

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1961.02.01](#) / SA-145

DATE: Wednesday February 1, 1961

LOCATION: The attack took place in the Indian Ocean at Nahoon Beach, five kilometres north of East London Harbour, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

32°59,4'S, 27°57,1'E



NAME: Geoffrey Zimmerman

DESCRIPTION: The swimmer, a 14-year-old male, was 1,57 metres tall and weighed 47 kilograms and was wearing a black and white diamond-patterned swim suit. He was tanned and his toe was bleeding slightly before the attack.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Temperatures ranged from 16,3° to 26,3°C. The sky was overcast with 7/8 cloud cover. During the morning there was a gentle to moderate 15- to 20-knot northwesterly breeze, but by afternoon the wind had shifted and there was a light southeasterly breeze.

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, January 31, 1961 at 20h47

SEA CONDITIONS: The water was slightly choppy and clear, but dark due to cloud cover. The sea temperature was 25,5°C and it should be noted that bathing was banned at East London beaches when the sea temperature rose to 22°C or more. The attack took place an hour before high tide.

ENVIRONMENT: The beach had a gradual slope, but there are conflicting reports regarding the presence of a channel. According to one report there was a channel running parallel to the beach, another says there was no channel.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 60 metres

DEPTH: 1,2 metres

TIME: 14h50

NARRATIVE: Four boys were in a group of ten bathers who were further seaward than most of the 35 or so bathers at the beach. Two boys, 15-year-old Desmond Schultz and 14-year-old Robert Nuttall, were swimming 2,4 metres from Zimmerman and had just surfaced behind him when the attack took place. The shark sped past the two boys and seized Zimmerman's leg. He shouted and beat the water in front of him with his arms. The water around him became disturbed, then red with blood. The first dorsal fin and part of the shark's body was seen at least twice and on each occasion the shark was swimming towards Zimmerman. Schultz and Nuttall, who pulled Zimmerman to the beach, said that the shark circled three times after releasing the him. One witness, 15-year-old Barry Kreuzsch, said that the shark was "showing itself on the surface like a porpoise." He said the shark was 1,5 metres in length and continued to swim in the surf after Zimmerman was taken from the water, and Lifesaver Simpson saw a shark's fin 30 minutes after the incident about 275 metres from shore.

INJURY: Zimmerman sustained multiple injuries on both legs and feet, but no flesh was removed. The big toe of his right foot was severed at the base. The muscle tissue of his

right calf had been cut to the bone, but no flesh was removed. A long shallow laceration involving skin and subcutaneous tissue was present on the inside of the left thigh with a series of singular triangular tooth marks on the outside of the thigh. There were additional wounds on the lower portion of his left leg, left ankle, right heel, left elbow and left forearm. The wounds had clean-cut edges and individual teeth marks were visible. No tooth fragments were recovered.

FIRST AID: Lifesavers G. Cooke and Roy Simpson carried Zimmerman to the beach. The boy appeared disoriented and periodically attempted to sit up, pull his legs up and turn on his side during first aid treatment. Tourniquets had been applied although by this time bleeding had stopped. There was a marked pallor of the oral and conjunctival mucous membrane. His pulse was rapid and weak and he appeared to be losing consciousness. He complained of difficulty with breathing although respiration appeared normal. Twenty minutes after the attack he was carried up a steep path, through dune vegetation, to the waiting ambulance. En route to the hospital, he went into cardiac arrest. He was revived but suffered cardiac arrested a second time and was dead on arrival at the hospital.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The original investigators believed that the patient had been bitten at least four times, but when the photographs of the injuries are re-examined it appears that there were only two bites, the remainder of the wounds occurred as the patient struggled to free himself from the shark. Dr David Davies based his original description of the victim's injuries on photographs of the wounds. However, the prints in the Oceanographic Research Institute files were not made in a professional photo lab and the negatives were inadvertently reversed; all the photographs from which Davies wrote his description of Zimmerman's injuries were printed wrong way round. The text and photos in this report have been corrected.

The ORI Investigational Report Number 5, written by Dr David Davies and Jeanette d'Aubrey, noted that the shark had a jaw width of 26,7 centimetres, and believed that a 2,1-metre, 90-kilogram Zambesi shark was involved. Perhaps they were correct, but it is also possible that the accident involved a white shark, or even a mako shark.

SOURCES: Davies, David H. and Jeanette D. D'Aubrey (1961). Shark Attack off the East Coast of South Africa, 1st February, 1961. Investigational Report No.5, Oceanographic Research Institute, South African Association for Marine Biological Research; Natal Mercury, February 2, 1961



Geoffrey Zimmerman and Desmond Schultz who witnessed the attack on Zimmerman. It is unclear which boy is Geoffrey Zimmerman because some contemporary press reports reported that the boy on the left was Zimmerman and the boy on the right was Schultz, while in other press reports it was the reverse.