

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1988.04.15.a](#)

DATE: Friday April 15, 1988

LOCATION: The accident took place in the Atlantic Ocean at Riviera Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, USA.

26°47'18.94"N, 80°01'52.66"W

NAME: Robert B. Nicholson III

DESCRIPTION: He is a 24-year-old male from Oak Ridge, New Jersey.

BACKGROUND

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 50 yards

TIME: 18h45

NARRATIVE: Robert Nicholson was swimming with Heather Riley near the Sheraton Ocean Inn (3200 N. Ocean Boulevard) when he felt something bump him in the chest, but he said he wasn't concerned about it. "I was riding a wave in and something hit me really hard in the chest. I wasn't really worried because I'd been bumped before by fish. Then it bit me in the foot. It grabbed me and started to shake me. I hit it with my hand to get it off, and it bit my hand. Somehow, I got it to let go." Unaware of the extent of his injuries, Nicholson swam back to shore.

INJURIES: A finger of his left hand was broken and he sustained lacerations to the dorsum of his left foot, but no tendons were severed.

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FIRST AID / TREATMENT: Nicholson told Heather to go back to the hotel and get help. "I saw the amount of blood and I got scared," he said. "I ran back to the hotel and went to the swimming pool and began to hose out the wounds. Then I wrapped myself up in towels and waited for the paramedics."

He was transported to St. Mary's Hospital for evaluation and treatment. He required 45 stitches to his foot and five to his hand. He still needed skin graft surgery when he returned to New Jersey.

SPECIES: Not identified, but according to Nicholson, the shark was about eight feet in length.

SOURCES: Palm Beach Post, Saturday April 16, 1988
North Jersey.com, April 22, 2013

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Electa Pace, Florida Shark Attack File

Shark attacks close beach at Riviera

By **JOE BROGAN**
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

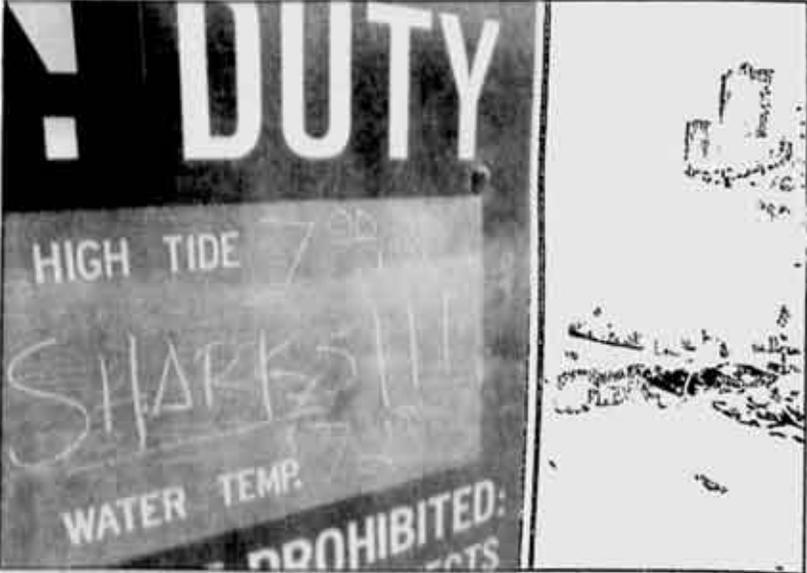
RIVIERA BEACH — A New Jersey man Friday became the third victim attacked in two days along a half-mile stretch of Singer Island teeming with sharks in a bait-fish feeding frenzy.

Robert B. Nicholson III of Oak Ridge was bitten on the left foot and left hand while swimming near the Sheraton Ocean Inn, 3200 N. Ocean Blvd.

Heather Riley, 18, of Boston, who was swimming with Nicholson, said he was about 50 yards offshore when the shark attacked at about 6:45 p.m. "He kicked it and got away and then ran to the hotel," she said. "He lost a lot of blood and had a serious cut on the top of his foot."

Nicholson, 24, was taken to St. Mary's Hospital, where doctors were determining Friday night whether surgery was necessary.

"If we had known there were sharks in the water, we never would have gone in," Riley said.



HILLARY SLOSS/Staff Photographer

Usually an avid swimmer, Haj Hemmings of Lake Park decided to work on his tan Friday when he heard that Singer Island waters were teeming with sharks.

Please see **SHARKS/14A**

Lifeguards close beach park after 3 attacks by sharks

SHARKS/from 1A

They were swimming in an unguarded portion of the beach. Much of Singer Island's beachfront is unguarded.

Lifeguards closed guarded portions of the beaches to swimming Friday when spinner sharks up to 6 feet long attacked schools of bait fish in water as shallow as 2 feet.

"The only people out there are the surfers, and they're taking their lives in their hands," said Brian McManus, lifeguard captain at Ocean Reef Park. "Sharks are thrashing in the surf and they're going for everything that moves. They're everywhere."

No other shark problems were reported by lifeguards throughout Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast Friday.

Trough holds fish for sharks

There are more shark attacks on Singer Island than anywhere else in the county, and experts have blamed a trough in the sea floor that runs along the beach just offshore. Bait fish tend to congregate there, the experts say, and sharks follow them in.

Even before Nicholson was attacked, Palm Beach County's Ocean Reef Park and the Riviera Beach Municipal Beach were closed Friday because of two shark attacks on Singer Island surfers Thursday.

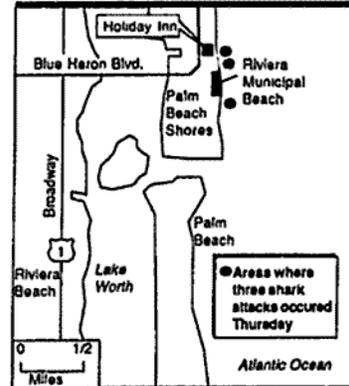
Riviera Beach reopened its beach later Friday.

In one Thursday incident, Joe Costa, 19, of Miami was bitten on the left foot as he lay on his surfboard 150 feet offshore near the Sand Dune Shores Apartments in Palm Beach Shores. The area is just south of the Riviera Beach Municipal Beach.

Costa was in stable condition Friday in St. Mary's Hospital.

Thursday's other victim, Kenneth Burns, 15, of 8832 Lyndall Lane in Lake Park, was paddling for shore on his board off the Holiday Inn at 3700 N. Ocean Blvd. when a shark seized his right hand, he said Friday.

Burns, a freshman at Palm Beach Gardens High School, said he pulled his hand free but it took 40



stitches to repair the cut.

In addition, a Wisconsin woman was bitten by a shark two weeks ago off the Ocean Mall in Singer Island.

About 250 disgruntled beachgoers sat on the sand at Ocean Reef Park Friday morning.

"We're not letting them in the water even to get their feet wet and a lot of people are peeved," McManus said.

Sharks fascinate tourists

He said seasonal visitors were awe-struck by the sharks' acrobatics.

"You can see them jump and thrash back and forth before they hit the water again," he said.

A low pressure area caused unusual 7- to 8-foot waves, he said, and caused more movement of bait fish.

"When fish move around, sharks chase them," he said. "This month has been terrible. We've had the beach closed for about half this month so far on account of sharks."

McManus also said there have been occasional sightings earlier this month of much larger black-tip and hammerhead sharks off the park — some of them more than 8 feet long.

"The waves are breaking 200 yards offshore, so it's a great ride in," he said.

Teenage surfers swarm the area when schools let out for the day, he said, with as many of 150 of them battling each other for the big, rolling waves.