



Tuna Industry Pioneers of San Pedro and Terminal Island, California

August (Auggie) Felando

Former President of the American Tuna Boat Association, Maritime/Fishing Lawyer, and Retired U.S. West Coast Tuna Fisherman

Interviewed on November 22, 2012



August Felando was born in San Pedro, California, in 1929. His family roots reach back to Viz Island, Croatia, and Guernica in the Basque province of Spain. He fished on two-family owned tuna and sardine purse seine vessels during 1946-1950. In 1951, he became a co-owner of the F/V Challenger, a tuna baitboat, and as managing owner sold the vessel in 1958 for conversion to a tuna seiner. From 1960-1991, he managed the affairs of the American Tunaboat Association, including participation in hearings before the California State legislature, Congressional Committees, and federal agencies. During this same period, he was an advisor to the U.S. Commissioners of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and to the U.S. State Department. From 1971 to 1981, he served as the U.S. Government's expert advisor on fisheries during the UN Law of the Sea conference. At the time of this interview, he was a member of the Tuna Advisory Subpanel to the Pacific Fishery Management Council, and of the General Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commissioners for the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission.

Interview Abstract: Mr. Felando discusses exploratory purse seine fishing ventures conducted by West Coast-based tuna fishermen to open up new fishing grounds outside of the established eastern Pacific grounds. In doing so, they encountered large schools of yellowfin tuna in association with dolphin (which they referred to as porpoise). He describes the efforts of these pioneering tuna boat captains to develop gear and methods in collaboration with the National Marine Fisheries Service that led to dramatic reductions in the number of dolphins entangled and killed in tuna purse seine nets.



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Interview Transcript:

There was a lot of controversy about the status of yellowfin resources in the Eastern Pacific and there were efforts now, okay we have a conservation program. What adjustments can we make? You can make an adjustment [*i.e.*, *move operations*] to the Atlantic, East Coast.

We saw a lot of skipjack in 1962 off the east coast of United States but it looked like it could be a purse seine fishery. And people therefore said, 'Well, I don't go that way; I'm going to go to the west'. And so they went outside "the line"¹. So in 1969 was the first year it was successful doing it. It was a controversy...is that a real thing or people just faking it [*i.e.*, *catching fish outside the line*]?

Anyway in 1970, Joe Madruga had been – earlier than 1970 – been out to Central Western Pacific and had seen fish around Palau. And he was convinced because what he saw there was people using one pole fish and forgetting all the two pole and three pole fish around there. So he felt that it was a new area we had to go into².

So as the boats moved to the west below the "10 line" [*10 degrees south Latitude*] they started finding tuna associated with porpoise³. The people came down to us at the Association⁴ and said, 'Hey, you know you have this problem here...'

So I had Harold Medina, Frank Gonsalves, Ed Madruga, and others – can't remember right now... We had a meeting and Bill Perrin⁵ said, 'Well, what we can do is have a hydraulic system cork line; we can lower the cork line, and the porpoise can go out but [I] would like to test it.'

¹ The "Line" refers to the outer boundary of the Interamerican Tropical Tuna Commission's (IATTC) Yellowfin Regulatory Area (see map below). The IATTC set annual catch quotas for yellowfin tuna inside the area.

² One pole, two pole, etc. refers to the size of tuna that could be caught by a single man and single bamboo pole, two men with two poles joined to one hook, etc.

³ Fishermen often used the term "porpoise" when describing their observations and interactions with small cetaceans, specifically dolphins from the family Delphinidae. Porpoise species are members of the family Phocoenidae.

⁴ American Tunaboat Association

⁵ Bill Perrin was a National Marine Fisheries Service biologist who was the first government at-sea observer to document dolphin mortalities as a result of U.S. tuna fishing operations in the eastern Pacific Ocean. He was instrumental in working with industry to help craft the conservation measures that led to dramatic declines in dolphin mortalities in the fishery.



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. During the meeting, Harold was trying to suggest that there was a more simple way of dealing with the release of the porpoise and, rather than depending on hydraulic gauge or complicated use of sound⁶, and what have you, to scare the porpoise and redirect them.

And so after the meeting Harold said, 'I have an idea. What we'll do is reduce the size of the mesh of the net to reduce the possibility of porpoise nose getting stuck in the net and thereby impacting the "back down".' The back down⁷ had already been developed by Anton Missetich in 1959 but they were still having [dolphin] mortalities. So Harold said, 'I'm going to do it on my own.'

So he spent the money, got the 2 inch mesh installed in the boat in Panama and I said, 'Let me know what happens.'

