

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1955.01.17

DATE: Monday January 17, 1955

LOCATION: Wy-ar-gine Point at the northwestern end of Balmoral Beach, Middle Harbour, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

NAME: John Willis

DESCRIPTION: He was a 13-year-old male, a student at Mosman Intermediate High School.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: It was a cloudy day with fine rain and the air temperature was 79°F.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, January 16, 1955

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was murky.

DISTANCE FROM ROCKS: 20 yards.

WATER DEPTH: Seven feet

TIME: 14h30

NARRATIVE: John Willis was hunting lobsters when

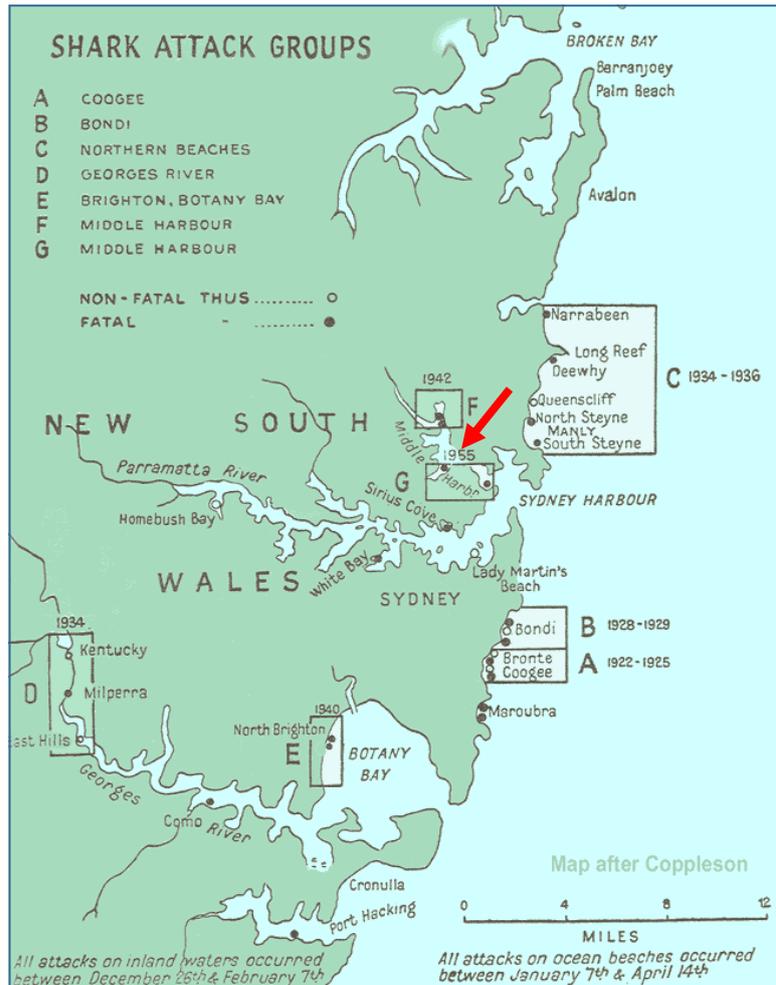
he screamed and beat the water with his hands. Then he slowly swam toward the rocks, reached the shore and collapsed. He was bleeding profusely as three men carried him 150 yards to the beach. By the time a doctor arrived he was dead.

INJURY: Fatal. Abrasions and lacerations to right thumb and forefinger. Deep incised wounds on left shin and right calf. Teeth marks were visible on the anterior of his left leg and posterior right leg, but no tissue had been removed. Death resulted from exsanguination.

Coppleson writes, "it was thought that young Willis was carrying a fish or lobster on a spear in front of him and that this was the shark's main objective. Lacerations on Willis right forefinger and thumb suggesting that the spear was wrenched violently from his hand support this theory."

SPECIES INVOLVED: The incident involved a bronze whaler shark, according to the Australian Shark Attack File. A short time afterwards, at high tide, a shark swam within 10 yards of the shore and along the concrete wall of the rock pool. Two other large sharks cruised near the spot where Willis was bitten. They were later joined by a third shark and circled the area for more than two hours. Attempts to catch the sharks were unsuccessful.

SOURCES: The Central Queensland Herald, February 17, 1955



Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 71, 174-175

Alan Sharpe, page 74.

NOTE: According to the Australian Shark Attack File, Willis was spearfishing /snorkeling and the incident was provoked.

Shark Attack Hero "Gone Bush"

SYDNEY, February 16.— A youth acclaimed today as a hero of a shark attack and nominated for a bravery award cannot be found.

His brother said tonight that he had "gone bush," looking for a job and no one knew where he was.

He is Jim Ellis, 17, who dived to the rescue of John Willis, 13, after Willis was badly mauled by a shark at Balmoral Beach on January 17.

Ellis ignored the fact that the shark that mauled the boy must have been nearby when he swam to haul him ashore.

The City Coroner (Mr F. McNamara) at the inquest on the boy's death today describing Ellis' action said: "I cannot imagine a more outstanding act of bravery."

He instructed that the youth be found and said that he would make the highest recommendation that he be awarded a medal for his bravery.