

ACTIVITY: Snorkeling

CASE: GSAF 2004.11.11.a

DATE: Thursday November 11, 2004

LOCATION: The incident took place at Malakula, Vanuatu (formerly, New Hebrides).

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: He was a male in his late 30s, a German tourist. He was wearing a blue and yellow striped "Speedo".

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was clear and cloudless. The air temperature was probably 26°C, as it was throughout Vanuatu.

MOON PHASE: Waning crescent, 3% of the moon's visible disk was illuminated. New moon, November 13, 2004.

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was clear.

ENVIRONMENT: No one was fishing or chumming in the vicinity.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 150 metres

DEPTH OF WATER: <10 metres

TIME: 09h00

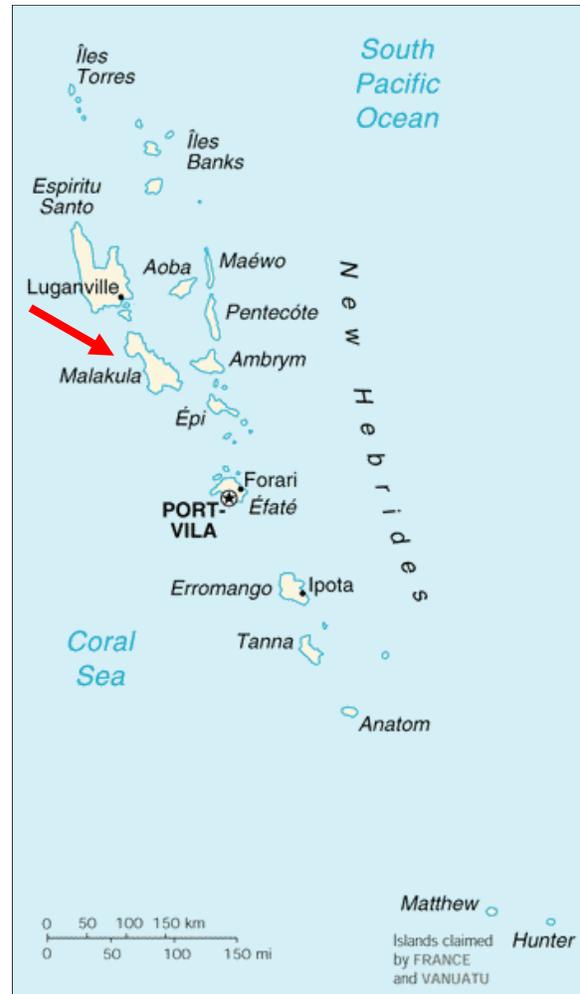
NARRATIVE: The snorkeler was looking at coral when saw something fast moving and grey in color out of the corner of his eye. He felt the impact as the shark hit his left inside thigh and was aware of a significant amount blood in the water . He shouted for help but swam to shore unaided. He was helped out of the water by villagers.

INJURY: The patient sustained a large bite with loss of tissue to the medial left thigh down to the sartorius muscle, narrowly missing the femoral artery. There were other bite wounds proximal and distal to main injury.

FIRST AID: A pressure bandage was initially applied to his leg. He was taken by truck (90 minutes) to aid post where IV commenced with 0.9% saline and his bandages were changed or reinforced. He was transported to the Hospital by air charter.

TREATMENT: The patient arrived in the operating theatre at 20h30. He was in significant pain, but stable and not shocked. The wounds were cleaned, debrided and rebandaged under general anaesthesia. Femoral nerve block gave good post operative pain relief. Next day patient was transferred to a hospital in Australia for ongoing care, before being repatriated to his home country.

