carcharhinus obscurus*, about 1,5 metres in length, that had been in the tank just two or three weeks. Ninety minutes after the incident Buckland and Ballard re-entered the tank, caught the shark in a monofilament hand net, and released it in the sea.

NOTE: This incident involved a captive shark, and thus is classed as a "provoked attack."

SOURCES: Interviews with John Ballard and George Buckland

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine.

