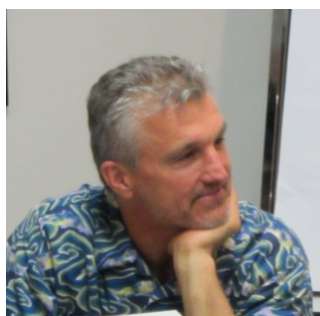


## Tuna Industry Pioneers of San Pedro and Terminal Island, California

Frank Gargas, Sr., Frank Gargas, Jr., and Steve Gargas

Retired U.S. West Coast Tuna Fishermen

Interviewed on November 22, 2012



Steve Gargas (left), and Frank Gargas, Jr. (right), reminisce about their fishing career during a meeting with other retired San Pedro tuna fishermen. 2012.



Frank Gargas, Sr., (left) talks with Dave Itano (right), one of the interviewers, about his life fishing for tuna. 2012.

Captain Frank Gargas is recognized by many in the tuna industry as one of the most influential and pioneering tuna fishermen in the world. He was instrumental in developing the African and Western Pacific tuna fishing grounds and brought back the first full loads of purse seine caught tuna to U.S. based canneries from these productive fishing grounds. Captain Gargas' illustrious tuna fishing career spanned over 47 years. Frank's two sons, Steve and Frank Jr., fished with him and are recognized as outstanding fishermen in their own right, with Steve serving as helicopter pilot during the pioneering years and Frank Jr. rising to the ranks of fishing captain. Frank and his sons pay tribute to the role of Mrs. Gargas as the glue that kept them together through the trials and tribulations of their tuna fishing careers.

**Interview Abstract:** Captain Frank Gargas, Sr., and his two sons, Frank Jr. and Steve, reflect on their experience as a fishing family. Frank Sr. relays a time when the family was with him on the tuna boat and they encountered rough weather from Hurricane Camille (1969). Steve talks about his mother and what she faced as a wife of a fisherman, having her husband at sea much of the time. Frank Jr. reflects on what drew him to become a fisherman.



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## Interview Transcript:

**FG. Sr:** Here we are in 160 foot vessel - my wife, my daughter, my two sons, and the baby puppy dog that we've just inherited on our way to Puerto Rico where [we] were living at the time.

**FG. Jr:** In the early phase, it was much more of family business and you got to see your father more often because the trips were shorter and he'd fish closer to California, closer to home.

**FG Sr.:** Sure enough – there's a hurricane coming. And what hurricane? It happened to be Hurricane Camille the biggest hurricane that had hit in 80 years.

**Steve G:** But as the boats got bigger and, of course, your parent would be away a lot longer, you spend a lot of time in your household with your mom being both parents.

**FG Sr:** If we go back and it speeds up and it catches us, we're going to be in dire straits. I says 'nope, I'm not going home; I'm going to keep going'.

**Steve G:** So I'd say she was as tough as he was here at home as he was out fishing.

**FG Sr:** And about midnight that night we started to get into rough weather and the boat started bouncing. All the salt we piled down below had fallen all over. The jugs in the icebox we're breaking. And my two kids, they were seven or at eight years old then, they were running down the aisle and the boat's going down, and they thought they were in an amusement park because they're up in the air and the boat's down here and their mother is yelling at them. They thought it was the funniest thing that ever happened. They never had so much fun.

**Steve G:** She told herself when she was younger that she would never marry a fisherman because she already knew what the life was going to be like and she didn't want to go there. So, she ended up marrying my dad.

**FG Sr:** And believe it or not, I'd not gotten seasick all my life. My wife my daughter my two sons, who got seasick? – me and the dog! We're both seasick we're heaving and these guys are playing like they're in heaven!



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**Steve G:** I would have to say, I have to take my hat off to her because as tough as it was and for the problems they had to go through various periods of the industry, she was always there.

