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Allen Tyrrell oral history interview by Robert Cardin, July 20, 2010

Allen Tyrrell (Interviewee)

Robert Cardin (Interviewer)

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Robert Cardin: Hello, this is Robert Cardin. Today is July 20, 2010. I am at my residence, conducting an oral history with Captain Al Tyrrell for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation project with the Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Al. Would you please state and spell your name?

Allen Tyrrell: Name’s Al Tyrrell, T-y-r-r-e-l-l.

RC: And Al, when were you born?

AT: Born August 15, 1924, long time ago. (laughs)
RC: (laughs) Twenty-four [1924], okay.

AT: Yeah.

RC: Where were you born at, Al?

AT: I was born in New York, Brooklyn, and spent most of my time—my young life—you know, right there in Brooklyn. Moved to Long Island, Hempstead, when I was sixteen.

RC: When did you move to Fort Pierce?

AT: Well, I joined the Marine Corps in 1942 and was in the Second World War, two and a half years of combat over there, Second World War. After I got back out of the service in forty-six [1946], I came to Florida. I’d just got married up there in Boston, to a girl out of Boston, and we came to Daytona Beach. That’s where I came first, to Florida—1946, to Daytona. I bought a house right there, a mile east of what is now the racetrack.

RC: Oh, yeah?

AT: Yeah, I bought a house there: three bedrooms, two bath. I didn’t do any fishing then. I was managing the restaurants. That was in the 1940s. I managed a restaurant on the beach in Daytona. I don’t know if you want to hear anything about that.

RC: I would like to know—you say you were two and a half years over there. Where were you, Al, if you don’t mind me asking?

AT: Oh, overseas? In the South Pacific. Yeah, I was in—I went through boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and the rifle range in North Carolina, Camp Lejeune; then they shipped us over to Camp Elliott in California and shipped us overseas. We went through jungle training in French Samoa, and then we went from there into the invasion of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. That was in 1943. From there, they sent us back to—we stayed in the Gilbert Islands for, like, six—about five or six months, and then they shipped us back to Hawaii for R and R. And spent, I don’t know, three or four months in Kauai, and they gave us a lot of free time up there before they sent us. Then, from Hawaii, they sent us into Okinawa, and we made a D-Day landing in Okinawa. That was in April 1 of forty-five [1945], I believe.
RC: So, you spent a good two and a half years off the continental U.S.

AT: Yeah.

RC: Well, I’m glad you’re here to talk to us, Al.

AT: Yeah, I’m lucky. (both laugh) It’s like I told this guy, I says, “I’m just lucky to be here. I went through a lot of stuff over there.” A lot of my buddies are still there, you know. I just was one of the lucky ones to get back, and that’s the way it is. I stepped on the ship—we did a lot of (inaudible) searching for snipers after everything settled down. I was with an anti-aircraft outfit, and we were on the cliff right near Yontan Air Force Base in Okinawa. We used to get a lot of souvenirs from the Japs [Japanese] and trade ’em all for whatever, whiskey or guns. I had a sub Thompson [Thompson submachine gun] and Rauser machine gun, various weapons that I traded with the Air Force. The Air Force had everything.

RC: They had all the supplies?

AT: Yeah, they had everything. So, then they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and we had an excess amount of points on our outfit. They could have sent us home a long time ago, but they kept us over there. When they dropped the bomb and the Japanese surrendered, that’s when they sent us back, two weeks after they dropped the bomb. I boarded a ship for Seattle, Washington. I asked the guy—he was the master sergeant in our outfit—“How many guys are left from our outfit, our original outfit?” We came over with a regular battalion, and that was 1300 guys. He said, “There’s twenty-six of us left.”

RC: Oh, my God.

AT: I felt damn lucky to get on that ship and go back to Seattle, you know.

RC: Glad you’re back, Al. It’s been a pleasure in my lifetime listening to you on the marine radio and stuff like that. Wouldn’t have been the same without you.

AT: (laughs) Well, I’m just lucky. I got through all that stuff.
RC: What brought you here to the Fort Pierce area?

