

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1944.08.20 / SA-080

DATE: Sunday August 20, 1944

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean off the rocks below the Marina Hotel at Margate. Margate is 131 kilometres southwest of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
30°51,8'S, 30°22,4'E

NAME: Dennis Nissen

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 19-year-old male, was 1,69 metres tall, weighed 68 kilograms and was clad in black swimming trunks. He wore no jewelry and had no injuries before the attack.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a cold, overcast, miserable day. The Port Shepstone meteorological station recorded temperatures from 15° to 19°C, and 14,7 millimetres of rain. The sky remained completely overcast throughout the day. At 08h30 there was a light five-knot westerly breeze, and at 15h00 a light five-knot southwesterly breeze.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, August 18, 1944

SEA CONDITIONS: Brown discoloured water poured from the Umzimkulu River and visibility was nil. A north-to-south current was flowing and a channel was present.

ENVIRONMENT: In 1944 Margate was a small coastal resort, although it had received international publicity in 1922 when a "sea monster" washed ashore there. Margate has a wide curving beach sweeping from Lucien Point in the north to a rocky outcrop in the south. The lagoon of the Kongweni River lies behind the main bathing beach.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: The attack took place three to four metres from the rocks and about 100 to 150 metres from the beach.

DEPTH: Between nine and 12 metres

TIME: 14h00

NARRATIVE: The Margate Town Council had employed two Zulu life-savers in the belief that sharks were less likely to attack blacks than whites. The two life-savers observed the current, determined when and where bathing was safe and set markers daily. They had banned bathing because of the dirty water flowing from the Umzimkulu River, but Nissen insisted that he was going for a swim despite the bathing ban. He allowed the life-savers to accompany him, however, and one swam on either side. As Ted Blake, Pat Adamson and two friends watched, the three men swam around a rocky outcrop, known locally as the Point. Suddenly a large shark seized Nissen by his leg. He screamed once and disappeared beneath the waves.

INJURY: Fatal. His body was never recovered.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified



SOURCE: Interview with Ted Blake on October 6, 1986.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine

21 AUG 1944

Young Man Seized By Shark

A 19-year-old Johannesburg youth, Dennis Nissen, was attacked by a shark and pulled under the water at Margate, on the Natal South Coast, yesterday morning. His body had not been recovered last night.

Nissen and two lifesavers were the only people bathing. They were swimming some 100 to 150 yards from the beach when Nissen suddenly shouted. One of the lifesavers saw a large shark seize Nissen by a leg and disappear. He managed to catch the shark by the tail, but was unable to retain his grasp.

A number of people on the beach attempted to take out a lifeline, but were met in the breakers by the returning lifesavers.

Nissen lived at 79 Garden Street, Turffontein, and was staying at the Marina Hotel with a friend.

