

ACTIVITY: Swimming
CASE: GSAF 1925.03.12
DATE: Thursday March 12, 1925
LOCATION: Newcastle Beach,
New South Wales, Australia.
32°56'S, 151°48'E

NAME: Jack Canning
DESCRIPTION: He was a 16-
year-old male and an expert
swimmer.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was cloudy
to overcast.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon,
March 11, 1925

ENVIRONMENT: There was a
sandbank with an inshore
channel.

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea
surface temperature was 72°F.

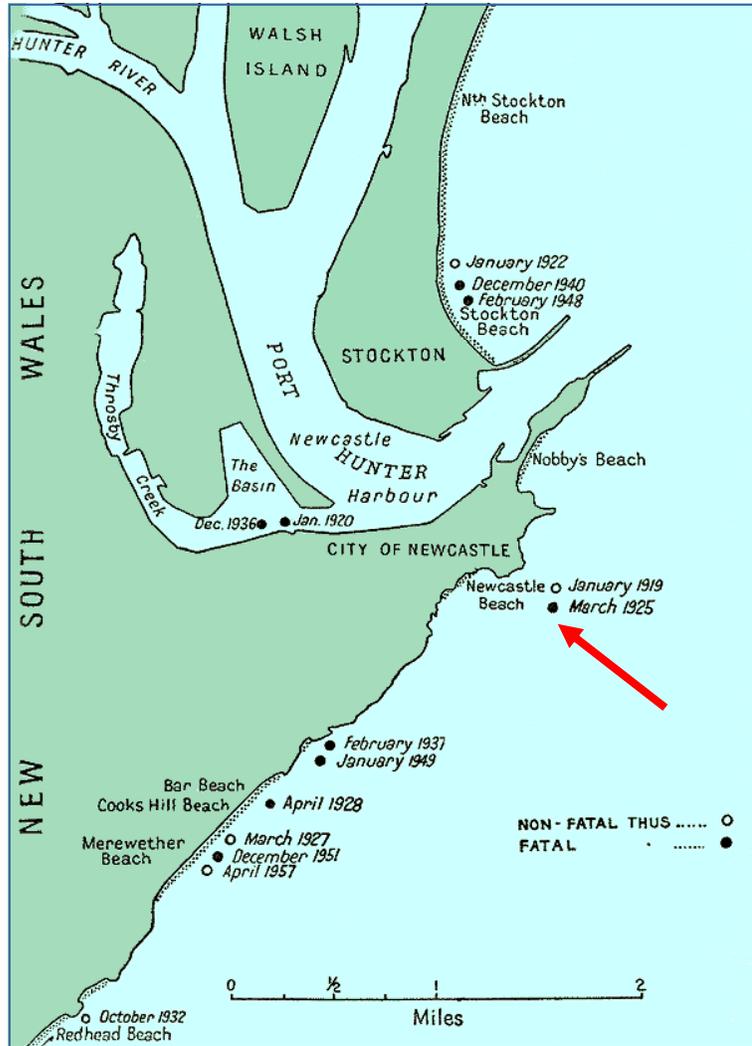
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 200
yards

TIME: 15h15

NARRATIVE: About 40 people
were bathing. Canning was
waiting for shoots when
onlookers saw him rise out of
the water, arms waving wildly,
and then he disappeared beneath
the surface. Canning was
swimming feebly with one arm
towards the beach when he was
rescued by lifesaver Gordon Lees.
A lifeboat was also launched.

INJURY: Fatal. His right arm
was severed below the elbow
and there were extensive
lacerations from the left
buttock along the back of the
leg to the heel. He died a few
minutes after admission to
Newcastle Hospital.

Dr. Victor Coppleson wrote: "Dr T. Hamilton, Medical Superintendent at the Newcastle Hospital, kindly supplied me, in March 1925, with the following particulars as to the nature and extent of the injuries received by Jack C. The patient was seen by Dr Hamilton within five minutes of being attacked and a careful medical examination was thus made. The patient showed considerable shock, with cyanosed lips, stertorous breathing, and a cold and clammy skin. The pulse was very slow, between 40 and 50, and extremely weak. His wounds consisted of a complete lacerated amputation through the middle third of the left forearm. A huge lacerated wound on the left buttock extended in depth to the ischial