**FG Sr:** I enjoyed having my sons with me very much because unfortunately I spent many years in all of their younger days away from them. I would come home for a week, two weeks at the most, and I was going again anywhere from 30 to 60 days and I didn't really know my boys until they came and fished with me. So it's with great pleasure that I accept[ed] my two sons as crew members.

**FG Jr:** It wasn't about the money. It was that following in your forefathers footsteps and going international to take over this multinational business that was multi generations in the making, that had this international crew going to all these exotic places; and there's just experiences you experience that you can't put a price on.

Filmed by [John Dutton Media](#).



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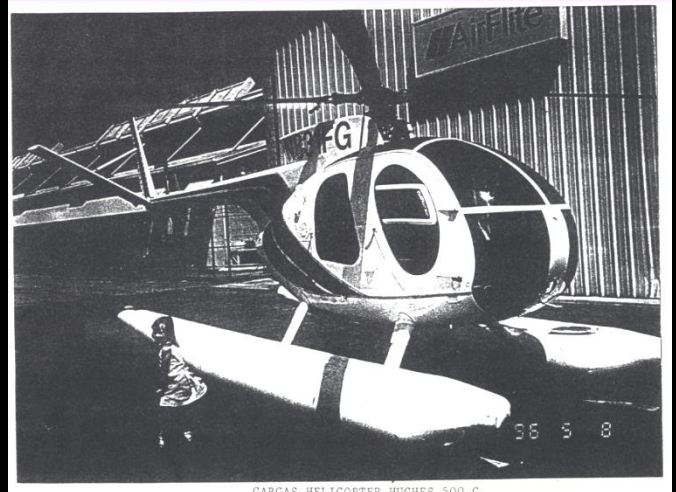


Photos Provided by Frank Gargas, Sr.

Below: Captain Gargas' first helicopter, a Bell 47-G5, which he used on the F/V Caribbean. His son, Steve Gargas, became a helicopter pilot and would fly in search of tuna, working alongside his father. Frank Gargas Jr went on to Captain some of the fishing vessels.

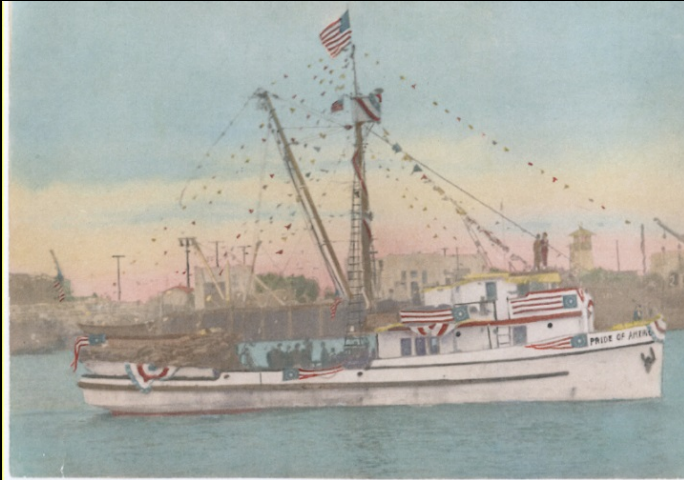


Frank Gargas Sr. in his early fishing days. He went on to pioneer the use of helicopters onboard tuna fishing boats.



GARGAS HELICOPTER HUGHES 500 C





Captain Gargas began fishing as a deckhand on his father's boat, the F/V Pride of America, shown here in the Port of Los Angeles participating in the San Pedro Fishermen's Fiesta.



While serving as a deckhand on the F/V Pride of America, Frank worked his way up the ladder eventually becoming a part owner in his father's next vessel the F/V Columbia, shown here in the Port of Los Angeles.



After a very successful few years as Captain of the F/V Columbia, Van Camp Sea Foods offered Frank the captain position on the F/V Santa Helena. At the time, it was the biggest and most modern purse seine vessel in existence.



After several years successfully running the F/V Santa Helena, Del Monte Foods offered Frank partial ownership in a new vessel, the F/V Caribbean. Frank oversaw the construction of the boat and captained it very successfully and profitably for over a decade.



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