

The Sun Always Shines on the 4th of July

By Barbara Del Piano

Some years the waves are up; sometimes the ocean is flat. Winds may vary and the luck of the draw determines which teams get the more desirable lanes. Some years the races are neck and neck; other times one team racks up the points early in the day. But there is one factor that never changes; the sun always shines on the Fourth of July.

When the annual Walter J. Macfarlane Memorial Regatta gets underway at 8:30 Saturday morning, July 4 suspense will hang heavy in the salty morning air as crews from more than a dozen teams look forward with eager anticipation to competing in the oldest continuous canoe race in Hawai'i.

For the past 56 years, the Outrigger Canoe Club has sponsored this popular water sport event, the only wave race on the O'ahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association calendar, and certainly the most colorful. Most paddlers agree that it's also the most fun.

It all started when Club president Walter Macfarlane unexpectedly died in 1943 (long before most of our paddlers were even born) and the Outrigger decided to rename the Club-sponsored canoe races held on the Fourth of July in his honor.

As World War II raged across Europe and the Pacific, a tremendous effort was put forth by Club members to make this first memorial event a truly outstanding one. A full page ad appeared in the newspapers inviting one and all to Waikiki to enjoy a water extravaganza. A picture of Walter Mac appeared beside one of Duke Kahanamoku surrounded by Outrigger beauties, Anna Morris, Wanda Grant and Kathleen Patterson.

The Outrigger ad listed a program of 16 events, including races between MP class sailing boats from Kaneohe Yacht Club, a mixed tandem surfing contest and a tug of war between Outrigger and Hui Nalu.

Participants, in addition to OCC and Hui Nalu, consisted of two six-man teams comprised of officers and enlisted men, and a wahine team made up of WACS, WAVES, SPARS and lady marines. A couple

of beach boy teams were formed especially for the occasion.

The next day the papers proclaimed the races a big success. As for the tug-of-war, when the two teams began to vigorously paddle in the opposite direction, the rope broke. When the same thing happened on the second try, the officials declared it a tie.

Each year since, the Macfarlane Regatta has continued to be one of the most popular canoe racing events in Hawai'i.

Part of its appeal is the element of unpredictability, with the outcome of the races depending as much on luck as on skill. One year, the Waikiki Surf Club's canoe swamped during the senior women's event. With only the ama visible above water, the crew opted to paddle instead of bail and managed to win the race, crossing the finish line stern first.

Then there was the time the waves were so big that 30 canoes swamped. One year, the Outrigger had everything going for it in the senior men's race. With perfect waves and a draw of lane one, they appeared to have it made. However, the canoe swamped and Hui Nalu, in lane seven, came in first.

There have been four ties in the Macfarlane Regatta, but one of the closest cliff-hangers was the year that Outrigger and Hui Nalu went neck and neck throughout the day. The outcome depended on the senior men's race. Again, the two teams were side by side, even coming in on the same wave at the finish. The officials ruled that Hui Nalu won by a nose.

Last year, the Thunderbirds put on an awesome aerial show as the canoes raced directly below.



The fastest mile in Macfarlane history was paddled in 1988 by the OCC Boys 18. Members of the crew were Heath Hemmings, Wyatt Jones, Hunter Eggers, Alike Winter and Guy Hicks. Not pictured: Jon Glaser. They're shown receiving their trophy from Muriel Flanders and Walter Guild.

For the first 22 years, the races took place right in the Outrigger's "front yard". Since the move to our present site in 1965, the Club has provided a hearty, early morning breakfast at the crack of dawn. Following a pep rally in the Bar, the paddlers give their traditional OCC cheer loud enough to wake even the soundest sleeper.

Each club sets up its headquarters in a tent on the beach, and along with paddlers, spectators, canoes, coolers, umbrellas, beach chairs and other paraphernalia, the beach is a solid mass of people, sound and color. In the ocean, the brilliant blues of sky and water are dotted with sailboats, surf boards, rubber rafts and inner tubes, adding yet more color to the scene. Even the turtles, swimming peacefully on the other side of the breakwater, seem to be enjoying the day.

When the canoes line up in the water and the crews get ready for the first race, the excitement begins to build and it continues to mount throughout the day as the points are tallied and one team or another takes the lead. When each winning crew crosses the finish line, a spontaneous cheer erupts from that club's supporters, joined by spectators along the beach, those leaning over their hotel room balconies and others watching from a flotilla of assorted seacraft anchored at the half-mile turn.

As the day wears on, the excitement reaches a climax when the major races of the day take place in mid-afternoon. After the last race, when the winners have been officially declared, the trophies awarded, and the last drop of champagne emptied from the prized silver bowls, the weary but happy paddlers, laden with leis, put down their paddles, catch their second wind and the partying begins.

The official paddling party on the Club grounds attracts hundreds of paddlers and their coaches, families and friends who gather to celebrate with a BBQ, dancing and entertainment.

It's anyone's guess what the 1998 Macfarlane has in store. It's sure to have some surprises, some unexpected thrills and sad disappointments. The only thing we can be sure of is that, whatever happens, the sun will shine!