AT: Well, I originally came from Daytona to Riviera Beach, which was a pretty good fishing town at that time, back in the sixties [1960s]. I was with Morrison’s Cafeteria and I worked as a manager for Morrison’s in West Palm Beach. Then, on my day off, I bought this—my first boat, and just for the hell of it, I went out fishing with these commercial, you know the way the commercial fleet was. Started catching fish, and I made as much money in one day as I made all week managing the restaurant. (RC laughs) So I said, “Well, I think I’m gonna start fishing.” (laughs)

RC: That would have made a deciding point.

AT: Yeah. So, I started fishing there in Riviera with a lot of the old timers. They’re gone now, but Max Pender, Stanley, all those guys.

RC: Stanley? Who was Stanley?

AT: Stanley Pender—

RC: Max and Stanley Pender?

AT: Yeah, they’re from Riviera Beach, and they were good fishermen.

RC: Do you remember the point of actually moving to Fort Pierce?

AT: Yeah, the fishing got slow down there in Riviera Beach, and everybody was traveling to Fort Pierce because they had a big run of kingfish up there in Fort Pierce. So, I just moved from Riviera Beach to Fort Pierce, and actually had a trailer when I first came up, stayed out there at ABC Trailer Park, and fished Fort Pierce from there on out.

RC: Do you remember when it was when you came up here?

AT: It was, like—it was in the seventies [1970s]. I think it was 1973. Nineteen seventy-three, I came up.
RC: It sounds like the kingfish is what brought you here.

AT: I think so. I think they did. They had a big run of fish down there in Riviera and then the fish moved out, like they usually do. They go north. Then we caught ’em red hot in Sebastian, we were catching—it was unlimited then, and we were catching anywhere from 1500 to 2200 in Sebastian.

RC: Were those day trips?

AT: Yeah, day trip, one day trips.

RC: Man, that’s some good fishing.

AT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there was a lot of good fish there. And I fished, you know, Fort Pierce, Sebastian.

RC: Al, are you married now?

AT: Yeah, still married. My wife’s in Alabama. (laughs)

RC: How old were you when you got married to your present wife?

AT: That was back in—let’s see, it’ll be forty-seven years. It was back in the early sixties [1960s]. I think it was sixty-two [1962], yeah.

RC: Al, how many children do you have and how old are they?

AT: Got ten, ten children, six boys, four girls.

RC: Well, can you give me a range of ages instead of naming all off every one of them? (laughs) What’s your youngest and what’s your oldest?
AT: From—let’s see, the youngest one is—she would be twenty-seven. She’s not here any longer. She had a bad accident—

RC: Oh, Lord.

AT: —and passed away. And the oldest one is Anne, and she’s, like, sixty-three. I think she’s sixty-three.

RC: Thank you for sharing that with me, Al. I’m sorry to hear that. How much schooling do you have personally, high school or college?

AT: I was seventeen. I was in the last grade of high school and I turned eighteen and went into the Marine Corps. I never actually graduated from high school. But yeah, I went into the Marine Corps when I was eighteen. I’d just turned eighteen.

RC: I know you don’t have any other job besides fishing at this point in your life, but how ’bout in the past? What other jobs do you have, just a restaurant manager? What else did you try?

AT: I was in the restaurant business.

RC: Just in general?

AT: Yeah, yeah. I was pretty much assistant manager, then manager. I had my own place in Tampa one time.

RC: Oh, you had your own restaurant?

AT: Yeah, yeah, had a big barbeque pit with a drive-in. I ran two drive-in restaurants over there in Tampa for this guy. He was a builder and a millionaire, I don’t know about a multi-millionaire. I was running his restaurant in Daytona before the sixties [1960s]; it was in the fifties [1950s]. He wanted to start some drive-ins. He had his own plane and we used to fly back and forth from Daytona to Tampa. We started a drive-in restaurant in Tampa. Actually, he built two of ’em and I ran both of ’em for him. But I pretty much stayed in the restaurant business most of the time before I started fishing.
RC: Sounds like he shouldn’t have given you the day off to do fishing, huh?

AT: Yeah, I guess. (laughs)

RC: Well, now I’d like to talk about the Oculina Bank a little bit. How familiar are you with the Oculina Bank, Al?

AT: Oh, I fished the Oculina Bank, when I couldn’t find any snapper or grouper after we kingfished in the mornings. We would kingfish maybe up till twelve o’clock. And then, you know, a lot of guys would hunt for grouper and snapper on the offshore bar; then, if you wouldn’t find ’em there, you would go out further towards the Oculina Bank. Generally, there was good spots out there. You could find snapper and grouper out there.

