

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1927.00.00.b

DATE: Ca. 1927

LOCATION: The incident took place in brackish water 15 miles up the Cataract River. The river empties into the sea about 40 miles south of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, and it is Australia's longest navigable tidal river.

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer was a 10-year-old male.

NARRATIVE: "Four boys were swimming. One ten-year-old had strayed a bit farther out than the rest. Suddenly without any warning, a big shark seized the boy and started to take him down the river...One of the other boys saw what was happening and swam with all his might after the huge monster and his struggling victim. He caught up with them, and began to belabor the shark over the back and head as hard as possible with his fists. This so startled the ugly brute that he let go his hold of the boy and disappeared. Then the valiant fourteen-year-old boy brought the younger lad to shore".

INJURY: The victim "showed feeble signs of life, but efforts to revive him proved useless; in a few minutes he was dead. He was badly torn from bites and had a crushed shoulder."

A couple of months later, on May 9, 1927, when the Duke of York was conducting the opening exercises at Canberra, the new capital of Australia, he presented the would-be rescuer with a medal awarded by the King of England in recognition of his great courage.

SOURCE: Captain Young, in *Shark! Shark!*, pp.192-193 who says the story came from the *Sydney Bulletin*

Islanders years ago, but the Germans introduced counterfeit teeth so that disastrous inflation resulted, and the islanders had to find a new coinage.

Among volcanic islands such as most of these, where there is a very limited river-delta area, and almost no appreciable mud where smaller fish and crustacea may feed, sharks are generally absent save for the pelagic types that come in once in a while for a chance meal. The same holds for Hawaii also, making it relatively valueless for commercial shark fishing. School sharks in great numbers are necessary for a constant supply, and these follow the littoral fauna which are located in quiet, muddy regions.

As we came into Auckland harbor and passed North Island, I remembered the New Zealanders in the London office who feared that we might ruin shark fishing as a sport with our commercial venture. Anchored a short distance away was Zane Grey's yacht *Fisherman*, on an expedition to catch Mako shark and swordfish, and to take the movie "Adventures of the South Seas."

The director stayed over in Auckland to plumb the possibilities of further financing, while Jimmy Stedman and I continued on to Sydney, where we were met by Tommy Turner and Caldwell. These two reported that successful tanning of shark leather was being conducted in Australia and that it would be impossible to sell our patents.

We settled for a few days at the Hotel Wentworth. Sharks occupied our thoughts from morning to night, and we talked constantly of equipment, costs, marketing, and the outlook in general, which was none too bright.

And then occurred one of the bravest deeds of which I have ever heard, startling enough in itself but carrying with it a special significance for us, for we were striving to gain a favorable reception from Government and local financial interests, as well as from fishermen.

About forty miles south of Sydney the Cataract River empties into the sea. In the brackish water about fifteen miles in from

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the coast four boys were in swimming. One ten-year-old had strayed out a bit farther than the rest. Suddenly without any warning, a big shark seized the boy and started to take him down the river.

There was a choking cry—"Shark! Shark!"

One of the other boys saw what was happening and swam with all his might after the huge monster and his struggling victim. He caught up with them, and began to belabor the shark over the back and head as hard as possible with his fists. This so startled the ugly brute that he let go his hold of the boy and disappeared. Then the valiant fourteen-year-old boy brought the younger lad to shore. He showed feeble signs of life, but efforts to revive him proved useless; in a few minutes he was dead. He was badly torn from bites and had a crushed shoulder.

The papers were full of the heroic deed. I wish I could remember the names of the boys, but it was several years ago, and I have forgotten. If anyone wishes to, he may consult the files of the *Sydney Bulletin*, and find all the details.

A couple of months later when the Duke of York was conducting the opening exercises at Canberra, the new capital of Australia, he presented the hero with a medal awarded by the King of England in recognition of his great courage.

It needed no such episode as that shark attack to convince the majority of Australians that sharks will and do attack humans, for there have been only too many cases of bathers being taken, even in the surf, for there to be any argument. No one down there feels immune from sharks, I can tell you. Not long ago, nineteen large sharks were netted in the first line surf at an Australian beach by my old company!

In recent years there has been an alarming increase in shark attacks on bathers, but this may be partly accounted for by the increased popularity of surf bathing. The authorities now do not take unnecessary chances; they have erected "shark-towers" at the most popular beaches from which keen-eyed watchers can spot shark fins through the surf and ring a bell. At the sound of the bell, no one lingers to dispute with "Jack Shark." Even