

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing and snorkeling

CASE: [GSAF 1992.11.29](#)

DATE: Sunday November 29, 1992

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean off San Onofre, Orange County, California, USA.

33.3°N, 117.3°W

NAME: John M. Regan

DESCRIPTION: He is a 31-year-old male, a medical technician, and he was wearing a black wet suit.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: First Quarter, December 1, 1992

SEA CONDITIONS: Underwater visibility was poor.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 feet

TIME: 15h30

NARRATIVE: "I shouldn't have been swimming with speared fish, especially in poor visibility," said Regan. "It was a case of mistaken identity; I was dressed in a black wet suit, looking like a seal, which is the shark's regular food. I'm willing to bet that if I had been wearing scuba gear and exhaling bubbles instead of carrying speared fish, the mako would have ignored me."

INJURY: Puncture wounds and lacerations to right calf.

SPECIES: The incident reportedly involved a mako shark, 1.8 metres [six feet] in length. Ralph Collier, foremost researcher of Pacific coast shark accidents, believes Regan may have been bitten by a white shark: "I have a strong feeling that the shark involved in this incident was probably a juvenile white shark. I base this observation on historical data on time of year, location, and causal species ID. The water was murky and the reef is frequently visited by juvenile and subadult white sharks. Shortfin mako sharks seldom venture into the shallow waters of this area based on conversations with commercial fishermen over the years. On the other hand, juvenile, subadult and adult white sharks are frequently observed in the area."

SOURCES: Los Angeles Times, November 30, 1992; The Orange County Register, December 1, 1992; Alert Diver Magazine.

CASE INVESTIGATORS: Hillary Vidars and Ralph Collier



John Regan

Twenty years and a wealth of experiences have honed his skills and whetted his appetite for more.

BY HILLARY VIDERS

Although shy and unpretentious by nature, John Regan leads a life teeming with adrenaline-pumping experiences.

John, a soft-spoken and personable 33-year-old diving professional, developed a love of the outdoors at an early age. He grew up in Southern California

and has traveled throughout some of the most scenic vistas of the United States, from the Baja Coast to the Northwest. He currently resides in Oregon.

"A recurrent image I keep in my mind is a dive trip with the whales in Glacier Bay, Alaska," he says. "Every night at dusk as our boat was returning to shore, I

saw wolves walking on the beach."

John took up diving at age 13 and later enlisted in the Navy, where he served as a diver medic and decompression chamber technician for experimental and saturation diving operations. Afterward, John earned a bachelor's degree in geology. He has since undertaken a variety of jobs, including underwater salvage, scuba instruction, and dive guiding.

John considers salvage work the most difficult: "Although many salvage jobs are in shallow water and near shore, the visibility is usually terrible and the bottom littered with dangerous debris — broken glass, tangled metal and wires, and industrial pollutants."

John's favorite job was teaching marine ecology to high school students at the Catalina Island Marine Institute in the summer of 1994. Another memorable job was a whale shark project in Baja, Calif., with renowned marine biologist Dr. Eugenie Clark for *National Geographic* and the University of Maryland. The expedition consisted of 25 people, including Dr. Clark, her four children, plus video and still photographers.

"I served as divemaster of the research vessel and tagged and took skin samples of whale sharks," says John. "'Genie' Clark was a delight to work with, and I learned about whale shark behavior very quickly — actually in about three seconds — after being slapped in the head by a 30-foot whale shark's tail!"

John recalls his encounter many years before with another shark that was definitely less friendly. While snorkeling and spearfishing off the Southern California coast, John was attacked by a 6-foot/1.8-meter mako and suffered multiple lacerations on his right lower leg. Still sporting 22 scars from the mako's teeth marks ("My leg has

a perfect outline of the shark's jaw!"), John believes the attack was a result of his own mistake.

"I shouldn't have been swimming with speared fish, especially in poor visibility. It was a case of mistaken identity — I was dressed in a black wet suit, looking like a seal, which is the shark's regular food. I'm willing to bet that if I had been wearing scuba gear and exhaling bubbles instead of carrying speared fish, the mako would have ignored me."

Treating the injury was not difficult, he says. "Whenever I go on a boat, I always carry a complete emergency first aid kit and a DAN Oxygen Unit. The worst part of this incident was being hounded by the media."

For many divers, a shark encounter would provide enough excitement for a lifetime, but for John, the greatest thrill may be yet to come. While diving in a remote site in a foreign country recently, John accidentally discovered a 200-year-old sunken Spanish galleon. With the help of a nautical archeological firm, he is currently working with a team of experts and government officials to obtain excavation permits.

Despite the wealth this wreck may one day yield, John isn't planning to trade in his truck for a limo. "Appreciating nature, traveling, diving and working underwater are what I love," John reaffirms.



Quiet man: John Regan's relaxed demeanor belies a life filled with adventure.