

Waikiki Surf wins Molokai-Oahu canoe race after three swampings

By TONI WITHINGTON

Battling 15-foot waves and swamping three times within an hour, the men of Waikiki Surf Club led a ragged field of paddlers over the finish line yesterday in the 15th annual Aloha Week Molokai to Oahu canoe race.

Only six canoes in a starting field of 12 crossed the finish line. The others either broke up in the heavy swell or had to be towed ashore.

Leading Waikiki to victory were Joseph "Nappy" Napoleon, captain, and 14-year racing veteran Rabbit Kekai, steerman.

Also crossing the finish line in a winning time of six hours, 37 minutes, 13 seconds were Nick Beck, Baldwin K. "Blue" Makua, Jr., Mike Tongg and Randy Chun.

Relieving them during the race were team members Richard Henning, Jeffrey Young and Val Ching.

The record time for the 38-mile race is five hours and 56 minutes set by Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club in 1964.

Outrigger Canoe Club's winning time last year was 6:43:57.

Three times the men in this year's winning canoe were thrown into the water as their canoe flipped over.

The first dunking came half way between the starting line at Hale O Lono Harbor on Molokai and the beach at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Hotel. The second followed in 20 minutes and the third 15 minutes later.

"It took us about 15 to 20 minutes each time to flip over the canoe again," Kekai said. "This was the roughest race yet. But we never gave up."

After sprinting rhythmically to the finish line the winners spilled from the canoe to cheers, welcoming leis and quarts of milk and juice.

A light rain, traditional Hawaiian sign of a blessing or a victory, dampened the crowd of about 2,000 as the canoe touched the sand.

The winning crew also met a shower of about 10 trophies presented by businessmen and the royal court of Aloha Week.

Defending champions of the Outrigger Canoe Club had to be towed ashore after repeated swampings.

Reports from other paddlers say the canoe of the Order of Kamehameha broke in half after hitting a giant swell. No one was injured.

The koa canoe entry from Kailua was so badly battered it had to be lifted on to a conveyer boat.

The Lani Kai canoe also had to be towed ashore as did one paddled by Maili Sons.

Many paddlers and back-up men suffered from sea sickness.

Finishing behind Waikiki Surf Club with a time of 6:40:46 was Healani, led by captain Richard Bell. The team captured first place in the non-koa canoe division.

Coach Clement Paialina said the canoe also swamped three times, the first time three miles from the starting line.

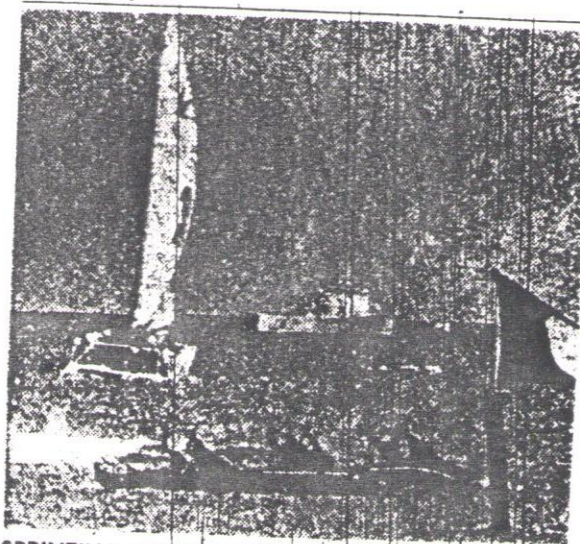
Crossing the finish line third to capture second place in the koa division was a greatly improved Molokai team. The team, which has been paddling for only three years, kept the canoe upright throughout the 6:47:02 trip.

Also placing in the non-koa division were Lanikai with a time of 7:01:53 and Waikiki Surf Club, 7:11:14.

Third place in the koa division went to Hui Nalu with a time of 7:20:48.



BIG KISS FOR WINNING DADDY — Two-year-old Suzie Kekai gives her father, Robert "Rabbit" Kekai a smacking reward for steering his Waikiki Surf Club crew to victory.



SPRINTING FINISH — Paddlers of the Waikiki Surf Club few yards of the 38-mile Molokai-Oahu Canoe Race yesterday. Their winning time was six hours, 37 minutes, 13 seconds. — Photos by John Titchen