

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming  
**CASE:** **GSAF 1922.05.06**  
**DATE:** Saturday May 6, 1922  
**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Western Cape Province at Simon's Bay, a bight in False Bay, 94 kilometres from Table Bay, South Africa.  
34°11,2'S, 18°26'E



The *General Botha* in Simon's Bay

**NAME:** Edward G. Pells

**DESCRIPTION:** The swimmer was a student at the University of Cape Town. He later became Professor of Education at the University of Cape Town.

### BACKGROUND

**MOON PHASE:** Waxing Gibbous with 72% of the Moon's visible disk illuminated. First quarter Moon on May 4, 1922 at 12:55 Universal Time.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** The water was described as calm and translucent.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Simon's Bay, first used by the Dutch as a winter anchorage because it provided shelter from the north-westerly gales that lashed Table Bay, has served as a Naval Base for more than two centuries.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** The incident took place 150 metres from the end of the jetty.

**TIME:** "Morning"

**NARRATIVE:** Edward Pells dived into the water for a slow swim around the training ship *General Botha*, moored 300 metres off the end of the jetty. Three Malay fishermen, Edroos Slarmie, Jonkie Moses and Marona Potts, were in a flat-bottomed pram anchored nearby. The incident is described by Gordon Wilson in an article titled "*Shark Attacks in False Bay*" which appeared in the Simon's Town Historical Society Bulletin, Vol. XIII, No.3:

"He (Pells) had covered about half the distance when there was a swirl of water below him, followed by what felt like the impact of a torpedo. Simultaneously he was seized by very powerful jaws. . . At the same moment the (shark) turned sharply downwards. Its tremendous tail flashed in the air and lashed the water as it descended with Eddie.

"Young Pells was of course now panic stricken and in the dim depths he struggled frantically to free himself. By using leverage against the shark's body, he literally tore himself free! The large serrated rows of the top jaw simply ripped through the yielding flesh and muscle of his stomach and thigh while the smaller teeth, fewer and further apart, gashed his back and in the process of forcing his body from this merciless grip.

"Fifteen feet down he was aware of the monster looming darkly beside him and he struck at once for the surface. At last, with lungs craving for fresh air, he broke surface in a wide circle of flecked foam and in his immediate vicinity, the water began to crimson ominously. Quickly locating the dinghy he struck out for it with what speed he could muster. The shock of the attack robbed him of his speech and he was unable to shout for help. The three

Malay fishermen had witnessed the attack and were hoisting their stone anchor. Eddie was weakening but at last the eager hands of the fishermen hauled him over the gunwale and in that instant the sinister shape of the huge shark approached and bumped the bow of the dinghy. Petrified horror spread over the Malays' faces as they thought the shark would upset the pram and tip them all into the sea."

**FIRST AID / TREATMENT:** "Mr Robert Lankester, the coxswain of the port boat, also witnessed the near tragedy. After a short but anxious row to the jetty, the Malays delivered Eddie to a waiting car summoned by Mr Lankester while Eddie was still in the water. Within minutes Eddie was lying on the operating table of the False Bay Hospital having the flow of blood staunched and the wounds stitched by the District Surgeon who had fortuitously just finished an operation!!"

**SPECIES:** "Mr Lankester immediately asked his boats' crew to keep a look-out for the shark and reports came through that the shark was still cruising about in the Bay. Mr Lankester then got his equipment ready: a large foot-long half-inch steel barbed hook with a foot of heavy metal trace, three steel harpoons fitted in wooden shafts, and plenty of rope. He fixed a four-gallon drum on the line and baited the hook with a leg of pork.

"Two days later the shark was seen idly swimming on the surface of the Bay and the port boat went out after him. Mr Lankester threw the baited hook, drum and line overboard and it was not long before the bait

was taken and the shark was well and truly hooked. A battle royal followed but the heavy drag caused by the drum on the line eventually tired the shark out and it was forced to the surface. Approaching the shark in the boat, Mr Lankester plunged the first of the harpoons well home into the monster's back. Immediately the shark came for the boat with open jaws. Mr Lankester thrust the second harpoon down its throat and the great jaws snapped closed, bending the steel shaft on the harpoon like a piece of baling wire! Eventually a third harpoon sealed its fate and it was subdued and brought to the shore. It was then discovered that the half-inch steel hook had been almost straightened out in the struggle.

"Hung by its tail from an old gum tree (then growing in the area where the present Marlin and Tuna Club House stands, before the reclamation of the area by fill), it proved to be over 12 feet long (3,66 metres) and over a thousand pounds (+453,6 kilograms) in weight. It was a Blue Pointer (*Carcharodon carcharias*) known as the great white shark (or the great white death in Australia) and is the most ferocious and voracious of all shark species.



Mr Lankester and the shark

“Mr Lankester cut the jawbone from the shark and later Eddie Pells allowed the monster's jaws to be fitted to the wounds on his body. They fitted his wounds exactly even to the breaks in the continuity of the wounds which corresponded precisely with broken or missing teeth in its lower jaw. Mr Lankester presented Mr Pells with one of the shark's teeth which the latter had mounted on a tie pin as a memento of his desperate encounter.”

**SOURCE:** Gordon Wilson

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Marie Levine