

ACTIVITY: Swimming
CASE: **GSF 1922.12.05**
DATE: Tuesday December 5, 1922
LOCATION: The attack took place in Hervey Bay at Pialba Beach near Maryborough, Queensland, Australia.
25°20'S, 152°44'E

NAME: Alfred Gassman
DESCRIPTION: He was a 19-year-old male from Cordalba.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, December 4, 1922

SEA CONDITIONS: The attack took place at mean high tide.

ENVIRONMENT: The attack occurred at one of the most popular bathing sites along the beach. Just prior to the attack, schools of mullet were in the water. A large shark had been seen in the area for about five weeks, generally in the vicinity of the Torquay rocks, but in the absence of any accident, swimmers believed that bathing was safe.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 50 metres

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Four feet

TIME: 09h15

NARRATIVE: He was swimming in front of Mrs. Kah's residence at Torquay with two friends, Vincent Thomas Sittell and Oscar Bonney. They had been in the water for about four minutes when Gassman's uncle, Douglas Pothecary noticed a shark approaching and called "shark, make for shore". The boys made for the beach, then saw Gassman in difficulties and helped him to shore.

INJURY: Fatal. "The right side of his chest wall was badly torn and below that a complete bite extending from the lower ribs, including the tissues of the right hip, had been taken out, the teeth having apparently slipped down from the chest wall in the struggle."

FIRST AID / TREATMENT: The injured teen was taken to the bathhouse, but died 15 minutes later.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack was said to involve a 2.7-metre [nine foot] "blue" shark. The shark continued to swim 15 to 20 feet from shore. Several lines were put out and some shots were fired at it without effect. Rewards for capture of the shark were offered by residents of Pialba, Maryborough and the Burrum Shire Council.

SOURCES: Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), Wednesday December 6, 1922, page 18; Victor M. Coppleson.Q4.(1933); Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 92 & 237; Fraser Coast Chronicle, January 3, 2014.



ATTACKED BY SHARK.

Bather Fatally Injured.

MARYBOROUGH (Q.), Tuesday. — A dreadful accident occurred between Scarness and Torquay this morning when Alfred Gassman, aged 19 years, who was bathing in the sea with his uncle and two friends, was savagely attacked by a shark. His right side was torn away. Gasman managed to reach the shore. He was taken to a shed for attention, but died. He had been visiting PIALBA from Cordalba, where he resided with his parents.

News of the tragedy caused consternation, as the whole of PIALBA beach had been regarded as a particularly safe bathing place. During the last 40 years there has not been a single record of any similar incident. Visitors to the seaside recently have seen what appeared to a large shark.

The victim when attacked was in three or four feet of water.* The shark continued to circle about in the water, and was easily discernable from the shore. Several lines were thrown out, and one man fired four shots at the shark without effect. Burrum Shire Council has offered a reward of £10 for its capture.

SHARK TRAGEDY.

BATHER ATTACKED.

DREADFUL INJURIES.

MARYBOROUGH (Q.), Tuesday.

A dreadful fatality occurred between Scarborough and Maryborough this morning, when Alfred Gassman, aged 19 years, who was bathing with an uncle and two friends, was attacked by a shark, and his right side was torn away from the armpit to the stomach.

Gassman managed to reach the shore, and was taken to a shed for attention, but died shortly afterwards. The deceased was visiting Pialba from Cordalba, where he resided with his parents. The news of the tragedy has caused widespread consternation, as the whole of Pialba Beach had been regarded as practically a safe bathing place. For the past 40 years there had not been a single record of any similar incident. It has been stated that visitors to the seaside recently have seen what appeared to be a big shark in the locality where Gassman met his death.

The victim was only in between three and four feet of water when attacked. Subsequent to the tragedy the shark continued to circle about the water, and was easily discernible from the shore. Several lines were thrown out and one man fired four shots at the monster, which is stated to be about nine feet long, but without effect. The Burrum Shire Council has offered a reward of £10 for the capture of the shark. It is understood this amount will be supplemented by the residents of Pialba. The deceased was about to leave for his home at Cordalba on Saturday, but decided to prolong his stay.

*The Sydney Morning Herald,
Wednesday December 6, 1922,
page 13*

'God, Doug, I'm done': last words of shark attack victim

"GOD, Doug, I'm done." Those were the last words spoken by 19-year-old Alf Gassman who was killed by a shark in Hervey Bay on December 5, 1922.

The shark tore out almost the whole of his right side from the armpit to the thigh and as deep as the spine, the Maryborough Chronicle reported at the time.

Mr Gassman, who was holidaying in the Bay from Cordalba, near Childers, was to have returned home on the Saturday before the Tuesday attack but had decided at the last minute to stay an extra few days.

The shark kept circling in the vicinity for an hour or so after the attack, coming in quite close to the shore on four occasions to the spot where it had bitten the boy.

Several lines were thrown out and one man waded in and fired four shots into the shark with no apparent effect.

Details of the teen's death re-emerged after the sighting of a 3.7m shark about 50m from the shore at Scarness on Tuesday this week.

The full story published in the Chronicle on December 6, 1922, follows:

For over 40 years at least, Pialba has enjoyed an unbroken immunity from man-eating sharks until yesterday morning, when a young man named Alfred J. Gassman, 19 years of age, lost his life with tragic suddenness as a result of being terribly torn about by a savage specimen in a few feet of water.

