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December 18, 1958

Dr. Paul R. Saunders
1171 Ritter Hall
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
La Jolla, California

Dear Dr. Saunders:

has handed to me his correspondence with you relative to his encounter with the turkeyfish. I do not believe there is very much I can add to what has already been said. Certainly the information from himself and from Colonel Lifton is about as authoritative as it can be. I was present more or less in the role of an interested and presumably educated bystander. At the time I met the fish, I believe that I was swimming on another part of the beach, and consequently I was not aware of his difficulty until at least an hour or two after it happened. I then went to the H & N dispensary and at least satisfied myself that things were under good control and that the proper things, to the best of my knowledge, were being done.

There were a couple of points of significance that stand out in my mind, the first being the rather extreme degree of pain. The amount of swelling was also dramatic as was the fact that it seemed to be an unusually long time before it disappeared completely.

The other astonishing aspect, as I remember it, was the severe degree of circulatory collapse. Unfortunately I do not remember the details of his pulse rate, but it certainly is my recollection that his blood pressure sank alarmingly and that repeated doses of adrenalin were required to keep it up to a satisfactory level. This, of course, was the fact which made us all a little apprehensive although I do not think that any of us really feared that the situation might be fatal.

There was no particular need for any secrecy and there were enough of us who were able to pass out correct information so that no really wild and hairy rumors got circulated.

By the following day, as I remember it, the general symptoms had pretty much disappeared although I think there was still some pain and there certainly was some swelling in the infected fingers and hand. I will have to refer you back to himself to let you know how long it was before he felt fully recovered from a definite feeling of shakiness.

Dr. Paul R. Saunders

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While it was an unpleasant experience for the victim, the episode was unquestionably an extremely valuable one for all Task Force personnel, and all swimmers from that time on thought twice before fondling strange fish. None of us who were there at the time will ever forget it. I wish I could remember when the responsibility for the patient passed from Dr. Lifton to Dr. Custer. Vaguely it is my impression that Custer did not return until well into the evening, several hours after treatment was started. By this time there was no reason to introduce any dramatic change in the form of treatment, and all that was required was to bolster him up now and again with a bit of adrenalin.

I am sorry that I cannot furnish you with any more detailed information. Although, if you have any further questions, I will try to answer them.

Very sincerely yours,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY THOMAS L. SHIPMAN, M.D.

THOMAS L. SHIPMAN, M.D.
Health Division Leader

TLs/ebb

cc: Colonel S. R. Lifton

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