

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing

CASE: GSAF 1992.01.08 / SA-404

DATE: Wednesday January 8, 1992

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean off the rocky point at Christmas Bay, Sheffield Beach, on the KwaZulu-Natal north coast, South Africa.

29°29'S, 31°16'E.

NAME: Daniel van Huysteen

DESCRIPTION: The diver, a 36-year-old male, was clad in a black full wetsuit with pale blue panels, black face mask with blue frame, red snorkel, and black swim fins. He carried a metallic blue speargun and towed a red float on an orange line. The diver had no injuries prior to the incident.



Christmas Bay

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was partly cloudy and there was a light south-westerly breeze.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, January 5, 1992

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm with a half-metre swell. Underwater visibility was five metres and sea surface temperature two kilometres to the south was 24°C at sunrise, although the diver described the water as "cool".

ENVIRONMENT: The diver was in a large shoal of four-kilogram 'bonito' (probably *Euthynnus affinis*) which extended from the surface to the limit of visibility.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 800 metres

DEPTH: Greater than four metres

TIME: 17h15

NARRATIVE: The diver entered the water about 16h15, hoping to shoot king or queen mackerel, but saw none and left the water. Then he saw terns feeding offshore. (These birds often feed on small schooling fish driven to the surface by larger shoaling fish.) The diver entered the shoal of bonito, shot at one and missed. He was floating on the surface reloading his gun when a shark struck the side of his face and shoulder with force, dislodging his mask. The shark was not seen again and the diver swam to shore unaided.

INJURY: The upper jaw teeth of the shark inflicted two closely-spaced lacerations on the diver's left cheek (three-millimetres deep and about eight centimetres in length) which extended across the ear and nearly severed the lobe. These lacerations were contiguous with eight shallow puncture marks on the back of the neck, and there were several small triangular puncture wounds on the left side of the chest. Teeth of the lower jaw punctured

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the right cheek close to the mouth, along the chin line and inflicted very shallow parallel lacerations on the throat.

EQUIPMENT DAMAGE: There were puncture marks caused by the teeth of the shark near the neck of the wetsuit.

FIRST AID / TREATMENT: The diver donned his diving hood to control blood loss and drove nine kilometres to his home. He showered (still wearing his hood), and afterwards his wife drove him to Victoria Hospital, Tongaat, about 15 kilometres away. The diver arrived at the hospital at 18h20, and Dr Sham, surgeon, sutured his lacerations. The diver was admitted for the night, and discharged the following morning.

SPECIES: The evidence available suggests that a blacktip shark, *Carcharhinus. limbatus*, about 1,5-metres (precaudal length) was involved. It is possible that the shark, aroused by the shoaling fish and the firing of the speargun, may have mistaken a reflection of the diver's mask for the flank of a slow-moving fish. It is believed the very shallow, closely-spaced lacerations were inflicted by short, narrow, pointed teeth.

CASE INVESTIGATORS: Andrew Gifford, Global Shark Accident File and Jeremy Cliff, Natal Sharks Board



Danie van Huysteen displays his stitches after being attacked by a Black Fin shark near Ballito on Wednesday.
Picture by TERRY HAYWOOD

Natal Mercury
January 10, 1992

Spearfisherman thanks lucky stars for escape

SPEARFISHERMAN Danie van Huysteen thanks his lucky stars for living to tell the tale of his attack by a shark off Sheffield beach near the Natal north coast town of Ballito on Wednesday.

Thirty-six-year-old Danie, acting superintendent of the Ballito municipal traffic and protection services, was snorkelling off the rocks at Christmas Bay on Sheffield beach when he saw a shoal of fish in deeper water.

"I must have been about 800 m out to sea. I fired my spear into the school of bonito, but missed.

"As I surfaced and pulled in my spear I felt a bang from underneath and my mask was knocked upwards. It was only when I saw all the blood in the water and the shark circling among the fish below me that I realised I'd been attacked."

After swimming back to

By Fiona McDonald

shore, Danie pulled on the hood of his wetsuit.

"It was the best form of pressure bandage available."

Wife Annemarie said she did not realise anything was amiss when Danie rushed in shortly after 6 pm.

"Danie was in the shower when he asked me to fetch his radio as a doctor was needed. I just thought it was a normal call out. That was when he told me he'd been attacked by a shark — and I saw him in the shower with his diving hood on!"

Danie praised his wife for her calm handling of the situation as she drove him to Victoria Hospital at Tongaat, where he received stitches to his face.

According to Danie, Natal Sharks Board officials said he was attacked by a 2 m Black Fin.

Danie had a narrow escape

North Coast Courier
January 24, 1992

By Gay McCormick
Ballito's lucky shark attack victim Danie van Huyssteen has fully recovered from his ordeal and is back at work, sporting a fine beard to hide his newly acquired scars.

Danie was attacked by a shark whilst spearfishing at Christmas Bay near Sheffield Beach at about 5.00pm on January 8. The shark bit the side of his head and almost took off the bottom part of his ear. However this was successfully stitched back in place after the attack.

Danie was spearfishing, and was between 500 and 800 metres from shore when he saw a shoal of fish in the water. He swam under the shoal and came up into the middle of it. It was then that the shark lunged, raking his chest which was luckily covered by a rubber wetsuit and biting at his head as it passed.

'The impact of the hit knocked me out for a moment and when I came round my goggles were in my hand and I realised that I

was bleeding. I saw the shape of the shark and realised what had happened. I loaded my speargun and slowly made for shore, watching for the shark carefully,' says Danie. 'Fortunately it did not return.'

Danie had the headpiece of his wetsuit in his car and quickly pulled this over his head as the tightness would help stem the flow of blood. He drove home and was taken to the Victoria Hospital in Tongaat by his wife. His wounds were stitched under general anaesthetic.

The Natal Sharks Board have advised that the shark which attacked was probably a blacktip shark between 1.5 and 2 metres long and that these sharks are not usually known to be dangerous. They said that Danie was probably attacked because he disturbed the shark while it was feeding on the shoal of fish that was present.

Blacktip sharks usually feed on fish and smaller sharks.