

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1927.12.28 / SA-049

DATE: Wednesday December 28, 1927

LOCATION: The attack took place at the Little Brak River, Western Cape Province, South Africa. The Little Brak River empties into the sea 12 kilometres north-northeast of Mossel Bay.

34°09'S, 22°14,4'E

NAME: Ockert Stephanus Heyns

DESCRIPTION: He was a 17-year-old male and he was 1,91 metres tall.



BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: New Moon, December 24, 1927. First Quarter, December 31, 1927.

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was calm, clear and warm.

ENVIRONMENT: The lagoon and river mouth were closed, but at low tide there are numerous rock-pools off the sandy beach.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: The attack took place seaward of the breakers.

DEPTH: One metre

TIME: Shortly after 11h00

NARRATIVE: Ockert Stephanus Heyns was swimming with three other people when the shark surfaced between them. All reached shore safely except Heyns. The December 30, 1927 edition of the *Eastern Province Herald* reported that “the shark was in a breaker which overtook young Heyns when thigh deep. It sped at him like an arrow, and in a moment had bitten his left leg clean off above the knee. Heyns fell on his back in the water, whereupon the shark turned and attacked him again, inflicting a glancing bite low down on the right leg, which was near the surface. Heyns’ uncle, Muller Heyns, and spectators dashed into the reddening water and the shark swiftly made off, the whole tragedy not occupying 15 seconds.”

INJURY: His right foot was partly severed and his left leg was severed approximately 15 centimetres above the knee.

FIRST AID: “Heyns was borne to the sands where temporary tourniquets were placed on the limbs and enabled him to be carried to the tiny hamlet of beach cottages which has grown round the station about half a mile distant,” reported the press. There a motor car was procured and Mr J.J. Scholz of Mossel Bay took the victim to Mossel Bay Hospital, 14 kilometres away.

TREATMENT: Heyns was semi-conscious when he arrived at the hospital 40 minutes after the attack. Although the haemorrhage had been “successfully checked”, Heyns died at 19h00 that evening. He was buried at Mount Hope, the family farm at Zebra near Oudtshoorn in the George District.

SPECIES INVOLVED: According to Mr A.M. Heyns, nobody bathed at Little Brak River until after the shark had been caught; apparently it remained in the vicinity for a number of days and was seen by many people. The shark was said to be 2,39 metres, then 4,45 metres, then 5,48 metres in length, but all witnesses agreed that it was a white shark. Eric Wadner of the South African Fisheries followed the shark in a motor boat and attempted unsuccessfully to harpoon it. The *Natal Advertiser* of December 30, 1927 reported that Lewis Roos of the steam trawler *Undine* harpooned a 4,27-metre shark, thought to be responsible for the attack, and brought it to the fishing jetty. However, the *Mossel Bay Advertiser* of December 31, 1927 reported that two days after Heyns' death a shark was caught on a pork-baited line and "relics of the victim were found in the shark". The shark was 4,4 metres long [14'6"] and had a girth of 2,4 metres [8'].

NOTE: Mr A. Muller Heyns was presented with three decorations for bravery: He was awarded the silver medal of the Royal Humane Society, the (gold) Stanhope Medal awarded for the bravest deed of the year, and the (bronze) Albert Medal.

SOURCES: *Natal Advertiser*, December 30, 1927; *Eastern Province Herald*, December 30, 1927; *Mossel Bay Advertiser*, December 31, 1927

CASE INVESTIGATORS: Coreen Fourie of the Dias Museum and Marie Levine