SOUTH KOREAN FISHERIES OFF ALASKA

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After a disastrous expedition by the Samyang Fisheries Co. in 1967, the same fleet returned to Alaska in 1968 with the addition of one refrigerated support vessel. A second company, the Korean Marine Industry Development Corp., made its initial venture in 1968 to the grounds off Alaska. It sent one stern trawler on 2 expeditions to the eastern Bering Sea. Production, mostly walleye pollock, was low.

The first interest by the Republic of Korea in fishing the grounds of the northeast Pacific Ocean and eastern Bering Sea was demonstrated in 1966. A single exploratory vessel worked along the Aleutian Islands, in the eastern Bering Sea, and into the Gulf of Alaska as far east as Kodiak. In fall 1967, the Samyang Fisheries Co. sent a refrigerated processing and support ship and 8 pair trawlers to the fishing grounds off Alaska. Enroute, 2 trawlers and 29 crew members were lost in a violent storm south of the Aleutian Islands. This tragedy was compounded by adverse climatic conditions that plagued the fleet for its entire stay. Catches were small, primarily walleye pollock (Theragra chalcogrammus). The fleet returned to Pusan in mid-November and landed only a few tons of fish; the rest was eaten by the crew. The 1967 expedition resulted in financial, vessel, and human losses.

In 1968, the Samyang fleet--the 957-gross-ton 'Sam Su No. 301' and the remaining 6 pair trawlers, the 'Sam Su Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10,' returned to the grounds off Alaska in early May. They were joined in early June by the 'Sam Su No. 201,' a refrigerated transport of 828 net tons. The principal fishing grounds were around the Fox Islands in the eastern Aleutians, and west of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. The Samyang fleet departed the Alaskan area in mid-July 1968 and returned to Korea with over 800 metric tons, mostly walleye pollock with some flounder and cod.

Fig. 1 - South Korea's Sam Su No. 301, anchored at Kodiak, Alaska, was built in Japan in 1956. She and her fleet of trawlers were part of war reparations by Japan to Korea. The ship is 213 feet long and carries 67 men.

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The Koreans had hoped to catch herring but were unable to find any. As in 1967 the fleet was beset by technical troubles, although minor compared to 1967. One trawler ran aground, several experienced mechanical difficulties and one hit an iceberg.

In early June the 6 trawlers were authorized to enter Akutan harbor while their support vessel sailed to Sand Point to pick up new radio equipment. Several crew members went ashore illegally and were fined US$10,000 by the U.S. Immigration Service.

BCF Agents Visit

BCF Fisheries Management Agents visited both the Sam Su No. 301 and Sam Su No. 201. Vessels of the Samyang fleet were part of the war reparations received from Japan. None of the vessels had fresh water-making capabilities. As of June 25, 1968, the fleet's total catch was reported as 350 metric tons, consisting of nearly 100 percent walleye pollock. Average catch by the fleet per fishing day was about 30 metric tons.

The fish were salted in the round and placed in burlap bags, each bag containing about 50 pounds (25 kilograms) of pollock. Then, they were frozen and kept under refrigeration in the holds of the processing ship, or on the accompanying refrigerated transport.

The Trawlers

Trawlers of the Samyang fleet are Japanese built, 100 gross tons, about 90 feet long with a 5-foot draft, and can make 8 knots. Each trawler has 15 crew members. The vessels work as pair trawlers and their most efficient fishing depth was reported to be 40-50 fathoms.

