

## Huffaker stops short of goal, but--

# in his mind, he crossed channel

By ROBERT L. JOHNSON  
Advertiser Maui Bureau

WAILUKU — Harry Huffaker feels he's conquered the Alenuihaha Channel, even though he didn't touch shore on Maui Saturday night.

Huffaker left the water at 8:12 p.m. Saturday to board his escort boat, Spooki Luki, still a mile or two from the Maui coast.

He had been swimming for 20 hours and 4 minutes since he entered the ocean at Upolu Point, Hawaii, eight minutes after midnight.

His father, Melvin Huffaker, who came to Hawaii from his home in Mexico to see his son swim the channel, said in Honolulu last night that "Harry was fresh as a daisy" when he boarded the boat.

The swimmer was surprised to find his father

aboard. The elder Huffaker and the swimmer's wife had been brought out to the Spooki Luki from Hana by Al Reynolds in his boat Kaiulani.

WHEN FATHER AND SON met on the boat, the son said, "Well, Dad, I'm glad you're here to witness it. I'm glad you could make it." and the father said, "I'm glad you made it."

Huffaker explained last night, "When they gave Harry the message to get out, we all thought we were practically there. The coast was dark and unknown. There was concern for the safety of the boat."

"So far as Harry and I were concerned, we were in. We felt we had touched home base. In his mind, all our minds, he had made it."

AT LA PEROUSE Bay lat-

er Saturday night, where the swimmer and his family spent the day yesterday, the swimming dentist said, "I feel the swim was a success. I plan no further attempts on this channel."

He explained he could have reached shore and only stopped short of it in concern for the safety of his escort boat and the people in it and for his attendants on surfboards.

Last April Huffaker left the water conceding defeat in the grip of a strong current that carried him down the Maui coast and prevented him from reaching shore.

SATURDAY NIGHT Huffaker was approaching the coast just off Kaupo. He had not been carried down the coast as in April.

The swimmer's father said See Huffaker on A-4, Col. 6

## dentist forced to stop short of goal in channel swim

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last night, "We were within a mile or two of the shore Saturday night. It was my impression we were within a mile-and-a-half."

The coast between Kaupo and Kipahulu the swimmer was approaching is almost uninhabited.

"After dark," the father said, "the boat began taking soundings as we approached the coast. It was dark. There was risk to the boat. The men on the surfboards didn't want to go in without the boat."

"Harry couldn't go in without the surfboards. The main consideration was whether the boat should go in any further. We weren't set up with a party on shore with lights because we hadn't expected to arrive after dark." It was decided the boat shouldn't go farther in and that Harry should come aboard.

THE ELDER HUFFAKER had high praise for those who helped his son. He said, "My hat's off to the Outrigger Club. I've been following long distance swims for nearly 30 years. This club is something different. They are really terrific boys."

The father said last night, as Harry was sleeping, "According to the British Long Distance Swimming Association, it's required to touch on land. That Harry could have done, but at that time of night, in darkness, with no boat, he could have been lost



HUFFAKER

on the shore."

That Huffaker, being able to keep swimming, could

have made it seems to have been proved 23 years ago by a Honolulu traffic policeman named Gene Smith, who crossed the channel on a surfboard Oct. 24, 1946.

Smith, though he didn't swim, made the passage from Upolu Point to Kaupo alone, without an escort boat.

NICK SOON, owner of the Kaupo Store, has pictures of Smith and his surfboard in his photograph album.

Soon, 75, went down to the shore Saturday night to look for Huffaker. During the afternoon he had watched from his store as the Spooki Luki approached the coast.

He was ready with a camera and telephoto lens to photograph Huffaker's arrival. He never got to take any pictures.



ARMED ESCORT — Surfer John Marshall escorts Dr. Harry Huffaker on the channel swim. Taped on the surfboard are a shark gun and a flashlight. — Photo by Ron Haworth.

# Anatomy of the Channel Swim Across Alenuihaha

By Ron Haworth  
Star-Bulletin Surfing Columnist

"I've proved to myself that I can swim this channel. Let's head for a hot shower."

