

Huffaker battles stubborn Alenuihaha current

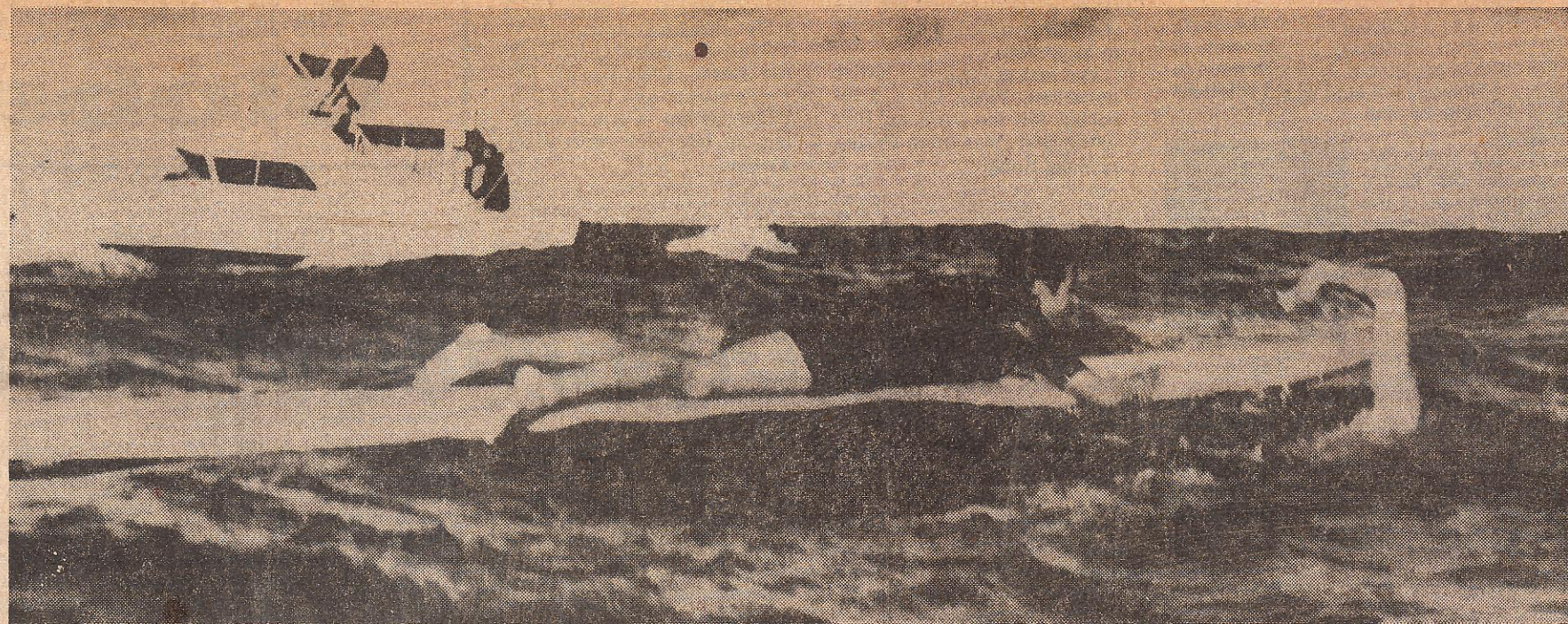
KIPAHULU, Maui—Caught in a strong southerly current, Harry Huffaker, the gallant "swimming dentist" from Honolulu, was striving last night to make the last two miles to shore and be the first man to swim the tricky 29½-mile wide Alenuihaha Channel.

It was his second attempt to swim the channel between the Big Island and Maui, but again the stubborn southerly current held him off. "He's still out there and trying," said one observer watching in the dark the lights of his accompanying boat.

At 8 p.m. he had been in the water 19 hours and 52 minutes. He started from Upolu Point on the northwest tip of the Big Island at 12:08 a.m. yesterday.

Direct radio communication with the boat accompanying Huffaker was lost around 7:30 p.m. yesterday, according to Lt. Leslie Medeiros of the Hana Police Department.

That was soon after Huffaker's wife and his father transferred from a boat



With an attendant along on a surfboard, Huffaker swims methodically along, switching from a crawl to a breaststroke to rest his muscles.

owned by Al Reynolds to that of Al Allen, which continued to follow Huffaker.

At that point, the swimmer still was heading for Kipahulu, but was "having trouble" with the current.

Reynolds said. He estimated Huffaker could not reach shore before 1 a.m.

