

ACTIVITY: Wading

CASE: GSAF 1957.01.05 / SA-116

DATE: Monday January 5, 1957

LOCATION: The incident took place near rocks on the southern bank of the Umgeni River mouth, seven kilometres north of Durban Harbour, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

29°48'S, 31°02,5'E

NAME: Sydney Victor Williams

DESCRIPTION: The was a 12-year-old coloured male.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Durban beaches were crowded and the entire province was experiencing a hot spell; in Durban the noontime temperature was 30,7°C. The sky was clear and cloudless; 15 people were treated for sunburn at Addington Hospital.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, January 1, 1957. First Quarter, January 9, 1957.

SEA CONDITIONS: The sea was calm, but the water in the river mouth was turbid and dirty.

ENVIRONMENT: Small hammerhead sharks were being caught off the South Pier in Durban. Although migratory fish were keeping to deeper water, fishing was particularly good off the Umgeni River mouth and anglers were catching large number of barracouta *Thyrsites atun*.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: Unknown

DEPTH: One metre

TIME: Unknown

NARRATIVE: Sydney Victor Williams and his 15-year-old brother, Christy, had been swimming in the Umgeni River mouth when they were called from the water by their mother. They were walking towards her through the shallows, close to the rocks on the southern bank of the river, when Sydney suddenly threw his hands into the air and vanished beneath the surface.

INJURY: Fatal, next day his body was recovered at Vetch's Pier, six kilometres south of the Umgeni River mouth.

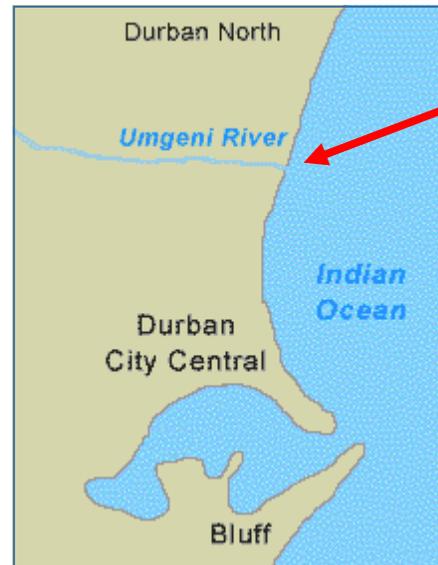
SPECIES INVOLVED: Unknown

COMMENT: In a newspaper account of the tragedy Sydney's sister was said to have seen his body carried out to sea by the current. However, at the inquest, Detective Sergeant Carl Maritz, S.A.P., who investigated the case, testified that wounds on the body indicated the boy had been taken by a shark.

SOURCES: Personal interview with Carl Maritz and newspaper articles.

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Marie Levine

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Shark Could Have Taken Boy

8 - FEB 1957

A 12-year-old Coloured boy who was drowned at the Umgeni River mouth on January 5, could have been taken by a shark, according to evidence contained in inquest papers which were filed in Durban yesterday.

The boy, Sydney Victor Williams, of 8 Westgate Street, Observatory, Capetown, was on holiday in Durban when the tragedy occurred. The inquest magistrate, Mr. C. B. Reynecke, recorded a verdict of misadventure, death due to drowning. The boy's body was recovered at Vetch's Pier some time later.

DETECTIVE'S EVIDENCE

Detective - Sergeant Carl Maritz, S.A.P., who investigated the case, stated that from marks on the body it appeared to have been taken by a shark. "When the river is in flood sharks abound in the dirty water off the Umgeni River mouth and I have personally seen sharks enter the river mouth. It is possible that the deceased was taken by a shark when he vanished in the water," said Detective-Sergeant Maritz.

Sydney's 15-year-old brother, Christy Williams, stated that they were both swimming near the Umgeni River mouth on January 5.

Their mother called to them and while they were crossing the river in water which was waist deep, Sydney suddenly vanished under the water, throwing his hands in the air.

Shark thought to have taken young boy in Umgeni River mouth

DET. SERGEANT C. F. B. MARITZ, C.I.D., Stamford Hill, gave evidence at an inquest that from marks on the body of a non-European boy, it would appear that the boy was taken by a shark.

Weather: Fair and warm

REAN: Fair and warm, with moderate to fresh westerly winds, becoming variable later tomorrow.

Transvaal and Natal mostly cloudy and thunder conditions tomorrow.

6.50; sunrise to 6.49.

February 8.

RES

Yesterday, 84;

Minimum

Monday, 72.

noon, 63.

Today, 95;

He was giving evidence at the inquest on Sydney Williams, of Westgate Street, Observatory, Cape Town, who threw up his hands and disappeared while about waist deep, after swimming near the mouth of the Umgeni River on January 5 this year.

Det.-Sgt. Maritz said in an affidavit: "When the river is in flood, the sharks abound in the dirty water off the Umgeni River mouth. I have personally seen sharks enter the river mouth so it is possible that the boy was taken by a shark when he vanished in the water."

He said the boy's body was found next day at Vetch's Pier about four miles from the Umgeni River mouth.

VANISHED

Christy Williams, 15, brother of Sydney, said that he and Sydney were on holiday in Durban on January 5 when they went into the Umgeni River near the mouth for a swim.

After they had been swimming for some time, said Christy, his mother shouted for them to come out of the water.

He said: "I then saw my brother go over towards the rocks which were on the south bank of the river. While he was crossing over, about waist deep in the water, I suddenly saw him vanish beneath the water, throwing his hands in the air."

Peggy Williams, 25, sister of Sydney, said she later saw Sydney washed out to sea by the current, which was flowing at the time.

Sydney disappeared as if he had stepped on the river bottom. Mr. Reynecke, inquest magistrate, recorded a verdict of misadventure, death due to drowning.