

ACTIVITY: Hard hat diving

CASE: [GSAF 1853.09.28](#)

DATE: Wednesday September 28, 1853

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean at Morehead City, North Carolina, USA. 34.7°N, 76.8°W

NAME: Alfetto

DESCRIPTION: He was a commercial salvage diver, and a Spaniard.

NARRATIVE: The coasting vessel *Atlanta* was capsized in a squall on Thursday September 22, 1853 and sank just inside the bar. The owners of the craft contracted with a diving company to raise the vessel and recover her cargo. On the day after the incident, Alfetto described what happened:

“As you know we had made our fourth descent, and while my companion clambered into the vessel, I waited on the ground till he should attach the cords to draw something out. The pressure at that depth is not disagreeable at first but in a little while it began to affect my head, and flashes of light would appear to play around every object at which I looked. [*Ed. Note: The diver could be describing symptoms of nitrogen narcosis or exhaustion.*] I was just about to signal to be drawn up for a moment’s rest when I noticed a shadowy body moving at some distance above me and towards me.

“In a moment every fish had disappeared, the very crustacean lay still upon the sand, and the cuttlefish scurried away as fast as they could. I was not thinking of danger and my first thought was that it was the shadow of a passing boat. But suddenly a feeling of terror seized me, I felt impelled to flee from something, I knew not what, a vague horror seemed grasping after me such as a child fancies when leaving a darkened room. By this time the shadow had come nearer and taken shape. It scarcely needed a glance to show me that it was a man eater, and of the largest size. It was near enough for me to see it plainly, and there was nothing I could do but look at it, for had I signaled to be drawn up then it would have been certain death. All I could do was to remain still till it left. It lay off 20 or 25 feet, just outside the rigging of the ship, its body motionless, its fins barely stirring the water around its gills. It was a monster, as it was, but to add to the horror the pressure of the water upon my head made it appear as if pouring flames from its eyes and mouth, and every movement of its fins and tail seemed accompanied by a display of fireworks.

“I am sure the fish was 30 feet long, and so near that I could see its double row of white teeth. Involuntarily I shrunk closer to the side of the vessel. But my first movement betrayed my presence. I was the shining eyes fixed upon me, its tail quivered, as it darted at me like a streak of light. I shrunk closer to the side of the ship. I saw it turn on its side, its mouth open, and heard the teeth snap as it darted past me. It had missed me, but only for a moment. The sweep of its mighty tail had thrown me forward. I saw it turn, balance itself, and its tail quivered as it darted at me again. There was no escape. It turned on its back as it swooped down on me like a hawk on a sparrow.

“The cavernous jaws opened and the long shining teeth grated as they closed on my metal harness. It had me. I could feel its teeth grinding upon my copper breastplate as it tried to bite me in two; for fortunately it had caught me just across the middle where I was best protected. Having seized me it went tearing through the water. I could feel it bound forward with each stroke of its tail. Had it not been for my copper helmet my head would have been

torn off by the rush through the water. I was perfectly conscious, but somehow I felt no terror at all. There was only a feeling of numbness. No, not half so much terror as I feel now in recalling it. I wondered how long it would be before those teeth would crunch through, and whether they would strike first into my back or my breast. Then I thought of Maggie and the baby and wondered who would take care of them, and if she would ever know what had become of me. For I never dreamed of escape. My eyes rested upon the rows of teeth within a few inches of my face, and I even noticed the wrinkles in the shark's hide as it moved. All these thoughts passed through my brain in an instant, but in that time the connecting air tube had been snapped, and my head seemed ready to burst with pressure, while the monster's teeth kept crouching and grinding away upon my harness. Then I felt the cold water begin to pour in and heard the bubble, bubble, bubble, as the air escaped into the creature's mouth. I begun to hear great guns, and to see fireworks and rainbows and sunshine and all kinds of pretty things, then I thought I was floating away on a rosy summer cloud dreaming to the sound of sweet music. Then all became blank. The shark may have eaten me then at his leisure and I never would have been the wiser. Imagine my astonishment, then, when I opened my eyes on board this boat and saw all of you fellows around me. Yes, sir! I thought I was dead and ate up, sure!"

