ACTIVITY: Treading water

CASE: GSAF 1960.04.30 / SA-137

DATE: Saturday April 30, 1960

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at Inyoni Rocks, Amanzimtoti, 26 kilometres southwest of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 30°03'S, 30°53,4'E

NAME: Mike Hely

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 16-year-old male, was 1.7 metres tall and weighed 59 kilograms. He was lightly tanned, clad in yellow, red and green swimming trunks and wore a silver ring on the ring finger of his right hand. He had no injuries before the attack.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was overcast and there was a slight westerly wind.

MOON PHASE: Waxing Crescent with 18% of the moon's visible disk illuminated. First Quarter, Mary 4, 1960 at 03h00 (Universal Time + 2h).

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was turbid and choppy and a one-metre shorebreak was present. The water was greenish. Visibility was less than a metre and the water was full of foam, suds and effluent discharged into the surf zone by SAICCOR, a cellulose factory 19 kilometres to the south. Water temperature was 23°C. “Normally a south-to-north rip current is present along the rocks,” said Hely. The tide was incoming and, according to Hely, no channel was present, “Although a channel forms at low tide, none exists at full tide.”

ENVIRONMENT: “I don't know if anyone was fishing, people often fished from the rocks,” said Hely. “There is usually a lull between summer and winter when fishing is not good, the incident was during that lull.” Two days before the incident, after he swam through the channel to backline, Hely remembers that the shark siren went off.

Two hours after this attack, two Amanzimtoti life-savers, Eric Lambert and Keith Dalldorf (who had been injured by a shark in 1947, GSAF 1947.07.15), determined to find out if the shark was still in the vicinity. They swam out to sea but saw nothing. Many anglers attempted to catch the shark, and later that day George Simpson landed a blacktip shark.

Two weeks later, on 14 May 1960, the shark anglers on Durban's South Pier had a record haul: 19 sharks were landed, their combined weight was nearly three tons.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 40 to 50 metres

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DEPTH: Two metres
TIME: 15h35

NARRATIVE: Michael Hely and his friends had spent the day at the beach. Hely had been using a paddleboard earlier but gave it to a friend and then swam out to body-surf. “Many people were on beach, about a hundred people were swimming on the shorebreak, and five of us were on the backline: Stan Mallon, Neville Schultz, Koosie Hugo, and one other, besides me,” said Hely.

Hugo and Hely were swimming together when Hugo felt something swim between his legs. Seconds later, the dorsal fin of the shark broke the water 20 metres from Hely. “I had been in the water about 15 minutes and was a bit further seawards than the rest, facing seawards and treading water, when I felt the shark brush my right leg and heard warning shouts from the other swimmers,” he said, “then I felt pressure as the shark grabbed my right arm.”

Hely was catapulted out of the water by the force of the strike, then dragged below the surface. He struggled with the shark, broke free and made for shore. “I felt no pain; after the initial bite I had no feeling in my arm and thought it had been severed by the shark”. As he swam to the beach the shark bit him again on his right side. Hely felt the shark swimming beneath him; it stayed with him until he reached the shore but did not bite him again. He stumbled ashore unaided and collapsed on the beach.

INJURY: The shark made two tentative bites: one on the right leg and another on the right arm, before making a determined bite on his torso.

RIGHT LEG - The knee joint was opened by a lesion less than two millimetres square. The lateral popliteal nerve was damaged.
RIGHT ARM - The wound extended from below the wrist to a point half-way up the forearm.
LEFT HAND - The index finger was lacerated and partly denuded of flesh by the shark.
TORSO - The right side of the torso was mauled; the entire lateral abdominal wall was torn away, two-thirds of the small bowel was outside the abdominal cavity and was extensively perforated. His right kidney was exposed, most of his right gluteal muscles were removed, the 12th rib was cut and grooved lesions were made in the crest of the ilium.

