ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Vincent N. Battaglia, 1921-1997

March 3, 1991

MP3 Audio File MP3 Audio File [Length: 1:02:23] (28.5 MB)

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PREFACE

The Battaglia family were fishermen who migrated from Sicily. Vincent Battaglia's father, Guiseppe, settled in San Francisco in 1906, but the family moved back and forth between San Francisco and San Diego. After the father's death (in 1923) the family established its permanent residence in San Diego (1931). Vincent was ten years old at that time. Vincent continued his education in San Diego - he went through the eighth grade at Roosevelt Junior High School, and, at the age of 15, he began his career as a fisherman. In this interview Mr. Battaglia discusses or describes many aspects of fishing. Some of these are:

- The floating trap developed by his grandfather for Alaskan salmon fishing

- Gill netting and gill nets
- The use of the *Star of India* by Alaska Packers
- His experiences as the captain of a fishing boat at the age of 15
- The fishing industry in San Diego in the 1930s
- Fishing in the western Pacific, Central and South America, and Africa
- Use of the seine and the porpoise problem
- The procedure of "backing down" in purse seining
- Use of fishing boats by the Navy during World War II
- C. Arnholt Smith and the fishing industry
- The use of "reefer" ships
- The fishing industry and how it was ruined.

The above listing of items is in no way a summary of this interview. So much of the story of the industry has to do with the names of people involved, personal experiences, and relationship of events. This interview does much of this and should be required reading for anyone interested in the industry and the history of San Diego.
Thomas E. Walt, Editor August 31, 1993

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an oral history interview with Mr. Vincent Battaglia who was a tuna fisherman in San Diego for years. The date is March 3, 1991. My name is Bob Wright. We are doing this interview in his home.

ROBERT WRIGHT: Can you give me your full name? And where were you born?

VINCENT BATTAGLIA: Vincent Battaglia. I was born in San Francisco November 4, 1921.

RW: What was your father's name?

VB: Guiseppe Battaglia, and my mother's name was Mary Aliota.

RW: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

VB: Yes, I've got three other brothers and one sister.

RW: What are their names?

VB: Margaret is the oldest; Danny, Johnny, and Tom is younger than I am.

RW: Are they all here in San Diego?

VB: Yes.

RW: Did you have some schooling in San Francisco?

VB: When we came to San Diego I was ten years old.

RW: So that was in 1931 when you came here?

VB: Right.

RW: So you went to school in San Francisco for about four or five years?

VB: I'd have to think about that.

RW: But you went to school here?

VB: Right, to the eighth grade, down at Roosevelt (Junior High School). That's when I got out of school when I was 15 years old, eighth grade.

RW: And you got married to ... what's her name?

VB: My wife's name is Lena.

RW: When was that that you got married?

VB: January 12, 1946.

RW: And you have some children?

VB: I've got three daughters. Marie is the oldest and then my daughters, Patricia and Annette.

RW: Out of curiosity, was your father a fisherman?

VB: Uhmm, all my family were fishermen.

RW: Starting where?

VB: My dad, when he came to this country from Sicily. I wish I had read his diary. He came in 1906 to San Francisco. But he fished in the old country before he came here. He was about 18 years old when he came. He was in the Navy and then he came to fish in California.

RW: Were things pretty bad in Sicily?

VB: Oh, yeah, it was real bad.

RW: This was before World War I time?

VB: Right.

RW: Were your whole family fishermen, even your grandfather?

VB: Everyone in our family cared for fishing, all my brothers, my brother-in-law who is married to my sister.

RW: Did your father have family in San Francisco when he went there?

VB: I don't know who came first. He had a brother and a sister. My father, when he came to this country, he went to work for my grandfather, fishing. These were all Alaskan fishermen from North Beach in San Francisco.

RW: Do you remember the ships they were on?

VB: The Star of Alaska, the Alaska Packer Line, and the Northwest Packers; those were the two companies they worked for. My grandfather was in charge of that crew that went up there.

RW: They went for a ride up there, then did the fishing, and then they just rode back? They didn't crew on the ships?

VB: No, no. Each ship had its own fishing area. They brought all the work crews up. At the end of the season whatever the pack was they came back on the same ship. Whatever the pack was for the season, and all the equipment. On each ship there was one man in charge. They called him the boss of Alaska; they were fish bosses. My grandfather was called the boss of Alaska. That was because of this trap that he had designed and built in Alaska for the Alaska Packers. It was two he built.

RW: Is this sort of a net type of thing?

VB: Yes. It is a floating trap. It is used instead of a gill net. This came out about 1912 when he designed this trap. They are a copy of the tuna trap they used in Sicily. He took that tuna trap design and that is what he designed for Alaska.

RW: Is this sort of a gill net?

VB: No, there is a difference there. These things are anchored; they are three miles long. It is like a big corral, a big fence. In the different areas the salmon will backtrack. They go in one direction till they reach, we'll say, the end where the fish are going to be railed or taken out of the net. That is what my grandfather was noted for, that trap.

RW: Was the trap designed so that they could let other fish get through, because you can't catch them all? You don't want to catch them all?

VB: No. This was a perfect means of control. They call it the escape panel. If the salmon looked small or there was too many salmon in the trap, they would open up the escape hatch and the salmon would continue up the river.

It is not like gill nets. With gill nets whatever you catch there is not a waste. Sometimes it is too small, or you catch too much. This fish, when it is removed from the trap, was alive. They could measure how much fish was in that trap. And then they would decide, "Okay, let's take these out," and they would spill them out.

RW: An example: Was the trap set at the head of a river when the salmon are going up?

VB: Right. These were at an island; it was at Chinook Bay. It wasn't like Bristol Bay. Bristol Bay is where the gill-netters used to be in shallow water. I'll tell you some research and I found out what river it was where they set this trap. Say, on a weekend, like a Sunday, or two or three days, they could actually leave the trap open and the fish will continue to go up the river. It was a perfect means of control.

RW: I was trying to visualize what the net looked like. Was it mesh and then had panels that could let the fish through?

VB: Right. As an example, and this is a crude description. Build a fence and make it 100 feet deep, then narrow it. Say, you start out with a fence like a "V." This trap is three miles long, so you have an open end of say, maybe a mile or a mile and a half across. Then it narrows down to three miles later. That's where it narrows down to the point of the "V." This is no backtrack. (Showing a sketch) This is where the fish was removed, right there, at the last chamber.

RW: So, with the "V" shape they just swam into the head of the "V"? Then if you wanted to let them through, you just opened it up?

VB: Right

RW: Was the mesh large enough for the smaller salmon to go through?

VB: No, no. This was fine mesh, real fine, like the finest string.

RW: But the openings were about an inch square?

VB: I'd say about an inch, right. You didn't want any of the gill in this mesh. It was just a complete opposite from a gill net. A gill net would be, maybe the mesh would be two or three inches. I really don't know what the mesh is; we don't use it.

RW: With the gill net the fish just get caught into the net itself?

VB: Right. The bigger the mesh, the bigger the fish you catch in gill nets. If you are going to fish for sharks or if you are going to fish swordfish, or sea bass, whatever, you are talking four, five, six inch mesh. For barracuda, you are talking about a mesh in those days - when they used barracuda nets in San Diego - that mesh was only about two inches, just enough for the head.

RW: On this one in Alaska, that was all handmade, wasn't it?

VB: I don't know. Some nets were being manufactured. I see advertisements of different net manufacturers that would supply the net. Herring fishing, no. In herring fishing those nets were made by hand in San Francisco. When I was a kid and go into a home, I'd see all the nets being draped over the chairs while they would make their nets. They weren't that big. Herring nets, when I was a kid, were made by hand, but not this - this net was three miles long. It would be impossible to do. The anchors weighed 1,000 pounds. I got a list of the anchors; you wouldn't believe how much material went into that net. In fact, I've got the ledger here with all the material in it.

RW: How many times did your dad go to Alaska?

VB: I think about 18 years, 18 times.

RW: On all of the Alaska Packer type of ships?

VB: Right, for these two companies, the Alaska Packers and Northwestern, and on the Star of India. That was their ship. The last year that my dad went up there was 1921.

RW: The last trip up there (for the *Star of India*) was about 1921 or 1922.

VB: In 1930 was the last trip for the *Star of Alaska*.

RW: The last trip for the *Star of India* was about 1923. Then she was bought in 1926 and brought down here. Is it all documented that your dad was on the *Star of India*?

