

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1944.03.26.a](#) / SA-077

DATE: Sunday March 26, 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: Geoffrey Best

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer was a 23-year-old merchant seaman who had just arrived from London.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The Durban meteorological station recorded temperatures from 19° to 29°C and no rain fell. At 08h30 there was 1/8 cloud cover with a light five-knot northeasterly breeze, but a coastal low was passing through the area.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, March 24, 1944

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was clear, a south-to-north current was flowing, and a three-metre-deep channel was present.

ENVIRONMENT: The water was thick with bluebottles, *Physalia physalis*.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 20-25 metres

DEPTH: One metre

TIME: 10h00

NARRATIVE: It is not known if Geoffrey Best was within the crowd of bathers or at the edge of the group, but he was apparently standing in the shallows when the shark attacked. Life-savers saw him struggling in bloodstained water and brought him to shore.

INJURY: Best's left leg was bitten; his calf was lacerated and there was "a very severe wound in his left thigh".

FIRST AID: Unknown, but the swimmer was taken to Addington Hospital.

TREATMENT: Despite blood transfusions, Best died in the hospital at 01h00 on March 27, 1944. The inquest report stated his death was "due to shock following haemorrhage from shark bite of the left thigh whilst sea bathing."

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified

COMMENT: Bathing was banned after this incident. Later that same day, however, life-savers wanted to train at Country Club Beach and so three life-savers swam out to determine if it was safe. It wasn't; one of the trio, Gabie Botha, was bitten by a shark.

SOURCES: Interviews with Des Collopy, Jimmy Warren & Maurice Selby by Marie Levine; Natal Mercury, March 27, 1944 edition.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine

SHARK MENACE 27 MAR 1944

Two More Men Bitten Yesterday

ONE VICTIM DIES IN HOSPITAL

A VISITING merchant seaman and a young Durban man were severely bitten when two more shark attacks occurred off Durban beaches yesterday. The seaman died in hospital at one o'clock this morning.

The seaman was G. Best, aged 25, whose home was in London, and who only arrived in Durban yesterday. He was attacked while standing up to his waist in the sea at the North Beach at 10 a.m.

The other victim is 18-year-old G. P. Botha, of 69 Churchill Road, Durban. He was attacked while swimming with two companions off the Country Club Beach at 5.30 p.m., and his life was probably saved by the prompt action of a close friend, Louis Johnson, who applied pressure to an artery and halted the flow of blood from a severe wound in the thigh.

The number of people bitten by sharks off Durban beaches since January 4 is now six—three at the Country Club Beach and three at the North Beach. Three of the attacks were fatal.

CRY FOR HELP

The story of how Botha was treated for shock by his companions before an ambulance rushed him to hospital, where doctors, warned by telephone, were standing by, was related to "The Natal Mercury" last night.

Botha, Louis Johnson and Leslie Robinson, all members of the Pirates Surf Lifesaving Club, entered the sea at 5.30 for a last dip.

"We swam out about 25 yards from the first line of breakers," said Robinson, "and waited for a wave to come in. All of a sudden I was bitten. I shout 'help.' We were playing, but when we saw the blood-stained water we knew we had been attacked."

They immediately ran off to telephone.

Despite a terrible wound on the outside of the thigh and profuse bleeding, Botha kept remarkably calm, said Johnson. A piece of flesh a little bigger than a large hand had been ripped away. Johnson immediately applied his hand to a pressure point.

"I was lucky," he said, "and found the spot right away."

The bleeding abated considerably. The ambulance arrived soon after Botha's companions had given him preliminary treatment on the beach for shock.

Both Botha and Best were given blood transfusions on admission to hospital.

About 10 a.m. bathers at the North Beach raised the alarm when Best was seen struggling in blood-discoloured water. Lifesavers brought him ashore. According to eye-witnesses he had a very severe wound in the thigh. He was waist-deep at the time of the attack, and other bathers were nearby.

An all-day bathing ban was imposed at both the North and South beaches yesterday, which were cordoned off and vigilantly patrolled by lifesavers, who had great difficulty in keeping bathers out of the water.

Because of yesterday's bathing ban many people paddled at the water's edge, which was thick with bluebottles. As a result several people were taken to Addington Hospital to be treated for stings.

