

**ACTIVITY:** Scuba diving

**CASE:** [GSAF 1989.02.02](#)

**DATE:** Thursday February 2, 1989

**LOCATION:** The attack took place in the Tyrrhenian Sea at Scoglio Stella near Piombino, Golfo di Baratti, Tuscany, Italy.

**NAME:** Luciano Costanza

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver was a 47-year-old male.



## **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, January 30, 1989

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** One mile

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 27 metres

**TIME:** 10h25

**NARRATIVE:** The diver was either spearfishing or removing debris from an underwater cable near rocks. His son, Gianluca Contanzo, and a friend, Paolo Bader, remained on the boat.

Costanzo initially encountered the shark on the seabed, panicked and made for the surface. The shark followed him, surfaced and made a cursory half-circle and submerged while the diver swam (vigorously) toward the support boat. Paolo and Gianluca started the boat engine, intending to go toward the shark and compel it to leave the area. Before the diver was able to reach the boat, the shark launched a violent surface charge, grabbed the diver's chest and took him beneath the surface "with the shark's body moving side-to-side, with splashing, as it submerged and vanished," reported Ian Fergusson of the Mediterranean Shark Attack File.

**INJURY:** Fatal. A piece of floating tissue, possibly liver, pancreas or similarly buoyant viscera, was spotted by the search team a short distance from the attack scene being picked-over by seagulls as it floated at the surface (Elba Fire-Rescue chief, pers comm. and in written evidence), but was not recovered. The fact that no substantial part of the body was recovered is not unusual in Mediterranean case histories, despite subsequent subsurface and surface searches (e.g., Case No's 1956.07.21, 1954.07.15, 1951.07.00.b, 1948.09.22, 1926.07.24, etc), and indeed from the 21 verified shark attack fatalities since 1907 in Mediterranean waters, 14 (67%) involved apparent ingestion of, or other cause for, the non-retrieval of remains. (Fergusson, in prep. for Environ. Biol. Fishes).

**DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT:** The diver's tanks, weight belt and swim fins were recovered. Fergusson states: "Cursory lacerations to the victim's dive belt, alongside indented, stab-like marks on both his air tanks and dive weights were actually compelling evidence, demonstrating the wide interspace of teeth marks found on such items bitten by these sharks and the rather minimal pressure needed to damage them. The torn webbing was highly suggestive, in retrospective analysis, of where one or two of the shark's teeth apices entered the webbing weave, then caused lateral tears, with 'flocked' margins, from head shaking or perhaps a single rapid movement. The very same action, which probably

(judging from the belt) involved other teeth actually contacting the diver's body, appears to have both severed restraints for the air tanks and weight belt simultaneously. The swim fins were probably dislodged through the same activity (subsurface head shaking) and were found not far from the other gear. No part of the wetsuit was ever recovered, and may have been partially ingested and carried for some distance before being discarded by the shark. Finally, white sharks are well-known, if sporadic, visitors to the attack area during winter months (captures of 500cm + specimens at various coastal sites around Elba; one specimen also actually from the Gulf of Baratti where the attack occurred).

Interestingly, the exact same spot was also the scene where a very large (300 cm plus) pregnant specimen of bronze whaler, *Carcharhinus brachyurus*, was taken by fishermen, extending the northerly range of this species in Italian waters (Vacchi et al., 1995).

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, six metres in length.

**COMMENT:** The incident was closed officially by Italian magistrates following a sitting in Milan (Coroners proceedings) as a fatal shark attack with the species implicated being *Carcharodon carcharias*. In doing so they firmly slammed the door on any inference that Italian authorities were attempting to manufacture a non-shark story, so as to deflect negative attention from tourism. They spent considerable time assessing the evidence, and considering the supposedly conflicting material that contemporary media accounts offered as an ulterior motive for Sgr Costanzo's death.

These supposed motives were much publicized. All revolved around alleged insurance scams, illegal dynamite fishing, etc etc. None, however, stood up to either police or forensic scrutiny. The version of events relayed by the witnesses, plus the physical evidence offered compelling reasons to conclude that this was a genuine shark attack. As stated by the very experienced head of the subsurface investigation (Fire-Search & Rescue Chief Officer on Elba, pers. comm in 1995) and his detailed contemporaneous case notes and statements made at the time, there was no evidence whatsoever to indicate a seabed explosion as alleged by some news media (i.e, the illegal dynamite fishing plot), nor did the victim's gear substantiate such a claim under close examination.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Alessandro De Maddalena, Italian Shark Attack File

**ADDITIONAL SOURCES:** Cappelletti (1989a), Bertuccelli (1989), Giudici & Fino (1989), Biagi (1989), Albertarelli (1989); Ian Fergusson, Mediterranean Shark Attack File; Alex MacCormick, pages 39-42.

## **Shark Kills Diver Off Italian Coast**

**PIOMBINO, Italy (AP) — A 20-foot-long shark attacked and killed an experienced scuba diver off the Mediterranean coast, news reports said Friday.**

**Luciano Costanzo, 46, was killed during a fishing outing Thursday with his 19-year-old son, Gianluca, and a friend, the reports said.**

**The son told Milan's Corriere della Sera newspaper he heard his father yell for help and then saw the shark circle twice and pull his father down.**

**"I clearly saw my father in the mouth of the shark," the son said.**

**The Port Authority in this central Italian city closed the area to swimming and diving after verifying the attack.**

**Large dangerous sharks are rare in the Mediterranean. The last verified attack off the Italian coast was nearly 30 years ago when an underwater photographer was killed by a shark near Naples, newspapers said.**

*The Victoria Advocate, February 4, 1989, page 17*

## **Divers in search for killer shark off Italy**

**PIOMBINO, Monday SEARCHERS have recovered the remains of equipment belonging to an Italian scuba diver believed to have been eaten by a shark, port officials said today.**

**It is the first reported shark attack on a human in Italian waters for 20 years.**

**A diving team searching the waters off the north-west port of Piombino found two oxygen tanks, a weighted belt and flippers which showed tooth marks from Thursday's attack.**

**Gianluca Costanzo, 18, told authorities he saw his father Luciano grabbed by a shark about a mile offshore during a fishing trip.**

*The Glasgow Herald, February 7, 1989*