

Name of person interviewed: Phil Ashworth [PA]

Place interview took place: Fairfield Inn, Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: September 24, 2011

Interviewer: Markham Starr [MS]

Transcriber: Laura Orleans

Abstract

Phil Ashworth recalls his first job, his brush with death and being the only American on a Portuguese boat.

Demographic information

Sex: Male

Ethnicity: White

Occupation: Fisherman

Key words

Role

Commercial fisherman (captain crew)

General Social and Cultural Characteristics

Ethnicity, ethnic identity

Social and Cultural Characteristics of Fishing

Life aboard a fishing vessel

Socialization/training to be a fisherman

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MS One of the stories I really like was the, you were getting into scalloping I think that's just a great

PA I remember. I remember. Yeah. I'd been dragging for about a year and that was after completing school through CETA and it was a rainy Sunday, it was in January, and I saw a boat, right over at, on the State Pier, tucked right in the corner there near the street. And the guys were doing gear work. So I pulled up and I got out and I looked down, I asked for the skipper. The guy's name was Jimmy Tinker from Maine. Boat was the

Ellen Louise. And I said "I'm looking for a site" and he said, he asked me "You ever been fishing before?" And I said "Yeah I've been fishing for a little over a year" And he said "Okay" He says we're gonna sail tomorrow, gear work's pretty much done. He said, "Why don't you uh, just meet us here tomorrow morning nine o'clock." I said, "Ok." So the next day comes and I meet up with the boat and we throw the lines like almost immediately and we steam out, we worked off New York. When we got down to New York, um, we were called up on deck and I said, "Ok what do we do?" And they just looked at me. And, 'cause I had never set foot on a scalloper before. But I was young, I think I was 19, and I was, I worked hard, I had, I just followed instructions you know. I followed the guys around and I learned quick and I was working with an older gentleman on the port side and uh, we ended up breaking the trip at one point cause of bad weather. We pulled into Manhattan, we unloaded down at the fish pier down there. And then we went back out and we did a second full trip and uh, boy that hurt, the grip. I'll never forget from just cuttin' scallops one after the other after the other, your wrist felt just like a squeaky hinge, a door hinge, it hurt so bad. But most of the guys on the boat after four or five days I actually began to earn their respect because I wouldn't quit. I wouldn't quit. I wouldn't stop. I stayed up late and I went in late, got up early. But the kicker was on the way home when we finally finished up the whole marathon. And it was I think probably better than two weeks from the time we left the dock, 'cause we had put in to Manhattan to unload and Jimmy Tinker called me up to the wheelhouse and he says, he says, "you lied to me." I said, "Oh Jimmy, no not really." He says, "you told me you'd been scalloping." I said "no Jimmy, think back." I said, "think hard."

3:00

PA I said "You asked me had I ever been fishing. And I had. I said I'd been fishing for over a year. Just not on a scalloper. You never asked me if I'd been scalloping. Had you asked me if I'd been scalloping I would have told you no. But you know what I'd been tryin' and tryin' and tryin' and nobody would give me a break, you left the door open and I took my chance." So he kind of laughed a little bit and he thought and he said "Alright." He said, "Well you're a good boy, 'cause you work hard." He said, "So here's the deal." He said, "I'll let you stay on the boat he said, but you gotta take a half share." He says, "if you want a full share" he said, "I'll give it to ya, but you gotta go find another job." He said, "The choice is yours." So I didn't even have to think about it. I said "I'll take the half share." And so I went out with him the next, second trip and he gave me a full share. And I worked with the crew. So that's, that was the beginning of my scalloping history if you will. An interesting one.

MS And how long did you stay on scallopers?

PA Oh boy that's actually a tough question because I went back and forth and here and there. All together I fished probably about 17 years in total, 'cause this was in the very late 70s, '78, '79 and the last trip I made I believe was 1995. And I've taken a little bit of time off here and there, but most of the time during those years, I spent actively with the fleet. I jumped around from boat to boat. For various reasons. Like most fishermen do. Very few fishermen'll stay on one boat for their whole life.

MS Can we do a little jump to other story, I think the other story that she was probably interested in hearing I mean what happened is in the first recording apparently the one they last did the recording isn't good enough for broadcast so they're trying to get

PA Yeah she told me there's some background noise. I don't you know, I remember bits and pieces of it, some of the stuff I might have told

MS Well what I was wondering, could you talk about the story where you're evacuated off the ship after, when you're hurt in the storm?

