

**ACTIVITY:** Bathing

**CASE:** GSAF 1927.01.03

**DATE:** Monday January 3, 1927

**LOCATION:** Grey's Point, Port Hacking, New South Wales, Australia.  
34°05'S, 151°12'E

**NAME:** Mervwn Allum

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 15-year-old male.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** It was a fine but cloudy day and a light rain had fallen. The air temperature was 71.5°F.

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, January 4, 1927

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water temperature was 70°F. High tide was at 08h28, low tide was at 15h20

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 15 feet

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Four feet

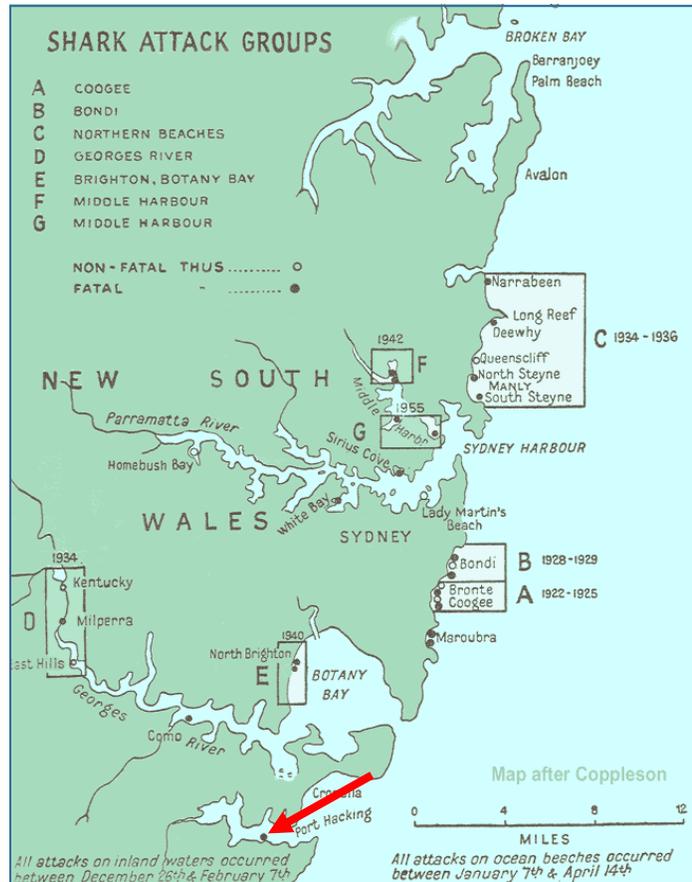
**TIME:** 11h30

**NARRATIVE:** He was bathing with a crowd when the fin of large shark appeared several yards away, and then disappeared. Seconds later the boy called out. The shark had seized his leg and, struggling frantically, he was pulled beneath the surface of the water. His head and chest were seen shortly afterwards several yards from where he had been seized and the bathers realized he was being dragged out to deep water. Several swimmers went to his rescue. One of them punched the shark with all his strength and the shark released the boy. The rescuer was bringing the boy to shore when the shark made another lunge at him but it was driven off. A rowing boat picked them up.

**INJURY:** Fatal. Hospital records describe the injury: "The flesh of one leg had been completely torn off, except for a small strip, from the thigh to the ankle, leaving the bones exposed, also "teeth marks" about the boy's body." He was taken by ambulance to St. George Hospital but was dead on arrival.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The shark remained in the vicinity for some time and was reported to be about 3.7 metres [12 feet] in length.

**SOURCES:** Sydney Morning Herald, Tuesday January 4, 1927; Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), January 4, 1927, page 15; Singleton Argus, January 4, 1927, page 5; Washington Post, January 5, 1927; Brisbane Courier, Friday April 1, 1927, page 18; Victor M. Coppleson, N21 (1933); Victor M. Coppleson (1958), page 230, et al



## SEIZED BY SHARK.

### BOY DIES FROM INJURIES.

#### HEROIC ATTEMPT AT RESCUE.

SYDNEY, Monday. — Mervyn Allum, aged 15 years, of Charlotte street, Ashfield, was shockingly mutilated by a shark while he was bathing at Port Hacking to-day. He died shortly afterwards.

