

How Chicago Angler Conquered Giant Tuna

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encounters style and swank in fishing terms. In northern Wisconsin and northern Minnesota, for instance, the gullible vacationist is told that he has caught a great northern pike (with accent on great and northern), whereas he has caught only the old familiar friend of his boyhood, the pickerel (*Esox lucius*), which is no more northern than it is central, and which is found in virtually every type of fresh water in the whole central and eastern section of the country and in waters at a considerable distance to the south.

But, tuna or tunny, the great silvery-sided monsters that lured Howell and his party to Nova Scotian waters this summer are major league fish. Anyone who has caught one will vouch for that. Howell, who owns and operates a 160-foot twin Diesel engine yacht—the *Thalia*—and gives employment to a crew of twenty principally so that he can pursue his favorite sport of fishing, cruised to Liverpool in the summer of 1933 to investigate at first hand the reports of giant tuna in those waters. In his party then was his fishing captain, Charley Thompson, who, Howell says, knows more about deep-sea fishing than any other salt-water roamer alive today, and who, according to popular belief in fishing circles, actually can smell out tuna, tarpon, swordfish, and the like, just as a bird dog locates a bevy of quail.

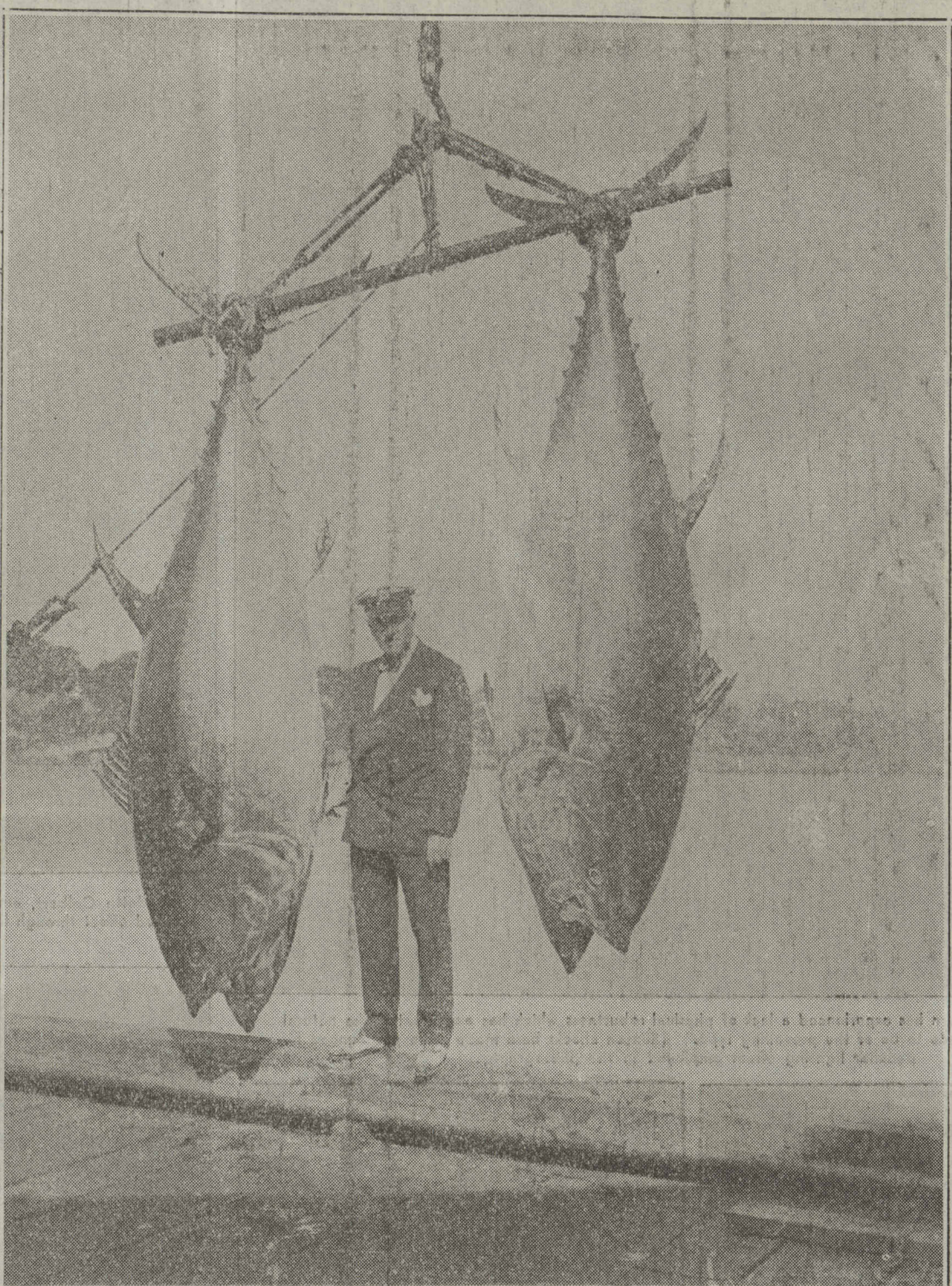
The 1933 Howell expedition to the waters around Liverpool was far from being highly successful. The fishermen of the party captured a few tuna, 320 pounds and under, but the big ones all got away, because of the fact that the reels employed were equipped with leather brakes, and such great force was used by the fishermen in applying those brakes to check the rushes of the fish that line after line was broken. Tactics employed on 140-pound sailfish just wouldn't work on 800-pound and 900-pound tuna.