He came back in April 1971 and said, 'Auggie, it works.'

I said, 'Okay, lay out what you did so we can pass the word to everybody else how to make this panel, and insert this panel.'

So one of the first boats that did that was the Queen Mary – Joe Medina – and we found out that was successful. And then the government didn't believe Harold and placed an observer aboard and they found, yes, it was working to reduce porpoise mortality.

Filmed by John Dutton Media.

⁶ Use of sound refers to a novel technique at the time, pioneered by to Captain John "Blacky" Zorotovich, using sound from the sonar to scare dolphin away from the boat.

⁷ Refers to the procedure of running the vessel in reverse to create a teardrop shape to the purse seine net which would depress the cork line at the apex of teardrop allowing the dolphins to swim out of the net.



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Auggie Felando and Richard Chikami talking about the San Pedro-Terminal Island tuna fishery. 2011.



Auggie Felando was a crew member aboard the F/V Western Sky in 1947. Circa 1956. San Pedro. Felando, August, and Harold Medina. *The Tuna/Porpoise Controversy: How tuna fishermen were caught in the government's net and fought to survive.* Western Sky Press. 2011. Pg 78.

Photos of "the back-down" method. Courtesy of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission. 5/23/2014.



Step 1: A purse seine vessel initiating the back-down procedure with the skiff towing the vessel mid-ship to create the tear-drop net configuration needed to successfully depress the cork line and allow the dolphins to escape.



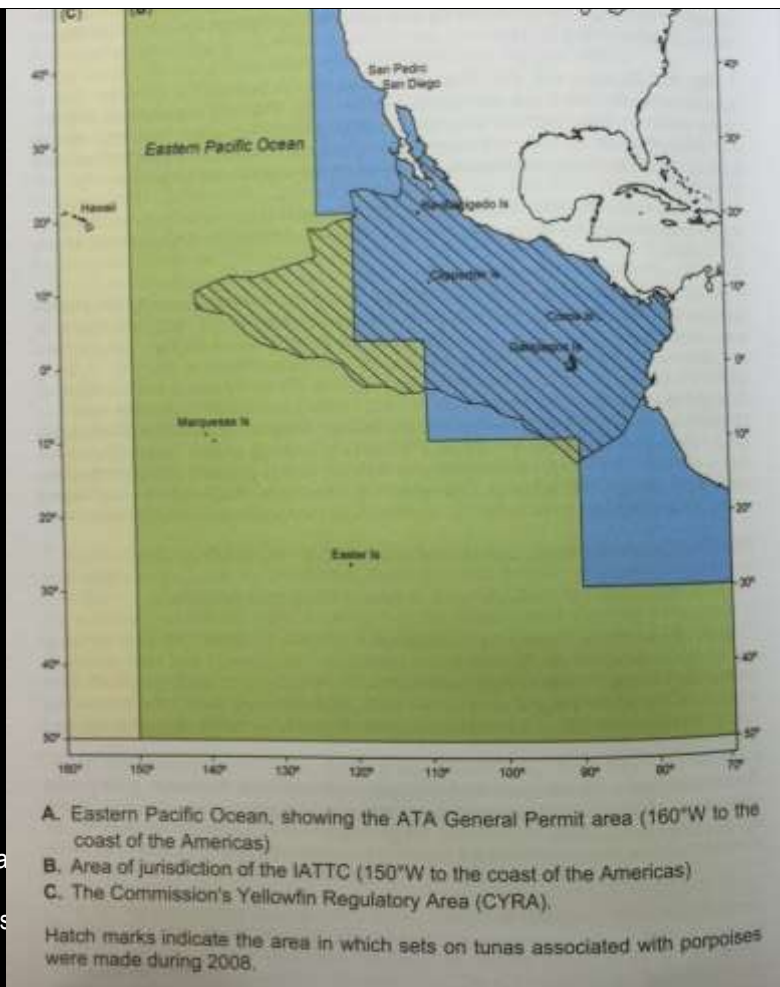
Step 3: The vessel "backing down" with main engine in reverse, submerging the cork line at the Medina Panel apex with dolphins being successfully released.



Step 2: The tear-drop net configuration as seen from the vessel's helicopter circling above. Note the speed boats positioned at the apex of the tear drop which corresponds to the location of the small mesh Medina Panel that facilitates the successful release of the dolphins.



Step 4: Dolphins swimming over the depressed cork line. Note the buoy which marks the location of the Medina Panel and allows the captain to orient the vessel for maximum efficiency in compressing the cork line.



Map of tuna ma
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