

ACTIVITY: Treading water

CASE: GSAF 1999.03.05

DATE: Friday March 5, 1999

LOCATION: The attack took place off the Whaler Condominium in Kaanapali, Maui, Hawaii, USA.

NAME: Robyne Knutson

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 29-year-old female, is 5'4" and weighs 119 lbs. A superb ocean swimmer and free-diver capable of holding her breath for more than two minutes, she was not wearing a mask and snorkel, nor was she menstruating. She is a Haiku resident and is studying massage therapy.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, March 1, 1999. Third Quarter, March 9, 1999

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was calm and crystal clear with 85-foot visibility.

ENVIRONMENT: Both Dettwiler and Chas Wilkerson, captain of the *Wind Warrior* charter boat, said they saw a pod of whales in the area at the time the woman was bitten. The mother, calf and escort whale were about 150 yards from the swimmers, Wilkerson estimated. Maui County lifeguard Alan Akana speculated that the mother whale was giving birth at the time, causing the pod to remain in the area even after the attack. He said blood in the afterbirth may have drawn the shark to the area.

No large sharks were spotted during an hour-long flight from Maalaea Bay to Napili in a Coast Guard helicopter on the day following the incident, reported Francis Oishi, aquatic biologist with the state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 300 yards, opposite the Whaler Condominium

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: 40 to 60 feet

TIME: 10h45

NARRATIVE: Robyne Knutson entered the water near the Hula Grill Restaurant at 10h30 with Bruce C. Brown, a 54-year-old experienced ocean swimmer. The pair were shoulder-to-shoulder treading water and looking for whales. They were facing seaward, when the shark approached from below and bit Knutson's inner thigh, pushing her backwards. Brown kicked and punched the shark and it released its hold and disappeared. Brown began towing Knutson toward shore.

INJURY: The shark removed skin and muscle from Knutson's right thigh from hip to knee with substantial tissue loss. The wound 14 to 15 inches long.

FIRST AID: Brown said Knutson was bleeding profusely as he swam, pulling her toward shore. Knutson lost consciousness along the way and he was shouting for help when the crew on the 64-foot catamaran *Gemini* came to the rescue.

The catamaran was nearing shore to pick up a charter at Dig-Me Beach fronting Whalers Village when Gemini Captain J. Dushane heard a man calling for help about 600 to 800 yards away. "I picked up the binoculars. That's when we noticed he was dragging this girl



Whaler Condominium, Kaanapali

back toward the beach,” Dushane said. “The side of her leg was gone. There was just this big gaping hole.” While Gemini Operations Manager Steve Dettwiler took the helm, Captain Dushane and crew member Jeff Worthen helped bring the couple aboard, wrapping the woman's leg in towels. “She was conscious and breathing, but she was definitely in a state of shock,” said Dettwiler, who used his cellular telephone to call for fire and ambulance crews. EMS was waiting on the beach when the crew arrived on shore. Captain Dushane carried the woman off the boat to the beach, where Dr. Betsy Schusser, a family practitioner at the nearby West Maui Healthcare Center in Whalers Village, examined Knutson before paramedics took her by ambulance to the hospital. “She was in shock with a barely discernable blood pressure,” said Schusser. Maui Ocean Activities manager Mike Carter, who ran to get oxygen and assisted with administering first aid.

TREATMENT: Paramedics took Knutson by ambulance to Maui Memorial Medical Center where she underwent surgery later the same day. Doctors were optimistic that proper circulation could be restored to the injured leg, said Boyd Kleefisch, hospital administrator. On Saturday, her condition was listed as stable.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack was thought to involve a 12- to 13-foot tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, but one witness said the attack involved a white shark.

NOTE: DLNR officers posted yellow warning signs along the coast from Hanakao Beach Park to Honokowai after the attack and notified nearby hotels so they could caution guests. The warning signs were removed at dusk Saturday after Oishi and National Marine Fisheries Service biologist John Naughton saw no large sharks during their flight in a Coast Guard helicopter. “All we saw were healthy whales,” Oishi said.

Last October, a tiger shark bumped a visitor during a diving tour south of Lahaina. The visitor was not injured.

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