THIRD SECTION

Honolulu Star-Bulletin

NEWS AND FEATURES FOR ALL THE FAMILY

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DUKE KAHANAMOKU RECALLS THE 'OLD DAYS' AT WAIKIKI BEACH

By JOHN WILLIAMS

Hawaii's ambassador of goodwill, Sheriff Duke Paoa Kahanamoku, got a big kick out of flying down from the coast in the Hawaii Clipper last weekend.

A couple of hours later he was home at his Diamond Head cottage where the Pacific swishes across the beach against his front lawn. He had peeled off a swank suit he'd bought in Los Angeles and donned swim trunks so that his great body showed to perfection as he stretched on a rattan lounge.

We settled down to yarning. No doubt about it: Duke was glad to be home. Out before him on the reef four Hawaiians worked together with a net, scooping wriggling fish from emerald pools. Duke wanted to join them.

He confessed: "Now and again I go out." (He gestured, hinting that guiltily he steals across the beach and snares himself fish with a spear or throw net.)

"Oh, boy, they're good to eat fresh from the water."

And he licked his lips.

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Duke always has a good time at everything he does. About flying down in the clipper he said: "I couldn't sit still. There was so much to see. San Francisco swiftly fading out of view below, then the two bridges, then a tanker just out at sea that was so tiny below us that it looked like a trawler.

"We climbed steadily upward toward a thick white cloudbank that looked like marshmallow. It was dark and gray below the clouds: I thought of the Dole race and shuddered. But soon we were above the clouds and settled down for level flying at 10,000 feet where it was sunny and clear.

"The trip was a lot of fun. There was a good gang aboard."

The more Duke talks, the more he uses those words: the gang. Once he was invited at Paris to go down and swim in Algiers, but he refused because the French expected him to travel alone and put on a one man show.

Being with a gang is second nature with Duke. The Kahanamokus used to live near the beach between Waikiki and the Ala Moana. His father was a cop. (The day the last Kahanamoku boy was born, the father was promoted to sergeant, so the new boy was called Sergeant.)

Duke was the biggest and oldest of the six boys, so he led that gang.

It was the day of horse trams. Duke worked it out so the gang could get free rides from the Ala Moana along Kalakaua to the Moana. They'd ride on to the terminus at Kapiolani park and unhitch the horses and take them around and hitch them on the other end for the return trip to town.

This pleased the driver because it was an hour and a half's drive from town so by the time the tram reached Waikiki he was sick of the horses.

Of course if Duke and the gang struck a hostile driver then they just clung on the rear of the tram and sneaked a ride. The gang would get so big that its weight would make the tram end heavy, and the horses would stall, and that would make the driver mad. He'd tie the brakes and hop from the tram and chase the gang down the street, windmilling at the air with the whip.

He hadn't a hope of catching the gang. They were like monkeys, barefooted and agile. They left home with boots on, old fashioned black boots of stiff leather that blistered their feet. But they'd sneak around the corner and bury their boots in the sand like a dog buries a bone, and on the way home they dug them up again and put them on and squeak-squeaked down the hall to their bedrooms.

Today Duke thinks that his father was wise to the trick, but he was a pal and went on reading the paper, making out he didn't notice the gang come in.

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By the time Duke was 15 he had ganged up with a big gang that every day met at Waikiki beach right by the Moana pier. Most of this great gang are alive today, successes at desks in the city's life.

Duke ran out of fingers when he tried to tick them off. Here they are:

Kenneth Atkinson, Atherton Gilman, Knute Cottrell, Zen Genoves, Dude Miller, Harry Steiner, A. C. (Pete) Young, Lane Webster, Ted Cooper, Kenneth Brown, David Larsen, Steamboat Bill, Tough Bill, Major, Norman Oss, Bill Roth, Lawrence Cunha, Ginger Mayne, Sam King, Dad and Mike Center, and the Hustace brothers Harold, Tom, Curtis and Henry.

Many more that have escaped Duke's memory.

For a long time there were only two wahines: a couple of haoles—Mildred Turner (they called her Ladybird because she was so tiny and neat) and Josephine Pratt.

Jo was the first haole girl to ride a board. The gang was proud of her. They called her Jo so that she wouldn't feel embarrassed amongst a lot of boys. But Jo told the gang to skip that. She'd do anything in the water most of them could, and she did. Which is the best way of silencing the average male.

