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THE FABULOUS
CABO BLANCO CLUB
IN COLOR

MARLIN
CHAMPION
ALFRED GLASSELL JR.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CORNELL CAPA

MOUNTED MARLIN TAILS FORM SURREALISTIC PATTERN ALONG CABO BLANCO CLUB DRIVEWAY

BLACK TAILS AND BLUE OCEAN

The black marlin of Peru is the coveted prize of Cabo Blanco's fabulous fishing club

by GEORGE WELLER

THE BLACK MARLIN, the largest bill fish caught on hook and line, meets man off a remote corner of Peru that is costly to reach and still costlier to fish. The meeting place lies off a 300-foot headland of brown sand, burned dry by the sun and scuffed by hot winds. It is named Cabo Blanco. Immediately north of the headland, where Peru meets Ecuador, the dried-codfish climate suddenly melts into a moist green hothouse of bananas and coconuts. Slow, muddy rivers empty into a tepid ocean populated thickly with amber jacks, roosterfish, groupers, sailfish and sleepy giant rays as broad as a nightclub floor. The aristocratic marlin seems to abhor this sea slum of congested commoners. Off Cabo Blanco it turns its long black bill westward and rides the blue stream of the Humboldt Current on the course of the raft *Kon-Tiki*. Here it dines on its favorite, the sierra mackerel, or samples the plump three-foot squids which school like huge pineapples on the ocean's surface.

To better pursue the marlin, S. Kip Farrington Jr. of New York, a leading salt-water fisherman, organized in May 1951 the Cabo Blanco Club, one of the world's more exclusive fishing fraternities. Farrington himself supervises its membership list, which numbers only 20, most of whom are Americans. The membership fee is $10,000, but even with that it is not altogether clear on what Farrington bases his selections. He reportedly has turned down one bid of $50,000 to join, and he has been pursued almost relentlessly by other aspirants.

The club charges $25 a day per person—upped from $15—for room and board. The rent for one of its three motor cruisers, imported from Nova Scotia, runs $100 a day. Tackle is a bargain. Full gear, costing from $1,000 to $2,000 to buy, rents at $10 a day.

So uncommunicative are the American members—even after selecting his membership, Mr. Farrington likes to check everything mentioning publicly the Cabo Blanco Club—that a visitor expects a chilly reception. Actually the atmosphere is easy and amiable, no strain. Once the stranger has reached the remote home of the black marlin, it is assumed that there is no further reason for discouraging him from the chase. The club is managed with great efficiency and ease by a graying Pole named Sygmund Plater whose tank battalion was nearly annihilated at Cassino. His wife, daughter of a Polish general, keeps the rooms spotless and the cuisine diverse. An intelligent young Spaniard named Juan Matutes cares for the elaborate tackle room where the lockers of the founding members bear brass plates, like the seats of knighthood.

The most awkward chore for this staff comes after the fishermen have gone. It involves sending by air their marlin, gutted and iced, to a taxidermist in Miami, Al Pflueger, who is an expert in stuffing marlin. One happy feature about Peru is that its sharks are gentlemen and usually do not chew pieces off the beaten marlin before it is boated. Panagra cheerfully flies marlin corpses as big as dories, because the revenue is fabulous.

