



Photo : George Rose,  
Courtesy of Gold Coast City Council Local Studies Library

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** [GSAF 1937.10.27.b](#)

**DATE:** Wednesday October 27, 1937

**LOCATION:** Kirra Beach, Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia.  
29°10'S

**NAME:** Jack Brinkley

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 25-year-old male.

### BACKGROUND

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, October 26, 1937

**ENVIRONMENT:** There was a sandspit seaward of an inshore channel, and the attack happened in the channel.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 90 yards.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 20 feet

**TIME:** 17h30

**NARRATIVE:** Norman Girvan and Gordon Doniger were body-surfing when the shark struck. Gordon Doniger tells us:

"I saw a shoot (wave that could be ridden shorewards) coming and called out to Girvan, 'Here's a shoot.' I swam to the other side of him but about five yards farther out. Just then Girvan said, 'Quick, Don, a shark's got me.' I thought he was still fooling and called out to him not to miss the shoot. Just then he put his arm up and I saw blood shooting everywhere. I could tell then that he had been attacked by a shark, and I called out, 'I'm coming, Blue.' (Girvan is known as "Blue".) I swam over to him and took hold of him and at the same time I saw a man named Jack Brinkley swimming towards us and about 10 yards away. I called out to him, 'For God's sake, Jack, come and give



*Norman Girvan*



*Joe Doniger*

us a hand with Blue and get this thing away.' At that time I had hold of Girvan. I first tried to take him by the arm and found that it was just hanging by a bit of flesh. Brinkley turned to swim towards us and just then he began to kick an struggle and appeared as though he had been attacked. I was trying to get to shore with Girvan at this time. Girvan said to me, 'It won't let me go, it's got my leg.' Just then I felt Girvan being shaken forcibly and he was pulled out of my arms. I felt the body of a shark brush my thigh. The shark came to the top and I could see that it was a big one, but I cannot estimate its length. Girvan said, 'I'm gone. Goodby', and almost immediately the shark dragged him under the water. I then struck out for shore. I was swimming with my head down in the water when a shark swam right underneath me I thought it was going to attack me and I tried to push it away and my hands caught it by the fin. I pushed at it and pushed myself away and I saw the shark attack Brinkley at his left side, and just then I got on a shoot and came in to the shore. While on the shoot I passed my brother who was swimming out to Brinkley. I remember arriving at the shore but I do not remember anything after that for about 10 minutes."

Joseph Doniger continues:

"I was standing about ankle-deep in the surf at Kirra, Coolangatta. I saw three men, Jack Brinkley, Norman Girvan and my brother, Gordon Doniger, about 75 to 80 yards from the beach. I saw the three men waving their arms about and splashing in the water. I heard Brinkley yell my name and something about a shark. I then saw Brinkley begin to swim towards the shore. heard my brother Gordon calling to Brinkley for assistance. I saw a swirl in the water and the fin of a shark right next to my brother and Girvan. I then saw the water discoloured and red with blood. By this time Brinkley had turned and was swimming back towards my brother and Girvan."

"By this time I had entered the water and was swimming towards the three men. As I as swimming out I saw Brinkley, who had only then taken a few strokes towards my brother and Girvan, attacked by a second shark. I know there were two sharks because the shark that I first saw was bigger than the shark which attacked Brinkley. By the time Brinkley was attacked, Girvan had disappeared and my brother was swimming towards the shore. I was then within about five yards of Brinkley who was calling out to me, 'Hurry up, Joe, for God's sake get me out of this.' I swam to Brinkley and secured a hold and began to make for the shore. Just as I did the shark attacked again. This time it caught Brinkley by the left arm just below the shoulder. Brinkley gave a groan, stiffened out and became a dead weight. His left arm was bleeding freely and was practically severed."

"When the shark attacked Brinkley when I was holding him I saw it plainly and it was about 8 feet long. The shark made no further attacks and I then succeeded in getting Brinkley to the beach where with the help of other members of the Kirra lifesavers a tourniquet was applied to Brinkley's arm. Brinkley remained conscious during the whole time I was with him. All I heard him say was, 'If I hadn't turned back for Blue it wouldn't have got me.' I did not see Girvan after he sank out of sight from my brother's arms."

**INJURY:** Brinkley's left arm was almost severed and his left side was severely lacerated. He was taken to Coolangatta Hospital where he was given blood transfusions and his arm amputated, but he died soon afterwards.

**SPECIES:** Efforts were made to catch the shark, and next day an 11'6" tiger shark (thought to be a female), six feet in girth and weighing 850 pounds was caught which contained

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some human remains (including Girvan's hand, recognizable by a scar). Dr. Birch examined the remains and said, "From the appearance of the wounds and the description of the attack, it would seem the shark struck or bit the arm with elbow deepest in the centre of the mouth. There was also a clean-cut wound on the right thigh; some deep, rather jagged parallel wounds about half an inch apart on the thigh; and some superficial wounds one to two inches in length on each side of the leg."



*The 11'6" tiger shark*

**COMMENT:** Joseph Doniger claimed that two sharks were involved in this incident.

Coppleson felt it was more likely "that there was one shark, whose main target was Girvan. As it sped by, its fins and body brushed past Brinkley and hit him with terrific force."

**SOURCES:** Victor M. Coppleson (1958) pages 81-84 & 234; A. Sharpe, pages 84-96; H. Edwards, pages 114-115.



# KILLER SHARK IN NORTH.

## YOUNG MAN KILLED.

### Another Frightfully Mauled.

BRISBANE, Wednesday.—The first shark tragedy in history of Kirra beach, near Coolangatta, occurred this afternoon, when a young man lost his life and another was seriously injured while surfing on the main beach.

The victims were:—

#### KILLED.

Norman Girvan, 18 years, of Coolangatta, whose body has not been recovered.

#### INJURED.

Jack Brinkley, a youth, of Coolangatta. Left arm almost torn off at the shoulder, and one leg badly mauled. His arm was later amputated in hospital.

The two youths, who were members of the surf life-saving club, were surfing on the Kirra beach at Coolangatta at 5.25 p.m., when the attack was made.

Joe Doniger, a fellow life saver, gallantly swam out to Brinkley's aid when he heard him scream for help after the shark made its attack. When Doniger reached Brinkley the latter called out to hurry up, and then collapsed.

The shark was still cruising nearby, but Doniger succeeded in bringing Brinkley ashore.

The first attack took place about 100 yards from the shore in choppy surf,

and in a gloomy light caused by storm clouds obscuring the sun.

The victims were members of a party of life savers who visited the beach for their usual afternoon swim. After finishing work Joe Doniger, B. Harding, Alf. Kilburn, Norman Girvan, Jack Brinkley and Gordon Doniger were minutes in the water the first three swimming together, and after a few returned to the beach, the others remaining in the surf to obtain a shoot.

Shortly afterwards the shark attacked Girvan. Gordon Doniger, who was close by, saw the attack and made an effort to assist Girvan. His hand, however, encountered a terrible wound made by the shark and he let the body go, and he and Brinkley swam fast as they could for the beach. Brinkley was in the lead, and was about 75 yards from the shore when the shark attacked him, tearing his left shoulder and leg. He screamed for assistance, and Joe Doniger heroically rushed to his rescue and brought him ashore. An improvised tourniquet was applied to the arm by club mates pending the arrival of a doctor, and later he was removed to hospital.

After Brinkley had been brought ashore Alf Kilburn obtained a surf ski and went out a short distance to try to find Girvan's body. He reached the first line of breakers, when he saw the shark circling near a patch of blood-stained water and returned.

Joe Doniger, Les. Kilburn, C. King J. Duncan and R. Girvan, a brother of the lad who was killed, and Alf Kilburn later went out in a surf boat, and though they remained at sea for about half an hour, they saw no sign of the shark. Portion of Girvan's body was seen floating in the water. This later was washed ashore and taken possession of by the police.

Opinions conflict in regard to the size of the shark. It was at least ten feet in length, and either of the tiger or grey nurse variety.

Girvan was a son of Mr. and Mrs. R. Girvan, of Coolangatta.