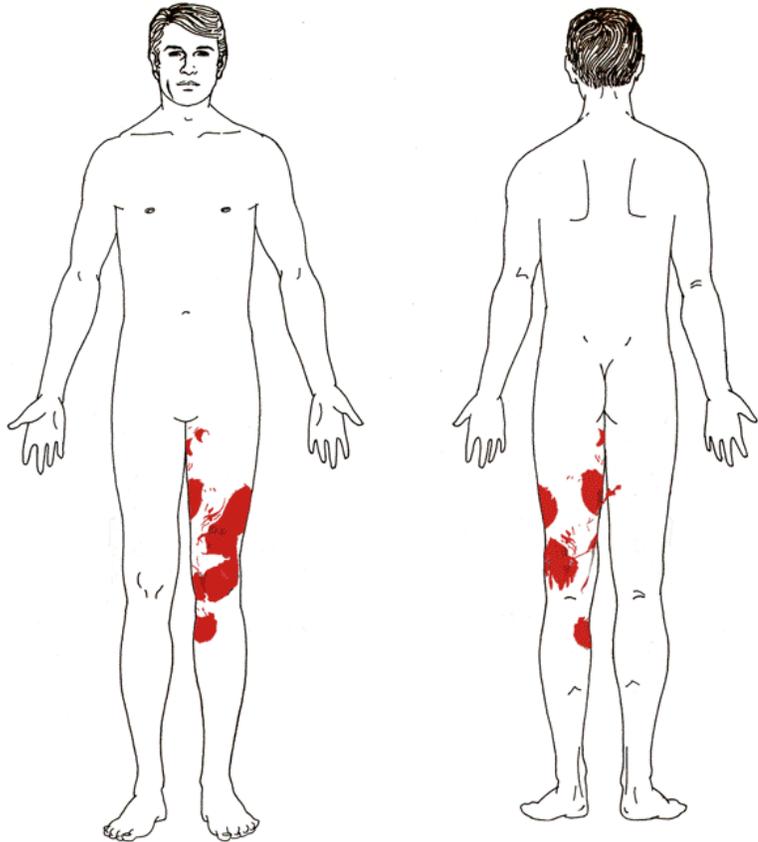
SPECIES INVOLVED: The photographs were reviewed by E. Ritter, M. Levine and R.



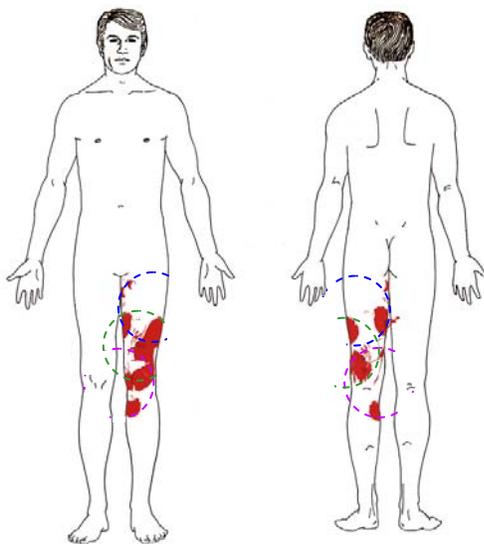
Collier. All ruled out tiger shark involvement and were in consensus that a carcharinid shark was involved. Collier wrote, "In reviewing the photographs, it is apparent that the teeth of the shark are serrated and set in the jaw with their roots and cutting edges close to the adjacent teeth on either side. The size of the bite suggests a shark no more than 5 or 5.5 feet in length. The nature of the wound outer edges, insertion points of the teeth and accompanying tissue bridges, suggest a charcharhinidae animal, possibly a reef shark."

"Motivation is perplexing as it is not 'investigation' for there are too many wounds. The loss of tissue suggests a predatory or feeding event, but I think that a displacement or defensive motivation cannot be ruled out. A review of the diver's actions and oceanographic conditions might lend some insights into which of these possibilities might be the cause."...*Ralph Collier*

"I agree that the motivation was not 'investigation'. The shark hit the diver at speed which suggests that the animal was highly agitated and may have perceived the diver as an interloper or a threat. The shark may have made a series of quick bites, or if the diver's leg was flexed, two, possibly three bites (see below left). It is probable that the diver, instinctively, twisted away from the shark at the initial bite.



...*Marie Levine*



What is really intriguing is that the person sustained multiple bites so high on his leg... It is a bit unusual for a shark to go for these areas and completely ignore the "end parts"... That suggests something was there, e.g. a bait fish or another fish attempting to seek shelter. The person was definitely not the prime target. ...*Erich Ritter, Ph.D.*

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Terry Peake, Shark Research Institute.