RC: If you went there, they were there?

AT: Yeah.

RC: (coughs) Excuse me. Al, do you know why it was designated as an area to protect?

AT: Well, why it was an area to be protected? Because of the coral on the bottom.

RC: Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank? What do you know about it?

AT: Well, I think that, more or less, it was a super-good spot for snapper and grouper, number one. But I think that the rock shrimpers and the scallopers pretty much devastated the coral out there on it, ’cause I seen ’em out there a lot. I would see ’em right out there, right on the bank.

RC: Right there where you were trying to fish?

AT: Oh, yeah, they were there.

RC: Has this closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing?
AT: Yeah. Well, you can’t go snapper or grouper fishing. So, naturally it impacts what you catch.

RC: Your bottom fish landings?

AT: Right.

RC: Did it cause you to, like—you said you’d fish till noon for kingfish and then switch to snapper and grouper. Once the Oculina Bank—once you were no longer allowed to do that, did that shift your effort in any way? Now you had to kingfish all day, or you came home?

AT: Well, the fish in Fort Pierce, especially, they have the habit of quitting about one o’clock. It’s pretty difficult to get ‘em, unless—in the wintertime, sometimes you’ll find a bunch of fish after one o’clock. But they just generally shut down at one o’clock.

RC: So the nature of the beast, without that afternoon option, I guess it just shortens your days?

AT: Oh, yeah, it lessens it, definitely.

RC: Less income, basically, would be your—

AT: Less income, that’s right.

RC: Well, if bottom fishing and anchoring wasn’t prohibited in there, would you still fish there or would you have ever quit?

AT: Well, if you could fish there right now?

RC: Yeah.

AT: Yeah, I would definitely go out there and try to catch some.

RC: We spoke about bottom fish. Can you tell me how you bottom fished out there?
AT: Well—

RC: Was it like hook and line fishing or bandit?

AT: Yeah, I would anchor up on a spot I marked some fish on and—

RC: And bandit fish ’em?

AT: Yeah, I had a regular bandit reel. I had two of ’em. I had one of my sons on one side and I would be on the other. We’d catch 300 or 400 pounds.

RC: That’s groupers and snapper?

AT: That’s groupers and snapper, both.

RC: What else did you fish for out there, amberjacks or the pig porgies or any of that? Did you ever do any of that?

AT: No, I never did amberjack fish. I just more or less—

RC: One of them top dollar fish?

AT: —snapper/grouper, you know, a few porgies mixed in with ’em. But that was it.

RC: So, this would be like 300 pounds on top of the 1,000 pounds or something you might have already caught of kingfish?

AT: Yeah, whatever we caught on kingfish would be, you know, 300 or 400 pounds of snapper/grouper on top of that.

RC: Sounds like a heck of a day.
AT: Yeah, it was big days back then. (laughs)

RC: Al, overall, how has fishing changed in your area since you began—excuse me. How has fishing changed in the Fort Pierce area, just overall, in general changes you’ve seen?

AT: Well, actually, the fishing in the seventies [1970s] and the sixties [1960s] was super good. You could catch—as far as kingfish, you’re talking about catching 1,000 to 1800 in a day. My best catch was 2200 in a one day catch. Now, that was pretty consistent back before the gill nets. Once the gill nets started, they would catch 30,000, 40,000 at a crack and disturb the school of fish, and you would have a hard time catching a lot of fish. That was during the unlimited times.

RC: So, they would what, turn the fish off or scatter ’em out?

AT: They would scatter ’em out and they wouldn’t bite in the morning because they would—a lot of times they’d set ’em right before dark and right after dark, and it would spook the fish.

RC: So, they wouldn’t bite. So, right in the morning when you would you’d normally have a bite, they were spooked and then you never had an afternoon bite. It pretty much shot the whole day, netting at night time.

AT: Oh, yeah.

RC: Well, now that that’s not allowed, I guess that would be another change in the fishery. What would be a more recent observation?