An heroic attempt at rescue was made by Mr. Stanley Gibbs, of Yeuille street, Dulwich Hill, who beat off the shark until both he and Allum were rescued by a rowing boat. A curious feature of the tragedy, which occurred near Grey's Point, was that Allum was with a large number of other bathers.

Allum and several friends arrived at Grey's Point on the previous day on a camping expedition which was to continue during the holidays.

The fine weather had attracted large numbers of people to the beach. Allum, with several friends, was on the outer fringe of the crowd in the water, which reached no higher than his chest. Suddenly the shark, with its fin showing above the surface, was seen several yards away. The fin disappeared, and a few seconds later the bathers were startled by a piercing scream from Allum. The shark had seized his leg, and, struggling frantically, he was dragged beneath the water. His head and chest appeared shortly afterwards several yards from the spot where he had been seized, and the bathers realized that the shark was dragging him into deep water.

Several swimmers made towards Allum, but foremost was Gibbs, who quickly reached the boy, and, grasping his arm, attempted to beat off the shark, which tenaciously retained its hold on Allum's leg. For several seconds Gibbs punched the shark with all his strength. Suddenly both he and Allum disappeared, but when they rose to the surface it was apparent that the shark had released its hold.

#### Boy Attacked Second Time.

Gibbs began swimming towards the shore, pushing the injured boy in front of him. The water was stained crimson for many yards with blood from Allum's wounds. The shark made another dash at the boy and his rescuer, but before it could obtain another hold on Allum Gibbs again beat it off. At that moment a rowing boat reached the scene of the struggle, and with difficulty Allum and Gibbs were dragged on board and taken to the beach.

The superintendent of the St. George District Ambulance described Allum's injuries as the worst he had seen in all his experience. Besides the injury to the leg there were marks of the shark's teeth on the boy's body. These were evidently made by the shark in its second attack, when a small piece of flesh was ripped from Allum's side. The shark is said to have been 12ft. in length.

## SEIZED BY SHARK BOY DIES FROM INJURIES. HEROIC ATTEMPT AT RESCUE

SYDNEY, Monday — Mervyn Allum, aged 15 years, of Charlotte street, Ashfield, was shockingly mutilated by a shark while he was bathing at Port Hacking to-day. He died shortly afterwards.

An heroic attempt at rescue was made by Mr. Stanley Gibbs, of Yeuille street, Dulwich Hill, who beat off the shark until both he and Allum were rescued by a rowing boat. A curious feature of the tragedy, which occurred near Grey's Point, was that Allum was with a large number of other bathers.

Allum and several friends arrived at Grey's Point on the previous day on a camping expedition which was to continue during the holidays.

The fine weather had attracted large numbers of people to the beach. Allum with several friends, was on the outer fringe of the crowd in the water, which reached no higher than his chest. Suddenly the shark, with its fin showing above the surface, was seen several yards away. The fin disappeared, and a few seconds later the bathers were startled by a piercing scream from Allum. The shark had seized his leg, and, struggling frantically, he was dragged beneath the water. His head and chest appeared shortly afterwards several yards from the spot where he had been seized, and the bathers realized that the shark was dragging him into deep water.

Several swimmers made towards Allum, but foremost was Gibbs, who quickly reached the boy, and, grasping his arm, attempted to beat off the shark, which tenaciously retained its hold on Allum's leg. For several seconds Gibbs punched the shark with all his strength. Suddenly both he and Allum disappeared, but when they rose to the surface it was apparent that the shark had released its hold.

#### Boy Attacked Second Time

Gibbs began swimming towards shore, pushing the injured boy in front of him. The water was stained crimson for many yards with blood from Allum's wounds. The shark made another dash at the boy and his rescuer, but before it could obtain another hold on Allum Gibbs again beat it off. At that moment a rowing boat reached the scene of the struggle, and with difficulty Allum and Gibbs were dragged on board and taken to the beach.

The superintendent of the St. George District Ambulance described Allum's injuries as the worst he had seen in all his experience. Besides the injury to the leg there were marks of the shark's teeth on the boy's body. These were evidently made by the shark in its second attack, when a small piece of flesh was ripped from Allum's side. The shark is said to have been 12ft in length

## SHARK ATTACK.

### At Port Hacking.

### BOY KILLED.

### Heroic Rescue Effort.

A boy of 15 years, while bathing at Port Hacking yesterday, was terribly mutilated by a shark, and shortly afterwards died from his injuries. He was Mervyn Allum, of Charlotte-street, Ashfield.

An heroic attempt at rescue was made by another swimmer, Stanley Gibbs, of Yullistreet, Dulwich Hill, who beat off the shark until both he and Allum were rescued by a rowing boat.

A curious feature of the tragedy, which occurred near Grey's Point, in Port Hacking, was that the victim was with a crowd of other bathers. As one eye-witness said: "This fact explodes the theory that a swimmer is safe from sharks amongst a crowd."

Mervyn Allum and several friends had arrived at Grey's Point on the previous day on a camping expedition, which was to last over the holidays. Grey's Point, which is between Cronulla and National Park, is one of the most favoured of the southern seaside resorts owing to its bathing facilities. With a gently shelving beach and still water, it was considered fairly free from sharks.

At about 11.30 a.m. the brilliant weather had attracted a crowd of people to the beach, and a large number were swimming. Allum, with several friends, was on the outer fringe of the crowd, in water that reached no higher than his chest.

Suddenly a large shark, with its fin showing above the surface, made its appearance a few yards away from the crowd. The fin disappeared from sight, and a few seconds later the bathers were startled by a piercing scream from Allum. The shark had seized his leg, and, struggling frantically, he disappeared beneath the surface. His head and chest appeared again shortly afterwards, but several yards further

away from the spot where he had been seized. The crowd of bathers realised that the shark was dragging him into deep water.

Several swimmers made towards Allum, but foremost was Stanley Gibbs. Swimming powerfully, he quickly reached the boy, and grasping his arm, attempted to beat off the monster. The shark was holding tenaciously to Allum's leg, and for several seconds Gibbs punched it with all his strength. Suddenly both he and Allum disappeared, but when they reappeared it was apparent that the shark had released his hold.

Gibbs commenced swimming towards the shore, pushing the injured boy in front of him. The water was stained crimson for many yards round with blood from Allum's wounds.

The shark, apparently eager for more blood, made another dash at the boy and his rescuer. Before it could obtain another hold on Allum, Gibbs again beat it off.

At that moment a rowing boat, manned by Donald Campbell, of Devonshire-street, city, who was also spending the week-end at Port Hacking, and in which he had been fishing some distance away, arrived where the struggle was taking place. With difficulty Allum and Gibbs were dragged on board, and taken to the beach.

Here it was seen what frightful injuries Allum had suffered. The flesh of one leg had been torn completely off, except for one small strip, from the thigh to the ankle, leaving the bones exposed. The superintendent of the St. George District Ambulance described it as the worst injury he had seen in all his experience. There were also teeth marks on the boy's body, evidence of the shark's attempt to close its jaws on him during its second attack. This had been partially successful, for a small piece of flesh had been taken from his side.

In an unconscious condition Allum was placed in a waggon of the St. George Ambulance, which had come to Port Hacking after a telephone call, and he was taken to the St. George District Hospital. Here, however, it was found that he had been dead for some time. The body was removed to the city morgue.

After Allum had been carried on to the beach the shark remained in the vicinity for a considerable time. The bathers, who had received a severe shock, did not venture into the water again until after its disappearance, and even then they were extremely cautious. The shark cruised about the beach, evidently in search of further prey, but finally swam away.

