



**LIGHT AT THE END OF THE CHANNEL**—The Outrigger Canoe Club draws a bead on the finish line in Ala Wai Channel at the end

of yesterday's Molokai-to-Oahu race. —Star-Bulletin Photo by John Titchen.

# Last Year's Tahitian Victory Avenged

# Isle Team Wins Canoe Race

SB  
10/17/77

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While nearly everyone else in the islands was sensibly nestled in bed, about 400 men arose yesterday before dawn to breakfast in the darkness and get ready to shake the brick-red dust of Molokai from their feet.

Shortly before 1 in the afternoon, the first of them arrived in the Ala Wai Channel. A cheery crowd lined the shore and police liberally ticketed parked cars in Ala Moana Park as the Outrigger Canoe Club wearily heaved itself across the finish line to win the 26th Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race.

The red and yellow, 39-foot fiberglass canoe made the 42-mile trip in five hours and 55 minutes, most of it choppy Molokai Channel that had its wicked way with some canoers. Outrigger finished a healthy half-mile or so ahead of a koa canoe manned by Maire Nui.

WHAT, OUTRIGGER coach Tom Conner was asked, was the breakfast of champions? "Coffee and donuts," he said, laying waste to nutritional wisdom with a smile. "We don't eat much before a race." As he spoke, enough leis were draped over him to turn him into a

walking shrub, ukuleles began playing and Outrigger fans burst into song. This was not just another race.

Although it was the seventh win in the race for the venerable club, it seemed to matter more that the thrashing local clubs took last year from the Tahitians had been avenged. Tahitians won seven of the first 10 places last year, including the first four.

This year, they took five, but they were second, fifth, seventh, eighth and ninth. That, Hawaiian pride could take.

"WE JUST BLEW 'em out right at the start," said Conner. "Our strategy was to sprint the first 30 minutes and it worked. Last year, they (Maire Nui's first crew) got the lead. This time, we had a quarter-mile lead after the first half-hour. We knew if we stayed with them 'til we got to the (Molokai) channel, we'd be okay."

In each of the past two years, the channel had been unseasonably lame, providing the Tahitians with the calm, easy-riding course they enjoy back home.

But this year, the channel had reverted to its rough-house self. The swells averaged four or five feet, but many were bigger, and the wind blew enough to make it choppy.

THE RACE BEGAN at Hale O Lono, a rocky harbor cut from the edge of the Molokai Ranch. Normally, it is the kiawe-strewn playground of cattle and the home of a cottage industry which sends red dirt to Oahu to become cinder-block tile.

But the night before the race, the coastline blazed campfires as citizens of Molokai turned out for their version of the Kentucky Derby. Trees were strung with electric lights, latrines were erected and every tent on the island was pitched along the narrow beach.

"The people of Molokai were upset when we had the race start at Kaunakakai last year," explained Ward Russell, president of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association. "This is one of the few chances they get to come to the Molokai ranch to fish and camp."

IT LOOKED LIKE Resurrection City, West. Some tents were clustered together and tables were set up, groaning with food and cookware, a giant outdoor kitchen. Children wandered barefoot in the dusty road and their big brothers drank beer in the back of pickups.

A caterer set up his own kitchen, selling chicken and laulau dinners with rice, chow fun and macaroni salad for \$2.50. But as one of the local kids said to a friend, "I'm tellin' you, brah, dat food ain't 'dat good."

Still, there was a captive audience for the starchy fare, including the Imua-Canoe Club from California, the sixth-place finisher, and several of the dozen Tahitian teams. Many clubs, such as Outrigger, stayed in hotels or private homes, but others roughed it in kiawe thickets or slept next to their canoes under a sky milky with stars.

A LONG PRAYER in Hawaiian and chanting cheers by several clubs prefaced the start of the race at 7 a.m. Hundreds of Molokai residents watched from Hale O Lono Point and from bluffs above the harbor.

As the paddlers left the arid coastline and passed Laau Point, they may have wondered why go through this exercise in futility.

The swells suddenly were cut by the wind coming out of the north. Several boats foundered in the rough seas. The chores were divided: Some paddled and some bailed.

Maire Nui's first crew tore its canvas covering in several places. A spokesman for the crew later said it lost 10 minutes trying to repair the damage. A request for permission to repair it was denied by race officials.

"THEY WOULDN'T be able to do it out here, anyway," said one. "They'd swamp before they could get it on."

