



ACTIVITY: Scuba diving

CASE: [GSAF 2016.06.24](#)

DATE: Friday June 24, 2016

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Caribbean Sea at Isla de la Providencia, San Andres Isles, Colombia.

13°22.690'N, 83°931' W

NAME: Dr. Arturo Velez

DESCRIPTION: He is a 59-year-old radiologist, an attending at Hospital Clinica del Country in Bogota, Colombia. He is 5'9" and weighs 189 lb. He was wearing a white long-sleeve shirt, multicolored swim trunks, red mask, snorkel, blue fins, snorkel, scuba tank and buoyancy compensator. He was also wearing a 2 cm silver whale tail on a silver necklace. He had no injuries before entering the sea.



Dr. Arturo Velez

SUPPORT BOAT: A yellow fiberglass dive boat with a single outboard engine.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a warm sunny day. The air temperature was 30°C [86°F] and there was a light 10-knot NE breeze.

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 81% of the Moon was illuminated. Full Moon, June 20, 2016.

SEA CONDITIONS: The estimated sea temperature was about 28°C [82.5°F].

ENVIRONMENT: The archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia while geographically located near Nicaragua, politically it is part of Colombia. The incident took place on a sloping coral reef with occasional sandy patches. The reef ranges in depth from 30 to 120 feet.

DISTANCE FROM BOAT: 200 feet

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 1.5 nautical miles
DISTANCE FORM ROCKS OR PIER: 1.8 nautical miles
DEPTH OF WATER: 40 feet
TIME: 11h00

NARRATIVE: Dr. Arturo Velez and his wife were sailing from mainland Colombia to Serrana Bank, Providencia and San Andrés islands. At Isla de la Providencia, they stopped to dive at site popular because of shark sightings.

It was a two-tank dive. The first dive was to 80 feet. There was no spearfishing during this dive and the many reef sharks swimming around and among the divers appeared very relaxed.

The second dive was on a shallower part of the reef. There were large schools of creole wrasses. From the start of the dive there were at least 10 reef sharks present. At this time, Dr. Velez had been in the water for about 90 minutes. Fifteen minutes into the dive the divemaster speared a lionfish* and fed it to the nearest shark from his spear. A couple of minutes later the divemaster speared another lionfish and repeated the process. At that time Dr. Velez had been in the water for about 90 minutes and was 20 feet away watching the scene. Three divers were within 10 feet of him when he saw a third big lionfish and started to point his hand in its direction. At that moment the shark came from behind and bit his right hand. Instinctively, he pulled his hand it free. "I am almost sure the shark mistook my hand for one of the lionfish being speared," he said.

INJURY: The patient sustained a severe injury to the skin and tendons of his right hand.