AT: Recently, in the last three years, I saw an increase in the kingfishing. There would be limits in different areas, like there would be boats catching limits in Cape Canaveral and boats catching limits in Sebastian, boats catching here, limits, and Jupiter—and all in the same day. So, that told me that there was a lot more fish that was beginning to show in the last three years. Right now we got some cold water that’s pushing the fish around, but—

RC: So, you used to—you kind of might have to follow the fish around a little bit. But now, the fish are actually more scattered out in general.
AT: Yeah, they were at different times, when the water was right. You know, we got a lot of cold water right now, but it’s shoving the fish pretty much south or wherever the good water is. That’s where the fish are. Yeah, there was limits everywhere. That told me that there’s a lot of fish around.

RC: Fish everywhere.

AT: I’d say so, yeah.

RC: (laughs) Well, Al, when you were fishing in the Oculina Bank, did you have any experiences with law enforcement within the bank or regarding the bank?

AT: No, I didn’t.

RC: Never came up and checked you or anything?

AT: No, they never bothered me up there. That was quite a while back.

RC: Well, now, I want to talk to you about a little bit about your fishing history, and I know that you’ve mentioned some of it. So, we’ll try not to double up wherever we can. But let’s go back to what’s your first memory of fishing and how old were you? Like, were you fishing with your grandpa on the pond? What got you into it?

AT: Well, what got me into it? Well, I used to fish in the lake in the yard with a thread and a safety pin and catch catfish out of the lake when I was a kid. (laughs)

RC: Did you love it back then, too?

AT: Oh, I loved it, yeah. Then, when they gave us a break here in Hawaii when I was in the Marine Corps—they gave us R and R and gave us days off. So, I run into this Hawaiian Chinese guy. He had a bunch of boats, and I got to know him pretty good and I used to help him fish mullet in the river.

RC: In Hawaii?
AT: In Hawaii.

RC: Regular old mullet?

AT: Regular mullet. He had net boats. And he would go up the river about right just before dark, and he would put one part of his net on one bank and stretch it right into the other bank. Then, he would go up about, I don’t know, a thousand yards, something like that and stretch another piece of net across. Then we would take a heavy weight and scare the hell out of ’em and he would scare them into the net and he would fill the boat up full of mullet, yeah.

And then, also, he would have these observers. He had guys working for him (inaudible) Hawaiians that were on the beach at daylight on these high towers like lifeguard towers you see on the beach, and he had them spotting fish. When they spotted a bunch of fish, they’d call him and he’d have a couple of ’em row the boat out. It was called the Wailua River over there in Kauai. It was dead calm; it was in a lagoon. And he’d have ’em bring a beach seine and he would drop, you know, like a beach seine and he’d drop it on the beach, and then two guys would row around the fish and come around and drop the other side on the beach. Then, three of us on each side would pull the net in. I helped him pull the net in a lot of times. He’d have, I don’t know, 5,000 or 6,000 pounds of fish.

RC: Pulled right up there on the beach.

AT: Right there on the beach. You know, and people used to stop along the highway and they’d buy ’em live right out of the net; and then the excess, he’d take to town and sell ’em.

RC: Sounds like a sight.

AT: Yeah, I had a lot of fun. I didn’t get any money out of it, but I just had a good time. (laughs) He’d call me and wrote me letters and want me to come back to Hawaii to fish with him, you know, but I got married and I had a little baby girl to start with. Shoot, I didn’t go back. I could have went back then and fished over there, but I didn’t.

RC: So, your dog tags didn’t get in the way when you were pulling in the nets? You just—

AT: No.
RC: Did you have to keep ’em on when you was on R and R?

AT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I had to keep the dog tags on.

RC: So, you was out there in your military clothes and sitting there fishing, huh?

AT: Yeah, well, you just—you know, you didn’t—you’d wear your khakis over there in Hawaii, yeah. They weren’t too strict on you when I—

RC: “Sarge, I was taking them on and off, sarge. I’ll be on the beach.” Is that the way it was?

AT: Yeah.

RC: That’s cool.

AT: Well, you know, the same way when we were in combat over there. You wore what you want to wore. You didn’t have to wear a shirt. That’s the way it was. You wore anything. They didn’t care.

RC: I just wondered how you kept from being AWOL [absent without leave]. Sounds like you spent a lot of time on the beach. (laughs)

AT: No, they’d give you a couple of days off and you’d go to work one day, you know, that’s that.

RC: That sounds like fun. So, Al, you said you went fishing on your little boat and had a big catch that was the same—as big as a week’s restaurant pay, and I guess just all of a sudden, you decided, “I’m gonna be a commercial fisherman.” Is that the day it hit you?

