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35 CENTS TAX INCLUDED

Swimmer attacked off Solana Beach

SHARK KILLS



Photo by HARRY ROMERO JR. / CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lifeguards try to revive David Martin after he was bitten by a shark Friday morning near Solana Beach's Fletcher Cove.

Warnings cover N. County coast

GARY WARTH
STAFF WRITER

SOLANA BEACH — A great white shark is believed to have killed a 66-year-old man as he swam with fellow triathletes off the coast of Solana Beach on Friday morning.

"They saw him come up and out of water, scream 'shark,' flail his arms and go back under," said Rob Hill, a fellow member of the Triathlon Club of San Diego and friend of victim David Martin, a retired veterinarian and 38-year Solana Beach resident.

Hill said he was running on the beach while about nine other club members were in the water when the attack took place about 150 yards offshore at Tide Beach Park, about a half-mile north of Fletcher Cove.

The attack was the county's first shark fatality in nearly 49 years. Authorities advised people to stay out of the water from Torrey Pines



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A woman identified by authorities as a family member of the shark attack victim is distraught Friday morning at Fletcher Cove in Solana Beach.

INSIDE: Under "surreal" circumstances, a sunset vigil unfolds at Fletcher Cove. Page A-5.

State Beach to South Carlsbad State Beach until Monday.

Witnesses reported seeing Martin lifted violently out of the water before being pulled under.

"The swimmers said it was a terribly violent attack and they knew something was wrong right away," said Solana Beach fire Capt. Dismas Ableman.

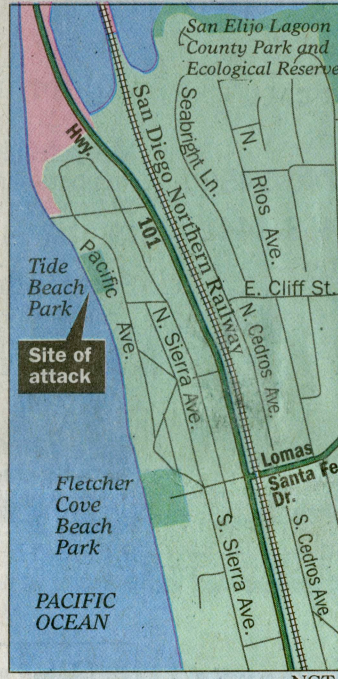
Martin's fellow club members rushed to his aid, but the massive wounds inflicted by the shark quickly took their toll.

Tony Romero, a part of a construction crew building a sea wall just south of Tide Beach Park, said he heard the screams of women in the water at about 7 a.m.

Looking up, Romero saw a group of people coming out of the water, carrying a limp man by his upper body. Romero described the man as not breathing, with foam in his mouth, and with severe wounds to his legs.

► SHARK, A-7

Fatal attack



WATER ADVISORY

The area above details the site of the attack, near Tide Beach Park in Solana Beach. The area in red represents an advisory by lifeguards from mid-Carlsbad to just south of Torrey Pines State Reserve to avoid water activity.

LA JOLLA
SAN DIEGO
Mission Bay

Retired veterinarian competed in triathlons

TERI FIGUEROA
STAFF WRITER

SOLANA BEACH — One of David Martin's final acts impressed — but did not surprise — his son.

"When he was bit, he started yelling 'shark' to warn other swimmers," Jeff Martin said Friday afternoon. "That's the kind of guy he was."

Martin's family was shaken

Friday after learning that the man with five kids and a number of grandchildren died after a shark attacked him while swimming with the Triathlon Club of San Diego, a group with which he had trained for about three years.

The attack came on a typical spring day, with picture-perfect weather and a brilliant blue sky.

Experts believe Martin fell victim to a great white shark.

► COMPETED, A-7



BILL WECHTER / NCT

Jeff Martin, right, one of the victim's five children, hugs Solana Beach neighbor Ken Taylor on Friday.

