

ACTIVITY: Body surfing
CASE: GSAF 1980.07.27
DATE: Sunday July 27, 1980
LOCATION: The incident took place at 14th Street Beach, Ocean City, New Jersey, USA.

NAME: Jeff Moffat
DESCRIPTION: He was a 15-year-old male from Hatboro, PA. He was 5'11" tall and weighed about 160 pounds, and was wearing navy blue shorts. He wore no jewelry and had no injuries before the incident.



BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The air temperature was in the 80s, but the sky was overcast and a storm was brewing.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, July 27, 1980

SEA CONDITIONS: The incident took place at high tide and water temperature was in the 70s. The sea was turbid, resulting in poor underwater visibility, but the rough water made for good body surfing.

ENVIRONMENT: A barge had broken up offshore but no debris was evident in the area. The incident took place 100 yards north of the 14th Street fishing jetty. Jeff remarked that "people were always fishing from the pier. He did not observe any diving birds or dolphins in the vicinity, but noted that the undertow was bringing fish inshore.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 75 feet

DEPTH OF WATER: Six feet

TIME: 15h00

NARRATIVE: It was the start of the Moffat family's two-week vacation at the Jersey shore. People were leaving the beach due to the impending storm. "It was not a great day for the beach," Jeff remembers, "but the water was great for body-surfing". He was body surfing with his 13-year-old brother, and the pair had been in the water for about 30 minutes. "I caught a wave but did a somersault in the water and flipped over and my back slammed against something." He compared it to falling off a ladder and landing on a rock. As he stood up, his brother, who was behind him, saw his back and said they should tell the lifeguards. As the boys exited the water, Jeff remembers the lifeguards blew their whistles to call everyone out of the water.

INJURY: There was a semi-circle of puncture wounds at the small of his back.

FIRST AID: Jeff, his brother and the lifeguards walked over to the First Aid Station at 12th Street Beach. He remembers his parents arriving at the Station and that the wound only really started bleeding when he sat down at the station. An ambulance arrived about 30 minutes after he was bitten and he was transported to the hospital.

TREATMENT: The surfer was taken to Shore Memorial Hospital (1 East New York Avenue

•Somers Point, NJ 08244-2387 • Telephone: 609-653-3500). Some 60 stitches were needed to close the wound. He was not admitted to the hospital, but treated on an outpatient basis. Jeff remembers that the doctor there told him to go back into the water as soon as the stitches were removed because the salt water would speed healing. Jeff doesn't remember receiving any antibiotics and his recovery was uneventful.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Jeff never saw a shark and although his brother told him (in the surf when he saw the injury) that it was "a bite", it didn't occur to him that he had been bitten by anything until the doctor said the same thing.



The lifeguards on duty when Jeff was injured say they have little doubt. "I know it was a shark," said former lifeguard Dennis Ardell, who was on duty as a lifeguard that day (now a 58-year-old real estate investor from Philadelphia.) "I saw a fin swimming out toward the ocean." Ardell said he told the beach patrol captain that he saw a fin, but was told to keep quiet. "In Ocean City, a shark could walk up on the boardwalk and order a hamburger and everyone will say they didn't see it. It's as if there are sharks in the water everywhere except Ocean City."

George Lafferty, 87, the former beach patrol captain, recalled no such conversation with Ardell. He said he's seen bathers with bloody toes from crabs, skin gashes from jetty rocks, and angry welts from jelly fish stings, but never any shark-torn flesh. Turner said his No. 1 suspect is still a shark, though he had considered whether a piece of floating debris, such as a plank with nails, was the culprit.

No photographs were taken of the wound prior to suturing; the photo above was taken later the same summer. The surfer's description of the wounds as deep "punctures" and "razor cuts" suggests that he collided with a shark.

SOURCES: Jeff Moffat; Wendy Ruderman



Ocean City, New Jersey