

**ACTIVITY:** Sea disaster  
**CASE:** [GSAF 1966.05.20.c](#)  
**DATE:** Friday May 20, 1966  
**LOCATION:** Jervis Bay, New South Wales, Australia.

**NAME:** Kor Van Helden  
**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 40-year-old male.

**BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER / SEA CONDITIONS:** Storm seas

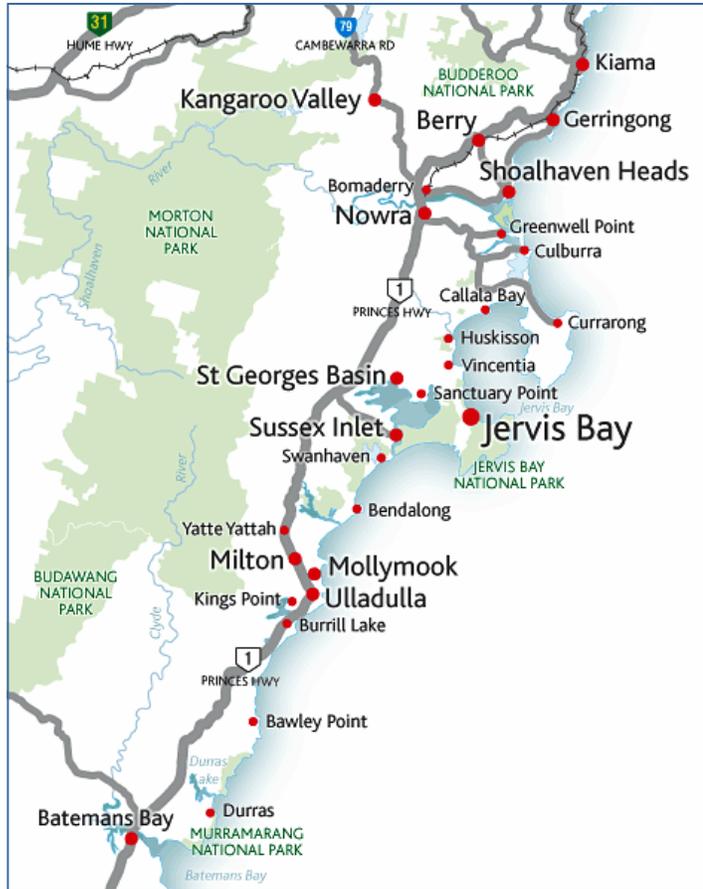
**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, May 20, 1966

**TIME:** Night

**NARRATIVE:** The 304-tonne dredge *World Atlas* sank during a storm off the coast of Jervis Bay. Thirteen of the 17 crew members died, including Kor Van Helden. His remains washed up on a beach.

**INJURY:** Fatal

**SOURCE:** Jack Green, page 35



## Shark Tales

The public tends to be overly paranoid about shark attacks, even though deaths are rare

FOR a creature that kills on average less than one person a year in Australia, the shark appears to have copped a seriously bad rap.

According to the International Shark Attack File, the chances of being mauled are one in 11.5 million, yet a cry of "shark" engenders panic like no other. The case is no different in the Illawarra, where there have been 21 attacks, three of them fatal, between Helensburgh and Jervis Bay in 138 years - hardly significant for a region where the ocean is synonymous with leisure.

According to Taronga Zoo life sciences operations manager John West, the first known shark attack in the region was in 1871 and involved a wobbegong, which turned on an Aborigine while he was fishing in the shallows of Jervis Bay.

For a generation of people, there was no attack so shocking as that involving four fishermen on Bellambi Reef in 1923. By journey's end, 50-year-old Joe Rigby, a Corrimal father of five, was taken by a shark. Two of his companions also died. The four mates set out in their 15ft timber boat on the morning of June 6 when, according to lone survivor Jack Butler, of Woonona, the craft was hit by a "shuddering bump" from below and began taking on water. "After a while, Joe and myself tried to swim to shore ... Hardly had I gone five yards when my foot got tangled in a fishing line and I called out to Joe that I would have to go back. "He replied, 'Goodbye, Jack. If I get to shore I will send help as soon as possible'. I returned to the boat and when Joe had gone perhaps 100 yards we heard a cry and saw him no more." As the ordeal progressed, two more men, George Clarke, 36, of Woonona, and Ernie Power, 36, of Corrimal, perished, although it is unknown whether they too were taken by sharks. Mr Butler was ultimately rescued by a passing steamer.

