

**ACTIVITY:** Standing

**CASE:** GSAF 1942.12.26

**DATE:** Saturday December 26, 1942

**LOCATION:** The incident took place near Ironstone Point, Bantry Bay, Middle Harbor, New South Wales, Australia.

33°47'S, 151°E

**NAME:** Denise Burch

**DESCRIPTION:** She was a 15-year-old female. Denise Burch, her sister Pam, and their mother had been evacuated from Hong Kong two years previously. Her father and brother remained as Japanese prisoners-of-war.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** The air temperature was 73°F. Most sources state that it was a sunny day, but one claims that it was overcast with light to moderate rain.

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, December 23, 1942

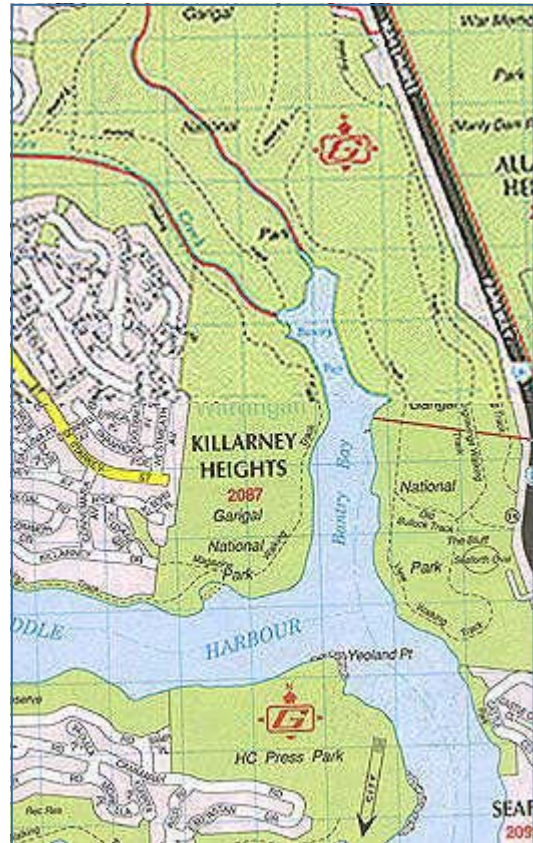
**WATER CONDITIONS:** The water was described as “crystal clear.”

**ENVIRONMENT:** Many sharks had been seen in the vicinity prior to the attack.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** “Close to shore.”

**DEPTH OF WATER:** A half-metre

**TIME:** 10h30 — 10h50



**NARRATIVE:** It was Boxing Day and eight teenagers, four boys and four girls ages 15 to 18, went for an outing. One of the other girls in the party was Rosemary’s older sister, Pamela. The group left the Spit at 09h00 in two boats and stopped for lunch at Ironstone Point. Two of the boys were swimming in deep water 20 metres from shore. Denise was cooling off close to shore when the shark seized her legs. She screamed, toppled backwards in the water as the shark tried to drag her into deeper water, and disappeared. Those on shore rushed into the water, pelting the shark — clearly visible in the blood-stained water — with rocks and branches. The shark fled and the girl surfaced.

**INJURY:** Fatal. She died before she could be brought ashore.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** A bull shark, according to the Australian Shark Attack File.

**SOURCES:** The Canberra Times, Monday December 28, 1942, page 3; Gilbert P. Whitley (1951), page 193; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), page 70; Coppleson Archives, 1223/11, Item 2.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Richard Weeks, GSAF

# GIRL KILLED BY SHARK

## Middle Harbour Tragedy

Denise Rosemary Burch, 15, of Cliff Street, Manly, was taken by a whaler shark in two feet of water in Middle Harbour on Saturday morning. She died before she was lifted from the water.

Miss Burch was one of a party of four girls and four boys, including the dead girl's elder sister, Pamela. They left The Spit about 9 a.m. in two boats for a day's outing in Middle Harbour.

The boys and girls, aged from 16 to 18, rowed to Ironstone Point, near Bantry Bay, where they landed for lunch.

While one or two of the boys swam in deeper water, Miss Burch paddled in the shallow water.

About 10.50 a.m. the girl was standing in about two feet of water, when the other members of the party heard her scream. One of the boys was swimming about 15 yards or 20 yards away in deep water.

Miss Burch was seized by the legs and dragged under the water by the shark. For a minute or two neither the girl nor the shark could be seen, but the water was stained with blood.

### SHARK DRIVEN OFF

One of the boys seized an oar with which he tried to drive off the shark. Other members of the party joined him, armed with sticks and stones.

A few moments later Miss Burch appeared above water. She was taken ashore by her companions. She had suffered terrible injuries, and she was dead before the party reached the shore.

The body was taken to The Spit, and Sergeant van Wouwe and Constable C. Fenton of the Water Police met the party.

In addition to Miss Burch and her sister the party consisted of Stanley Netherington, 18, Coles Road, Haberfield; James Riley, 17, Cowles Road, Manly; Del Johnston, 17, Balgownie Road, Manly; Kath Mumford, Beatrice Street, Manly; John Ryan, 18, Wyuna Avenue, Manly; and Miss Snodgrass, 17, of West Ryde.

### HONG KONG EVACUEES

Mrs. Burch and her two daughters were among those evacuated from Hong Kong about two years ago. Her husband, Mr. R. J. Burch, and their son are prisoners of war in the hands of the Japanese.

Denise Burch was employed at Amalgamated Wireless (Aust.) Ltd.

Miss Burch's funeral will be this afternoon after a service at St. Andrew's Cathedral.

On January 4 of this year Miss Zeita Steadman of Ashfield, was fatally mauled by a shark at Bantry Bay, a short distance from the scene of Saturday's tragedy.

*The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday December 28, 1942, page 4*

## BOXING DAY SHARK TRAGEDY

Denise Rosemary Burch, 14, who was killed by a shark at Bantry Bay, Middle Harbour, on Boxing Day, was standing in about 2ft 6in of water when the shark attacked, a witness said in evidence in the Coroner's Court yesterday.

John D. Bragg, 18, of Harbord, said he was rowing past in a boat at 10.30 a.m. on December 26. The girl screamed and disappeared. He rowed to the spot and beat the water with an oar until the shark swam off. He and others carried the girl ashore.

A finding of accidental death was returned by the City Coroner, Mr. Oram.

*The Sydney Morning Herald  
Saturday January 16, 1943, page 11*

## GIRL FATALLY MAULED BY SHARK

SYDNEY, Sunday.

Despite frantic efforts by her friends to save her, Denise Rosemary Burch, 16, was fatally mauled by a shark near Botany Bay, Middle Harbour, yesterday.

Although the shark was attacked with sticks and oars, it retained its hold on Miss Burch for several minutes. When brought to the shore she was dead and terribly injured about the legs.

Miss Burch, who lived at Manly, was evacuated with her mother and sister from Hong Kong 2½ years ago.

John Snodgrass, 17, of Bellevue Ave., West Ryde, who was swimming about 15 yards away from Miss Burch in deep water, had been there for half an hour prior to the attack, but was not attacked.

The scene of the fatality is about half a mile from where Miss Zeita Steadman was killed by a shark on January 4 last.