

ACTIVITY: Swimming
CASE: GSAF 1946.08.18
DATE: Sunday August 18, 1946
LOCATION: Ellis Beach, 20 miles from Cairns, Queensland, Australia.
16°41'S, 147°E

NAME: Phillip South Collin
DESCRIPTION: He was a 30-year-old male.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, August 20, 1946
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 60 feet
TIME: 15h20

NARRATIVE: Phillip Collin was with a picnic party. They were tossing a tennis ball when someone missed the catch and the ball went into the water. The ball began to drift out to sea so Collin went after it. He swam into the path of a shark. The attack was witnessed by people on the beach. The shark dragged him beneath the surface three times then disappeared.

INJURY: Fatal. His body was never recovered.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The shark was estimated to be 14 feet [4.25 metres] in length.

SOURCES: The Canberra Times, Monday August 19, 1946 , page 2; Gilbert P. Whitley (1951), page 193; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 87-88 & 239; Alan Sharpe, page 97



SHARK FATALITY NEAR CAIRNS

CAIRNS, Sunday.

Before the horrified gaze of his wife and two children, Phillip Collin, 30, was fatally mauled by a shark to-day at Ellis Bridge, 20 miles from Cairns.

The shark, which was estimated at 12 feet, struck three times at its victim, whose body has not yet been recovered.

Collins was with a picnic party at the time of the attack. There were from 30 to 50 young people in the water.

A ball thrown by one of the party landed in the water some distance from the main body of the swimmers. Collins swam out to retrieve the ball and was attacked.

He screamed "shark," but the attack was so sudden and vicious that nothing could be done.

Police are searching for the body.

SHARK FATALITY

ELLIS BEACH ATTACK

EVIDENCE AT INQUEST.

A detailed account of the shark attack at Ellis Beach on Sunday, August 18, which caused the death of Philip South Collin, storeman-packer employed at Cummins & Campbell Ltd., Cairns, was given in the Coroner's Court before Mr. W. E. McKenna, S.M., yesterday. The witness was Harold Swinburne, of Draper-street, who was closer than any other person to Collin at the time of the attack.

Swinburne stated that at about 3 p.m., 50 of the party, including Collin, went in for a swim.

"After I had been about ten minutes in the water, I saw the deceased throwing a tennis ball," said witness. "I was on the northern side of the crowd in about the centre of the swimmers. Deceased was about four yards from me, further out to sea. I was about 40 yards from the beach.

"The ball was thrown to me, I threw it high in the air above the swimmers, and it landed 12 to 15 yards out to sea from me, so it was about 55 yards from the beach."

Witness added that he was about to go out for the ball when he saw the deceased ahead of him.

"He did not appear to be a very good swimmer and I called out 'I'll get the ball Phil.' Deceased replied, 'It's all right, I'll get it.'"

Witness said he stopped and watched Collin swimming out.

"I saw him put his hand out for the ball, then there was a swirl and a splash and Collin disappeared," continued witness.

"A couple of seconds later he reappeared and called out 'Swinny, Swinny, shark.' He was looking straight at me. I would be about 10 yards from him.

GREAT POOL OF BLOOD.

"I prepared to go to his assistance, but I was stopped by Mr. Jack Sellars. There was a great pool of blood round the deceased. He seemed to be trying to push the shark off.

Witness said he noticed four to five feet of the shark's tail upright in the air, then it seemed to roll on its side.

WAS BRONZE WHALER.

Swinburne declared the shark was a Bronze Whaler. It would be at least 16 feet long judging by the length of its tail. He was of the opinion that the shark grabbed Collin round the waist.

Witness added: The deceased disappeared again. About five seconds later he reappeared about a yard from the original spot. His intestines came right up above the water. The deceased had been bitten in half or disembowelled. He appeared to be lifeless. He disappeared again and came up in eight or nine seconds and floated, face upward, about 10 yards away. I am convinced he was dead then. He floated for some seconds, then something seemed to get hold of him and he disappeared finally."

Witness added that he saw the shark only once—about 3.15 p.m. He was convinced no good purpose would have been served had he gone to deceased's aid. He considered Mr. Sellars was instrumental in saving his life.

SELLAR'S EVIDENCE.

John Palmer Wallace Sellars, qualified life-saver who, with Hector Boyle, also a qualified life-saver, was a guest at Cummins & Campbell's staff picnic, said he went in at the southern end of the swimmers, 12 to 15 yards from them on the seaward side.

"I noticed several of the swimmers playing with a ball. I was 12 to 15 yards on the south seaward side when I saw two men swimming out to sea. One stopped a few yards out and the other—whom I know now as the deceased—kept on swimming out. The ball would have been 12 to 15 yards from the party of swimmers, 50 to 60 yards out to sea.

"The thing that attracted my attention was that the man was a weak swimmer. I kept watching him. Just before he reached the ball my attention was attracted elsewhere. Then I heard the call of 'Shark' from the bathers.

"I swam over to them to make sure they were moving out of the water. My thoughts were on the deceased. I turned and saw him as though he were treading water with a pool of blood around him. Everyone else but Swinburne was leaving the water. I told him to get out. He said 'No, he's my clobber. Boyle, who had been on the beach keeping watch over some children swimming, was coming into the water then.

"I realised that the only way to help the deceased, without a line, was for two strong swimmers to go out to him."

Witness said he then heard deceased's cry of "Swinny" and he saw the tail of a shark upright in the water beside deceased.

The water in which witness and Swinburne were standing was between hips and armpits.

Witness said he was convinced the second time deceased came up that he was dead.

Sellars saw the third attack and disappearance of deceased's body.

"I am certain nothing could have been done for the deceased, who died almost outright after calling 'Swinny, Swinny.'"

"I stopped Swinburne and several others from going out, because I noticed swirls around the area and I considered the shark, or sharks, was still there," he added. "A swimming man can do nothing against a shark attack."

MR. McKEWEN'S STATEMENT.

"I am satisfied that nothing could have been done to save Collin's life or to recover his remains, and that Sellars is a very brave man to have stayed in the water as long as he did and see that every other member of the party got safely out of the water. If he had

not remained as calm as he did I feel that other lives would have been lost," said the manager of Cummins and Campbell Ltd., Mr. Stanley Elmer McKewen, in a statement regarding the fatality.

Mr. McKewen was unable to attend the inquest. He saw the incident from the beach, his statement said. Two life savers and an Ambulance bearer had been invited to attend the picnic, to safeguard the picnickers.

EXHIBITS AT INQUEST

A white webbing belt, an exhibit at the inquest. Plain-clothes Constable W G. Mason said, was found at Ellis Beach on August 25, by a woman who noticed it on the beach where she was chasing sand crabs. It was shown to Mrs. Collin, who said it was similar to the belt her husband was wearing with his trunks.

The ball exhibited, Mason said, was found on the beach by Sellars and others shortly after the fatality, about 50 yards from the scene.

Mason detailed searches made by the police and a R.A.A.F. Catalina and crash launch, and said that none of them had been successful in finding Collin's remains.

The inquest was closed. The witnesses were examined by Sub-Inspector Martin Elford.