

**ACTIVITY:** Free diving for abalone

**CASE:** [GSAF 1996.08.13](#)

**DATE:** Tuesday August 13, 1996

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean on the south side of Bird Rock, at Tomales Point in Marin County north of San Francisco, California, USA. 38°13.7'N; 122°59.7'W.

**NAME:** Colum Tinley

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 36-year-old male.

**BOAT:** A four-metre inflatable Avon boat.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** The sky was overcast and foggy, and the air temperature was about 16°C.

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Crescent, 1% of the Moon was illuminated. New Moon on 14 August 1996.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was calm with a 0.5- to one-metre ground swell. Underwater visibility was five metres and water temperature was 12°C, estimated.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The ocean floor was primarily rocky, with some scattered short-stature kelps.

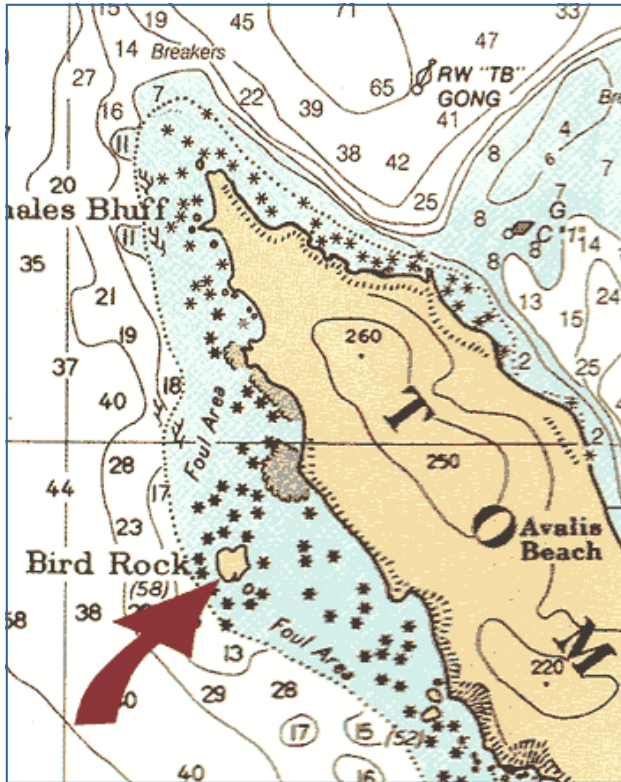
**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 30 metres

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Five to six fathoms

**TIME:** 11h15

**NARRATIVE:** Colum Tinley, Karol Knox and Charles Wilson had spent the morning riding the flood tide into Tomales Bay, scouting for California halibut, *Paralichthys californicus*. They experienced a number of unsuccessful passes through the mouth of Tomales Bay and four fruitless exploratory dives off the east side of Bird Rock. Undaunted, the persistent abalone hunters moved their inflatable boat to the south side of the rock.

Tinley rolled off the starboard side of the boat and proceeded to the bottom, where he collected two abalone. He surfaced on the starboard side of the inflatable, between the boat and Bird Rock. There he measured a suspected "clicker abalone" (under 18 centimeters legal size). After confirming the legal size of the suspect abalone, Tinley dived to a depth of about three fathoms, where he noticed something to his left. The diver had been in the water about five minutes. He quickly recognized the silhouette of a large white shark, four to five metres in length, below him in the water column. The shark abruptly turned and charged upward toward the diver. Within a heartbeat, the shark held Tinley firmly in its jaws as it continued its upward trajectory. Instinctively, Tinley had thrown his hands out in front of his body to ward off the impending attack. He recalled, "It happened so damn fast I don't remember my position in the shark's mouth, or even remember any feeling of pain or pressure." Within two metres of the surface, the shark repurchased its hold on the diver,



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much as a dog plays tug-of-war with an old sock. The shark released the diver abruptly and swam off.

**INJURY:** The diver sustained five lacerations to the left shoulder involving the deep tissue, six lacerations to the left forearm, two lacerations to his left hand, and a large cut to the left side of his lower abdomen..

**FIRST AID:** Tinley quickly swam the five metres to reach the inflatable, where he was helped aboard. Once on board, Tinley, a registered trauma-room nurse, began assessing his own injuries. A hand-held VHF marine radio was used to place an emergency "mayday" call over channel 16. The USCG informed the caller that its helicopter was currently on call and would not be able to transport the injured diver to a hospital for some time. Because of this delay, the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department helicopter, *Henry One*, was dispatched to Tomales Point at 11h38 hours, arriving on the scene at 11h55 hours. Tinley was placed aboard and airlifted to Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital in Santa Rosa, arriving at 12h29 hours.

**TREATMENT:** After he was admitted to the hospital's trauma room, it was quickly determined that Tinley's blood pressure was low and he was in a state of shock. Several hours of surgery was required to repair the damage to Tinley's nerves, ligaments, tendons, vascular vessels, and the soft tissue of his shoulder, arm, hand, and abdomen. During the operation, surgeon James Harwood removed three small tooth fragments from the laceration in the diver's left shoulder. In October 1996, Tinley underwent a surgical nerve graft to repair a severed posterior interosseous nerve, returning about 90 percent of normal function to his left hand.

**SPECIES:** The tooth fragments retrieved from Tinley's shoulder confirmed his identification of the species involved as a white shark. They also assisted in determining that the shark was approximately six metres in length.

**NOTE:** This was the ninth white shark incident from the Tomales Point "recurring location."



**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier