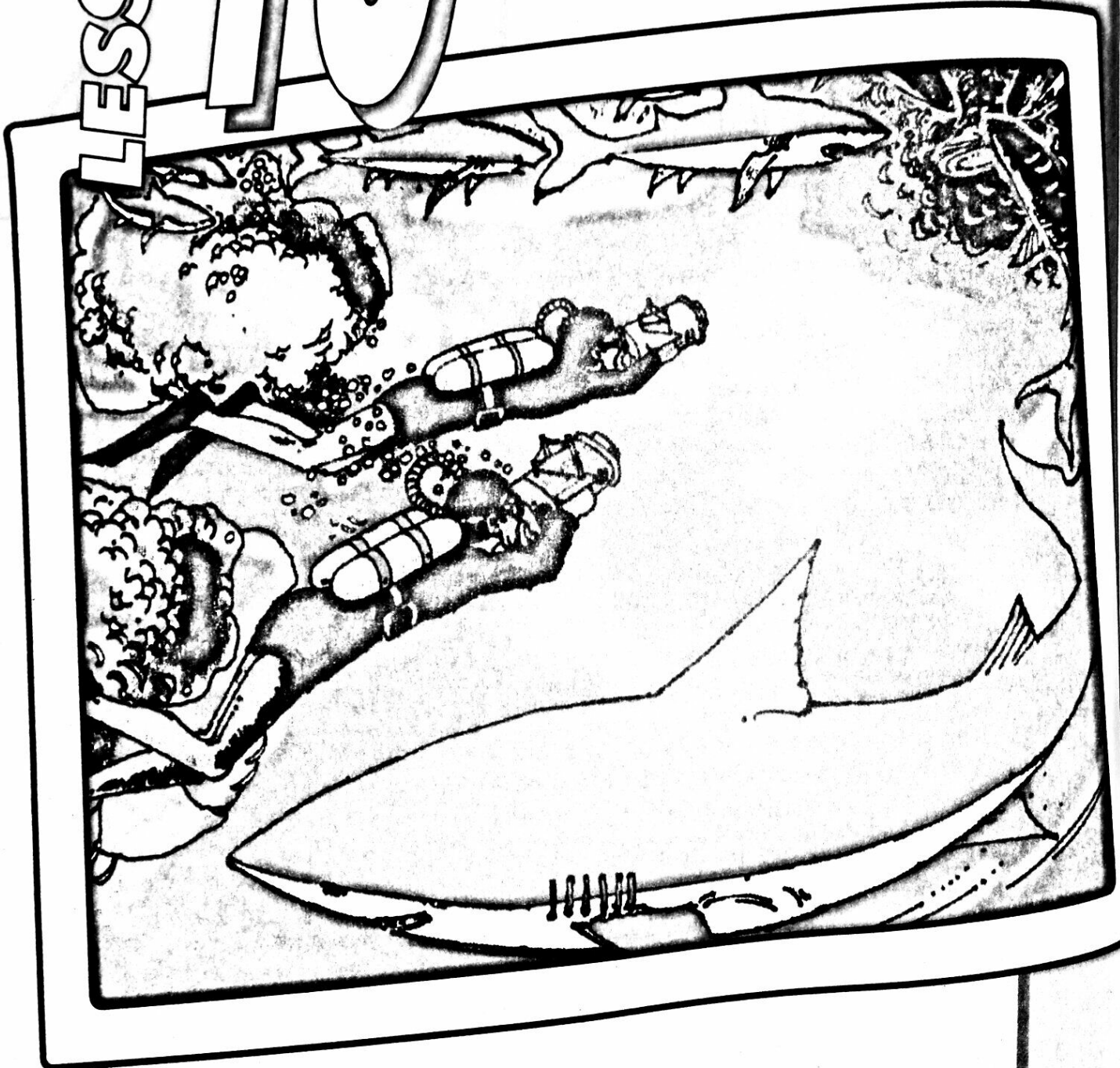


LESSON

10



# Shooting Sharks



# Shooting Sharks

(From the chapter entitled "Diving for Sport and for Science" by Bill Barada in *World Beneath the Sea*, a Special Publication of the National Geographic Society)

Slipping into the waters of the Pacific at Rangiroa Atoll, I flipped my way into the larger of two submarine passes that split the reef. Cautiously, I began to creep down one of its coral walls. Beside me, my friends Al Giddings and Dewey Bergman moved with the same discretion. The reasons for our vigilance were all around us — throngs of foraging sharks, including greys, black tips, and white tips.

5

We had planned this hazardous undersea itinerary with the hope of making a film documentary on sharks in a "feeding frenzy". Like many divers before us, we sought to pierce some of the riddles of shark behaviour by observing and recording it at close quarters. We had found a perfect "studio" here in the Tuamotu Archipelago. In this cleft in the coral, hundreds of five- to ten-foot (1.5 - 3m) sharks prowl a 300-yard-wide (275 m), mile-long (1.6 km) strip of water.