AT: Yeah, it just—I figured out what I was making in the restaurant spending sixteen hours a day working for Morrison’s Cafeteria, you know, all peer pressure. I mean, that place is loaded. We probably fed 5,000 on lunch and 4,000 on dinner.
RC: Jeez.

AT: I mean, you know, a lot of peer pressure, a lot of people coming through the line, and it was a lot of pressure. So, the ocean, to me, was a lot different, and a hell of a lot better. So, I said, “Well, I think I can make as much money in the ocean as I can in this restaurant.” So, that’s why I started.

RC: Is that that first day out? You said followed the other boys out and you had what, did you have a thousand pounds or something?

AT: No, I just said, like, 500.

RC: And what were they paying for ’em back then?

AT: Yeah, they were—

RC: How much was the first fish you sold worth?

AT: Oh, the first fish, that was cheap. The first fish back, way back there, were like fifteen cents. And they went lower than that.

RC: So, that was a $75 paycheck the first day.

AT: Yeah, but I actually made more money in the restaurant. But per day, there was more money per day.

RC: Yeah, a lot more money.

AT: Yeah. Well, it was a better life. It was a lot calmer out there in the ocean. I had sixty-five people working under me: salad girls, waiters, cooks, you name it.

RC: Busboys and dishwashers.
AT: Busboys, dishwashers. Yeah, it was a pain in the rear end, a lot of pressure.

RC: Well, you must have made a good choice. It’s been over fifty years now that you’ve been fishing.

AT: Yep.

RC: So, you must have liked your choice. Well, how old do you think you were when you came up here to Fort Pierce? You said that was in the early seventies [1970s], like seventy-three [1973]. So, that would put us at thirty-seven years ago.

AT: Yeah.

RC: I’ll be darned. You came up here and you was fishing the kingfish, and you were—how did you fish for the kingfish in the seventies [1970s] here in Fort Pierce, trolling or hand hunting?

AT: Yeah, trolling featherheads, spoons mostly. I used a lot of spoons. Bugs, you know, a (inaudible) bug.

RC: So, you were jerking a bug and everything back in the seventies [1970s].

AT: Yeah.

RC: Changed much. When you first came up, you came up and you fished by yourself in your own boat, or you and a son?

AT: Yeah, I had a bunch of boys.

RC: That was what, a twenty-six foot boat?

AT: Yeah, when I first came up here, I had a little blue Lapstrake wood boat, twenty-six footer.

RC: That was a Chris-Craft, wasn’t it?
AT: It was a—I forget the name of the name of the make of it. The first one was Chris-Craft. The second one was—

RC: That was a wood boat you was fishing up here in the seventies [1970s]?

AT: Yeah, a wooden boat, yeah.

RC: Here we got a chart of the Fort Pierce area. Here’s the coast. Here’s Fort Pierce, and I think we can see the 12 and 14 Buoy. Is that the Bethel Buoy up there?

AT: Right.

RC: Can you show me on the map where you fished here in Fort Pierce?

AT: Yeah. Back then, we fished a lot on the Northeast Grounds. That was—you know, Northeast. I think 350, LORAN number 350, 966, all the way to Bethel.

RC: And there’s what, outside of the bar there outside of the Bethel Buoy or just up through here?

AT: Yeah, we fished Bethel. We fished on the bar outside of Bethel Buoy—

RC: Up there on the (inaudible)—

AT: —up to 400 to 420 or 440. Also, back then there was a lot of fish the first part of the year, like in November. There was a lot fish in Vero [Beach], inshore, all that where—

RC: That had to be up in here.

AT: Yeah, just right outside of the cove. There was a lot of kingfish then, but not too much anymore. But back then, back in the seventies [1970s], there was. There was a lot of fish in
Vero. North of 12, yeah, there was a lot of fish there, too. They were between north of 12 and— but the Northeast Grounds was the hot spot.

RC: So, we’re talking seventy, eighty and ninety feet here in the Northeast Grounds?

AT: Yeah, I think that was more productive than anywhere.

RC: I guess up there off the Vero Cove, you’re talking about forty, fifty, sixty feet?

AT: Yeah, it was just offshore of the cove. Yeah.

RC: And as north of 12 [Buoy], you’re referring to this fifty, sixty foot bottom in here?

AT: Yeah, just 6200 line, right there north of 12 Buoy. We caught quite a few fish there when we fished for Charlie Lowe. That’s Steve’s dad.¹

RC: Right.

AT: Yeah.

RC: And his fish house was what (inaudible) Charlie’s? No? What was the name of his fish house?

AT: I didn’t know anything but Charlie Lowe’s. (laughs)

RC: Trying to remember Steve telling us the name of it.

AT: Oh, yeah.

RC: (inaudible)

¹ Steve Lowe was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00014.
AT: Yeah.

RC: I see you’ve picked—so, in general, the Fort Pierce kingfish grounds have always been the Northeast Grounds and north of 12 [Buoy] basically, the two grounds we have down here.

AT: Yeah, but there was—you know, you could head east. They pretty much showed up—it was the funniest thing when they showed up. They were thickest on the Northeast Grounds, but you did catch some east of the inlet, too. It’s according to the water. You know how the water gets bad, if it gets dirty or something after a blow. Then, the fish will be maybe a little south of the Northeast Grounds. That’s the way it was.

RC: After a blow, we get a lot of dust coming off of Bethel Shoals, here, that shoal.

AT: Yeah, yeah.

RC: I always thought that put a lot of dirt in the water.

AT: Yeah, it made it dirty, so it pushed the fish south. The clarity of the water was better a little bit south of there.

RC: All right. Well, back when you made it up here, you were fishing here in the kingfish grounds. So, I guess you’re fishing mainly kingfish. During what months of the year did you fish ’em here? Year-round?

AT: Yeah, you could—I fished between—it was the same old story. I fished Fort Pierce, and when the spring run came on in, primarily April 10, I would usually go to Jupiter to get in on the May run. The May run down there in Jupiter was pretty heavy sometimes. Sometimes it wasn’t, but generally it was pretty good.

RC: So, the majority of the year you’d be here, and other parts of the year you might travel with the fish.

AT: Yeah.
RC: These fish that you’re talking about back then, how long would a trip last? Were you day trip boating then, too?

AT: Yeah, a day trip, yeah.

RC: We already talked about what you caught and where you were selling it.

AT: In the eighties [1980s], I fished Daytona for quite a few years up there. Daytona was pretty much of a hot spot that nobody really went to, only a few boats out of the Cape [Canaveral]. And we were—1982 and eighty-three [1983], all the way up to 1990, was pretty much—Daytona was pretty much a hot spot. I fished it up there with Louis Wells and Tris Colket and Flash on the—that’s the guy out of the Cape there on the Bottom Dollar, you probably know him.²

RC: Brock.

AT: Brock. Brock was up there kingfishing with me. He would kingfish in the mornings and then dive in the afternoon.

RC: Right.

AT: Yeah. But [in] the eighties [1980s], we spent a lot of time up there, caught big catches. Wintertime was, you know, anywhere from—we’d make day and a half trips, and it would be anywhere from 1500 to 2500 pounds.

RC: So, were talking—in general, you’ve probably spent fifty years catching kingfish, basically.

AT: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Then when we hear some talk—you said something about the grouper and snappers. When did you—do you still fish for the groupers and snappers?

AT: Yeah, I catch—when I’m in Jupiter, I catch some mutton snapper, not a whole lot.

² Tristram Colket was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00003.
RC: I mean, actually trying to go catch ’em like you used to. You said you went right to the Oculina Bank looking for ’em every day at noon.

AT: Yeah. Well, I would say it’s different now down there when you got—if they quit in the mornings down there like eleven o’clock, or maybe the kingfish quit and then you got to wait till five o’clock before they bite again, and then you can—

RC: Cut some shrimp.

AT: Different drops. That’s the way I fished down there, usually.

RC: Well, when did you stop fishing for the groupers?

AT: Well, when they got real scarce, you know? Actually, they got pretty scarce and I couldn’t get out there. Yeah, I couldn’t get out there on the bank because it’s closed. I know that there was fish out there.

RC: So, now you just catch some grouper and snappers, but you basically quit—your big catches quit when the Oculina Bank closed?

AT: Yeah.

RC: It was 300 or 400 pounds a day?

AT: That was always a plus out there. You could always catch something.