A man who was in the water at the time said he had a very good view of the shark, since it swam close to him; and he was sure that it was not less than 12 feet in length. He said that the water in the vicinity of the encounter was of a gradually fading crimson hue for an appreciable time afterwards.

**FIGHT WITH SHARK.  
BOY'S GREAT HEROISM.  
CORONER'S COMMENT.**

*"Worthy of Victoria Cross."*

SYDNEY, Thursday - A remarkable story of a boy's heroism was told in the Coroner's Court today when an inquiry was held concerning the shark tragedy near Grey's Point, Port Hacking, on January 3. Melvyn Allum, aged 15 years, of Ashfield, was attacked by a shark while bathing, and died later from the terrible injuries he received.

Stanley Frederic Gibbs, shipping clerk, who was camping at Port Hacking, said that he and some friends were in a launch when their attention was attracted by a scream. "I was bending over the engine slowing it down with a lever," said Gibbs. As I looked up I saw the shark's body as it turned on its back. The shark was practically on Allum then. There was nothing to indicate that the shark had bitten him. I dived off the boat and swam to his assistance. When I got to Allum, the shark was alongside him. Allum was conscious. I asked him for his hand. Then I could see the shark under the water. There was blood there just as I reached him. He gave me his hand very limply. As I caught his hand the shark came at him again and pulled him under the water.

At that time I stood on the shark. I kicked it with my foot to frighten it, and caught at its fin with my other hand. I tried to swim in. Then I think the shark came again and pulled Allum out farther. Allum was unconscious when he came from the water after having been pulled under. Mr. Campbell then came in the rowing boat. We got him into the boat, and I rowed to the shore.

Constable Billett said that he witnessed the tragedy from a week-end cottage about 300 yards away. He saw a boy swimming out to meet the launch. Suddenly a shark swam round him and appeared to jump out of the water and over the top of him. Gibbs appeared to jump from the launch, and it appeared that the shark was under his legs. He could see Gibbs punching at it and kicking it

Dr. Stratford Sheldon said that death was due to shock following terrible wounds to the left thigh and leg.

In returning a verdict in accordance with the medical testimony the coroner (Mr Fletcher) said that the bravery and self sacrifice of Gibbs merited the award of the Victoria Cross if such distinction could be conferred in the circumstances. The matter would certainly be brought under the notice of the Royal Humane Society.

**SOURCE:** The Argus (Melbourne, Victoria), Friday January 21. 1927, page 15



The Duke and Duchess of York and Stanley Gibbs, the young hero of the Port Hacking shark tragedy. The photograph was taken just after Stanley Gibbs had been decorated with the Albert Medal. In endeavouring to save a friend, Gibbs fought the shark with bare fists, and although the man-eater twice returned to the attack, Gibbs succeeded in dragging the lad to the shore.

*Brisbane Courier, Friday April 1, 1927, page 18*

## **Gibbs, Stanley Frederick (1909–1991)**

**By Anthony Staunton**

Stanley Frederick Gibbs (1909-1991), shipping clerk, was born on 2 January 1909 at Hunters Hill, Sydney, eldest of four children of New South Wales-born parents Lindsay Thomas Gibbs, drover, and his wife Edith, née Trevillion. After leaving school, he worked as a shop assistant and later became a shipping clerk.

On 3 January 1927, at Grays Point, Port Hacking, New South Wales, fifteen-year-old Mervyn John Allum was on the outer fringe of bathers in chest-high water when his leg was seized by a large shark. Gibbs was aboard a launch when he heard a scream, looked up, and saw the shark. He immediately dived into the water and swam to Allum's assistance. Gibbs kicked the shark with his foot and grabbed its fin with his hand, succeeding in getting the badly injured Allum released from the shark's jaws. A rowing boat reached the scene and the oarsman, Donald Campbell, pulled the pair on board, but Allum died shortly after.