The club's life as a club, however, is unavoidably artificial. Only the

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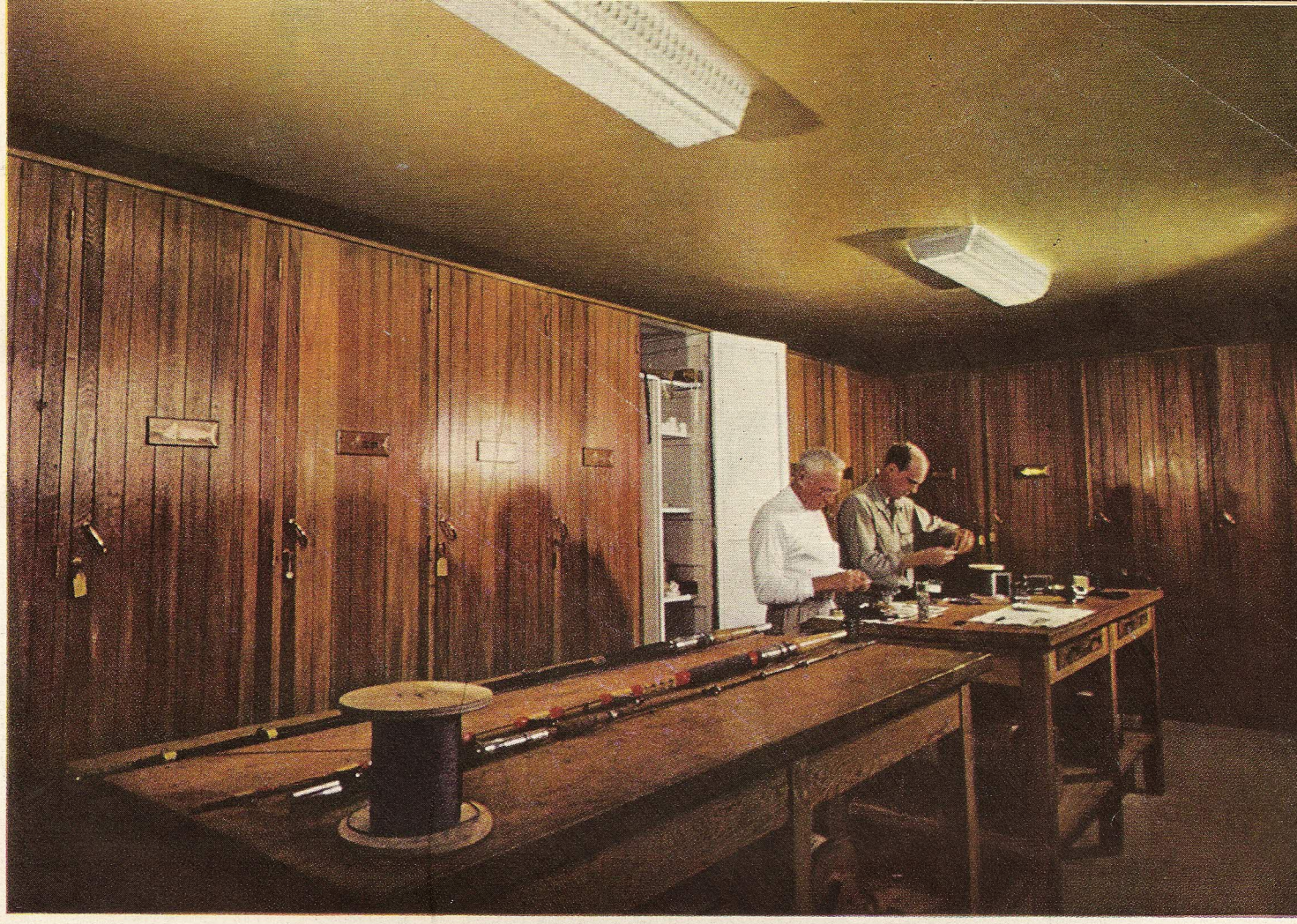
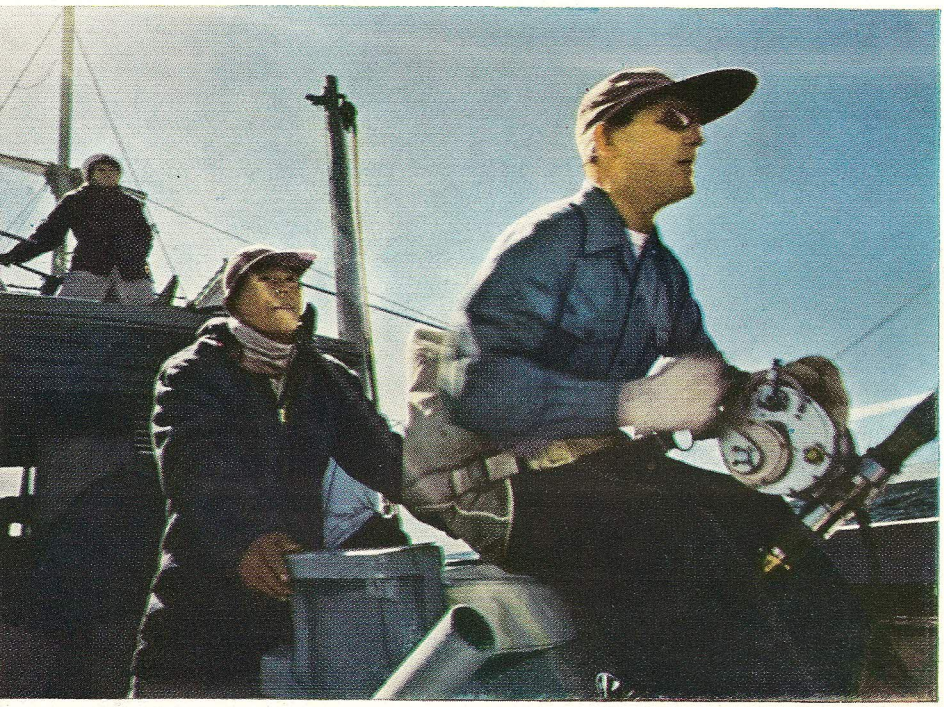