VB: I've got a picture of my dad pulling in this net on the *Star of Alaska.* On that gang there were 40 men and the picture that I have dated 1912 shows 18 men. My father is in that picture, my grandfather, and my uncle with these 18 men. But that was just part of the crew. These were the select fishermen out of North Beach in San Francisco; these were the best. It wasn't like a gill net where you really suffered a lot. You were working sails and you were exposed to the weather. In other words, you were the cream of the crop. My (father) was proud of that fact and (of) my grandfather for what he did.

RW: They were using individual boats and was that gill netting?

VB: Those were gill nets. That would be like the *Star of India*, the Star of Italy, or the *Star of Peru.* I question a lot of people . . . It wasn't only the *Star of India;* there were other ships, people from San Pedro. But they all sailed out of San Francisco.

If you talk about the Covellos, Castagnolas, or Joe Morlina, or this woman who works for the Tribune. Her father was from Naples. He went out on the *Star of England.* So each ship - there were about 30 or 40 ships - worked in a different area. And when you worked for that ship and your work was completed, the nets were loaded up on that particular ship.

RW: And they had their own canneries up there, too?

VB: Right. When my grandfather started there was a lot of packing of salmon. Then later they got into canning.

RW: My former father-in-law was Danish. He and another childhood friend went up there on the St. Catherine and they were gill netting. He was paid something like two cents a fish.

VB: That's how they got paid, but the cannery workers were paid so much per hour, or by the month. You know I want to tell you something, Bob, while my grandfather was up there. There was a lot of fighting and arguing going on the different techniques of fishing. It goes on today.

The seine that we know today, the Norwegians used the seine. This was beach seining. This was the way of seine - now when we talk about you would leave that out in the water. You didn't close the bottom of it; you pulled them into the beach. But the water was so shallow there was no reason for closing the bottom. That's the seine.

Then there were the gill nets. It is the same thing. Whatever outfit you were with they would tow ten or fifteen of these boats out to the fishing grounds. They let you go, they release you, then you were on your own. Strictly sails then until 1952 when they used power equipment. So that is pretty tough duty. The only way you could tell them apart was, like the book says, by the sail. If the mast was down, it was an Italian boat; if the mast was up, it was a squarehead. These guys, there was no way they could get along. It has always been that way. You get a bunch of guys here now that are in better areas, you set here, and another guy sets in front of you. Come on, now, it must have been a free-for-all.

But not the salmon trap. He was in a world all his own. Then there was another difference, too. My grandfather's was a floating trap. It was the only one of its type. The other type you anchored it to a pile driving. These were actually in rivers. So that kind of gives you an idea what was going on in those days.

RW: It sounds like the Sicilian and Italian fishing was more humane and/or you had less loss.

VB: That's true; that is why he was so envied. There was a lot of hate; a lot of jealousy against this man because there were just so many guys could fish on his trap. But it was only the Sicilians. The gill net is really the ones for the Genoese people from San Diego. The Sicilians, there was just a handful of them; the majority of the fishermen in San Francisco were from Naples and Genoa.

My grandfather's group came around about 1895. My grandfather fished on the east coast for about five years before he arrived in San Francisco about 1895. That is that Aliota gang, the Sabellas. There was a small community of them at North Beach. These were the men that fished with the trap and they fished with the gill nets. The majority of those people were the Genoese. The *Star of India* people would be from Genoa. The *Star of England,* that group might be the gang from San Pedro, the people from Naples, or Monterey.

RW: So each ship sort of worked for one company, but each ship had their own type of fishermen?

VB: Right. Or two or three different gangs for one company. The *Star of India* could work for one company, but there could be two or three gangs on there with all their own equipment. When the ship arrived in Alaska, they discharged the men; it just stood there with a skeleton crew on it. At the end of the season they loaded it up with their pack, whether it was a good season or a bad season. That was their particular ship.

RW: What I am leading up to is, it seems to me that the Alaska Packers was a complete company and they had, let's say, 12 ships. And each ship had to fish exactly as the other ones did, no matter what the fishermen did. This is my assumption. In other words, they had a technique for catching salmon for the Alaska Packers and that was it. That is the way they did things. But you are saying that each ship was different because of the crew, the fishermen.

VB: No. The Alaska Packers Association had gill netters, everybody with them were gill netters - except for the squareheads, the Norwegians and Swedes - but Norwegians mostly. They were the ones that were fishing with the seine. The Indians up there would use gill nets, except for the few traps that were used, other than what my grandfather had. But the only floating trap in Alaska was the one that my grandfather built.

RW: So you had the floating trap, the gill nets and the seining.

VB: I would say that even today they mostly seine up there. The majority of the boats were the gill-netters, a one or two net operation.

RW: I would have thought that the squareheads would see that you were getting more fish and less loss, that they would have shifted over to the floating net.

VB: There must have been permits issued. Even today, you can't fish in Alaska. There are so many permits issued. My cousin retired in 1983 and when he sold his boat he also sold his permit. In those days there were territories; there were areas in which you were licensed to fish. You come with a gill net and let's say you only have two feet of water. That is the research I've got to do now. I know where my grandfather worked in Chinook Bay. That is on a peninsula there. Bristol Bay was gill nets. Then you've got the rivers; you could dam a river.

There were different areas. The season only lasted two weeks, or within a month's time. You were gone six or seven months because it took you so much time to get your equipment ready and get set for the area in which you fished. Remember now, when you've got two different groups of people in one area, you've got trouble. And there was a lot of that going on. It has always been like that, but it has been controlled.

RW: - I understand that with the *Star of India* it would go up there with a bunch of Italians or Sicilians fishing, but then they would have Chinese or others working the cannery. So they are all mixed in on this voyage.

VB: Right. When you hop in on the ship you have cannery workers. For an example, let's talk about my grandfather's ship, the *Star of Alaska.* The Chinamen who went with him came back with him. All the people that went up, the longshoremen, they had barracks - they lived in a barracks - but the ship remained there. I'd say that the two most successful ships that fished in Alaska would be the *Star of India* (because I hear more people talking about the *Star of India*), and the *Star of Alaska.* The *Star of Alaska* was famous because I've got an article that was written about my grandfather, describing my grandfather. He was like a celebrity because of the *Star of Alaska* and his fishing trap. In fact, on a return trip from Alaska (our family would make a big joke about this) a Chinaman dies on his ship. He was in charge of his men. My grandfather wanted to bury this man at sea, but the Chinese wouldn't let him do it. So he salts the guy because that was the wish of the Chinese - like a fish, like they salt down anchovies - he salted down the Chinaman. That was my grandfather's responsibility.

The Chinese played a big part in Alaska. There in North Beach I call them my neighbors. And the Japanese, the Chinese, the Filipinos, that went on for years. Even until today those people who go to Monterey, they fly up from San Diego and they go from Monterey. And there are those who go from San Francisco; from Pittsburgh to go to Alaska. But the Sicilians, like I say, were just a small group. I don't want you to think that Alaska was full of Sicilians; it wasn't. It was everybody.

This industry in San Diego is mostly Portuguese and Italians, and the Japanese before the war. You talk about dirty shifts; there were a lot of men who went to Alaska.

RW: In 1931 your dad gave up and came back down here?

VB: No, my dad died in 1923. The last year he fished in Alaska was in about 1922.

RW: What happened to him? He was a young guy

VB: You can't fish in San Diego. They had planned on coming to San Diego. My uncle Mike had already come to San Diego. He used to go to Alaska on the *Star of Peru.* He was one of the pioneer tuna fishermen in San Diego. My brother, Daniel, was born in San Diego in 1918. They were always coming back and forth between here and San Francisco. Then after the earthquake up there in 1906, a lot of these people moved to San Diego. My dad came down in 1923. They were going to go in partners with my uncle. In those days there was influenza. He got it one morning and he died that night, in 1923. The whole family was in San Diego, but we went back to San Francisco. My mother didn't return here until 1931 when she got married again. This has been our home ever since.

RW: Did she marry another fisherman?

VB: Yeah

RW: So you were ten years old when you came down here? You went to school for another few years.

VB: You know, Bob, I want to stop you here. It is hard to remember dates, but I was 15 years old and at the eighth grade when I got out of school, because I wanted to go fishing. I was making more money than a school teacher when I went fishing.

RW: The Depression was on.

VB: That's right, but the fishermen never knew Depression.

RW: What was the first boat you went on?