RC: So, I guess in ninety-four [1994], then your bottom fishing stopped, and now you just do like an anchor up in the afternoon thing for a mutton every now and then?

AT: Yeah. I did catch some snapper and grouper up there when I was in Daytona, but when I was in Fort Pierce it used to be usually the offshore bar or the Oculina Bank, one or the other. Yeah.
RC: I know it. I think we’ve covered quite a bit here. Let’s see, I think there’s (inaudible). Okay, finally, I’d like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of Oculina Bank. I would like to know if any of these regulations of fish affected you or how you fish. In eighty-four [1984], this became no-trawling or no-dredging or no-bottom longlining. Did that affect you any?

AT: Yeah, no trolling, you couldn’t—

RC: No trawling, like you couldn’t be a shrimper or a bottom longliner here. So, I guess that wouldn’t have affected you because you hadn’t said nothing about bottom longlining here, right? Did you ever bottom longline?

AT: No. I shark fished, though. But on occasions, shark fished in Daytona.

RC: Then, in ninety-four [1994], was the closure to no bottom fishing and no retention and anchoring. Ninety-four [1994], I guess that would have affected your fishing?

AT: Yeah. Well, you couldn’t go out there and catch ’em. So, that did affect me, yeah.

RC: Then in ninety-six [1996], there was no anchoring. Well, that didn’t matter, ’cause in ninety-four [1994] with the no-bottom fishing, that already put you out of it, right?

AT: Right, yeah.

RC: In ninety-eight [1998], they made the Oculina Bank bigger, and I guess, since you already quit fishing out there, that that didn’t affect you? Is that correct?

AT: Yeah. Well, I knew you couldn’t catch snapper grouper out there. So, I just didn’t ever bother with it. It was a loss here. If I could have gone out there and caught ’em, that would have been a plus on my income, that’s for sure.

RC: So, during lunch you mentioned something about you used to have an unlimited snapper/grouper permit.
AT: Yeah.

RC: And now you have a limited. That was based on the groupers you caught. It was ninety-five [1995] and ninety-six [1996] landings that decided whether you had a—which permit you got.

AT: Right.

RC: What, the fact that in ninety-four [1994], you quit catching as many bottom fish? I guess that would have directly affected which permit you were issued?

AT: Oh, yeah, definitely. I probably would have kept my unlimited if that was open.

RC: And that’s not—today’s market, that’s like a $15,000—basically, you could have lost out—

AT: A big loss. (RC laughs) I would think so.

RC: So, it’s still costing you money today, huh?

AT: Oh, yeah, definitely.

RC: Okay. Well, we talked a little bit about that at lunch. I hope you don’t mind me pointing it out now. I’m gonna read you a little statement here. The designation of marine protected areas closed to fishing is becoming more and more frequently used as a management tool. You know these kind of closed areas are used more and more often in different areas.

AT: Yeah.

RC: What do you think about the use of these closed areas to fishing, compared to other types of management? You know, there’s size limits, seasons, license requirements, closed areas. In comparison, what do you think of these closed areas? Would you rather see seasons? Are seasons better? Are size limits better?
AT: Well, everything is being limited to—it makes it tougher on a fisherman every year. Different things, the lowering of all the quotas on different fish and the closed areas on these things, it all takes a toll on your income. And I think—I don’t know whether or not the—why they should use those closed areas, because it does affect all the fishermen and their incomes.

RC: I guess closed areas really affect certain fishermen more than others, because if the closed areas isn’t in your backyard, then you’re not the one affected.

AT: Right. Well, it affects the ones that are close in that area, yeah.

RC: Whereas trip limits and seasons might be more evenly dispersed between the user (inaudible) between the—I mean, you know, when we are on a fifty fish limit, then everyone pays the price, right?

AT: Right, yeah.

RC: Excuse me for thinking out loud there. But that just hit me, how much more localized the effect could be from a closed area other than—

AT: Well, it makes it tougher on a fisherman, that’s all. Everything, the lowering of all the quotas and everything else. It makes it tougher for fishermen to make a living. That’s for sure.

RC: Well, Al, if you had to choose, what type of management do you like? Which would you choose? Which do you prefer? Has there ever been any management come down since you’ve been fishing that you liked, any type of management?

AT: Well, management by the fishermen would be the best, I guess. They ought to know more about the ocean and the fish than anybody.