The author of the article, who was onboard the support boat, relates: "We felt the boat to which the air hose and cords were attached jerk and lurch violently, and we saw to our horror, one of the hose break off short at the pump, at the same time the other signaled to be drawn up. That there had been an accident we all knew, but what it was no one could say. No sooner was the man on deck than he told us. "Alfetto has been seized by a shark! A monster white shark!" Just as he was stepping out of the vessel to be drawn up he saw the shadowy form strike at him and dart away with Alfetto in his mouth. But scarcely had done speaking when Alfetto popped out of the water about 50 yards from the boat. We made for the spot immediately, and found him floating just below the surface, insensible and with several holes punched in the metallic part of his diving suit. We hastened with him to the large boat and after working over him for several hours had the pleasure of seeing him revive towards evening."

INJURY: No injury

DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT: The diver's copper breastplate and harness were bitten by the shark. "The sailors who had heard his story and saw the punched harness declare that it was the bubbling sound which he remembers to have heard which caused the fish to lose his hold, that the air escaping into the creature's mouth frightened the monster. The copper breastplate was too strong to be mashed entire, but the sharp teeth punched holes in it like a smith's drill might have done. Another fortunate circumstance, too, was the strap with Alfetto had fastened around his waist with the two weights attached had been bitten in two when the shark seized him, otherwise he would have sunk instead of coming to the surface, as he did when released. On the whole we considered it the most remarkable escape on record."

SPECIES: According to the press report (next page), the incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*.

SOURCE: Washington Post, October 7, 1883, page 2

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Clay Creswell, Global Shark Accident File

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IN THE JAWS OF A SHARK

The Thrilling Experience of a Diver On the Coast of North Carolina.

For THE SUNDAY POST.

The narrowest escape from a horrible death on record occurred a few days since on the coast of North Carolina, near the little town of Morehead. This escape of a diver from a most terrible fate, and the whole adventure, is more remarkable than any tale of fiction we ever heard.

The Atlanta, one of the best known coasting vessels in these parts, was capsized in a squall on September 22, and sunk just inside the bar. The owners of the craft contracted with a diving company to have her raised and to recover as much of her cargo as was still serviceable. It was while engaged in this work that a diver known as Alfetto, a Spaniard, had the adventure of which we speak, and of which we were in part a witness.

Attracted by that curiosity with which landmen always regard these amphibians, I had made Alfetto's acquaintance at the hotel and had found him much more intelligent than most of his class. He had been led to this life, so he told me, through the pure love of adventure. Upon his invitation I accompanied him on the morning of September 25 out to where the Atlanta lay. She was on her beam ends in about eight fathoms of water.

"It is a pretty rough life you divers lead," I said to Alfetto, as we seated ourselves in his boat.

"Yes, yes," said he, "it is a rough life we lead, and yet there is an excitement and romance about it that makes it strangely fascinating. We have strange experiences, sometimes. A man never gets quite used to being a dozen fathoms under water, and the uncertainty of what the dark shadows are which move so noiselessly around him will make the bravest a little nervous sometimes, for it gets dark rapidly as we descend, and all objects appear shadowy."

"How deep down can you go, Alfetto?" I inquired of him.

"Well," he replied, "I have been, several times, as deep as twelve fathoms, and once in Lake Huron I was fifteen fathoms under the water, but I will never go that far down again. What was I after, you ask? Oh, it was a safe full of money that had gone down in a burning steamer. In great depths like that the pressure is terrible, but, when in a few fathoms only, the sensation is one of lightness, all sense of weight is gone, we can move ourselves, harness and all, as lightly as that piece of cork on the water there. The fish and ink-squids and all kind of curious and horrible looking creatures will gather around us in shoals to find out what new monster it is that has invaded their domain. For a diver in his armor is not a pretty thing. Our greatest enemy is the shark. Usually they are afraid of our strange shapes, and simply hover round showing their rows of long, gleaming white teeth, as they dart at the smaller and less lucky fish which always swarm around a wreck. But occasionally a large white shark, a regular man-eater, comes along. He is always hungry and afraid of nothing. Then the diver must be on his guard, for there is danger. But the white shark is quite rare in this latitude."