No More Breaking of Lines

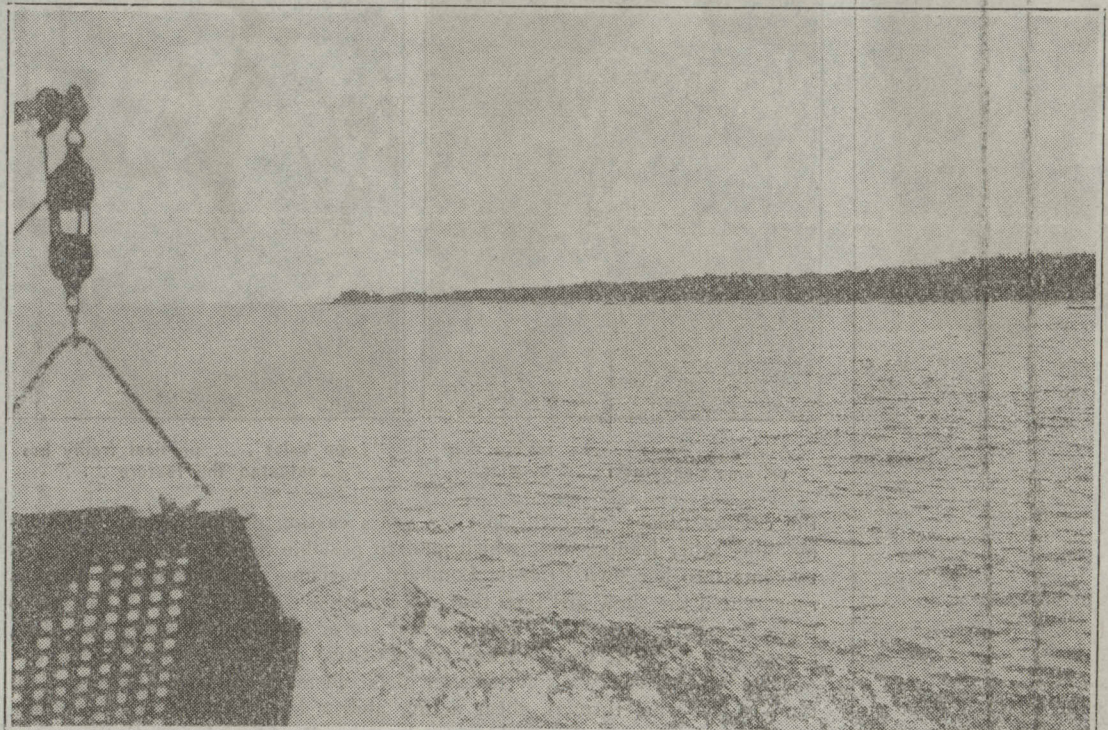
This year it was different. Howell and Captain Charley knew exactly the nature of their quarry. When word reached them that the giant tuna were inshore they pointed the nose of the *Thalia* for Liverpool and took along reels no longer equipped with leather brakes.

"We'll fight these fish to the finish, if it takes a week to each one," said Captain Charley; "but we won't break any more lines."

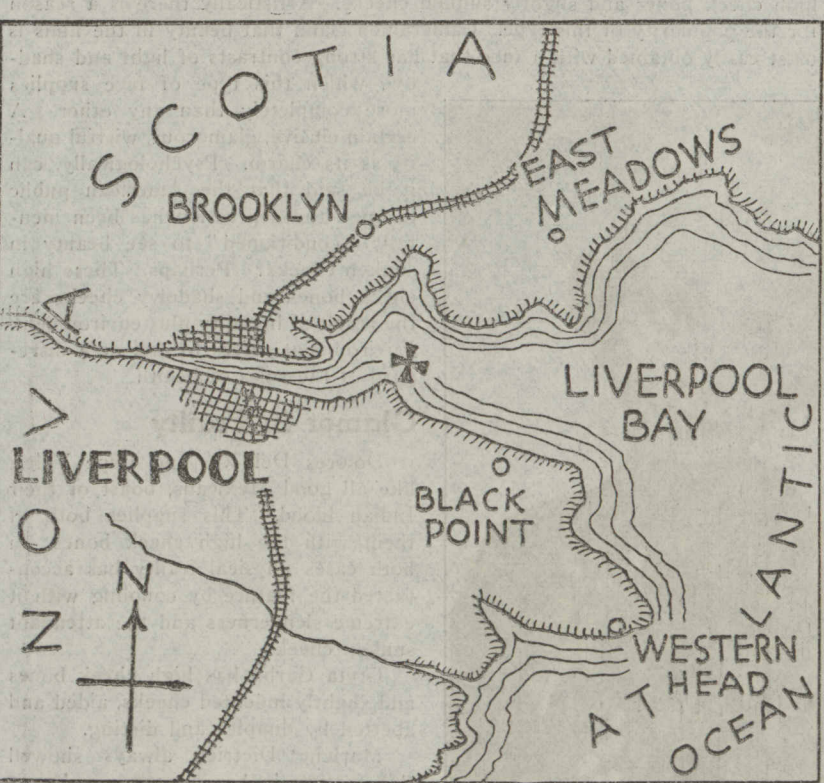
The reels in question are huge affairs, about the size of a boy's toy drum. Each is equipped with a tension screw by which any amount of drag up to a certain limit, can be applied to the spool of the reel. In fighting the giant tuna of Liverpool, Howell and his fishing captain decided to use a



"Five giant fish, including the record-breaking specimen, the 792-pounder, and a third weighing 780 pounds, were caught . . ." (Thomas M. Howell with the second and third largest of the five tuna.)



"The big fish . . . forage about the nets of the commercial fishermen placed along the shores of the bay . . ." (The best tuna fishing grounds as viewed from the deck of Howell's yacht.)



" . . . Liverpool, located in the narrowest reach of Liverpool bay and at the mouth of the Mersey river . . ." (Cross indicates tuna fishing grounds.)

drag of 40 pounds, just sufficient to let the fish know they were not free and intended in the end to wear down the rushes of the monsters.

The big tuna reel carries 600 yards of 36-thread linen line, which has a dry test of 72 pounds on a dead weight and which when wet will resist without breaking about 30 per cent in excess of the 72 pounds. Attached to the end of the line by a brass swivel is a 20-foot twisted wire leader, or trace, which in turn is attached to a tempered steel hook that is about four inches long and more than two and a half inches wide at the widest part of the curve.

The rod used with this equipment is a straight,

a beam of 7 feet. In its rear cockpit is located a swivel, chair, upon which the hero of the day sits with his rod in hand. The butt of the rod fits into a socket in the seat of the chair. From the shoulders of the fisherman harness extends to the reel. Several rods and reels, of course, are taken along in the boat, and in addition a vast plenty of rope, and plenty of food, supplies and motor fuel. The fishermen never know how long they will be at sea when they set out to catch a 700-pounder. The 62-hour stretch with the 700-pounder might have extended to twice that length of time, or more.

When the *Thalia* this summer reached Liverpool, located in the narrowest reach of Liverpool bay and

around the nets. Then one of the herring would be selected for the hook and impaled upon its point. Howell prefers to hook his bait through the head, with the point of the hook coming out through the belly. Other fishermen use that method or hook the bait either simply through the head or through the back.

