

ACTIVITY: Body boarding

CASE: [GSAF 1986.12.22 / CASE 353](#)

DATE: Monday December 22, 1986

LOCATION: The attack took place about 22 kilometres northeast of Mossel Bay at Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie Strand, less than a kilometre east of the Great Brak River in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.

34°S, 22°05'E

NAME: Richardt Anton Olls

DESCRIPTION: He was a 21-year-old male, 1,8 metres tall and weighed 70 kilograms. He had an athletic build, was lightly tanned and wore blue and white baggies under a thin short-sleeved, short-legged, one-piece black neoprene wetsuit. He also had black swim fins but wore no jewelry and had no injuries before entering the sea.

BODY-BOARD: He was using a blue foam boogie board; it is not known if he wore a leash.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: Rain had fallen during the morning but the sky had cleared by the time of the incident. There was a light onshore to northeasterly breeze and Mossel Bay meteorological station recorded a temperature of 18°C.

MOON PHASE: Waning Gibbous, 69% of the Moon was illuminated. Third Quarter, December 24, 1986.

SEA CONDITIONS: There were several reports of localised upwellings during the previous month and sea temperatures varied from “extremely cold” to 23°C. At 14h00 on the day of the accident the water temperature measured 21°C. Mean low tide was at 13h40. The water was clear with virtually no suspension; visibility was six metres. The surf was small, the waves were no more than 1,5 to two metres. A sandbank had formed about 20 metres off the beach and a channel was present. The accident took place in the northern end of the channel at a point where the water runs out to sea and he had been using the rip current to move offshore.

ENVIRONMENT: SAOU Strand is a steeply sloping beach backed by low dunes. Local fishermen reported that the area was “dead as far as fish and squid were concerned”, but they had been catching many sharks at night for the past few weeks. Only one raggedtooth shark was landed, the rest were copper sharks. Most of the sharks ranged in size from 10 to 40 kilograms, but a few weighed as much as a hundred kilograms and larger sharks had been snapping anglers' traces. They also said that often the carcasses of sharks caught the previous night were still lying on the beach next morning. Although anglers had been fishing the evening before the accident, no one was fishing when the shark bit Olls. Paul Bernard, who was in the water with Olls when he was bitten by the shark, said, “There were quite a few small schools of fish around and about five minutes before the accident we saw some dolphins. The shark must have been after them.”

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: 80 metres

DEPTH: Four to five metres

TIME: 17h00

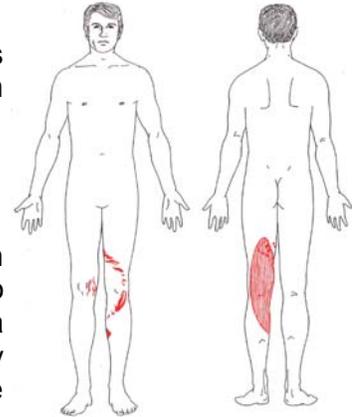
NARRATIVE: Forty bathers were in the water but Richardt Olls was to the left of the bathing flags; the bathers were approximately 100 metres further north and 20 metres out to sea where the surf was breaking on the sandbank. Olls and a friend, 20-year-old Paul Bernard, who was on a waveski, were ten metres apart waiting for a wave. Suddenly Olls shouted to

Bernard that he had been bitten by a shark. "I paddled over to him but saw nothing – just blood in the water", said Bernard. "By this time he was in the waves and I couldn't stay next to him." Meanwhile two 16-year-old lifesavers, Gerhard Geldenhuys and Willem Roos who were on duty from Sea and Sand, also saw blood in the water. Bernard paddled to shore and then went in with the two lifesavers to fetch Olls. "By this time he was almost on the beach", recalls Bernard. Lifesavers pulled Olls out of the shorebreak, laid him on the sand and sounded the alarm to call bathers out of the water.

INJURY: Fatal. The body-boarder's left leg was bitten and his femoral artery was severed. The injuries indicated the shark swam up between his legs and bit his flexed left leg.

DAMAGE TO BODY-BOARD: Unknown

FIRST AID: The two lifesavers placed the injured body-boarder on his side, head-downward, and used beach towels in an attempt to plug the wound. They also tried to fashion a tourniquet with a beach towel. Bernard recalls, "He was still conscious, but badly shocked." Dr Caspar Grobler and Dr J.H.B. de Lange, who were on the beach when the accident took place, assisted the two lifesavers but after five minutes they was concluded that the patient was too severely injured to be adequately treated on site and a decision was made to transport him to the hospital immediately. The patient was placed on a surfboard which was used as a stretcher, carried along the beach and up a flight of steps to a waiting kombi. Accompanied by the two doctors, the patient was rushed to George Hospital. He either died en route to the hospital or shortly after arrival.



SPECIES INVOLVED: No X-rays were taken of the wound and no tooth fragments were recovered, however measurements of the wound indicated that the width of the shark's jaw was about 35 centimetres, and the teeth marks on the anterior of the leg indicated a white shark at least three metres in length was involved. About 12 days after the accident a three-metre, 200-kilogram, white shark was caught in the same area by five fishermen: Boetie Potgieter, Walter Robinson, Jack Meyer, Baan Van Rensburg and Calla Visser. Some of the shark's teeth were broken, but its gut was empty; there was no evidence that it was the same shark which bit the body-boarder.

SOURCES: Interviews with Gerhard Geldenhuys, Willem Roos, Dr. C. Groble, Dr. J.H.B. de Lange and Dr. Smallberger.

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