

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1998.04.26](#) / SA-0429

DATE: Sunday April 26, 1998

LOCATION: The incident took place in Mozambique at either in Bilene Bay (previously known as San Martino) or 10 kilometres to the south. Bilene Bay is 30 km [18.6 miles] south of the Limpopo River mouth and 126 km [78 miles] north of Maputo.



NAME: Wilma van Molendorff

DESCRIPTION: She was a 35-year-old female from Boksburg. An experienced diver and a Springbok underwater hockey player, she owned a pharmacy in Germiston and carried R1-million in life insurance. She was engaged to Johan "Pof" Preller, a 50-year-old accountant from Potchefstroom whom she had known for about 10 years. The couple became romantically involved some time after Van Molendorff's husband died in a car crash in 1995.



BOAT: Inflatable dinghy.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: New Moon, April 26, 1998

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: Three kilometres

TIME: 15h05 [3:05 p.m.]

NARRATIVE: The couple had been spearfishing some 12 kilometres off the coast and were returning with about 60kg of fish aboard their small inflatable boat when they had engine trouble. They decided to swim and tow the boat to shore.

When Van Molendorff left Preller and swam back to the boat to check on their position with satellite equipment she was bitten by a shark.

Preller said he used a rubber diver's fin to paddle the craft, with Van Molendorff aboard, to the beach after the attack. He then ran 10 kilometres to summon help. He reached his car at about 20h00 [9 p.m.] that night and drove to where they had been staying.

He said he "had a quick drink and something to eat" before driving to a caravan park to alert the owner, Eddie Ruiz, and ask for help. Preller's affidavit says: "Ruiz advised me that he would organize a party to go and fetch the body and equipment, and told me to go back home and sleep. I was totally exhausted, I went home and fell asleep."

Garry Katzin, a member of the team who went to fetch Van Molendorff's body that night, states that Preller was not present when the team returned with the body at about 1 a.m. "He arrived about 30 minutes later. He promptly loaded the fish into a cooler box and left," said Katzin. "He didn't take the body with him. It was very strange to me that he loaded the

fish and left the body there."

INJURY: Fatal. The shark severed part of her right arm and caused extensive injuries to her chest and abdomen. Preller said that she died about 10 minutes after the attack.

SPECIES INVOLVED: According to Preller, the shark was about three metres in length.

NOTE: Von Mollendorf died just two days after signing a newly-drafted will which bequeathed most of her estate to Preller. In 1999, her father, Fred Uys, a dentist from Vereeniging, opposed Preller's application to the Pretoria High Court to have her will accepted and validated. Uys claimed in court papers that his daughter was pressured to draw up the document and that she had been told by Preller what to say in it.

Uys also claimed that Preller, who married a few months after the fatal attack, was responsible for his daughter's death due to negligence.

The Master of the Pretoria High Court found that Van Molendorff's will was not properly signed by witnesses.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Andrew Gifford, Shark Research Institute-South Africa

