

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1954.02.27

DATE: Saturday February 27, 1954

LOCATION: The accident took place at The Entrance, Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, Australia. 33°20'S, 152°E

NAME: Reginald Fabrizius

DESCRIPTION: He was a 23-year-old male.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was overcast.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, February 26, 1954

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was flat but discolored from recent rains. The water temperature at Swansea Bridge, Lake Macquarie) was 78°F.

ENVIRONMENT: Lake Macquarie is the largest salt-water lake in the southern hemisphere. Many sharks had previously been seen in the vicinity of the accident.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 100 to 150 yards

TIME: 17h10

NARRATIVE: Reginald Fabrizius was swimming alone and no one witnessed the accident, although the shark was seen a few yards from Fabrizius by an onlooker. Fabrizius swam 50 yards towards shore before being pulled onto a surf ski by R. Viquerat off The Entrance Surf Club, assisted by C. Ross and F. Lewis.

INJURY: Fatal. There was a large wound on the right knee and thigh. The femur was exposed.

FIRST AID / TREATMENT: A tourniquet was applied by a doctor on shore and the wound packed. Fabrizius was taken to Gosford Hospital under the care of Dr. G. Duncan. He was given blood transfusions and his wounds were sutured. He died suddenly post-operatively.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified.

SOURCES: The Canberra Times, Monday March 1, 1954, page 1; The Sydney Morning Herald, March 1, 1954; J. Green, pages 44-50; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 87 & 238



SHARK VICTIM DIES

SYDNEY, Sunday.

A surfer who was badly mauled by a shark 150 yards off The Entrance late yesterday afternoon, died in Gosford Hospital early this morning.

The surfer was Reginald Fabrizious, 23, of Cavendish Street, Stanmore.

He was the first person to be fatally mauled by a shark this season.

Fabrizius was swimming alone in the surf when the shark attacked him, ripping the flesh from his right thigh to the knee.

A fellow club member, Bob Viquerat, 28, saw Fabrizious in trouble and dashed out to him on a surf ski.

He pulled Fabrizious from the water as the shark circled for another attack.

He was rushed into the operating theatre at Gosford Hospital and two doctors tried to save his life.

About 20 lifesavers from The Entrance and Gosford hurried to the hospital to offer blood.

Doctors treated Fabrizious with blood plasma and asked Sydney Red Cross blood bank to send more plasma by fast car to Gosford.

Victim Of Shark Attack Dies

GOSFORD, Sunday.—Reginald Fabrizious, 23, of Cavendish Street, Stanmore, victim of a shark attack yesterday, died in Gosford District Hospital this morning.

Fabrizius was surfing alone 150 yards from the shore at The Entrance when the shark attacked shortly before dusk.

It tore flesh from the thigh to the bone.

Robert Viquerat, a member of The Entrance Surf



REGINALD FABRIZIUS

Club, paddled out and brought Fabrizious ashore on his surf ski.

Members of the surf club waited at the hospital for hours to give their blood in case transfusions were necessary.

When the seven march-past teams filed on to the beach at Wamberal to-day, the teams lowered their banners and stood for one minute's silence as a mark of respect for Fabrizious.

Hero remembers mate's rescue

IT is a painful memory for 82-year-old Bob Viquerat, but one of the most dramatic rescues of the many he has performed during his long association with surf lifesaving the shark attack rescue of 1954.

It was about 3pm on a murky Saturday afternoon.

Bob Viquerat was shaping an axe handle outside The Entrance SLSC club house, having clocked off from his surf patrol shift at noon.

The ocean was the colour of tea because of the amount of brown rainwater spewing out of The Entrance channel and into the ocean. The beach was closed.

The surf was only about three to four feet, he estimates now, but it was dangerous.

A few of Mr Viquerat's clubmates were coming back into the beach from a swim, saying that one more was still out there waiting to catch the next wave in.

"All of a sudden I heard this bloody yell," Mr Viquerat said. "It was this yell for help. As soon as I heard the yell I knew what it was. I could tell by the sound of the voice. I knew it was that a bitey had got somebody. I have never heard a voice with so much feeling. He only yelled out once, that's all."

Mr Viquerat knew he could not swim out in time and there was no one to throw a line out, so he ran up to the club and grabbed a surf ski, dragged it down to the beach and started paddling.

"On the way out, you wouldn't want to read about it," he said. "I am heading towards him [the victim] and I am trying to get to him quick and I am side-on to the waves. You don't do that, mate, not in the surf or anything, and this bloody wave picked me up and washed me about 30metres backwards."

The only way to stop himself being dragged back to the beach was to dangle his legs in the water. "I was shitting myself," he said. "I am no hero. I was frightened, because I knew what the trouble was."

When Mr Viquerat reached the victim, he realised the man he was out to rescue was his best mate, Reg "The Runner" Fabrizius.

"He threw himself onto that ski, I don't know how," Mr Viquerat said. "He just said, 'matey'. I was known by everybody as matey. That's the only bloody word he said."

Mr Viquerat got his friend onto the beach, laid him down, and by that time others had made it down to the beach and he was handed a piece of clothing that he strapped around the man's upper thigh.

"I just filled the space in that the shark took, in between his crotch and his knee," he said. "It took it all in one big piece. Its teeth went over onto the other leg and just scratched it. We couldn't do anything more for Reg."

Another clubmate took only 15 minutes to drive Reg to Gosford Hospital. He passed away that night in hospital.

While Simon Falconer's rescue may not have been quite so personally traumatic, his instinct for trouble set in motion the events that saved Joanne Leaver's life after she was found clinically drowned at Soldiers Beach on March 9. The 22-year-old volunteer was patrol captain on that day when he saw a surfer struggling to climb back on her board. Fortunately, Ms Leaver is around to tell the tale, and Mr Falconer says she has a team of a dozen trained volunteer lifesavers to thank for that. Mr Falconer said his involvement in saving Ms Leaver's life was the highlight of a job he loved. "It's a good feeling knowing that someone was clinically drowned and you helped to bring her back to life," he said.

SOURCE: Central Coast Herald, April 26, 2003, page 20