Dr. Harry Huffaker spoke those convictions in the spooky blackness a mile off Maui's treacherous south shore Saturday night, after his channel swim was terminated for safety reasons.

It happened as he was entering his 20th hour in a marathon assault to become the first man to swim from the Big Island to Maui across the Alenuihaha Channel.

The channel is surveyed to be 29.5 miles wide. But swimmers don't tread straight lines.

Had Huffaker already spanned over 30 miles?

This was only one of the considerations I had to take into account as his swim coordinator.

SHOULD I KEEP HIM swimming toward the inky silhouette that was Maui?

Or had the time arrived to grip his shoulder and signal the end?

Did we wish to technically call the swim a success? This meant touching Maui.

I thought back across 20 hours of Alenuihaha Channel and that moment Harry started his swim off Upolu Point, saying:

"That hot shower in La Perouse sure will feel good."

"But first I have some swimming to do."

And swim he did.

THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT Huffaker swam like a man who knew where he was going and when he would arrive.

Members of the sponsoring Outrigger Canoe Club escorted the swimmer on surfboards. The 39-foot "Spooky Luki" provided the main escort.

A school of porpoises caused a brief scare before the swim was an hour old.

"It was more than a little unsettling to have black fins slicing blue paths through the phosphorescence," paddler Bruce Ames said.

One porpoise did rolls directly under Huffaker, unconcerned about the swimmer's peace of mind.

HUFFAKER SWAM BOXED between two paddlers during the night hours.

Both boards were equipped with a blinking red light and one had a shark prod, a device housing a 12-gauge shotgun shell triggered to explode when jabbed against anything solid.

By dawn the swimmer had covered 12 miles, and his prospects brightened with the sunrise.

The channel breathed contentedly beneath 3-foot ground swells and a horizon of cotton-candy clouds.

Huffaker's escort was trimmed to one paddler at dawn, lightening the load on the three-man team who shared the responsibility of herding Huffaker towards the Hana end of Maui.

AROUND MID-MORNING Eddie Case, a Hawaii Prep Academy student and top prep swimmer, paced Huffaker for fifty minutes.

Huffaker's diet over those 20 hours consisted mostly of orange soda with an occasional slice of peach. The orange soda, cuts the salt and neutralized the stomach.

Noon saw Huffaker no weaker, although he had cut his pace from 56 strokes per minute to 44 strokes.

People on the boat could now see detail on Maui.

And then it became slowly obvious that a current was retarding Huffaker's forward progress.

Maui stood still.

AND WORST OF ALL, Huffaker was aware of the current.

"Maui isn't getting any closer," he pointed out.

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I had just relieved John Marshall on the board. I lied.

I told him Maui was becoming more distinct every half-hour.

If a channel swimmer needs one thing above all else, it's hope. And I intended to see him keep swimming until eight that night.

At that time, if he was still in the water, a decision would be made.

I knew the man's capabilities and his "channel moods."

He was now a stronger swimmer than near the end of his triumphant Molokai swim.

THEN HE BROKE FREE of the unseen current and was once again eating away at the blue miles to Maui.

As the day waned it was obvious he could ill-afford those lost hours when he was in the current.

It was no longer possible to climax the swim before darkness.

Determined and showing only normal fatigue, he continued on into his second night in the water.

The 19th hour was the worst.

All of us knew what to expect on shore — sheer cliffs, surf, and a coast not unlike the Blow Hole coastline.

HUFFAKER KEPT AT IT. And those escorting kept straining for sight or sound of breaking surf.

There was no conversation between paddlers. We were too intent on guiding the swimmer to the closest point of Maui.

Eight came, and I signaled for Marshall, who had coordinated Huffaker's previous swims. We pow-wowed.

So it was there that three men, all but alone in a channel which gives no quarter, mutually agreed to terminate the swim for reasons of safety and to label it a complete success from the swimmer's viewpoint.

IT WAS NOT A BEATEN Huffaker who swam to the escort boat and climbed aboard.

Nor was it the same man who was beaten last April in the same channel.

Given daylight he would have gone forward.

And he would have walked on Maui.

The fact that he didn't is insignificant in the greatness of his accomplishment.