

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** 1944.01.04 / SA-073

**DATE:** Tuesday January 4, 1944

**LOCATION:** The attack took place in the Indian Ocean at North Beach, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

29°51,1'S, 31°02,4'E

**NAME:** Ronald Joel Selby

**DESCRIPTION:** The swimmer, a 26-year-old male, was 1,78 metres tall and weighed 80 kilograms. He was fair-haired and tanned and wore black swimming trunks with a red trim, the uniform of the Durban Surf Life-savers Club. Two years earlier he had been commended for his rescue of six people during a single incident at North Beach and, throughout his career as a life-saver he had saved more than a hundred lives. A superb swimmer, Selby was the Natal breaststroke champion in 1938 and was a member of the Natal water polo team.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The day was hot; temperatures ranged from 22° to 29°C. It had rained for the past three days during which 12,5 millimetres of rain had fallen but the sky was clearing when the attack took place. At 15h00 there was 1/8 cloud cover and a light 5-knot easterly breeze.

**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter, January 2, 1944

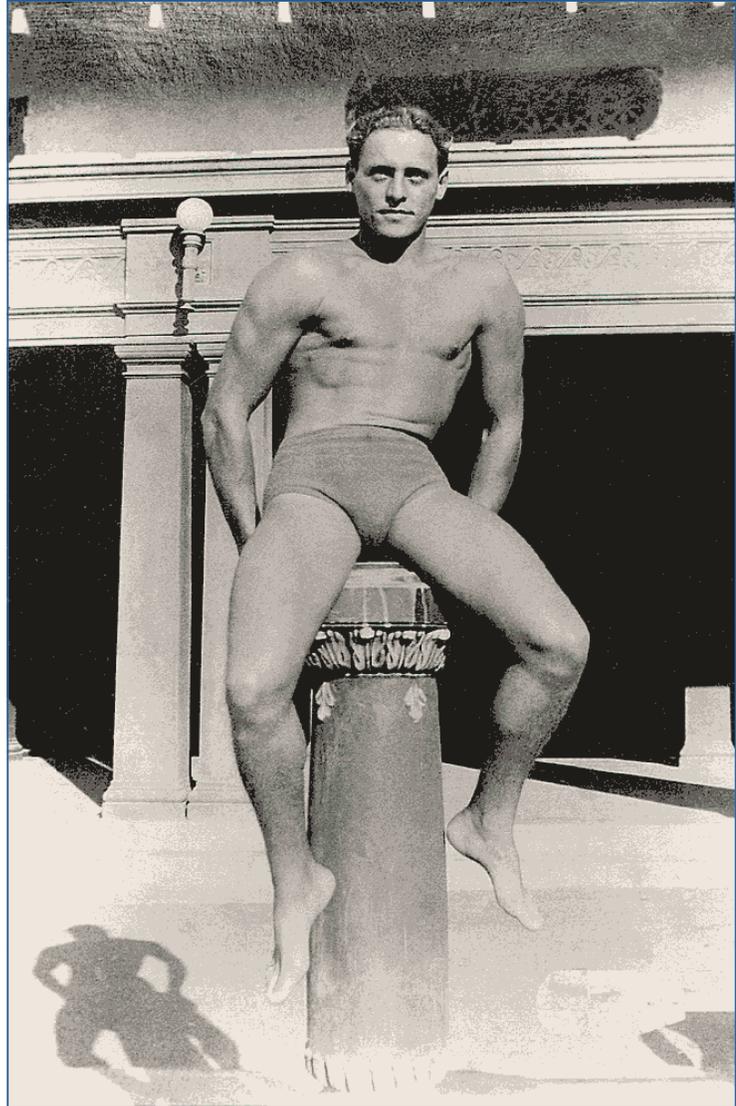
**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was heavy, dull green, discoloured and full of floating debris as the result of the heavy rains. The water was rough; earlier in the day Selby rescued a corporal of the Royal Air Force who had been in difficulty in the surf.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Ten minutes before the attack a shark was seen and several swimmers left the water, but no general warning had been given.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 55 metres

**DEPTH:** 1,2 metres

**TIME:** 17h50



*Ronald Selby*

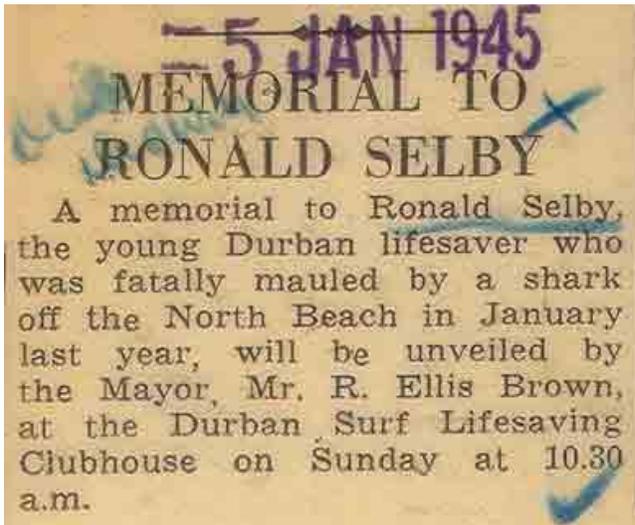
**NARRATIVE:** Ronald Selby was swimming with his brother, Maurice, who was also a lifeguard, for about 30 minutes. The two men were seaward of the main crowd of bathers and about three metres apart when Ronald shouted that he had been bitten by a shark. Maurice saw a wave wash over his brother; it was red with blood. He reached his brother seconds later and, with the assistance of constable A.F. Heymans of the South African Police, brought him to the shore.

**INJURY:** The shark had torn the flesh off the right leg between the knee and ankle, severing the posterior tibial artery.

**FIRST AID:** A tourniquet was applied as soon as he reached the beach. The patient was carried to a nearby car, taken to Addington Hospital, and was in Casualty about five minutes after reaching shore.

**TREATMENT:** Ronald Selby had often said that he "would sooner die, than lose a leg" and the Selby family mentioned that his treatment included application of a mustard plaster. On the afternoon of January 5th his right leg was surgically amputated above the knee. He died the next day, January 6, 1944, of toxemia.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Not identified



**SOURCES:** Interviews with Ronald Selby Jr. (Ronald Selby's son) in March 1986, and Maurice Selby (Ronald Selby's brother) in October 1986; Natal Mercury, January 21, 1944 et al.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Levine

*-5 JAN 1944*  
**MAULED BY  
SHARK**

Mr. Ronald Selby, a young Durban man, was badly mauled by a shark on the North Beach late yesterday afternoon. He is in Addington Hospital in a serious condition.

Mr. Selby, who lives at Killarney Flats, is a son of Mr. Arthur Selby, a Durban stationer.

He was bathing with his brother Maurice—both are voluntary lifesavers—about 5.45 p.m. beyond the main crowd of bathers. Near them was Constable A. F. Heymans of the S.A. Police.

"I had been talking with the lifesavers about sharks shortly before we went into the water," Constable Heymans told "The Natal Mercury." "We had only been in a short time when I saw something large flash in the water and I immediately thought of sharks. Then Ronald Selby shouted, 'A shark has got me.'

"His brother Maurice immediately went to his rescue, and I also assisted in getting him to the beach.

"The shark had torn the flesh of Ronald Selby's right leg between the knee and the ankle. A car was standing nearby and we got him into it. He was in hospital in about five minutes."

Four doctors attended Mr. Selby last night.

*-8 JAN 1945*  
**Helped To  
Save 100  
Lives**

A mural tablet, erected to the memory of Ronald Selby at the Durban Surf Life-Saving Club's clubhouse, was unveiled by the Mayor, Mr. R. Ellis Brown, in the presence of a large gathering yesterday.

During the time Ronald Selby was connected with the club, said the Mayor, he had been instrumental in saving well over 100 lives.

Selby was bitten by a shark on January 4 last year. He died two days later.

Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Selby (parents), Ronald Selby's father and mother-in-law (Mr. and Mrs. Curnick), his brother and sister, and Councillor Major J. Raftery.

Mr. W. Scott, who presided, referred to Ronald Selby's sterling character and unselfish adherence to duty.

The Mayor spoke in recognition of the work done by the Durban Life-Savers Club—an entirely voluntary institution.

Apart from the satisfaction of being of service to those in danger the members received no recompense for what they did. Every time a life-saver went to the assistance of a person in difficulties, he took his life in his hands.

Durban owed a great debt of gratitude to the members of this club as did people who visited Durban and bathed in the sea. Many hundreds of lives had been saved by the vigilance and prowess of the members.