

ACTIVITY: Paddling in knee-deep water

CASE: [GSAF 1958.04.05](#) / SA-0125

DATE: Saturday April 5, 1958

LOCATION: The attack took place at Uvongo, 129 kilometres (80 miles) south-west of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The incident location was a hundred metres from the spot where Allan Green was killed by a shark on 20 December 1957.

30°50,2'S, 30°23,8'E

NAME: Fay Jones Bester

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: Fay Bester, a 28-year-old female, was wearing a red and yellow floral-patterned bathing suit. She was a slender, petite woman about 1,5 m [4'11"] tall. Mrs. Bester was a widow (her husband had been killed in a motorcycle accident in Durban the previous year) and mother of four small children: seven-year-old Lionel and three girls, eight-year-old Nola, six-year-old Priscilla and three-year old Dianne. She was spending the holiday at Esperanza, near Umzinto, with relatives.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Witnesses said the sky was sunny. The Port Shepstone meteorological station recorded temperatures ranging from 17° to 25°C (62.6° to 77°F). At 08h30 the sky was overcast and it was calm, but by 15h00 the sky had cleared and there was a moderate 13-knot north-easterly breeze.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, April 4, 1958

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was muddy and turbid. Heavy seas had pounded the coast on the night of 4 April and seriously damaged the protective shark barrier at Uvongo. The accident occurred at low tide while workmen were repairing the barrier.

ENVIRONMENT: The shark nets were removed for repair early on April 5th and bathers were warned to swim elsewhere. It was at this unprotected part of the beach that the accident took place. A channel was present.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 20 metres.

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: Less than one metre

TIME: 11h10



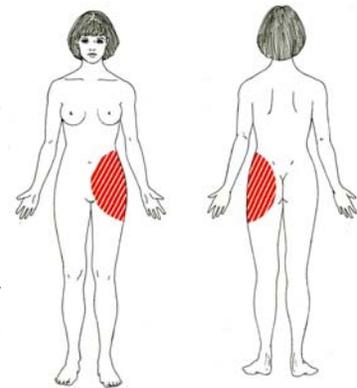
NARRATIVE: Five hundred people were on the beach when Fay Bester walked over to join a group of people who had gathered to watch workmen repairing the shark barrier 30 to 40 metres from the beach. The day was hot, and to keep cool, she stood with a group of about 15 other people in the water at the river mouth, then paddled in the knee-deep water. Geoff Wolfe, owner of the Uvongo Hotel, warned the group that it wasn't safe, but most of the people – including Fay Bester – remained in the water.



Fay Bester

Moments later the shark swam out of the four-metre-deep channel and rushed at the young woman. Willie Noeth, sitting at the water's edge, heard Mrs Bester scream and saw her fall forward as the shark knocked her off her feet. "Then she was flung into the air, and the water turned red," said Graham Perry. People splashed and hit the water with their hands to drive the shark away.

But the shark turned swiftly, and the legs of a woman near Mrs. Bester were badly abraded by the tail and fins of the shark as it swung around. The shark clamped its jaws over the Mrs. Bester's waist and tossed its head vigorously. "The shark "shook her like a dog shakes a bone and wheeled half out of the water," said Mr B.J. Bonthuys of Brakpan. The attack lasted only a few seconds; as people ran shouting and splashing through the water the shark disappeared.



Rescuers rushed to help young woman, lifted her from the water and carried her to the beach. One of them, Mrs B. Theunissen of Benoni said, "by the time we reached the sand, she was dead."

INJURY: Mrs. Bester's left leg was almost severed and her abdomen was severely bitten. The Pietermaritzburg coroner's court, Mr G.J. Geldenhuys, returned a verdict of "Death due to shock and haemorrhage through multiple injuries".

SPECIES INVOLVED: According to witnesses the shark was three metres [10 feet] in length, and their descriptions of the fish suggest that it was a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*. An unsuccessful attempt was made to catch the shark on a pork-baited line.

COMMENT: In 1958, 225 sharks were caught in the Durban nets, the largest number since their installation. Of these, 22 were white sharks – a very high percentage. From 1952 (the year the nets were installed) to 1972 the annual catch of white sharks varied between one and 15. Not only were large numbers of sharks off Natal in 1958, there were record numbers of white sharks among them.

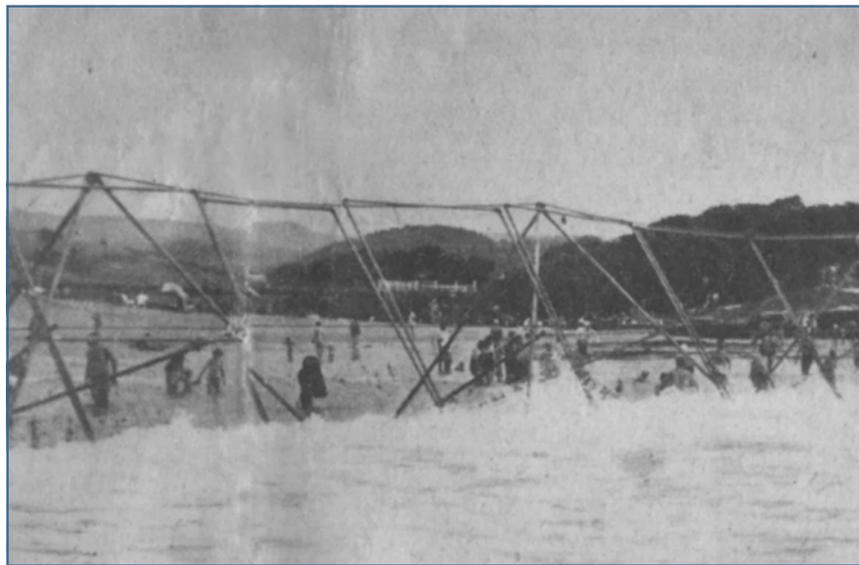
SOURCES: Interviews with witnesses Geoff Wolfe, Mrs. Masterson, and Graham Stephens; The Sun Coast Herald, April 6, 1958; Natal Mercury, April 7, 1958; Daily News (Durban), April 5 & 10, August 8 and December 23, 1958; Sunday Tribune, April 6 & 20, 1958.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine

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From the collection of Geoff Wolfe



Shark barrier at St. Michaels