



MEREWETHER BEACH, NEWCASTLE

**ACTIVITY:** Treading water

**CASE:** GSAF 1951.12.06

**DATE:** Thursday December 6, 1951

**LOCATION:** Merewether Beach, New South Wales, Australia.

32°55'S, 151°48'E

**NAME:** Frank Okulich

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 21-year-old male and an Australian surf ski champion.

**BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** The sky was cloudy to overcast.

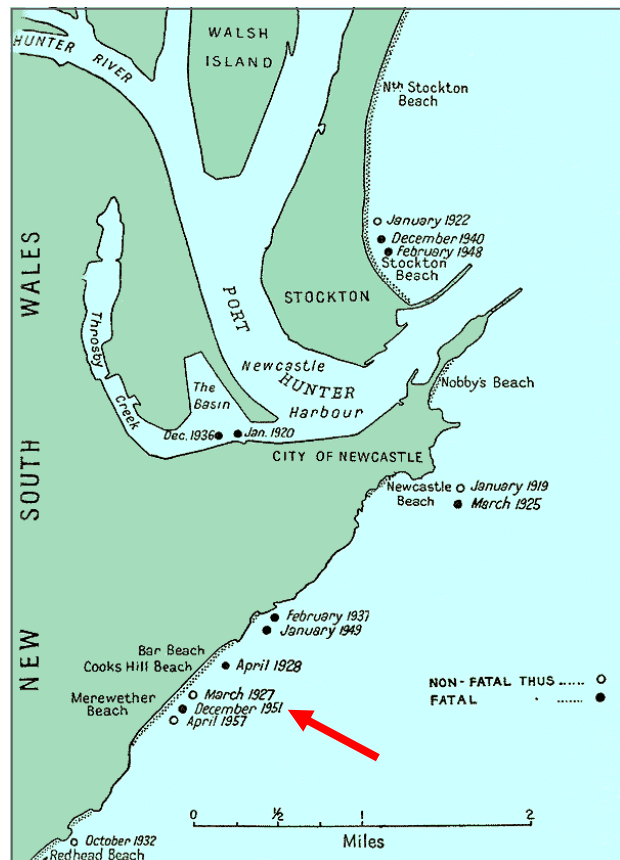
**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter, December 6, 1951

**ENVIRONMENT:** There was a sandbank with an inshore channel. Anti-Shark nets had been installed at Newcastle Beach, but the accident took place where no nets had been set because of a reef.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 100 yards

**TIME:** 15h00 —16h00

**NARRATIVE:** He was body surfing with



three Merewether Surf Club members. Two of the lifesavers caught a shoot but Okulich and 15-year-old Jim Jones missed it. Jones began swimming for the beach while Okulich lingered for the next big wave. Onlookers at the beach saw Okulich pulled beneath the water three times. They saw him surface and wave feebly as a dark stain spread over the surface. Then Okulich was lifted by a wave. The afternoon sun shining through the water silhouetted his body, and alongside him was a long dark shadow. Ron Galbraith and William Morgan paddled out on surf skis but didn't see Okulich or the shark. His body drifted ashore an hour later.

**INJURY:** Fatal.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Onlookers saw the shark. They estimated that it was 2.4 metres [eight feet] in length.

**SOURCES:** V.M. Coppleson.N16.(1933)  
V. M. Coppleson (1958), page 79  
Coppleson Archives, 1223/11, Item 3  
Sharpe, page 85  
The Gleaner, December 7, 1951

## Shark kills ski champion

SYDNEY, Dec. 6 (AP):

A shark killed surf ski champion, Frank Okulich, 21. The horribly mauled body was washed into shallow water at Merewether beach at Newcastle, 100 miles from Sydney this afternoon, one hour after the shark had dragged Okulich under the water.

The shark attacked Okulich 100 yards from the shore. He had been swimming with three other Merewether life-savers.

An eyewitness on the beach said: "I saw a shadow on the crest of the wave. It tugged the boy under, but he came up again waving his hands. I saw the shadow attack him again and again. Then his head just bobbed in the waves like a cork. After about four minutes I saw a shark make another go at him—then his body disappeared."

*The Gleaner (Kingston, Jamaica)  
December 7, 1951, page 10*