

ACTIVITY: Diving

CASE: GSAF 1996.07.04.a

DATE: Thursday July 4, 1996

LOCATION: The incident took place south of Cat Cay in the Bahama Islands.

NAME: Michael Beach

DESCRIPTION: The diver is a 24-year-old male.

SUPPORT BOAT: *Pirate's Lady*, a 60-foot sailing vessel registered in Miami Springs, Florida.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 83% of the Moon was illuminated.

ENVIRONMENT: The Cat Cays are two islands: North Cat Cay and South Cat Cay, approximately 10 miles south of Bimini

NARRATIVE: The incident took place during a Blackbeard's Cruise shark dive. When the divers were gathered in a semi-circle with their backs to the reef the divemaster swam down with fish on spear, implanted the spear in the sand, and moved off. On this particular occasion, the man got between the bait and a shark and was inadvertently bitten.

At 12h30, the US Coast Guard received a call for help from the *Pirate's Lady*. The Coast Guard dispatched a helicopter from Miami with a medical corpsman on board. The chopper picked up the patient at Cat Cay where the *Pirate's Lady* had docked, and arrived in Miami shortly after 14h00.

INJURY: The diver sustained a six- to eight-inch laceration to his left calf.

TREATMENT: The patient was treated at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, Florida. The injuries required 400 stitches, and he spent a month at Jackson Memorial and eight months in physical therapy.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Said to involve a grey reef shark.

NOTE: Subsequent reports said the incident took place while he was hand-feeding the shark, and after this incident hand-feeding of the sharks was discontinued.

REPORTED BY: Gail Nansen & Dave McGee



diver's leg in Bahamas Water mishap one of several

26/5/2 Howell

Shark bites diver in leg off Cat Cay

By DAVID LYONS
Herald Staff Writer

A diver had a holiday excursion to the Bahamas cut short Thursday when a shark bit him in his leg as he explored the waters off Cat Cay east of Miami, the Coast Guard said.

Michael Beach, 24, was airlifted to Jackson Memorial Hospital, where he underwent surgery for a six- to eight-inch gash in his left leg, a spokeswoman for the hospital said.

The shark bite was one of several water accidents that kept Dade firefighters and emergency room crews busy on the Independence Day holiday. A 36-year-old man and a 55-year-old woman were in critical condition Thursday after boating mishaps, and a water-bike collision left a 14-year-girl with minor injuries.

Spokeswoman Eunice Dever-

PLEASE SEE SHARK, 2B

SHARK, FROM 1B

aux said Beach, whose hometown was unavailable, was in stable condition and very "talkative" with his doctors after his arrival back in Miami, where the trip originated. Beach even asked if he could have his wound photographed for posterity. But hospital rules prevented it.

Petty Officer Scott Carr said the Coast Guard received a call for help about 12:30 p.m. from the 60-foot sailing vessel *Pirate's Lady*, registered in Miami Springs. Beach and an unidentified companion were about five miles south of Cat Cay, which is roughly 40 to 45 miles east of Miami.

The Coast Guard dispatched a helicopter from Miami with a medical corpsman on board. En route, the Coast Guard instructed Beach's friend how to properly apply pressure to the leg to slow the bleeding. The chopper picked up Beach at Cat Cay, where the *Pirate's Lady* had docked, and arrived in Miami shortly after 2 p.m.

Carr said he could not recall a shark-bite case in the Miami area this year. The first attack in Florida this year came in Volusia County when a surfer was bitten by a two-to-three-foot shark off Ponce Inlet. There were 29 shark attacks in Florida last year, none fatal.

In other incidents, a 55-year-old boater was airlifted from

Elliott Key to Mercy Hospital around noon after suffering an apparent stroke. She was admitted to the hospital in critical condition, a Mercy official said. The patient's name was not released.

Just before 5 p.m., two Georgia teens escaped serious injury when the water bikes their mother rented for them collided some 300 feet from the beach behind Key Biscayne's Sonesta Beach Hotel.

A 14-year-old girl was stationary on one water bike when her 17-year-old brother veered his craft toward hers in an attempt to splash her, police said. The brother's water bike struck his sister's leg, and she was taken to Mercy Hospital with a suspected fracture. Doctors at Mercy determined otherwise, and she was soon released. The horseplay occurred close to shore, within the personal-watercraft exclusion zone, police said.

Almost 30 minutes later, a 36-year-old guest at the Sheraton Bal Harbour Hotel was piloting a kayak some 75-yards from shore in the 9900 block of Collins Avenue when he fell overboard. It appeared he was a poor swimmer, police said.

A family member and another person managed to pull the victim to shore. Paramedics rushed the man to Miami Heart Institute, where he was listed in critical condition. His name was not released.

Miami Beach Shark Victim Defends Sharks

Miami Beach dive-boat captain Michael Beach has always admired sharks as a primordial link to a lost age. "They're so primitive, so unevolved, and so unchanged," he explains. "When you see one in the wild, you realize you're seeing something very special."

So on dive tours, he used to like to feed the sea beasts in front of clients as "a way to dispel classic myths about sharks being these brutal monsters."

It didn't turn out that way. He was *hand-feeding* gray reef sharks on a boat off Bimini in 1996 when one apparently determined Beach's bait was too "fishy" and went for his left calf. The captain tried to pry away the shark's teeth with his hands, impaling a few fingers in the process. The whole attack took ten seconds, but Beach lost one-third of his blood, required 400 stitches, and spent a month at Jackson Memorial and eight months in physical therapy.

Beach, a conservationist who has a doctorate in maritime history and underwater archaeology, felt a surprising emotion as he recovered: guilt. "I instantly realized that my shark bite would be used as further proof that these animals are villainous," says Beach, who has recovered but might face muscle atrophy. "In fact, I was the one going against nature by hand-feeding the sharks."

He winces at the term *shark attack*: "I call myself a 'shark-bite survivor' or a 'shark-accident survivor' because sharks never attack people. It's people that invade sharks' territory."

He declined offers from the Discovery Channel and Oprah to sell video of the, uh, bite. He didn't want it used as propaganda. And Beach recently joined eight other survivors, organized by the Pew Environmental Group, on Capitol Hill to lobby legislators to pass the Shark Conservation Act of 2009, introduced by Sen. John Kerry. It would close loopholes related to "finning," the brutal practice of slicing off live sharks' fins for soup. "It's an unbelievably cruel process," Beach explains. "You cut the fins off and throw the carcasses overboard. Sharks breathe by moving through the water, so it usually takes a couple of hours to die."

SOURCE: Gus Garcia-Roberts, August 10 2009
http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/riptide/2009/08/miami_beach_shark_victim_defen.php