

ACTIVITY: Bathing

CASE: GSAF 1922.03.02

DATE: Thursday March 2, 1922

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

NAME: Mervyn Gannon

DESCRIPTION: He was a 21-year-old male.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a bright and sunny day. The air temperature was 71°F.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, February 27, 1922

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was also 71°F and there was a half-tide.

ENVIRONMENT: A shoal of salmon may have been in the area. A sandbank running out from an inshore channel furnished a footing for surfers about 25 yards from the beach.

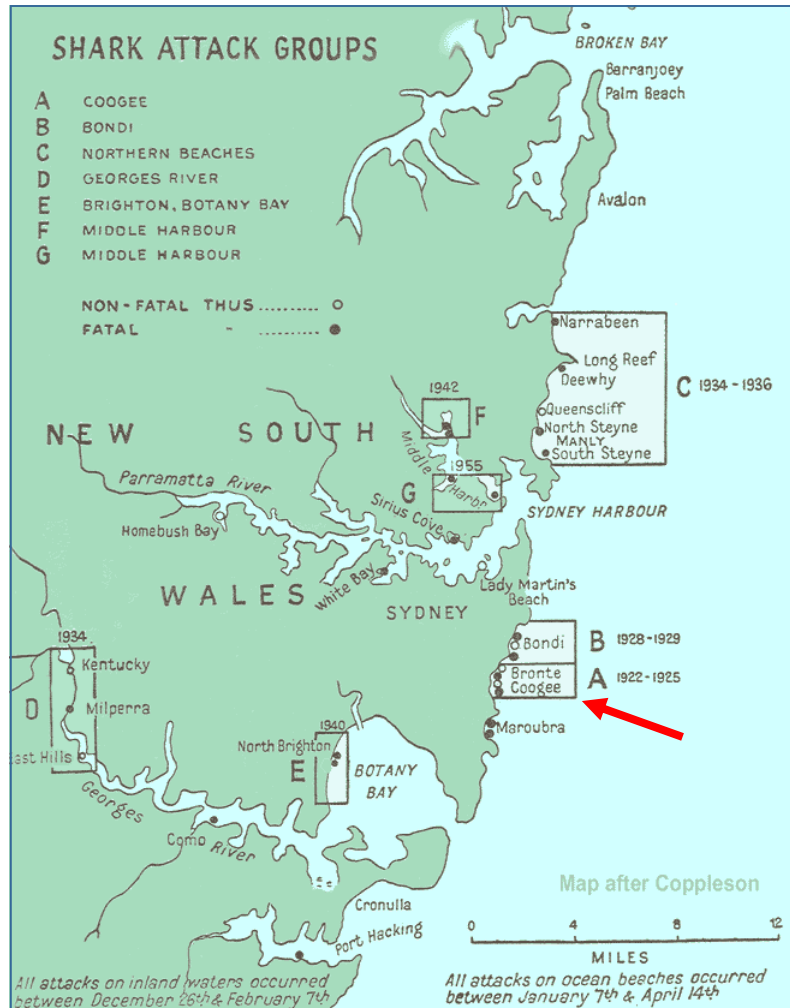
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 30 to 40 yards

DEPTH OF WATER: Knee-deep

TIME: 11h00

NARRATIVE: Some 30 people were body surfing. Onshore, the beach inspector saw the fin of a shark heading toward the surfers. He immediately sounded the shark warning and all made a frantic rush to leave the water, except Gannon, who turned to face the shark. He punched the shark several times with his right arm, and then the shark severed it, leaving a bleeding stump. Gannon tried to catch a shoot in, but again the shark attacked. In the attempt to ward off the shark his left arm was injured. Two men, J. Brown and Ernest Carr, went to his rescue and while they were dragging him ashore, the shark made a third lunge, shaking the rescuers. Gannon was still conscious when he was brought ashore.

