

ACTIVITY: Swimming or standing

CASE: [GSAF 1984.07.24.a](#)

DATE: Tuesday July 24, 1984

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico opposite the South Padre Hotel at South Padre Island, Texas, USA.

NAME: Carmen Castro Gaytan

DESCRIPTION: She is an 18-year-old female from Mexico City.

BACKGROUND

ENVIRONMENT: A second teenager was injured by a stingray.

DEPTH OF WATER: Chest-deep

TIME: "Shortly after noon"

NARRATIVE: Beachgoers heard her screams for help. "Help me please, a fish is killing me," she cried, according to Cidonio Barron Leon, who helped pull her out. He said he saw a shark as he went to her aid.

INJURY: Her legs were bitten.

TREATMENT: She underwent extensive reconstructive surgery on her legs at Valley Community Hospital.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Unknown. The shark was said to be about four feet in length.

SOURCES: The Chronicle Telegram, Wednesday, July 25, 1984; Philadelphia Daily News, July 25, 1984, page 14; Galveston Daily News, Friday July 27, 1984



2 girls bitten in separate shark attacks

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas (AP) — “Help me, please, a fish is killing me,” cried a teen-age girl whose legs were mangled by a shark in the first of two attacks on swimmers at this Gulf Coast beach resort.

Police patrolled beaches overnight and city and county officials planned to meet today to decide whether it is safe for sunbathers to frolic in the surf following the attacks on the teen-age girls Tuesday.

Both were swimming in chest-deep water in front of their luxury hotels when they were attacked.

Carmen Gaytan, 18, of Mexi-

co City, underwent six hours of surgery for “severe leg injury” at Valley Community Hospital in Brownsville, where she was in guarded condition today, said hospital spokeswoman Susie Payne.

She needed up to 60 stitches in both legs and one ankle was severely mangled, hospital officials said.

Just two hours later, about 3½ half miles away, a 13-year-old girl was also attacked by a shark near the Tiki Motel, officials said. She was treated and released from a local hospital.

Incident called 'accident,' not 'attack'

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND (AP) — City officials contended Thursday it was a "shark accident" — not a shark attack — that left a teen-age tourist with a mangled foot, and speculated that the girl may have provoked the predatory fish by kicking it while swimming. City official Joe Rubio said a marine biologist with Pan American University in Edinburg made the determination after reading the statements of witnesses and looking at photographs of Carmen Castro Gaytan's wounds.

Ms. Castro, 18, of Mexico City, was listed in guarded condition Thursday as she recuperated from more than five hours of reconstructive surgery to her legs and right foot at Valley Community Hospital in McAllen. Hospital officials said it is too early to tell if she will regain use of the foot.

Ms. Castro was gnawed by a 3-to-5-foot shark Tuesday while swimming in chest-deep water outside her South Padre Island luxury hotel.

"Help me please, a fish is killing me," Cidonio Barron Leon of Reynosa, Mexico, quoted Ms. Castro as saying in Spanish.

According to Rubio, "the proba-

bility of it happening again is very slim." He said the beaches have remained open since the incident.

A few hours after Ms. Castro was injured, a 13-year-old from College Station, Texas, was bitten by what was believed to be a shark while swimming in front of the Tiki Hotel.

She required 70 stitches on her legs, but Rubio said marine biologist Robert J. Edwards was unable to tell if she had been bitten by a shark.

"The bite was minor," Rubio said. "He doesn't have enough information to make any kind of determination."

Rubio said Ms. Castro may have provoked the "shark accident."

"He (Edwards) said these sharks are very stupid creatures; they get confused very easily," Rubio said. "He said it was probably trying to get to deeper water."

"More than likely he (the shark) ran into her leg and got it caught in his mouth," Rubio said. "Or maybe she was trying to get away, kicked it and got her leg caught in its mouth."

According to Rubio, the shark was probably a blue-backed shark between 3 and 5 feet long.

"We have three or four other

species; it could have been one of those," Rubio said.

Rubio said air, land and sea surveillance ended at 8 p.m. Wednesday: "We spotted one shark all day yesterday way off the coast, feeding on his usual diet — fish."

The shark incidents — the first in 23 years in the area — came at the height of the tourist season at this popular border resort on the southern tip of Texas.

City officials have downplayed any possible danger and said they hoped publicity would boost tourism.

"We haven't noticed people staying out of the water," Rubio said. "We hope we can get some more publicity and get more tourists down here. We don't even consider this a major incident. ... We see no reason to spoil anyone's vacation."

But some vacationers told the *Dallas Times Herald* they were reluctant to go into deep water. Others said they were angry because hotel personnel hadn't told them of the attacks.

"No one at our hotel even told us to watch out," said Sharon Jones, a Tucumseh, Okla., resident on her first ocean vacation.