VB: I was on the *Annapolie* (sp?), a small bait boat. We went to Mexico with them. Those people who ran the boats couldn't speak English. I was 15 years old and I signed on as captain because I could clear the boat, enter the boat. In those days you did everything yourself. I was the interpreter. So they were looking for kids like me. I made good money with them. On the second trip we burned up. The destroyer NICHOLAS is the one that picked us up right outside Ensenada.

The second boat I was on was *Bon Voyage* with Joe Corona. I fished on that boat maybe three years. Then from there I went to Monterey in 1929 (1939?) and started fishing for sardines. You went where the fish was at. I've fished in Monterey; I've fished in San Francisco; I've fished in San Pedro, fished in San Diego. That is when this tuna industry was growing. But it was hard to get on a tuna boat in those days; there were just so many boats. If you knew tuna fishing, you just couldn't get the jobs.

RW: You mean there were not that many boats?

VB: No. But I, like I say, that is what I did - you went to Alaska, you fished in San Francisco, you fished in Monterey, San Diego, San Pedro. You fished as far as Cedros (Mexico).

RW: Didn't it work down to who you knew? Family?

VB: It's always been for family, oh, yeah. My brother Danny in 1937 fished on the Europa because it was a family operated boat. The Sabellas had that boat. The Castagnolas - I've got a breakdown of that family right now that Andy gave me. All the grandchildren are still fishing on his boats on the western Pacific.

RW: Can you spell some of these names?

VB: I'll give it to you. In fact, I've got some notes you can look at. I've got the breakdown of the Castagnola family. I took one family starting from San Francisco in 1902, the Castagnolas, in their little Felice. (Looking at pictures and naming some of the boats) They are still fishing in the western Pacific. I've got the history of that one family spanning 90 years. The Castagnolas are my neighbors here.

There you go again - it is family oriented. It has always been like that. And a lot of marriages between the Portuguese and the Italian families. You went on a boat and there was a brother-in-law, a cousin. It has narrowed down now to just the captains and his families are still operating. My nephew is still operating because he is the captain. Either the guy is a captain on the boat, he is a son-in-law, a nephew to the navigators, the engineers, and they work the western Pacific.

RW: I was curious - back in those days, did they have a lot of superstitions on some of the boats?

VB: Well, that deal about not sailing on Fridays, that has always been there. Like my uncle, they just don't take chances. They weren't superstitious, but they just didn't take chances. They didn't want to risk. My uncle and me would fill the tank; he would take along a bottle of whiskey. For 12 guys he would pour out 12 drinks. What was left he would take the bottle up to the bow and break it over the bow. It was just not taking a chance.

TAPE 1, Side B:

RW: You were saying there was not much superstition, but what else got the fish?

VB: Hard work. That's what kids do and you take chances. You work in conditions where nobody else would work. You push and you drive and even if it is a family on a boat, I've described them. These people are very emotional, but it never interfered with their business.

I wrote about what happened in Panama one time. My uncle Sal was on the *Helen Ann,* as an example. My uncle Sal and my uncle Mike stood on the boat and my uncle Mike's son and myself with a crew, went to the Shammie Point - it is a river where to get bait. In those days you went to Panama, or wherever it was, to the bait grounds and you'd get your load of bait to load up your bait tanks. We were about two miles at least from the *Helen Ann* and got caught in a rainsquall. This was a bad one; one that could have sank us, we could all have lost our lives, the rigs, the equipment and everything.

We were towing a receiver. A receiver is how you take the bait out to the boat. You put it in a receiver to tow it out to the boat. That was part of the equipment. We let it go because it was too clumsy. It was like a barge. In order to survive we had to get rid of this thing. There was a little island near and just lucky we made it because we were almost swamped with the net and everything. We had about ten men.

Now about two hours later this squall had passed by so, thank God, we were alive. We started heading for the boat and when we got out on the boat my uncle Mike and my uncle Sal were crying; they thought they had lost us. They were so relieved when we got back to the boat safely. Then my uncle asked my cousin Tommy, "Where is the receiver?" "I had to leave it," Tommy said. You want to see a guy get mad? My uncle was so mad that he could have killed him. Now you see what I am getting at? Now you forget about nephews and this and that. "Go back and find that thing," he said. We did go back and we found it. So there is your family operation. If somebody gets scratched it is going to be one of your family.

RW: Were you on the boat when this squall hit?

VB: We were on the beach with the skiffs. The boat was two miles away from us. The water is so shallow you can't come in with these tuna boats. So the tuna boats stay out in the deep water, and we go with the rigs two miles. They can't see us because of the rain. Without that receiver you might as well stay home, and without bait, what can you do? So, to save ourselves, we just got rid of the receiver.

RW: You came to San Diego in 1931, you went to school and then you went fishing right in the middle of the Depression years. You were on the boats that caught the bait first?

VB: In San Diego these boats were half-ring boats; they fished with nets and they fished with bait and hand lines. With the half-ring net which is a net that closes from the bottom like a small purse. The first fish that was packed in San Diego was the sardines. They used to catch them with a "lumpara" net. A "lumpara" is a copy of the trap. The "lumpara" net is the same design like a trap, but is smaller. You have wings on the side and you set it on a school of fish; you close the sides and bring the fish to the boat. There were about ten canneries in San Diego packing sardines. We are talking about 1905 to 1910, those areas.

RW: Most people forget the fact that there were sardine canneries here.

VB: That's what they started with; that's what they were in San Diego; they were sardine canneries. They were used for fishmeal; they were packed; they were dried; they were salted down.

This bay used to be full of turtles. When I went to the San Diego Historical Society I saw these pictures of the turtles in the bay. I talked to my cousin, Joe Ballesteros. In fact, I've just seen Bob Wolcott today. I talked to Joe Marlene and he said, "Yeah, that's right; this bay used to be full of turtles." They used to be where North Island is now, along that stretch of beach there. Where the carriers are now, that is where the turtles used to be. I think the Chinese used to fish the turtles.

Clams - when I was a kid we used to dig for clams. We got here in 1931 but even then you could dig clams over there where the carriers are right now. And clams, Bob, were the size of plates. I am talking about Pismo clams.

In 1935 we used to get bait right off the tuna boats for the tuna boats right in the bay; we never went outside. You could just make a big haul with a "lumpara" net and get the bait that you wanted.

When did they dredge this bay? They started about 1912. In my book I described it this way: where Lindbergh Field is, we used to go spear fishing for mullet; it was a slough in there. These aren't islands anyway. Shelter Island is not an island actually, it is a peninsula. Harbor Island is the same thing - it's fill. So we remember the bay the way it was. There were about ten canneries; they were packing sardines then.

RW: One cannery (was) at the corner of Laurel and Pacific Highway, the Westgate.

VB: There were three of them there. There was Westgate, Neptune, and California (which used to be Del Monte Cannery). In fact, the buildings are still there. Then there was Steele K. Hovden, which they called the king of the sardines in Monterey.

You know where the aquarium is in Monterey? Holkin Cannery is now the aquarium. He was a Norwegian but he revolutionized the sardine industry by packing the sardines in cans. He is the man that invented all of these little techniques because he came from the old country. He was the one responsible for using them as fish bait. No way in the world can we pack all these sardines, so he came up with this production - fishmeal. That man in 1927 closed his cannery in San Diego and went fishing, concentrating on sardines. And the first thing you know he no longer was packing sardines. But he was one of the originals in San Diego.

If you follow these people, everything starts in Alaska - the way of soldering cans, the way of packing, and the big line shafts with pulleys and belts. Then everything was copied down here.

Now we get back to the nets - the techniques of catching the fish. In Monterey they used to use gill nets. A gill net could be dragged through the water and just catch the sardines by gilling, or the sardines would wash up on the beach. They started using the "lumpara" net. That's the net like I told you that pulled from the side; you don't close any bottom, you just chock the fish. From there they went in (for the) pursing net. That was in 1927. But in San Diego they were already using the pursing net for bluefin, sardines, bonita, barracuda. On the *Bon Voyage* we'd go out one day and catch maybe five to ten ton of sea bass, yellowtail, barracuda.

RW: That close?

VB: Right. The boats that used to fish from here that went to Turtle Bay that's what they did. They went down for market fish. The other day Julie Solezzi donated 24,000 cans of tuna to the armed forces. His grandfather was Julie Solezzi who used to fish for rock cod - tons of the stuff. There was no market for it. I've seen those pictures at the San Diego Historical Society of the big jewfish. We used to catch the jewfish at San Martin, but it was all close in to the beaches.

