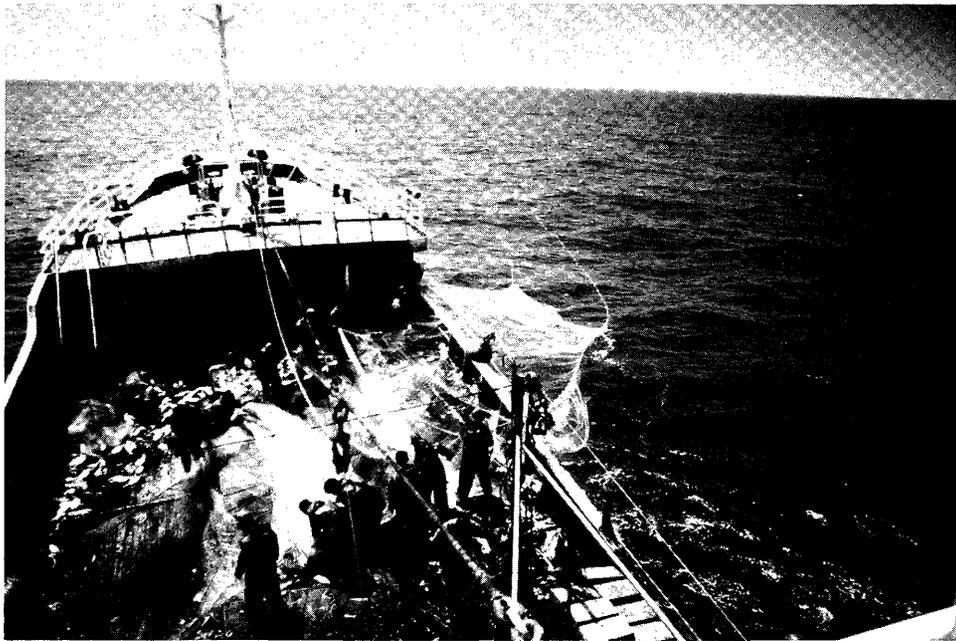


## Feature

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SQUID DRIFTNET OBSERVER



*Net retrieval aboard the Korean driftnet vessel Woo Jin 51.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In 1987, Congress passed the Driftnet Impact Monitoring, Assessment, and Control Act to initiate negotiations with nations that conduct high-seas driftnet fishing to develop a cooperative agreement for monitoring and assessing the numbers of marine resources of the United States killed and retrieved, discarded, or lost in driftnet fisheries. In 1990, the United States conducted the first year of a full observer program on squid driftnet vessels from Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan. A total of 58 U.S. observers were deployed to foreign driftnet vessels in 1990. These observers spent a cumulative total of more than 4,500 days at sea and monitored over 2,100 fishing operations. Data collected by the observers will be used to determine the bycatch of marine mammals, salmon, other marine fishes, seabirds, and sea turtles killed incidentally in the driftnet fisheries and to assess the impacts of the catches on these marine resources in preparation for a United Nations-recommended ban on large-scale open-sea driftnet fishing in mid-1992. Data collected in 1990 by the observers are strictly confidential and according to international agreements cannot be made public until June 1991.

The following is an excerpt from the journal of U.S. fisheries observer Greg Morgan who was one of the first members of the high-seas driftnet monitoring program to be deployed to a Korean driftnet vessel.

#### **6/20/90 MID-PACIFIC OCEAN 0100**

The whining sound of the retrieval gear jolts me out of sleep. After a few moments of disorientation, I recognize the noise and remember where I am--on the *Woo Jin 51*, 2,000 miles from land, as a U.S. fisheries observer.

It seems like I just got to sleep moments ago, which is not far from the truth. I remember looking at my watch at 2200 hours, wondering if I would ever have a normal sleep cycle again. I realize that my cabin mates, all officers of the *Woo Jin 51*, are gone and preparing for net retrieval. I jump into my clothes and head for the bridge. Out on the work deck, the crew hasn't started the retrieval. The first officer is steering for the first radio buoy. As usual, it's raining. I note the position on the SATNAV (satellite navigation system), and make a mental note that it has been 1 1/2

hours since the last fix. I'll have to dead reckon the position later.

Time has been a problem for me during this cruise. The ship keeps local time, which my data forms were as unprepared for as I was. We change time zones regularly and often cross the International Date Line. Sometimes it takes a day for me to realize that we have changed the clocks again. I have noted in my log book that observers should be supplied with a time zone map. This is just one of the unexpected details I have encountered in my first year in the high-seas driftnet observer program.

Heading for the deck, I put on my Mustang flotation suit and hear myself mumble, "Here we go again." Now it's up to the flying bridge for another day of squid driftnet monitoring. As a scientific observer, I have no enforcement role. My job is to monitor and collect biological data on the catch. In my hand I have two thumb counters. I have a covered clipboard with a pencil attached to complete my catch log.

