

**ACTIVITY:** Wading

**CASE:** GSAF 2005.09.05

**DATE:** Monday September 5, 2005

**LOCATION:** The incident took place just south of the New River Inlet in North Topsail Beach, near Onslow County beach access No. 3, Onslow County, North Carolina, USA.

77°-2,548.00', 34°2,600.50'

**NAME:** Elizabeth Gardner

**DESCRIPTION:** She is an 18-year-old female from Hollysprings. She was wearing a two-piece navy blue swimsuit and ring on her left hand (her hand was not in the water at the time of the incident). She did not have her menstrual period and had no injuries prior to the incident.

## BACKGROUND

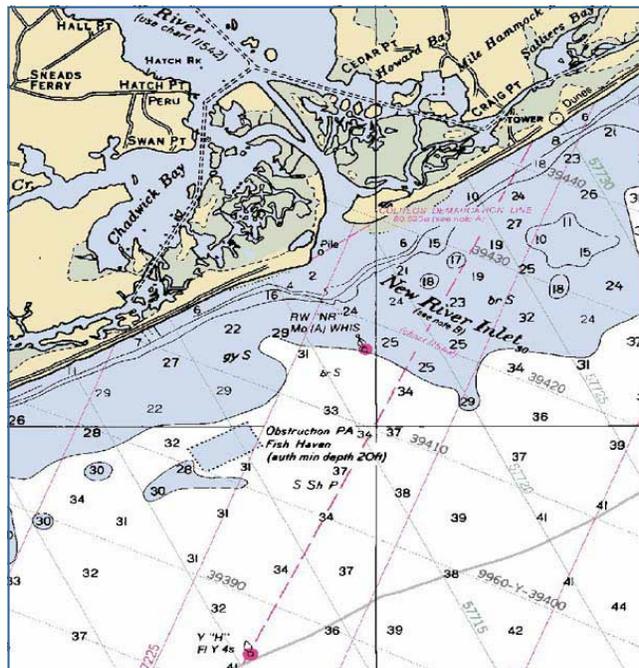
**WEATHER:** Overcast and very windy. The air temperature was 84.9°F [29.4°C], dew point was 60.1°F [15.6°C], no rain, sea level pressure was 30.22 in / 1023 hPa, and there was a moderate northeast breeze at 18.4 mph / 29.6 km/h with gusts to 23 mph / 37 km/h.

**MOON PHASE:** Waxing Crescent, 3% of the Moon was illuminated. New Moon, September 3, 2005

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was brownish blue and murky with zero visibility; Elizabeth could not see the seafloor in waist-deep water and the water was very foamy at the incident site. The current was moving at an angle, from northeast to northwest, and there were small swells. The sea surface temperature was 85° to 87°F, estimated. Mean low tide occurred at 15h22.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Although Elizabeth was unaware of a channel in the area, according to Fire Chief George Moore, there is a shoal 500 to 600 yards from shore that people often wade to at low tide. Elizabeth said that the sea floor was very uneven; it changed from ankle-deep water to waist-deep water very quickly. No dolphins or unusual bird activity was reported. One man told WNCT-TV 9 that he caught a few sharks right off the beach while he was surf fishing, one nearly four feet in length, and people were fishing about 1,000 feet east of the incident site.

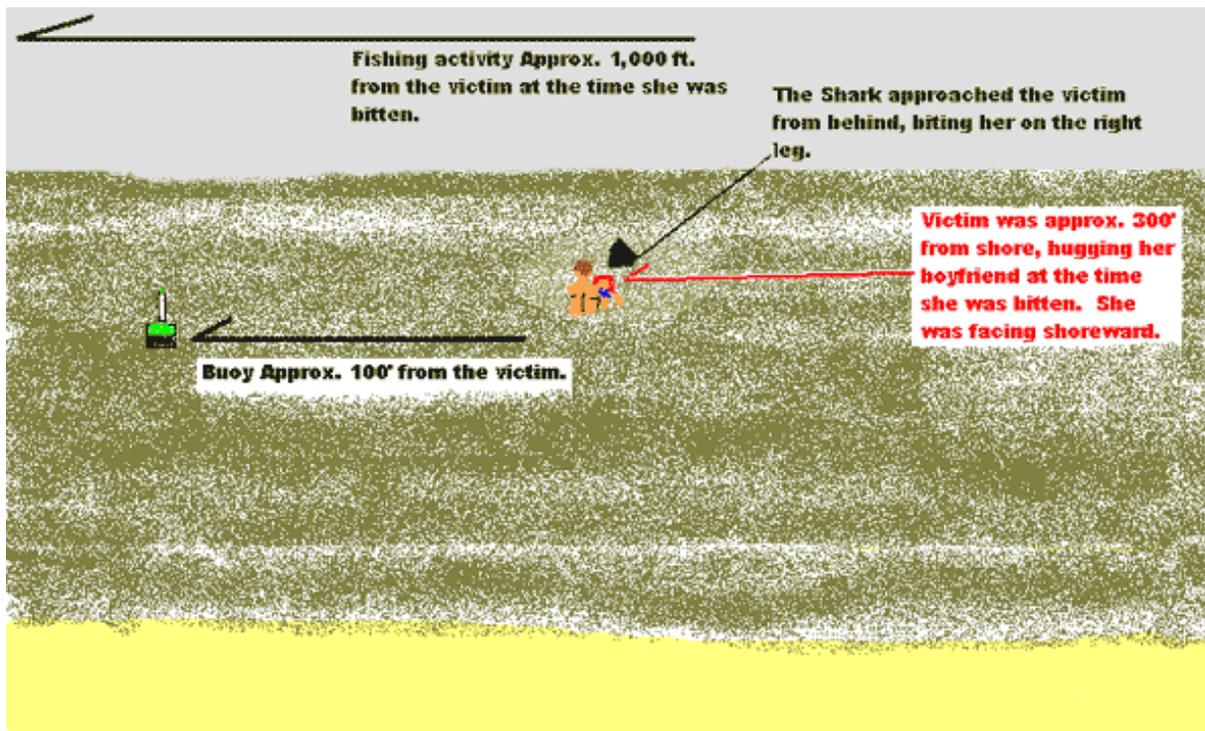
**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 300 feet. There was a buoy in the water east of the beach and Elizabeth and her boyfriend were seaward of the buoy.



**DEPTH OF WATER:** Waist-deep

**TIME:** 14h30. The dispatch call came to the North Topsail Beach Fire Department at 3:10 pm [15h19]

**NARRATIVE:** Elizabeth Gardner, her boyfriend Forrest Powell, and family had come to the beach for a day's vacation; it was Labor Day, September 5, 2005. About 30 people were on the beach and a few people were in the water, but no one was near Elizabeth and Forrest. The couple had been playing in the waves for 15 to 20 minutes. Immediately before the attack, she was hugging her boyfriend. As she turned toward shore, she felt something grab her right leg. She felt three bites that lasted approximately three seconds. Elizabeth lifted her right leg out of the water and, when she saw it, started screaming. Forrest picked her up and carried her almost the whole way to shore. As he neared the beach, three men met him in the water and carried Elizabeth the rest of the way to shore.



**INJURY:** The bite was severe; she sustained tendon, muscle, tissue and skin loss to the lower poster right leg. The Achilles tendon was damaged or partly removed. The wounds extended from the right heel to halfway up the calf. There is a quarter-sized hole just above the right ankle and teeth impressions along the posterior right foot.

**FIRST AID:** On the beach about 10 people gathered around Elizabeth. Some were putting towels under her leg and someone placed a tourniquet on her leg, but an EMS worker who happened to be on the beach told them to take it off. First aid was administered on the beach by bystanders, then by EMS. George Moore said she was in and out of consciousness the entire time she was being treated on the beach and put into the ambulance. Elizabeth said she felt pain immediately, as soon as she lifted her leg out of the water. She also says that numbness set in quickly.

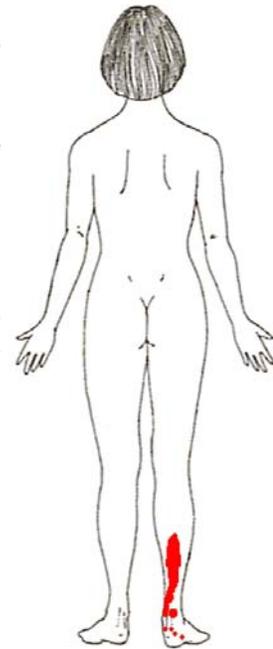
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**TREATMENT:** Paramedics transported her to Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital where she was given morphine. Hospital staff attempted to clean the wound, but she was in too much pain for them to continue. She stayed at the Naval Hospital for about 3.5 hours, then was taken by ambulance to Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville for surgery. The attending physician at Pitt was Anthony C. Smith, MD, and the surgeon was Michael R. Bard, M.D. Some 21 centimetres of sutures were needed and the hole was left open to drain.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** A bull shark was considered to be the species most likely involved in this incident. It is thought that the shark was about six feet in length.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Clay Creswell, Global Shark Accident File

**SOURCES:** Interview with Elizabeth Gardner, et. al. by Clay Creswell; DeShaunta Bullock, WNCT-TV 9



*Sea Surface Temperature on September 5, 2005*

