



ACTIVITY: Body Surfing / Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1922.02.04](#)

DATE: Saturday February 4, 1922

LOCATION: Coogee, New South Wales, Australia.
33°55'S, 151°12'E

NAME: Milton Singleton Coughlan

DESCRIPTION: He was an 18-year-old male, a fine, sturdy, bronzed youth, with the physique of a grown man. He was the son of Thomas Coughlan, the postmaster of Randwick, and the great-great-grandson of Benjamin Singleton after whom the township of Singleton was named.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It had been cloudy much of the day, but the sky had cleared, and it was a "light, sparkling sunny day". The air temperature was 78°F.

MOON PHASE: First Quarter, February 5, 1922

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was 74°F and the shoots were good; "There were. long rolling breakers that would carry a man in at express speed 150 yards or more."

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: He was on a reef 30 to 40 yards from the clubhouse, and about 30 yards from a cluster of rocks. The seabed was covered with rocks and weed.

DEPTH OF WATER: "Waist deep"

TIME: 15h30



MILTON SINGLETON COUGHLAN,
Who Lost His Life.

NARRATIVE: At least 6000 persons had gathered on the beach to watch the swimming carnival, but it had not yet started and the sea was too tempting to ignore. Milton Coughlan got down on the rocks near the club house. He took a header into the sea, swam into the area known as the reef, and began catching breakers. A friend called out to him to watch out for sharks in the channel, and Coughlan laughed. He was standing in the water when he saw the shark and shouted a warning to the other body-surfers. While he was swimming ashore, the shark struck him with "great violence". As Coughlan signaled to his club-mates

for help, the shark grabbed his arm and momentarily dragged him beneath the waves. Moments later he reappeared above water, and spectators saw him pummeling the shark with his left arm, but then the shark took his left arm in its jaws.

Jack Chalmers, a member of the North Bondi Surf Life Saving Club, saw Coughlan's plight. He rushed down the rocks near the clubhouse and hastily tied a line round his waist. As he scrambled over the slippery green rocks he fell and his leg was badly lacerated. Struggling to his feet, he plunged into the water and together with Australian swimming champion Frank Beaurepaire, brought Coughlan to shore.



J. CHALMERS,
Who Heroically Went to the Rescue of
Coughlan.

INJURY: There were semi-lunar wounds about seven inches in length on each side of the right arm in the region of the elbow. On the left arm there was a large lacerated wound in the shoulder region "severing all except the humerus. There were several small puncture wounds around the left elbow.

FIRST AID / TREATMENT: Coughlan was rushed by ambulance to Sydney Hospital. Dr. Ramsay Sharp recorded that the patient "was unconscious on admission, his colour being very pallid, respiration slow, pulse just palpable, and reflexes absent." He died in the hospital at 15h55 of shock and haemorrhage just 25 minutes after the attack.

SPECIES INVOLVED: It was believed that a white shark was involved in this attack.

