

Information Sheet No. 28



Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

FELICE (PHIL) MIRAGLIOTTA – Fishermen's Co-op

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| 1920, Dec 19 | - Born in Geraldton, WA. |
| 1934 | - Began fishing with his father on the Thelma. |
| 1942 | - Joined the Army. |
| 1945 | - Returned to Geraldton. |
| 1947 | - Began fishing at the Abrolhos in the Dove. |
| 1948 | - Married Pasqualina Cuocci. |
| | - Purchased own boat Vicki Marie. |
| 1950 | - Founding member of Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative. |
| 1983 | - Retired. |



Phil Miragliotta. Photograph courtesy of the Miragliotta family.

Phil Miragliotta was born in Geraldton on 19 December 1920 to Frank and Loretta Miragliotta. Together with his brothers, Orizia (Rincie) and Joe, and a sister, Anita, he was educated in Geraldton at the State School. Due to his father's health problems Phil began crayfishing on weekends and during school holidays from the age of twelve. At fourteen he left school to work on his father's boat full-time.

The Miragliottas sold their catch to passenger liners and freight ships and were among the first exporters of crayfish in Western Australia, selling cartons of twelve dozen cooked crayfish to Singapore from 1938 through to the fall of Singapore during the Second World War. The war saw the creation of a new market with the Red Tail Cannery supplying canned crayfish to troops locally and overseas. "Manpowered" to supply the cannery, Phil was exempted from

service until 1942 when he had a dispute with the manager of the canning company, who was paying the fishermen three shillings a dozen for crays and then selling them to the American Forces based in WA for fifteen shillings a dozen. Within a week Phil found himself in the Army, serving about 12 months in Western Australia and subsequently posted to Bouganville, Papua and New Guinea working in the area of water transport until his eventual discharge in 1945.

After the war Phil and his brother Rincie fished Geraldton waters in their boat the Dove for 12 months, then began fishing at the Southern Group of the Abrolhos Islands. In 1948 Phil married Pasqualina Cuocci and they had four children, daughters Anita and Vicky and sons Frank and Phillip. In 1948 Phil bought a boat of his own, the Vicki Marie, and Rincie bought out his share of the Dove.

The markets for crayfish continued to expand and the burgeoning American Market saw a big increase in demand for crayfish. When a request by the Geraldton fishermen for an extra twopence per pound was rejected by their buyers, the fishermen decided to take matters into their own hands and the Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative was formed on 12 December 1950. Phil and Rincie were founding members and later Directors of the Co-operative.

During the off-season the fishermen built the Co-op premises with bricks they made themselves. They built a snap freezer, two bait rooms, a holding room, office space and a large factory area and the Co-operative processed, snap-froze and exported the local catch to America. To maintain their supply, the existing processing companies were forced to match the Co-op's prices. In the second year of its operation Phil was elected a director. Supported by about seventy percent of the local fishermen, the Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative went from strength to strength and over the years has improved its processing and marketing techniques and diversified into engineering, boat building and prawning and provides a helicopter service to the Abrolhos Islands for fishermen and their families.

References

*Text taken from **Geraldton: 150 Years, 150 Lives**, Local Studies Department, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 117.*

Copies are available from the Library, 37 Marine Terrace, Geraldton (PO Box 101, Geraldton, WA, 6531) for \$27.50 (plus \$6.50 postage and handling).