As the surf riders do today, the gang used to sit on boards out by the reef and yarn like jackasses while waiting for the waves to race them inshore. In those years the Myrtles and Healanis were at their prime, so the Waikiki gang thought it would be fine to form a club and have a name to throw scores into the Myrtles and Healanis.

They talked it over day after day as they sat on their boards out by the reef, their bronzed bodies reflected in the water.

They couldn't think of a good name until one day Duke suddenly said:

"Look, there's the name" and pointed out at the waves tripping on the reef, and the gang all turned, sort of expecting something like a bolting horse.

So Duke had to explain: all the waves come in together, in a hui or clubbed together, and nalu is Hawaiian for surf.

There they had it: they'd call the club Hui Nalu, a name which was destined to become famous.

The gang had no club house. Any spare dough they had they turned into root beer and pie, and into fruit which they chopped up in a bowl and poured on five cent cans of milk. So they picked out a big hau tree which grew where the Outrigger Canoe club clock stands today. There they'd sit in the shade and yarn and work on surfboards.

Incidentally, Zen Genoves and Kenneth Atkinson built the first big board. It was three inches thick and 10 feet long, the finest redwood out of California. The club coined a word for it: gudgeon.

To ride a gudgeon was something.

The Hui Nalu under the hau tree soon became so famous that opportunist Alexander Hume Ford, who always thought years ahead for Hawaii, persuaded the gang to join the Outrigger club, which he organized in 1908.

Some of the gang didn't join the Outrigger, though, so the Hui Nalu remained a separate unit. Still, both crowds kept on meeting under the hau tree. The Outrigger with its grass hut and shade for the canoes added swank to the beach and conveniently handled the overflow from the hau tree.

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Around about 1908 Duke started to step out in interclub athletics. He was a fine youth, six feet tall, a ball of muscle weighing about 190. As a sideline he used to row for the Healanis, but when he tried to become a member of the club he was blackballed.

Today Duke says: "All the club weren't against me. It was a handful of smart guys who said it was just too bad about me wanting to join, but I laughed them off because the most of us were pals, anyhow, and so I joined the Myrtles and helped clean up the Healanis.

"Dad Center was with the Myrtles and before I joined them I swam as anchor man against him in a relay race. I beat him by a touch, which made us realize that I could swim."

But nobody did much about it.

The gang's fun went on. Highlight was the wreck of the good ship Helga, full of coal from Australia, on the reef opposite Ft. De Russy. The crew shot off flares and skyrockets. Knute Cottrell and Zen and Atherton Gilman shot out in their big canoe, and Duke swanked out in a tiny, two-sailed sort of sea sled, which he called the Imp.

The wreck was beyond the breakers, so the canoe and the Imp were swamped, which meant harder work in recovery than it reads.

Duke's Imp caused a lot of mischief. He and his brother David used to sail in it outside and aloha friends sailing for the coast. The boys could upset the Imp at will and right it again.

One day so realistically did they "upset" that the captain of the Matsonia turned his ship and steamed to the rescue, sounding great blasts on the whistle.

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Duke swam into world fame on August 12, 1911, 12 days before his 21st birthday. A swim meet was held in the harbor at Pier 5 where the transports dock today. Duke knocked seconds off the 50, 100 and 220 records. Zen Genoves cleaned up the 440, 880 and mile races.

Local enthusiasm ran high. Smart guys on the mainland said no human could swim as fast as Hawaii claimed Duke could, and they invited Duke and Zen to swim at A. A. U. mainland meets.

Fine oldtimers like Bill Rawlins (later a federal judge) clubbed together and arranged benefits, etc., to raise money to send Duke and Zen.

The team left early in 1912. Lew Henderson was manager and Dude Miller was trainer-companion, but mostly companion. He had a great ear for music and was a wizard with any instrument. Besides, he and Zen had been to the mainland before. Therefore they were men of the world. They knew how to buy railroad tickets and how to step into a mainland hotel lobby or to shave in a Pullman with the nonchalance of a drummer.

Dude and Zen in 1909 went to the Seattle fair with Guy Rothwell and Bill Morgan in the transport Dix. They showed off an Hawaiian exhibit, and Dude and Zen gave canoe displays on lakes Union and Washington.

