

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1957.12.23 / SA-119

DATE: Monday December 23, 1957

LOCATION: The accident took place at Margate, a resort situated 131 kilometres southwest of Durban on the KwaZulu-Natal coast of South Africa. Margate is 6,4 kilometres south of Uvongo where Allan Green was fatally bitten by a shark three days earlier. $30^{\circ}51,8'S$, $30^{\circ}22,4'E$

NAME: Vernon James Berry

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer was a 23-year-old male. He had arrived by car from Bulawayo the morning of the attack with two friends: Thomas Robinson and Stan Wallace.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: According to the records of the Port Shepstone meteorological station 17 kilometres away, the temperature ranged from 15° to $24^{\circ}C$. At 15h00 there was 4/8 cloud cover and a gentle nine-knot easterly breeze. Although no rainfall was recorded on the day of the attack, there had been 4,2 millimetres of rain the previous day.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, December 21, 1957

SEA CONDITIONS: Some reports say that the water was clear, others say it was dirty. According to JLB Smith, "In late December 1957, a belt of discolored water was clearly visible along virtually the whole shore of Natal". The incident took place 30 minutes after mean high tide, and two days after spring tides.

ENVIRONMENT: On the afternoon of 22 December two young boys were lying in the surf when two sharks rushed at them, however, they avoided the sharks and were not injured. Immediately before this incident, a group of Africans 300 metres north of the main beach saw a large shark swimming toward the bathers and one of the men from the group ran down the beach shouting a warning. After the attack the shark remained in the area and cruised parallel to the beach.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 10 metres

DEPTH: One metre

TIME: 16h23



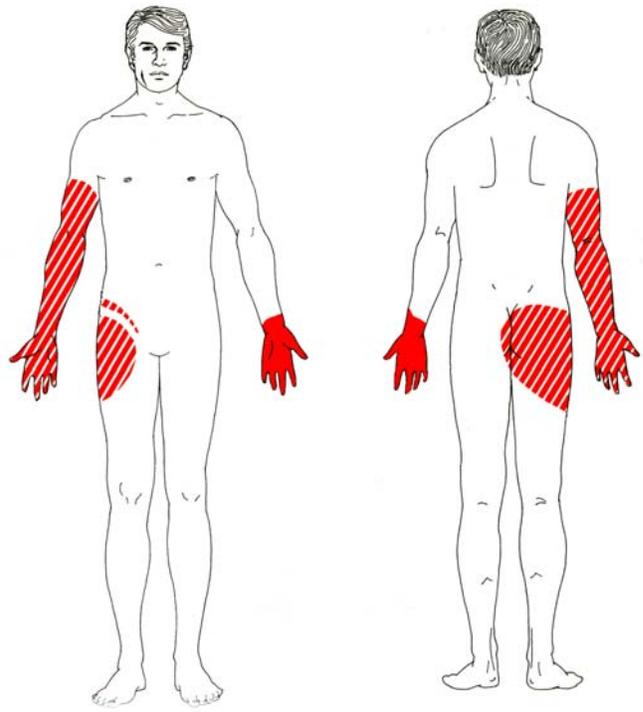
NARRATIVE: Hundreds of people were on the beach when Vernon Berry entered the water at 16h00. Reports are conflicting: some witnesses said the Berry was bitten by the shark in a channel opposite the lagoon, others say that he was swimming amid 200 other bathers in the centre of the lagoon. A witness sitting on the rocks saw the shark gliding through a breaker directly at Berry; it tore into his side and pushed him sideways along the surface and through a breaking wave. Five metres away, Robinson, heard Berry cry for help, turned, and saw only his hand above water reddening with blood. Witnesses said the shark assaulted the swimmer three times within 30 seconds and describe the swimmer and shark turning “somersaults in the waist-deep water”. Robinson went to Berry's aid and with another friend, Fred Norman, carried him from the water.



Vernon Berry

INJURY: Berry's right arm was broken and stripped of all flesh and his left hand was severed above the wrist. His lower abdomen, buttocks and right thigh were severely bitten by the shark.

FIRST AID: As Berry was taken from the water he became aware of the extent of his injuries and then lost consciousness. He was carried to the life-savers' clubhouse and an ambulance was called. Dr Lynch rendered first aid on the beach. Berry never regained consciousness; according to the press he convulsed and died in the back of a jeep owned by Rocky Doveton while en route to Port Shepstone Hospital, but Dr Lynch said that he died moments before he was being placed in the jeep.



SPECIES INVOLVED: Witnesses estimated the shark to be more than three metres in length, and the nature of the injuries suggest that a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, was involved. Two days later a 181-kilogram shark was hooked at West Street Pier, Durban.

NOTE: Bathing was immediately banned at Margate. Next day the Margate Council met to consider temporary measures: banning of bathing after 15h30, increasing the number of watchers and watch points, provision of an aerial patrol covering the Lower South Coast, investigation of protective nets and the financing of such measures. On Christmas Day limited bathing was allowed and on 26 December an air patrol began that scanned the coast between Uvongo and Southbroom until 15h30 each day. The aircraft, belonging to Comair and chartered by the Margate Town Council at a cost of £40 a day, was used for less than a week; it was discontinued after the attack on Julia Painting (GSAF 1957.12.30).

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SOURCES: Interviews with Neville Doveton (March 12, 1987), Geoff Wolf and Dr. Lynch by Marie Levine; South Coast Herald, December 27, 1957; Natal Mercury, January 10, 1958; Daily News (Durban), August 8, 1958

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine

Mankiller Shark

South Coast Week Of Tragedy

TERROR again came to bathers when a mankiller shark, in water less than four feet deep, seized a 23-year-old Rhodesian, Vernon Berry, on Monday afternoon.

Berry, together with friends Tommy Robinson and Stan Wallace, had only arrived that mid-day from Bulawayo by car. The young men had not found holiday accommodation and had decided to sleep in a van belonging to five friends who had arrived the previous day.

After making arrangements for their meals at a local hotel, together with their friends they decided to have their first bathe and it was then that Berry had suddenly yelled "sharks" and disappeared in a sudden welter of disturbed water.

Tommy Robinson and a friend, Fred Norman, floundered across towards Berry and seeing him in blood discoloured water, proceeded to haul him towards the beach where it was found that Berry was seriously mauled.

Joined by the remainder of their friends they carried him across towards the Lifesavers' clubhouse. In the meantime an ambulance had been summoned but Berry died on the way to Port Shepstone Hospital.

This tragedy, the second in four days on this part of the coast, has cast gloom over the

beaches. Where sharks are observed warning could then be given to bathers by the firing of Verey lights.

Whatever is decided upon, drastic measures will have to be taken to rid the holiday beaches of the menace responsible for these continuing tragedies. While shark nets similar to those off the beaches of Durban could help, the cost and difficulty of adequate servicing of them would be well nigh impossible.

P.S. Mayor Urges Shooting Of Sharks

During the last 17 years, since 1940 there have been 31 shark attacks on the whole Natal Coast, 14 of them fatal. For the last two or three years however the menace seems to have decreased and people were lulled into security. This year however, the waters round the river mouths appear to abound with sharks and reports have come in from fishermen and others of monsters seen at many points.

Young Dusty Miller bathing at Margate on Sunday afternoon had a lucky escape. He and a friend were lying in the surf, just covered by the water, when they heard a scream from a girl on the beach. Looking round they saw two sharks coming for them right into the shallow water. As they jumped clear of the water, Dusty saw the white belly of the front one as it turned over and swerved to attack.

The Mayor of Port Shepstone, Clr. S. Lowe, within an hour of the attack on the second victim, Vernon Berry, had interviewed the District Commandant, Captain Len Truter, and the Chief Magistrate, Mr. W. R. Hawes, and received their unrestricted backing in a scheme he has thought up

S.C. Aerial Patrol

Bathers on beaches between Mpongo and Southbroom yesterday morning saw the first aerial patrol of their beaches in operation. An aircraft belonging to Comair of Durban and chartered by the Margate Council to scan the coastline between these two centres began experimental operations. Observers in the aircraft reported seeing a large ray. They had, however, seen no sharks.

At the time of going to press it was intended to repeat the morning's reconnaissance in the afternoon.

The cost of this operation is being borne solely by the Margate Council.

*The South Coast Herald
Friday, December 27, 1957
Front page*

He urges that every angler, or anyone else who can handle a gun, take a .303 rifle down to the beach and watch for sharks. Even if a nick is taken out of a shark, his colleagues, when they see the blood, will finish the job. Clr. Lowe hopes that the Mayors of adjoining Boroughs will follow suit.

It is in the hands of the Mayor of a town to give permission for firearms to be fired within its precincts. Clr. Lowe asks those who are prepared to help with this job to contact the Town Clerk, Mr. John Cox, who will give this formal permission.