Available evidence points to great white as the culprit

TERI FIGUEROA
STAFF WRITER

NORTH COUNTY — The first fatal shark attack off the coast of San Diego County in nearly 49 years almost certainly came from a great white shark, according to a professor who examined the body of its victim, and an internationally recognized shark expert.

And, the expert noted, fatal shark attacks are extremely rare.

The clean bite left on the body of

victim Dave Martin, who was killed by a shark Friday morning, is indicative of a great white, according to Richard Rosenblatt, a professor emeritus with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Rosenblatt said he suspects that the shark was looking for food when it attacked Martin. Generally, he said, sharks feed on seals and sea lions — and Martin, who was wearing a wet suit, may have looked like a sea animal.

► CULPRIT, A-7

INSIDE | THE HEAT IS ON

Unseasonably high temperatures are expected throughout North County this weekend.

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BUSINESS | WAVES OF UNCERTAINTY

The mood among merchants, tourists along the coast ranges from confidence to concern.

PAGE D-1

SPORTS | TRIATHLETES STUNNED

Rare incident astonishes endurance racers who regularly train in the ocean.

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INSIDE THIS EDITION

Shift in automobile trends



Prices at the pump are driving a run on fuel-efficient vehicles, hurting sales of SUVs.

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Racial tension in N.Y.

Three New York detectives are acquitted in the 50-shot killing of an unarmed groom-to-be.

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THE WEATHER



Hot and sunny. Coastal highs in the 70s; around 90 inland, D-6.

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Friends, athletes, strangers bid farewell to victim

■ Several dozen gather at the beach where David Martin was fatally attacked

CRAIG TENBROECK
STAFF WRITER

SOLANA BEACH — Friends and fellow athletes used weathered wood planks to scrape an impromptu farewell — “Good Night Dave” — in the wet sand at Fletcher Cove on Friday night.

As the sun crept below the horizon, the crowd of more than 50 people stood side by side on the same small beach where shark attack victim David Martin, 66, died just 12 hours earlier.

Some who had come to say goodbye were friends and acquaintances. Others said they had never met the retired veterinarian and longtime Solana Beach resident, but felt close to him nonetheless.

“I know him in my heart,” said Carlsbad resident Catherine Simmons, who draped a strand of kelp across the sandy memorial before kneeling in the sand. “It just seems so surreal.”

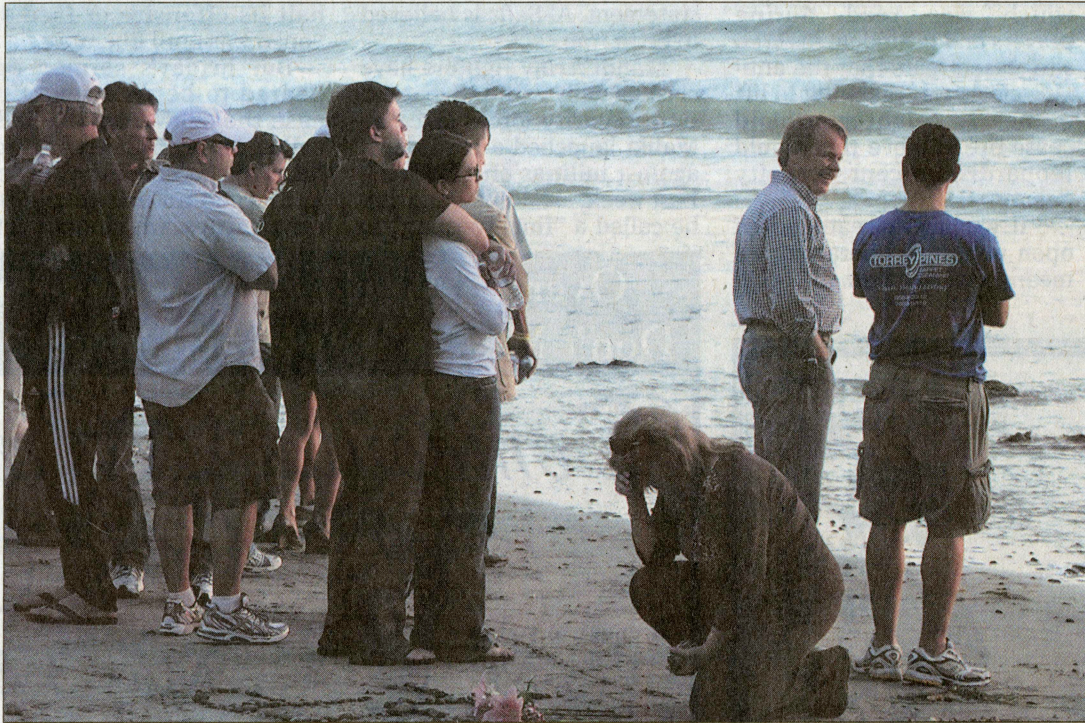
The vigil began around 6 p.m., when dozens of well-wishers — mostly members of the Triathlon Club of San Diego — gathered at the B&L Bike and Sports shop a few blocks away for pizza and conversation.

