

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** [GSAF 2009.09.12](#)

**DATE:** September 12, 2009

**LOCATION:** The accident took place in the Atlantic Ocean off mile post 4.5 in Corolla, a barrier island town in Currituck County, North Carolina, USA. 36.3° N, 75.8°W

**NAME:** Richard A. Snead

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 60-year-old male from Ross Township, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was wearing aqua blue-green swimming trunks.



*Richard A. Snead*

### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER:** At 21h01, Currituck recorded mostly cloudy skies and visibility of 10 miles. The air temperature was 64.4°F, dew point 60.8°F, humidity 88%, sea level pressure 29.96 inches, and there was no wind.

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, September 4, 2009; Last Quarter, September 11, 2009; New Moon, September 19, 2009

**ENVIRONMENT:** Snead entered the water about five or six miles north of a research pier, and there are several shipwrecks offshore. Red flags were posted Saturday warning people to stay out of the water due to dangerous currents, and considerable dolphin activity was observed in the area on both Saturday and Sunday.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** Four to six feet.

**TIME:** 23h30 [10:30 p.m.]

**NARRATIVE:** It was the first day of Mr. Snead's vacation. He was staying with family in an ocean front cottage in Corolla NC. At about 9:00 pm, Mr. Snead went for a walk on the beach. He came back to the house after his walk, told family members who were at the time in a hot tub that he was going for a swim, grabbed his towel and headed back to the beach. Police think that Mr. Snead went into the water sometime around 10:30pm near mile post 4 1/2. When Mr. Snead hadn't returned from his swim family members started looking for him and around midnight the police were called. Mr. Snead's glasses and towel were found on the beach.

**INJURY:** Fatal. Mr. Snead's body was discovered Thursday morning September 17, 2009 by a tourist who was taking an early-morning walk in the 1300 block of North Virginia Dare Trail, Kill Devil Hills, some 20 to 25 miles south from where he went swimming. Lt. Banks thought it was likely Mr. Snead was attacked near the area where he entered the water to swim. The Medical Examiner's Office in Greenville determined that shark bite injuries caused his death.

**COMMENTS:** It appears that Mr. Snead may have initially been bitten by a shark on his lower extremities, or possibly his torso, and attempted to push the shark away. There are distinctive wounds on his hand that indicate he attempted to defend himself (100-0698).

The wounds visible on the lower extremities were survivable, but could have led to panic and drowning.

A tiger shark frequently grabs prey on the surface, then submerges and using its wide snout, pushes its prey item into the sand or a crevice as it feeds. The intact face/head of the deceased and its discoloration suggests this may have been the case with the deceased's body; his body spent time on the seafloor immediately after death.

A tiger shark, and possibly other species of sharks, fed on the remains, but the defleshing of the limbs appears to be work of teleosts and crabs.

Although the deceased was an experienced swimmer, he resided in Pennsylvania far from the sea. The accident took place on the first day of his vacation and there were strong currents, which he may not have had enough experience to handle or in been in physical condition to manage.

There was considerable dolphin activity on the day the deceased disappeared, and on the following day. Heavy dolphin activity suggests schools of fish were present and at such times there are invariably large numbers of sharks in the area. The deceased entered the water after dusk, a time when many species of sharks feed.

Due to the paucity of the remains a forensic analysis of the sequence of events prior to finding the body is not possible. However, evidence gleaned from the remains, together with the circumstances surrounding the deceased's disappearance, suggests that the most likely scenario is one which supports the medical examiner's initial opinion — the deceased was bitten by a shark, which resulted in drowning and death.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Clay Creswell, Global Shark Accident File



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### **Autopsy: Shark killed man who washed up in Kill Devil Hills**

KILL DEVIL HILLS, N.C. A Pittsburgh man whose body washed up in Kill Devil Hills, N.C., after he went for a late-night swim off Corolla died from extensive shark bites, according to police and the medical examiner's office.

The man's body was discovered Thursday morning in the 1300 block of N. Virginia Dare Trail by a tourist who was taking an early-morning walk, according to the Kill Devil Hills Police Department. The man was identified as Richard A. Snead, 60, of Ross Township in Pittsburgh. The body was taken to the regional medical examiner's office in Greenville; the cause of death "has been determined to be injuries sustained from a shark bite," according to a news release from the Currituck County Sheriff's Office.

An autopsy assistant at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, where the autopsy was done, said Snead suffered extensive injuries, including internal injuries. There is no question that the shark attack caused his death, she said.

"Living tissues look different when they receive an injury, versus tissues that are already dead," she said. The full autopsy report is not yet available.

Officials had not determined what type of shark attacked Snead.

When Snead hadn't returned from his swim shortly before 1 a.m. Sunday, his family reported him missing, authorities said. Red flags were posted Saturday warning people to stay out of the surf. The Sheriff's Office today was warning swimmers to be alert "and to be aware that this incident occurred while the person was swimming at night," the release says. Snead had gone into the water at mile post 4 1/2; the mile post is measured beginning at the Currituck County-Dare County line.

"I haven't heard of any (shark) sightings, but I haven't checked with any other jurisdictions," Currituck County Sheriff Susan Johnson said today. The drowning death of a 12-year-old boy who drowned late last month did not appear to be shark-related, she added.

Johnson couldn't recall any recent shark bites, she said.

**SOURCE:** Cindy Clayton and Patrick Wilson, The Virginian-Pilot, September 18, 2009; <http://hamptonroads.com/2009/09/autopsy-shark-killed-man-who-washed-kill-devil-hills>

**Missing man died of shark bite  
Currituck: 1st shark attack in nine years**

Officials believe a missing Pittsburgh man whose body was discovered Thursday on a beach in Kill Devil Hills died as the result of a shark bite.

The man, Richard A. Snead, 60, went missing last weekend in the ocean off Corolla, and a search by local agencies and the Coast Guard over the weekend yielded no clues.

Snead was reported to have gone swimming near mile post 4.5 in Corolla after 9 p.m. on Sept. 12. The man's family reported him missing shortly after midnight that day.

The Medical Examiner's Office in Greenville determined that shark bite injuries caused his death, according to a preliminary report.

"The cause of death was multiple injuries due to shark attack and the manner of death is accidental," said spokeswoman Crystal Baity. "They're estimating that he died shortly after he went missing."

She said a full autopsy report wouldn't be available for about another month.

According to the Currituck Sheriff's Office, Currituck County has not had a report of shark bites sustained by swimmers since 2000.

The sheriff's office points out that Snead went missing after dark and advises swimmers to be alert in the water.

**SOURCE:** Daily Advance, Friday, September 18, 2009

**NC Shark Attack Claims Life of Ross Twp Man**

A 60-year-old Vietnam Veteran from Ross Township died in a shark attack while vacationing in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

The body of Richard Snead was found yesterday. The medical examiner has listed the cause of death as injuries from a shark bite.

Neighbors tell KDKA's Alison Morris that Snead had been swimming around 9pm over the weekend. His wife called for help when she couldn't find him.

A passerby discovered his body on Thursday about 18-miles away from where Snead had been swimming.

Neighbors say the couple lived on the street for over 20 years and they describe Snead as a really nice person who enjoyed the outdoors.

Though funeral arrangements are pending, Snead is expected to be buried at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies.

**SOURCE:** KDKA2, September 18, 2009, <http://kdka.com/local/Shark.Attack.Death.2.1193329.html>