



By Ron Haworth

Kakina is Koa Kindling



The gremmies carry the Kakina to the water.



Watching the races at the old Club.



Butch Ledford still has his OCC steering paddle.

"After what I thought might drown me and my fellow paddlers, I got to the surface and started counting heads. Luckily five popped up. Then I saw paddles and bits and pieces of koa, then *Kakina* surprisingly still rigged and upright."

These words and vision still haunt the mind of Loch "Butch" Ledford who in 1962 was steering *Kakina* and his 14 and under gremmie crew from the old club to the Ala Wai for paddling practice. And but for a dropped paddle and Waikiki surf too large for practice there would be no story and the crew would not have that wave forever breaking in their memory.

One can only imagine...NO!...One can't imagine the spark of relief, quickly doused by dismay, when the teenage crew swam to *Kakina* thinking all was well...until...Doug Sheehan relived the reality.

"*Kakina* looked swamped but otherwise fine but when we swam to her we saw she had no bottom!"

Butch did the casting, "Our no-nonsense coach, Rabbit Kekai, felt we were qualified for the task. We had a seasoned crew made up of me, Gary (McClure) Vietch, Hal Burchard, Bill Peters, Ed Pickering, and Sheehan."

Act 1

Minutes before they had been paddling past Kaisers' off Hawaiian Village when Gary, who was stroking, dropped his paddle on the right side, and as it drifted back, out of instinct, seats 2, 3, and maybe 4 and 5, leaned to pick it up.

Sheehan: "Pickering yelled for us to grab hold of the canoe and I saw him hanging on to an iako but it was too late. *Kakina* somersaulted... ama up, ama down, ama up, ama over."

"We quickly righted *Kakina* but all attempts to bail her met with failure because of the surf now breaking around us," Butch said. "And back then *Kakina* didn't have floatation pockets."

Burchard recalls some teenage confusion on how to proceed. "This was compounded by Gary's fear of surf, sharks, and the ocean in general."

Butch concurred: "Gary almost walked on water when he felt a paddle blade touch his foot."

Act 2

"We were getting pushed closer to the inner reef by white water and I knew we were in a vulnerable position", admitted Butch, "but I thought we were okay, even though we'd given up trying to bail her dry. Remember...at this point she still had her bottom intact. We were trying to reach the newly dredged Kaiser channel when a huge set loomed.

"We negotiated the first wave but the next became our demise. We were all hanging on to the canoe with the ama toward shore juggling paddles when it lifted us up the face and broke. I still see Pickering clinging to the manu and going over the falls on a wave I estimated at eight feet."

"Gary was hanging onto *Kakina*," Burchard recalled, "and so it was the five of us that did the heavy pushing until, with the help of the Hawaiian Village catamaran beach boys towing us, we finally got her to shore.

Sheehan said they were all pretty much exhausted by the time they reached the beach, and fearing the reception they would receive back at Outrigger did nothing to revive them. Indeed, Ledford was required to explain the accident at an informal inquiry.

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No Rabbit Hole

It was at this point in the Shakespearian tragedy coach Rabbit arrived on the scene no doubt wondering what happened to his crew and *Kakina* when they failed to show up at the Ala Wai leaving him one canoe short for practice.

In paddling the buck stops with the steersman and it was only Ledford left at ground zero to face judgment and an irate Rabbit; the crew had gone seeking help and maybe calmer waters.

"From a distance *Kakina* looked fine, but I will never forget the look on Rabbit's face when he ran up and glanced into her he saw nothing but sand where a koa bottom should have been. I could see he was furious and I wisely backed away. As I said he was a no-nonsense coach and this was BEYOND non-sense; in hindsight...yeah...nuclear"

Hal Burchard who later was to skipper the hydrofoil *SeaFlite* inter-island remarked, "We treated koa canoes with reverence and were honored to have been chosen to deliver *Kakina* to the Ala Wai. This made the tragedy all the more painful and is still humbling today."

Humpty-Dumpty Had a Great Fall

The egg in the children's nursery rhyme could not be put back together again by all the Kings horses and all the King's men...but *Kakina* was koa, born in a lofty place... bold... brave... fearless... and after months of being abandoned in the Outrigger parking lot, (believed beyond salvage), the pieces were to be put back together. George Blanchard is credited with taking them to his home in Pauoa Valley to do the patching.

When finished, Mark Buck, who was coaching at the time, drove the Club Volkswagen van and trailer to bring her home. However, *Kakina* was used sparingly until George Perry in 1967 made extensive modifications to bring her up to racing form and *Kakina* was again prominent in that year's Fourth of July Macfarlane Regatta.

Paoa Log Weighed 8 Tons

Perry at the time was Hawaii's acknowledged koa canoe craftsman dating from when he built his first canoe *Kehukai* in 1954 for Lanikai Canoe Club. Three more were to follow, *Makulua* and *Holulele* for Lanikai and *Paoa* for Outrigger.

Perry told this writer in a Honolulu Star-Bulletin interview before *Paoa* in 1969 won her maiden race in record time: "A felled koa log can lay undisturbed for three to five years in a curing process. Few people appreciate the task involved in bringing a koa log to sea level. It can mean a crew of workers camping for weeks under primitive conditions trimming the tree for its descent to sea level."

George's son Tay Perry, recently elaborated, "Four horses typically aided in the descent dragging the log down the mountain, two in front and two in back to brake any unwanted momentum."

The Wizard of Oz

Loch (Butch) Ledford immigrated to Australia in 1972 but he didn't hide behind a curtain but instead stayed active in paddling. He is a past president of The Outrigger Canoe Club of Australia (1995-2000) and remembers paddling fiberglass canoes from a mold off Waikiki Surf Club's Malia.

"They were the heaviest canoes I have ever paddled...now

long gone."

When Rabbit visited Australia in 2004 for a surfing carnival and ran into Ledford he shouted, "BUTCHIE! I REMEMBER THE *KAKINA*!" So does Butch. "I was fortunate to share steering *Kakina* with Freddie Hemmings (who had taught me to steer when I was 12) in the 1969 Molokai Hoe where we finished a close second to Surf Club. I think *Kakina* has forgiven me."

The previous year *Kakina* had set a then Molokai record of 5:55:16 despite a huli in mid-channel. One *Star-Bulletin* headline lead read OUTRIGGER FLIPS OVER RECORD. A salty high 'ama' by a koa warrior.

No Critiques

Heretofore, this *Kakina* tale lay dormant and unrecorded; the major reason perhaps due to *Forecast* publication being suspended beginning January 1961 for 37 months for lack of Club related material to fill the 16-page magazine.

Koa Log was fortunate to contact the three gremmie crew featured, (Gary Vietch and Ed Pickering are deceased and Bill Peter's whereabouts is unknown), and is pleased this *Kakina* tragedy revisited has reunited three gremmies after a half-century.

Butch put it in context, "I feel that time has not passed when talking to Doug and Hal; fantastic experience...all the best you Gremmies!

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