



**ACTIVITY:** Scuba diving

**CASE** [GSAF 1979.05.03 / SA-277](#)

**DATE:** Thursday May 3, 1979

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at Mbibi, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**NAME:** Alan Symons

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a novice scuba diver, a member of the Wits University Diving Club. His dive equipment was brand new; he had used it only once before in a swimming pool.

#### **BACKGROUND**

**WEATHER / SEA CONDITIONS:** A north-east wind had been blowing for four consecutive days and the inshore surf was rough. A longshore current was flowing in a northerly direction and water visibility was about 10 metres.

**MOON PHASE:** First Quarter, May 4, 1979

**ENVIRONMENT:** Mbibi is a rocky promontory on the Zululand Coast.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** There were two to three metres of water over the sandbank that had formed offshore and the water depth where the divers planned to regroup was five metres.

**TIME:** Shortly after 12h00

**NARRATIVE:** Alan Symons and other members of the Wits University Diving Club, he joined other divers at on Thursday 3 May 1979. Four divers, including Symons, entered the water at 12h00. They intended to snorkel out beyond the surf zone and then begin the dive. When the three divers reached the backline, however, Symons was missing.

After divers unsuccessfully searched for Symons, an aerial search began at 16h00 but also failed to find the missing diver.

Three days later, on May 6, a black Rondine swim fin, size 8-9, was found on the beach three kilometres south of Mbibi. Other than normal scratches and nicks usually found on swim fins, no marks were evident. On May 9, six days after the diver disappeared, the remains of wetsuit pants were found 11 kilometres north of Mbibi. The wetsuit pants were found inside-out. There were numerous bite marks of a large shark or sharks on the pants.

Both the swim fin and wetsuit appeared to be new which suggested that they might have been those worn by the diver when he disappeared.

From the extent of the damage to the wetsuit it was concluded that a person wearing it could have died as a result of the injuries inflicted. It was not possible, however, to establish whether the wearer was alive when the suit was bitten or if anyone was wearing the wetsuit at the time. (Neoprene is buoyant; it is conceivable that the suit dropped from a boat or was washed into the sea and was bitten as it floated in the water.) A search of the area – a kilometre north and a kilometre south – revealed nothing else.

**INJURY:** Presumed fatal.

**CASE INVESTIGATORS:** Walter Pople, Graeme Charter, Beulah Davis, Natal Sharks Board