



Twelve Days of Terror: A Definitive Investigation of the 1916 New Jersey Shark Attacks

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The acclaimed account of the infamous and heretofore unexplained shark attacks that served as the horrifying real-life inspiration for Peter Benchleys Jaws

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Nathan says

The somber historicity of the attacks is juxtaposed with luridly sensational retellings of the events as imagined by the author, and the effect of the two tacks tend to cancel each other out. The latter half of the book abandons this approach altogether and provides dated common knowledge on sharks in general, especially considering the book's relatively recent vintage. If you know nothing about sharks, this will be more interesting than it is to anyone who has ever cursorily viewed National Geographic on TV; either way, this is a strictly optional read.

Li says

The story of the 1916 shark attacks is fascinating. The author's writing style, however, instead makes it something of a chore. Awkward or confusing phrasing, over-dramatized recountings of the attacks (not quotes from period papers but the author's wording), and seemingly constant deviations from the actual story that drag on so long that you've forgotten the original point when you come back around. I'm not terribly familiar with shark science or the history of the attacks so I can't speak to the accuracy of either, but the writing made it difficult to retain any information anyway.

Jeff says

A terrible book, in my opinion. The author, who previously published a similar book and also provided material for a Discovery Channel documentary, seems to be trying to make use of all of his collected research material on the subject and cash in on it. The detail is mind-numbing and long-winded.

Even more annoying is the author's high opinion of himself and his research. He often references himself and his own publications, invariably with the words "comprehensive" or similar adjectives. Even the title arrogantly includes the word "definitive". Yet the author is an M.D. and a hobbyist, a dedicated one but a hobbyist nonetheless.

A final gripe is the editing. I noticed several spelling mistakes and, as mentioned earlier, a lot of detail that is unnecessary, leaving me to wonder "how is this relevant to the shark attacks?".

It could have been a better book had it not been so bloated and self-important.

Ashley says

I loved the first 60 pages or so and found myself completely intrigued throughout the portions that were

dedicated to the victims and what happened in 1916. However, towards the second half of the book, I felt that the author became repetitive and began to drone on about things a reader generally does not care about. It almost felt like he was writing just to acquire more pages. When I first began reading, I looked forward to picking it up again to continue, but as I neared the end the only reason I even bothered opening it was just to say I finished it. Again, decent first half, but the rest made me think I was reading a textbook where all you think about is counting down the pages until you're done.

Matti Karjalainen says

Richard G. Fernicolan mielenkiintoinen tietokirja "kahdestatoista kauhun päivästä" kesällä 1916, jolloin viisi uimaria koki onnettoman kohtalon hain hyökätessä heidän kimppuunsa New Jersey'n lähistöllä. Neljä heistä menehtyi ja yksi vammautui pahoin. Peter Benchleyn kerrotaan saaneen tapahtumista inspiraatiota menestysromaaninsa Tappajahai.

Fernicola kirjoittaa kiinnostavasti, kansantajuisesti ja on ilmiselvästi perehtynyt aiheeseensa. Hän kertoo kesän 1916 tapahtumat yksityiskohtaisesti, ja käy samalla läpi erilaisia tapahtumiin liittyviä teorioita niin aikalaistasolla kuin nykytietämyksenkin valossa. Ei ole esimerkiksi lainkaan selvää, oliko kyseessä yksi vai useampi eläin, ja mikä hailaji mahtoi olla syyllinen hyökkäykseen; todennäköisesti kyseessä oli valkohai, tosin makeassa vedessä viihtyvän härkähainkaan mahdollisuutta ei voida sulkea pois, tapahtuihan kolme hyökkäystä Matawan-joessa.

Kirjailija luo samalla kiinnostavan katsauksen amerikkalaiseen elämänmenoon ja yhteiskuntaan ensimmäisen maailmansodan aattona, unohtamatta tapahtumien ekologista puolta.

Annie says

Review deleted.

Shannon says

Whew...talk about being relieved to finish a book. I have never labored and struggled (of my own volition) to read a book than I did with this one. The first half of the book is good, not great but good. It is interesting, although a bit verbose, and includes much of the story of the shark attacks in 1916.

The second half of the book you really have to be patient while reading. The author travels many little rabbit trails, which makes for very unpleasant and tedious reading. He seems to like to "toot his own horn" at any opportune moment that even remotely relates to his writing topic at the time. Ugh!

I cannot recommend this book without making the future reader aware of the droning, tedious, and sometimes pompous writing. I would give it one and a half stars, because I didn't absolutely abhor it. But since we cannot rate in halves, I gave it two stars... because there were some fascinating gems hidden in the rough stones.

Stuart says

So, if like me you are both an obscure history nut, and have a bit of a shark obsession, then this book is definitely for you. A thorough, play by play examination of the infamous 1916 New Jersey Shark Attacks- the first officially recorded shark attacks in the United States- this book reads partly as a novel, partly as a history book, partly as a science text and lastly as a survival guide. Fernicola can definitely get a little carried away, sometimes his descriptions border on the corny or the overly graphic, but in the end it's still good history and the fact that it makes for a good read on top of that is to be commended, not snubbed. Some fabulous little tid-bits of history and samples of the culture at the time- political cartoons, postcards, etc. Interesting overall study too of how fear can capture an entire country- to the point where you have people in Ohio scared of sharks popping out of their local swimming holes. A must read for shark fanatics and Americana buffs.