10

As the darkly ominous shapes swarmed about us, Dewey and Al got set with their movie cameras. I had a still camera, but my main job was to shoot fish with my spear gun, attracting sharks to the bait and sending them into action.

15

The sharks began swimming quietly on all sides of us, keeping a distance of about 15 feet (4.5m) — too far for good filming. Each time I aimed the spear gun, one shark would line up behind my target. I could see his eyes rolling as he waited for me to fire. Excited, the others moved swiftly around him. When a 15-pound (7 kg) snapper swam into range between the cameras, I shot it. The sharks went wild, coming at us from all directions as they raced for the fish.

20

Dodging the voracious predators, Al and Dewey swept their cameras over the mad scene while I gripped the harpoon line with one hand and held myself fast to the coral with the other. When a shark hit the fish on the end of the line and took off, a pack of about fifty zoomed into a tight circle over our heads. The piece of coral I clung to snapped off, and the thrashing brutes fighting over the fish on the end of the line began pulling me towards them. I let go of the line and watched gratefully as the battling pack swam away with the prize.

25

30

Five days and 2 500 feet (760 m) of film later, we concluded our dives among these dreaded creatures. We had found that sharks don't always live up to their reputation of being dangerous man-eaters — at least not until familiarity really starts breeding contempt. Each day they became more aggressive, and we had a number of very close brushes.

35

Why did they tolerate us at all? Was it the fresh seafood dinners we provided? Perhaps. As investigators know so well, sharks react unpre-

dictably to the presence of human beings, but very often attack surface swimmers or those who have been injured or appear distressed. Our self-contained underwater breathing apparatus, or scuba, let us move about among them with ease and control. 40

### A Meaning in context

1. Match each word in the first column with its meaning in the second column.

- (a) discretion (l. 4)
- (b) vigilance (l. 5)
- (c) foraging (l. 5)
- (d) hazardous (l. 7)
- (e) itinerary (l. 7)
- (f) documentary (l. 8)
- (g) frenzy (l. 8)
- (h) voracious (l. 25)
- (i) predators (l. 25)
- (j) concluded (l. 33)
- (k) aggressive (l. 37)
- (l) tolerate (l. 38)

- (i) trip or route
- (ii) animals which prey on others
- (iii) record of a real event or activity
- (iv) endure or allow without interference
- (v) prudence
- (vi) hunting or searching (for food)
- (vii) brought to an end or completed
- (viii) watchfulness or alertness
- (ix) very hungry or greedy
- (x) risky or dangerous
- (xi) violent excitement
- (xii) disposed to attack

2. Give the meaning of each sentence in your own words.

- (a) We sought to pierce some of the riddles of shark behaviour by observing and recording it at close quarters.
- (b) My main job was to shoot fish with my spear gun, attracting sharks to the bait and sending them into action.
- (c) Sharks do not always live up to their reputation of being dangerous man-eaters.
- (d) Familiarity breeds contempt.
- (e) We had a number of very close brushes with the sharks.
- (f) Sharks react unpredictably to the presence of human beings, but very often attack surface swimmers or those who appear distressed.

### B In each case, choose the best answer

1. Why did the writer and his friends move down the coral wall cautiously?
- A They were unfamiliar with the strip of water they were in.
  - B There were sharks all around them.
  - C The coral edges were jagged.
  - D For all the above reasons.

2. How did the writer get the sharks into action?

- A He harpooned a shark.
- B He shot a snapper.
- C He threw waste food to them.
- D He feigned distress.

3. When did the writer shoot the snapper?

- A He shot it as a shark was pursuing it.
- B He shot it when it was moving towards the sharks.
- C He shot it when it was within range between the cameras.
- D He shot it as a shark lined up behind it.

4. What happened immediately after the writer had shot the snapper?

- A The sharks swam in circles above the fish.
- B The sharks showed momentary interest, but then moved away.
- C The sharks were scared off by the impaling of the snapper.
- D The sharks rushed to get at the snapper.

5. Why did the writer let go of the harpoon line?

- A He had to as he had lost grip of the piece of coral.
- B He was being pulled towards the sharks.
- C He became too exhausted to hold on.
- D He could not see as the water was turbulent.

**C Answer these questions in your own words.**

1. What was the extent of the strip of water in which the sharks prowled? Where was it?
2. What was the purpose of the undersea itinerary the writer and his friends made?
3. What was the writer's task in the filming of the documentary? What difficulties did he face in carrying it out?
4. When, according to the writer, did the sharks begin to "live up to their reputation of being dangerous man-eaters"?
5. How were the writer and his friends equipped for their job? What benefit did they derive from the scuba?