

ACTIVITY: Spearfishing using Scuba

CASE: [GSAF 1959.05.03.a](#)

DATE: Saturday August 15, 1959

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico off Panama City, Bay County, Florida, USA.

NAME: Lt. James Claude Neal

DESCRIPTION: He was a 26-year-old male stationed at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, August 18, 1959

NARRATIVE: Lt. Neal and five other skin divers were about eight miles southeast of the jetties, observing the undersea rock formation known then as Grouper Hall. They met at intervals to take head counts. But the last time the divers converged at the boat's anchor before surfacing Neal was missing.

The divers and Navy men spearfishing nearby immediately began searching the area. A 3.7-metre [12'] blue shark soon began circling one of these divers, who wondered if he was looking at the cause of Neal's disappearance. The diver crammed himself into a crevice in the reef's rock wall and remained in there out of sight as the shark and a larger mako shark passed within six inches of his face several times. When the fish finally veered off, the man escaped by following the guide rope to the surface.

Next day divers located most of Neal's equipment, including his tattered undershirt, shorts and loaded spear gun. Neal's belongings were scattered about 300 yards from where he was last seen. At sundown, they reluctantly called off the search. Although other divers and fishermen continued to look for Neal's body, nothing was ever found.

INJURY: Presumed fatal, but it was never confirmed that death was result of shark bite. It is possible that the man drowned and his body was scavenged by sharks and other marine animals.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified.

SOURCES: Washington Post, August 17, 1959; The Times Recorder, Tuesday, August 18, 1959; Perry Gilbert, Leonard Schultz & Stewart Springer (1960); David. Baldrige, page 183; <http://www.newsherald.com/articles/2001/07/29/lo072901e.htm>

Sharks May Have Eaten Skindiver

PANAMA CITY, Fla. (UPI) — Divers gave up a search Monday for the body of a 26-year-old Army officer and said it was "almost certain" he was devoured by sharks while skin diving in the Gulf of Mexico.

The victim, Lt. James C. Neal of Superior, Wis., assigned at Ft. Rucker, Ala., disappeared while on an underwater "sightseeing" diving expedition in the Gulf about six miles off Panama City Saturday. Another skindiver, Gary Seymour, 21, was attacked by two sharks while searching for Neal.

And a charter boat captain, Charles House, said two big sharks were hooked near the place Neal disappeared about an hour before the officer disappeared.

At Savannah Beach, Ga., meanwhile, it was disclosed that a 15-year-old Fort Lauderdale, Fla., girl was attacked and bitten by a fish while swimming. The girl, Elizabeth Fields, suffered gashes which required 28 stitches to close. The fish was believed to be either a shark or a barracuda.

Capt. Richard K. Anderson, commander of the Mine Defense Laboratory here, said it was "almost certain" that Neal was eaten by sharks.

Toothmarked Flippers Hint Shark Ate Diver

PANAMA CITY, Fla., Aug. 16 (AP)—Navy divers today found evidence that a shark probably killed an Army lieutenant. They recovered torn, bloody clothing and teeth marked equipment. One searcher barely evaded an attack by sharks.

Lt. James C. Neal of Ft. Rucker, Ala., disappeared yesterday while skin diving in the Gulf of Mexico six miles off Panama City. His body is still missing.

The Naval Mine Defense Laboratory in Panama City said divers found Neal's flippers, mask and lead weights, and pieces of his undershirt and bath trunks. They said the equipment bore evidence of teeth marks. The clothing, which was torn badly, appeared to be spotted with blood.

Neal and six others were touring the area on two boats which allow skindivers to follow a cable down into the water.

A skindiver, Gary Seymour, 21, of Panama City, was spearfishing about 50 yards from where Neal went down. He was asked to try to locate the Army man. Seymour said there were in the vicinity of large, natural rock formations called "Grouper Hall." He was swimming along when he noted a 12-foot blue shark six feet away. He said the shark made a pass at

him and Seymour wedged himself into a cavern.

The blue shark was joined by a mako shark, he said, and both lunged at him, missing his face by only six inches.

Selmour slipped out after both had made a pass, and made it to the surface.

Navy divers later were forced to quit the area because of the heavy shark activity.

2-17-59

Army Officer Believed Shark Victim

PANAMA CITY, Fla. (AP) — Ripped, bloodstained swim trunks and teeth-marked mask and flippers were the only traces today of a skin diving Army lieutenant.

Navy divers said Lt. James C. Neal of Fort Rucker, Ala., apparently fell victim to sharks while on a pleasure cruise in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Naval Mine Defense Laboratory in Panama City reported its divers had recovered Neal's flippers, mask and lead weights, and pieces of his undershirt and bathing trunks.

Gary Seymour, 21, of Panama City, who was skindiving in the area when Neal disappeared Saturday, said he tried to find the Army

officer. Seymour said two

