



ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 2002.09.27.a](#)

DATE: Friday September 27, 2002

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Vava'u Island group, Kingdom of Tonga.

NAME: Filipe Tonga

DESCRIPTION: Tonga is one of the local guides who takes tourists to swim with the migrating humpback whales.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Last Quarter, September 29, 2002

ENVIRONMENT: There were two humpback whales nearby, a mother and a calf. It is not known if the calf was newborn or if either of the whales had any injuries that might have drawn the interest of sharks.

TIME: 15h00

NARRATIVE: Filipe Tonga had been in the water only five minutes. He was with a group of swimmers and was watching the two whales. Tonga saw the shark and as it swam close to the group of swimmers, he struck the shark. The shark circled and approached the group again, and Tonga struck it for a second time. With that, the shark bit Tonga's leg.

INJURY: The wound consisted of a single bite to the swimmer's left thigh.

FIRST AID: Tonga swam back to the support boat and another faster boat was called that transported him to the hospital at Neiafu. Next morning he was flown to Nukualofa on Tongatapu where his injury was surgically repaired.

SPECIES INVOLVED: According to witnesses, the incident involved a tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, approximately 1.5 metres feet in length. A five-foot tiger shark is a juvenile, and juvenile sharks explore their environment, often test-biting unfamiliar objects. It is also possible that the shark, initially curious about the group of swimmers, felt threatened by Tonga, and reacted defensively.

Since the swimmer was the first to display aggression, this is considered a provoked incident.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Christy Butterfield