The media were asked to remain outside.

“People are here just to try to figure out how to try to deal with this thing,” shop owner Scott Rittschof told reporters behind the store.

“A lot of them are pretty shaken up,” he added.

One vigil attendee was Bill



CRAIG TENBROECK / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Carlsbad resident Catherine Simmons kneels near a makeshift memorial for David Martin as a group gathers to bid farewell to the man at Fletcher Cove in Solana Beach on Friday night.

Robertson, a friend of Martin's for 37 years.

The two men attended vet-

erinary school together, Robertson said, and Martin was the best man at his wed-

ding.

“You don't want to die a violent death like that,” said

Robertson, 62, with a shake of his head. “You want to die with your family around you.”

Around 7 p.m., the crowd silently exited the store and went to the beach.

Martin, a member of the 1,700-member triathlon club, was described by several acquaintances as an expert swimmer who held his own with younger athletes.

He was swimming with his training group when the shark, possibly a great white, attacked. Fellow swimmers pulled him from the surf.

“David was out there doing what he loved,” Rittschof said. “The guy was 66 years old and he was out there acting like a 26-year-old. It's awesome.”

Bob Babbitt, a fellow triathlete and publisher of Competitor magazine, said Martin

was a regular at the club's Friday morning practices, and he liked to compete in short races — those with a half-mile swim, 12- to 15-mile bike ride and a 3-mile run.

“David had a phenomenal year last year,” winning his age division in three major races and placing second in two others, Babbitt said.

Despite the tragedy and the shock of the day, most of those who attended the vigil appeared in good spirits.

Babbitt explained: “It's not so much mourning as

celebrating a life well lived by a guy who was obviously well loved. ... He was part of a tight-knit community and we'll miss him.”

Contact staff writer Craig Tenbroeck at (760) 901-4062 or ctenbroeck@nctimes.com

“People are here just to try to figure out how to try to deal with this thing. A lot of them are pretty shaken up.”

— SCOTT RITTSCHOF
Owner of B&L Bike and Sports shop in Solana Beach

SHARK

Continued from A-1

The last deadly shark attack off San Diego County coast was in 1959

The right leg had a deep wound from above the knee to the shin, said Romero, who described the left leg as "shredded."

"By the time he got to the beach, there was no blood coming out of the wounds," Romero said. "He was completely white. No pulse."

Hill said his friend may have bled to death before he left the water.

Women from the group ran for help from lifeguards. Lifeguard Grant Fletcher said he and others attempted to revive Martin with cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Martin was taken by lifeguard truck a short distance to Fletcher Cove Park, where medics from Mercy Air pronounced him dead at about 7:45 a.m., Ableman said.

