

ACTIVITY: Swimming
CASE: GSAF 1956.03.04
DATE: Sunday March 4, 1956
LOCATION: Portsea Beach, near entrance to Port Phillip Bay, Victoria, Australia.



NAME: John Patrick Wishart
DESCRIPTION: He was a 26-year-old male, a powerful swimmer and a member of the Surf Lifesaving Association.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, March 4, 1956
ENVIRONMENT: Portsea, the most westerly settlement on the Mornington Peninsula, lies on a two km strip of land bordered by Port Phillip Bay in the north and the Bass Strait in the south.
DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 230 metres
TIME: 16h45

NARRATIVE: There was a carnival at Portsea and crowds flocked to see the Surfing Lifesaving Competitions. It was late in the afternoon; the competitions were over and the crowds had thinned, but several swimmers lingered in the water. One of them was John Wishart and he swam to several of his mates, including Jack Hopper who was captain of the Portsea Club. They were treading water, facing seaward as they waited for the next wave when Hopper saw an "enormous black shape coming in behind us." It slewed around in front of the group and slammed into Wishart, and he disappeared beneath the surface.

INJURY: Fatal.

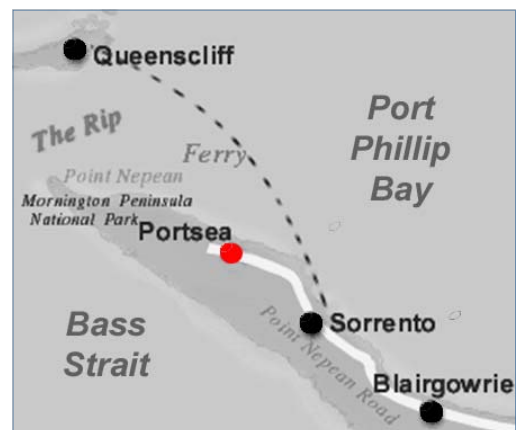
SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack involved a 3.7-metre [12'] shark and, according to witnesses, there may have been another shark nearby.

SOURCES: The Waco News Tribune (Waco, Texas), Monday March 5, 1956, page 11.
V.M. Coppleson (1958), pages 110-111 & 241.
Green, page 34.
Sharpe, pages 112-113.

Bathers See Shark Kill Life Guard

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 4—A young Australian life-guard was killed by a shark off a beach near here Sunday while hundreds of Sunday bathers watched the youth's vain struggle for life. John Wishart was attacked by the shark while swimming about 250 yards from shore.

Wishart was the second Australian to be fatally attacked by a shark in the last week. Another youth died when he was attacked in a coastal Queensland river a few days ago.



LEAPING SHARK KILLS MAN AT PORTSEA BEACH

A 12-foot shark yesterday seized life saver John Wishart, 27, in Portsea's first shark tragedy.

The shark leaped from the water to take Wishart by the head and shoulders as he swam 250 yards from the shore with three other life-savers about 5 p.m. after a club surf carnival.

Until midnight firemen, police and life savers patrolled the beach and operated a searchlight without success.

Wishart, a plumber, is a Portsea resident. He was an outstanding player in the Peninsula Football League.

Only an hour before, he had finished second in the club surf race championship.

Wishart, club captain John Hopper, of Spring Vale, Sergeant Gregory

Warland, of the Officers' Training School, Portsea, and Tony Woodhouse were catching waves soon after the carnival ended.



Twenty-years-old Gregory Warland, who was swimming alongside Wishart when the shark struck.

They were 150 yards out past a spot where 150 swimmers were in the water.

Sergeant Warland last night told how the shark, a black 12-footer, probably a whaler shark, leaped a foot clear of the water, knocked Hopper to one side with its tail, seized Wishart's head and shoulders and disappeared with him.

Warland said: "My first reaction was to go to his aid, but I could not catch sight of anything. The shark might have been underneath us. We did not know where they were."

Parents There

Wishart's mother and father manage a store at Portsea.

His wife and sister were on the beach watching when the attack occurred.

Spectators on the cliff

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saw a flurry as the shark struck.

The shark pounced upon Wishart, coming towards Sergeant Warland, and was only yards from him as it went under with its victim.

It cleared the water by a good foot as it made its leap.

The fatality was the first in the history of Victorian surf bathing, the secretary of the Surf Life-saving Association of Victoria (Mr. J. C. Williams) said last night.

It was only the third in the history of swimming in Victoria.

The two previous fatalities both occurred in Port Phillip Bay — the first shortly before the turn of

the century and the second in 1930.

Mr. Williams said it had been Victoria's proud boast that its coast had been generally free from sharks and that the beaches had been free from that menace.

Mrs. G. Bell, of Station Street, Aspendale, saw the shark attack the swimmer.

"We watched five men catch a large wave and come in to shore," she said. "But the sixth man missed the breaker by about two feet.

"He appeared to be waiting for the next roller when he suddenly threw up his arms and disappeared."

The Age, Monday March 5, 1956, page 1