The Italians and the Genoese, these were market fishermen. They didn't go out the way the Portuguese went out because they were the ones who were the whalers. They are the ones that went out to the banks. They were the ones who kept saying, "Let's try this; let's try that." They were more aggressive that way because they had had more experience. Who knows how much fish they had seen when they were hunting these whales? That is where it started from - from Alaska to the present day. Now it is all out in the western Pacific.

The man who designed the net to catch the tuna in the western Pacific was a man by the name of Lumpara from Monterey. That is the net that we designed to fish with in the western Pacific. That is where it's at. We don't have to fight these people over here any more. The Mexicans have control of these coasts now; it is theirs. They can fight with the environmentalists and the Green Peacers. This belongs to them now; they ran us out of here; we have no control of this anymore. We are too efficient in our operations. Now there are only about 40 of us left - 40 boats left.

RW: I didn't think there were that many

VB: There isn't really; if you break it down I think there is even less than that. I'd say that when they started fishing the western Pacific. Remember, Bob, they spent three years out there. It is all documented in my book. They took the last chance and there were a lot of failures. Either that - sink or swim, cut bait or fish.

For two or three years they couldn't catch the fish; the fish were wild. The canneries would foreclose on them until finally they designed a net deep enough and with enough boats in an area. It takes a lot of boats, a lot of searching and a lot of sets have to be made to catch the fish. You've got to know just when the fish is acting right. They act different in one area from another. Once they've got this down pat, the ones who survive, those are the ones who are still fishing today in the western Pacific. There are only about 40 boats left.

RW: Are fish at a given time of the year at a given point?

VB: No, you go by water temperature. That controls it. This is how it started here because the water temperatures here don't get warm enough for this specie in the summer months. Let's just say 69 degree water temperature, when you get that type water temperature you know that you're going to find fish in it - tuna. Out there it is the same thing. You don't want a water temperature that is 80 or 75 degrees, that is a little too hot. But the tuna you can find any place in the world. They found that you never go back to the place where you caught the fish last year, or whether it was last month. That's how big the ocean is.

We fished on this coast here when part of the fish was among dolphin schools. I fished on the largest tuna seiner in the world. The captain on that boat lives one block away, Pete DeMonte. We never set on dolphin; we didn't have to. But there were some people that could work dolphin schools and some couldn't.

I'm going back to 1963, 1965. Nobody has ever said, "Hey, what's happened to this industry?" But there was the guys who were real champions that could fish that fish. Others found school fish; there were logs. The biggest majority of them are the ones that went out to the western Pacific. To me those were the champions. They went out to find the school fish. To be successful you have to leave San Diego; you have to be able to fish porpoise, you know, dolphin-type schools; school fish, tuna, skipjack. They'd give us quotas; you couldn't catch too much tuna. They give you a lot of restrictions that it is just impossible to work under them - regulations that don't make sense.

Your argument this year could be in Peru because the fish was in Peru. Or maybe one year because the fish was in Mexico. Or it could be off of Nicaragua, or off of Costa Rica. It all depends the areas. In that particular year they forced these boats on this 200-mile limit where you have to stay outside the 200-mile limit. In order to catch tuna you had to fish outside. It was an imaginary line and you had to work outside that imaginary line. So they forced them outside into schools of dolphin carrying tuna.

RW: In other words, you had your school of tuna with the dolphins swimming above them. That is what you use to sort of spot the tuna. Then you put a set on them.

VB: Right. I described a set today and any champion can tell you it takes a helicopter to find a school of porpoise. They sense that boat for 20 miles and when they start heading for them they get nervous; they get away from you.

RW: But the school goes with them?

VB: Wait a minute. We say the boat catches up to this school of porpoise. There are two different species; there are the "spinners" and there are the "spotters." The helicopter finds the spotters that carry the tuna. Only with the spotter porpoise does the tuna travel. For some reason they don't travel with the spinners. So now just imagine you are right on top of the school and the school spreads out. These we call untouchables. You find the spotter porpoise with the tuna. That is where the speedboat comes in. You cut off the ones that don't carry. They narrow it down so that you don't put a lot of these porpoise in the net because you have to get them out of there alive. This was perfected over 15 years ago. There were no more killed. That is what you set on, you set on those and that porpoise school that is carrying the tuna. You don't set on the whole school of dolphin. That is the way they operate it today. The few remaining boats out of San Diego operate like that. These are the champions. It took a lot of skill, a lot of know-how to do it. It is easier to take a dolphin out of the net alive than dead.

Now we'll describe a school of porpoise the way it used to be in those days. When you see a school of porpoise, and any of the old-timers can tell you, in the ocean you just surge until you see the birds, then you run in for them, ten miles or whatever it is, to catch up. Now when you come to these schools ... I am talking about before there were any purse seiners' nets, they weren't afraid of the boat. When you got up to this school you could see the school spread out. It was black, they were so thick. When the school was traveling the bait was kept in vaults. They see the tuna breaking this bait. You see the porpoise, you see the spinners, the spotters - that's the way they travel. It is like a caravan; they were following the bait. That is what the schools used to look like. You went up to the bait boat, you threw in a little bait, and the spotters would come right to the boat. Now the fish would come and you'd start fishing, maybe two or three passes, and then the school would move on. Then you would want to find another school. Once in a while the guys, just to be ornery, would go through the school. The minute they did this that school would break up into a million pieces, scatter all

over the ocean. It was just the same effect as blackfishing. Blackfish and the dolphin are enemies among each other. If you see blackfish today, you don't see any fish tomorrow. Then when they start setting on the porpoise, now you've got trouble; the porpoise get very touchy.

I am talking about 1962 when they first got setting the porpoise. The first man to back down on this back down technique where you spill them out was Harold Medina aboard the Alfece. With his net in the water he backed down and spilled them over.

RW: That is what I was going to mention. That's the wrong technique. Some of the guys go in the water, too.

VB: That's right. He was the guy that did that. Harold would back down and Gil Xavier told me the other day, "Vince, I was with Harold. Yeah, I went out and Harold was backing down and we got in and started taking them in." This was in 1963. He is the man who put the Medina panel in. That is the panel that when you back down in that area there is a real fine mesh. There is no way in the world that a dolphin can get caught. It pops the net and that sinks down and the porpoise goes right out.

RW: Let me explain here on the tape in case somebody doesn't know. You would find a school of tuna and would make a set by dropping the skiff off. The purse seiner would go all the way around to keep dragging the net off of the aft end of the purse seiner until it got to the skiff, then they would close the net. When they had all the tuna in the net they would close it up from the bottom. Then they would bring the net up close to the purse seiner, but they have dolphins in with the tuna. So then they would back down with the purse seiner enough so the net would sink and the dolphins could escape.

VB: Right. The school is so huge that it would be a catastrophe to set on it. You are talking tons and tons of porpoise in the net. Nobody would even dare set on it. In other words, they could see the fish but they just couldn't do it - period! At that time there were a lot of school fish on the coast, too. Remember, this is when they first converted these boats. They used to get a lot of shark damage. You know, when you have a net with a lot of fish, the sharks eat that net up just to get through to the school. But Harold Medina was the man who figured out the system of "backing down," and you could spill this screen out over the top.

Another thing that happened, too. The spinners are the ones that die real easy in the net. You don't want to set on the spinners. The spotters live. The spinners, you caught them; they like the fish. Everything in the purse seiner dies except the spotters. Even the weight sometimes of the fish collapse in the net, but the porpoise would go out over the top.

I am not saying then we were not guilty in killing the porpoise because we did. But it took a while. I'd say by 1970 he did perfect this technique of backing down when the kill was zero, only to the men that continued fishing porpoise. I've got the tape here, wherever the dolphins are, I've got that tape; I bought it. I want to tear it apart. I can find 50 things wrong with that tape. I am not exaggerating. But in that tape it starts off with a purse seiner, the Elizabeth C.J. That picture was taken in 1970. They show back down there it was perfect. They didn't have any kills; but they don't tell you this when they show that tape. They accuse us of being killers; we kill porpoise. They don't explain the Medina panel how it works.

They talk about this Senate hearing and they interrupt everything these people are saying. These guys are the champions when it comes to porpoise. The guys that fish out of San Diego, they are the champions. I am not going to mention no names now, but the guys who are working in Mexico, a lot of these are American capitalists who are fishing in Mexico. I've got no arguments with Mexico; I couldn't care less. I'm not about to get involved in this dispute for nothing. They still won't spend their money (for) the nets; they won't, because that is their territory. We've lost control of the fishing over there.

