

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 2003.08.19](#)

DATE: Tuesday August 19, 2003

LOCATION: The attack took place in the Pacific Ocean at Avila Beach, San Luis Obispo County, California, USA. Avila beach is 200 miles northwest of Los Angeles and 241 miles south of San Francisco.

35.2°N, 120.7°W



NAME: Deborah Franzman

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 50-year-old female, was clad in a full wetsuit and swim fins. She taught philosophy and ethics at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, and lived in Nipomo with her teenage son. She was a strong athlete who swam in the ocean three or four times a week. Often she was joined by friends, but at the time of the attack she was swimming alone.



Deborah Franzman

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: At 07h56, the sky was overcast, visibility was five miles [eight kilometers], and there was no wind. The air temperature was 59°F [15°C], dew point was 55.9°F [13.3°C], humidity was 90% and sea level pressure was 29.98 inches [1015.1 hPa].

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 55% of the Moon was illuminated.

ENVIRONMENT: The incident took place alongside a group of seal lions.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 75 yards

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: 20 feet

TIME: 08h15

NARRATIVE: About 30 local lifeguards were training and competing just north of Avila Pier and Deborah Franzman was swimming alone 200 yards south of Avila Pier when the attack took place. A friend on the beach noticed she was swimming with some sea lions when they suddenly scattered. Then there was a large surge of water near the swimmer and she was pulled beneath the surface. Although no one saw the entire fish, witnesses reported seeing a large fin as the shark breached the surface and Franzman screamed for help. Five lifeguards dashed off the pier; one grabbed the cell phone of a passer-by and called 911. "The others dived into the water despite having no rescue gear and little idea what might be waiting for them," said Harbor District Operations Manager Casey Nielsen. "It was heroism. They knew someone was bitten, and they went into the water anyway and brought her to shore. My first thought would have been 'Stay out of the water.'"

INJURY: Fatal. The shark bit the swimmer's hip and left leg, severing her femoral artery, and there were lacerations to her right leg.

FIRST AID: Franzman was unconscious when the lifeguards pulled her to shore. They loaded her into a pickup truck, initiated CPR and tried to stop the bleeding. Despite the skills

of the lifeguards, the swimmer's injury was too severe, and paramedics pronounced her dead at the scene.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, about 15 to 18 feet in length. Authorities immediately closed Avila Beach as well as beaches in Cayucos, Morro Bay, Oceano and Pismo Beach. The beaches reopened at midday, but authorities would not allow people to enter the water.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier, GSAF