

HONOLULU STAR - BULLETIN JAN 15, 84 A-4



ARTIFICIAL FLIPPERS—Lucky, the 350-pound female logger-head turtle who received artificial flippers during a 3½-hour operation yesterday, lies awake on the operating table just after the surgery was completed. —AP Photo.

Injured Sea Turtle Is Doing Well with Artificial Flippers

By Martin Marris

ISLAMORADA, Fla. (AP) — A loggerhead turtle who lost her front flippers to an attacking shark was learning to use rubber replacements today after undergoing an implant operation that followed nine months and \$200,000 worth of human care.

"She's starting to move her flippers in a more normal manner now that she's recovered some from the anesthesia," said Marlin Simon, the curator at Theater of the Sea, a few hours after yesterday's surgery.

"You can see that she's still numb around the flippers, but she's looking a lot better than when she was first put in after the operation," he said.

The turtle, named Lucky, immediately began swimming when lowered back into her pool following the 3½-hour surgery at the marine attraction on Upper Matecumbe Key, about 75 miles southwest of Miami.

IF SHE recovers successfully, scientists plan to release her into the sea on Valentine's Day.

"I feel good," said orthopedic surgeon Dr. Patrick Barry of Miami, who headed the team that performed the operation. "It worked perfectly."

"This is a grope in the dark,"

Dr. Jesse White, a marine biologist at the Miami Seaquarium, had said just before the operation began. "We've never done this before."

THE TOTAL cost of caring for Lucky for nine months, of designing and manufacturing the flippers and of time donated by scientists and others was estimated at \$200,000.

The 350-pound turtle, estimated to be about 25 years old, lost both front flippers when a shark attacked her as she rode on the back of a male turtle while mating in the Atlantic off the Florida Keys in April.

YESTERDAY, Lucky was placed upside down on an outdoor operating table as more than 100 onlookers watched.

Nearby lay a flower arrangement sent by an Ohio amputees' group. Lucky has been made the group's 44th member.

"Best wishes," the note read. "Your fellow members of the Amputees' Support Group, Dayton, Ohio."

Barry and orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jurgen Toft, who flew in from West Germany for the operation, started by hollowing out the injured bony stump on the turtle's right-front flipper to receive the first foot-long rubber replacement.

The surgeons drilled holes cross-wise into the bone for the bolts that hold the flipper in place.

"It fits," Barry declared with satisfaction as he screwed up the bolt, which bears on its underside the words "Lucky the Turtle."

"We're looking for another 75 years out in the sea, so we're building it deep into the bone," the surgeon said.

The flippers were donated by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. of Akron, Ohio, and Howmedica Inc. of Rutherford, N.J.