Duke Scion of Royalty

By JOE BRENNAN

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19th of a series

Digging further into the young swimming sensation's genealogy uncovered the fact that the name of his people was given to the Kahanamoku (Kanaiaupuni) clan by Kamehameha or one of his alii early in the 19th Century, in commemoration of "the putting together of the Islands of Hawaii to form the kingdom." This had been part of their reward for serving loyally during the Kamehameha I reunification days.

Additional research check was made with the former Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Liliuokalani — the late Elizabeth Kahanui Rogers Webb. She explained that Grandmother Kahoeka and Grandfather Kahinu-iki-Paoa of the Kahanamoku were kahau — retainers — of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop. She made it clear that to be a kahu of an alii was to be a close intimate friend of the chiefess and, invariably a blood-relative or kalu-alii. Mrs. Webb defined it further by saying, "Queen Liliuokalani often remarked, 'When royalty is born, those who work for them — kahus — are born, too.'"

Little of this relationship was known to the hades, so Mrs. Webb explained that Hawaiian youngsters had always been disciplined against discussing family ties and other family matters. And particularly was it true that no kahus, or retainers, could speak of the private affairs of their chiefess. In short, this uncommunicative custom of the Hawaiians tended to keep a cloak of secrecy around family histories.

Records Combed

But one thing was certain; the seekers of information on Duke's family tree were positive that there never had been a full-blooded Hawaiian of more kingly form and hospitality than the subject of the search.

They wanted to satisfy readers' curiosity about him, so they ransacked the records of the Territorial Archives and

"Duke of Hawaii"

The Biography of Duke Kahanamoku

the library. They sought out kamaaina and Hawaiian families, and combed their attics and records for data on the Kahanamoku family.

One of the best sources of authentic information on Duke and his ancestry was his first cousin, Maria Kanehaikane Pilioi. Auntie Maria, she was called by those who knew her affectionately, is the "memory-bird" filled in the newsmen on Duke's genealogy.

Her version of the family history paralleled that of another helpful lady informant — the late Emma Ahuena Taylor. The latter lady explained that Duke's ancestors through his mother, Julia Paaluhi Kahanamoku Paoa, contributed much to her son's alii ancestry.

It was pointed out that Duke's great-great-grandfathers (on the maternal side) was Paoa Hoolae of the Big Island of Hawaii. His wife was Hinaleimoana. Their son and Duke's grandfather — assumed the family name of Paoa in lieu of Hoolae.

Paoa's wife (Duke's grandmother) was named Mele Ulamaa. This explained how Duke got his middle name. It also explained Duke's brother, Samuel Kahanamoku Paoa's name.

Duke's cousin Maria traced through the Paoa family and showed where he was a descendant of Kinau (premier, kuhina nui, or regent of the Kamehameha Dynasty). She pointed out that Duke's grandmother, Kahoeka, was the granddaughter of Maiua and Hakipa (Duke's father's middle name), who were descended from the prominent Alapainui line. The Alapai family strain was kept alive as a middle name by Duke's brother, Samuel.

All these family and ancestral facts were painstakingly dug up and presented to the public — Duke Kahanamoku's enchanted public — and it made, for them, colorful, romantic reading.

Public Delighted

When these facts widely disseminated that Duke was definitely a full-blooded Polynesian of Hawaii with royal blood coursing through his veins, people became even more enthralled with the young man. His wide-eyed naivete while: scintillating, spectacular — and with kingly blood! That was all the public needed to know — their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

Duke had suddenly become a symbol of all that was good and fine in Hawaii and Hawaiians. He got the message through the adulation paid him wherever he went. And now he knew he would have to live up to the image which people were holding close to their hearts and minds.

Their image was not a challenge to Duke. He was now conceded to be a fully matured man with no juvenile tendencies, no erratic behavior, and with one big foot in the door into fame. Only the beachboy was supposed to be out of the man. Duke told himself he would try to keep the beachboy, holder it, enlarge upon it.

Near-Disaster

Yet, in a moment of sheer love for swimming, he did a thing that almost wrecked the image he wanted to preserve. At the time, the Continental Intrathoracic Club was aboard the old slow-moving steamer New York, en route from Europe to America.

In mid-ocean the big vessel developed engine trouble and was momentarily stalled in a choppy sea. The ship was rolling heavily, the pitching coming next, consequently. Duke had not had a taste of swimming in quite some time. His thirst for it had become monstrous. So, while the steamer was standing helpless, he decided to indulge himself in bathing suit and, to the astonishment of passengers and crew alike, dived overboard.

Not until Duke had swum well away from the vast hull did he have any idea of how fast the vessel was drifting away from him. In addition to that, the instant he was in the water he got a true appreciation of how choppy the sea really was. It was far cry from the flat and calm water he was in the habit of swimming in.

The Duke's feeling of worry began to pierce him. He turned toward the ship and made no progress. The yells of delight from passengers lining the rails now turned into cries of alarm. Realizing that he was in New York waters, and far from land, Duke turned on all the swimming power and drive he had for it. It was a losing battle. Passengers, crewmen and officers were galvanized by the sight of his predicament.

"Man overboard!" rang the cry.

'Lower Lifeboat'

Bells sounded. People rushed up from below decks. The ship's rails became more jammed with passengers. Duke's head and shoulders grew smaller in the distance. Meanwhile the ship's engines were still dead and she had no means of locomotion.

"Lower the lifeboat!" called out the angered captain.

Immediately a lifeboat was manned, and it was swung out from the davits for its slow descent to the water. By the time the sailors got to their oars and started rowing away, Duke's head was only a speck in the heaving sea. It took some heavy, fast sweeping of the oars to reach him.

When the lifeboat picked up Duke and got him aboard the still drifting New York, the swimmer's hands had to be tied. Olympic hero or not, Duke was chewed out by the captain and there was nothing to be way of apology the Islander could make to placate the officer.

NEXT: Home is the Swimmer.