

ACTIVITY: Scuba diving
CASE: **GSF 1989.10.14**
DATE: Saturday October 14, 1989
LOCATION: The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Kahe Point, O'ahu, Hawaii, USA.

NAME: Ray Mehl, Jr.
DESCRIPTION: He was a 33-year-old male from Montana. He was novice diver and had nearly a full tank of air.



BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, October 14, 1989
SEA CONDITIONS: Underwater visibility was 25 to 30 feet.
ENVIRONMENT: The dive site is also known as Electric Beach for the power plant at the shoreline. About 200 yards offshore there is an underground pipeline that the electric company uses to cool down their systems. After cooling, the warmed salt water exits a large pipe resulting in the creation of reef about 20 feet high. Unusual behavior by parrotfish was exhibited just before the diver disappeared.
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 750 feet
DEPTH OF WATER: 27 feet
TIME: 16h30

NARRATIVE: Ray Mehl, Jr. and his buddy were diving near the cooling water discharge pipe of the Kahe Point Power Plant when he disappeared 15 minutes into the shallow dive. His dive buddy conducted a circle search but could not locate him.

His body, minus head and an arm was found by fire rescue divers 200 feet to the west the following morning. Before the body could be recovered, a large shark appeared and consumed most of remains. Small pieces of tissue and some of the diver's equipment was later recovered.

SPECIES: The incident involved a large tiger shark.

SOURCES: Washington Post, October 17, 1989
Spokane Chronicle, January 17, 1990
Jim Borg, pages 77-78
Leighton Taylor, pages 108-109

Did shark make her a widow?

Associated Press

HONOLULU — A Montana woman who says her husband was eaten by a shark is battling red tape to have him declared dead, but the city medical examiner said he is following standard procedure.

Ray Mehl, a 32-year-old carpenter, was scuba diving with friends off Oahu Island's west coast when he disappeared Oct. 14.

The next day, divers searching the ocean spotted a decapitated body with the left arm missing. Before they could recover it, however, the body was devoured by a 12- to 14-foot tiger shark. Divers later recovered a small piece of human tissue and some diving equipment that had been loaned to Mehl.

Authorities never determined whether Mehl drowned before he was attacked by a shark or sharks.

Three months later, Pam Mehl, who has since moved from Hoodport, Wash., to Stevensville, Mont., has been unable to get official confirmation of her husband's death.

"Ray had no insurance, and without a death certificate, I can't apply for Social Security benefits," Mrs. Mehl said Monday in a telephone interview. "I can't even sell his motorcycle without power of attorney."

Mrs. Mehl said her husband went to Hawaii, where friends had promised him a good-paying job, on Oct. 1. She had packed and was preparing to move to Hawaii with her

three daughters when she was told her husband was dead.

Honolulu Medical Examiner Alvin Omori said he will not issue a death certificate unless he is certain Mehl is dead.

"We need definite proof for the protection of the public," Omori said. "We have to be careful because there are documented examples where people have faked deaths."

Omori's office recently sent the tissue to a Connecticut laboratory for genetic analysis. If the lab identifies the DNA, Mehl's parents will be asked to provide blood samples to determine whether there is a genetic match.

Omori said the chances of identifying Mehl's DNA are slim, since the test is still in the experimental stage.

"But it's all we can do," Omori said. "We only had a portion of the large intestine and nothing to compare."

Mrs. Mehl's only other option is to file a petition in state court to have her husband declared dead, a process that normally requires a seven-year waiting period, Omori said.

If the court finds strong evidence that Mehl is dead, it could waive the waiting period and issue what is known as a presumptive finding, Omori said.

Mrs. Mehl said she is on welfare and cannot afford to petition the court.

Honolulu attorney Patricia Napier, who has been assisting Mrs. Mehl at no cost, said the petition process would cost \$300 in out-of-pocket expenses.

"I can't blame the medical examiner's office if they don't want to make a determination, but somebody has to," Napier said. "The judicial process is expensive for someone who has no money."