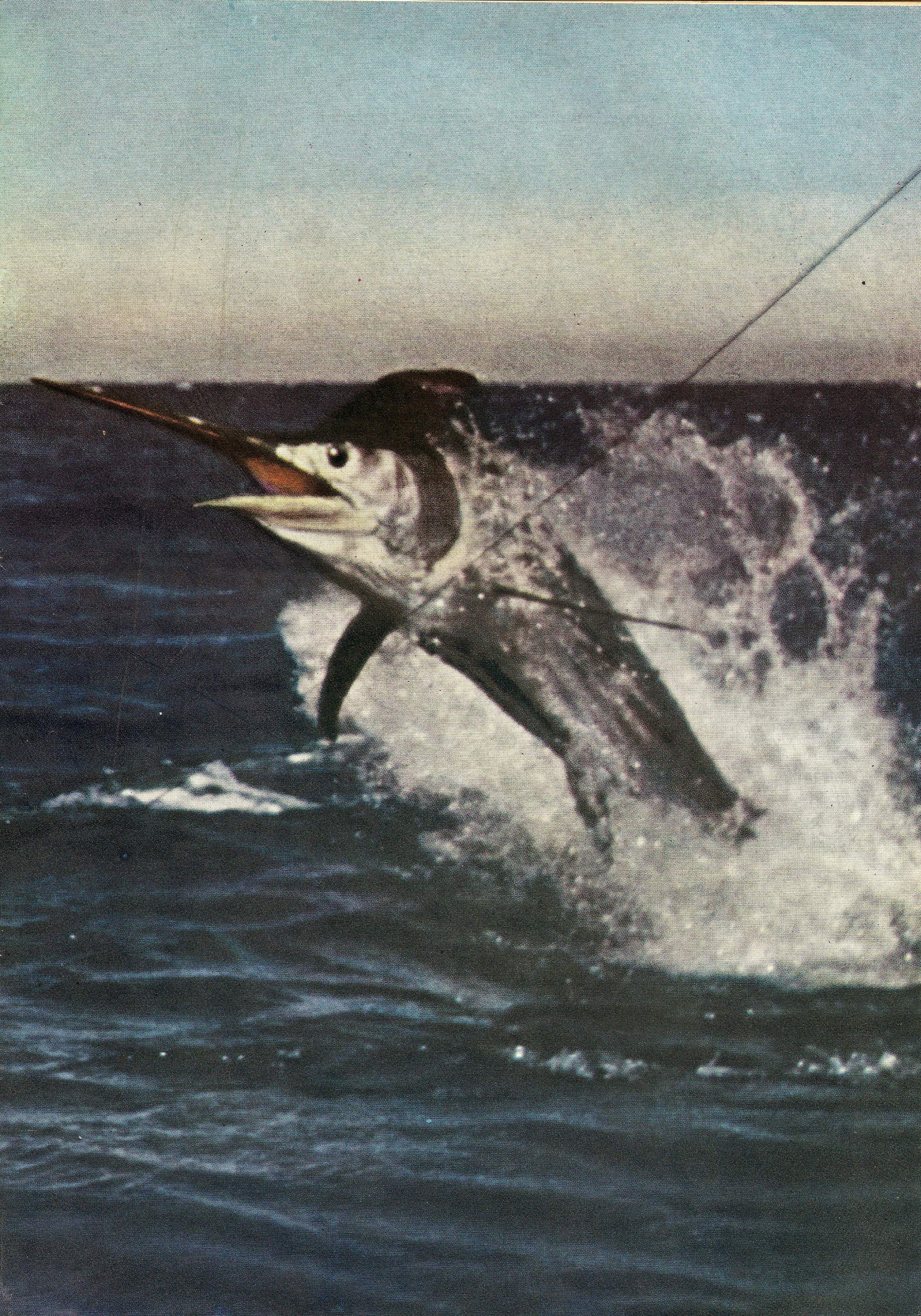
TACKLE ROOM (*above*) reflects the utilitarian but luxurious décor which characterizes the Cabo Blanco clubrooms. Here Jim Hutton of Cincinnati, Ohio and his son Jim Jr. prepare gear.