INJURY: The St. Vincent's Hospital records describe his injuries: "i) right hand torn off; ii) left hand minus little finger and terminal phalanges of the third and fourth fingers; iii) circular laceration passed from anterior aspect of anus around and through gluteus maximus muscle and up as far as promontory of the sacrum passing through the deep spinal muscles of the back; iv) three or four "teeth" marks down back of left thigh, laceration very ragged."



FIRST AID: He received expert first aid attention and was sent to St. Vincent's Hospital by ambulance.

TREATMENT: The hospital records continue: "He was shocked and bloodless on admission. Dr. O'Gorman Hughes operated. Wounds of the buttock were partly closed, the left hand was reconstructed and the right hand amputated. Before midnight gas gangrene due to *Bacillus aerogenes capsulatus* and the *Bacillus welchii* had commenced and soon there was a characteristic odour about the bed. By the following night the gangrene had spread a great deal and although the patient was operated on again, it did not in any way check the progress of the gangrene and he passed away quietly at 5 p.m. on March 4, 1922, suddenly, due to toxic absorption and septicemia."

SPECIES INVOLVED: The beach inspector saw the shark and identified it as a blue pointer (white shark) about eight feet in length.

SOURCES: Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), Friday March 3, 1922, page 6; Northern Territory Times and Gazette, Tuesday March 7, 1922, page 1; Victor M. Coppleson, N5 (1933); Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 63 & 230; A. Sharpe, pages 56-57; G.A. Llano, pages.160-161.

ATTACKED BY SHARK.

SURFER BADLY INJURED.

ANOTHER GALLANT RESCUE.

SYDNEY, Thursday. — Coogee Beach to-day was again the scene of a grim, unequal combat between a young man and a shark. Mervyn Gannon, a motor mechanic, aged 21 years, was surfing among 30 or more bathers less than 10 yards from sand, and in 4ft. of water, when a shark suddenly charged at him in the crest of a roller. Gannon strove to beat it off with his fists, but the shark bore down almost on top of him, and tore his right hand off at the wrist. The blood from Gannon's mutilated forearm reddened the surf, and this appeared to infuriate the shark, which again made at Gannon and bit off all the fingers of his left hand. Gannon still fought hard, and in spite of the danger assistance was quickly forthcoming.

"Jack" Brown, a lifesaver employed by the Randwick Council, saw the fin of a shark coming through the water in Gannon's direction, and he dashed to Gannon's aid. Brown was accompanied by Ernest Carr, a well-known surfer of Coogee. The two swimmers quickly reached Gannon, who was then farther out, and was still beating at the shark with the bleeding stump of his right wrist. Brown and Carr

seized Gannon by the arms and dragged him towards the beach. This called for the utmost courage, as the shark was less than 6ft. away. "Come quickly, Brownie," murmured Gannon in a weak voice, and a second later the shark made a rush at the three men. The horrified surfers thought that the three would be killed, as the shark speedily overhauled them. The monster seized Gannon by the shoulder and tore open his back to the waist. Lashing the water furiously, the shark followed the trio, and its teeth closed on Gannon's thigh, lacerating it frightfully. Brown and Carr, with great courage, stuck to the injured man, and eventually got him ashore. Gannon was hurried to St. Vincent's Hospital, but his recovery is despaired of.

The feat of Brown in facing the shark at close quarters in shallow water rivals that of Chalmers, who brought in Milton Coughlan. Lifesavers expressed the opinion that the shark was the same as that killed Coughlan, and that it was attracted to the crowded beach in its pursuit of a shoal of salmon which appears at Coogee at this time each year. Surfing was abandoned for the rest of the day.

Gannon enlisted under an assumed name when 17 years of age, and saw service in France. His fortitude in his terrible injuries has been remarkable. He is still conscious, though his condition is desperate. Portion of his back was torn away by the shark in such a manner as to expose the spine. "I am not too bad; I am not going to die," he murmured weakly to-night, when relatives gathered at the hospital. The shark which attacked Gannon was 9ft. long.