

ACTIVITY: Free diving

CASE: GSAF 1989.11.18

DATE: Saturday November 18, 1989

LOCATION: The accident took place in the Atlantic Ocean at Melkbosstrand, 35km north of Cape Town, Western Cape Province, South Africa.



NAME: Gerjo Van Niekerk

DESCRIPTION: He was a 29-year-old white male. He was 1,85 metres tall, weighed 75 kilograms, and was wearing a two-piece black five-millimetre neoprene wetsuit with zip front and hood, black silicone face mask, black fins, weight-belt, and red and white gloves. He was carrying a 1,08-metre black speargun attached to an orange float with 20 metres of line. He had no injuries prior to entering the water. He was a member of the False Bay underwater club and had been diving for five years.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, November 20, 1989

ENVIRONMENT: Named after the species of *Euphorbiaceae* bushes which grow on the dunes and give off a milky latex like substance, this 7 km stretch of white sandy beach, is commonly referred to simply as Melkbos. It is sandwiched between the Atlantic ocean to the west and the Blouberg mountain to the east. It is notable for being one of the landing points for the South Africa-Far East and South Atlantic/West Africa submarine cable systems.

NARRATIVE: Gerjo Van Niekerk was diving alone, hunting perlemoen and crayfish when he disappeared.

INJURY: Fatal. Van Niekerk's body was not found, but rescuers recovered his orange float. A few days after his disappearance his shark-bitten leg washed ashore on the beach.

SPECIES: The accident was thought to involve a white shark.

NOTE: This accident took place two months after Gerjo was injured by a shark while diving at Smitswinkel Bay (GSAF 1989.09.17). I interviewed after the September incident, and at that time he said the experience had not dampened his enthusiasm for the diving. "It was a one-in-a-million freak accident," he said.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine