

ACTIVITY: Scuba diving
CASE: [GSAF 2005.10.11](#)
DATE: October 11, 2005

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Caribbean Sea off the East Wall in Grand Cayman at a dive site known as Jack McKenney's Canyon.

NAME: Lea Ann Hughes

DESCRIPTION: The diver is a 57-year-old female from Norman, Oklahoma. Lea Ann is a highly-experienced diver, a PADI Course Director with just under 2000 logged dives. She is 5'4.5" tall, weights 140 pounds, and was wearing scuba gear, a black and yellow bathing suit, neon yellow swim fins, black face mask, black cap with a yellow bill, wedding band on her left ring finger, a gold and diamond ring on her right ring finger, and a gold thumb ring. She did not have her menstrual period and had no injuries prior to the incident.

SUPPORT BOAT: *Ocean Frontiers*, a 42-foot white-hulled dive boat.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was sunny and the air temperature was 80°F.

MOON PHASE: First Quarter, October 10, 2005

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was blue and calm. Sea temperature was 82°F (measured), and underwater visibility was 80 feet.

ENVIRONMENT: The dive site, named for filmmaker Jack McKenney, has deep vertical canyons leading to the deepest drop-off in the northern hemisphere – 25,000 feet. It is the East End's number one dive site for sharks and eagle rays. No one was feeding, chasing or otherwise provoking the sharks.

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: 60 to 80 feet.

DEPTH AT WHICH INCIDENT TOOK PLACE: 50 to 70 feet

DISTANCE FROM BOAT: 10 yards from the boat's mooring line

TIME: 15h00

NARRATIVE: Lea Ann had been in the water for about 25 minutes. She was with a group of about eight divers but only two were within 15 to 30 feet of her. She was hovering in midwater, motionless and watching the sharks. She reports:

"We were returning from our dive, coming up over the wall and were making our way back toward the boat when we spotted the two sharks, one about five feet long and the other about seven feet long."

"Initially, we were excited to have this encounter and my husband began photographing the sharks. Suddenly the sharks began circling around us and moving erratically. Our divemaster began his ascent to the boat and the larger of the two sharks began charging at



the him. I watched in disbelief as he kicked at them and pushed them away. Once the divemaster neared the surface close to the boat, the shark turned and began to repeatedly charge at me. I kicked him in the head with my fins at least five times and punched him in the face with my clenched fists. It wasn't until I began yelling at him that he finally turned away from me. When he turned from me he joined the second shark and began frantically biting at something in the coral beneath us. I was not bitten but feel certain that if I had not fought him, the encounter would have had a different outcome.”

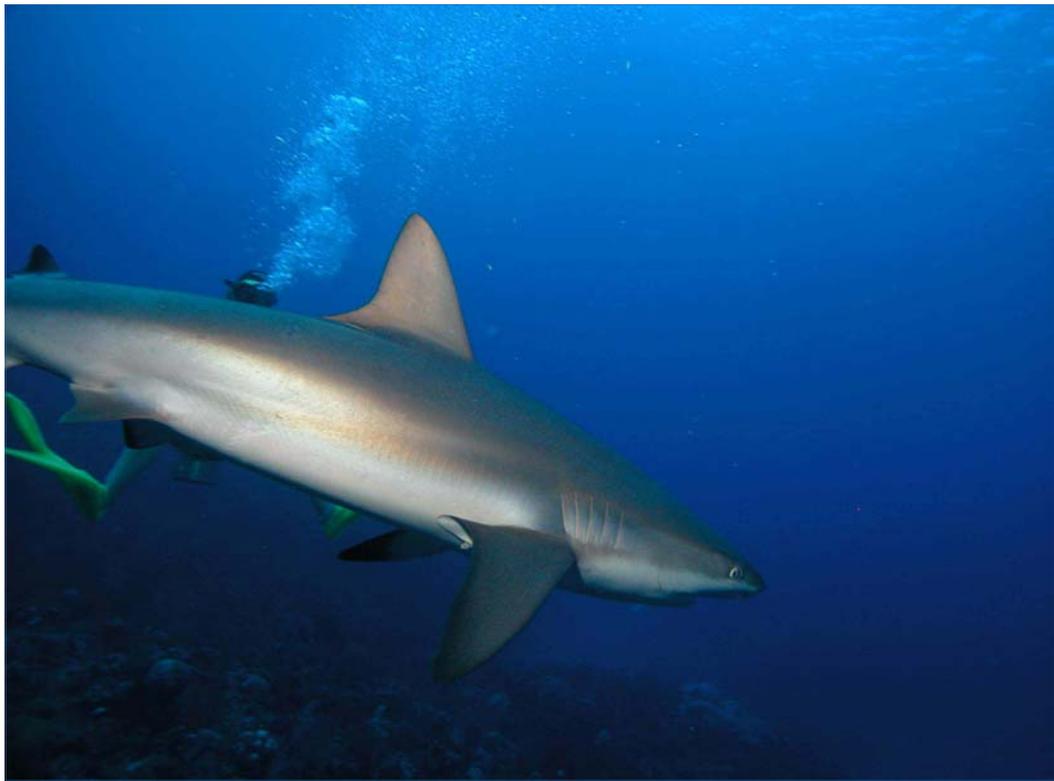
“I have dived with hundreds of sharks and certified hundreds of divers and have never seen or experienced anything like this. This attack was totally unprovoked and I feared for my life and for the life of the young divemaster who was leading us. What I experienced and witnessed was contrary to everything I have ever heard, believed, read or been taught about sharks and shark behavior, and is not something I ever want to experience again or have anyone I know ever experience.”

INJURY: No injury

SPECIES: “These were not great whites or bull or tiger sharks. They were Caribbean reef sharks,” said Lea Ann. It was the larger shark [seven feet in length] that repeatedly charged the diver for approximately five minutes, each bout lasting 30 to 45 seconds. She describes its behavior as “frenzied and erratic.”

SOURCE: Lea Ann Hughes





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