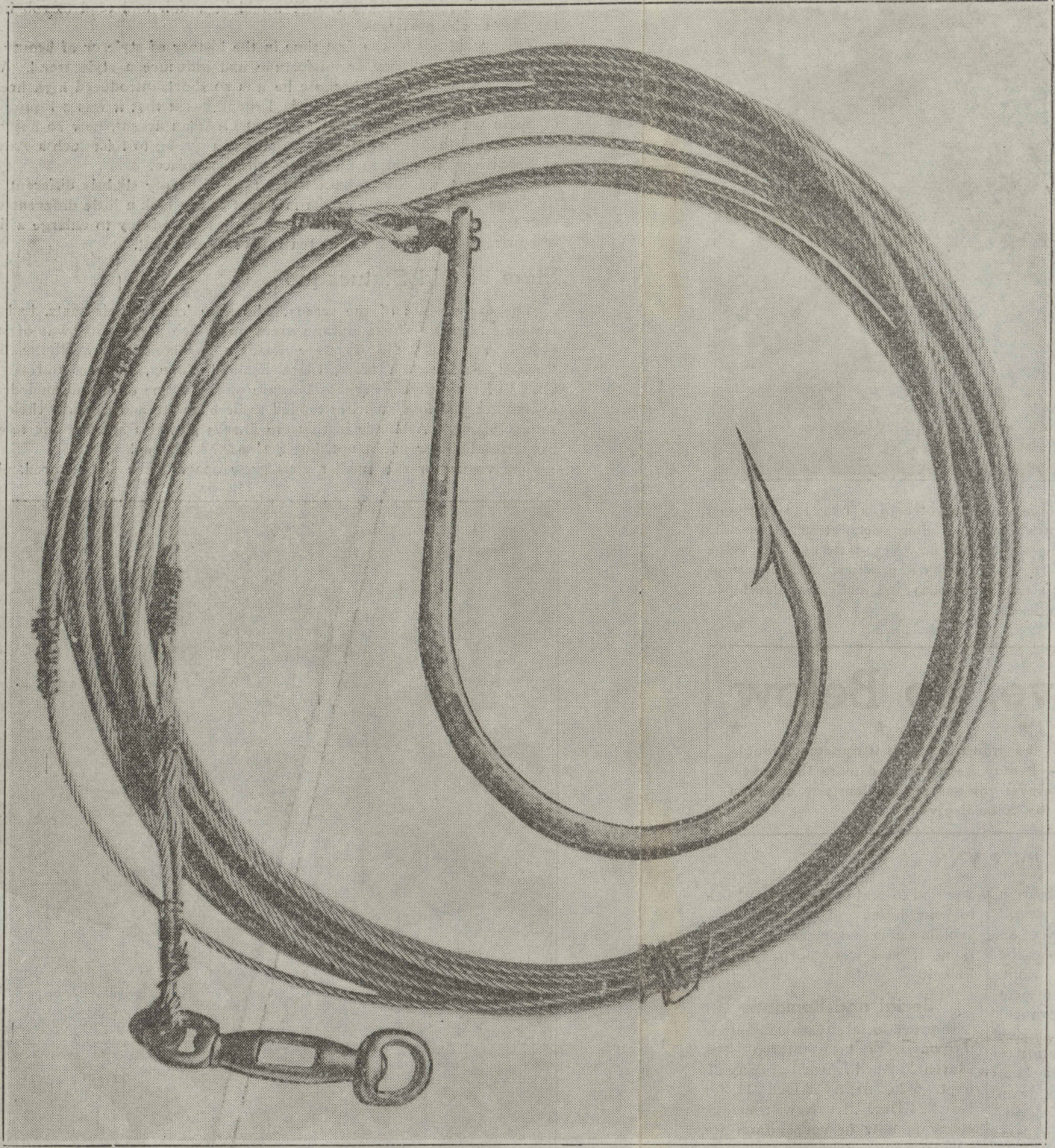
With the baited hook in the water, the fisherman would have nothing much of interest to occupy his time until that crucial moment when some great prowling tuna would seize the herring. Then action! Action! The fishing captain would loose the mooring and cast off from the buoy. The launchman would start the launch's engine. Some one would sound the signal horn on the craft. The yacht, lying in the harbor off the town and all prepared for the warning signal from the launch, would have its propeller throbbing by the time the anchor was weighed. It would slip silently away from the town to follow the launch, for no one would know just how far to sea the battle with the tuna would take the little fishing boat.

Fight to Finish

The tuna, which had taken the bait in about eight fathoms of water, in nearly every case would go for the open sea, most likely sounding for deep water as it rushed away from the launch; the launch, with its engine running, would attempt to keep up with the rush of the fish, but in most cases for the first fifteen or thirty minutes actually would be dragged along by the frantic tuna. Usually the first rush of the hooked fish would be the worst. But always, always tugging on the line until the end, the creature would never give up until the last ounce of its strength was exhausted.

Man against fish, the fisherman simply would hang on to his rod at first. As the tuna would grow weaker in its struggles, the fisherman would retrieve a bit of line when possible, not merely by reeling in the line in the manner of an ordinary inland lake angler,

All this and more were what made the thrills for Howell in the catching of the five giant tuna off Nova Scotia this summer. On the morning of Aug. 6, just as the sun was climbing over the rim of the Atlantic away out at sea, Howell, a guest, Arthur De Cordova of New York; Capt. Charley Thompson, and a launchman left the yacht in their tiny fishing boat. Picking up their two bushels of herring for bait, they tied up their launch to a net buoy about two miles east of the anchored yacht and close to the southern shore of the bay. It isn't recorded that they had any premonition of what was in store. They simply fished, with Howell manipulating the rod. At 11 o'clock the fisherman



"Attached to the end of the line by a brass swivel is a 20-foot twisted wire leader, or trace, which in turn is attached to a tempered steel hook . . ." (Hook, swivel, and 20-foot leader [colored] are shown here actual size.)

Salt Water Rod and Reel Records

SPECIES	WEIGHT	WHERE CAUGHT	DATE	BY WHOM
Tuna	954 lbs.	Liverpool, Nova Scotia	Aug. 17, 1934	Thomas M. Howell
Swordfish (striped marlin)	1,040 lbs.	Valparaiso, Chile	May 16, 1930	Zane Grey
Swordfish (black marlin)	975 lbs.	Bay of Islands, New Zealand	Feb. 25, 1926	Capt. L. D. Mitchell
Swordfish (broadsword)	673 lbs.	Bay of Islands, New Zealand	Jan. 9, 1928	H. White-Wickham
Tarpon	232 lbs.	Panuco river, Mexico	March, 1911	W. A. McLaren
Shark	798 lbs.	Bay of Islands, New Zealand	Jan. 23, 1931	H. White-Wickham
Sawfish	600 lbs.	Fort Myers, Fla.	May 2, 1897	E. vom Hofe
Snook	180 lbs.	Paria Island, Panama	Aug. 1, 1931	W. B. Gray
Ju-fish	750 lbs.	Miami, Fla.	1925	Richard Tallman
Black sea bass	515 lbs.	Catalina Island, California	1916	Wallace Beery

(With the exception of that relative to Mr. Howell's tuna, all of the records above were supplied by Field & Stream.)

got a lusty strike. Away rushed the tuna. Captain Charley chopped the mooring line in two and the launch was free, its motor already firing. Out, ran the fish line, almost to its end before the launch could gain momentum and Howell could check the first rush of his fish. As the tuna would grow weaker in its struggles, the fisherman would retrieve a bit of line when possible, not merely by reeling in the line in the manner of an ordinary inland lake angler,

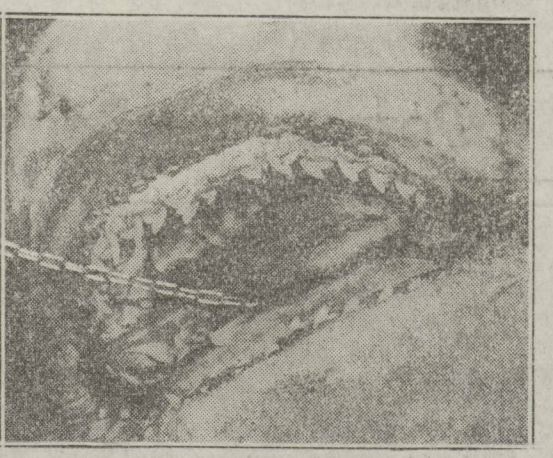
but by pumping the rod upward and backward and gaining a few feet of line through the use of the reel crank when lowering the rod after an upward movement. On and on, through long minutes that might stretch into lengthy hours, this struggle would continue. Finally the fish would reach its limit of fight. Slowly it would be worked toward the launch, its movements growing feebler with each succeeding moment. In the end the tuna would be dead, or nearly dead. As it would float helplessly beside the launch, the fishing captain would gaff it to hold it securely until a rope could be fastened around its tail. Then the elated fisherman would start for the yacht with their trophy in tow.

linen line right off the spool of the reel. The tuna rushed to the surface for one mighty splash after another; then down, down it went to the deep. Out in the open ocean the water was considerably rougher than in the bay. How followed hour without any signs of the fish weakening. Howell turned the rod over to his guest. More hours followed. Captain Charley took the rod. Night came on, and with darkness the waves increased in height.