By this time we had reached the spot where the Atlanta lay. My acquaintance and his comrade were soon attired in their diving suits and lowered over the side of the vessel into the water.

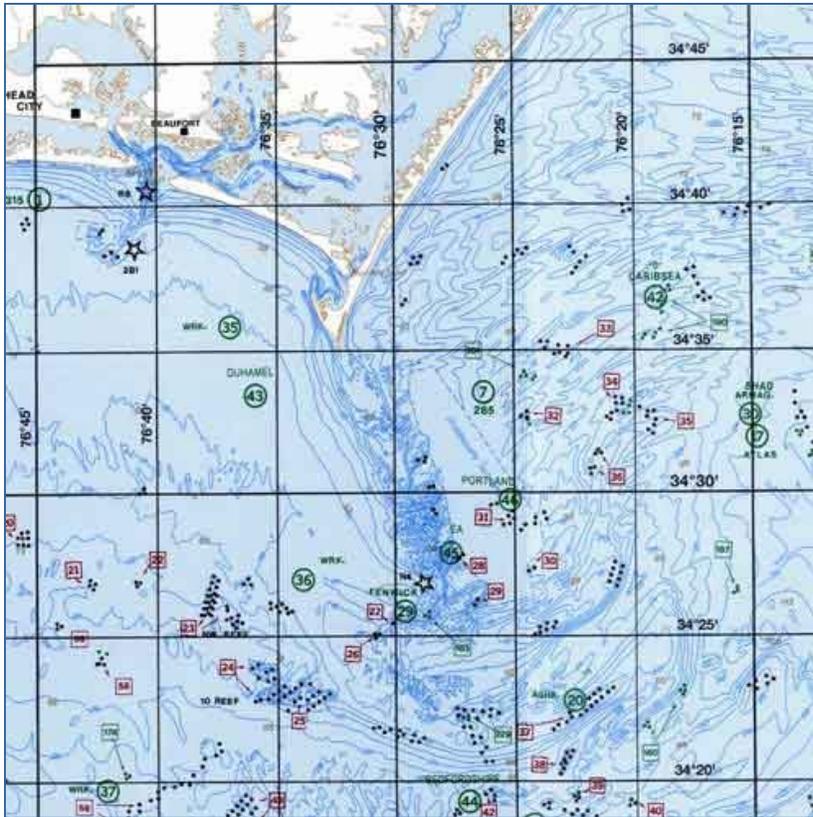
They had made several successful descents, attaching the cords to various articles of value, and then coming up for rest, when on the fourth trip suddenly we felt the boat to which the air hose and cords were attached jerk and lurch violently, and we saw, to our horror, one of the hose break off short at the pumps, at the same time the other signalled to be drawn up. That there had been an accident we all knew, but what it was no one could say. No sooner was the man on deck than he told us. Alfetto had been seized by a shark! A monster white shark! Just as he was stepping out of the vessel to be drawn up he saw the shadowy form strike at him and dart away with Alfetto in his mouth. But scarcely had he done speaking when Alfetto popped out of the water about fifty yards from the boat. We made for the spot immediately, and found him floating just below the surface, insensible and with several holes punched in metallic parts of his diving suit.

