

ACTIVITY: Bathing

CASE: GSAF 1934.03.12

DATE: Monday March 12, 1934

LOCATION: Dee Why, New South Wales, Australia. 33°45'S, 151°E

NAME: Frank Athol Riley

DESCRIPTION: He was a 17-year-old male from Tasman Road in Dee Why.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was an overcast, warm day. The air temperature was 77.4°F.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, March 15, 1934

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm with light surf and the water temperature was 73.5°F.

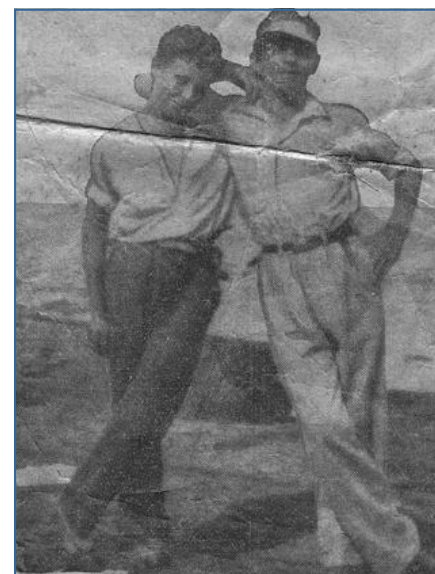
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 20 yards

DEPTH OF WATER: Three feet

TIME: 15h00

NARRATIVE: There were 40 to 50 bathers in the water well within the breakers when a shark fin appeared among them. "Frank was about four feet from me," said his friend, Laurie Shields. "Then I saw a fin and part of the back of the shark between Frank and me." The shark circled Riley. "The shark was so close that I could have put my hand on its back; I had hardly realized what had happened when the shark attacked," he said. "Frank had no time to call out before he was dragged under the water and the water above him turned red. Then he appeared on the surface. The shark still had him by the leg. Frank was splashing with his arms and making desperate efforts to get away to the beach. The shark kept jerking him backwards and forwards."

Lifesaver Laurie O'Toole ran into the water with a belt. The shark still had the teen by the leg, but released him as the lifesaver approached. O'Toole and two other men brought the injured boy to shore.



Frank Riley (left) and Laurie Shields

INJURY: Fatal. His left leg was severed at the hip and his buttock was removed by the shark. He died moments after he was brought to the beach.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified. The shark was said to be 14 feet in length. Lifesavers hunted the shark in a surf boat and hooked it, but it broke away. The shark continued to cruise along the beach for several hours and was seen by beachgoers. Dee Why Beach remained closed for several days afterwards.

SOURCES: The Telegraph, Tuesday March 13, 1934, front page; The Courier-Mail, March 13, 1934, page 13; The Canberra Times, Thursday March 22, 1934, page 4; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 66 & 232

NOTE: Laurie O'Toole was later awarded the Royal Humane Society of Australasia's gold medal and the Surf Life Saving Association's silver medal, SLSA's highest award.



Laurie O'Toole



Dee Why Life Savers. Laurie O'Toole is the second from left



Dee Why Beach. Courtesy Warringah Library

WATER
FACE POWDERS
WATER PROOF

LATE CITY EDITION

The Telegraph

LIGHTEN THE PEOPLE'S BURDENS!

TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 1934

PRICE, 1½d

£2600 IN PRIZES—PAGE 9.

CITY FORECAST: Sultry, scattered showers.

13 MAR 1934

Look for the Red Star Stripes

BEACH HEROISM IN SHARK HORROR

Dee Why Boy's Death

SHARK HERO

TRAGIC RUSH: MAN-EATER IN BROKEN WATER

BOY DIED ON THE BEACH | **LEG BITTEN OFF NEAR HIP**

PLUNGING into the blood-stained breakers at Dee Why yesterday, Eugene Lawrence O'Toole showed magnificent courage in bringing Frank Athol Riley, 18, to shore after the lad's left leg had been torn off by a shark.

He practically dragged the boy from the jaws of the monster, which was still attacking its victim when O'Toole was only five yards away.

O'Toole's heroism, however, was of no avail. He carried Riley to the beach, and the boy died there after one brief whisper, "It's gone."

The tragedy indicates that the theory, held for so long, that sharks do not venture into broken water, must be discarded.

Riley, a short, natty boy, was only in a few feet of water when he was attacked. A few yards further along the beach a crowd of 30 or more bathers—men, women, and children—were surfing.

RESCUE WORK IN BLOOD-STAINED WATERS

UNCLE SAM TO OWN ONE HOME IN 7

Has Taken Over Two Million Mortgages as a Start

(SPECIAL SERVICE)

WASHINGTON, Monday.

THE "New Deal" will have one in every seven home-owners in the country in debt to the Government before it completes its £1,000,000,000 mortgage re-financing plan.

