

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** [GSAF 1960.05.19](#)

**DATE:** Thursday May 19, 1960

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean at Hidden Beach, near Aptos and Santa Cruz, in Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz County, California, USA.

*36°57.6'N; 121°53.7'W*

**NAME:** Susan Marie Theriot

**DESCRIPTION:** She was a 16-year-old female.

### **BACKGROUND**

**ENVIRONMENT:** The incident took place over a sandy bottom.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** 40 to 50 metres

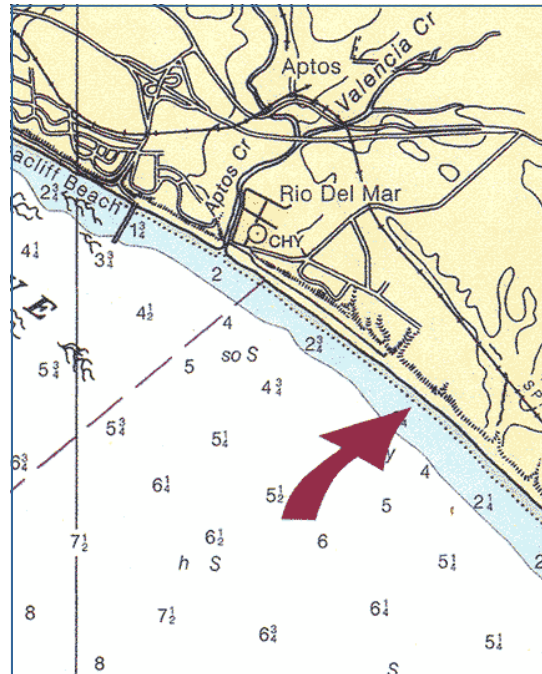
**DEPTH OF WATER:** One to two fathoms

**TIME:** 13h00

**NARRATIVE:** Theriot was swimming with four student friends. It was 1300 hours as Theriot and her companions were joined by 38 other sophomores from Mora Central High School for a day of fun at the beach. The beach outing was a reward for selling a specified number of their high school yearbooks.

A huge shark appeared just beneath the surface and circled the girl several times before rushing in and seizing her left leg. Theriot screamed to friends that something had grabbed her leg. Classmate Larry Cronin was sitting in an inner tube near Theriot and grabbed her by the arm, pulling her slightly up onto the tube with him.

Tessie Lettunich watched the shark circle the two swimmers several times. She said, "It was awfully big, darkish gray, with a big fin sticking out of the water." Theriot's blood quickly began clouding the water around the inner tube as many students began screaming for help. Most began kicking their feet wildly in an attempt to keep the shark away as they all headed for the safety of the beach. When they were only a few meters from shore, a large wave seemed to sweep the students, simultaneously, up onto dry sand. Several students ran up the beach to summon aid for their injured classmate.



**FIRST AID:** Classmate Edward Cassef, age 16, applied a tourniquet to Theriot's badly lacerated leg. Theriot, unconscious from shock and loss of blood, was transported by ambulance to Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz.

**TREATMENT:** A hospital official reported, "She was so weak we had to build her up with blood transfusions before we could operate." Several surgeons, including Paul J. Weiss, treated Theriot's extensively traumatized leg, which ultimately had to be amputated below the knee.

**SPECIES:** The descriptions of the shark and the injury, provided by witnesses and surgeons, clearly identified a four to five-metre white shark as the species responsible for this attack.

**SOURCES:** Shark Research Committee, [http://www.sharkresearchcommittee.com/unprovoked\\_swimmer.htm](http://www.sharkresearchcommittee.com/unprovoked_swimmer.htm); Journal-American (NY), May 20, 1960; San Francisco Chronicle, May 20, 1960, page 6.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Ralph Collier