Through that first night the fishermen took turns with the rod. The next day it was the same, with the sea seemingly growing heavier all the time. All that next day and all through the second night the tuna rushed and fought against the hook and line. At times the little party of four was drenched with spray. At other times the waves threatened to swamp the launch. Several times the fishermen were at the point of cutting the line in order to escape into the bay to get away from the perils of the sea. But they hung on through the third day and through most of the third night, until 1 o'clock on the morning of Aug. 9, when the huge fish with the fighting heart was brought to gaff. In all that time Captain Charley had only three hours' sleep.

The fish weighed, as related before, 792 pounds, and was thought at first to be a world's record-breaker, though later it was discovered that a greater tuna had been caught previously by a sporting Britisher. The tuna was 9 feet 7 inches long and its girth measurement was 6 feet 7 inches.

Howell figured that he could land a bigger tuna. He did. On the morning of Aug. 17 he hooked and landed the record fish in 1 hour and 48 minutes. There was nothing wrong with that fish, either. It just did not fight as long as the 792-pounder, though it was hooked in the mouth in a similar fashion. Howell knew that he had his quarry well in hand after the first thirty minutes and cautiously played the big fellow to the end. It was towed to the wharf of a fish shipping house and weighed by tested scales—956 pounds of tuna. It was 10 feet 3 inches long and 7 feet 4 inches around at its heaviest point. The meat of the big tuna was given to the townspeople; its skin was packed in a barrel



"Big, wicked devils, they trailed his tiny fishing launch . . ." (Jaws of tiger shark.)

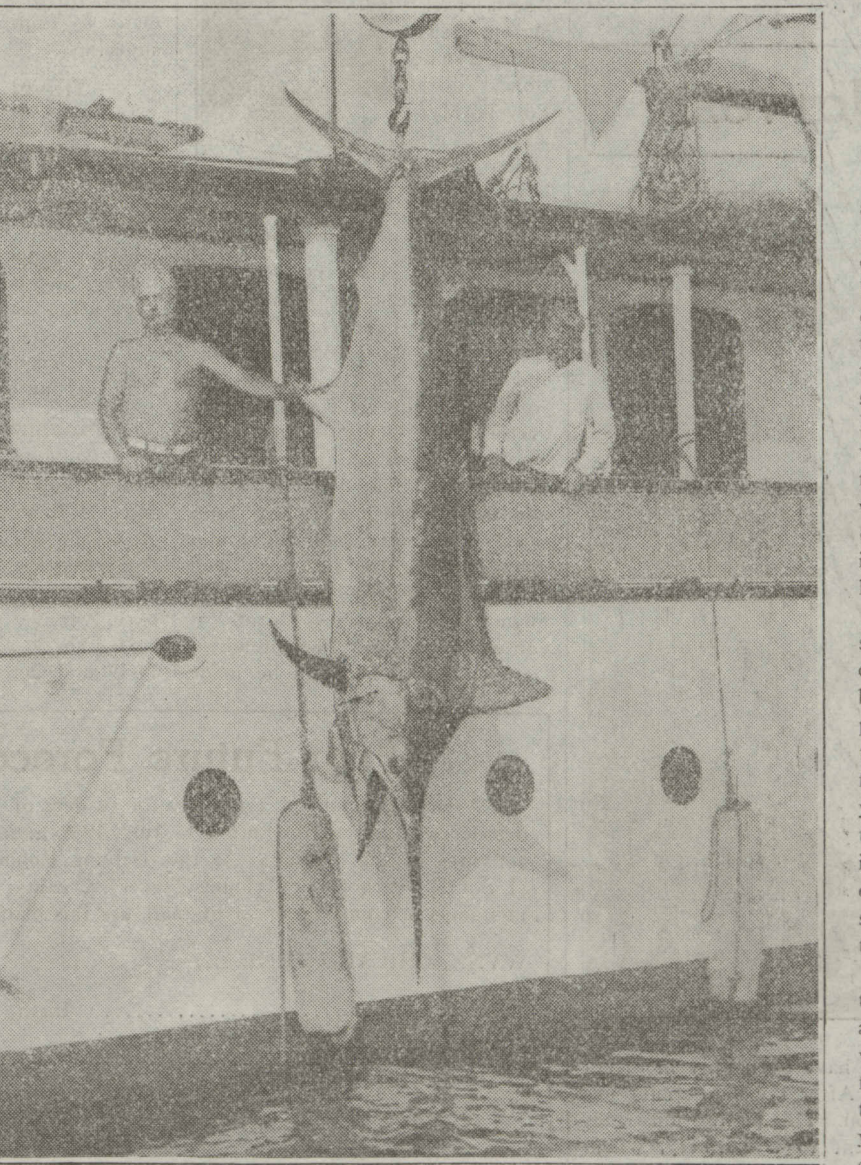
By direction of Howell, his yacht cruises up and down the Atlantic coast throughout the fishing seasons as they come in the calendar—in the north in the summer, in the south in the winter. The yacht stops here and there where this or that kind of fish is striking. The 22-foot launch is carried on the deck of the yacht. The captain of the yacht is boss of the launch only when that last named craft is on the deck of the yacht, but he is not captain of the launch when it is aloft on the important business of fishing. Capt. Charley Thompson is commander and navigator of the little fishing boat at all times when it is at sea.

Howell attends to his business in Chicago a great part of his time. When he figures that he can spend a few days or a few weeks on his yacht, he catches a train and goes east to whatever port the yacht at the time may be. His fishing captain keeps him informed as to how the fish are biting. If it is off Long Island that the *Thalia* is anchored there is always the splendid chance of getting in other big broadbill swordfish, like the 405-pounder. If it is off Florida, there is always the thrill of capturing the hard-fighting tarpon. But though Nova Scotia, Long Island, and Florida all are dear to the fisherman's heart of Thomas M. Howell, it was in the waters around those far-away Pacific islands, the Galapagos, that he had his most fun.

Studies Wild Life

On those islands, twelve large ones and several hundred small ones, lying 500 miles west of Ecuador, Howell became deeply interested in the subject of ornithology and took countless photographs of many varieties of the 85 different kinds of birds abounding there. The magnificent albatross, bird of ill fortune of "The Ancient Mariner"; the delicate-hued frigatebird, the rare flightless cormorants—all these and many others were recorded on his camera's films. He studied the giant land tortoises, and members of his crew captured the equally big sea turtles that lay their eggs in the sun-scorched sand of the Galapagos beaches.

In the waters around some of the more remote islands he fished for sailfish, and caught one only forty pounds lighter than the world's record-breaker. In the same waters he took on his line the 650-pound black marlin swordfish, the terrifying head of which pro-



" . . . a 650-pound black marlin swordfish from the waters around the Galapagos islands in the Pacific . . ." (Taken off Tower Island, Galapagos archipelago.)

jects over his desk in his private office in Chicago. He took thousands of feet of movies of his battles with these monsters of the tropical seas, the quick eye of the camera catching clearly the leaps of the sailfish as it broke water time after time.

Among Sharks

It was in the Galapagos seas, teeming with an astounding variety of marine life, that Howell encountered the shark as a game fish. Big, wicked devils, they trailed his tiny fishing launch, their dorsal fins protruding above the surface of the water and their wide, ugly jaws, filled with chisel-like teeth, snapping under his very nose. Sometimes he baited a hook for these monsters. At other times his fishing captain took a harpoon into the back of one or another that approached the launch too closely. Whether hooked or harpooned, the shark always put up a desperate fight



" . . . fished for sailfish, and caught one only forty pounds lighter than the world's record-breaker." (Sailfish, weighing 140 pounds, gaffed and dragged into the launch after a thrilling battle near Hood Island, of the Galapagos group.)

at intervals by good, clean excitement. His health "is benefited immensely." And his knowledge of the wild life of water, earth, and air is extended in a 11 dimensions through the manifestations of nature that he constantly observes.

Born to Sport

Some men are born fishermen and others take up angling late in life. Among the first-named group, of course, is Howell, who cannot remember back to the time when he was not interested in fishing. Another of the group is Zane Grey, the novelist, who is known as the world's premier fisherman from the fact that he has traveled to almost every well known and many an obscure distant fishing ground in seeking variety in the sport. Grey has fished the eastern and the western coasts, Florida and the Hawaiian waters, and has cast his line more than once in the clear waters of far-off South Sea islands. He has owned and operated several private yachts and has invested thousands of dollars in fishing equipment. Not long ago he set out with seven or eight companions on a \$500,000 tour around the world—mainly to catch fish.

