

# SO FAAA, SO GOOD

SB 10/6/95

Despite unrest at home, Tahitian paddlers primed to defend title

BY GREG AMBROSE  
*Star-Bulletin*

AS the Tahiti airport went up in flames and rioters beat French gendarmes and rampaged through Papeete to protest the Sept. 5 French nuclear detonation on Mururoa Atoll, the Faaa Canoe Club remained firmly focused.

After all, they were training for a possible third straight Molokai Hoe victory.

Keeping their concentration was no easy task, with the airport a smoldering ruin, French riot police swarming all over Papeete and merchants arming themselves to prevent another \$40 million riot after the next nuclear test explosion by France.

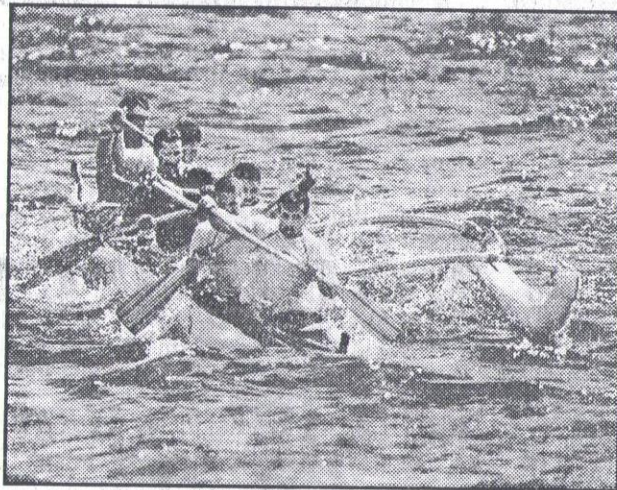
The canoe club shares the same area of Tahiti as the torched airport and the headquarters of the Tahitian independence movement Tavini Huiraatira, the most vocal critics of the nuclear blasts. But canoe club members had no worries that the rioters might damage their outrigger canoes in their zealotry.

"The canoes were never in danger," said club president Hugh Laughlin. "People respect the canoes. They are expressing anger against the tests, but not against us."

Even though they were at the epicenter of rioting in Faaa, "we blocked it out and focused on our training. We are suffering for what is happening in our country. But we want to prove that through our sport we share friendship," Laughlin said.

"The victory of life is to make friends, not enemies."

The canoe club's single-minded commitment to winning inspired Hawaii steersman Tom Conner to jump ship from the Outrigger Canoe Club and twice guide the Tahitians to victory.



BY CRAIG T. KOJIMA, *Star-Bulletin*

*The Faaa Canoe Club practices off Waimanalo.*

"I wanted to go faster, I was tired of going slow," said Conner. "They work harder, they train harder, they don't have all the distractions of Hawaii teams, and they believe in each other."

"A lot of local team members think they are better than the next guy."

For the past two years Conner has hung on to the steering paddle as the crew stroked so strongly across the treacherous Kaiwi Channel that other teams gave up and battled for second place.

Conner has been on 11 winning teams in 21 attempts, and thanks to the tireless Tahitians, two of those were the top times in the race. In 1993, Faaa broke the five-hour barrier that other crews couldn't crack since the 41-mile endurance contest began in 1952.

Laughlin stresses that although many of the paddlers were born elsewhere in French Polynesia, it is not an all-star team. They are all members of the Faaa Canoe Club, and train together after work every day. The best 16 team members paddle in the 84-kilo-

meter Bastille Day race, then the best nine of those are selected for the Molokai competition.

Conner and a Tahitian club member who moved to Australia to compete on kayaks round out the team.

"They are fun to paddle with," said Conner. "They are just simple country guys, and life is simple for them on Tahiti. They get up, work, paddle and go to bed."

Because his flight to Tahiti was canceled due to the violence, Conner hasn't been able to practice with the team, but he reckons two days of paddling off Waimanalo will get them on the same wavelength.

They will practice in the California-designed Bradley canoe that they twice paddled to victory, but will race Sunday in a new canoe designed in Hawaii that only Conner has tested.

Walter Guild helped design the new Force V outrigger, 19 of which will be used in the race Sunday. The new canoe was the brain-

## MOLOKAI HOE

- **What:** 44th annual Molokai-to-Oahu men's outrigger canoe race.
- **When:** Sunday, 7:30 a.m. start at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor. First team expected to finish before 1 p.m. at Fort DeRussy Beach, Waikiki.
- **Record:** Tahiti's Faaa Canoe Club became the first to finish in less than five hours: 4 hours, 55 minutes, 27 seconds in 1993.

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# FAAA: Club remains focused

FROM C-1

child of Joe Quigg, who for decades has designed the fastest devices in Hawaiian waters, be they surfboards, paddleboards or outrigger canoes.

"We just modified his design," said Guild.

But it's the paddlers who infuse the canoe with the energy to

achieve its winning potential.

"We are people who develop the spirit of the canoe," said Laughlin.

"We are too small to worry about the nuclear testing. We let the people who are able to fight the nuclear testing fight it.

"And we don't race against the other teams, we race against the ocean."



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BY CRAIG T. KOJIMA, Star-Bulletin

Members of the Faaa Canoe Club. "We don't race against the other teams, we race against the ocean," says club president Hugh Laughlin.