The best fishermen that we have down there still can't do the job right because they won't spend the money. It is different over here. There are fishermen who lost their lives, like the Korean on the Calypso, his son. His son died because a shark got him. He went into the net to save a porpoise. People don't know that. But he had gone into the net to take the porpoise out. Luckily I was the navigator, I didn't have to do that. But everybody on those boats went into the net. The navigator didn't go, the cook didn't go, the chief engineer didn't go, and the skipper, but everybody else had to get in that net and take the porpoise out. It is not one hundred percent safe. Maybe a net could collapse on you. But maximum effort was made to save the porpoise.

But describe how the porpoise act today. You look for them, you hunt, you search to find the porpoise. Like I say, that is what you set on. These guys were professionals. That is the truth now.

RW: The helicopter, all it does is find the fish sooner. The sooner you do it the better, it's quicker.

VB: When you see the porpoise surface you will see the fish, they shine, or you'll see a colony where the fish are thick. I would search one hour, two hours on a school because, as I say, the tuna lie deep. A tuna isn't a fish that comes on the surface and waves at you. They do surface sometimes, but it takes a while to find the porpoise that are carrying the fish.

RW: I understand that they set on logs, too.

VB: That's right. Every year is different when you work a school of fish, or years when you work on the logs because they are attracted to them. On the western Pacific when these boats used to go over there they drifted with logs. Lights used to attract the fish to a log. And that is what they set on. Anything that is drifting they would just drift all night and in the morning they would set on that log. That is the kind of fishing that was done when they first went out there because they couldn't catch the school fish. They would see the school fish as the fish on the surface is white, you know, the fish that break the water.

TAPE 2, Side C:

RW: Going back a little bit, you were fishing when the war started. What boat were you on then?

VB: The *Morning Star* off of Guadalupe Island, out about 200 miles. That is where we were that day (December 7, 1941). I can even remember how many tons we brought in from that trip - 87 tons of tuna.

RW: You heard it over the radio? Did you get any orders from the Navy to go do something or other?

VB: No. When that happened they called the boats mostly in from Galapagos Island. Those were bigger boats. Those boats were ordered in to Panama and the government confiscated them. The boat that I was on, no, until we came to San Diego. Then when we pulled up to Ballast Point to clear customs they came aboard and wanted to know if there were any Japanese, or if we had seen anything. We might have come in two weeks after the war started. But there was no pressure to make us come in.

RW: Were you searched or have nets up, or anything like that?

VB: No, we were bait fishing.

RW: Oh, so you weren't too far out?

VB: No, about 200 miles south of here. That is considered a local boat.

RW: Did you enlist in the Navy?

VB: I will tell you this from the book. My brother, Tommy, came in; he was on the *American Voyager.* This is the boat that came from Costa Rica some place. They arrived at the same time as the *Prospect.* The *Prospect* was a Japanese owned fishing boat with an all Japanese crew. Now, they might have gotten here, say December 15, 1941. This is just a rough date. When they reached Ballast Point they took all the Japanese off the *Prospect* and they took half the crew off the American Voyager. That half crew from the *American Voyager* that they took, they put aboard the Prospect. My brother Angelo was there with my brother Tommy on the *American Voyager.* This boat was taken to the cannery where they discharged the fish off the *Prospect.* That *Prospect* stood in San Diego until the Navy took it and converted it to a "YP" and put a captain on it. That was Joaquin Theodore. This is the man I told you about who was the captain of the *Prospect.*

I joined the Navy May 1, 1942 as a second-class machinists mate. I went aboard the Prospect and on May 6, 1942 we went overseas - only six days. There were about 12 of us.

RW: They put you in uniform?

VB: Right. I never went to boot camp. Like Joaquin Theodore says, (he speaks broken English), he says, "You know when I went to Mr. Warren, the Lieutenant Commander, I don't even know how to salute." He said, "Mr. Theodore, we don't care how you salute; we want you because of your seamanship." And that's what these boats were; a lot of the navigators were Portuguese. Six days after that we were on our way overseas.

RW: What rate did you get?

VB: Second class machinists mate because I was mostly an engine man then.

RW: Oh, I thought you were a navigator.

VB: No. This was before I became a navigator. I became a navigator after I came back from overseas about 1946.

RW: Why did they call them "YPs?"

VB: Yard Patrol. They designated them yard patrol for work inside the bay. That is the Navy for you. They took a lot of fishing boats; mostly they were smaller in size, that didn't have no range on them. The purse seiners in Monterey were small. That is what they used them for - buoy tenders and working closer in shore. The tuna boats had the same designation, but they had the range and refrigeration.

They told us, "You guys won't have to worry; you are going to go from here to Panama, Panama back to San Diego." That wasn't the case. They found a lot of uses for these boats because they were refrigerated and they had a lot of cargo space. They could carry a lot of fuel; they were shallow draft, and that is the reason for using these fishing boats.

The Conte Bianco, the boats from South America, they are the ones that all went to the Caribbean. The ones from San Diego headed straight overseas to Pearl Harbor. Then from there we were assigned our different stations.

RW: And what boat were you on?

VB: The *Prospect.*

RW: That's a good-sized boat.

VB: Right. That boat I would say was about 115 feet long, diesel driven. We had a Washington diesel; I can remember the engine, I remember everything about that thing. I was the only one who knew anything about those engines because I had been working on diesel engines.

We were overqualified. If you are a fisherman you grow up with this. In those days when you were 20 years old you had already gone fishing five years. You grew up with these engines (whether) they were gas or diesel. Robbins made a Union engine in San Francisco; the Enterprise engine was made in San Francisco. We knew engines; we were naturals for this here work.

Now, navigators Joaquin Theodore, Eddie Madruga - these were the guys. Where are you going to find a guy in the Navy who are navigators who could navigate a battleship? They can navigate a ship in any ocean, any place in the world. In fishing you drift a lot, you change courses, you do a lot of dead reckoning. You navigate on a fishing boat 24 hours a day. You drift at night because you've got to get into a position next morning, unless you know how to use all the planets. Whatever you are going to use, you've got to be able to get a position in the morning, noon, night. So these guys for seamanship, they were the finest sailors in the world. I am proud to say I was one of these men. And you learn from these people. You learn because it is in you.

RW: Over and over and over again to get it right. Did you take some cargo over?

VB: I don't remember what the cargo was, but we did take cargo.

RW: Were you armed?

VB: We had just a couple of 50 caliber machine guns; we had some depth charges, one machine gun on top of the pilothouse, and one where the bait tank used to be in the back.

RW: Did you guys have to learn how to shoot all that stuff?

VB: No. We picked up a gunners mate in Pearl Harbor. We did have regular Navy people aboard.

RW: How many were in the crew?

VB: I'd say about 17 men.

RW: And you had to stand your watches?

VB: Yeah. It wasn't like a fishing boat. There you had two different sections. You had the engineers and you had a cook that was full-time, a second cook, a galley boy. Where you would normally carry 12 men, they would carry five or six extra.

RW: That was your first trip, really, to the Far East then, wasn't it? And you were under wartime conditions. You went from here to Hawaii and then on?

VB: Then from there we were assigned to Palmyra. I remember that. We went to Samoa, from Samoa we went to Fiji. In fact, we were the first boats that went in to Fiji because I remember liquor was only six cents a shot. From (Fiji) we went to the New Hebrides Islands and north of that was the Espiritu Santos Islands. These were the bases that we put in to. Every place we went in, we were probably the first boat there. You knew we are getting closer to those guys in Guadalcanal. Our neighbors always to the north were these people at Guadalcanal, the Japanese. They sent us out to maybe pick up a flyer, or tow a barge someplace.

This is a story that is in the book. One night they challenged us, a Navy ship. We identified ourselves and they said, "Good luck to you guys," and they go off. The next morning we are going to go to Espiritu Santos. This is in the northern group of islands. When you go into the channel we see a ship ahead of us. It is breaking in two. You know it doesn't look right being in that shape. We get closer to the ship that challenged us the night before. It was the USS TUCKER, a destroyer.