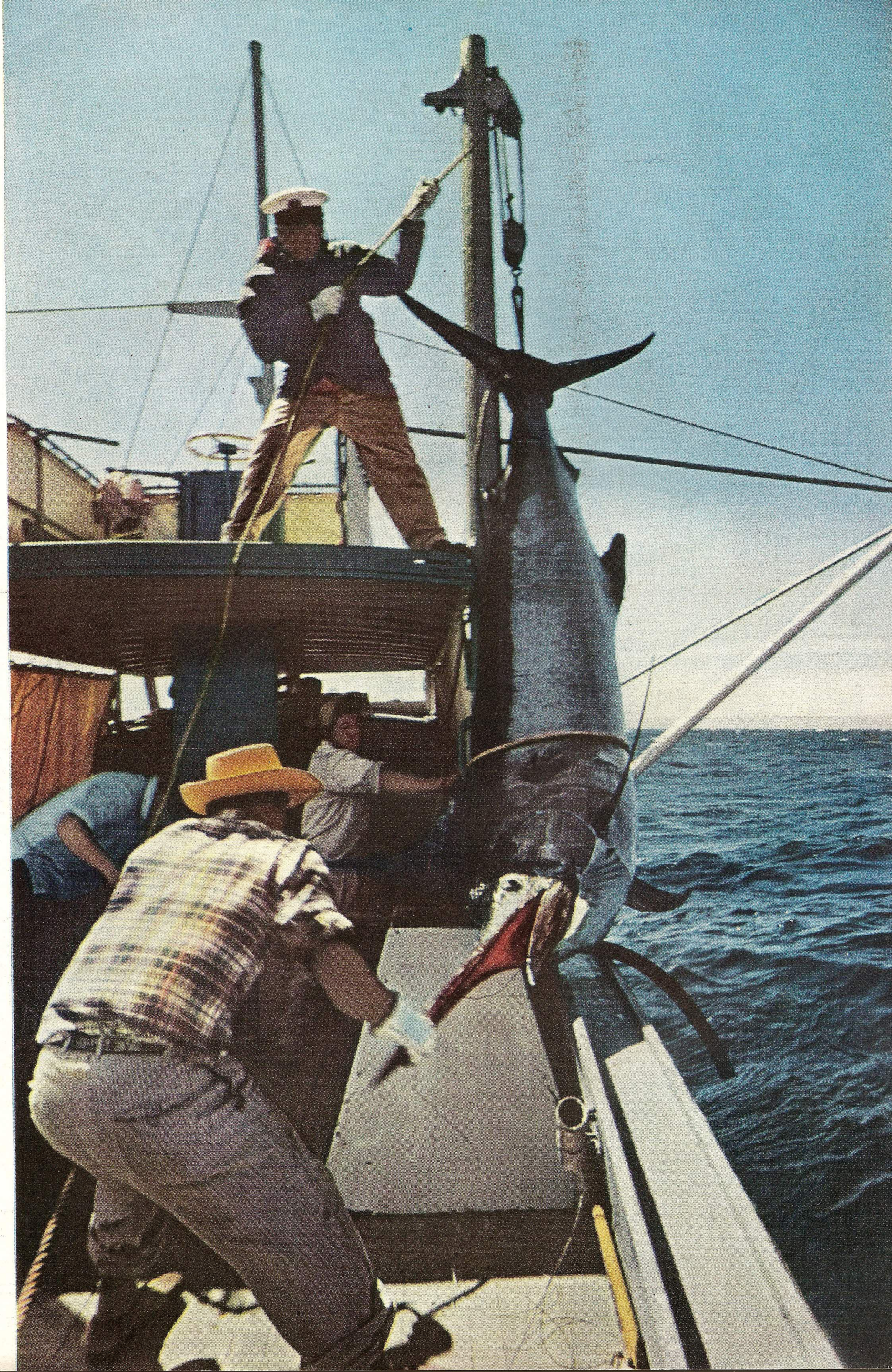
MAIN LOUNGE AND TROPHY ROOM is where fishermen relax after battles with 1,000-pound giants like the one mounted over the fireplace. This was first big marlin caught at Cabo Blanco.