Official reports state, more than 2,000,000 will find their mortgages taken over.

With 20,000,000 people already in the Federal Government pay roll, so already more than the Treasury, the additional \$1,000,000,000 will make an unprecedented total of

THREE BIG CITIES ARE ALL IN A STEW

LEADING cities came close to business lock-out yesterday and so far today—

SYDNEY
No rail due to-day. Forecast: "Warm and sultry." Temperature 75.8, humidity 85.0 at 10 a.m.

MELBOURNE
The 100 at 3 a.m. 4/10/34. Judges and lawyers removed signs for 1000 lines from the streets. "The 1000" in CHINA STREET. Forecast: Hot again.

ADELAIDE
Business day very quiet. Four million and more of beer offered in rail for 40 lines of rail. Outlook expected again to-day.

MURRAY
Police believe Thursday and Friday, Melbourne River 1000 over rail. 1000. Business disrupted with tropical rain, and believed by rail. Cash crop probably affected.

PERTH
Rain just prevented from floods. Rain, forecast and 1000 lines 1000.

Further Weather Details, Page 10.

MEN, WOMEN LOOK ON AS THUGS ROB VICTIM

NEARLY twenty men and women looked on, and not one person made any attempt to go to his rescue, when a Redfern business man was brutally attacked and half strangled by two thugs near the corner of Walker and Cleveland Streets, Clippenside, last night, and rescued by a watch and chain.

Taken to a police station, and held to satisfy that he would testify for the victim, who was taken to

BODY IN BATH MYSTERY: POLICE SEEK COUNT

(SPECIAL BEAM SERVICE)

PARIS, Monday.

POLICE at the Channel ports are keeping watch for a handbag labelled "Count," aged 30, following the mysterious death of Madame Louise Hotel, pretty wife of a wealthy grain dealer.

The mystery lady was 30 in a well made, unimpeachable habit of

STRIKE FOR A SMOKE

By agreement has been reached in the strike of 800 Hibernian Bay railway workers.

The men agreed work last Friday, when their demand for close off for a smoke was refused. They were told that they might strike on the job.

By HONORABLE Members, Bureau of Investigation, in addition to other special service of information, is sent to the investigation, the new one million pounds in this case, and all other events in Australia and New Zealand are covered.

Other Cables Page 8

The Telegraph, Late City Edition, March 13, 1934

KILLED BY SHARK

Boy's Leg Torn Off

DEE WHY TRAGEDY

SYDNEY, March 12.

Frank Athol Riley (17), of Tasman Street, Dee Why, was so badly mauled by a shark at Dee Why this afternoon that he died soon after being taken out of the water.

The shark appeared in the middle of a group of bathers within 20 yards of the shore. A loud cry from Riley was the first warning which most of the bathers received.

The boy's left leg was torn off at the hip. Life-savers gallantly went to Riley's assistance and brought him ashore. The boy was barely conscious when taken out of the water, and died in the club house before anything could be done to stop the great flow of blood.

NEARLY 14 FEET LONG.

According to people who saw the attack, the shark was nearly 14 feet long. Life-savers manned a boat at

once and went out into the surf with a harpoon and a line. The shark was hooked once but broke the tackle.

The attack was made without warning in about 3 feet of water, well within the breakers. The sea was fairly calm, and the surf was light. The huge black fin of a shark suddenly broke the water a few yards from where Riley was standing. Several other people were close to him, but could do nothing. The shark tore off the whole of Riley's left leg and buttock.

Laurence O'Toole, of South Curl Curl, permanent life-saver at the Curl Curl Club; Francis Bourke, of Pacific Parade, Dee Why; and Thomas Johnson, of the Crescent, Dee Why, dashed to his assistance through the light surf, and carried him ashore. The youth was taken into the clubhouse, but it was obvious that nothing could be done for him.

DRAGGED UNDER WATER.

Laurence Shields, a close friend of Riley, said that he disappeared completely, and the water above him began to turn red. Then he appeared on the surface. The shark still had him by the leg. Riley was splashing with his arms, and making desperate efforts to get away towards the beach. The shark kept jerking him backwards and forwards. Riley continued his efforts to escape. He kept calling in a hoarse voice, "Shark, shark. Oh, oh!"

"I knew I could do nothing for him, and swam towards the beach," said Shields.

Two hours after the tragedy the shark was still cruising up and down the beach.

The Courier-Mail, March 13, 1934, page 13

SHARK FATALITY

Rescuer Commended For Heroism

SYDNEY, Wednesday.

"I must congratulate you on your action in going out to the rescue of this unfortunate man. You did not know what risk you were taking of being bitten yourself by the shark," said the City Coroner (Mr. Farrington) to-day to Eugene Lawrence O'Toole, at the inquest into the death of Frank Athol Riley, 16, who died from injuries received when attacked by a shark at Dee Why on March 12.

