

ACTIVITY: Floating with life buoy

CASE: [GSAF 1879.00.00](#)

DATE: Circa 1879

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Gulf of Mexico, in the Mississippi River delta.

NAME: Gus Ericsson

NARRATIVE: "It happened 21 years ago," said Captain McLaughlin, one of the oldest and best known bar pilots in the Mississippi River Service.

"I was out looking for ships with my partner, Captain Tom Wilson, and the usual crew, and about 12 miles out of South Pass we sighted a large sailing vessel which proved to be the *Zephyr*, from Bath, in charge of Captain Switzer. There was a rival pilot boat nearby, and we both made a rush for the ship to get the job of taking her in."

"Our party was nearest, and Captain Wilson and two sailors put off in a small boat to go aboard, but in their hurry they made a miscalculation and were struck by the bow and capsized. It all happened in a flash, but Wilson and one of the sailors were lucky enough to get hold of the overturned boat and hang on. The other sailor was thrown some distance away into the water."

"He was a big, brawny, six-foot Swede named Gus Ericsson, and when we saw him come up one of the crew tossed him a circular life buoy, which he seized at almost immediately. The buoy was amply sufficient to sustain him, and he put his arms across it and held himself out of the water fully breast high. We had another small boat and started at once to pick up the three men, making for Ericsson first."

"When we were less than 100 feet away, I saw a gigantic tiger shark rise and start toward him, and the next instant the poor fellow shot down out of sight, life buoy and all, like a man going through a trap. We were so horrified that we simply sat and stared, and what seemed to be two or three minutes elapsed. It must have risen from a great depth, because it bounded at least four feet into the air and fell back with a splash. Of Ericsson we never saw a trace. He went into that shark's jaw as surely as two and two make four."

"We rescued the other men all right."

INJURY: Fatal.

SPECIES: Tiger shark

SOURCE: Indiana County Gazette, Wednesday October 3, 1900



A Mississippi River pilot



Mississippi River delta

A MAN EATING SHARK.

The Story a Mississippi River Pilot Tells of His Own Seeing.

Will a shark bite a living human being? The question has been debated hundreds of times and came up for discussion among a little party at a suburban resort. "In spite of the current legend," said one of the group, "I don't believe sharks will attack a living person. I have spent my life near the sea and have heard a hundred stories of swimmers being killed or bitten by the monsters, but all the tales were either at second hand or were so vague they would never have passed for evidence in court."

"Well, sir," said another of the party, "I believe sharks do kill men, and I have the best of reasons for my belief. I witnessed such a tragedy with my own eyes." The speaker was Captain McLaughlin, one of the oldest and best known bar pilots in the Mississippi river service.

"It happened 21 years ago," said the captain when pressed for the details, "but the circumstances are as distinct in my mind as if it had occurred only yesterday. I was out looking for ships with my partner, Captain Tom Wilson, and the usual crew, and about 12 miles off South Pass we sighted a large sailing vessel which proved to be the Zephyr, from Bath, in charge of Captain Switzer. There was a rival pilot boat near by, and we both made a rush for the ship to get the job of taking her in.

"Our party was nearest, and Captain Wilson and two sailors put off in a small boat to go aboard, but in their hurry they made a miscalculation and were struck

by the bow and capsized. It all happened in a flash, but Wilson and one of the sailors were lucky enough to get hold of the overturned boat and hang on. The other sailor was thrown some distance away into the water.

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"When we were less than 100 feet away, I saw a gigantic tiger shark rise and start toward him, and at the next instant the poor fellow shot down out of sight, life buoy and all, like a man going through a trap. We were so horrified that we simply sat still and stared, and what seemed to be two or three minutes elapsed. Then the life buoy suddenly appeared. It must have risen from a great depth, because it bounded at least four feet into the air and fell back with a splash. Of Ericsson we never saw a trace. He went into that shark's jaw as surely as two and two make four.

"We rescued the other men all right," said Captain McLaughlin in conclusion, "and Captain Wilson is still alive to bear out what I say. That, gentlemen, is my reason for believing that sharks will attack human beings. However, if any one can tell me what became of Ericsson, I am open to conviction."—New Orleans Times-Democrat.