

ACTIVITY: Scuba diving

CASE: **GSAF 1985.02.18**

DATE: Monday February 18, 1985

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean off the west end of San Miguel Island, one of the Channel Islands, Santa Barbara County, California, USA.

34°03'N, 120°26.3'W

NAME: Chris Masshos

DESCRIPTION: A 29-year-old male. He wore a two-tone blue and black wetsuit with black gloves, mask and swim fins, a single air tank and regulator, and a green game bag.

SUPPORT BOAT: *Truth*, a charter boat

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was clear

MOON PHASE: Waning Crescent, 2% of the Moon's visible disk was illuminated. New Moon, February 19, 1985.

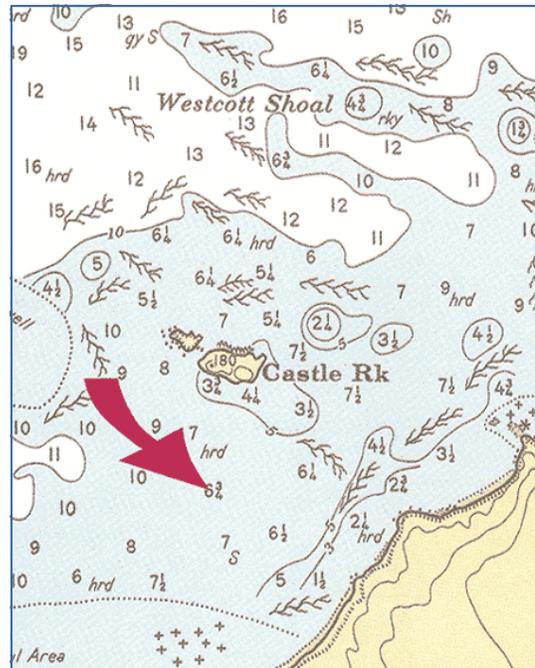
SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm and underwater visibility was in excess of 13 metres.

ENVIRONMENT: Huge populations of pinnipeds and sea birds San Miguel and its surrounding offshore rocks, such as Castle Rock, for breeding, nesting, and resting. Castle Rock lies 100 yards off St. Miguel Island. A week prior to this incident, several divers observed a large white shark in the same area.

DEPTH OF WATER: 48 feet, but the incident took place about three feet above the sea floor.

NARRATIVE: Chris Massahos was hunting California spiny lobster. He was swimming close to the bottom, over a nine-foot-wide ledge, when his attention was drawn to a large object at the extreme edge of his visibility. At first he thought one of the northern elephant seals, *Mirounga angustirostris*, or California sea lions he had seen earlier near the boat was coming in to check him out. However, he was soon able to distinguish the outline of a huge shark. It kept swimming slowly and deliberately toward him. When the fish was about three metres from Massahos, he was able to identify it as a white shark, about six metres in length. It had adjusted its course, turning slightly so that it swam parallel with the diver. The shark swam with Massahos for about 10 minutes, then turned and swam off.

Abandoning his search for lobster, the diver moved along the bottom toward his boat, continually scanning for the shark. He had almost reached the location of the boat when he ran out of air. He immediately surfaced, yelled for help, then placed his face back in the water to try to locate the shark. Massahos saw the shark rapidly approaching from below, so he quickly curled up into a ball. He was struck on his right shoulder by the shark's head. The force of the impact spun him around. "It felt like being hit by a car going 20 mph," he later remarked. Massahos was brought on board the boat without further incident. The shark was not observed by any members of the dive party after it struck Massahos.



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INJURY: The diver sustained several bruises to his back and right shoulder.

DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT: Parallel deep gashes were scored into the surface of his scuba tank. It is believed that these gashes were caused by several of the shark's teeth while its mouth was slightly agape.

SPECIES: According to the diver, the incident involved a white shark about six metres in length.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Ralph Collier