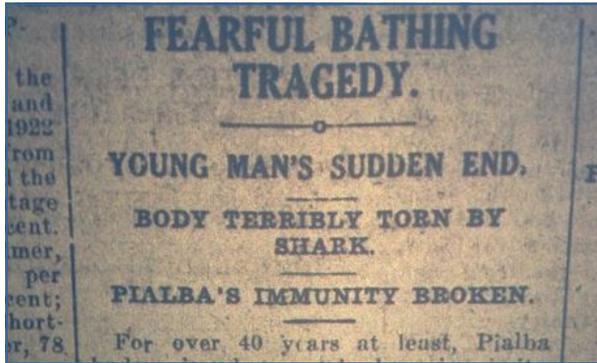
The incident occurred at a point between Scarness and Torquay, about 9.15am, when Gassman, who was staying at a boarding house, went down to bathe with Messrs Oscar Bonney, of Gympie, Douglas Potheary (an uncle of deceased) and Vincent Thomas Sittell. The party went into the water just when the tide was reaching its highest point, and almost immediately the shark savely attacked Gassman, tearing out almost the whole of his right side from the armpit to the thigh, and as deep as the spine. It had also inflicted other gashes on his body with its teeth.

He was quickly assisted ashore and conveyed to a bathhouse but the unfortunate young fellow died shortly afterwards.

The Maryborough Ambulance was summoned by telephone, but although Superintendent Roffe proceeded to the scene with all haste, his services were unfortunately not required other than to bring to Maryborough the body of the young man who, only an hour or so previously, was planning out a day's enjoyment at the seaside.

The news of the tragic occurrence spread with rapidity and widespread sorrow was expressed at such a promising life being so abruptly terminated.

Consternation was also caused by the fact that the shark was still at liberty and endeavours



were quickly made to catch it by line, but were without success up to last night.

It could be clearly seen hovering about at a distance of approximately 15 to 20 feet from the shore, and Superintendent Roffe, on his return to town, stated that he had distinctly seen the shark, which he thought was about nine feet in length.

The Burrum Shire Council announced yesterday that it offered 10 pounds as a reward for the capture of the monster and it is understood that this amount will be supplemented by rewards offered by private residents of Pialba and Maryborough.

Mr L. Ammenhauser has asked us to state that he will contribute a guinea towards the capture of the shark. He will lodge the money at this office today.

It has been stated that the shark has been seen in the locality where the tragedy occurred, for about five weeks, but the absence of any accident of this nature in the past, has tended to create the belief that bathing was always safe.

The position is one of the most popular bathing sites along the beach, and the unfortunate tragedy will no doubt have the effect of diminishing the numbers of bathers during the coming holidays, especially if the unwelcome visitor is not hauled ashore.

The victim of the tragedy was visiting the seaside from Cordalba, where his parents, Mr and Mrs W. G. Gassman reside. The deceased is also survived by four brothers (one of whom, William, is night officer at Woolooga), and four sisters, all of whom are residing at home. Deep sympathy will be felt for the bereaved family in their tragic loss.

The body, which has been lying in Mr J. Ammenhauser's funeral parlour, will be forwarded by train to Cordalba this morning and, on arrival, will be borne to the parents' residence by members of the Cordalba Rifle Club, of which the deceased was a member.

A Pialba correspondent sends us the following account of the tragic occurrence:
This morning, at 9.15 o'clock, two young men named Alf Gassman and Douglas Potheary went swimming in front of Mrs Kath's residence at Torquay.

They had been in about four minutes, and were in about four feet of water, when Potheary noticed a shark approaching and called "shark, make for shore".

Both boys made for the shore and Potheary looking around for his friend was horrified to find the sea red with blood and Gassman in terrible difficulties.

He helped him to the shore and Gassman collapsed with the words "God, Doug, I'm done", the last words the boy spoke. He died some 15 minutes later.

His whole side was bitten away, leaving an awful and ghastly wound.

The ambulance, with a nurse, was quickly on the scene, and took the body to Maryborough. The body will be forwarded on to Cordalba tomorrow to the residence of Mrs Gassman, from where the funeral will take place.

The shark, estimated to be 10 feet in length, is evidently a fierce and savage brute, as the wounds disclosed two maulings on the unfortunate boy's side and it kept circling around the vicinity for an hour or so afterwards, coming in quite close to the shore on four occasions to

the spot where it had bitten the boy.

Several lines were thrown out and Mr Murray waded in and fired four shots into the shark with no apparent effect.

This shark has been around the Bay for some four or five weeks, being seen on different occasions between Scarness and Urangan, generally hovering around the Torquay rocks.

With the holidays approaching, it behove the residents and authorities to move in the matter of trapping this monster before it adds any more victims to its list.

This is the first time in the history of Pialba that anyone has been attacked by a shark and we extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs Gassman and family in the loss of their boy who was over 19 years of age and who was to have gone home on Saturday last and at the last moment decided to stay an extra few days.

SOURCE: Fraser Coast Chronicle, January 3, 2014,
<http://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/news/god-doug-im-done-last-words-shark-attack-victim/2129433/>



*1920s : Building sand castles on the beach at Pialba.
Image taken from Bauer Family Album, Maryborough Wide Bay & Burnett Historical Society.*