

ACTIVITY: Surfing

CASE: GSAF 1993.10.30

DATE: Sunday October 30, 1993

LOCATION: The incident took place the Pacific Ocean at "Bunkers," 0.8 km north of the breakwater jetty at Eureka in far northwestern California, USA.

40°46.2'N; 124°13.6'W

NAME: Robert Williams

DESCRIPTION: He was a 26-year-old male clad in a black wetsuit with a gray logo design on the arms and legs. He was 6' tall and weighed 180 pounds.

SURFBOARD: A trifin board slightly more than two metres in length with a white top and bottom and a yellow and green design on the top rails.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The air temperature was about 16°C.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, 100% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated.

SEA CONDITIONS: There was a one-metre swell undulating the otherwise calm sea. The water temperature was about 10°C and underwater visibility was five to six metres.

ENVIRONMENT: The sandy bottom gently sloped away from the beach to the open sea. As William prepared to enter the water to surf, he saw several pinnipeds in the surf very close to shore.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 200 metres

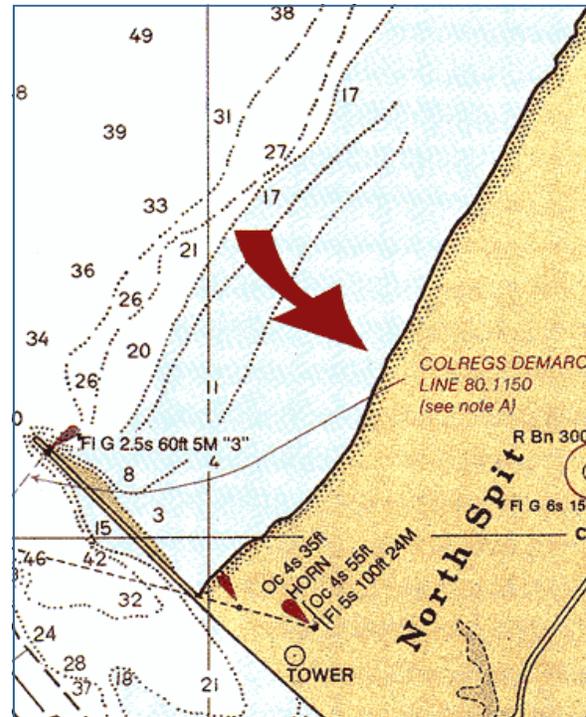
DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Four fathoms

TIME: 16h30

NARRATIVE: "Five other surfers had gone out about 15 minutes before I got in the water and were waiting for a decent wave. They were talking when I paddled up to them. I paddled away from this group about 15 yards and waited several minutes before I saw a nice set [of waves] building. I began paddling out to catch the set when, all of a sudden, there was a surge of water that pushed me up into the air. I saw the shark at this moment for a fraction of a second. The shark grabbed my legs and board, pulling me underwater three to four feet. I hit the nose of the shark, which did nothing. Then I saw its eye, so I jammed my thumb in as far as I could."

The shark's response was quick and dramatic. It released the surfer and shook its head from side to side as it swam very fast at a precipitous downward angle, out in the direction of the open sea.

Williams resurfaced a few metres from his surfboard. When he scrambled onto his board, he noticed the severity of his wounds. He shouted for help; several surfers responded and assisted him to the beach.



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INJURY: The surfer sustained a wound to the middle of his left thigh and lower legs, involving musculature, nerve and vascular-vessel damage.

TREATMENT: Several companions drove Williams to St. Joseph Hospital in Eureka. When admitted to the hospital, Williams was in a mild state of shock, but alert. Physicians James Schilz and George Isenhardt treated his injury. Following several hours of surgery and many months of therapy, his physicians predicted a complete recovery.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The incident involved a white shark

NOTE: In a letter to Ralph Collier, dated September 4, 1999, Williams wrote, "Every year on the 30th of October I go for a surf and have some champagne and a cigar afterward to celebrate life. Even though I know the shark was just 'investigating' me, I feel that I now have a better perspective of death and life. The attack really scared the hell out of me; that's why I celebrate every year."

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier