

# Fishing

By



## "The Crappie Catcher"

(In answer to many requests for a reprint of the Crappie Catcher's far, far story, it is offered here in a two-part series.)

A FEW YEARS AGO my boss lady and yours truly were visiting my late brother in Liberia, West Africa, which lies along that part of the tropical Atlantic known as the Gulf of Guinea.

The Gulf of Guinea is crossed smack-dab in the middle by the Equator. Its waters are legend for the giant barracudas which abound there. Its coastline has important historical interest for Americans because more than 90% of the African slaves which were brought to this country were shanghaied and packed into the bilges of slave ships along the Guinea Coast. Descendants of these Guinea Africans are reading this column today.

The little woman is not from Missouri but she certainly played the part of a mule-state gal once we got settled down in my brother's villa which was located less than a hundred feet from the pounding surf. She insisted that I take her fishing to prove to her that the tall fish tales I had told her of the giant cudas were not merely a fisherman's stretching of the truth.

THE ATLANTIC BARRACUDA is a different species from the variety we catch along the Mexican or California coasts. The African species is a much larger and much more ferocious fish than his Pacific cousin. The full-grown cuda of the Guinea waters will measure more than 4-1/2 feet from stem to stern, and will tip the ballast over 40 pounds. My brother had caught one that measured nearly six feet and went 60 pounds. Native fishermen have brought in barracudas nearly twice the size of brother's catch.

Our hacienda on the beach was only a short walk from the native fishing village of the Kru people, who were once a tribe of warriors but who had settled down to become a peaceful fishing people. We walked down the beach one evening as the Kru fishing fleet was coming home after a long day of foraging for their livelihood. We spotted a rather reddish-colored Kru whose dug-out canoe was the largest in the fleet. We made arrangements with him to take us fishing the next morning.

JUST BEFORE DAWN of the appointed day we met Red at the native fishing village. I gave our skipper the name, Red, not so much because of his skin texture, but because he used the same choice words that my fishing buddy, Red Marion, uttered every time he lost a big one. The three of us put out to sea at dawn with Red supplying the horsepower with his hand-whittled wooden paddle. About ten miles out we met up with hundreds of other native canoes fishing the coral reef which had been my favorite cuda grounds 15 years before when I was living in Liberia. The natives were trolling for mackerel. They were using heavy handlines which they fastened around their necks as they paddled like mad, trolling lures about a hundred feet behind.

I got a weak, as well as sick, feeling when I thought of the possibility of a giant six-foot cuda striking the lure and snatching one of those natives' heads clean off of his body. I made my fears known to Red, and he relieved me of my anxiety when he said, "No worry, boss, cuda no live here now--they move to far, far place". "You want to go to far place, me take you, but we need speedboat like the one the American embassy got".

Our total catch for the trip amounted to only three small fish which would not weigh three pounds all added together. The little woman really went into her Missouri "you got to show me" act, and you better believe me, she really put it to me. She ordered the skipper to head for home.

IT WAS A THREE-HOUR paddle back to home port. The tropical sun was starting to give us the business, but not nearly so much as the wife was giving it to me. She sang a chorus about the fish tales and the big cudas I had brag-

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Every family should have one member, at least, who is prepared to care for emergencies. This is of especial importance to young parents with growing families.

However, crises occur in the lives of older persons, too. It is becoming increasingly common for First Aid Training to be required in many kinds of employment. Actually, this instruction is necessary for everyone.

ged about. She sang the same verse over and over with little variation for the entire trip homeward except for the very last part of it. My hide was saved from further scorching by one of the most unusual sagas of the sea that I ever witnessed.

As Red rounded one of the mile-long breakwaters protecting Monrovia's harbor, he spotted a fellow Kru fisherman in distress. An old native, fishing close to home base, was hanging on to his handline like mad. Something on the other end of the line was pulling his dug-out canoe in first one direction and then another. Red shifted into high, and paddled frantically toward the ole man.

"Ole man got one hell of a torto. I help him.", Red told us, as he picked up his tempo as Jim Dandy to the rescue. When he got within 10 or 15 feet of the other canoe, he threw his paddle into our dug-out while leaping into the water all in the same motion. He swam to the old man's fishingline, and caught hold of it, then went under water, following the line down to the quarry hooked on the other end. Within a few seconds, which seemed like an hour to us, he popped back to the surface, riding piggy-back on a giant sea turtle, holding firmly to its front legs.

IN THE MEANTIME, Red's younger brother had also sighted the situation and had come on the scene. Red, holding this monster of the sea by its front legs, frog-kicked over to his brother's canoe, and held the turtle's forelegs out of the water for his brother to lift into his boat. When the brother got hold of the turtle, Red swam back to us. The torto must have been too heavy for the guy to lift into his boat, for as he tried to swing the thing over the side of his canoe, he lost his grip on one leg which slipped out of his hand. As the turtle stretched its neck to snap his steel-trap jaws on the fisherman's other hand, the fellow let the monster slip back into the water, rather than face life as a one-handed fisherman.

Red was furious with his brother, and rattled off some choice Kru talk a la my buddy, Red Marion. He told us, "My brother, one mother, two father, catch hell tonight-o. He let big meat get away."

(More about Red next week. Far, Far Place.)

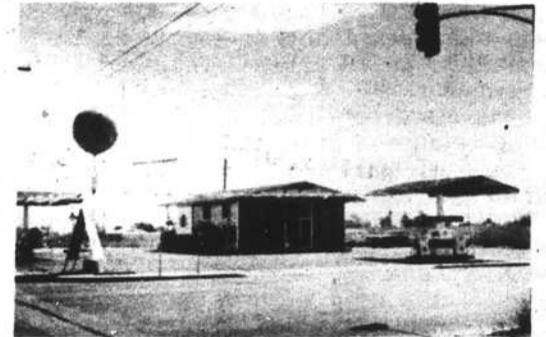
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