

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** **GSFAF 1992.11.25**

**DATE:** Wednesday 25 November 1992

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Atlantic ocean about a mile north of Sebastian Inlet, Indian River County, Florida, USA. 27°51.6'N, 80°26.9'W

**NAME:** Matthew Robertson Paul

**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 19-year-old male from Largo. The surfer is 5'7" tall, weighs 157 pounds and had no injuries prior to the accident. He was wearing board shorts and a yellow surfboard leash.

**SURFBOARD:** The surfer was using a 6'2" Spectrum green trifin board with red fins.



## **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was sunny and the air temperature was about 70°F.

**MOON PHASE:** Waxing crescent with 2% of the Moon's visible disk illuminated. New Moon on November 24, 1992 at 04h12 Eastern Standard Time.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was green. Sea surface temperature was approximately 72°F and underwater visibility was five to 10 feet.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Nobody was on the beach and two other surfers were in the water, but only one surfer (Justin Poppa) was within 15 to 30 feet of Matthew. Bait fish were in the area and Matthew observed birds diving into the water.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 50 yards

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 50 feet

**TIME:** 07h30

**NARRATIVE:** Matthew Paul and his friend, Justin Poppa, entered the water at about 07h20 and paddled seaward. They had been in the water just 10 minutes. Matthew was sitting on his board, waiting for a wave and facing shoreward, when a shark grabbed his forearm, pulling him off his board and taking him beneath the surface.

Justin saw the shark's tail slapping back and forth, and then saw Matthew climb back onto his board, bleeding. He told Matthew to grab his ankle and paddled back to the beach.

**INJURY:** There were deep lacerations to the patient's right arm and hand.

**FIRST AID:** On the beach, the patient wrapped a towel tightly around his arm. The two surfers jumped in the car and called an ambulance which met them halfway to the hospital. Some 30 minutes elapsed from the time of the incident to the surfer's arrival by ambulance at the hospital.

**TREATMENT:** At Memorial Hospital, 57 stitches were needed to repair the injury, and the patient was discharged. He subsequently underwent additional surgical procedures, one to remove a rock that also had worked its way into the wound and one to try to repair the

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nerve damage to his right little finger.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** X-rays revealed three of the shark's teeth in the surfer's hand: two were embedded in the little finger, and another was near the thumb. The teeth were identified as those of a six- to seven-foot blacktip shark.

**SOURCES:** Matthew Paul; St. Petersburg Times, November 27, 1992, page 1.B and November 26, 1993, page 1.1.1.3; Orlando Sentinel, November 28, 1992, page B.3; Fort Pierce Tribune, November 30, 1992.

**NOTE:** Matthew reported that he felt pain immediately upon being bitten. He reported that there were "a lot of bait fish in the area" and believes that the shark "was just cruising around and made a mistake...the shark did not know what I was."

*Sarasota Herald-Tribune  
Saturday November 28, 1992, page 6B*

## **Shark attack injures surfer**

**A surfer attacked by a shark off Sebastian Inlet on Florida's east coast needed 50 stitches to close the gashes on his arm and hand, and X-rays revealed two shark teeth left behind.**

**Matthew Paul, who turned 19 on Thanksgiving, said he was paddling in the surf with Justin Poppa the day before when a shark grabbed him by the forearm and dragged him off his board.**

**Poppa said he saw a tail slapping back and forth, then watched as Paul climbed back on his board, bleeding from deep gashes.**

**The two Largo friends got to the beach 25 yards away, wrapped a towel around Paul's arm and took off for the nearest hospital, using a cellular phone to call along the way for an ambulance to meet them.**

**X-rays revealed the teeth, one embedded in the little finger and one near the thumb. Paul was sent home after minor hand surgery.**

### **Shark Bites Surfer's Arm Leaves 2 Teeth in his Hand**

A surfer attacked by a shark off Sebastian Inlet needed 50 stitches to close the gashes on his arm and hand, and X-rays revealed two shark teeth left behind.

Matthew Paul, 19, of Largo, said he was paddling in the surf with Justin Poppa Wednesday when a shark grabbed him by the forearm and dragged him off his board.

Poppa said he saw a tail slapping back and forth, then watched as Paul climbed back on his board, bleeding from deep gashes.

X-rays revealed the teeth, one embedded in the little finger and one near the thumb. Paul was sent home after minor hand surgery.

**SOURCE:** Orlando Sentinel, November 28, 1992, page B3

# Shark attacks Largo surfer

■ Matthew Paul is surfing near Sebastian Inlet when a shark bites his arm.

By SUE LANDRY  
Times Staff Writer

**LARGO** — It was 7:45 a.m. when the two friends from Largo carried their surfboards into the water at a favorite spot about a mile north of Sebastian Inlet on the east coast of Florida.

Matthew Paul and his friend, Justin Poppa, had been there many times before. Usually, it was crowded. This day, the day before Thanksgiving, they were alone.

They paddled out. Poppa got to a good spot first and turned his board around. He watched as Paul saw a good wave and started to turn his board to get in the right position.

Paul never saw what hit him. But Poppa saw it and could

hardly believe it.

The smooth head. The wide mouth. The teeth. Shark!

The powerful fish grabbed Paul by the forearm and dragged him from his board. Poppa could see only his friend's head. On the other side of the surfboard, he could see a tail slapping back and forth.

Then, as quickly as it had started, it stopped. The shark let go, and Paul managed to climb onto his board again.

Paul thought at first maybe it was a stingray. But when he pulled his arm from the water and saw deep gashes and blood, he knew.

"Justin, watch out! There's a shark," he called out.

"I know," Poppa called back as he paddled as fast as he could to his friend.

Paul couldn't paddle, so Poppa told his friend to grab his ankle and started paddling to shore.

Please see **SHARK 10B**



Times photo — SCOTT KEELER

**Matthew Paul and Justin Poppa were surfing when a shark attacked Matthew. It let go, and they sprinted for shore.**