



ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1983.12.22 / SA-320](#)

DATE: Thursday December 22, 1983

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at the mouth of Great Fish River, 90 kilometres south of East London, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.
33°29,5'S, 27°08'E

NAME: Colin Biggs

DESCRIPTION: A 16-year-old male. He wearing blue baggies and wore a blue swim fin on his right foot.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Temperatures ranged from 18,7° to 24,8°C, and no rain had fallen. At 08h30 there was 3/8 cloud cover and no wind, at 15h00 there was 1/8 cloud cover and a gentle seven-knot southerly breeze.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, December 20, 1983

SEA CONDITIONS: The Great Fish River was in flood; the water was chocolate brown and visibility was nil. The dirty water extended out beyond Rocky Point and around the bay to Bats Cave. At 06h00 the sea temperature was measured at 17°C and mean low tide

occurred at 10h54.

ENVIRONMENT: On the day before the incident a fisherman gaffed a Zambesi shark, three metres in length and with a mass of 196 kilograms, at the the mouth of the Great Fish River. At the time of the incident two anglers were fishing off Timms Gully, a just a hundred metres away: one was using live bait, the other a stripped mullet head.

Colin Biggs and two friends, Gary Jones-Philipson and Robin Lansdell, entered the sea at 12h20. All three had been sweating excessively before going in the water and one of the victim's friends urinated in the sea about five minutes before the attack. Two other swimmers were nearby, a 20-year-old male and his 22-year-old sister who had begun her menstrual period that morning.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 40 metres, just inside the breakers

DEPTH: 1,65 metres

TIME: 12h30

NARRATIVE: Colin Biggs had been body-surfing for ten minutes. As he kicked off to catch a wave he felt a bump on his lower left leg and immediately afterwards he felt a sharp pain around his left ankle and on the sole of his foot. He described it as feeling "like a thousand needles". He shouted to his friends that he had been bitten by a shark. At first they thought he was joking, then they saw the blood. They grabbed Biggs and dragged him out of the water. The press reported that witnesses said they saw a shape in the water as Biggs was brought ashore.

INJURY: There were lacerations on the lateral aspect of his left calf, the ankle, dorsum and sole of his left foot.

FIRST AID: Life-guard Jeremy Mansfield laid the patient on a towel in the shade, placed cool towels on him, and stopped blood loss by using arterial pressure. Then he administered Ringers-lactate to prevent shock. Colin Biggs suffered from asthma so no morphine was administered; however, Biggs says he did not suffer severe discomfort. After ten minutes transport arrived and he was taken to Grahamstown.

TREATMENT: The wounds required 37 stitches. Photographs taken before surgery were sent to the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified

SOURCES: Interviews with Colin Biggs; J. Mansfield; Dr. T. Counihan and Dr. Clement

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine