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with Notes on Attacks by Another Shark Along the New Jersey Coast in 1916**

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A Boy Attacked by a Shark, July 25, 1936 in Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts

With Notes on Attacks by Another Shark
along the New Jersey Coast in 1916

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Southern New England newspapers of July 26 and 27, 1936, chronicled what purported to be an attack on a boy by a shark in Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts, at a point just north of Mattapoisett Harbor. The attack being apparently authentic, I wrote Dr. Hugh M. Smith at Woods Hole nearby, urging that he investigate the alleged attack and get the exact facts. He answered that he was collecting all data and that everything indicated the authenticity of the attack.

After the close of the season (1936) at Woods Hole, and on his way back to Washington, Dr. Smith visited me in New York and left with me an envelope containing the data he had collected. And his final words were, "I leave the whole thing in your hands. I am too busy to do anything more. In any case, you will be able surely to establish the fact of the shark's attack and the boy's death."

It is a matter of great regret to the writer that the pressure of other work has so long delayed the preparation of this report, the only account of an attack by a shark on a human being on the New England Coast, and that in the meantime Dr. Smith has died.

THE SHARK ATTACK AT HOLLYWOOD BEACH, BUZZARD'S BAY, MASS., JULY 25, 1936

The attack under study occurred off Hollywood Beach, just above Mattapoisett Harbor, Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts, between 3 and 4 p.m. on July 25, 1936. Joseph Troy, Jr., 16 years old, of Dorchester, Mass., was swimming about 150 yards off shore, in water 10 or 15 ft. deep, along with an older man, Walter W. Stiles, of Boston, Mass. The two were about 10 ft. apart. Stiles was swimming quietly using the side stroke, but Troy, using a "crawl" stroke, was making considerable commotion in the water. Suddenly and without warning, a shark coming from under water appeared at Troy's left side (the side away from Stiles) and, turning somewhat belly up, laid hold of the lad's left leg and carried him under water before he could make any outcry. However, the momentum carried both shark and lad closer to Stiles.

Stiles recognized the attacking creature to be a shark and recalled that it probably had a mate not far away—since sharks are commonly believed to go

in pairs. Yet he had but one thought—to help his friend. So with superb courage he trod water while Troy fought the shark (as evidenced by the lacerations of his hands) and quickly broke away from it and came to the surface. Stiles then swam to his friend, caught and supported him with one hand and paddled with the other while shouting for help.

The shouts were heard by Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Fisher, of Dorchester Center, Mass., who were mooring their boat after a sail in the Bay. Mr. Fisher jumped into a dory and rapidly rowed to where Stiles was supporting the wounded boy. Fisher and Stiles, with much difficulty, got Troy into the boat, and then Stiles, much exhausted, was helped to clamber aboard. In the meantime, the shark was standing off and on in the blood-reddened water but a few yards away, seemingly ready to make another attack—and why it did not is inexplicable.

While the rescue was being made, a telephone call had been put in for a doctor at Mattapoisett. During the waiting for him, the mangled boy was laid on a door to maintain his body in as normal and as easy a position as possible. The late Dr. Irving N. Tilden of Mattapoisett came quickly, supposing the call was a case of drowning.

He found the wounded boy conscious in spite of the fearful lacerations from the bite, but in a severe state of shock—no radial pulse could be felt. The lad was at once put in a motor car and carried as quickly as possible to St. Luke's Hospital in New Bedford, 11 miles away. There it was at once seen that amputation was imperative, but because of the lad's condition, this was delayed until intravenous saline and glucose injections could be made. The amputation, performed by Dr. Edwin D. Gardner, now living in Marion, Mass., was done just above the bitten part of the thigh and the wound was being sutured when the boy rapidly grew worse and, in spite of all efforts to save him, died about 8:30 p.m., some five hours after the attack.

As to the injuries sustained by the lad (Troy), it seems best to quote, rather than transliterate, Dr. Tilden's report to Dr. Smith. He writes that the following injuries were found:

On the right upper chest and the right shoulder were areas of discoloration [due presumably to a rasping stroke of the shark's denticled hide] but the skin was not broken. The terminal phalanx of the left middle finger was practically amputated just distal to the terminal articulation. There were several superficial lacerations of the middle finger and also of the terminal phalanx of the left index finger. There were multiple lacerations of the right index and ring fingers.

On the dorsum of the left thigh, extending from the fold of the buttock downward for a distance of eight inches, there was a loss of tissue which included skin, subcutaneous fat, fascia, muscles, blood vessels and sciatic nerve, in places down to the femur. This loss of tissue, although not as deep as posteriorly [sic], extended forward on either side of the thigh, becoming more superficial anteriorly so that a strip of skin no more than two and a half inches wide on the anterior surface of the thigh was left intact. External to this strip of intact skin, the skin itself was torn in shreds. The femoral vessels were left intact at about a distance of half an inch from the injured muscles. There was only a moderate amount of bleeding from this wound. The skin edges were serrated as if cut off by a toothed object. The femur was not fractured. The circulation of the leg and foot below the injury seemed all right, although the foot was somewhat pale and cold.

The identity of the shark that made the attack is of very great interest. It seems surely to have been a "man-eater," a *Carcharodon carcharias*. Here is the evidence. Stiles saw the shark attack Troy and writes that it "exposed its belly very clearly, that this was very white and the transition of this to the very dark color of the sides was quite sudden or sharp." This is true of the two mounted "man-eaters" in the American Museum. Furthermore, the white in our specimens extends much farther up on the sides than in any of our other mounted sharks (Fig. 1). This unusual amount of white on the sides is probably the reason why this shark is also called "the great white shark." Further, Stiles writes that "the tail had two long sharp flukes" and that the upper one seemed slightly longer than the lower. In our best specimen (Fig. 1) the pointed flukes of the lunate caudal fin are nearly equal in length—the front edge of the dorsal lobe measuring 27 in., that of the ventral lobe 23.5 in. The rear edge of the dorsal lobe has near the top a slight notch making it seem longer—as may be seen in Fig. 1.

One other bit of evidence is worthy of presentation. Dr. Tilden, in reporting various effects of the shark-bite, says—"The skin edges of the wound were serrated as if cut off by a toothed object." Just here it seems well to insert the photograph of a *Carcharodon* tooth (Fig. 2) that the reader may see how accurate is Dr. Tilden's statement.

On the matter of the identity of the shark, Dr. Smith writes that: "From all the circumstances in this case, it clearly appears that the offending shark was a man-eater (*Carcharodon carcharias*), estimated to be 10 to 12 feet long by the two men, Stiles and Fisher, who saw it and have written out their accounts and sent them to me."

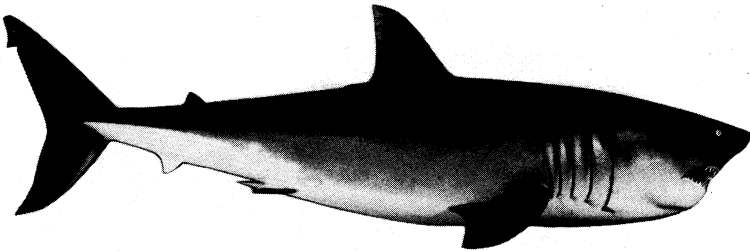


Fig. 1.—A 10-ft., 7-in., 998-lb. *Carcharodon carcharias* taken off Brielle, N. J., in 1933. The spread of the lunate caudal fin is 35 in. The length of the upper lobe measured along the front edge is 27 in.; of the lower lobe 23.5 in. Note the large amount of white on the side—"great white shark." From a photograph of the model in the American Museum made from a cast of the recently dead fish.

From the fact that this is the only account of an attack by a man-eater shark on a human being in New England waters, the reader has probably already come to the conclusion that this kind of shark is very scarce in these

parts. But not so. Dr. Smith, with characteristic thoroughness, compiled a list of 20 definite records of *Carcharodon* in and near Buzzard's Bay from 1871 to 1927, and at the end he notes that "This list is by no means complete."

Now as to details: Specifically, two individuals are recorded as caught on the same day, the others were seen or caught on separate days in the years noted. In size these measured individual sharks ranged from 4 ft. to 12 ft., 6 in. in length. Indicative of their relative frequency and abundance, it is noted that "specimens" were taken in Buzzard's Bay on 6 days in June, 1903: 7, 9, 20, 23, 25, 27. The largest white sharks recorded were seen by Vinal Edwards (the veteran collector and recorder of the U. S. Fish Commission Laboratory for many years). Dr. Smith states that "He reports several 18 to 20 ft. long seen in the summer of 1905 off Gay Head."

The years with reported occurrences are 1871, 1873, 1898, 1903, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1910, 1911, 1916, 1923, 1924, 1927. It should be noted that the records, beginning with 1903, are frequent—nearly all being by Vinal Edwards, who was particularly on the lookout for sharks.

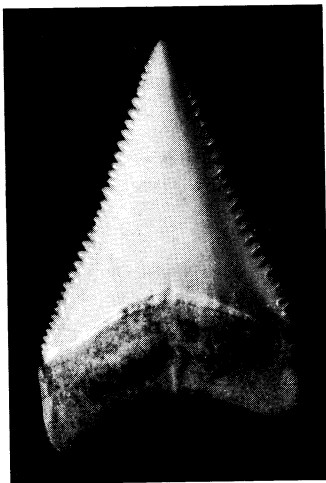


Fig. 2.—The triangular serrate tooth of a *Carcharodon carcharias*. Natural size not known. Photograph A.M.N.H.

