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. Lifesavers 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, lifesavers 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.


CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine
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. Botha, of 69 Churchill
Road, Durban. He was at-
tacked 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 pres-
sure 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 com-
panions 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
in the first line of breakers,” said
Botha, “and waited for a wave
in. All of a sudden I
about ‘help.’ We
were playing, but when
blood-stained water
crept our
them immediately ran off to tele-
phone.

Despite a terrible wound on
the outside of the thigh and pro-
fuse bleeding, Botha kept re-
markably calm, said Johnson. A
piece of flesh a little bigger than
a large hand had been ripped
away. Johnson immediately ap-
plied his hand to a pressure point.

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

The bleeding abated consid-
ernably. 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 ad-
mission to hospital.

About 10 a.m. bathers at the
North Beach raised the alarm
when Best was seen struggling
in blood-discoloured water. Life-
savers brought him ashore. Ac-
cording 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.