Stefanie says

The three stars are for the subject matter--the series of shark attacks off the Jersey Shore in 1916 that served as the inspiration for Jaws--and for the fact that this is a passion project. I definitely respect the author's thorough and long-lived interest in the events. However, this book needed more organization and a better editor. The book definitely meanders, and there is not a thought that this author had about the shark and the attacks that wasn't in here, sometimes twice. The tangents were distracting (e.g., the diesel spill in the Raritan Bay of 2000 has no relevance to the shark attacks of 1916, yet it's in there). Still, I came away from this having learned something, and that is good.

John says

This was definitely this guy's first book, it's not really well written, and there are a lot of badly phrased and badly paced sections. I didn't really read it to be swept away by great writing though, I read it because I had heard that the movie Jaws was based on these attacks in New Jersey back in 1916, and I wanted to know more about them.

The material is so interesting, and the accounts that he gets with eyewitnesses are compelling enough to keep you reading. The last third of the book is pretty repetitive and clinical, as he tries to decide what kind of shark it was. He thinks a great white, and that would be cool and everything, but by that point you've read all the accounts of the actual attacks so going on and on about different bite techniques and whatnot is pretty dull.

I'd say this is a library book because all you really want to read is the first half, about the actual attacks. This shark actually swam a mile or so up a river in New Jersey and killed two people swimming in the river. A mile from the ocean! Bet they didn't see that coming.

Stephen Bauer says

I live close to the Matawan creek, where three of the five shark attacks of 1916 occurred, so this story was of

keen interest to me. The author did an admirable job of weighing the pros and cons of what actually happened in 1916 and why. He strove to rely on verifiable or credible information and witnesses, combined with current research on shark behavior. It was never known for sure what kind of sharks attacked the five victims or why the attacks occurred. The author explores the potential answers to both questions thoroughly and in great detail. At the time of the attacks, shark attacks on human swimmers were unknown to both the public and scientists. It was this series of attacks on the Jersey shore that is the genesis of the current fear of sharks and which was a major inspiration for the movie Jaws.

I appreciated the fact that the author included relevant social and historical detail from the time. It helped to understand how the public reacted the way they did. The author also wrote patiently about the fanciful and sensationalist theories, opinions, rumors and reports of the incidents at the time, of German U-Boats, German conspiracies to terrorize or destabilize America, mackerels and sea turtles, dogs in the water, sizes and kinds of sharks, etc.

The author, who happens to be an medical doctor, gave extensive descriptions of the bite marks, bite patterns, other wounds, and medical conditions of the victims. Perhaps they would be easily understood by physicians, but I found the descriptions of the bite marks hard to picture. In the author's tentative opinion, all of the attacks were committed by a rogue, juvenile white shark. That is not proven, but if you connect all of the factual dots, that is the picture that wants to emerge.

I admire people like this author who get interested in a phenomena and pursue it with passion. This book serves as an update of research into previous work about the attacks. The author is hoping that future research into shark behavior will be able to give a more certain idea of what kind of shark, or sharks, were involved and why the attacks happened. The research will contribute to preventing shark attacks in the future. The book also helps to contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the ecology of the Jersey Shore.

I learned much more about sharks than I need to know, plus a fair bit about marine life in general off the Jersey Shore. Even though I think the book could have benefited from an editors attention, the overall narrative was well constructed. Once I got into the book, I had a hard time putting it down. I look forward to anything new that the author might publish on the subject.

Zeke says

This is the first book I've read on the 1916 New Jersey shark attacks. The author gives pretty good accounts of each attack and then later he gives medical analogies. No one will ever know for sure why these fatal shark attacks happened so suddenly at the same time since it was so long ago and due to the fact that shark behavior is still mostly a mystery. The author gives us many different theories for us to ponder at the end. The bottom line is that sharks are in the ocean and swimming in it carries the risk of bumping into them.

Michael says

A very thorough, and accurately researched, telling of the multiple shark attacks that occurred in New Jersey in 1916. I like how this author continued to expand his findings, even from his research in the 80's, to make

sure that he could give us, as the reader, a chance to make our own decisions about what kind of shark was responsible for the attacks and how it matched up with his conclusion. Not only that, he gives us the atmosphere of the world at that time which brings about some interesting theories as to why the attacks might be happening. Some peoples' theories are really out there, but it's fun to see how they might put two and two together. I also love some of the weird ideas people had for catching the culprit. This book is probably best read when not planning to go the beach or any body of water connecting to it (fresh, brackish, or otherwise).

Michael says

One of the most famous chain of events in shark attack history. Maybe the most famous. A series of attacks up the New Jersey coast that ultimately fell on the shoulders of a wayward Great White. It's a good book. Well researched and documented. A very interesting story and events.

Susan says

This is the second book that I have read about the shark attacks of 1916 on the Jersey Shore. Unfortunately, Fernicola's book has nothing to add to the data that is already in print. He is trying to tell several different stories at once, and succeeded in telling not one of them very well. The actual account of the shark attacks is muddled by chapters on various types of sharks, their appearance and behavior. The details of life in the summer of 1916 could have added some depth to the story, but instead they just got in the way. After the movie "Jaws" had been cited for the dozenth time - ostensibly to reinforce a point the author was trying to make - I flipped to the bibliography. There were a hundred books on sharks listed, including Peter Benchley's _novel_ "Jaws", but not one of the first hand interviews that Fernicola claims to have conducted. A hand drawn map, made by a witness to one of the attacks and given to the author, oddly does not show up in the book, but plenty of illustrations of newspaper headlines, cartoons, and postcards of the time are included. No newspaper articles are cited, either, just a list of 25 newspapers. If you only read one book about the shark attacks of 1916, I suggest you pick a different one. If you want a good story about shark attacks, pick up "Jaws".