STRIKE! and the line rips away, as Alfred C. Glassell Jr. of Houston, Texas, half-seated in the chair, begins a half-hour fight with a marlin. Behind him Chico, the mate, waits and watches for any emergency, while on top deck Captain Jesus Ruiz handles the boat in maneuvers which demand great precision and timing.

EXPLODING FROM SEA in a cascade of spray, a marlin twists and dives in attempt to shake loose the well-set hook. This one, weighing 500 pounds, fought for 30 minutes and made 14 leaps before it was finally subdued and boated. Black marlin record, held by Mr. Glassell, is 1,560 pounds, caught off Cabo Blanco in 1953.





BLACK TAILS

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whims of marlin hold the members together. When marlin refuse to show their tails, the club sags. Even at the season's height—always under dispute, but usually recognized as between March and August—the members never come to Peru simultaneously. This convivial privilege is denied them by the fact that of the three boats—one 40-footer and two 38-footers—usually only two are in operating order.

Because of its still inadequate fleet, not all fishermen, even wealthy ones, have tried to penetrate Farrington's guard and enter the club. The most stubborn big angler to hold out against Farrington is Charles Johnson, a bespectacled General Motors man from Asheville, N.C. Johnson has the money to enter the club but doesn't want in. To bring his own cruiser down Johnson spent nearly $5,000 in Peruvian custom duties alone. With his Floridian captain R. L. (Whip) Foster, the auto baron lives in frugal waterfront style at Talara, the Panagra landing field, in rooms leased from a Norwegian commercial fisherman named H. L. Hammarberg, who keeps a boatyard. The Johnson system of avoiding membership is probably even more expensive than being a member of the club, but it is the only alternative.