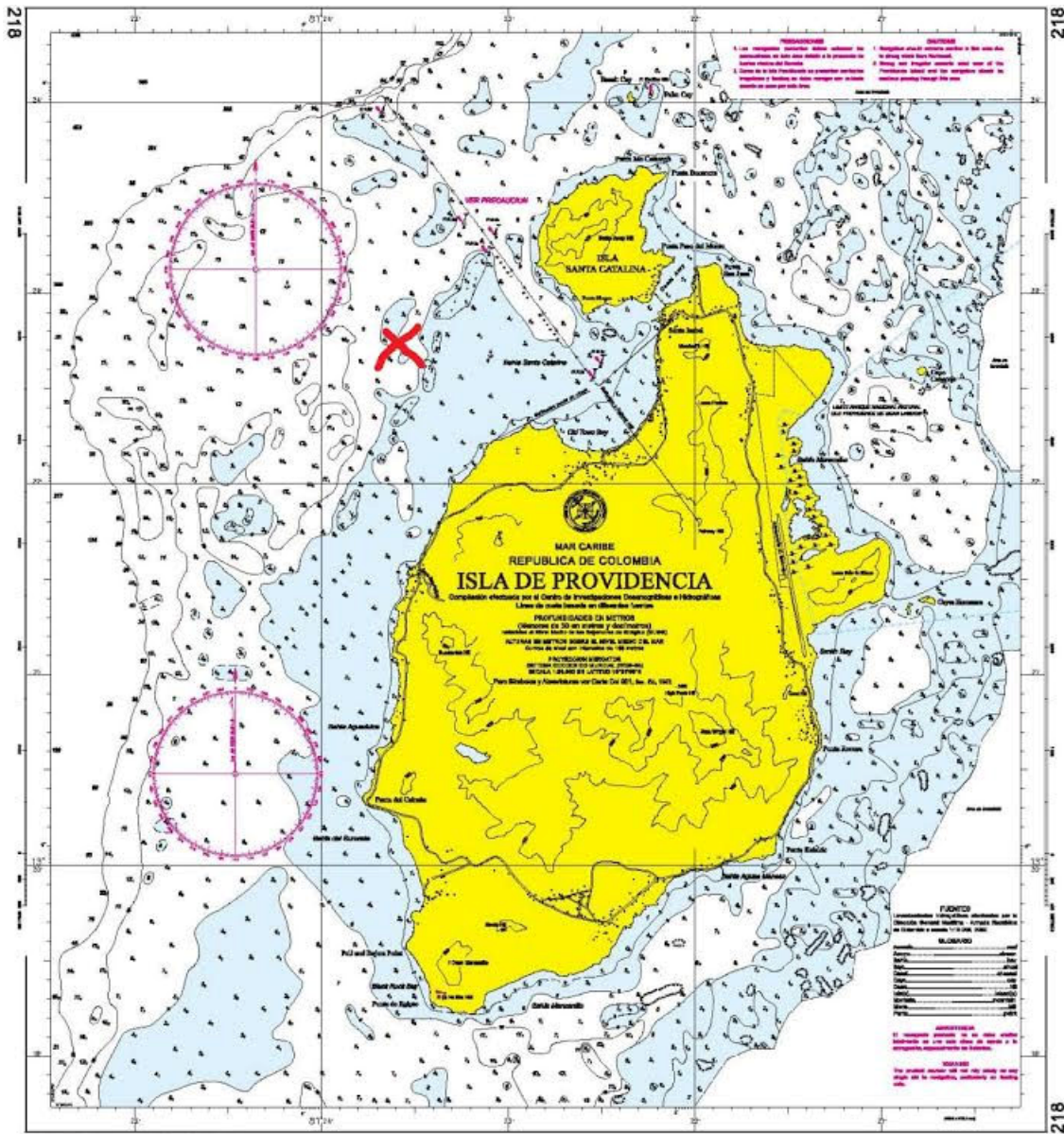
FIRST AID / TREATMENT: The divemaster and other divers helped Dr. Velez ascend to the surface slowly and safely as possible. Dr. Velez's wife, a registered nurse, tore her shirt and wrapped it firmly around his hand, applying direct pressure to the wound to stem blood loss. The support boat was not close to the divers; it took 15 minutes for the boat to pick up the divers. On the boat, the divemaster rinsed the wounds with fresh water. When the boat reached port, he was taken by car to a local hospital, arriving there 30 minutes later. At the hospital, the wounds were washed again with saline, he was given a tetanus shot and IV antibiotics were started. The wound was dressed and he was evacuated by a Colombian Air Force plane to Bogota, Colombia, the same. In Bogota, he was admitted to Hospital Clinica del Country where a surgeon, Helena Aschner, performed two surgical procedures to repair tendons of the hand. No tooth fragments were found on x-rays.



SPECIES: Caribbean reef shark, *Carcharhinus perezii*, about 4.5 feet in length. Although Dr. Velez didn't see the shark that bit him, a diver who was four feet above and behind him witnessed the incident.

SOURCES: Telephone interview with Dr. Arturo Velez and completed GSAF questionnaire.

* Lionfish, *Pterois volitans*, is an invasive species. Originally found only in the Indo-Pacific, the fish has become established in the Caribbean and Bermuda waters, and along the eastern coast of the United States as far north as New York. A voracious predator in coral reef environments, they consume over 50 species of fish including some economically and ecologically important species.



Incident site marked with red X