We hastened with him to the large boat and after working over him for several hours had the pleasure of seeing him revive towards evening. The next day he told us how it had happened. But we will let him tell it in his own words:

"As you know, we had made our fourth descent, and while my companion clambered into the vessel, I waited on the ground till he should attach the cords to draw something out. The pressure of water at that depth is not disagreeable at first but in a little while it began to affect my head, and flashes of light would appear to play around every object at which I looked. I was just about to signal to be drawn up for a moment's rest when I noticed a shadowy body moving at some distance above me and towards me. In a moment every fish had disappeared, the very crustacean lay still upon the sand, and the cuttle-fish scurried away as fast as they could. I was not thinking of danger and my first thought was that it was the shadow of a passing boat. But suddenly a feeling of terror seized me, I felt impelled to flee from something, I knew not what, a vague horror seemed grasping after me such as a child fancies when leaving a darkened room. By this time the shadow had come nearer and taken shape. It scarcely needed a glance to show me that it was a man-eater, and of the largest size. It was near enough for me to see it plainly, and there was nothing I could do but to look at it, for had I signalled to be drawn up then it would have been certain death. All I could do was to remain still till it left. It lay off twenty or twenty-five feet, just outside the rigging of the ship, its body motionless, its fins barely stirring the water about its gills. It was a monster, as it was, but to add to the horror the pressure of the water upon my head made it appear as if pouring flames from its eyes and mouth, and every movement of its fins and tail seemed accompanied by a display of fireworks. I am sure the fish was thirty feet long, and so near that I could see its double row of white teeth. Involuntarily I shrank closer to the side of the vessel. But my first movement betrayed my presence. I was the shining eyes fixed upon me, its tail quivered, as it darted at me like a streak of light. I shrank closer to the side of the ship. I saw it turn on its side, its mouth open, and heard the teeth snap as it darted by me. It had missed me, but

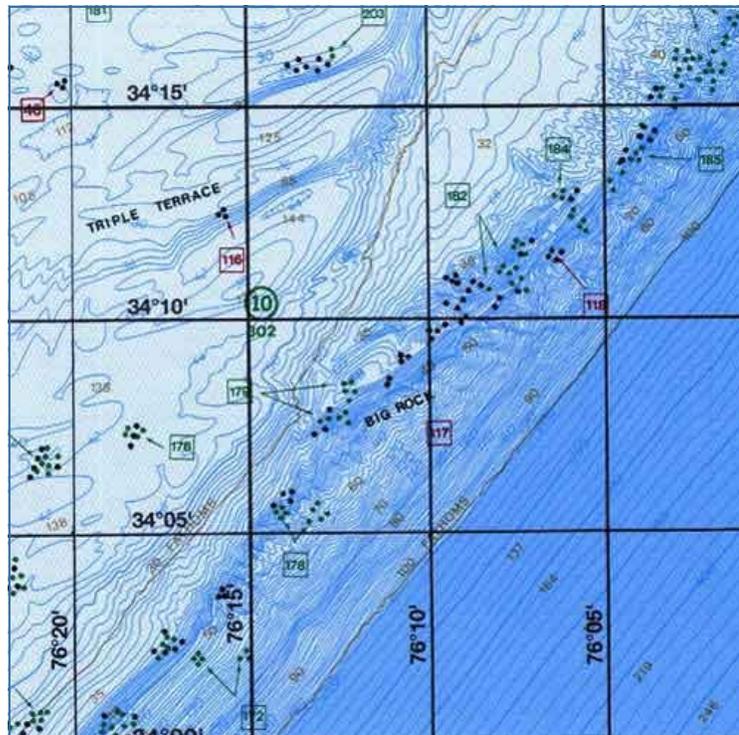
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Nearshore Detail