The only marlin ever seen at close range by many fishermen at Cabo Blanco is the immense specimen hanging on the wall of the clubhouse. There it floats on blue waves of cigar smoke, the sealight from the front picture windows gleaming on its silver belly. It was Cabo Blanco's first 1,000-pounder, caught April 4, 1952 by Alfred C. Glassell Jr., a sporty Houston businessman who fishes in total Texas fashion, with two cruisers linked by radio. But already this prize is a has-been. By taking a 1,560-pound fish August 4, 1953 Glassell became champion of the world.

But records here are short-lived. Novices, even women, are lucky. Ted Williams, while ruminating on his divorce from his wife and, temporarily, baseball, flew down in December '54 and casually took a 1,235-pound marlin. An even bigger one broke his leader and escaped. A tall girl named Kimberly Wiss, who works in New York for a public-relations firm, took a 1,525-pounder, the women's world record, after an 80-minute battle. Had the marlin lunched more heavily, Miss Wiss could easily be world's champion.

As if to prove that the marlin are always there, the club has flanked the driveway on its seaward side with scores of huge tails, black and stiff. The driveway leads down about half a mile to a battered wooden wharf about 15 feet wide and perhaps 300 feet long. The wharf has a hoisting crane to lift out fish, a machine to weigh them, and a host of leaky pelicans and cormorants squatting on the decks of a mosquito fleet of sailboats owned by Indians.

A few hundred yards north, up the shore, is an Indian fishing village of little gray shacks. Green surf breaks in white-laced bars at its doorsill, and there are children playing, men repairing nets, and women in braids and Mother Hubbards carrying water on their heads in oil tins, pacing barefooted along the sand. This is the home of the dozen or so Indians lucky enough to work as crewmen and servants for the marlin hunters.

The majority of the Indians, whose population numbers some 500, earn their living by catching fish for the tables of Lobitos Petroleum, Ltd., an old, highly profitable British oil firm which owns outright most of the land in Cabo Blanco.

AMERICAN HOPE

In the eyes of the Indians the sportsmen represent two prospects: an immediate hope that they will get a day's work on a motorboat, and a deferred hope that the Americans will buy into Lobitos oil—as they already have at Talara, farther south—and change conditions for the better.

The Indians taste marlin only when a Detroit tool executive or a California realtor, having cut fins and bill off his prize, gives the carcass to his crew. But with respect to marlin meat the millionaires often fare little better. During three weeks last April, the supposed "best" month, the red pennant that marks a black marlin's capture was not seen on a single incoming mast.

The man who broke the jinx was Raymundo D. Castro Maya, a small Brazilian who has probably caught more big fish in proportion to his weight than any man in the world. And he is as knowledgeable about snaring marlin as he is able.

At sunset on the dock one evening, after the big binoculars at the clubhouse had picked him up coming in

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SUBDUED AT LAST, FIGHTING BLACK MARLIN IS BOATED

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with a red flag, he told how it is done. An 835-pounder, long and black, was suspended moodily from the block above him for photographs. Its belly was covered with living white parasites resembling buffalo bugs, clinging stubbornly to the white skin by their tails. The triangular mouth of the monster was sewed up to keep its last meal from coming out, a necessary precaution in fishing for pounds.

"We always find the marlin going north," the Brazilian explained. "The first thing to make sure is that it is not a swordfish. A swordfish shows two fins, dorsal and caudal, a marlin only one. After you see it, the next thing is to show the marlin the bait."

Baiting for marlin is really the art of serving a highly fastidious guest. The marlin may want mackerel at 11, but fancy only bonito at 12. When finning out on the surface, it is rarely hungry. It has usually eaten heavily downstairs and risen to the sun only for a snooze. The hunter is offering it not dinner, but a second dessert. Full already, it can be finicky.

Sometimes the marlin is lazying along in a school of helpless giant squids. "If it is already eating squid," said Castro Maya, "you offer it something else. Marlin are like humans. They like surprises."