Swimmers warned

At about 3 p.m. Friday, lifeguards at Fletcher Cove hung bright yellow signs that read, "Due to recent shark attack, all water activity prohibited until further notice." The prohibition actually is a strong advisory, said Encinitas lifeguard Capt. Larry Giles.

The fourth annual Surfin' Fire surf contest, which was scheduled to start at 7 a.m. Saturday, has been postponed because of the shark attack and will be rescheduled sometime within the next three weeks, said event organizer Jon Peterson.

The shark was almost certainly a great white and was probably 12 to 17 feet long, said Richard H. Rosenblatt, professor emeritus of marine biology at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Rosenblatt, Scripps' shark expert, said that white sharks travel through the area, and the way the man was attacked and the "massive" but clean wounds "sounds like what a white shark would do."

Lifeguards said they contacted authorities from Scripps Institution of Oceanography and SeaWorld and asked them to examine the bite marks to determine what kind of shark attacked Martin.

Swimmers in the group with him said they saw a large gray shark in the water, but could not identify the type of shark.

Solana Beach lifeguard Craig Miller said air support, including a Coast Guard helicopter, had been called immediately to look for the shark. The helicopters patrolled Friday morning, and Miller said they would continue to search during the day for the next three days. Lifeguards on the beach looked out to sea with binoculars Friday morning.

Rosenblatt said great white sharks are endangered and, if spotted, should not be killed. Miller said lifeguards would contact wildlife authorities if they saw the shark again, but Rosenblatt said the odds of ever finding the shark are slim.

Martin remembered

Martin's family and club members were shepherded into the Solana Beach Community Center next to Tide Park where they met with trauma volunteers. As they arrived at the center, women, men and at least one teenager hugged each other and cried. After a



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A sign warns beachgoers Friday at South Cardiff State Beach. Similar warnings were posted from mid-Carlsbad to Torrey Pines.

couple hours, family members left in two white SUVs, many of them still crying.

Neighbors of Martin remembered him as a nice man who cared for his flower garden and always was friendly.

"He was a very nice man," said Jerry Streater, 82. "Very friendly."

Michel Bream, 49, said she didn't know Martin but had planned to meet him just to compliment him on his flowers. She said his death left her concerned for her 13-year-old son, who surfs at the same beach.

Hill said he and Martin lived just

"I'll probably still go in the water after this. I don't know if I'll go here in the next few days."

— MIKE FERNCASE
44-year-old North County resident

blocks from the beach.

"He was down here all the time," Hill said.

Hill said club members had been meeting at the beach for at least six years and never had seen a shark, but he did remember seeing a seal or sea lion on the beach earlier this week.

Mistaken identity?

Solana Beach lifeguard Craig Miller said a seal pup was found on the beach Friday morning before the attack and was taken to a marine animal rescue center.

Hill suspected the shark may have confused the wet-suited swimmers with a seal or sea lion.

At a news conference at the beach, Rosenblatt said great white sharks hunt along the bottom, look for seal silhouettes above and then rise to attack.

mans are probably cases of mistaken identity, when a shark is under the impression the human is a sea lion or a seal, said Burgess and Christian McDonald from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

"We can't get into the head of a shark, so we can't say if it was (thinking), 'There is a human' or 'There is a prey 5 to 6 feet in length that looks like something I should try,'" Burgess said.

And humans are not very graceful swimmers when compared to sea animals, so it is possible that Martin's movements attracted the shark's attention.

Burgess and McDonald cautioned that shark attacks on humans are extremely rare. The last fatal attack by a shark off the coast of San Diego was on June 14, 1959.

And worldwide, only one

fatal confirmed shark attack was confirmed last year, Burgess said.

"So, to have a fatal shark attack is an uncommon situation," he said.

Burgess pointed out that the Solana Beach attack victim was swimming early in the morning — within the dusk-to-dawn feeding times favored by great white sharks.

And the incident happened near a kelp bed — which may have been filled with fish that the shark was interested in eating, he said.

Fear of the water after a fatal attack is "a natural reaction" that Burgess said he finds around the world.