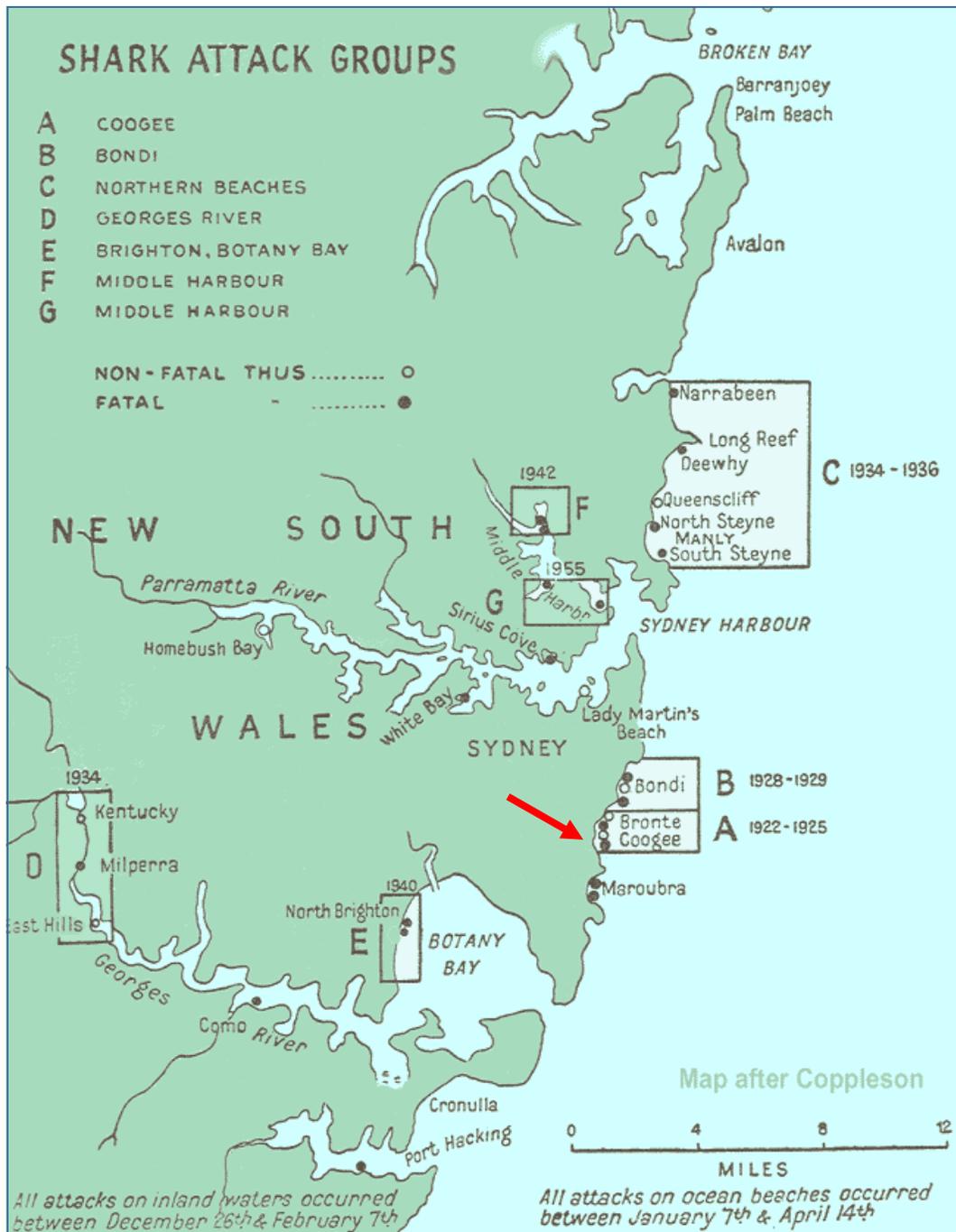
NOTE: Both Chalmers and Beaurepaire were awarded medals from the Royal Shipwreck Relief & Humane Society of New South Wales and the Surf Life Saving Association of New South Wales. They were also rewarded with £500 each. Beaurepaire used his money to start a national business, Beaurepaire's Tyres, and eventually became Lord Mayor of Melbourne. Chalmers was awarded the Albert Medal, the highest decoration for bravery given to a civilian.



Frank Beaurepaire.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Richard D. Weeks, Global Shark Accident File

SOURCES: Victor M. Coppleson, N4.(1933)
Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 62 & 230
Galveston Daily News, February 6, 1922, page 4, et al
The Sydney Morning Herald, February 16, 1922, page 10
Dick Whitaker, <http://passingparade-2009.blogspot.com/2011/04/shark-attack.html>



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TAKEN BY A SHARK.
BOTH ARMS BITTEN OFF,

Sydney surf competitions were abandoned on Saturday owing to one of the competitors being taken by a shark. The victim was Michael Coghlan, 19, a member of the Coogee life saving club. Jack Chambers, a North Bondi life saver, heroically attempted to rescue him. Coghlan was less than 25 yards out when the shark attacked. The water became red with blood. When first attacked Coghlan beat the shark off, but the monster again darted in and bit off Coghlan's right arm at the shoulder. Then he snapped the left arm off at the elbow. Coghlan was rescued and taken to the club room where he died in a few minutes.

Nebraska State Journal, February 6, 1922

SWIMMER BITTEN BY A SHARK
Boy of Eighteen Dies From Results
of Attack.

LONDON, Feb. 5.—While swimming in the sea at Coogee, near Sydney, Australia, Michael Coghlan, eighteen, was attacked by a shark and fatally bitten, says a Reuter dispatch. His arms were almost severed. A returned soldier, Jack Chalmers, swam to the rescue and dragged Coghlan from the shark's jaws. Other swimmers carried Coghlan from the water but he died on the beach.

Northern Territory Times and Gazette (Darwin, NT)
February 7, 1922

Coogee: 6 Feb 1922. Time 3.30pm

Milton Coughlan was bathing on the "reef", good shoots, 30-40 yards from clubhouse. The shark was seen by Coughlan and warning given by him to other surfers. He was attempting to swim ashore when the shark attacked him with great violence, taking his right arm off. He was badly torn about both arms. "Badly mauled both arms, one of which was hanging by a thread." Taken by ambulance to Sydney Hospital, where he died shortly after admission.

Ctd.

Sydney Hospital record 4-2-22

O.E. colour very pallid, quite unconscious on admission to casualty. Respiration shallow, pulse just palpable, reflexes absent. Corneal reflexes present.

Wounds: Right arm; a semi-lunar wound on either side of arm around elbow seven inches long. Left arm; lacerated wound in shoulder region severing all except humerus. Several small punctured wounds round left elbow.

Collapse from loss of blood. Seen by Dr Ramsay Sharp.

Died at 3.55pm ie; on admission.

SOURCE: Coppleson Archives, 1223/11, Item 3, Shark Attacks New South Wales