

## SHARKS IN SAN DIEGO

by Carl Edmonds

The activities of the above reporter during the first three quarters of 1973, were dutifully recorded and dispatched to the editor of the newsletter. On the grounds of literary demerit they were not included in previous editions of the newsletter, but with the change of editorial staff, this can be remedied at least in part.

With wife and four children in-tow, I arrived in San Diego, intent on looking up some criminal associates, both south of the border and at San Clemente. Two surprises awaited me. The first derived from my propensity to over-indulge in Vodka drinking parties with other countries' expatriates, and the second was the high cost of accommodation. These were in some way related. I finally left the luxury shores of La Jolla and leased a delightful house overlooking the sunset cliffs, at the moderate \$900.00 per month. Initially there was some doubt as to whether the US Navy required a loud-mouthed vodka drinking Australian who hob-knobbed with Russians and elected Labour Prime Ministers. While they were making up their minds, I proceeded on a series of short lecture commitments to the local universities and medical groups. Some of the most intriguing aspects of that location are the superb marine life sanctuaries, and the Scipps Underwater Canyon. A lecture on Dangerous Animals was an obvious goer, and this was very well received. In the anecdotal chit-chats following my lecture, I was informed that there was no accurately recorded shark attack in the area, and that even though one had been reported a decade previously, it was almost certainly a guise to exploit insurance companies - with the alleged victim being seen in Mexico with his de facto (on subsequent investigation, this rumour turned out to be entirely untrue). Indeed, it seemed that everyone shared a most casual attitude towards a danger which, although perhaps exaggerated in Australia, definitely exists. The result was that I did receive some well-natured taunting regarding this particular marine hazard. One cannot buck the locals, especially if one is relying on lecture fees to ensure one's subsistence. I decided to hold my peace.

Over the next week or so, while co-incidentally pottering around the local coroner's office, I came across many interesting reports of diving deaths, and became on more-or-less first name swearing terms with the coroner's staff. Then came the interesting request. Would I mind coming down to the autopsy room to inspect a body? It appears that the local whips had already been in and diagnosed a diving accident with "death from lacerations due to the safety boat running over the diver" (not an infrequent event in any country). Well, the story from the diving partners was slightly different. So the obvious procedure was to examine the body. It was a fairly well-developed 39 year old male, with multiple concentric lacerations over both sides of one leg, and a distance of approximately 12 inches between the 2 major areas. Rolling up shirt sleeves and disappearing into the wound, I finally came up with 4 pieces of shark teeth, one triangular with serrations along the edges. The locals were rather taken aback by a small exclamation on my part "Ah yes a classical Isuridae, judging by the jaw separation, about 12-16 feet long, or do you measure them in meters?"

There was the odd altercation or two and even an attempt at rebuttal, e.g. "How do we know the shark didn't bite him after the propellers sliced him up?" This needed no answer other than my five minutes uproarious laughter.

When one adds the actual story, as given by his diving buddies, it does seem as if San Diego must claim to have shark attacks. What apparently happened was that the divers, who were not spear-fishing and who did not carry any abalone or shellfish, entered the water for their only dive, late in the afternoon, and swam some way from the boat. The deceased rose to the surface within minutes of leaving it, and exclaimed "Shark! Tourniquet!" He was then pulled on board the boat, bleeding profusely, but with no-one taking notice of his request. No tourniquet was used and the patient bled to death. The incidence has thrown some doubt on the safety of the San Diego area regarding shark attacks. In the past, one local expert claimed that sharks don't actually bite, they are just trying to dislodge their older teeth! This rationalisation gives no solace to the widows. However, before we are too critical of the reporting of marine animal injuries from other countries, we could perhaps look at our own most ineffectual and sloppy system of documenting these injuries. What usually happens in Australia is that the descriptions are despatch by word of mouth, and through dribbles of beer. During 1973, I have been informed of one severe injury from a diver being run over by his safety boat, and therefore I do not ridicule the San Diegians' hypothesis, only its applicability in this particular case. I have also been informed that during 1973 there was severe morbidity from both Ciguatera and Tetrodotoxin poisoning from fish. I can find no area where these events were recorded and so passed them on to Doug Walker for inclusion in his stickbeak system. Where were our observer members of SPUMS in 1973! Also, how many of us, even in SPUMS, would be adept in the diagnosis and treatment of these conditions? More anon on this topic.

## BUBBLES

### Avascular Necrosis of Bone

A certain past editor of the newsletter, is said to have moth balls throughout his bone structure, and there is a suggestion that he is trying to pass this off as dysbaric osteonecrosis. On a quick run through the differential diagnosis of these bone lesions, one finds reference also made to obesity, alcoholism and syphilis. Come on now Bob, let's see us check the different diagnosis out first, before we pay worker's compensation.

### Advertising

A dymo tape fiend has been at work desecrating one of our more illustrious Australian research units. On the scientific officer's door, there is the comment "don't blame me for going so slowly, as I'm probably going in the wrong direction". Outside the administration door, is the quote, plagiarised from Pogo, "we have found the enemy, and it is us". The head of the unit has such a large office, with so many cupboards that he had to label the last one as an AA Milne type "useful cupboard". On his door is the warning "No trespassing, Violators will be eaten", and halfway up the stairs, which one has to climb to read the notice, there is a large hand, pointing upwards and labelled "upstairs", no decks on that ship!

### HMAS NEVERBUDGE, ie. THE PRINCE HENRY HOSPITAL HYPERBARIC UNIT

Seen in the Director's office is the following list of rules and regulations.

- Rule 1 the Chief is right;
- Rule 2 In the improbable hypothesis that a subordinate may be right, rule 1 becomes immediately operative;
- Rule 3 the Chief does not sleep, he rests;
- Rule 4 the Chief is never late, he is delayed elsewhere;