White sharks "were there last week, and will be there next week," he said of the beach environment.

"Entering the sea is entering a wilderness," Burgess said.



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Looking south from Tide Park in Solana Beach, this stretch of beach was closed Friday. "I've never seen the beach closed in 30 years," said Solana Beach resident Linda Schooler. "This is eerie to me, to not see a single person walking on the beach. It's very strange — and tragic."



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A phalanx of photographers and reporters attend a news conference Friday given by Solana Beach officials in Fletcher Cove.

"A human swimmer is not too unlike a seal," he said. "We think it's a case of mistaken identity."

Rosenblatt said sharks usually do not return to eat people they have bitten.

At nearby Mitch's Surf Shop in Solana Beach, salesman Clarke Ledger said he didn't expect the fatality to have a long-term effect on businesses.

"Maybe for a month or so, until the hype calms down," he said. "But it's San Diego. That's why everybody lives here."

Steve Stermon, assistant manager at Surf Ride Board Shop in Solana Beach, also said he doesn't expect busi-

ness to be hurt.

"Your average surfer knows sharks are out there," he said. "It's just another danger that comes with the sport."

Earlier this year, stories of shark sightings swept the coast from San Diego County north through Orange and Los Angeles counties, the Los Angeles Times reported in late March. One surfer claimed a bite mark on his surfboard was made by a great white at Bolsa Chica State Beach, but lifeguards at nearby Huntington Beach said there was no evidence of great whites in the vicinity at that time. Other shore authorities also hadn't recorded any unusual sightings.

History of attacks

The last fatal shark attack along San Diego County was off Ocean Beach on June 14, 1959. A body of a suspected shark-attack victim, 25-year-old Michelle von Emster, was found off the coast of Point Loma in April 1994, but a forensic investigation revealed the bites were made by scavenging sharks after her death, according to the University of Florida, which operates the International Shark Attack File.

The last fatal shark attack in California, according to data from the state Department

"Your average surfer knows sharks are out there. It's just another danger that comes with the sport."

— STEVE STERMON
Assistant manager at Surf Ride Board Shop in Solana Beach

of Fish and Game, was on Aug. 15, 2004, in Mendocino County at Kibesillah Rock. The victim was a man diving for abalone with a friend.

On Aug. 19, 2003, a woman swimmer was killed by a great white at Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo County on the central coast.

Overall, shark attacks are extremely rare. There were 71 reported worldwide last year, up from 63 in 2006. Only one attack, in the South Pacific, was fatal, according to the University of Florida.

The university's International Shark Attack File has counted an average of 4.1 people killed by sharks annually worldwide in the last seven years.

Sharks are highly migratory, making it unlikely that Friday's attacker poses additional risk to swimmers, said

FATAL SHARK ATTACKS IN CALIFORNIA

April 25 — Solana Beach

Aug. 15, 2004 — Fort Bragg

Aug. 19, 2003 — Avila

Dec. 9, 1994 — San Miguel Island

Jan. 26, 1989 — Malibu/Paradise Cove

Sept. 15, 1984 — Pigeon Point

Dec. 19, 1981 — Spanish Bay

June 14, 1959 — La Jolla Cove

May 7, 1959 — Baker Beach

April 28, 1957 — Morro Bay

Dec. 7, 1952 — Pacific Grove

George Burgess, a biologist at the university. Still, other sharks may lurk.

"It's not anymore dangerous than it was yesterday or the week before," Burgess said. "The reality is, when you enter the sea, it's a wilderness experience. There are animals out there that can and do occasionally do harm to us."

Swimmers undaunted

International triathletes train in Southern California and probably will continue to use local beaches without concern, said Bob Babbitt, editor and publisher of Solana Beach-based Competitor Magazine.

"I guess as much as they should be concerned about being hit by lightning," he said when asked if athletes should be concerned about swimming at the cove. "The ocean is the ocean, and one of the attractions of why we do it. It is exhilarating. To be out at the ocean swimming, or running, can both be dangerous. We all know that. But nobody goes in thinking, 'I'm going to be bit by a shark.'"