tuberosities, and in length to within six inches of the left heel in a series of deep torn lacerations. Surrounding the margins of the indentations made by the bites were numerous serrated triangular gashes regularly arranged in rows and compatible with the history of shark-bite. It seemed that the forearm must have been completely enveloped by the mouth of the shark, gripped by the teeth and thence torn off. The injuries to the lower extremity seemed to have been inflicted by a snapping action of the shark's jaws, followed thence by a shearing action which tore the flesh away from the bony skeleton. The marginal triangular teeth-marks around each laceration seemed to suggest that the shark gripped the part with its posterior rows of teeth and thence tore the part savagely. Reviewing the whole circumstances the appearances suggested very rapid jaw work by the shark and a savage tearing of the parts which were gripped by the teeth. Dr Hamilton points out that an interesting feature was that no part of the body which was covered by the black swimming costume was attacked by the shark."

SPECIES INVOLVED: Onlookers saw the shark, but no species identification was made.

SOURCES: The Argus, Friday March 13, 1925, page 11; Victor M. Coppleson.N16.(1933); Victor M. Coppleson (1958), page 230; Coppleson Archives, 1223/11, Item 3.

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

BOY SEIZED BY SHARK.

ABOUT TO "SHOOT" BREAKER.

SPLENDID RESCUE EFFORT.

Victim Dies in Hospital.

NEWCASTLE (N.S.W.), Thursday — Shortly before half-past 3 o'clock this afternoon Jack Canning, aged 16 years, was attacked by a shark while surfing off Newcastle beach. The monster bit the lad three times, and despite a gallant rescue on the part of the official life-saver, Mr. Gordon Lees, who swam out 100 yards to the almost unconscious boy. Canning died at Newcastle Hospital a few minutes after admittance.

A graphic account of the events leading up to the tragedy was related by Mr. Andrew Cook, a member of the Newcastle Surf Club.

Canning, he said, went into the water shortly after 3 o'clock. Swimming beyond some 40 people who were bathing a few yards from the shore, he went out a distance of some 220 yards. Near the beach there was a sand bank, and a channel of calm water between the bank and shore. Canning, who was one of the club's best swimmers, and who had been swimming about, waiting his opportunity, came in nearly to the beach in a large breaker. A few minutes later he swam out again towards wher the rollers were bracking. As he was known as one of the best "shooters" on the beach he was being watched with interest, when, to the horror of those sitting on the sand, he was heard to give a cry and half his body, with the arms waving wildly in the air, was seen to rise out of the water.

Unflinching Heroism.

In a moment the lad's fearful position was realised, and a wild rush was made towards the shed containing the club's surf boat. Before the boat, which was being dragged frantically to the water's edge by a hundred helpers was more than a few yards from the shed a swimmer, with life belt attached to him, was already half way to the spot where Canning could be seen making feeble efforts with one arm to swim towards the beach. Without hesitating a moment, Mr. Gordon Lees, the official life-saver, had, single-handed, gone into the surf in a heroic attempt to rescue the boy. Those on the beach watched him breathlessly, as with strong, powerful strokes he made for Canning.

After the shark's first attack the boy could be seen trying to fight the monster off with his arms. A moment later, he disappeared below the surface of the water. After what seemed an eternity his head appeared, and with one arm he made feeble efforts to keep afloat. By this time Lees had almost reached him, and the next minute had him firmly supported in his arms. The task of pulling in Lees and Canning was but the work of a few minutes, even women assisting to pull on the line.

Canning's Terrible Injuries.

As Lees, carrying Canning in his arms, struggled out of the water a stretcher was in readiness, and within three minutes Canning was in Newcastle Hospital. The shark had, however, inflicted terrible injuries. Canning's left arm had been taken off just above the elbow, there was a mortal wound on the side of the abdomen, and the left thigh had been almost torn off.

The action of Mr. Lees is regarded as one of the most courageous ever performed in New South Wales.

Three weeks ago Canning won the junior alarm reel race at Nobby's carnival, and last Saturday came third in the junior State championship at Manly. Half an hour after the tragedy, the shark, which was of the grey nurse variety, and about 9ft. to 10ft. long, was swimming up and down the channel between the sand bank and the beach.

It was announced to-night by Mr. W. A. Crawford, secretary of the Northern Surf Life-saving Association, that steps were being taken to show public appreciation of the heroic conduct of Gordon Lees.