

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1982.02.13

DATE: Saturday February 13, 1982

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Atlantic Ocean off Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, USA.

NAME: Gladys Sackville

DESCRIPTION: She was a 76-year-old female wearing a white swimsuit. She was a strong swimmer. She lived at 2840 S. Ocean Boulevard, Palm Beach.



BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Air temperatures ranged from 70° to 80°F. The sky was overcast and there was a light southwesterly breeze.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, February 14, 1982

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was calm with a very light chop. The sea surface temperature was about 76°F and the tide was incoming. Although the water was clear there were large quantities of floating weed.

NARRATIVE: Gladys Sackville often went swimming with a friend, but she was swimming alone when she disappeared. She often entered the sea in the evening or before sunrise, but it was not known when she did on the day of her disappearance. When she failed to return by 09h00, a friend, Mr. Herbert Thomas, reported her missing to the Palm Beach Police Department. At 10h37, the operator of the pleasure craft *Tinker Toy* reported the discovery of a body with sharks feeding upon it about 1/4 to 1/2 mile offshore approximately three miles north of the area Mrs. Sackville usually went swimming. The Coast Guard cutter *Shoalwater* was dispatched to the scene, arriving there about 10h55, by which time the body had drifted another mile northwards. When the Coast Guard arrived they found an eight to ten foot tiger shark feeding on the body, as well as a two to four-foot spinner shark. The body was recovered and subsequently identified as that of the missing woman.

INJURY: Fatal. Her back was bruised and a left rib was fractured prior to death. The large, deep bruise on her right inner forearm could have been caused when she struck the shark or other hard object during a violent struggle. There were numerous other injuries which were believe to be inflicted after death as sharks fed on the body. The condition of the body made it difficult to access the sequence of events. The Palm Beach Coroner ruled the woman died of accidental drowning, but officials said they had no idea whether a shark attack prompted the drowning or preceded it. It may have been that she was bumped in mid-back by a shark, subsequently lost consciousness, and then drowned. A shark or sharks may have started feeding on the body, dragging it eastward and northward.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Morris Vorenberg

NOTE: According to press reports, the woman went missing around midnight on Friday February 12th. However, Morris Vorenburg, the case investigator, reports that she went for

a swim in the early hours of Saturday morning, February 13th

SOURCES: The Daily Intelligencer (Doylestown, Pennsylvania), Sunday February 14, 1982
Eugene Register Guard, February 14, 1982, page 2
Daytona Beach Sunday News-Journal, February 14, 1982, page 11B

Shark found hitting body of woman, 76

MIAMI (AP) — A shark was still circling the mutilated body of an elderly woman found off Palm Beach Saturday morning, and a resort beach in Key Biscayne was cleared of swimmers when a school of sharks was spotted just offshore, the Coast Guard said.

The sharks are migrating around the South Florida coast, officials said.

A Coast Guard patrol boat found the body of Gladys Sackville, 76, of Palm Beach, floating in the Atlantic Ocean about 1½ miles off the plush Breakers Hotel.

"A 9- or 10-foot tiger shark was still hitting on her when we found her," said Petty Officer Ed Wargo.

Palm Beach police Lt. Don Cornutt said the woman was reported missing Saturday by friends who said she often enjoyed swimming in the ocean late at night or early in the morning.

The Palm Beach County coroner's office ruled Saturday night the woman died of accidental drowning around

midnight, but officials said they had no idea whether the shark attack prompted the drowning or preceded it.

"There is no way we can tell if she was attacked before or after she drowned," said Dr. Lee Abbott, assistant medical examiner. "But she certainly had been eaten by a shark."

Shark expert Dr. Sam Gruber of the University of Miami said it was unlikely the woman died directly as a result of the shark attack.

Experts say unprovoked shark attacks on human beings are rare because sharks usually avoid feeding on humans, preferring small fish.

A total of 15 shark attacks on human beings were reported in Florida last year, making it "an unusually active year," Gruber said. Two people were killed, a man swimming in Tampa Bay and a woman off Daytona Beach.

Meanwhile, at Crandon Park in Key Biscayne, a school of what Gruber said were pregnant 7- to 10-foot Blacktip sharks migrating along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida forced park officials to clear the waters of swimmers hoping to escape record-high Miami temperatures.

The crew on a Coast Guard helicopter spotted 50 to 60 "quite large" sharks just offshore, Petty Officer Robert Benjamin said.

Woman Found Dead Amid Sharks Off South Florida Coast

PALM BEACH (AP) — An elderly woman was found dead, a shark still swimming around the body, off Palm Beach Saturday morning as dozens of the swarming creatures migrated around the South Florida coast, the Coast Guard said.

In Key Biscayne, meanwhile, a resort beach had to be cleared of swimmers when a school of 50 to 60 sharks was spotted just offshore, officers in Miami said.

A Coast Guard patrol boat found the mutilated body of Gladys Sackville, 76, of Palm Beach, floating in the Atlantic Ocean about 1½ miles off the plush Breakers Hotel. "A 9 or 10 foot tiger shark was still hitting on her when we found her," said Petty Officer Ed Wargo. "There was quite a bit of her missing — appendages and stuff such as that."

Palm Beach Police Lt. Don Cornutt said the woman was reported missing Saturday by friends who said she often enjoyed swimming in the ocean late at night or early in the morning.

The Palm Beach County coroner's office ruled Saturday night the woman died of accidental drowning around midnight, but officials said they had no idea whether the shark attack prompted the drowning or preceded it. "There is no way we can tell if she was attacked before or after she drowned," said Dr. Lee Abbott, assistant medical examiner. "But she certainly had been eaten by a shark."

But a shark expert, Dr. Sam Gruber of the University of Miami, said it was unlikely the woman died directly as a result of the shark attack.

Gruber, shark researcher at the university's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, said the woman probably drowned from being pulled underwater by the shark or "just got unlucky." Experts say unprovoked shark attacks on humans are rare — the beasts usually avoid feeding on humans and prefer small fish.

Daytona Beach Sunday News-Journal, February 14, 1982, page 11B