Heather Fuhr, a member of the Triathlete Hall of Fame, mourned the loss of Martin.

"It was definitely a shock to hear that a fellow triathlete lost his life to a shark attack," the Encinitas resident said in an e-mail. "Our thoughts go out to his family, friends and those who were out in the water with him this morning. I cannot even begin to imagine the emotions they are feeling."

Mike Ferncase, 44, was one of a throng of area residents who came to Fletcher Cove Park on Friday morning to talk about the attack and look out at the ocean where it happened. Ferncase said he lives a few blocks away and surfed the waters regularly. He thought he might suspend his hobby temporarily, but not forever.

"I'll probably still go in the water after this," he said. "I don't know if I'll go here in the next few days."

Another surfer, 18-year-old Brett Richardson of Del Mar, said the attack didn't worry him or his surfing buddies.

"It's not going to stop surfers from going out," Richardson said, saying his friends were some of the many who continued to surf in Cardiff on Friday morning, despite amplified warning from lifeguards that a shark might be in the area. Richardson said the weather was perfect and he planned to go out Saturday.

The Associated Press and North County Times reporters Phil Ireland, Loren Nelson, Matt Null, Craig TenBroeck, Teri Figueroa and Sarah Gordon contributed to this report. Contact staff writer Gary Warth at (760) 740-5410 or gwarth@nctimes.com.

CULPRIT

Continued from A-1

Great white sharks are the most common large predatory sharks off the coast of San Diego, said George Burgess, curator of the International Shark Attack File at the Florida Museum of Natural History, part of the University of Florida.

"The presumption is that this was a white shark. It must have been a very large shark," Burgess said.

A species that can get up to nearly 20 feet long, he said, the great white shark will "go after large items, which makes it dangerous to humans, because they are appropriately sized objects that can be ... mistaken for normal prey."

Most shark attacks on hu-

COMPETED

Continued from A-1

Such attacks are rare; the last fatal attack off the San Diego County coast came in 1959.

"Who saw this coming?" Jeff Martin said as a friend offered condolences. The two men were standing not far from Jeff Martin's Solana Beach house, only a stone's throw across the street from the elder Martin's home.

That proximity meant David Martin was able to "see his grandchildren all the time," his son said.

Martin, 66, was a retired veterinarian who not only competed in triathlons, he would often win in his age group, his son said.

"He died doing what he liked to do," Jeff Martin said.

As an animal doctor, Martin had owned and worked in the

Rancho Solana Animal Hospital in town. He later merged with other veterinarians, and they worked at All Creatures Animal Hospital in Del Mar, his son said.

Martin said his father was "really enjoying" his retirement, and had been traveling. David Martin also had a pilot's license and used to fly small planes out of Carlsbad's McClellan-Palomar Airport, his son said.

Jeff Martin, a pilot with a commercial airline, was in Phoenix when his wife called him about 9 a.m. with the news. The son was back in San Diego slightly more than three hours later.

Ex-wife Robin Martin, who was married to David for about 20 years, was shaken when she declined to talk to reporters Friday afternoon.

"I just need time," she said while standing in the front yard of the home in which

David Martin had lived for nearly four decades. Cars filled the driveway and street in front of Martin's two-story house, which boasts brilliant roses growing in bushes near the front gate.

The residence is blocks from Fletcher Cove and not far from the site of the attack off the shoreline along Solana Beach, a small, tony community about 14 miles north of downtown San Diego.

Neighbors said Martin was a fixture in the tight-knit neighborhood mixed with older and newer homes, many with manicured lawns sitting along skinny streets.

Most residents said they knew and often waved to Martin, who they said was a quiet person.

"He was a very nice man," 82-year-old Jerry Streater said as he stopped to speak with two neighbors about the news. "Very friendly."