

**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing  
**CASE:** GSAF 2009.10.29.R  
**DATE:** Reported October 29, 2009  
**LOCATION:** The accident took place in the Indian Ocean at Vilanculos, Inhambane Province, Mozambique. 22°35'47"S, 35°6'45"E

**NAME:** Mark Rogotzki  
**DESCRIPTION:** He is owner of the Dive Factory in Johannesburg.

**BACKGROUND**

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was “clean” with 20 metres underwater visibility.

**DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT**

**SITE:** 15 metres



Mark Rogotzki with a 31kg ignoblis kingfish

**NARRATIVE:** Mark Rogotzki, Rob Allen and three other spearfisherman, plus the skipper, had spent approximately two hours at sea traveling to an isolated reef about 20 km south of the last island in the area. The reef rose from 30 to 35 metres to approximately 15 metres below the surface. Deciding the reef was worth diving, Mark entered the water followed by Rob Allen. The other three divers stayed onboard the boat, waiting to see what Mark and Rob thought about the site because the current was extremely strong and visibility was not good. Mark descended and identified the usual fish species that are commonly found where big game fish lurk. He passed through a school of baitfish and headed down to the reef below. He shot an eight-kg Kakaap, *Aprion virescens*, and ascended. When he reached the surface, he called to Rob who was 20 metres away who immediately swam straight to him.

“At 20 metres I could only see Mark when I looked out the water. I could only see Mark underwater when I was 10 metres from him,” said Rob. “At the time I did not know why he had called. I was thinking it could be because of a shark and he needed me to help fend it off his fish or, he had shot a bad shot and needed me to put a second spear into the fish or, there were more fish in his area and I might be able to get a shot at one. When I got closer and Mark came into view, the underwater visibility was between eight and ten metres, I only then saw his fish coming up directly below him. At this time the fish was still and had been shot well. All this time Mark was in an upright position, finning hard to stay on the surface while pulling the fish up as fast as possible.”

“At this stage I realized it must be a shark as Mark was pulling the fish up fast — not something he would be doing if it was a bad shot. A moment later, as I got a little closer and I was about to dive, the shark came into view. The shark was directly below the fish and coming up at full speed. My initial reaction was that I was still too far away to do anything about it and the shark seemed set on taking the fish at speed. I had witnessed this action many times before but this time this shark did not stop at the fish. He even

brushed the fish with his pectoral fin as he passed and continued up at full speed. The fish at this point was about seven to eight metres below the surface.”

“I then realized the shark was now heading straight at Mark. The initial position/approach was not to bite the foot, the shark was definitely aiming higher, possibly the thigh. At this stage Mark pulled up his legs as quickly as possible and the shark just grabbed/snapped at the nearest thing. It took two snaps, the first on the foot, the second a little lower on the rubber foot pocket and fibre blade.

“Then, as quick as he had come up, the shark turned and headed straight down just as fast. My worry now was he would go for the fish and pull down the gear, maybe with Mark entangled in the floatline. Mark by now had dropped everything and was swimming hard to the boat which was about eight to ten metres away. I made sure he was not entangled in his float line and also kept an eye on the area below us to see if the shark was coming back. Once Mark was safe in the boat I climbed out

“The other guys hauled the gear in after I was able to calm everyone down.. There was panic on the boat and it would not have helped the situation. We gave Mark a coke when he asked for one just after he had said he thought he was going into shock. I told him and everyone that the bite was not life threatening and we must just slow things down, retrieve the gear and then head back slowly.”

**INJURY:** The diver’s left ankle and foot were severely lacerated and tendons were severed.

**TREATMENT:** Another two hours elapsed before the boat reached the land. Divers Accident Network (DAN) evacuated the injured diver in a small jet aircraft with doctors onboard to South Africa. He was admitted to Sunninghill Netcare Hospital in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa for surgical repair of his injury. On November 2, 2009, Rob wrote, “Mark is back at home after undergoing a few operations and is talking about going back in the water but next time with a shark pod. He will need a lot of physiotherapy though as most of the tendons were cut through.”

**SPECIES:** The incident involved a Zambezi shark, *Carcharhinus leucas*. “The guys in the boat say they saw the shark shake Mark,” said Rob. “Personally I think it was Mark trying to get out the way. For the shark to have shaken him it would have had to hold on to the foot and then shake, I’m sure this would have meant the loss of his foot “

**COMMENTS BY ROB ALLEN:** “Three points/observations which, I think, caused the shark to attack Mark:

- 1) Mark was vertical in the water and kicking. The shark would have had a very small profile looking straight up at him compared to his apparent size with the long fins on in a side profile.
- 2) Mark was finning at the time to stay on the surface. I have seen Zambies rush into an area while the fish is struggling. As soon as the fish stops they lose interest, even when the fish is lowered back down to their level. On the way up the shark ignored the

now-dead fish (it had been shot well, spine broken, no movement) Mark's moving fins were the attraction, but not the target.

3) Mark had recently spray painted his fins with bright blue and silver stripes. The blades were held into the foot pocket by two large shiny stainless steel fender washers which looked like eyes.

Would any of the above made a difference? No idea. Personally I think Mark may have stood a better chance of trying to fend off the shark if he had pulled the fish up until he had got his gun into his hand and then held onto it to use as a tool to fend the shark off. The speed the shark came in at him though was so fast that even if he had the gun in his hand he may not have been able to use it/get it into position. The bite therefore could have been somewhere else on the body and could have very easily been fatal.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Rob Allen.

**NOTE:** Rob Allen, a former Natal Parks Board marine ranger, was the first person in both South Africa and Mozambique to tag whale sharks for the Shark Research Institute (SRI). In 1993, he developed and manufactured the tagging applicator and tags (which are deployed underwater), and piloted SRI's microlight. In 1996, Rob was also a member of the SRI team that trained David Rowat's divemasters in the Seychelles to spot and tag whale sharks, and piloted SRI's microlight there as well.

Rob founded and owns The Dive Factory in Durban which designs and manufactures specialized spearguns and sells spearfishing and freediving equipment. He is one of South Africa's premier spearfishermen and free divers.