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SHARK ATTACKS ALONG THE SOUTH CAROLINA COAST

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AUTHENTIC published records of persons having been bitten by sharks while in bathing along the Atlantic coast north of Florida are rare; indeed, after exhaustive research, I have found no authentic record excepting an episode off New Jersey in 1916.

Yet, within the last decade, off the coast of South Carolina there have been several well-authenticated cases of fierce attacks upon bathers. I am setting down here some authentic, and what I shall call semi-authentic records of attacks which have occurred off the South Carolina coast in recent years.

On June 21, 1933, 15-year-old Drayton Hastie, of Charleston, S. C., was bathing at the north end of Morris Island, which is situated at the mouth of Charleston Harbor. I am giving an account of the incident in Mr. Hastie's own words:

... Far up the shore line I saw what I thought might be the dorsal fin of a large shark cutting the rough surface. I stood up and strained my eyes to make certain. Yes, it must be a fin, I concluded. ... Reaching the place and finding nothing that resembled a fin, I believed that I had mistaken a choppy wave for a fin. ... I did not like the idea of swimming with sharks all around, so I sat down in about three feet of water, at which place the beach sloped gradually until about six feet beyond where I was sitting, at the point it made a deep drop. I was almost certain that in such shallow water I would be safe from anything large enough to bite.

... I felt a swerve of water, which was immediately followed by an impact which brought me to my senses. Something clamped down on my right leg. I was aware of a tearing pain up and down my leg, and that I was being pulled outward by something which seemed to have the power of a horse. Looking

down, I saw, amid the foam and splashing, the head of a large shark with my knee in its mouth, shaking it as a puppy would shake a stick in attempting to take it away from some one. Through natural instinct, I started kicking frantically with my unharmed leg in order to free myself. I freed my right leg, only to have the monster bite me on my left one. All this time I had been pulling myself up on the beach backwards with my hands and kicking at the rough head of the shark, which seemed to me as solid as Gibraltar.

... Although to you this may seem long and strung out, it must have all happened in a space of ten seconds.

... Although some people said I had been bitten by everything from crabs up to whales, I still have a perfect design of a shark's mouth around my knee, measuring ten inches across. This confirms the statement of my friend who was standing on the bank and who said that the shark was easily eight feet long.

Mr. Hastie, with much difficulty, was carried to the army hospital at Fort Moultrie, where first aid was administered. It required more than 30 stitches to close the numerous wounds. Later he was transferred to Riverside Infirmary, in Charleston, where he remained a patient for two weeks.

Both the week before and the week after the attack on Mr. Hastie, two eight-foot sharks were taken within one hundred yards from where he had bathed. On identification they were found to be the yellow or cub shark (*Hypoprion brevirostris*), thought to be more a native of the West Indies than of the Atlantic Coast. The only previous record of this shark off Charleston was one small one taken in May, 1882, by Jordan and Gilbert,¹ and another small

¹ *Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, Vol. V, p. 581, 1882.

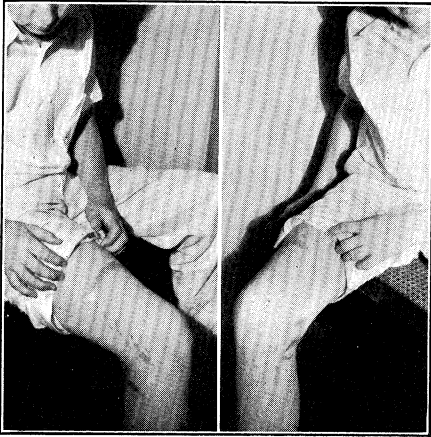


FIG. 1. PHOTOGRAPHS OF RIGHT LEG OF DRAYTON HASTIE, WHO WAS BITTEN BY A SHARK WHILE SWIMMING OFF COMINGS POINT, MORRIS ISLAND, JUNE, 1933. PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY WESLEY JACKSON, JUNE 25, 1934.

one taken by a member of the Charleston Museum staff in October, 1932.

Mr. Lewis Kornahrens was attacked while in the surf at Folly Island on July 31, 1924. Unfortunately, he is no longer in the city and I can get no statement from him. I am quoting from the chart of the Roper Hospital, where he was admitted the day the attack occurred:

The patient says he was standing in the breakers near the sea-shore in water about waist deep. This was at Folly Beach near the Elks Club. He says something that he thinks was a fish grabbed on both legs at the same time and that he hit the fish (?) with his fist, whereupon it turned him loose. A Negro man came to his assistance and helped him to shore. The patient says the Negro saw about six feet of the fish but didn't stop to observe closely (signed) Dr. J. N. Walsh.