PA Oh, oh. Yeah. That was on the Linda and Hilda. That was a Portuguese dragger. And what the Portuguese used to do, this was back in the 80s, the early 80s, is that an American citizen had to hold the papers for the boat. So most of the captains of these boats were from the Azores and they actually didn't hold citizenship, so I know it was some grey area so they passed me around from boat to boat when a captain would take a month off

6:00

PA and I'd go over and sign up at the Custom House and hold the master's papers, but somebody else would actually run the boat. So I'd be a month on one boat and then they'd pass me to another boat and I'd spend another month there. But anyway this one particular boat, this was in the wintertime and it was horrible, horrible weather. I mean it must have been blowin' 65, 70. And the wind turned around and went northwest and the boat iced up. I mean it iced up heavy. And we were out on deck with the wooden mallets and the shovels and in a matter of an hour or maybe less, a three quarter inch cable would be 18 inches around, with ice building on it. So a dragger, there's only six men on a dragger, so we had to work hard. We had to work furiously, cause you don't want the boat to get top heavy. When the bow, the top of the boat weighs more than the bottom of the boat they wanna trade places and that's just not a good thing. But we'd finished up, not really finished up, but we'd taken a break, and I was back aft near the net drum and I was walkin' forward and I just remember the boat took a couple of really weird pitches and plunged, the bow plunged in and I slipped and somehow went flyin' through the air. And I remember impacting the winch which was on my left and I slammed into that and then I went bangin' off the water tight door and remember lookin' aft and just seein' this big sea roll after us, just this white froth goin' behind the boat 'cause we were goin' right into it. And then the next thing I remember, I'm in my bunk and the guys are around me and they got this stuff all over my head and uh, I, from there I don't know I think I was in and out and then I don't even remember, but somehow I got into a dry suit. I think they put me in it and I was sittin' in the captain's chair up in the wheelhouse and I remember them talking and I looked to my left out the wheelhouse window and I saw the helicopter hovering there. And we were probably at that point maybe 20, maybe some 25 foot seas so it was still very rough and they were takin' me off the boat. Or they were gonna try to take me off the boat. And I got, came out of the wheelhouse, again it's really foggy, but I remember bein' up on the bow and lookin' up and seein' the basket just above us and they had the guy who was pullin' on a line and the basket hit the deck and the guys, nobody from the copter came down, and the guys

hurried up and put me in the copter, I mean put me in the basket, and somebody yellin' go, go, go.

9:00

And I can see a guy named Johnny with his hand circling, like you know it's ok to go. So the pilot began to lift and then what happened was the boat on the seas came up underneath on the basket and impacted on the bottom of the basket as it was being lifted off the deck and I guess the pilot saw that and I think what he did was he just gave her the power cause I remember just being like squashed down into the basket and I remember lookin' up and seein' the helicopter and then I remember lookin' over the side of the basket and just watchin' that hundred foot boat just turn into this little toy. I mean it was just so far below me. And I looked up and I saw the door to the helicopter was open and these guys that looked like bugs, with their helmets, their white helmets with the big visors. They do, they look like bugs. And they were just lookin' out and I remember bein' up underneath the helicopter and the guys holdin' wire and swingin' around and then next thing I know I'm right alongside the door and I reach out and they pull me in and I'm in the basket and remember how when I slid in, I looked forward into the helicopter and I saw two more bug heads turn around and look at me. It was the co-pilot and the pilot. And on the dash I remember seeing the arm, little arm sweepin' back and forth, looked like a windshield wiper but it must have been a radar. And uh, then it's vague. They're taken me out of the basket. They're cuttin' me outta the suit. Um you know and doin' medical things, checkin' my blood pressure, checkin' my head. I can't I don't remember much of the flight, but I remember the landing in Hyannis. And that big Sikorsky. Those were the big, great big Sikorskys, the ones that uh, not like they have now. But I remember that we didn't come in and touch down like you would think a helicopter would, this thing came in for a landing like a plane. You know. It came in and, glided in and coasted and then stopped. And uh, I remember comin' out of the helicopter and I saw the ambulance. I don't remember the, I really don't remember much else after that. I really don't remember the hospital, except leaving.

MS What did they do to you at the hospital? What did they have to do?

PA I had head injury. I have a scar here and I had another one that was on. I had to get a bunch of stitches and I had guess a very, very severe concussion, cause I had to take I think it was like trips, I think it was like three trips off. And the boat owner of the, the boat owner at the time, he was really a great guy. And he spoke virtually no English. I mean he might have had 50 words in his dialect. And I just remember him saying, no insurance, no insurance, no insurance. I said ok.

12:00

And they paid the hospital bills, every time that boat came in, there was a check waitin' for me at the settlement house. And when I was ready to go back to sea, they were ready to take me. So you know they treated me fair. Nowadays, I mean first thing everybody does is they get a lawyer. You know. But that was the early 80s so that was quite a while ago. The world has changed a lot since then. So. That's that story.

MS Great. Unfortunately, the next interview starts now. So

PA That's fine.

Interview Ends
12:40