

Priceless Canoe Wrecked

Death of the Uwila

By BOB KRAUSS

She was a koa racing canoe—a golden, glossy brown, long and low in the water. Her name was Uwila.

There are less than two dozen like her in the world.

A man burst into tears last Sunday when enormous waves ripped off her grace-

A Bob Krauss SPECIAL

ful bow, then cracked her sturdy hull down the middle.

Twelve men risked injury to save her. And failed.

This is the drama of the sea that came to light yesterday when members of the Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club outrigger paddling team revealed how their championship canoe was wrecked after they led by three miles at the half way point during last Sunday's race between Molokai and Oahu.

"All we have left is the ama (float on the outriggers)," said crew captain Gary Murakami, a Honolulu fireman. "I had to dive in and cut it loose. The rest of the canoe is still in the Molokai Channel."

Murakami estimated the replacement value of the sleek, handmade craft at \$2,500.

To members of the paddling crew, who paid their own way to Molokai in order to pit the Uwila against Hawaii's other top racing canoes, no amount of money can replace her.

"She holds the all-time record for the Molokai Channel," explained team coach Stew Kalama, a bus driver. "The club bought her by selling laulau and sweet bread and fish from a huki-lau. Charlie Mokuohai made her in Honaunau, on the Big Island. When she broke in two I fell down on the deck of the escort boat and cried."

He said the Uwila's last voyage began with every indication of success.

"We were leading by three miles past the half way point," he said. "After our second change of paddlers, number four couldn't pull his zipper shut."

(Each canoe is equipped with a canvas cover to keep water out of the open hull. When taking their seats, paddlers zip themselves in snugly.)

A few moments later, Kalama said, a 15-foot wave caught the Uwila broadside.

"It broke right over the canoe," he said. "Number six and five man (the two paddlers seated farthest to the rear of the canoe) were half way out of the water but the wave completely covered everybody else. I never thought the Uwila could come back the way she did."

However, water had

poured into the hull through the gap left by the torn zipper.

Kalama said he found some rubber bands used by sport fishermen to put tension on trolling lines. He dived over the side and wrapped them around paddler number four to hold his canvas snug.

Soon other zippers began pulling apart. "I think it was the weight of the waves," explained Kalapa. "The talons on the zippers just wouldn't hold together. I tried closing the gaps with clothes pins. But the water came in too fast. We couldn't keep it bailed out."

The final blow was a huge wave that caught the canoe almost head on.

"That was another problem," Kalama said. "The waves were coming in two different directions. The Uwila went bow first into this one. Number one, two and three men were completely covered. The rest of the canoe was sticking out at an angle. But she came back up. Then, all of a sudden, the canoe was full of water."

For 40 minutes, with 15 foot waves breaking over them, the paddlers tried to bail out the stricken Uwila. Two men, already exhausted from paddling, got cramps.

"Every time we got about seven buckets of water bailed out of the canoe, another wave would fill it up again," Kalama said. "Finally, we gave up."

Then began a heart-breaking attempt to save the canoe.

Kalama said the tired paddlers first tried to pull the 39-foot canoe onto the escort

Grants for 'Head Start'

Hawaii has received two Operation Head Start grants totaling \$321,332, Rep. Patsy T. Mink has announced. The grants are from the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity.

The Honolulu Council of Social Agencies has been named grantee for \$246,698 for an eight-month program to aid 420 pre-school children. Mrs. Yukio Gotanda will be the project director.

The Hawaii County Economic Opportunities Council in Hilo will receive a nine-month grant of \$74,634, from which 60 children will benefit. Takato Nagasako will be director.

Pancake Breakfast

The Honolulu Kiwanis Club and Nuuanu YMCA will hold a pancake breakfast on Nov. 5, their first major fund-raising project in over two years.

The groups hope to make the breakfast an annual affair.



Advertiser Photo by Gordon Morse

MURAKAMI He saved this much.

boat, a small cabin cruiser. A large wave caught the canoe and smashed it against the boat, ripping away part of the canoe's bow and an outrigger.

Next, Kalama and his men tried towing the canoe.

"We put a double hitch on her—one around number one seat and one around the bow," Kalama said. "But the weight of the water in the canoe made her drag. The rope around the hull got so tight that the bow began to collapse and the bottom split."

Then the tow rope broke. In the meantime, it was difficult to maneuver the escort boat because of the high seas. At one point a wave broke so high over the bow it flooded the open cockpit behind the cabin.

Kalama and his paddlers made a last, futile effort to haul the broken canoe onto the boat. The 12 men on board got the hull half way out of the water when an enormous wave dashed it against the escort boat and broke it in half.

The coach, exhausted by more than an hour of fighting the waves, said he fell to the deck and began to weep, pounding his fists against the cabin. Suddenly, Murakami dove into the water.

"Gary had paddled that canoe since he was 13," Kalama said. "He said he wanted to bring home part of the Uwila. Before anybody could stop him, he jumped over the side with a knife."

Murakami swam to the wrecked canoe. The broken outrigger stuck out of the water at an angle, like the

wing of a crippled bird. He cut loose the ama and swam back with it.

"I have it at home," he said yesterday. "Maybe we can use it on a new canoe. But I don't know where we're going to get it. It's going to take a lot of money."

The club has one other koa racing canoe.

"But she isn't the Uwila," said Kalama. "No two koa canoes are the same. And we have 120 paddlers in the club who want to paddle. But they can't afford a new canoe."

Offers of help have already begun to trickle in, Kalama said. Club members will meet today to see what can be done about having another canoe built.

Kailua resident Roy Campos, president of Campos Ranch, said: "A lot of those kids come from big families that can hardly afford 50 cents for membership. I think they need some help to at least replace their canoe."

At Thayer's

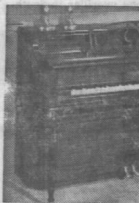
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