Offshore Detail



NATURAL BOTTOM SITES

	SITE COORDINATES	TYPE	DEPTH
1	34 38.52 77 00.76	LB. LOW RELIEF*	46'
	34 38.31 77 00.91	LB. LOW RELIEF*	46'
2	34 37.79 77 01.76	LB. POST REEF	50'
	34 38.22 77 01.90	LB.	50'
3	34 35.24 77 03.91	LB. STATION RK.	45'
4	34 34.19 77 09.00	LB. BEAR RK.	50'
5	34 32.92 77 08.99	LB. LOW RELIEF*	55'
6	34 33.09 77 03.31	LB. 45 MIN. RK.	55'
	34 33.44 77 03.86	LB.	55'
7	34 35.02 76 56.93	LB. LOW RELIEF*	60'
	34 35.34 76 56.74	LB. LOW RELIEF*	60'
	34 35.37 76 57.11	LB. LOW RELIEF*	60'
8	34 34.13 76 55.01	LB.	55'
9	34 29.85 77 21.93	LB. N. RIVER BKS	30'
	34 29.09 77 23.16	LB. HIGH RELIEF*	30'
10	34 31.79 77 18.17	LB. N. RIVER BKS	30'
11	34 30.58 77 14.67	LB. MOD. RELIEF*	40'
12	34 29.42 77 16.37	LB. OUTCROP	45'
13	34 29.70 77 10.80	LB.	55'
14	34 31.60 77 05.81	LB. LOST RKS.	60'
	34 32.04 77 06.08	LB. LOST RKS.	60'
15	34 29.98 76 60.00	LB.	60'
16	34 31.56 76 55.35	LB. LOW RELIEF*	60'
17	34 29.72 76 53.48	LB. MOD. RELIEF*	70'
18	34 32.66 76 47.85	LB.	60'
19		LB.	70'
20	34 28.89 76 45.27	LB. MOD. RELIEF*	70'
21	34 27.14 76 42.49	LB.	80'
22		LB.	70'
23	34 26.28 76 37.48	LB. NW REEF	70'
	34 27.27 76 37.59	LB. NW REEF	70'
	34 26.78 76 37.33	LB. NW REEF	70'
	34 25.78 76 36.66	LB. NW REEF	70'
	34 25.66 76 36.41	LB. NW REEF	70'
24	34 24.01 76 35.73	LB. NW END	60'
	34 23.33 76 35.66	LB. SW END	60'
	34 23.32 76 34.62	LB. HIGH RELIEF*	60'
	34 22.85 76 34.86	LB. HIGH RELIEF*	60'
25	34 22.92 76 33.53	LB. E END	80'
	34 23.29 76 35.54	LB. S END	70'
	34 23.60 76 34.71	LB. N END	85'
		LB. OUTCROP	55'

ARTIFICIAL REEFS AND WRECKS

*Lat/Lon numbers with three last digits are differential GPS surveyed.

1)	AR315 (DEPTH 50') "ATLANTIC BEACH REEF"		
	440' Liberty Ship	3440.350	7644.755
	80' Barge	3440.400	7644.483
	F-4 Aircraft	3440.350	7644.650
	2 A-4 Aircraft	3440.366	7644.650
	Concrete Rubble	3440.383	7644.658
2)	AR320 (DEPTH 50') "CLIFTON NOSS REEF"		
	140' Ship "Novelty"	3439.483	7648.433
	Bridge Rubble	3439.483	7648.450
		3439.400	7648.450
		3439.516	7648.466
3)	AR345 (DEPTH 60') "SWANSBORO REEF"		
	Pipes (East Group)	3432.250	7658.450
		3432.216	7658.383
		3432.216	7658.416
	Pipes (NW Group)	3432.300	7658.533
	Train Cars	3432.233	7658.500
	8 Concrete Units	3432.400	7658.466
4)	AR330 (DEPTH 80') "CHAPIN REEF"		
	320' Ship "Indra"	3433.700	7651.100
	160 Concrete Pipes	3433.583	7651.200
	41 Concrete Pipes	3433.616	7651.200
	Dome Units	3433.766	7651.250
		3433.766	7651.250
		3433.733	7651.333
	2 C-130 Aircraft	3433.633	7651.383
	F-4 Aircraft	3433.633	7651.366
	43 Can Units	3433.700	7651.400
	Train Car	3433.555	7651.366
		3433.555	7651.316
		3433.500	7651.266