The marlin likes to overtake its prey smartly, rear back its bill like a club and deal it a hearty swipe on the snout. With its three-inch deep-blue eyes, which have the scrutinizing powers of binoculars, the marlin scans the behavior of the meal after its blow. If the creature looks stunned, loses speed, goes into a flurry and faces suicidally into its jaws, the marlin opens wide and swallows it.

Generally, to catch marlin, two fist-size hooks are sewed inside a mackerel, the tips customarily facing toward the head of the fish. Once it has taken the hooks, the marlin may jump 40 times with one hook inside its gills, the other in its jaw.

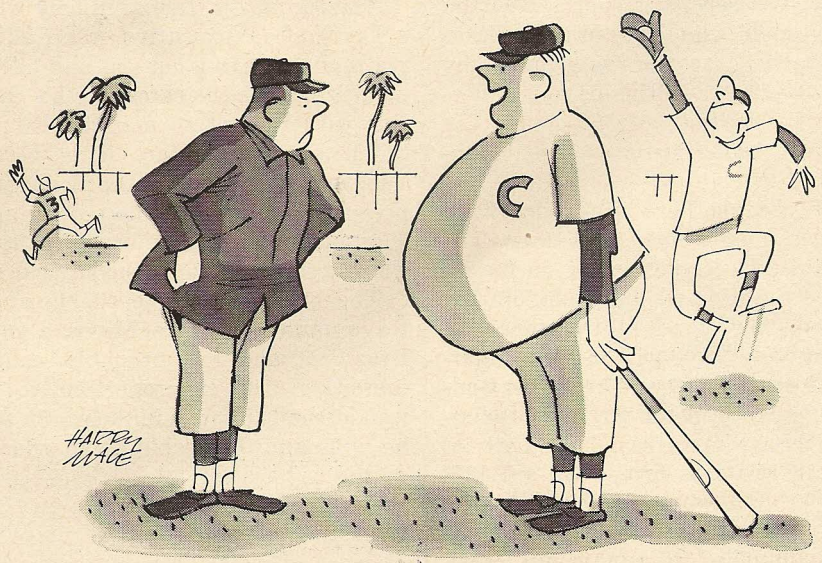
Castro Maya now explained how to play the fish. "When it takes the bait, you let go, give it a good chance to swallow. You throw the reel off gear, into free spool. The marlin swims away, very quietly and fast at first. I count 10. Zzzz-zz—it runs out the line —zzzzzz—it runs. When I am sure it has the bait, I strike it. I lift the rod. Now the fight begins. Fix your belt. Check your gloves. You will be very busy, and nobody, under the rules, can help you.

"For the next hour, at least, you will be pumping. Let it go. Pump it back. Let go. Pump. The marlin jumps in the air. That is well. You count the jumps. The jumps tell you about the courage of your marlin.

"The jumps are high and strong at first. Then, not so high. Then the jumping stops. It tries to go down—deep, deep. You must bring it up. If it goes down it will break your line and you will lose it."

The moment when the marlin leaps to begin its fight is the one for which these fishermen come so far, wait so long and spend so much.

Unlike other great fish, the black marlin does not cheat its aggressor by hiding itself or its agony in the depths. It dies as openly as the bull in the ring. It stands upright on the waves,



"It gives me more power."

momentarily superior to its element, like a naked man flying. It rolls its great dark-blue eyes over the boat in hate and permits the fishermen to see its contempt. Again and again it climbs up, enormously blue against the sky, water spewing from its glistening back. Every fin is spread in anger. It courses over the water in great flat leaps, a hurdler clearing invisible barriers 25 feet apart. It stands up and whirls like a Spanish dancer, bending down its angry head with its reddened mouth open, whirling its white waistcoat.