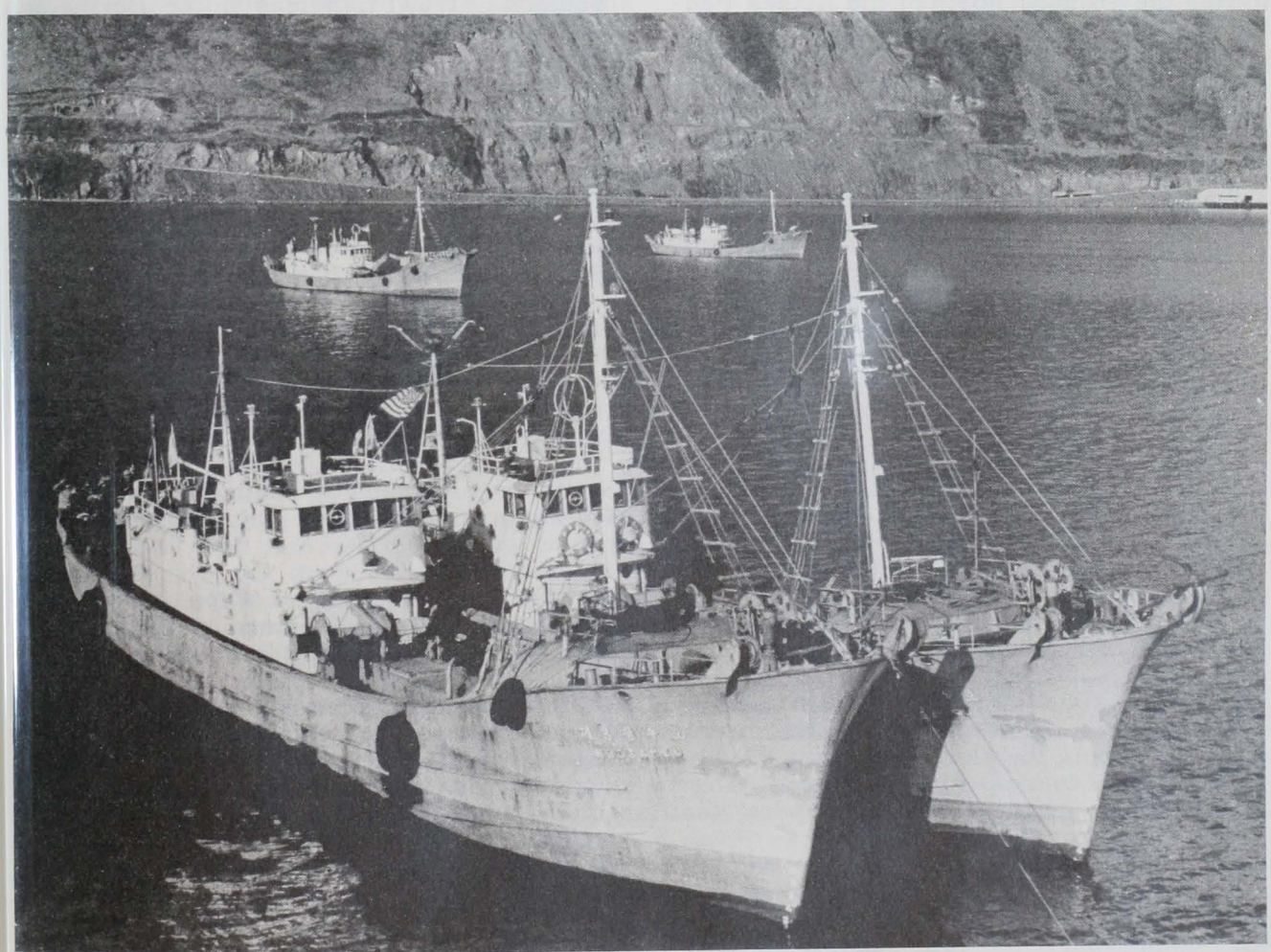

Fig. 2 - The South Korean trawlers in Kodiak Harbor belong to the Samyang Fisheries Co. Built in Japan, the vessels are about 100 gross tons, 90 feet long, have a shoal draft of 5 feet, and speed of 8 knots. Each trawler is operated by 15 men.

A company official aboard the Sam Su No. 201 said that 1967 and 1968 could be considered not merely as test fisheries, but as exploratory fishing.

Second Company

Besides the Samyang fleet, a stern trawler, the 'Kang Wha No. 601,' of the Government owned Korean Marine Industry Development Corp., made at least 2 trips to the fishing grounds off Alaska in 1968. She was first seen in late June in the approaches to Bristol Bay north of Port Heiden on the Alaska Peninsula. The vessel remained in that area for a week and then fished along the Aleutian Islands. She was observed near Attu Island, the western tip of the Aleutians, in mid-July, and indicated she was headed home. In mid-December 1968, she was again reported off Alaska, near the eastern Aleutians, returning to fish the grounds north of the Alaska Peninsula.

Although the Kang Wha No. 601 was observed fishing on several occasions, there were no fish visible on deck, so the exact catch composition is unknown. It was reported that, in mid-July, a stern trawler identified as the 'Kang Hwa No. 602' ended a month-long exploratory fishing cruise in the eastern Bering Sea and returned to Pusan with about 400 tons of walleye pollock and some herring. Available information indicates this stern trawler was probably the Kang Wha No. 601 and that the Kang Hwa No. 602, which was to fish for shrimp in the eastern Bering Sea, never operated in the Alaskan area.

Future S. Korean Fishing

The future of South Korean fishing off Alaska is uncertain. It is unlikely that the 1968 expeditions by either Korean company was highly profitable. In November, however, a Japanese news article reported that the S. Korean Government planned to support expansion of trawl fisheries in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean. The fishery resources on Alaska's vast Continental Shelf have already lured large fishing fleets from Japan and the USSR.

ARE ALL FISHES EDIBLE?

Not all fishes are edible. Some have organs that are always poisonous to man; others sometimes become toxic because of certain elements in their diet. In Japan, a national dish called fugu is highly prized. It is prepared from the puffer fish, and the gonads of the puffer are highly poisonous. For this reason, fugu is only served in restaurants licensed by the government.

Consumption of sharks and rays has been known to cause illness or death; this was probably because the victim ate a portion of the liver, which contains a very high concentration of vitamin A that the human body cannot tolerate.

There are 300 tropical species of fishes that cause fish poisoning; one type of poisoning is commonly known as ciguatera. A particular species may cause ciguatera when caught on one side of an island, but not if caught on the other side. These tropical fish are associated with reefs and do not usually venture far from the home reef; for this reason, the people living on one island may eat a certain species of fish, while those on a nearby island would not. No one knows what causes the fish to become poisonous, but most investigators agree that it is something in the diet. There is no method to determine before a fish is consumed whether or not it will cause ciguatera. Some common species of fish known to cause ciguatera are: surgeon fish, jacks, porgies, snappers, goatfish, moray eels, wrasses, and barracudas.

Scombrid fish, commonly known as tuna or mackerel, have been known to cause scombrid poisoning, usually because of inadequate preservation. The flesh of scombrid fish contains bacteria which, if the fish is not preserved soon after capture, begin to produce a histamine-like compound. This compound, if ingested by humans, causes a severe allergylike reaction and may even lead to death. ("Questions About The Ocean," U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office.)