

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming

**CASE:** GSAF 1960.12.24 / SA-140

**DATE:** Sunday December 24, 1960

**LOCATION:** The attack took place in the Indian Ocean at Margate, a resort located 131 kilometers southwest of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 30°51,8'S, 30°22,4'E



**NAME:** Serame Petrus Sithole

**DESCRIPTION:** The swimmer, a 25-year-old black male, was 1,73 metres tall. He was a well-developed adult, wore pale blue swimming trunks and a silver ring on the third finger of his left hand. It is not known if he had any injuries before the attack.

### BACKGROUND

**WEATHER:** It was a hot, sultry overcast day. The Durban meteorological station recorded temperatures from 19° to 27,5°C and no rain fell. At 08h00 there was 8/8 cloud cover and no wind, at 14h00 there was 7/8 cloud cover and a light five-knot south-easterly breeze.

**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter, December 25, 1960

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The sea was turbid and visibility was poor. Water temperature was 24°C. The tide was low and incoming and Sithole was swimming in 2,3-metre-deep channel which ran parallel to the beach.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Margate had two swimming enclosures a few hundred metres apart: one for blacks, the other for whites. Neither enclosure was popular; at low tide the water inside them was barely knee deep.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** Reports are conflicting: one source wrote that the attack took place 100 metres from shore, but other witnesses claim that the swimmer was only 10 metres from the beach when he was bitten by the shark.

**DEPTH:** Three metres



**TIME:** 16h30

**NARRATIVE:** Approximately 4,000 people were on the beach. Petrus Sithole was in a channel outside the protective shark enclosure. He was one of a party of three people but was closer to the beach than his companions when he was attacked. He was seen swimming vigorously, then he screamed and beat the water with his arms. The upper part of his body came vertically out of the water, then his cries ceased and he fell forward. Waves washed Sithole shoreward and as he neared waist-deep water, a man ran in the sea and dragged him to the beach.

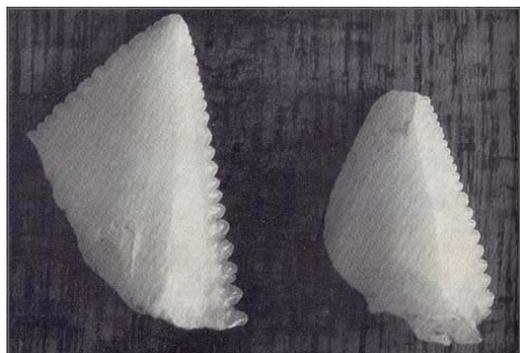
**INJURY:** Sithole's left leg was severed in the region of the upper thigh and his femur was shattered. The right leg was severed at the knee and the undamaged distal end protruded through the muscle tissue. There was an extensive longitudinal skin abrasion in the central lower chest/upper abdominal region which was 2,54 centimetres in width and 17,7 centimetres in length. The bites were described as clean-cut, except for some serrated edges on the back of the right leg. X-rays taken at Port Shepstone Provincial Hospital revealed two tooth fragments in the distal end of the femur of the right leg near the knee.

**FIRST AID:** Artificial resuscitation was started on Sithole as soon as he was on the beach, and Dr Feinberg reached the swimmer minutes after the attack. Some press reports say that Sithole died en route to the hospital. However, according to Dr Feinberg, Sithole died before he was brought ashore. Dr Feinberg accompanied the body to Port Shepstone Provincial Hospital.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** Initially Dr David Davies believed that a raggedtooth shark was responsible for the attack, but X-rays of the wounds revealed two tooth fragments which were located and removed. Dr Davies identified the fragments as having come from a Zambesi shark, *Carcharhinus leucas*. The larger fragment was ten millimetres in length, strongly serrated, and triangular in shape; there was no curve whatsoever along the sides. Dr Davies was a pioneer in the field of shark research and, aware that the fragments might someday yield more data about the shark species involved in the incident, he photographed and saved

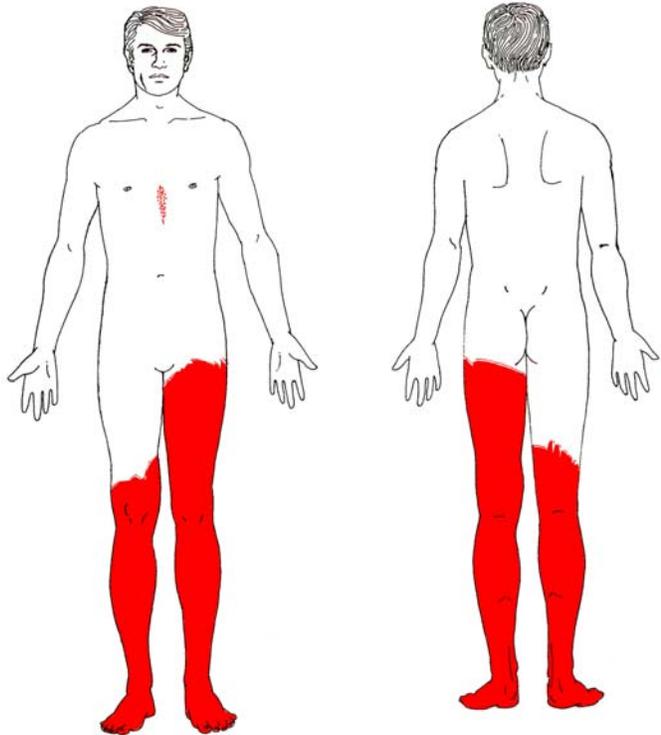


*X-ray of the right femur of Petrus Sithole showing tooth fragments embedded in the bone.*



*Tooth fragments retrieved from the right femur of Petrus Sithole. The length of the large fragment is 04 inches.*

them. Thirteen years later when Tim Wallett re-examined the fragments he had access to a far more comprehensive collection of specimen teeth. When Wallett compared the fragments with a slightly larger specimen tooth from a Zambesi shark it was evident that the tooth fragments recovered from the victim had much stronger serrations; the serrations of the tooth fragments were identical to those of a tooth from a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, about three metres in length.



**COMMENT:** Part of Sithole's blue swimming trunks were torn away by the shark during the attack. On January 3, 1961, a 147-kilogram raggedtooth shark was landed by Dave Griesel of the Margate Tuna Club at Palm Beach near Port Edward. The shark contained human remains: nine bones including a human kneecap with attached flesh, and a piece of black woollen material with seam which was thought to have been part of a bathing costume. Five teeth from the shark's lower jaw were broken. It is believed that this incident caused Dr Davies to initially consider a raggedtooth shark as the possible attacker.

Davies blamed the Zambesi shark in most of the cases he investigated afterwards when the tooth impressions bore a similarity to those found in this case. Assuming Davies' observations were valid (and he was a meticulous researcher), it follows that white sharks, rather than Zambesi sharks, were involved in many of those incidents.

**SOURCES:** Davies, David H. & Jeanette D. D'Aubrey (1961). Shark Attack off the East Coast of South Africa, 24 December 1960, with Notes on the Species of Shark Responsible for the Attack.

Investigational Report No.2, Oceanographic Research Institute, South African Association for Marine Biological Research.

Wallett, Timothy Stuart (1973). Analysis of Shark Meshing Returns off the Natal Coast. Unpublished MSc thesis, University of Natal: Durban.

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Levine