What the marlin wants is to chop away the snaffle tearing at its mouth. It starts hacking the wire with its four-foot spearlike bill, an all-purpose tool. Whether it wins freedom or loses depends on where it strikes. If it strikes close to its own mouth, as is natural, the blow falls somewhere along a 30-foot length of stainless-steel cable, the leader hanging from its mouth. Sometimes the wire breaks. Usually, however, it holds.

RARELY GUESSES RIGHT

If the marlin has a good hunch, or is lucky, it may strike farther up, beyond the wire leader, where there is about 25 feet of No. 39 thread, doubled. If it strikes here with the line tense, the line breaks and the marlin wins. Rarely does its guesswork carry it so far back toward man, the ultimate cause of its agony. And it almost never attacks the halfway cause, the boat.

The marlin may decide to wind itself in the wire leader. It thereby increases the chances of snapping free because it shortens the wire's length to the slender line. But it loses more than it gains because, thus trussed in wire, it cannot easily leap or pirouette.

"When it tires of jumping and goes down," said Castro Maya, "you must fight it in a different way. You must not let it hang dead on the line, like a manta ray. You must plane it." "Plane" means to gun the boat's engine and move gently ahead. This forces the marlin to rise and fight.

For fisherman and for marlin the 30 feet of wire leader is the last measure of death or freedom. Not until all the line has been gathered into the boat can the struggling fish be clubbed or gaffed. At the moment that the marlin feels the first human tug on the leader, it has clear warning that death is near. It starts the fight all over again. It darts away in a white flurry. Or, it dives to the bottom and sticks its bill in the sand, thrashing for leverage.

A fight can last almost any time,

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BLACK TAILS

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from 10 minutes—a freak, when the marlin has two hooks deep in its stomach—up to six hours. To land the biggest marlin last season, it took Walter Nye, a Chicago businessman, four hours and 45 minutes. The fish weighed 1,380 pounds. Nye, a novice at Cabo Blanco, caught it in March, a month too early according to some experts, and it was 14 feet long and 6 feet around.

There is, of course, a way of simply murdering the marlin, rather than catching it: to creep up on it in the pulpit of a cruiser and plunge a harpoon in its back. Marlin up to 2,200 pounds have been stabbed in this way. But to the sportsman this is only one step above feeding it bait with dynamite filling, as is done to sharks on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.

WHERE DO THEY GO?

Tracer tabs have been planted on migrating tuna in order to study their habits, but nobody has yet offered to bulldog a 1,500-pound marlin for this purpose. Yale and the University of Miami have been trying to check the black marlin at various points along the Humboldt Current. Black marlin are caught off New Zealand and Australia, but they run smaller than the Peruvian kind. The fishermen at Cabo Blanco have wondered often whether the heavyweights stay with the Humboldt all the way across the Pacific or double southward into the Antarctic by some private mid-Pacific course of their own. Nobody knows. For the present it is enough that they are at Cabo Blanco. END

CABO BLANCO'S MEMBERS

WENDELL ANDERSON, Grosse Pointe, Mich.
WILLIAM K. CARPENTER, Wilmington, Del.
RAYMUNDO D. CASTRO MAYA, Rio de Janeiro
JULIAN T. CRANDALL, Ashaway, R.I.
L. R. CRANDALL, Ashaway, R.I.
S. KIP FARRINGTON JR., East Hampton, N.Y.
ROGER FIRESTONE, Pottstown, Pa.
M. C. (JOE) GALE, New York
ALFRED C. GLASSELL JR., Houston
DOUGLAS HOUSTON, Buenos Aires
ANTON HULMAN JR., Terre Haute, Ind.
JAMES M. HUTTON JR., Cincinnati
NORTHRUP R. KNOX, Buffalo, N.Y.
SEYMOUR KNOX III, Buffalo, N.Y.
M. CHAPIN KRECH, New York
JAIME LLAVALLOL, Buenos Aires
JOHN M. OLIN, East Alton, Ill.
ENRIQUE PARDO, Lima, Peru
JOSEPH D. PEELER, Los Angeles
H. L. WOODWARD, Havana