ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF 1943.03.21 / SA-070

DATE: Sunday March 21, 1943

LOCATION: The attack took place in the Indian Ocean at North Beach, Durban, opposite the Miniature Railway, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 29°51,1'S, 31°02,4'E

NAME: Eric Ridley

DESCRIPTION: A 31-year-old male, he was described as having a short stature and wearing black swimming trunks. He was a Petty Officer of the British Royal Navy and stationed in Durban.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Durban meteorological station recorded temperatures of 19° to 27°C, no rain and at 15h00 there was 1/8 cloud cover and a gentle eight-knot northeasterly onshore breeze.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, March 22, 1943

SEA CONDITIONS: The surf was large, the current was strong, the water was murky, and a channel was present.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: Between 75 and 100 metres

DEPTH: Three metres

TIME: 16h10

NARRATIVE: Many bathers were in the water when Eric Ridley and a friend, Mr C.M. Kahn, went for a swim. Suddenly Ridley shouted for Kahn but Kahn was in difficulty himself and reached shore only after a struggle. For 20 minutes the life-savers repeatedly tried to get a life-line to Ridley but the heavy surf battered them against the iron stanchions that extended into the sea. Finally a life-saver succeeded in reaching Ridley and took him half-way to shore where they were joined by a former life-saver, C.D. Maher, and together the two men brought the unconscious man to the beach.

INJURY: Fatal. There was a deep laceration on his thigh and both his calves were mauled.

FIRST AID: Artificial resuscitation was administered to Ridley and he was taken to Addington Hospital in Durban.

TREATMENT: Ridley died en route to the hospital. Doctors at the hospital thought that his wounds may have been caused by iron stanchions in the water, but the life-savers believed they were inflicted by a shark. The inquest report dated March 23, 1943 states that death was caused by drowning.

SPECIES INVOLVED: Not identified

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Bite Kills Swimmer

A sailor, E. Ridley, was fatally bitten by a shark or barracuda when swimming about 300 yards out off the North Beach, Durban, opposite the miniature railway, yesterday afternoon.

One civilian who dashed into the sea to rescue Ridley, dressed only in his shirt, had his clothes rifled while he was in the water and lost his driver's licence and C.P.S. pass.

Three life-lines were sent to Ridley's assistance, and two of the life-savers engaged collapsed in a vain effort to reach him. Mr. C. D. Maher, of 12 Manhattan Court, formerly a life-saver, ran from his car when he saw Ridley was in trouble and, stripping to his shirt, dashed into the strong surf.

A third life-saver reached Ridley and brought him halfway back, where Maher grasped him and brought him ashore.

One of Ridley's legs was badly ripped, and although he was rushed to Addington Hospital he died before arrival.