The spotlight operator gives me a nod and I step up to my observation position, a corner of the flying bridge deck next to a pile of plastic buoys. The crew pulls the first radio buoy onto the deck and will get the net going any minute, so I zero out the thumb counters and get ready. As the net comes up, I see it's going to be one of those slow days with very sparse catch. My work is not physically demanding, but can be very tedious. Sometimes, I almost hope for some substantial bycatch to relieve the boredom.

The rain is a drizzle, being driven almost horizontally by a starboard wind. Fortunately, my catch log is printed on write-in-the-rain paper. The crew gets a big kick out of the paper, which is virtually indestructible. They have found that it doesn't tear and melts instead of burns.

As I stand on the deck, my mind wanders to thoughts of home in the United States. During the last 3 weeks, I have planned how I will spend the money I make on this cruise. In the evenings, I peruse maps of Montana and Idaho in my cabin and plan a fly fishing adventure. My cabin mates don't pay much attention to me or the maps. They don't recognize details of the United States.

Communication has been a problem on this cruise, as it is with any foreign vessel I have been on. But this cruise is more difficult because the crewmen have never met an American before. No one speaks English, which I expected. But on this cruise even the usual hand signals, dictionaries, and drawings are not much help, since few of the crew have ever had the opportunity to try to communicate with someone who doesn't speak their language. The simplest idea takes a long time to get across and usually patience wears out before the idea can be understood. I have had a difficult time explaining my work to the officers. I don't think they are interested anymore, but at least they are helpful.

I wish I had brought a Spanish-English dictionary along. I have met a few crewmen who speak some Spanish, but my 2 years of Spanish in high school were a long time ago. It took me days to figure out that "Santa Maria" means "overboard." When a crew member looked at me and asked "Santa Maria?" I thought he was asking if I was Catholic. When I answered, "No," I found he would save everything caught, like Pacific pomfret, until I said it was alright to throw them over.

One thing that helps my sanity is my weekly radio call to the other two observers on Korean ships. It has become mandatory to talk every Friday at 2000 hours to discuss common problems with species identification and filling out forms. Hearing English is the best part of our conversations and relieves most of our frustrations with communication on our ships

#### 0400

The catch is fairly normal now, causing my thoughts to drift away from my work. Over the past weeks I have learned to count with my thumb counters almost subconsciously and have to make an extra effort to pay attention.

I hear someone behind me and turn to see the cook holding out a cup of coffee for me. "Kam sa ham ni da," I say, using the only Korean phrase I have down pat. I am grateful for the hot coffee but I hate it with sugar. I have found that when I say "no sugar" I often get a little anyway. It seems that they have never seen anyone drink coffee without sugar before. I find it very interesting that food is so ritualized in some cultures.

**0500**

We use a random sampling table to determine which sections of the 70-kilometer net to monitor. I can take a 2-hour break now during which I plan to take a shower and do my laundry.

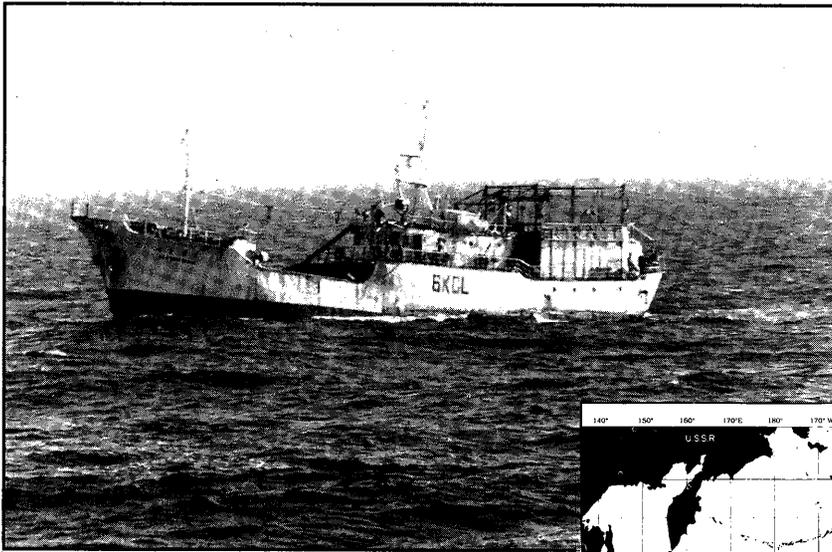
I have been a scientific observer since 1986 and have worked on foreign longline and processing vessels fishing within the U.S. 200-mile limit in the Bering Sea. But compared to those vessels, which were outfitted with high-tech electronics and modern conveniences, conditions on the *Woo Jin 51* are fairly primitive. For a shower, we have a traditional Japanese tiled bath (the ship was built in Japan), with a pipe of warm seawater running into it and the drain left open. This shower also serves as the laundry, which is done by hand. I do both, take a shower and do my laundry, at one time for convenience. Actually, it is quite inconvenient. Soap does not work well in seawater and it takes a lot of time to rinse myself and my clothes. With the humid weather and seawater, it also takes days for things to dry. Captain Woo gave me some shampoo, which the crew uses for

all-purpose soap. It works better than my American products.