So Duke was a greenhorn when he set off for the mainland in 1912's winter. He forgot about the cold when he bought clothes in Honolulu and skipped buying vests. When he got to the mainland the cold wind whistled through his shirt, so he stuffed cardboard inside until one day he was undressing at the Chicago athletic club and the cardboard fell on the floor, and everybody laughed and took him to Marshall Fields.

Zen and Duke had a lot of fun with the salesmen. They kidded they couldn't talk English, and as Duke tried on gloves and vests they kept up a running fire of comment in Hawaiian, which confused the salesmen and made all the customers gather round. When everybody really thought Duke and Zen couldn't understand English, everybody made wisecracks about Duke being a Red Indian without feathers, so Duke and Zen heap grunted, which made the salesmen think Duke was getting sore.

Duke had a lot of fun about that angle on himself. He'd get into streetcars just for the fun of it, and sit plump right in amongst a bunch of wahines, and get a faraway out west look in his eyes, and grunt now and again, and the wahines would whisper:

"Gee, dearie, he's a swell looking Indian, ain't he? Wonder if he eats yuh?" And when they'd feel that Duke couldn't talk English, they said a whole lot of other things. Kidding he couldn't talk English meant, too, that Duke remembered a lot of his old Waikiki gang tricks and sneaked free rides from admiring conductors.

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The mainland sports writers, who tried to act tough, looked upon Duke's and Zen's claims as so much hot air, but Lew Henderson and Dude Miller laughed them off, and Hawaii's reps kept on going without saying a word until they reached Pittsburgh where the snow was deep.

The news photographers became a pest with their big 5x7 Graflexes, and they made the boys pose with ukuleles and grass skirts. When Duke peeled off and donned a swim suit and puffed out his muscles, the photographers had to back up to get in his great size.

Duke and Zen kept their heads. They showed the wise mainland guys a lot of Waikiki gang tricks.

Example: At the first AAU race, the other competitors were lined up at the indoor tank, nervous as tom cats. Duke acted simple, asked the starter if he could jump in.

Starter and sports writers (and the other contestants) thought Duke was nuts, so the starter said: "Okay, hop in."

Which Duke did. No two indoor tanks are the same temperature, he found, and by loosening up in the pool, as a horse does before a race, he got the feel of the water. Expert Duke says that if you start in a race with a dry body, the water causes a shock which slows up your pace at least a second, which may mean eventual defeat.

Duke's style made a hit, especially when he cleaned up the mainland stars. They used the sluggish trugeon style which means a lot of waste effort. Duke had his special crawl which left a neat trail of bubbles in his swift wake.

That year, 1912, every swimmer did his best because victory meant representing America at the Stockholm Olympic Games. Zen didn't make out, so he and Duke and Lew beat it back to Hawaii. Duke remained and trained under George Kistler, famed University of Pennsylvania coach.

This gave him plenty of time in which to perfect turns for racing in tanks. They were the first he'd swum in. In Honolulu it was all open water swimming. (He and Zen, incidentally, used to keep fit every day at Waikiki by swimming through the waves from the Moana pier to the Elks club!)

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Duke's 1912 mainland visit and his Olympic victories set new world standards and set off Duke on a career which never will be overlooked in the history of international swimming. Every year thereafter he left Hawaii and swam on the mainland. In 1915 he and George Cunha visited Australia and New Zealand.

They were big hits.

Duke pulled the old tricks. When he loosened up in the water before a race, the Aussies cried: "My word, he'll lose the ryce if he isn't careful!"

Down there, he and George swam against relay teams of four men, which was something that hadn't been done by two men before.

About this time, too, Duke, during a mainland visit, had some fun with Honolulu boys at Yale. Harry Steiner and Herman von Holt told the Yale relay team, then the tops, that they'd produce a team to wipe the floor with Yale.

They persuaded Farrant Turner to come to Yale from Wesleyan college, and they made Duke 4th man but kept his identity a secret until the night of the race.

The Yale team thought it was easy money until Duke, the main cheese, stepped to the starting line!

The Honolulu gang cleaned up.

Duke went on from one success to another. Apart from keeping himself in physical perfection, success in many foreign countries became a big personal test for him, too.

