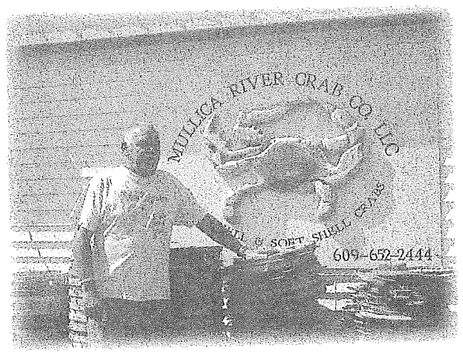
CAPTAIN PHIL ANDERSEN

As told by
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Phil Andersen was born in Camden, New Jersey, in 1944. His grandparents came to the United States from Norway around 1900. His grandfather operated a shipyard on the Delaware River in Camden, primarily building commercial fishing vessels used for Atlantic menhaden. His father was a tugboat captain earlier in life, later working for the American Dredging Company, based in Camden. While he was young, Phil's family would vacation in the Port Republic area and became very close to the French family, who had been in the region for several generations. Phil eventually considered them to be his second family. Mr. French was an avid duck hunter and it was with him that he shot his first black duck at the age of eight. He liked that moment to a light switch being turned on, as duck hunting became his life-long passion. When only 12, he bought his own sneakbox with money earned working in a grocery store. As far as he knew, he was the only boy in the area to acquire his own duck boat at such an early age. He powered the boat with an old 3hp Sears Elgin motor and hunted out of Nacote Creek with it.



Captain Phil Andersen

Phil later worked summers as a deckhand on party boats, as well as doing some clamming and crabbing, developing a love of working on the water. He went into the Marine Corps after graduating from high school, after which he took a job with a corporation, working in sales. Not happy with that work, he made the decision to leave that job while returning on a business flight from California. He attempted to quit the next day but was convinced to stay on six more months until a replacement could be found. He then had the chance to pursue his dream, moving to Green Bank in 1973, crabbing and clamming full time. At that time, there were no other commercial crab potters in the area. He crabbed from April until mid-November, and then clammed the rest of the year. He also duck hunted as much as he could in the winter.

He worked out of the Chestnut Neck Boat Yard and then purchased his current crab house on the Oyster Creek from Donald Maxwell in the early 1980s. He believes it was built in 1937, with the Maxwell family running their oyster business from it until they built a new place on the Nacote Creek. He bought the building with the idea of shedding out crabs in it, which no one in the area had done before. He built tanks inside it, pumping water into them from the creek. This turned out to be very successful, with each tank sometimes holding up to 500 shedders. When the tanks are full of crabs, someone needs to be there round the clock, since the crabs need to be removed from the water and refrigerated soon after shedding in order to preserve their eating quality. The crabs then go to local restaurants or to seafood distribution centers in Philadelphia or New York City. While Phil had clam bed leases, he never planted seed clam on them, since clam aquaculture was labor intensive and at the same time of the year that the soft crab business was. He has always considered crabbing to be his main livelihood. He has two men working for him now, and they tend between 350 and 400 crab pots a day.

About 15 years ago, Phil had another dream come true when he started to take gunning parties out during duck season. At this time, he ceased clamming and dredging crabs in order to focus on the hunting. He advertised in Wildfowl Magazine at first, but after a few years all his business was by word of mouth. Most of his parties come from Pennsylvania or New York, but he has had clients from all over the country. His parties mostly hunt from layout boats or floating blinds, depending on the species being sought. When hunting on his own, he still prefers to hunt from a sneakbox. Another advantage of taking out parties, besides making money doing something he loves so much, is the increase in hunting experience his retrievers receive. His dogs get more valuable experience during one season of hunting with guided parties than most hunters' dogs get in many years hunting on their own. He is especially looking forward to this season as he has a new pup ready for its first hunting season.

Phil carved a rig of his own decoys when he was 12, which served him for many years. They were cork bodied with white cedar heads. He got the cedar from Johnny Brown's sawmill in Port Republic. He only switched over to commercially made decoys when a few of his own birds were shot by members of parties he was guiding. He also used to run rabbit hounds but increased development and traffic caused him to give it up over concern for his dogs' safety.

When Phil turned 60 a few years ago, he finally stopped working seven days a week, taking Sundays off. He considers himself lucky to be able to make a living at several activities he enjoys so much and has no intention of slowing down in the near future. He has always enjoyed the support of his wife Ginny in all his pursuits on the water. She has even helped out in the crab house during busy times. He also feels fortunate to be working where he does. While the bay has deteriorated in many other areas, the lower Mullica River and Great Bay have been somewhat spared, due to the largely undeveloped watershed draining into it and to the ocean inlet flushing it out. Years ago, he took a great chance, leaving a secure job with benefits to pursue his dreams. Even with the ups and downs of working the bay, he has no regrets at all.