Maire Nui carried on gallantly, often using one paddler exclusively to bail.

Outrigger, meanwhile, enjoyed mostly smooth sailing. It's changes were almost flawless.

Each team had nine paddlers, six in the canoe and three in an escort boat. When switching personnel, two or three men are dropped ahead of the canoe by the escort boat. Just before the canoe reaches them, the

men to be replaced bail out on the right side and the reinforcements climb in on the left.

OUTRIGGER'S PADDLERS churned along in unison. At the top of one swell, two men would roll out to the right. The canoe would disappear in the trough between swells. When it reemerged at the top of the next, it again had six paddlers stroking in perfect time.

"We missed a couple changes," Conner said, "and we had to do quite a bit of bailing because we got some rips in the canvas. Other than that, things went pretty well. Except when I got stung on the hand by a Portuguese man-of-war."

"I never saw it, but the gland under my arm swole up and I had to sit out and put ammonia on it for 45 minutes before I could paddle again."

BOTH OUTRIGGER and third-place finisher Hui Nalu Canoe Club from Niu Valley used Tahitian-style paddles and quick, short Tahitian paddling techniques part of the way. "We used the Tahitian stroke until we got to the channel," said Conner. "Then we used the (longer) Hawaiian stroke."

By the time the canoe reached Diamond Head, Outrigger was changing paddlers every eight minutes instead of every 30. As for stroke style, Conner called it "The survival style. When you're that tired, there's nothing ethnic about it. You just paddle."

FRED HEMMINGS, steersman for the Hui Nalu team, thought the success of Outrigger and Hui Nalu vindicates the progressive stance they've taken toward canoeing. Hemmings and Conner have advocated changing the rules to allow more radical canoe designs and faster canoes. Conner had to make several changes in the winning canoe, including shortening it by 1 foot, to make sure it qualified for the race.

Outrigger and Hui Nalu are also the only clubs which have done a lot of experimenting with Tahitian paddling technique.

"I THINK IT'S interesting that the only two clubs that are taking a different tack were the first two," said Hemmings. "We stood apart in the controversy and we did the best here."

As far as the race went, Hemmings said "The Tahitians are competitive and proud people. But we are too. We just went out and out-paddled 'em today."

After the race, Hui Nalu had a party in Niu Valley with their house guests, the second- and fifth-place finishers from Maire Nui.



## Canoe Racing

### Molokai-Oahu

#### FIBERGLASS DIVISION

1. Outrigger, 5 hours, 55 minutes; 2. Hui Nalu, 6:18:34; 3. Kailua, 6:24:34; 4. Marie Nui, 6:38:21; 5. Imua, 6:39:09; 6. Teorooa, 6:39:28; 7. Teve Nui, 6:31:11; 8. Mahee, 6:32:06; 9. Tamarie Malae, 6:32:22; 10. Loward Kai, 6:30:44; 11. Papeete, 6:35:50; 12. Hui Lanaki, 6:38:28; 13. Tiara Pu, 6:40:55; 14. Hui Nalu Surf Club, 6:44:19; 15. Teatika Henua, 6:45:16; 16. Hanaiki, 6:46:14; 17. Pirae, 6:47:31; 18. Waikei Beach Boys, 6:47:33; 19. Koolau, 6:51:27; 20. Hui O'Kaloa, 6:52:45; 21. Halesona, 6:52:17; 22. Hawaiian Beach Boys, 6:54:19; 23. Lanikai, 6:53:02; 24. Waialea, 6:58:27; 25. Pae, 7:02:29; 26. Kamahele, 7:06:50; 27. Bora Bora, 7:11:53; 28. Hoo-Pae, 7:15:04; 29. Na Keli Oka Mo'i, 7:15:44; 30. Heena Kai, 7:18:19; 31. STP Tiara Tahiti, 7:30:04; 22. Hui Wai Kai, 7:36:45; 23. Honolulu Police Department, 7:46:48; 24. Sons and Daughters of Molokai, 7:48:40; 25. Jonahe, 8:20:19.

#### KOA DIVISION

1. Maire Nui, 6:58:50; 2. Waikei Surf Club, 6:52:15; 3. Lanikai, 6:53:07; 4. Kamahele, 6:58:18; 5. Kai Oua, 6:41:39; 6. Bora Bora, 6:46:45; 7. Koolau, 7:06:12; 8. Molokai, 7:07:19; 9. Kailua, 7:11:20; 10. Waikele, 7:26:27.