

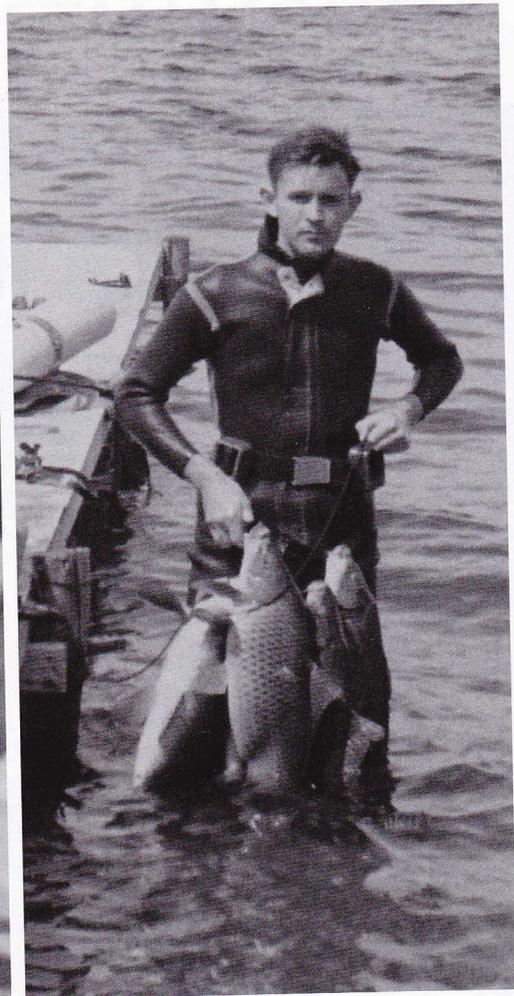


INLAND DIVERS CLUB

OF MINNEAPOLIS



MEMBERS OF THE INLAND DIVERS CLUB, INCLUDING GERRY PAULSON (FAR LEFT) AND FRANS CARLSON (3RD FROM LEFT). FRANS CARLSON WITH A STRING OF FISH [RIGHT].



Carp Games

BY CATHY BUCHHOLZ

Between 1880 and 1890, the State Fish Commission introduced non-native scaled or German carp into Minnesota lakes and rivers as the new game fish. These bottom feeders proliferated beyond control. A prominent figure in SCUBA diving in the early 1960s, Orville J. Blocker, or “Jack the Frogman,” was inspired to begin hosting an annual Midwest carp spearfishing tournament.

The contest was open to all divers, and Jack encouraged the local dive shops to contribute prizes such as spearguns, plastic snorkels or free tanks of air.

“It was a promotion for dive shops to get people diving and to help rid the lakes of carp,” says Frans Carlson, who was safety director of the Minnesota Inland Divers Club. The founder of the club, Gerry Paulson, started a dive shop in his garage in north Minneapolis. “I was an early fanatic to the sport – self-

taught – and one of the few divers in the state of Minnesota. I borrowed on my life insurance to get an air compressor,” says Paulson.

Despite the club being just a year old, the Minnesota Inland Divers entered Jack’s tournament, eager to show off their spearfishing skills. The same diver from a rival club had won the contest every year in recent memory.

The morning of the contest, the Inland Divers set off for Lake Minnetonka’s Gray’s Bay. The young men donned wet suits and snorkels and, at a depth of 10 feet, floated underwater with their elastic-powered spearguns. “You couldn’t move a muscle. Sometimes two or three carp would swim by and if you made any sudden movement or jerked the speargun around, they’d just disappear,” says Carlson. By late afternoon, the fish were counted. Newcomers Minnesota Inland Divers were

declared the winners, having speared more than 50 carp.

“No one expected us to win,” says Carlson. “Someone accused us of using carp traps.” Carlson laughs. “One of our divers yelled at that person to get down on their hands and knees and crawl around on top of the fish to look for spear holes.”

Each club was required to properly dispose of their fish. Carp are not allowed to be released back into the water. “We put a couple of fish in the back of pick-ups and on the bumpers of cars in the parking lot,” says Carlson.

While the Minnesota Inland Divers Club no longer exists, the carp still thrive. And what is past is prologue as sport anglers persist in trying to regulate these overpopulated rough fish.