

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing  
**CASE:** GSAF 2001.08.31

**DATE:** Friday August 31, 2001

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean north of Grand Cay in the Northern Bahamas.

**NAME:** Nick Raich

**DESCRIPTION:** The diver is a 44-year-old male from West Palm Beach. He is 6' tall, weighs 225 lbs, and was wearing orange shorts, booties, black gloves, dark gray mask, dark blue fins, a gold chain (around neck) and a silver watch. He had no open wounds.

**SUPPORT BOAT:** Type not known

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** Sunny, mid 90s, 10-15 mph breeze.

**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter, August 25, 2001

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea surface temperature was 88°F and there was a light two-foot chop. The water was slightly murky with 20- to 30-foot underwater visibility. The tide was outgoing. There was a channel about two miles from the incident site.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** One mile

**DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE:** 10 to 12 feet

**TIME:** 13h30

**NARRATIVE:** Nick Raich had been spearfishing for about an hour. There was a second person in the water as well, free diving and spearfishing. The divers were about 20 metres apart. For the first 30 minutes, Nick did not see a fish to spear. He was next to a coral head (to his left), when he spotted and shot a hogfish.

As Nick was ascending with the fish (he was about five feet from the surface) he was hit in the back by the shark. "I mean, he ran into me so hard it almost knocked my mask off. I thought the boat hit me," he said. The shark hit one time and then swam through Nick's legs as he ascended, most likely to get the fish which was dropped together with the spear. The duration of the entire incident lasted



between two and three seconds. Once at the surface, Nick looked around but could not see the shark. Although the wound was bleeding, the shark did not return. Nick did not see the shark prior to the incident, nor did he see the shark swimming away.

**INJURY:** The wound consisted of two bite marks from upper (12.7 cm in length) and lower jaw (17.8 cm in length). The upper jaw wound was to the right shoulder blade, cutting into the surface areas of the teres major, infraspinatus and rhomboid major muscles adjacent to the right armpit cleft. The lower jaw inflicted a wound in the thoracolumbar area about 7 cm above the waistline.

**FIRST AID:** Administered at Walker's Cay, Abaco Islands, by Gary Adkison 30 minutes after the incident.

**TREATMENT:** Fourteen sutures were needed to close the lacerations to the upper torso.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Although Nick never saw the shark, the tooth imprints and size of the wound indicate the incident involved a bull shark, *Carcharhinus leucas*. Due to the large size of the wound (33 cm diameter), the size of the animal was estimated to be approximately three metres in length (measurement comparisons conducted by Dr. E. Ritter).

**COMMENT:** The shape of the wound indicates that the shark approached Nick with a fully open mouth. Both wounds, inflicted by upper and lower jaw, show a straight line. According to the normal shape of a bull shark's jaws, it appears the animal swam straight (no rotation along longitudinal axis) into Nick. The right palatoquadratum (upper jaw) caused the slight downward laceration in the shoulder blade area, and the right mandible (lower jaw, Meckel's cartilage) caused the horizontal lower laceration.

**CONCLUSION:** In two incidents in the Bahamas in 2001 involving bull sharks the divers were spearfishing hogfish, *Lachnolaimus maximus*, and were hit from behind while ascending.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Gary Adkison, Shark Education and Research Center, Walker's Cay, Abaco Islands, Bahamas.