This ship is going into the channel ahead of us. If we had been first we would have hit that mine, but we were behind him. The TUCKER hits a mine and breaks in two. Now he's got to tow that thing out of the channel and don't make it sink in the channel. Now you don't know where it took the minefield. Lucky thing we towed it out of the mine field. They lost seven men. Like I told Danny the other day, I'm not going to tell these stories, let him tell the stories that happened because he knows more or less what had happened.

RW: Was your boat wooden?

VB: Right

RW: You think that would not attract the mines?

VB: No, because these were on contact. They were in the channel and if you hit one, it was going to go off. But the thing was, at night they challenged us and we had the "good luck." The next day they were the ones to get it. But there was a lot of them happening all the time. You are so close in all the time. I could tell you other stories. I was over there almost three years. You leave the dock to go across the bay and the dock blows up.

As I say, this was the closest base to Guadalcanal. Now they invaded Guadalcanal. There was a raid. They can't tell me that that was planned because when we went up there they didn't have any of these guys. They didn't know what they would actually find. But you know what is happening when you are there.

Our anchorage was Tulagi. It was maybe a two-hour run from Guadalcanal to Tulagi. This is where the big fight was where at night we would have to go to Tulagi. There were three YPs, the *Endeavor,* the *Challenger,* and the *Prospect.* Our duty was between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, back and forth, carrying troops from here to here, load with food, or whatever it was. A lot of fighting at Tulagi. In two or three days it was all over with.

It shifted and about a month later it was down in Guadalcanal. The Japanese started reinforcing. These guys with the Marines, the two groups, we thought were going to get it today because there was bombing in the daytime. At night a Jap ship would come down the channel. The next day an

American ship would come up. The big battles were fought two months after we got there. So how long can these guys last? *[For Pacific campaign during World War II, see Addendum]* Those three YPs, the *Endeavor,* the *Challenger,* and the *Prospect* received the Presidential Unit Citation. You know when they put the tracer out to try to find us in 1947? They wanted to find these guys who were on the YPs. Sometime in 1950 somebody said, "Theodore, you know the Navy is trying to find you people so you can get this recognition." The citation is a ribbon; it is not a medal. It is given to a unit.

We were a support unit, First Marine Division, and being attached to this unit we were entitled to the Presidential Unit Citation. I got mine last year because I wrote to somebody in Wisconsin someplace that I wanted that added to my records, not that I could care about a ribbon or medal, but I wanted that to give these fishermen the recognition they deserve for what they went through.

We arrived at Pearl Harbor. The first one that got lost was the *Triumphal.* One of them blew up. The *Yankee* left Midway and disappeared from the face of the earth. There were boats lost in typhoons. That is what the fishing boats did in World War II.

In 1952 there were a lot of protests. We protested because these vessels went to war; these men went to war. The imports destroyed an industry and nobody cared. But it has got to happen first. We worked in South America. I don't resent the fact that we were being deceived, but let's work with these people, let's negotiate with these people, let's try to save something. That is what my book is all about. My book is going to be very controversial, but it is going to be the truth.

RW: About what?

VB: Saving an industry that has been destroyed. Is it because we are Italians; is it because we are Portuguese? We gave. My mother in San Francisco was a young girl; she used to be the interpreter for my grandfather when she was eleven years old.

The Bank of Italy was formed in San Francisco by Gianinni. He didn't make the bank, it was the Italian people in San Francisco made the bank with their money. We built banks; we built churches; we built an industry. That is what we gave this country. You are not going to find a group of people like this any place in the world. In 1980 I made $80,000; the next year I was out of a job. How much taxes have we paid? We built this harbor. The Navy and the tuna fishermen built this harbor.

[Transcriber's note: Apparently discussed this further as the narrator asked to turn the tape off. Narration then continues about the *Star of India.*]

RW: C. Arnolt Smith I know put the *Star of India* in dry dock up there, but he also did a lot for the fishermen.

VB: National Iron Works wasn't a shipyard at first. The first boat that that man ever built was the Pequot. He took all the piece along the waterfront and created a shipyard, NASSCO (National Steel and Shipbuilding Company). It was the tuna fishermen money that developed the waterfront, all these piers and all these docks. We had all unskilled labor working in canneries, working on boats. You could get a job. Those people were good for us; they weren't afraid to get dirty.

But C. Arnholt Smith, to me, was one of the greatest things that ever happened in San Diego. He got involved with lawyers and you know what happens there. That is what destroyed the man, his reputation was destroyed. But let's give the man credit. He gave us the ballpark, he gave us a baseball team, he gave us a big cannery.

And I can tell you what happened to that cannery, too. The last strike was against Arnholt Smith; he had the last cannery in San Diego. That is when this union became militant. They drove the last cannery out of San Diego. If those guys had been smart they would have said, "Let's save this; let's go along with Arnholt Smith." They picked it up lock, stock, and barrel. Who else could they pick on? They picked on the last cannery and they ran it out of San Diego.

RW: Which one was it?

VB: The San Diego Fishermen's Union.

RW: The Fishermen's Union ran them out?

VB: Right. Because of the strike.

RW: Who was striking?

VB: There was a boat taken out. It wasn't an illegal strike. The man who took the boat out was Joe Parisi of the *Carol Virginia.* When Joe sailed that day all these Sicilians, tough guys, went down there and tried to block him from sailing. There were marshals down there and buses. But Joe didn't break any laws or anything. That is when Admiral Gehres just took the whole thing and moved because who else could they fight? If those guys had been smart they would have tried to keep that cannery in San Diego. That is the last cannery we had in San Diego - was Arnholt Smith's. He was good for this town. He had a fleet of small boats which could operate out of here. Support the man!

RW: I thought he had the Bumble Bee Cannery here.

VB: No. Van Camp had that. They moved their cannery from San Pedro. When they sold the boats to Mexico (I don't want to mention names, but) there was another one. Let's put a date in here. It was about 1975. When Van Camp moved the cannery to San Diego it was because we were starting to sell the boats to Mexico because of this environmental crap. The largest and most efficient cannery was the Van Camp Cannery, down on the pier at Tenth Avenue.

Then that was the same thing. They started putting on restrictions on the Mexican imported fish. After that is when Sun Harbor-Westgate moved. They were the last two canneries. You know, you hold out just as long as you can but to keep the industry the unions once in a while ... There are a lot of things that can cause you to move. But the last cannery that they should have held was the one that Arnholt Smith owned. He had a fleet of boats that were smaller; they couldn't go out into the western Pacific. He had to make it work here.

RW: That is where he had the Westgate-Sun Harbor cannery boats. Ken Reynard, who restored the Star of India was a skipper on the *Westgate* for Smith.

VB: You mean the big "reefer" ship? George Stevens was on it, too.

RW: Could be. But Reynard had it for years. They would supply the fishing boats and it also was a floating cannery. That's what I understand it was.

VB: No. It was a reefer ship. I use the word reefer here because that is what it is - a freezer ship. The small boats would catch the fish and put them on a reefer ship, a refrigerator ship. I fished in Africa. Africa was in a situation where his fleet of small boats could be used and the fish transshipped over

here. They would fish along the African coast and put the catch on a reefer ship, which would be the *Westgate.*

RW: I understand that what turned a lot of this around was that it was cheaper to have a bunch of women in Tahiti or some of the other islands to do the canning, than here in the States. That is what took it offshore here.

VB: Not only that, but Samoa, we'll say, is now closer to the fishing grounds than Puerto Rico, and cheaper labor. Puerto Rico was more centralized. That was good when the boats worked on this coast. And they could get their fish from Africa, Peru. They've got freezer plants down in Peru or Ecuador where Van Camp had their freezing plants. They would discharge in Panama so the fish would go to Puerto Rico from there.

But now, like I say, this boycott that is going on between us and Mexico, where does that fish go? It goes to Europe; some of it goes to Puerto Rico because that market cannot absorb the amount of tonnage they are catching now. So that hurts them economically.

RW: The Japanese do their own fishing, too, don't they?

VB: Yeah. The Japanese are 'backwalling' this year; they keep a low profile. Like in Alaska, everyone is working for the Japanese. What is going on up there, I don't know. I don't pry into my son-in-law's business. He owns a freezer, he operates, he fixes, he does everything. I don't ask him; I don't want to know.

The only thing I am worrying about is what I know here. I want to defend the fishermen themselves. I am not on any crusade. The guy didn't know that my book would end the way it did. If it comes out naturally, but this bunk about we are porpoise killers? Everybody in this world thinks we are; they have destroyed our reputation. Why? So they could sell some tape? And they aren't legitimate.