The habit of throwing dead animals off the Kiama Blowhole led the popular tourist area to become a feeding ground for sharks, a fact unknown to Ernest Conroy when he arrived in Kiama in 1924. Within two weeks of starting a new job at a blue metal quarry, the 21-year-old visited Kiama Blowhole to spear crabs for bait and at some point lost his footing. A fishing companion watched in horror as he tried to swim to safety but was suddenly pulled from the surface and never seen again.

Two more attacks followed before the NSW Government introduced a shark net system in 1937 to protect the most frequently populated beaches from attacks. The program was extended to include four beaches in the Illawarra, at South and North beach at Wollongong, and Thirroul and Austinmer beaches. The task of administering the nets was carried out by specialist contractors, including Corrimal brothers Eddie and Jack Hollis, who won the Illawarra contract in 1950. It marked the start of a family dynasty, the work continued today by Eddie's son, Ted, and grandson, Greg.

The netting program continued at the four Wollongong City beaches until the summer of 1966, when an attack on a 13-year-old boy resulted in Coledale Beach being added to the program. Raymond Short, of Hurstville, was swimming at the beach when a white pointer latched on to his right leg. Surf lifesaving brothers Raymond and Brian Joyce were the first to his side as he cried out repeatedly: "It's still got me. Get him off." The boy was dragged from the surf with the shark attached; it did not let go until a surfer bashed it over the head with a surfboard. Raymond was rushed to Coledale Hospital for emergency surgery, where his leg was saved from amputation.

**The region's last fatality occurred on May 20, 1966, when the 304-tonne dredge *World Atlas* sank during a storm off the coast of Jervis Bay. Thirteen of the 17 crew members died,**

**including 40-year-old Kor Van Helden, whose remains were found washed up on a beach, leaving no doubt he had been mauled by a shark.**

Nineteen-year-old Corrimal surfer Terry Cooper was lying on his surfboard at Tabourie Beach on October 10, 1972, when he saw the fin of a white pointer break the surface. He later described the attack as "like being hit by a train with teeth". "Out of my left eye, I could see the shadow of the shark hit and spin and come up on my leg. The white shark's nature is that he doesn't chew - he bites, rips, swallows or lets go. He made the mistake of letting go." It was impossible, he said, to explain the fear of trying to get to shore with a hungry shark in pursuit, but he escaped with his life - and 105 stitches in his buttocks and thigh.

The NSW Government raised the ire of professional fishermen in 1979 when it banned meshing during summer, a law made at the insistence of amateur fishermen who claimed they were depleting fish stocks. The professionals said the move interfered with their livelihood, while taking away a line of defence between sharks and swimmers.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries is quick to point out that only one fatal attack has occurred on a netted beach - at Newcastle in 1951 - since the program was launched 62 years ago. Shark protection programs - including declaration of the great white and grey nurse as protected species - have led to speculation the shark population had dramatically increased. Dr Adam Smith, a doctor of marine biology who founded the Great Australian Shark Count in 2007, said it was still too soon to say whether this was the case. He said 11,000 sightings of the 10 most common sharks (there are 170 in all) had been made in Australian waters in the space of 14 months but, as yet, there was nothing with which to compare the figures.

Bendigo Bank Aerial Patrol general manager Harry Mitchell said sightings were on the increase, but whether this meant more sharks was difficult to say. A 16 per cent increase in shark sightings has been recorded for the summer patrol period ending April 2008 compared with 2007, and that upward trend had been displayed since 2002. Mr Mitchell said the region's estuaries were major feeding grounds for marine life, including sharks, and many of those waterways were located next to popular beaches. Based on his observations from the air, he said the majority of sharks were casually loitering near these beaches. "They're being curious. They're in search of food, but humans aren't a natural food source," he said. He believed people had an unnaturally high paranoia about being taken by a shark, despite statistics to the contrary. "I don't know if it started with (the movie) Jaws, but it didn't help. A lot of people have a fear of being eaten," he said.