Success has bubbled to the heads of many stars, but Duke remained true to his Polynesian traditions and character. His sport was a lot of fun with lots of people. He kept it like that.

* * *

Today when he looks back on it all, dates become unimportant. But the events, the fun they had, are clear in his memory.

It is a pity Duke doesn't write a book about it all so that so much of Hawaii's great strides in international sport could be permanently recorded.

Many of the old Waikiki gang have albums filled with historic snapshots that are fast fading, but these should be preserved.

They tell a fine story.

There ought to be a roundup of that old Waikiki gang before memories become too dull.

The years unrolled swell stories.

Though it was only in 1918, how many today recollect correctly the details of the mainland tour Duke and a party of local boys made for the Red Cross?

There was Stubby Kreuger, Clarence Lane and Clair Tait. Tait was a fancy diver, and, because he was stationed at Pearl Harbor, he wore his navy uniform during the tour and it became a big hit with the wahines.

Owen Merrick, Star-Bulletin sports editor, went along as manager.

They toured all the west coast, went up into Canada (swam in Lake Louise), and put on exhibitions at every important city until they got east, then they went down to Chicago, New York and Boston.

At the tour's end Duke went to Washington and volunteered for service with the air corps, and they said okay if he'd stick around a bit they'd assign him to a training school, maybe down in Texas.

Remember the 1918 influenza epidemic? Duke was infected, it turned into double pneumonia, and in a couple of weeks he'd lost 15 pounds, so they shipped him west to sunny California where he caught a steamer for home,

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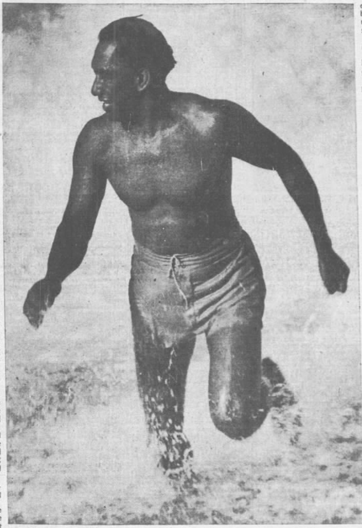
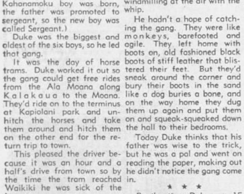


This is how Duke Kahanamoku celebrated his 46th birthday, August 24, 1936: a race into the water at Waikiki with many of the old gang. He rarely misses a day's swim generally in the afternoon. He takes out his board from the Outrigger club. This fine action telephoto was made by Nat Farbman of the Pan-Pacific Press Bureau.

When Duke, Zen Genoves, Dude Miller and Lew Henderson visited the mainland in 1912's winter, they became so homesick that they detoured down to Yale university to be with some of the old Waikiki beach gang. This photo shows them huddled in thick overcoats (the first Duke had worn) at Yale. From left, back row: Harry Steiner, Duke and Pete Young. Front: W. L. Williams, Lew Henderson and Zen. Dude Miller is in front.

Duke leaves the Hawaii Clipper upon arrival from the coast last weekend. Flying time was 17 hours and 45 minutes. Travel has changed. When Duke first went to the mainland early in 1912 he crossed in the famed old liner Honolulan. Time: 10 days. Since then he's crossed so many times he's lost count. Before Christmas last he sailed to Los Angeles in movie director John Ford's swank yacht Araner. Time: 18 days. Reason: rough seas, which made Duke eager for turns at the wheel. —Star-Bulletin photo.



Here's an old peep at Waikiki beach taken in 1910, the year Alexander Hume Ford founded the Outrigger Canoe club. That is the club's first building, a grass hut, in the background. Seated with a paddle nearly as big as himself is Duke Kahanamoku, 19 years young and on the eve of his famed international swimming career. Poised at left with an amateur camera is none other than Knute Cottrell.

These were the days! Here is the Outrigger Canoe club's senior six paddle crew that swept all before it in the 1908 regatta when a dozen and more crews competed. Do you recognise the boys? From left, back row: Knute Cottrell, Zen Genoves and Harry Steiner. Front: Kenneth (Rusty) Brown, Edmund Melanphy and Dad Center. Dad said they trained solidly for five months and finished up as tough as iron. The crews from the other islands got the shock of their lives.