The Earth Island people and the Marine Mammal Fund use as a mailing address Fort Mason, San Francisco. And you know what that is - that is a maritime museum up there. Does this make this legitimate; are these people legitimate? Now they are in an argument with the Mexican people to get involved in something that concerns Mexico and the United States.

RW: You are going to start a civil war

VB: Not me. You make up your own idea. You know, because there are so many different sides of it. I had a big argument with a guy (I won't mention his name) of the Intertropical Tuna Commission. He came aboard the Novice in 1965 as an observer to copy the logs. You know you should never show your logbooks to anyone. That was the first mistake. You just don't show your logbooks; nobody reads the logbooks. When the ship sinks the logbooks go out with the ship. When this guy came aboard we made a trip to Puerto Rico. He gave me a book to read. "This book shows me that you guys are trying to control this industry." He said, "You won't be fishing when we do."

Tape 2, Side D:

RW: Who ruined the fishing industry?

VB: I am talking about what is happening now. I blame the Intertropical Tuna Commission which started reading logbooks and misinterpreting the information, and the National Marine Fishers. These are federal government bodies that put in the restrictions and everything against us. You criticize, but you don't destroy. If you see something happening, change the laws. That is the point I am trying to make.

RW: I thought it was public opinion. Somebody was out to get you guys. It was public opinion, the parading in the streets and all this stuff.

VB: No, no, no way. It was the outside interference. You've got to become a part of the system. There is a law in Puerto Rico, as an example. I was sent out on the Western King. They have a big deal over there.

You must remember I worked 20 years in South America. The government there comes on your boat and they are real fine people; you can talk with these people. The Star Kist Cannery has a big operation there. So when they get through they say, "Come on, have a drink with us." Nick owns the boat. We changed the law. Would you believe that we had a law changed because the guy had a couple of bottles? But a couple of drinks around doesn't hurt either.

But the point I am trying to make here is that when the law is against the system, you change the law. We can operate in Puerto Rico one way; it's the same government, immigration, customs. You can't operate like that in California. What the hell is the difference? Aren't they the same uniform, immigration, customs?

Take a seaman in any port in the world because we, as fishing boats, have that right. You don't sign a certified crew list on a fishing boat. You don't even sign on; you become part of that crew list. This is one of the privileges of being on a fishing boat. The only licensed people on board are the captain, the first mate, the chief engineer. You are responsible for that man. He has a passport, you are sure his passport is in order; you put him on a boat he becomes your responsibility. If he gets off, you have to ship him back to his country of origin. You can never do that here.

So now you are working in South America, Puerto Rico. You do not need a permit to touch and trade. A merchant ship, any place it goes, needs a permit to touch and trade.

RW: Touch and trade?

VB: Touch and trade is a permit to go in. A merchant ship that sails around the world, they have to have a permit to touch and trade. You go in and you trade in this port here; you trade in that port there. Fishing vessels do not need this permit; we do not come under coast guard marine inspection - only for your license to fish. We are licensed to fish as a fishing vessel any place in the world.

This gets back to outside interference. When you've got a guy, a national marine fisherman that knows all the facts and doesn't do anything to change the laws to help the fishermen out to get past some of these hurdles, sometimes it takes a little bit more to get the job done. No, they chop your head off right now.

It took three or four years in the western Pacific to get that straightened out. These guys wouldn't show you no mercy. Do you understand my logic here?

RW: Yeah.

VB: But you have to work together or be part of the system

RW: But you are also implying sort of a conspiracy with foreign powers or somebody else.

VB: I'm not saying that; I'm going to call it ignorance.

RW: That could be, easily, easily.

VB: You've got to be part of the system; you've got to be able to communicate. How come they don't question us now? Why don't they get Eddie Madruga? They did it. They came up with some real good sensible answers. The guys talk and they interrupt. Everything that was done was sworn under oath. You tell me if it is a conspiracy. Look at the tape.

RW: The name of the tape here is, "Where Have All the Dolphins Gone?" - The Untold Story of the Dolphin Slaughter and the Shameful Cover-up, narrated by George C. Scott."

VB: Isn't that kind of strong?

RW: Where did you get this?

VB: This is the one they showed April 13, 1990. Augie Fellando could not defend himself against this. This was a conspiracy right here. This came on the air and Star Kist came out with this dolphin-free tuna and no one knew anything about it. If you are part of the system you can see, you recognize certain things because you grew up in the business. If the National Marine Fisheries and the Intertropical Tuna Commission are part of the system, well, defend us.

You read the logbooks; you know what the kills are. Augie Fellando has a perfect argument for this. Let's keep him out of this. I'm doing this on my own. If I write a book, I'll defend myself. Augie Fellando had no defense against this stuff, but if Augie wanted to stand up and tear this tape apart, he could do it. So can I. I can shoot this thing so full of holes, it is not even funny.

RW: Because they edited it in such a way it made you guys look like the bad guys?

VB: Exactly. And why did they do this? Because I wrote an article for the San Diego Union. This was advertised in the paper, as a Christmas gift, this was a good buy. I wrote in the paper and bawled them out saying, "You know something, this is a conspiracy. This is commercial." You tell me who these people are, Bob. Are these people legitimate; is this a part of Environmental Protection Agency? No. These are spin-offs; these are guys like the Green Peace that receive two million dollars. These guys are troublemakers. Why? So they can sell tapes? They have a mailing address at Fort Mason. What right do they have to use Fort Mason as a mailing address?

RW: I want to put that down. Just for the record here, it says, "For further information on the dolphin issue, contact Marine Mammal Fund, Fort Mason, Center Building, San Francisco. The tape is distributed by Video Project, 5332 College Avenue, Suite 101, Oakland, California 94618."

VB: Let me ask you something, Bob. If you see (Treasure?) Island Institute, does it mean anything to you?

RW: Never heard of it

VB: How about Marine Mammal Fund?

RW: Never heard of it

VB: Then the questions you are asking me aren't the right questions. Do you follow what I am trying to say?

RW: I'm sympathetic with you; that is my problem.

VB: But if I were to question these guys I could crucify them. How about the Intertropical Tuna Commission or the National Marine Fisheries? They are asking questions here and they come up with a real legitimate answer. But, no, these guys here get away with this kind of crap.

RW: Evasive.

VB: And very angry when they make their statements. They make a lot of claims that, to me, I'd hang them. These guys will never come up and challenge anybody; they'd never challenge me. So I am going to write my book and I am going to say exactly how I feel.

RW: Please do, please do.

VB: I am a tough man; I come from a tough industry. And I am going to write a tough book. I would like to see you guys publish my book, but I am afraid that they would think that they would get involved.

RW: Do what you think is right? The way I feel (is that) you (should) do what you think is right.

VB: When I went up to the San Diego Historical Society I said I like these people, they are educated, they are smart. That's what I want - I want to write a book in a way that people can say, "That guy knows what he is talking about." I've got to be very accurate in everything I do, but I am going to take them out.

RW: But you'd better be documenting it; that's the important thing.

VB: What do you mean, documented?

RW: You've got to have documents for everything you say.

VB: I've got all the news articles that tie in. I can relate one news article with another where they tie in. I'd bawl them out. (I would say,) "If you are writing an article, you don't know what you are talking about." This is the tape; I mention this in my book more than once. This is my defense.

RW: (Let me turn the recorder off.) We've had quite a discussion here on the injustice of this whole tuna business and the dolphins. Is there anything else you would like to add on the things that happened to you fishing?

VB: I've been fishing in Africa; was on one of the first boats to fish in South America, so I've done my share exploratory.

We went over to Africa with about ten boats one time, so we did make an effort to spread the feed out and cover different areas.

RW: One of the things I've heard from the other guys that I've interviewed said that they went to purse seiners because they saw one of the boats coming in that was out of San Pedro and they could go out and catch more fish with a purse seiner than they could with a bait boat because it takes so darn long to pull them in, one at a time. That is true, isn't it?

VB: They always knew that there was more fish when you fished with a net than with a pole. The technique wasn't ready - the power block, the power skiff. It takes nylon nets; it takes the skiff to keep the boat open because you've got to set in different ways when you work in rough weather. That was the only problem. It was tried.