From these invaluable data, it is clear that *Carcharodon carcharias* can not be put down as of very unusual occurrence along the southern shore of Massachusetts, and specifically in the Buzzard's Bay region. However, these numbers for these summer months of some years must not be overemphasized. This great shark is a native of tropical, subtropical and warm temperate waters. It is merely a summer migrant in the Woods Hole region, having drifted there in and with the Gulf Stream, and it is notable that in the assembled data from 1871-1923 (52 years) there is no record of a shark attack—and, indeed, none until 1936 (65 years). So it may truly be said that the chance of being bitten by a shark in these waters is about on all fours with the chance of being struck by lightning in these same regions.

This concludes the account of the only known case of a shark attack on a human being in New England waters. The account is based wholly on the data collected and so painstakingly set down by Dr. Hugh M. Smith. It is a source of keen regret to the present writer that the working up of the data was not done prior to Dr. Smith's death in 1941. Could the manuscript have had the benefit of his revision and emendations, it would surely have been put in better form. But the essential facts are here—thanks to him.

The late Herman Oelrichs had, for many years in the late 1800's a stand-

ing offer of \$500 for an authentic account of a shark attack on a human being north of Cape Hatteras. But the reward was never claimed and lapsed at his death somewhere about the turn of the century. From the avidity with which newspapers and public "take to" shark stories, and particularly to shark attacks on human beings, the fact that no claims were made for the award evidently means no attacks occurred.

In conclusion, it seems not inappropriate to end this paper with a brief resume of the only other shark attacks known from the Western North Atlantic.

SHARK ATTACKS ON MEN AND BOYS IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY WATERS IN 1916

In 1916 a "mad shark" (not inappropriately so designated by the newspapers) ranged along the northern New Jersey coast and a number of persons were killed. So many were the alleged attacks and so great was the fear engendered, that Dr. R. C. Murphy of the Brooklyn Museum and Mr. J. T. Nichols of the American Museum joined up to make a thorough survey of the "Shark Situation in the Waters about New York"—as the title of their report reads. Here follows a resume of their studies on *Carcharodon* as published in *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* (1916, vol. III, pp. 143-160).

So far as these authors could ascertain, the first of the New Jersey attacks occurred on July 2, 1916, at Beach Haven. This resulted in a fatality, but no details were ascertained. On July 6, another attack and another fatality occurred at Spring Lake (near Sea Girt), 20 miles further north. But again no details came to hand. And lastly, on July 12, a multiple attack occurred about 20 miles still further north in Matawan Creek, just inside Sandy Hook.

Some boys were in bathing. One was killed outright. A man, who tried to help this boy, was attacked in shallow water, and the skin and muscles of his thigh were badly torn, and the artery was probably cut, for he died shortly after. Further down the Creek, a boy's leg was so badly bitten as to call for amputation. All this in one afternoon and presumably by one and the same shark.

These attacks stirred the public as few things have and scores of shark-hunting boats patrolled the coast, the bays, the inlets and the rivers of northern New Jersey. It was called a "shark season" because scores of sharks of various kinds were seen and caught. These are thought to have come inshore seeking food consequent on a marked absence of menhaden and other fishes that go in schools and hence are easy prey for sharks. All the sharks taken by the patrols were "man-eaters" to the public, but, with one exception, not to ichthyologists. Fortunately, Mr. Nichols clipped and preserved all the shark stories from the newspapers and for them the following account is abstracted.

On July 14, 1916, Mr. Michael Schleisser of 29 East 132 St., New York, took a shark off South Amboy, New Jersey, in a drift net dragging behind his boat. The 8½-ft. shark required a lot of killing, but it was finally

subdued, brought in to South Amboy and dissected. In its stomach was found a lot of flesh and bones—weighing about 15 lbs. The large bones and the shark were brought in to New York. The bones found in the stomach were sent to Dr. F. A. Lucas, then Director of the American Museum, and were identified by him as human bones.

Mr. Schleisser, who had had some training as a taxidermist, mounted the skin and placed it on exhibit at the "Home News" office at 135 East 128 St. Mr. Nichols went there to see the mounted skin, and positively identified the fish as the great white shark, or man-eater, *Carcharodon carcharias*.

And as a postscript to the above, the following bit of personal testimony may be added. In 1917 or 1918, I saw in a fish shop on Broadway, near 86 St., New York City, the jaws of a shark labelled: "The Jaws of the New Jersey Man-Eater." I examined these jaws and noted the characteristic broadly triangular saw-edged teeth, which showed that these jaws came from a *Carcharodon carcharias*—and presumably from the New Jersey shark of 1916.

After the capture of this shark, no other shark attacks occurred in New Jersey waters and Murphy and Nichols came to the conclusion that Mr. Schleisser's shark was a solitary one and the sole attacker of the men and boys killed. And so the matter stood for 20 years until the attack described in the first part of this article brought another death to the record of shark fatalities in the Western North Atlantic.

From the evidence set forth in this article, plus the accounts in the literature, it seems that *Carcharodon carcharias* is not inappropriately referred to as a man-eater.