Mr. Kornahrens was treated for "repair of lacerated muscles on the left knee and leg," which required more than 100 stitches, and was discharged on August 28, 1924. Mr. Kornahrens continued to feel a severe pain in his knee cap and it grew steadily worse. Finally he was readmitted to the hospital on

November 4, 1924. A minor operation was performed and a fragment of a tooth was taken from the vicinity of the knee cap. His attending physician was Dr. D. L. Maguire, of Charleston. This fragment of tooth is now in the possession of the Charleston Museum (*Spec. 2811*). Recently it was sent on for identification to Drs. Gudger and Nichols of the American Museum of Natural History of New York, and the following is quoted from a letter from Dr. Gudger, dated July 13, 1933:

I am returning under separate cover today the tooth fragment you sent. This is not a barracuda tooth. There is no doubt on this point. Mr. Nichols and I are both satisfied that it is a fragment of a shark's tooth, and we are inclined to think that it is from one of the mackerel sharks, but presumably a young specimen.

Young Kenneth Layton and a friend were in bathing at Pawley's Island, which is about seventy-five miles north of Charleston, when they were startled by a cry of "Shark! Shark!" from a man standing on the beach.

At the place where they were bathing, the beach is very flat; consequently, they were well out from shore, although in water not much over four feet. Both he and his friend were terribly startled when they heard the cry of warning. Looking down the beach, they saw a large dorsal fin of a shark 50 yards away. They immediately rushed for shore. Layton says the shark deliberately tried to cut them off. When they reached water about waist deep, Layton was seized by the right heel and ankle. He struggled frantically, and in the meanwhile his friends who were bathing nearby were rushing to his assistance. Together with his struggle and the commotion caused by the approach of his friends, the shark was frightened to such an extent that it relinquished its hold.

Young Layton was rushed to the

Riverside Infirmary at Charleston, where it was ascertained that several tendons in his leg, including the Achilles, had been severed. His attending physician was Dr. A. Johnston Buist, of Charleston, S. C., who states that the patient has completely recovered the use of his foot. This attack occurred on August 28, 1933. The information regarding the attack was furnished me by Layton himself.

Mr. C. B. Hernandez tells me that in July, 1907 or '08, while swimming in a small creek about 15 feet deep, back of Coles Island, he was suddenly attacked by a shark. At the time, he was floating on his back. When the shark grabbed hold of his left knee, it apparently did not get a firm grip, but immediately attacked him again, getting a much firmer hold on the lower part of his leg. Mr. Hernandez says hardly a second elapsed between the first and second attack. He immediately floundered over and fought off the shark, which he saw quite clearly at the time. Apparently the shark was frightened away, because, though bleeding freely, he was not molested again as he swam back to the dock. Mr. Charles Millikan was standing at the head of the wharf when the attack occurred and clearly saw the shark. Both he and Mr. Fernandez estimated it to be about five feet in length. The scars on Mr. Hernandez' left leg are in crescentic form.

Mr. W. E. Davis, while swimming in James Island Sound, was viciously attacked by a shark. Mr. Davis is a member of the Officers Reserve Corps, and has recently been called into active service and is stationed at one of the C. C. C. Camps at White Springs, Florida. I have received a letter from him and am quoting from it in part:

On this particular afternoon, the tide was extremely high, even for a spring tide. So high, in fact, that it lacked less than an inch of covering the bridge. It was a perfectly

calm afternoon with barely a ripple on the water. Following my custom I dove from the wharf and headed out into the sound. I had swam probably thirty yards when my left foot was seized. Due to the water I was conscious of no pain, only pressure. My instant and involuntary reaction was to jerk practically clear of the water, and due to the sharpness of the teeth holding me I succeeded in ripping my foot clear. I immediately turned around and headed for the bridge. As I did so I saw directly in front a swirling of the water and at the same time the white of a shark's stomach and the tip of its tail. Unthinkingly, in my haste to regain the wharf, I swam directly over this spot and in so doing experienced a sharp burning contact with some rough-skinned body. Fortunately I reached the wharf very shortly. I was pretty well knocked out but did notice that my foot was practically mangled from about five inches up the leg down. Also a raw spot where the rough skin had touched me. The lacerations on my foot continued out in cleanly defined cuts to the tips of my toes, indicating that the shark had really held on to the last.

. . . It must have been a vicious fish and an intentional attack because I had no warning whatsoever. Further, the water that afternoon was exceptionally clear so that the shark could not have been mistaken as to what it was attacking. Also I was swimming vigorously and making quite a commotion in the water. Under the conditions I think it was a hungry, vicious shark that intentionally attacked me, and had



FIG. 2. PHOTOGRAPHS SHOWING RIGHT LEG OF MISS EMMA G. MEGGINSON WHO WAS BITTEN BY A SHARK(?) WHILE SWIMMING OFF FOLLY ISLAND, JUNE 16, 1933.

I been further out in the sound would have attacked me again.

When Mr. Davis was taken to the St. Francis Xavier Hospital in Charleston, it was at first thought that his foot would have to be amputated. Fortunately, this did not have to be done, and Mr. Davis regained the full use of it, although it required 70 odd stitches to close the lacerations. His attending physician was Dr. Robert Cathcart, of Charleston. This attack occurred on May 29, 1919.

These five cases, I feel, are absolutely authentic. The succeeding cases which I shall outline come under the category of semi-authentic, as no one actually *saw* the shark.

Mrs. Walter K. Kahrs and her husband were bathing at Folly Island on August 2, 1925. They had waded out until the water was about waist deep, Mrs. Kahrs in advance of her husband. They had both dived through the first line of breakers and were swimming steadily outwards, when Mrs. Kahrs was suddenly attacked. She screamed frantically and fought off the shark (?). Meanwhile, her husband, who had been swimming about ten feet behind her, rushed to her aid. Between the commotion of both of them the shark (?) was scared away.

Mrs. Kahrs was rushed to the Riverside Infirmary at Charleston, where it was found she suffered "multiple lacerations on both thighs, right buttock and hip." It required 78 stitches to close the numerous cuts and gashes. Her attending physician was Dr. John LaRoche, of Charleston.

Mrs. Kahrs tells me she was so frightened that she has no clear conception of what really happened. She was simply conscious of a sudden attack by some very large object. She thinks she struck the fish in her struggle, but is not perfectly certain about it. She also tells

me some of her scars are in the shape of a half-moon.

Miss Emma G. Megginson was standing in the surf in water about waist deep, when she felt something pinch the calf of her left leg, but thought it was her younger brother playfully grabbing at her. In another moment she felt a much more savage attack and then saw blood come to the surface of the water. She rushed out of the surf, and found she was bleeding freely from numerous cuts. She was taken to the Roper Hospital at Charleston, where it required 36 stitches to close the wounds.

Miss Megginson tells me she saw what was apparently the back of the fish and estimates it as being about a foot wide and black. She very kindly consented to let me have a photograph taken of her scars. The attack occurred at Folly Island on June 16, 1933. Her attending physician was Dr. G. F. Heidt.

I have endeavored to track down rumors of several other attacks that have been reported from time to time. But invariably they either happened many years ago, the victim and witnesses are dead or have moved away or a person has drowned under unusual circumstances. The information has been so meager in all the cases that I feel that it can not even be placed in a semi-authentic classification.

Invariably when an attack of this kind occurs every one immediately concludes, "barracuda." In many respects this is quite understandable, as the psychological effect would be extremely bad and no one would frequent the bathing beaches. In fact, last summer immediately after the attacks on Miss Megginson and Mr. Hastie, there was a marked decrease for quite a time in the number of bathers. The great barracuda (*Sphyreana barracuda*) is apparently very rare in and around Charleston. There is a skull of a fairly large specimen in the Charleston Museum, labeled

“off Charleston Harbor, 1874.” That appears to be the only authentic record. Occasionally the small northern species (*Sphyræna borealis*) is caught, but that, too, is apparently quite rare. For the last five years the museum has been trying to secure a specimen for its collection, but has been unsuccessful so far.

For any one wishing further information on these various cases, I will be only too glad to make appointments for them with the following: Messrs. Hastie, Layton, Hernandez, Mrs. Kahrs and Miss Megginson, Drs. Buist, LaRoche, Cathcart, Heidt and Maguire; and I feel sure, for any one sufficiently interested, I can get permission from the hospital authorities for him to go over the charts and records of the various cases.

There are records of the following sharks² having been taken in and around Charleston:

NURSE SHARK (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*). Occasionally taken during the warmer months.

DOG-FISH (*Mustelus canis*). Two records, one seen by Jordan and Gilbert in 1882 (Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1882, Vol. V, p. 581), and the second one brought in last winter by a trawler.

TIGER SHARK (*Galeocerdo tigrinus*). A 42-inch specimen brought in during December, 1932. Taken by a fisherman about twelve miles off shore. This shark was totally unknown to the fishermen and longshoremen, showing that

² Am using the word shark in the generally accepted sense of the word, and am not dividing them into various families.

it must be extremely rare. This is the first authentic record of its ever having been taken off the South Carolina coast.

SHARP-NOSED SHARK (*Scoliodon terrænoveae*). The most abundant of our sharks and the bane of the fishermen. Never seem to reach a large size.

GROUND SHARK (*Carcharhinus commersonii*). Moderately abundant during the warmer months.

BLACK-FIN SHARK (*Carcharhinus limbatus*). Extremely abundant during the warmer months. Apparently follows the shrimp trawlers in large schools. I know of a case where as many as nineteen were taken from under a trawler in a comparatively short space of time. Very few specimens exceed five feet in length.

YELLOW or CUB SHARK (*Hypoprion brevirostris*). Only four authentic records, but possibly more common than generally thought.

SHOVEL-NOSED SHARK (*Sphyrna tiburo*). Common during the warmer months.

HAMMER-HEAD SHARK (*Sphyrna zygaena*). This is also a moderately common species during the summer months.

SAND SHARK (*Carcharias littoralis*). One of the most common of our large sharks. Capt. William Magwood, of the shrimp trawler *Geneva Moore*, caught six, ranging in length from 8½ feet to 9½ feet, in a single haul of the net. Large specimens are frequently brought in by the trawlers during the summer months.

MACKEREL SHARK (*Isurus punctatus*). The only authentic record is a drawing made by Dr. Edmund Ravenel in 1821 from one brought in from off shore. The identification was made by Henry W. Fowler, of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. It is interesting to note that Dr. Ravenel was a close friend of the celebrated ichthyologist, Dr. John Edward Holbrook.