The radio blackout was caused by the location of Allen's boat, Medeiros said. If he did reach shore, Huffaker

planned to go by boat directly to the home of George Carter at LaPerouse Bay, Reynolds told Medeiros.

Last April he had tried to swim the channel and had come within 2 miles of shore

when the current forced him to give up.

The weather was beautiful and at first Huffaker made steady progress "like a mechanical man." He alternated between a crawl and a

breaststroke to rest his muscles.

He reached the halfway point at about 9 a.m. and his supporters were jubilant.

The sea was smooth, the see SWIM on A-2, Col. 2

THE SUNDAY STAR-BULLETIN & ADVERTISER



Huffaker battles tricky current

From Page 1

winds gentle and he had great going.

By 3:20 p.m. he was only about 6 miles off shore. There was a little wind by

then, but very little white water. That was good because in rough water a swimmer is bound to swallow water, "which doesn't do his digestion any good."

EVERY NOW and then he would wash out his mouth with an orange drink to cut the taste of the salt water. He ate half a turkey sandwich and a candy bar and took a pill to suppress his appetite. He also ate some slices of mandarin orange for the sugar content.

One of his aides said: "He swims like a mechanical man—looking straight ahead. He's going to keep going until he gets to Maui."

Accompanying him was the boat, "Spooky Luke." The food and juice was handed down from the boat to a man on a surfboard alongside, who handed it to Huffaker. He treaded water with one hand while taking nourishment.

To protect him from sharks, the accompanying team had shark probes and a

shark "rifle"—a harpoon-shooting device powerful enough to send a 6-foot harpoon through a shark.

AT ONE POINT early in the morning, Huffaker thought he really had run into sharks. But they turned out to be porpoises, and they frolicked along with him for a while before abandoning the sport.

At 4:20 p.m. the accompanying swim team said "he definitely is making good progress." At that time the power launch Kaiulani, formerly of Honolulu and now of Hana, came out to meet him. Aboard were Huffaker's wife, Chris, and his father.

By now the strain was beginning to tell. Huffaker did not appear as fresh and strong, but he was still determined. He was swimming constantly except for short breaks for juice, but was obviously tiring.

The trades now blew at about 15 miles an hour and there was a 2 to 4-foot swell with chop, but no white water.

On shore, people watched through binoculars. "He doesn't appear to be making very much progress," one observer reported. "He seems to stay glued to the same spot."

Shortly before 6, with dark just about a half-hour away, Huffaker was still 3 to 4 miles off shore, but still doggedly trying.

At 6:30 it was dark and he was 2 to 3 miles off shore and "still trying hard." By now, the water was choppy and the wind had quickened.

Huffaker began looking for a challenge as soon as he arrived in Honolulu in October, 1966, shortly after his graduation from dental school in Michigan.

He is a former Michigan All-American swimmer and he has been swimming since he was 9 years old. He immediately wanted a shot at the 26-mile Molokai Channel, which only one person, Keo Nakama, had been able to swim, in 1961.



Honolulu Magazine Photos

Huffaker, the swimmer; Huffaker, in his dentist's office.

nel. He said the water was rougher and saltier. He also said he was troubled by sharks and by swooping birds.

THE NEXT summer, he disclosed that he was toying with the idea of swimming the unconquered Alenuihaha Channel.

Last January, he said he was just waiting for good weather and by late April, that seemed to come to pass. April 26 he left Upolu Point at 1:17 a.m. and swam until 6:24 p.m. before he had to give up about two miles off Maui's south coast.

What beat him was the ter-

rible southerly-sweeping current. Aides aboard the accompanying boat advise him it would be impossible to make it to shore under those conditions.

"I will make another attempt to swim across the Alenuihaha Channel," Huffaker vowed. "Next time our task will be easier."

HAWAII CLIPPING SERVICE
P.O. Box 2033 - Honolulu, Hawaii
PHONE: 734-8124
Victoria Custer Elaine Stroup
HONOLULU ADVERTISER
OCT 5 1969

BUILDING on his collegiate training at Michigan from 1957 to 1961, Huffaker already had gained considerable experience as a long-distance swimmer. He had tried twice to conquer the English Channel, but didn't make it.

The second try, in 1964, ended when Huffaker blacked out just 2 miles from shore. The cold water—57 degrees—beat him.

A year after he arrived in the Islands, he swam the Molokai Channel and beat Nakama's record. After plunging into the water at Laau Point on Molokai, at 3:50 a.m., Sept. 17, 1967, he emerged 13 hours and 35 minutes later at Sandy Beach on Oahu.

Nakama made it in 15 hours, 31 minutes.

Huffaker said the Molokai Channel was tougher to swim than the English Chan-