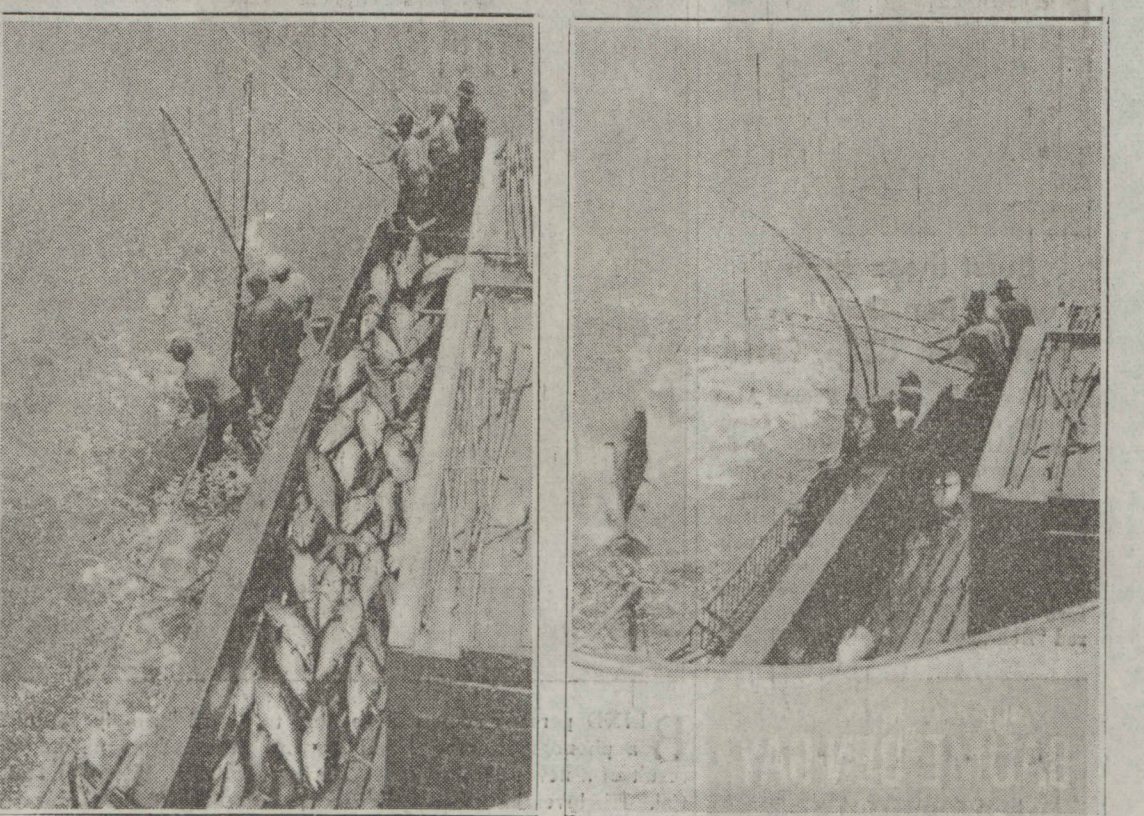
Of the group of men who take up fishing late in life, the late Calvin Coolidge, former President of the United States, was an outstanding example. It is said of Coolidge that when he was a boy in Vermont, and within easy distance of streams inhabited by those beautiful and gamey little fish, the brook trout, he showed little if any interest in fishing. It was only after he became President, and it was impressed upon him that he should take up some sport to popularize him with the people, that he



" . . . in the waters around those far-away Pacific islands, the Galapagos . . . he had his most fun." (Howell with 140-pound sailfish.)

chose to fish. Let it be recorded here, however, that, though Coolidge remained to the end basically a worm fisherman and he never learned the finer points of the sport, he was not a sham fisherman. He actually learned to like it. In his neat business suit and his white collar, and under the shade of a cowboy hat, he visited onto him, in well-meaning friends, he would sit for hour after hour—waiting for a fish to bite.

President, millionaire, common man—it is fishing that puts them on the same level and gives them the same common interest. It is in that sport that men of all walks in life can meet on the equal plane of brotherhood.



" . . . angle in teams of three for the fish that finally and up in little cans." (Howell with 140-pound sailfish.)