O'Toole, who was a permanent life-guarder at the beach, said that when Riley called out, he waded out to him. He noticed that the water was discoloured with blood and then, when witness was about 5 yards from Riley, the latter was thrown out of the water by a shark 12 to 14 feet long. Witness commenced to bring Riley ashore and was assisted by members of the club.

Roland Shields said that he was in the water with Riley and only about four feet from him when the deceased was attacked by a shark.

The coroner returned a verdict of accidental death.

The Canberra Times, Thursday March 22, 1934, page 4

Victim's 'hoarse cry' heralded tragic shark attack that killed Frank Riley at Dee Why in 1934

- String of fatal shark attacks strike northern beaches attacks 1935-37
- Shark about 4m long tore into young bather Frank Riley
- Lifesaver Laurie O'Toole made heroic rescue attempt in blood-filled water

More fatal attacks followed and public outcry led to meshing program

EIGHTY years ago a 18-year-old boy was fatally mauled by a shark at Dee Why Beach in front of horrified onlookers.

A lifesaver just three years older than the victim swam to his aid and brought him ashore but he died soon after. It was the first of four fatal shark attacks on the northern beaches in less than two years and followed five fatal shark attacks on the southern beaches.

Nine fatal attacks on popular ocean beaches in a short space of time was more than the public – or the politicians – could bear and led to the introduction in 1937 of the shark meshing program that continues to this day.

The victim on March 12, 1934, was Frank Riley, who lived in Tasman Rd, Dee Why, and had gone to the beach that afternoon with his friend, Laurie Shields. Laurie told one newspaper that he and Frank had been friends for four years.

"Frank was about four feet from me on my left," he told another. "Then I saw a fin and part of the back of the shark between Frank and me. A life of foam and spray from the fin showed that it had circled round Frank before coming between us. The shark was so close that I could have put my hand on its back. "I had hardly realised what had happened when the shark attacked Frank. He had no time to call out before he was dragged under the water. He disappeared completely and the water above him turned red. "Then he appeared on the surface. The shark still had him by the leg. Frank was splashing with his arms and making desperate efforts to get away to the beach. The shark kept jerking him backwards and forwards."

Dee Why lifesaver Laurie O'Toole rushed into the water with a belt, followed by several others. The shark still had hold of young Frank by the time O'Toole reached him but let go long enough for the boy to be brought ashore. But the shark had taken off Frank's left leg at the hip and part of his right leg, and he died on the beach.

The *Manly Daily* reported that it was the first time a large shark, estimated at between 3.7 and 4.3m long, had been seen at Dee Why. "The attack came with dramatic suddenness, the shark appearing without the slightest warning in the centre of a group of bathers within 30 yards from the shore. Riley's hoarse cry was the first intimation of the tragedy. "At the time of the attack, the sea was fairly calm and the surf light, and about 40 or 50 bathers were strung out in comparatively shallow water."

Following the attack, a boat was launched and baited hooks set in the hope of catching the shark. The shark took one bait but wrenched free of the hook and remained in the area for several hours, clearly visible from the shore. Dee Why Beach was closed for several days and more baits were set in the hope of catching the shark. There was even talk of using bottles filled with gignite to "bomb" the shark but it didn't return to the beach.

Riley was one of 12 children and his family was poor, so a subscription list was opened to raise money for it. One of the most poignant moments in subsequent days came when Frank Riley's mother received a simple message: "Dear Mrs Riley, Please accept our very sincere sympathy

in your great sorrow. From Colin Grant and Mrs F.E. Grant.” Colin Grant knew better than anyone else the terror Frank Riley had experienced that day – just two months earlier, on January 7, he had survived a shark attack at Queenscliff with the loss of a leg.

Laurie O’Toole was awarded the Royal Humane Society of Australasia’s gold medal and the Surf Life Saving Association’s silver medal, which was the SLSA’s highest accolade.

Sadly, Frank Riley’s death was just the first in less than two years on the peninsula.

Just 20 days after Riley’s death, 15-year-old Leon Hermes died after he was attacked by a shark at North Steyne.

Eleven months later, on March 2, 1935, 22-year-old Herbert McFarlane died after he was attacked by a shark at North Narrabeen.

Then, 11 months later again, 14-year-old David Paton was taken by a shark at South Steyne. His body was never recovered.

Following a government inquiry, shark meshing was introduced to Sydney’s beaches in 1937 and was introduced to Wollongong and Newcastle beaches in 1949. But while there have been no fatal shark attack on a meshed ocean beach in Sydney since 1937, the shark nets remain controversial.

SOURCE: John Morcombe, Manly Daily, March 10, 2014,
<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/northern-beaches/victims-hoarse-cry-heralded-tragic-shark-attack-that-killed-frank-riley-at-dee-why-in-1934/story-fngr8hax-1226847985051>