FIRST AID: When Hely reached the beach Mr J. Hugo gently pushed his intestines and kidney back inside his body cavity and carried him to the life-savers' clubhouse. A nursing sister and Arthur Wallace rendered first aid. Dr Fairburn reached the clubhouse within moments after Hely arrived, and Dr W.J. Macnbab arrived 12 minutes later. Hely was in shock but to lesser degree than might have been expected, according to the medical team. Bleeding had almost ceased, his blood pressure was 90/40 and his pulse was very fast. “I still didn't know the extent of the bites as I lay in the clubhouse,” said Hely, “and I kept saying to the chaps around me, "Cheerio this is the end of the line"; I kept feeling myself getting weaker and weaker. Then Dr Fairburn gave me a painkiller (1/4 grain morphia intravenously), although I didn't need it.” All of his limbs were elevated to assist the flow of blood to the trunk region. The two doctors felt that little could be done for him on the site, and 15 minutes after the incident he was sent to the hospital. “They stuck me in the back of a bakkie. On the way in [to the hospital] I could hear the police escort, going through the traffic, and I remember complaining about the bumps in the road so I must have been

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feeling some discomfort; I must have felt something as we went over bumps in road but it wasn't agonizing pain." Hely was taken slowly (26 kilometres in 45 minutes) to Addington Hospital in Arthur Wallace's van. “I never lost consciousness,” said Hely, “I remember arriving at Addington, being taken out and wheeled into casualty.”

TREATMENT: When Hely arrived at the hospital he was given three pints of plasma and three pints of blood. At 20h00 he was taken to surgery. “I remember being pushed into the operating theatre and waving to relatives,” said Hely. Emergency surgical repair, performed by surgeons Copley and Coll, involved debriding and suturing the wounds. “All they had done initially was suture the wounds; they just patched me up until I began to recover,” said Hely. “Prior to this time gangrene killed many of the swimmers bitten by sharks.”

Hely doesn't remember much about the next four days, “On Tuesday I became aware for a time and asked if I still had an arm.” He remembers little else until Friday. “Then I became fully conscious and had my first meal. I was told the extent of my injuries, felt real pain for the first time, and discovered that the surgeons had performed a colostomy." The abdominal wound with multiple perforation of the bowel, resulted in gross peritonitis, which cleared satisfactorily after parenteral administration of oxytetracycline. Paracolon bacillus (which is strongly haemolytic) was found in his wounds, and bacteria from the jaw of a raggedtooth shark caught in the shark nets at Durban was cultured and proved sensitive to Terramycin, Chloromycetin and Erythyromycin. Hely remained on antibiotic therapy until he left the hospital.

A week after the attack he developed an abscess in his abdomen. When it was opened, sea sand poured out and continued to trickle through a drainage tube for four months. In all, three surgical procedures were needed to repair the damage to his bowel before the colostomy could be removed.

“The surgeons had tried unsuccessfully to save my finger," said Hely, “two weeks after the incident it had to be surgically amputated.”

Hely spent the first three weeks in intensive care and remained in the hospital for five months. He returned to the hospital for two more surgical procedures and underwent a total of nine surgical procedures within two years of the attack.

Since 1982, doctors believed Hely suffered from gout in his knee but an X-ray showed sea sand was the problem. In March 1985, he underwent surgery to have the sand removed. By 1988 he still had numbness (parathesia) of the right arm and lacked fine motor control of his right hand.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Dr David Davies initially blamed a 2,13-metre raggedtooth shark, but revised his opinion later and suggested that a Zambesi shark was involved. The swimmer sustained deep grooves in his iliac crest (hip bone) which Davies believed were caused by the flat cutting teeth of the shark sweeping edge-on across the bone, the deepest cut in the bone extended to a depth 30 millimetres. Tim Wallett examined specimen jaws of Zambesi sharks in the collection of the Natal Sharks Board, but the largest tooth to be found was 22 millimetres in length. Several jaws collected from white sharks had teeth long enough to cause a lesion 30 millimetres deep. Based on this evidence, and the nature of the wounds,
Wallett concluded that the incident involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, about 2.1 metres [seven feet] in length and weighing about 91 kilograms.

**COMMENT:** This was the first case in southern Africa in which the swimmer survived after sustaining a major abdominal wound.


**NOTE:** Hely became semi-active in the sea about 18 months after the attack. Ron Shannon made a film, *Giants of the Deep*, that included an interview with Hely.

**CASE INVESTIGATORS:** Dr. G.D. Campbell; Dr. David Davies; Tim Wallett; Ellen Kerns, Marie Levine