Media attention following a fatality, such as that following the death of Brian Guest, 51, who was taken while snorkelling at Port Kennedy near Perth on December 27, did not help ease community panic, he said.

Fear was not a factor for Terry Cooper, who returned to the surf immediately after his attack. But the father of two, who still lives at Corrimal, maintains a healthy respect for the creature that came close to taking his life. "I used to have a saying, 'I don't go into the water and sharks don't come into the pub'. But I've since matured, so now I'll say they don't come into my backyard. "But, really, sharks don't care about us. That equalises our mortality. After all, we are just part of the food chain."

#### HISTORY OF ATTACKS

► 1871: An Aborigine is injured after being attacked by a wobbegong while fishing in the shallows at Jervis Bay.

► June 6, 1923: Joe Rigby, 50, of Corrimal, is taken by a shark while fishing with three mates at Bellambi.

- ▶ April 25, 1924: Ernest Conroy, 21, is taken by a shark while spearing crabs for bait at Kiama Blowhole.
- ▶ February 2, 1934: Beryl Morrin, of Austinmer, survives a shark attack.
- ▶ February 14, 1935: Darcy Lorenz, of Austinmer, has his left thigh mauled by a shark while surfing.
- ▶ March 20, 1940: Man named S Walker is injured by a wobbegong in shallow water at Gerringong.
- ▶ February 17, 1941: Fisherman named See is injured after hauling a shark aboard his boat off Bellambi.
- ▶ February 3, 1951: Spearfisherman Albert Pride, 20, of Waterloo, is attacked by a 4.5m shark in the entrance to Lake Illawarra, near Windang Island.
- ▶ February 15, 1953: Rex Gallagher is attacked by a wobbegong while spearfishing at Shellharbour.
- ▶ January 27, 1958: Ronald Kerwand, 17, of Peakhurst, is attacked while spearfishing at Swan Lake, near Sussex Inlet.
- ▶ April 5, 1959: A swimmer named McCauley is attacked at Thirroul.
- ▶ April 16, 1961: A fisherman named Spooner is injured after being attacked by a wobbegong at Otford.
- ▶ February 24, 1963: Scarborough youth Charles Dunn has flesh torn from his left leg by a 10-foot bronze whaler while spearfishing off Wombarra Beach.
- ▶ February 27, 1966: Raymond Short, 13, of Hurstville, was dragged from the surf at Coledale Beach with a white pointer shark still attached to his right leg.
- ▶ **May 20, 1966: Kor Van Helden, 40, is fatally mauled by a shark after the dredge *World Atlas* sinks during a storm off Jervis Bay.**
- ▶ April 15, 1968: Rodney Castle is injured by a bronze whaler while spearfishing off Gerroa.
- ▶ June 24, 1969: Spearfisherman named Byrne is injured by a wobbegong at Kiama.
- ▶ January 27, 1969: Underwater photographer Kevin Deacon, 20, of Manly, punches and belts an 8-foot bronze whaler with his camera as the shark grips his right knee at Currarong Reef, Nowra.
- ▶ October 10, 1972: Corrimal surfer Terry Cooper, 19, undergoes surgery to save his left leg after being attacked by a shark while riding his surfboard at Lake Tabourie.
- ▶ March 3, 1991: John Puljak, 17, of Barrack Heights, is attacked after swimming too close to a grey nurse shark while snorkelling at Bass Point.
- ▶ September 1, 1998: Scuba-diver named Lee is attacked by a wobbegong at Jervis Bay.

SOURCE: Michelle Hctor, Illawarra Mercury, Saturday January 10, 2009,  
<http://www.naturalfood.com.au/natural-food-articles/2009/1/10/shark-tales/>