The coroner announced his finding on the death of Allum on 20 January. Gibbs's 'bravery and self-sacrifice,' he said, 'merits the award of the Victoria Cross, if such a distinction can be conferred in the circumstances' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 21 January 1927, 8). The award to him of the Albert Medal, for gallantry in peacetime, was announced on 8 February, and presented before an enormous crowd of onlookers on 29 March at Sydney Town Hall by the Duke of York during his tour of Australia. A fund established in recognition of Gibbs's bravery eventually totalled over £400.

At St Stephen's Church of England, Newtown, on 20 April 1929 Gibbs married Catherine Charlotte Coulson. After her death in 1933, he married Rosamunde Marcelle Walker on 20 April 1935, also at St Stephen's; the marriage did not last. On 9 February 1942 he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. Posted to the 35th Battalion, he embarked for Finschhafen, New Guinea, on 18 January 1944. On the day of his arrival, however, he broke his leg. He was repatriated and on 28 December discharged from the AIF to work in an essential occupation.

After the war Gibbs worked for the Australian Gas Light Company in Sydney. He remained with the firm until his retirement in 1974; he had by then worked with the company for forty-five years. He had married Doris Mannix, a clerk, on 9 September 1948 at St Matthew's Church of England, Bondi. When the Albert Medal was discontinued in 1971, living holders were deemed George Cross recipients. Queen Elizabeth II presented him with the George Cross at Buckingham Palace on 12 July 1972.

Survived by his third wife and a daughter and son, Gibbs died on 3 March 1991 at Bondi and was cremated.

### **Select Bibliography**

- *Daily Telegraph* (London). 'Stanley Gibbs, GC.' 14 January 1992, 17



Stanley Gibbs, n.d.  
Australian War Memorial,  
P04794-002

### **Life Summary** [details]

<b>Birth</b>
2 January 1909 Hunters Hill, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
<b>Death</b>
3 March 1991 Bondi, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
<b>Cause of Death</b>
lung disease
<b>Occupation</b>
■ clerk ■ heroic civilian ■ soldier
<b>Military Service</b>
■ World War II ■ 35th Infantry Battalion
<b>Awards</b>
■ Albert Medal ■ George Cross
<b>Key Events</b>
■ Royal Tour, 1927
<b>Workplaces</b>
■ Australian Gaslight Co

- National Archives of Australia. B883, NX87937
- *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'Shark Attack at Port Hacking.' 4 January 1927, 11'Shark Tragedy.' 21 January 1927, 8

#### **Additional Resources**

- [World War II service record](#), B883, item NX 87937 (National Archives of Australia)
- [a public meeting is held to consider what steps should be taken to recognise Gibbs's bravery](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 1927, p 12
- [Gibbs is awarded the gold medal of the Royal Shipwreck Relief and Humane Society](#), *Singleton Argus (NSW)*, 15 January 1927, p 6
- [the coroner says that Gibbs should be awarded the Victoria Cross](#), *Barrier Miner (Broken Hill, NSW)*, 20 January 1927, p 4
- [report on the inquest into the death of Mervyn Allum](#), *Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, Qld)*, 22 January 1927, p 9
- [the King confers the Albert Medal on Gibbs](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1927, p 15
- [215 pds has been raised for the Stanley Gibbs Testimonial Fund](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1927, p 9
- [the Duke of York presents the Albert Medal to Gibbs](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March 1927, p 15
- [photo of Gibbs with the Duke and Duchess of York](#), *Brisbane Courier*, 1 April 1927, p 18
- [Gibbs takes part in a great march through Melbourne](#), *Argus (Melbourne)*, 26 April 1927, p 9
- [408 pds was raised for the Stanley Gibbs Fund](#), *Singleton Argus (NSW)*, 25 June 1927, p 8

**SOURCE:** <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gibbs-stanley-frederick-15353>

**NOTE:** "When you read WE Young's account 'several years' after the event, and his reference to the Duke of York giving the would-be-rescuer (Stanley Gibbs) a bravery award it seems clear that his reference to 'Cataract River' was actually the attack on Mervyn Allum in Port Hacking".  
...*Marcel Green*