RC: Well, forgive me if I’m wrong, but like some of these trip limits and stuff, that’s what you guys took to the councils and asked for, wasn’t it? On these different limits on the kingfish, wasn’t that the fishermen petitioning the government for it?

AT: Way back?
RC: Yeah, that’s like in the early nineties [1990s]. I think I remember you guys went with one of these trip limits and stuff. Am I remembering correctly?

AT: Yeah, we did. Yeah, that was that organization that we had. It’s no longer active.

RC: Do you think that plan has helped the fishing?

AT: It helped a hell of a lot. I thing the kingfish came back because it’s only fifty fish to catch a day and, on certain conditions, seventy-five. So, naturally, it made a plus on the kingfish, especially. I mean, you got a lot more kingfish right now than we’ve ever had, with the exception of way back in the sixties [1960s], before the nets. Yeah, I think that management by a group of fishermen was pretty good at bringing back the kingfish. I think so.

RC: I don’t think many people realize it was the fishermen’s idea, and that’s the way I remember it from the outside looking in, you know, the talk I heard. Okay. Well, that gives us one more question and we’ll be done here, Al.

AT: All right.

RC: Get out your magic ball here. Thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

AT: In ten years?

RC: Ten years from now.

AT: Well, we’ve got a problem here, because you know I’m gonna say it’s porpoise. (laughs) I think the porpoise are a predator, and I think the kingfish won’t stay permanently in Fort Pierce anymore because there’s probably a hundred porpoises out there eating ’em, and they—

RC: Is that any different than twenty or thirty or forty years ago?

AT: We didn’t have ’em. They didn’t bother us then.
RC: I guess the porpoises have learned to use you as a food source?

AT: Yeah, they just take your fish. You lose quite a few fish because of the porpoises. Now, the fish are gonna be better in other areas, but Fort Pierce is always like—the porpoise live here, and that’s the way it is. Anywhere else you go, you can go to the Cape or Daytona or Fernandina Beach, and then the porpoise will ride alongside of you and they don’t bother you; but here they do for some reason.

RC: But I mean there’s just a plain old noticeable—you’re telling me there’s a noticeable difference. These porpoises here are just using you as a food source?

AT: They teach their babies to eat the fish right off the hook, and it’s easy for them. That’s the way they do it.

RC: Easier that running one down, probably. All right, well thank you. Interesting perspective.

AT: Yeah, I don’t know about Fort Pierce. You know, there’s lots of places and a lot of fish. Jupiter seems to be increasing all the time and Daytona’s increasing. Cold water’s got Sebastian, but if you’ve got good water there, there’s gonna be—in ten years, there’s gonna be a hell a lot of fish. I think that it’s gonna increase rapidly because there’s so many now that’s gonna reproduce. It’s not gonna go downhill. It’s gonna go straight up.

RC: You can’t do any—

AT: You’re gonna have more kingfish than ever before. That’s my outlook on it.

RC: Al, we have a new spin in this. Now we have this—this isn’t part of this, but I’m wondering. You got the Gulf oil spill and all the dispersants in the water. Do you think any of our stock comes from any of those waters? I mean, where do our baby kingfish come from?

AT: I think principally North Carolina—

RC: Oh, okay.
AT: —and South Carolina. I think I’ve got—when they had the tagging system in North Carolina, I caught several tags at Hobe Sound. That’s the big, you know, fish that spawn. I caught and several other guys caught fish from Carolina. I think most of the fish, realistically, do come from Carolina.

They’ve found a new body of fish up there in St. Augustine that was right out of where nobody looks for kingfish, and that was 250 foot of water. And there was a great big reef there packed with bait, blue runners and everything, and they had some big catches up there. And it’s the first time they’ve found those.

RC: (inaudible)

AT: Yeah, up there in St. Augustine. That’s a new place, a lot of kingfish there. Yeah, all of our strength is gonna be nothing but a plus on kingfish from now on. They reproduce heavy, and I can’t see ’em going downhill at all.

RC: All right. Well, thank you, Al. This will conclude our interview; unless there’s anything else you would like to add to it. Are you satisfied with it?

AT: Yeah, I’m satisfied with everything.

RC: Thank you, sir. We’ll end the recording at this point. Thank you.

*End of interview*