

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1985.01.04](#) / SA-332

**DATE:** Friday January 4, 1985

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Western Cape Province at Buffels Bay, False Bay, within the Cape Point Nature Reserve. Buffels Bay is 77 kilometres from Table Bay, Western Cape Province, South Africa.

*34°19,2'S, 18°28'E*

**NAME:** Donald James

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver, a 34-year-old male, is 1,73 metres [5'8"] tall and weighs 82 kilograms [180 lbs]. He was clad in a light blue six-millimetre full wetsuit which included longjohns, long-sleeved hooded jacket, and booties. He also wore a silicone face mask with black rim, black swim fins, a dive knife on the inside of his right calf, four lead hip weights (a total of 12,7 kilograms / 28 lbs) on a black weight-belt and, attached to his weight-belt, a red goodie bag. He carried a black speargun and wore a gold dive watch on his left wrist. The diver had no injuries before entering the sea.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was slightly overcast but there was no wind. Air temperature was about 20°C [68°F].

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, January 7, 1985

**SEA CONDITIONS:** A slight south-to-east current was flowing, high tide was at 13h48, and swells were between one and 1,5 metres in height. Vertical water visibility was five metres; horizontal visibility was ten metres.

**ENVIRONMENT:** James was diving beyond rows of kelp separated by a 50-metre-wide channel. He had seen a large galjoen in the area the previous day. A few hours after the attack, at 14h00, a record yellowtail was shot at Buffels Bay from a large shoal which passed along the shore.

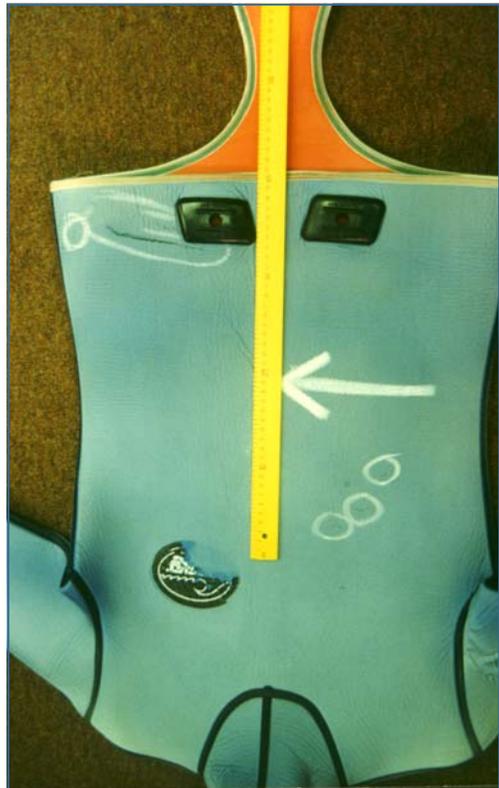
**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 150 metres

**DEPTH:** 15 metres

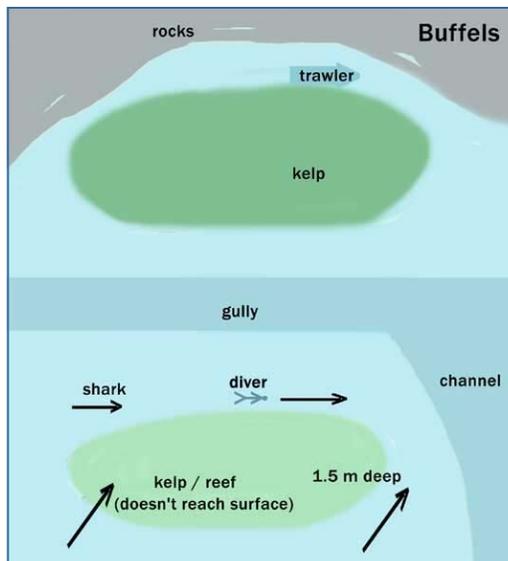
**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** Donald James and his dive buddy, Tullio Testa, entered the water at 10h00 and spent the next 90 minutes unsuccessfully hunting fish. The two men were about 25 metres apart when James assumed a vertical head-down position in the water to check on his partner. At

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that moment the shark came from behind (seaward) and his right; turned and pushed James – open-mouthed — as it passed. “The shark took my entire torso from chest-to-hip. It pushed me, very quickly, two metres under the water, let go and swam off about six metres,” recalls James. “Then it turned back and came straight for me. I still had my speargun and, in my mind, said 'PULL THE TRIGGER!', but with that, almost seeming to sense my thoughts, the shark turned back north. James swam into the kelp that extends to the surface, believing that the shark would not follow, “But for the third time, the shark came back at me and did exactly as before; it headed straight for my speargun, then turned away. I never saw it again.”



James and Testa summoned two divers on shore for assistance. The divers, carrying a buoy and ring of fish-heads for crayfishing, entered the water and, when the buoy got in their way, discarded it and helped James to the beach. When James was safely ashore one of the divers returned to the water to retrieve the buoy and encountered the shark in the kelp bed where the water was barely three metres deep.

**INJURY:** James' right side, from armpit to waist, was badly bruised and there were three puncture marks on his chest below the right nipple.

**EQUIPMENT DAMAGE:** The wetsuit jacket has three small cuts below the right nipple area and two parallel tears, in addition there is a small cut in the region of the left hip. The longjohn James wore underneath his jacket was also damaged; however, the garment was not available for examination. There were tooth impressions in two of the lead diving weights and the 50-millimetre-wide webbing of his weight-belt was almost severed.

**FIRST AID:** A clean nappie (baby diaper), placed inside the diver's wetsuit, served as a pressure bandage and he was immediately taken by private car to False Bay Hospital. En route to the hospital Testa, who was a third-year medical student, gave James a litre of guava juice and reassurance.

**TREATMENT:** The diver was treated by Keith Loxton M.D. at False Bay Hospital.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** James identified the shark as a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, approximately 3,5 metres in length.

**COMMENT:** At no time did the shark close its jaws on the diver. The teeth of the left lower jaw punctured the wetsuit and skin on the diver's chest while the damage to the weights, belt and wetsuit behind the belt was caused by teeth from the right upper jaw. James believed that the lead weights on his belt saved him from serious injury.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Levine

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