

Fishing for Trouble

BOB VAN ELSBERG
Managing Editor

I carefully wrapped a length of thread around the well-ripened, bloody chunk of mackerel, tying it to the hook I hoped would soon hold a catfish. A.G. Johnson, my father-in-law and an experienced fisherman, was sitting at the other end of the boat. A.G. could cast with precision, consistently landing the bait right where a fat channel cat might be hiding. On the other hand, I was lucky if I could get the bait over the right side of the boat. Reaching back with the pole, I made my best attempt at an overhead cast but, as usual, swung a bit wide. Who-o-osh! The baited hook flew past A.G.'s left ear—missing it by a whisker—while splattering a stream of mackerel juice along the side of his face.

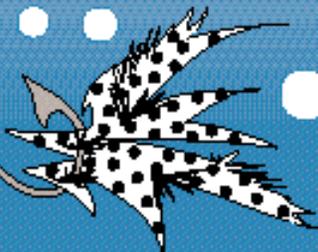
"Bob, if I wanted my lunch now, I'd open up my bag and eat it," A.G. said, giving me a sideways look that made me feel like crawling into the tackle box and pulling the lid shut. I fiddled with the reel, pretending

the line was snarled because I was too embarrassed to look back. I'd almost sent my father-in-law's ear over the side with the rest of the bait. And while that might have been a novel way to catch catfish, I doubt he would have approved.

Thanks to a bit of luck, we didn't have to deal with a nasty injury. There are, however, about 85,000 fishermen each year who aren't so lucky. They suffer fishing injuries serious enough to require hospital treatment. And while most hookings aren't bad enough to require a doctor's care, they can be painful and lead to serious infections. Here are some tips to help keep you from landing yourself or a fishing partner in the hospital.

Hooked on Fishing

- Always hold the hook or lure tightly in your fingers. Flailing hooks are liable to catch anything they come in contact with. Also, sudden moves by live bait can get you snagged.
- Carry a wire cutter or sharp pliers and disinfectant in your first aid kit.



- Be especially careful when dislodging lures and hooks which have gotten snagged on submerged branches, brush, or roots. For one thing, you can't see what you're doing, and the tension when the lure comes loose could cause it to spring up and sink the hook into your hand. It's best to invest in a hook retriever. Also, if your lure gets snagged underwater, don't try to break it free by reeling in the line. If the lure breaks free, the pole's spring action can send the lure flying back out of the water at you or someone else nearby.

- Point the tip of your pole toward the water when you're casting, not toward the face of your companion.

- Don't cast over a fishing partner's head. Always look around before making a cast.

- When landing a fish, work from the rear of the boat and use a net. Some species, such as catfish, have stiff spines in their fins which can cause painful injuries, so learn how to handle the fish properly.

- If you are snagged by your own hook, don't try to back it out. Instead, push it through the skin until the point and barb are exposed. Snip them off and also snip off the eyelet. Now pull the hook through the skin following its natural arc. Clean the wound and apply a disinfectant. Watch for infection.

- When walking, it's best to break down your fishing pole. If you can't, carry it with the tip trailing you and the hook or lure firmly attached to a hook holder on the pole. If your pole doesn't have a hook holder, you can also catch the hook on one of the pole's line guides.

Staying Afloat

Drowning is the most common cause of the hundreds of fishing-related deaths each year. To make sure you drown the worm instead of the fisherman, do the following:

- Always wear your personal flotation device (PFD).

- Don't overload the boat.

- Load the boat properly, keeping the heaviest loads in the middle and bottom of the boat.

- Never stand on the bow when the boat is in motion.

- Load and unload the boat one person at a time.

- Don't change places in a boat in the middle of the water. Come to the shore.

- During a storm, lay low in the boat and point the bow into the waves to avoid being tipped.

- At night, slow down and use the running and marker lights.

- If the boat capsizes, stay with it until help arrives. Don't remove your clothing or boots. They will help keep you afloat by holding air and also help keep you warm.

Wading

- Never wade alone.

- Let someone know where you will be.

- Wear a shoe or boot that will provide maximum traction on the slippery rocks underfoot.

- Unseen holes or drop-offs are a dangerous hazard. Test each step carefully in advance by taking a tentative shuffle step. Better yet, use a wading staff to measure the depth of the water before each step.

- Wear a PFD. ■

Information for this article was provided by *Safety Times*.