The first man that tried this with the fleet was from Monterey when the fish was depleted, the sardines. Jack Covella from Sun Harbor Cannery took a bunch of these boats to save an industry. He gave them nets; they were cotton nets, no refrigeration, no line shaft. They tried it in Mexico and he lost a lot of money. He was a pioneer in Peru. That is it; you've got to put the horse before the carriage. They all knew this - nylon nets, power block. It took one man, Lou Beretta. He is dead now, but if he was alive, he is the kind of man who would have opened up a cannery for fishermen in California.

RW: And where did he live?

VB: He lived in San Diego. He took his boat, a bait boat, the *Southern Pacific,* converted to purse seining with a nylon net, power skiff, power block, everything copied off of a San Pedro purse seiner, the *Anthony M.* The *Anthony M.* was a lone wolf. This man worked in Mexico. Pieces here and there, he added a power block and then he added the nylon net, power skiff, little by little. But the first conversion was that.

Then all of the boats got converted because the fleet was on the verge of bankruptcy; they could hardly get their production up. We've always had to compete with foreign imports. You've got to catch more tonnage. What it lacked was purse seiner people. The staff from San Pedro came down; they trained a crew.

We bought the *Star Kist,* we converted. Three men from San Pedro and the crew from San Diego, we all became champions. We were catching fish that we didn't even know existed. Like a school of fish, maybe you'd get a ton of fish. With a net you could circle and maybe get 30 or 40 ton of fish.

RW: We are talking about all kinds of tuna?

VB: Right, because you wipe them out; you catch the whole school of fish. With a bait boat, when you chummed on a school of fish, maybe you would catch five to ten tons. With a purse seiner net, from that same school you'd get 40 to 50 tons because you would catch the whole school. The nylon nets made it possible to hold the fish, otherwise you would lose a lot of them.

In my book I explain about the different techniques. You can explain how the nets work 20 years ago, ten years ago, with the first boats that went to Mexico bait fishing, navigation. It all tied up to 1962.

This fleet was bankrupt, probably for the second or third time. That is when Beretta took the chance. It was the only thing he could do. He knew he was going to lose his boat, regardless. He said, "Let's take the chance; let's see if we can make this thing work." He knew the fishing areas where the *Anthony M.* that man didn't know the fishing areas. You work with codebooks; you find fish. They didn't like the *Anthony M.* because it was a purse seiner. They tried to keep them out of the areas.

The man who was responsible for the conversion that everybody copied was the guy that had a hard time because nobody would cooperate with him. Is that strange? Lou Beretta did it very successfully. Then everybody else followed suit. He got producing again and the rest is history.

Then the quota came in. You were only allowed 100,000 tons of fish. That was the first restriction. Then they started copying the logbooks and you got another restriction. Let's face it, in some areas there were not only good years, you'd get a bad year. Until 1980 the same thing happened. You had

to improve production; you had to catch more fish. That is when these guys went out to the western Pacific. Three years, a lot of them failed; they lost their boats. Then in the fourth year they started catching more fish. But the sacrifice was made.

But they made the effort; we made the effort when we went to Africa. That was a different type of fishing. You transshipped; you put it in a freezer. But you've got to have time to do this; we never had that opportunity. That is why I feel, "If you copy down the log books - the Intertropical Tuna Commission or the National Fisheries -- don't you see we have this problem and we are trying to straighten it out?" But you defend us, you stick together, you make a phone call, you look the other way. I can say if we didn't make the effort then they could say, "Well, they deserve it." Now that we have, we no longer control it.

RW: The story I heard was that the transpacific and all of that was because the canneries moved offshore. It costs money to run a cannery.

VB: That's right. The Samoan canneries and at Guam they know where the fish comes from. They buy the fish from the trawlers, the Japanese boats that discharge over there. So now you can report the tonnage. The only reason we went to Africa was because we started seeing these boats from Puerto Rico coming from Africa.

We went over there and we did very good. In fact, we had a big year in Peru. They put the quota into effect and we said, "What have we got to lose? Let's go. We can transship." I think we did about a load and a half. Then we came home. And we were only taking the tuna. There were some fish we didn't want - the skipjack. Normally we would fish anything. See how choosy you can be when the fish is there?

But remember, you've got good seasons and bad seasons. Because you did it this year, that doesn't mean the fish is going to be there next year. Venezuela, how many times we went by Venezuela and nobody ever seen fish there. Now, maybe for four or five years it has been all right. There are a lot of fish being caught off of Venezuela. Next year it could be someplace else. You've got to be able to go where the fish is at. It doesn't mean now there is no fish off of Ecuador, or that there is fish off of Nicaragua. We don't notice because you have to go copy the logbooks on the Mexican boats, that's the fleet. We do not have a way knowing what's going on because nobody unloads their fish in San Diego.

Any American vessel that fishes on porpoise nobody will buy your fish. What a tragedy. You keep your mouth shut. There were only six or eight boats working out of San Diego. "Leave them alone; look the other way; go after somebody else." These guys were ruthless. They had no fears for nobody. I've got to take that chance.

RW: Getting back to the tape, "Where Have All the Dolphins Gone?"

VB: Where have all the canneries gone? Nobody wants to see dolphins dead; they are easy to take out of the net alive rather than dead. We perfected the process, but they never said one kind word. If you read what is here and what they imply and insinuate, we should sue them. But they are not responsible for this. They are not part of the system.

All I am trying to do is say, "We are not who you think we are; we are not Mafia; we gave to this country." I suffered in World War II. But these guys here and this George C. Scott, he claims that we covered up. What - to sell tapes? Is that why we came to this country here, to make twenty bucks? What about the Green Peace? They collected two million dollars.

RW: I'm going to get you all riled up again. Why don't we call it quits? It is after five o'clock.

VB: I hope I've given you what you wanted. I was honest with you and I told you exactly how I felt. I don't think I held anything back from you. If it comes out that way in the book, it has got to come out that way.

RW: This was great.

VB: You've got all the information that that book is about.

RW: Thank you. I'd like to see it in print. When do you think it is going to be done?

VB: I have different ideas about doing it. I might publish the book myself. Say hello to Sally for me. Tell her I fell in love with her. I think she is a fine lady, very sincere, very intelligent, very bright.

RW: So thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

ADDENDUM

VB: We go on a raid on September 8; Rich Tradosci mentioned Theodore. That is the kind of duty we had. We go to Guadalcanal. There were three YPs, the *Endeavor,* the *Challenger* and the *Prospect;* and three destroyers, and the *Calhoun.* We take these Marines aboard. They don't know what is going on. It was about ten o'clock at night. We pick up the Marines and go around the island. We had to reach a point about where the Japanese were. There was no way you could get the Japanese going over the island, it was such a jungle, or whatever. We get there in the morning and we discharge the Marines. In about four hours here come the Marines back.

That is where I first saw dead Marines was right there. We pick up the Marines and return to Guadalcanal. Now it is really tough. "Hey, you guys, you better get out of here. There is a (Japanese) cruiser and two destroyers in the channel."

This is what is happening all the time. The only place you can go hide is Tulagi. Now we are going to Tulagi, "Hail Marys" all the way. When we get there it is about midnight. The *Challenger* and the *Endeavor* were ahead of us; we were the last. The Japanese cruiser shoots up a star, shoots its flares up and lights up the whole bay. In the spotlight they find us and start shooting at us. I'm not kidding you, Bob, that ship was so close you could hear the blowers on the ship. They hit us twice. They hit the pilothouse. One guy was blown off the pilothouse; he is dead. Theodore looks like he got wounded; one Marine got wounded here; one guy got his arm shot off.

To make a long story short, I went over the side because of the ammonia. Theodore said, "Get off of this thing." Ammonia gas is very deadly.

RW: It was there to use for freezing (fish)

VB: Right. Theo manages to get the boat in the right direction to go towards the beach. We are in the water while the boat beaches itself. That is how they got Theodore off and they got these other guys off, but we were in the water.

But that's all right. Now we can get past this stage. The next night the Japanese came in again. I want to get this all in because some of this stuff I want to tell you what happened.

RW: I can see that; I can visualize it.

VB: The Japanese cruiser comes in again that night at midnight, and the same thing. They run a light across the beach and they see the ship on the beach. They didn't know it was the *Prospect.* It was already beached and I didn't think we could salvage it. Ernie and I (he is dead now) were about 100 yards away from the ship and they started blowing it out of the water. I put in my book, "The Japanese sank the same ship twice." Do you want to know where the Japanese navy was September 9, 1942? They were at Tulagi sinking a fishing boat. Then, to top it off, I could see that three vessels had received the Presidential Unit Citation. That was one of them. I can show you the document.

END
