

ACTIVITY: Fishing

CASE: [GSAF 1963.00.00.a](#)

DATE: Circa 1963

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean in the Seychelles.

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: He was a male, a fisherman.

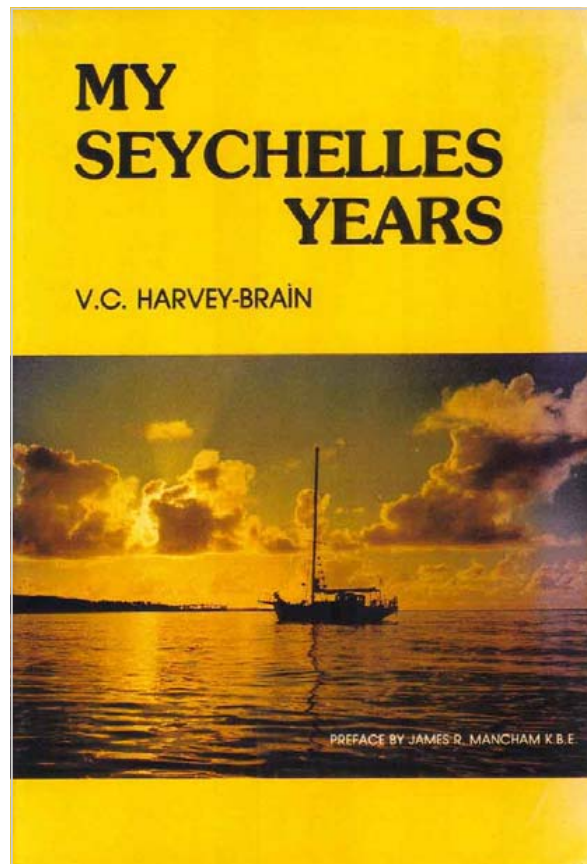
NARRATIVE: “Some fishermen in a pirogue had harpooned a turtle, and of course there was a lot of blood in the water. Owing to the fact that they were having difficulty in hauling the wounded turtle on board one of the fishermen jumped into the water, the better to grapple with it. He was attacked by a shark almost immediately — being taken by the thigh. The others in the pirogue managed to beat off the shark with an oar, and the wounded man was rushed ashore.”

INJURY: Fatal. “However, even though his wounds were not severe, being rather in the nature of lacerations, he died of shock on the way to the hospital.”

SPECIES: “The shark involved was said to be a hammerhead.”

SOURCE: The 1987 autobiography of Vere C. Harvey-Brain, a boat captain who plied the waters around the Seychelles after the Second World War, describes two shark attacks — one during his time in the area and one that occurred at the beginning of the 19th Century. The above account appears on pages 201-202.

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This is what an authority, Dr. Ommanney, has to say about the dolphin:-

"I have often been asked what the difference is between a dolphin and a porpoise. It is a difficult question to answer for the terms are loosely used. In the first place the classic dolphin is a fish, bright olive green and gold with blue spots. But if we leave the fish out of account and are only speaking of the small whale-like mammals then roughly one might say that porpoises are small whales with a rounded, beakless face, and a triangular dorsal fin, and spade-shaped teeth. Dolphins in the sense that we mean have a beaked profile, and sharp teeth. They usually have a sickle-shaped dorsal fin. But the larger dolphins, such as the grampus, are usually spoken of as whales."

Just why sharks are dangerous in some areas, whilst in others they are apparently not, is difficult to decide. It is known that in the relatively cold waters of South Africa, and Southern Australia, sharks are universally feared - whereas, in the warm tropical seas around the Seychelles and Chagos, they are not. We used to do a lot of skin diving at Chagos and Aldabra, in search of green snail shells and pearls. But over many years of this work none of my divers were ever molested by sharks. These divers were Seychellois of varying skin pigmentation. The only precaution ever taken was that the black divers sometimes used to blacken the soles of their feet. This, they thought, made them less conspicuous in the water. (i.e. The soles of a black man's feet are relatively white).

During my twenty-eight years in the Seychelles I was only able to establish one known authentic case of an attack by a shark on a man in the water. In this particular case some fishermen in a pirogue had harpooned a turtle, and of course there was a lot of blood in the water. Owing to the fact that they were having difficulty in hauling the wounded turtle on board one of the fishermen jumped in the water, the better to grapple with it. He was attacked by a shark almost immediately - being taken by the thigh. The others in the pirogue managed to beat off the shark with

an oar, and the wounded man was rushed ashore. However, even though his wounds were not severe, being rather in the nature of lacerations, he died of shock on the way to hospital. The shark involved was said to have been a hammerhead. Of course, quite apart from this particular incident, others have 'disappeared' while in the water.

I have to point out, however, that in contradiction to the foregoing, it is of interest to note that lurid accounts have been left by the early explorers of Seychelles waters, to the effect that in those days the seas around these islands teemed with monsters so fierce that they attacked all boats launched. It is even on record that a boat seeking to land passengers on Silhouette Island had the blades of its oars bitten off. Then again, the corsair Hodoul has described how in the year 1800, while his ship lay at anchor close to St. Ann Island, one of his boats, on putting off from the shore, was overturned by a school of sharks and that he and his crew had the terrifying experience of witnessing their shipmates being torn to pieces before their eyes. Also, sometime during 1913, an enterprise named the St. Abbs Whaling Company had an establishment on St. Ann's Island. During their sojourn there it appears that much whale offal was thrown into the sea. And once more one hears of shark attacks on human beings. In recent times a large sperm whale became stranded in shallow water off one of Mahé's western beaches. It wasn't long before huge tiger sharks, giant white sharks, and hammerheads crowded in, and in almost the twinkling of an eye the whale's carcass was torn to pieces.

From the foregoing it seems safe to assume that baiting a tropical sea bottom in a prodigious manner is bound to attract dangerous scavenging sharks - even from a great distance away.