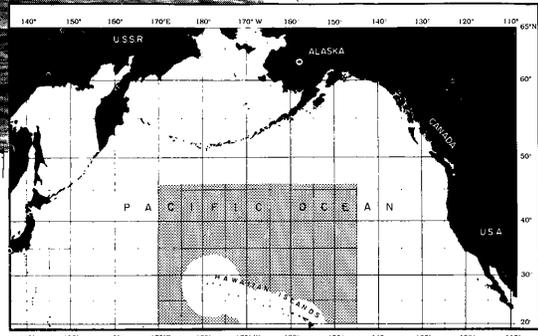
The hardest part of showering is trying to stay clean afterwards. I have to go through common areas of the ship which are often covered in squid ink. I try to avoid touching any walls to keep the ink off my clothes, but the ship is not cooperating today and pitches to starboard just as I turn the corner to the stairs. I brace my fall by grabbing a handrail. Unfortunately, I grab with my hand holding my clean towel which is now covered with squid ink. I take the towel back to the shower and rinse it out. I won't be showering for a few days.

**0730**

After a rest and a chance to catch up on paperwork, I am back on the flying bridge. The wind has picked up and those areas of my body not protected by my Mustang suit are speckled with squid ink. During the 10-30 minute break between net sections, I go down to the work deck to examine species. To do this, I change from the Mustang suit to rain gear and walk carefully on



*The Woo Jin 51 (above). International boundaries for the squid driftnet fishery are set at 46°N, 170°E, 145°W, and 20°N.*



the slippery deck. The crewmen are helpful and point out the species they know I want to look at. To confirm species identification, I take photographs of pertinent animals. Usually I have to rummage around the piles of squid to dig out the species I saw come up in the net.

#### **0900**

During a break between sections, I head for the galley for breakfast. Often, the cook comes to get me when it is ready, though I have to wait until I get a break to eat it. Breakfast is my favorite meal. The cook makes French toast and egg sandwiches--the only western-style food I get. It is there waiting for me today, but a little cold. Apparently, the cook has my time schedule figured out but had the meal ready just a little early today. I eat it appreciatively.

#### **1200**

After a few more hours of monitoring, the end of the set is near. The end never comes too soon. The net is bunched up and sinuous, and it seems to take forever before we actually reach it. In the distance, I can see the final flag buoy appearing through the waves periodically and luring me with rest like the sirens of the Aegean Sea.

At last we reach the buoy. I peel off my clothing and go to the bridge and get our position. Captain Woo is there and says, "Mr. Morgan--chop chop." This means that lunch is ready. I eat my meals in a small galley with the captain and chief officer. My taste for Korean food is not well developed, and often I have trouble getting enough to eat. The cook and officers are very concerned about this and try to get me to eat more than I care to. The rice and soup are foods I eat the most of, with a smattering of raw squid, cooked squid, Pacific saury stew, raw fish, kimchee, bean sprouts, dried seaweed, and pickled onions. Sometimes we get foods that are more like western-style food: barbecued chicken, beef bulgogi, or pork. Unfortunately, it only happens about once a week. My eating companions know that I like these foods and tend to give their portions to me. I have learned to eat many foods that at first I did not like. This is part of the cultural experience I signed up for. I realize how pampered observers

are in the Bering Sea where they have special meals prepared for them.

#### **1500**

I managed to get some sleep this afternoon and woke up in time to get our position when we started to set the net. Today, the visibility is good enough to do some marine mammal sighting while the net is laid out. I'm on the flying bridge again which feels just as much like home as my cabin. I have Doc Watson playing on my Walkman as I scan the horizon with binoculars. The crew gives me a friendly wave as they repair net. I wonder if they think I'm eccentric always standing at my post staring at the ocean.

#### **2100**

Another typical meal tonight. I tried not to eat much so I could go to sleep as soon as possible. Sleep is something I have to get when I get the chance--it's only possible a few hours at a time. I spend all my time either on the flying bridge or in my bunk. There is really nothing else to do. I have played poker with the crew a few times but the stakes are only cigarettes and I don't need those. I am trying to ration out my novels to last the whole 3 months at sea, but already I can tell I'm not going to make it. There are many Korean magazines floating around but I can only look at the pictures. My cabin mates get a kick out of American magazines. They recognize some movie stars and take pleasure in showing me that they know who these people are. That is about the limit of my personal contact with my cabin mates. They can sense that it is lonely for me on the ship and make an effort to be nice. It is not uncommon for me to go days without uttering a word except when I talk to myself (something I do more frequently as the days go by).

I look at the calendar before I try to sleep, always counting to the day I expect to go home. As with all sea cruises, time goes faster with every day that passes. I know that when it's finally time to leave I will be willing to stay just a little longer and that after 2 weeks on shore I'll be missing the ocean and life at sea.

This article was written by GREG MORGAN of the U.S. Fisheries Observer Program.