

## Chick Daniels

Continued from page 74

death mark its passing. William "Chick" Daniels was such a man. Chick Daniels was born in 1899 to German-Hawaiian parents and raised on the island of Kaua'i. He went to school until the ninth grade, and in his 19th year was drafted on the last call of the First World War. Two weeks later the armistice was signed, and Chick was spared. "They knew I was coming," he used to joke.

He took a job at the Honolulu Iron Works as a machinist's helper. The year was 1919, the pay was \$3 a day, and the workers called a strike. Chick's cousin, Hiram Anahu, persuaded him to come down to the beach, and once he tasted the lifestyle he never left.

The story goes that there was already a Steamboat Bill, a Tough Bill, and a Bill Kahanamoku at Waikiki, so the other beachboys started calling him "Chick" after a popular movie detective. The name fit, although it took on a different personality when he wore it. "Chick" Daniels was not a sleuth but a swashbuckler.

The many sides of his character found full expression on the beach. Chick was a strong swimmer who liked to surf and spearfish. He was also a consummate entertainer; an aunt who was a music teacher schooled him when he was young. He played 'ukulele, danced a wicked hula, and had a deep, rich, soulful voice.

His real talent, however, was with people. People could not get enough of Chick or he of them. A columnist once wrote that it was easy to get to know Chick Daniels—all you had to do was ask him for a towel. On the beach in front of the Royal Hawaiian, he had a shack where he stored backrests and a bench nearby where he sat, accessible to all. He was a big man, long limbed and barrel chested, and his presence lit up the beach. "People just sort of gravitated to Chick," one longtime visitor recalled. "He always had a story to tell, a song to sing. He had his uke and he'd be entertaining and singing around. He had that happy personality."

Honolulu Star-Bulletin columnist William Drury once noted that Chick was an institution at Waikiki, his chatty hospitality drawing a constant parade of visitors to his bench. One day in 1960 Drury paused at Chick's bench himself. He wrote this account:\*

"Hello," [Chick] said, coming forward to greet me. "When did you get back?" He knew my face but had

forgotten my name, and naturally assumed I was one of the thousands who come and go year after year. "When did you get back?" is a question Chick Daniels must have asked thousands of times.

Our conversation was constantly interrupted by pink, paunchy gentlemen in scanty beach attire. One carried a miniature transistor radio which ceaselessly chattered about a football battle between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Colts. He appeared every 15 minutes or so to give Daniels the latest results of the game.

"Giants 9 to 7," he said, coming up for the third or fourth time.

Chick said, "Right."

The man ambled away.

"He's a big surplus dealer on the continent," said Chick . . .

The surplus dealer came back. "Baltimore just scored," he said. "Colts 14 to 9."

"Right," said Chick . . .

Another paunchy gentleman came up and joined us on Chick's bench. The man mentioned Maui. "Maui?" said Chick. "I'll tell you about Maui. I went there once with Esther Williams and Jane Russell. We were in this hotel. There were horses' heads all along the wall behind the bar. Horses' heads, everywhere you looked. Outside they had a big pasture. And not a horse in sight."

The man left. "20 years ago he was here," said Chick. "20 years, that's a long time. I knew him then."

He started to tell me about the Shah of Iran and Ray Milland and Gregory Peck and Arthur Godfrey, but kept breaking off to hand out towels and backrests.

"Do you lose many towels?" I asked.

"Thousands," he said. "People steal 'em. Got R.H. on 'em, for Royal Hawaiian . . ."

A third paunchy man appeared. "Chick," he said, "I didn't get to say good-bye the last time I was here."

"Don't worry about it," said Daniels, slapping him on the shoulder. When the man had gone, Chick said, "He owns a restaurant in San Francisco. Comes here six or seven times a year . . ."

A fourth pink paunchy gentleman arrived at the bench, in search of an umbrella. Chick greeted him amiably.

"When did you get back?" he asked.

The man looked puzzled.

"This is my first trip."

A twist to Chick Daniels' happy-go-lucky demeanor was that he was a man easily given to sentimentality. He was also fastidious. Beachboys who worked with or near Chick all recalled that he was a strict disciplinarian. When he worked, he worked hard. "He wanted things done right," said Charlie Lambert, an attendant with the adjacent Outrigger Beach Services in the 1950s. "You were well groomed. You were polite. You smiled." Each morning Chick and his crew put chairs and towels out for hotel guests and were there all day attending to their needs. Chick himself carried the towels over his arm like a *maitre d'*, laying them down for guests so that "the sand fit their fanny." Guests had four towels to each chair. And two cushions.

Chick's most important attribute, however, was his vitality. Veteran Outrigger Canoe Club member Chris Cusack, who first met Chick in 1927, recalled that it was as if he had the energy and charm of two men. Chick was always in motion. When he was not entertaining and singing, he was marching up and down the sand, laughing, joking, talking it up.

And then there would come a time each day after the beach emptied out when Chick would take off his tank top and change from his khaki shorts into his swimming trunks. "It was almost a ritual," said Cusack. "He would run—and every beachboy I ever knew never walked into the water. They would run and duck their neck and curl their shoulders and hit the water, come up, swim all around. For Chick, it was sort of an exuberant thing, like his personality. Then he'd go shower, come out in maybe gray flannels, nice tasseled slippers, a blazer, wink and say, 'Got a big date tonight.' And off he'd go."

When the beach closed up, Chick headed for the bars. The Barefoot Bar, Don the Beachcomber's, and the Tiki Torch were among his many haunts, although his favorite place was called the Palm Tree Inn. Except for the people who frequented it, there was nothing special about the Palm Tree Inn. It was a little hideaway bar toward the west end of Waikiki, popular with the beach crowd. On afternoons when it rained, Chick led the chorus, "It's Palm Tree time!"

Chick was always a focal point at the

\*Reprinted with permission.