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CALIFORNIA RETROSPECTIVE

Famed surfer, swimmer, rescuer

In 1925, Duke Kahanamoku saved 8 people after their boat capsized in heavy seas off Corona del Mar.

DAVID C. HENLEY

It was in the turbulent Pacific waters off Corona del Mar 90 years ago when Duke Kahanamoku, the celebrated Hawaiian surfer and Olympic swimmer...

Down was breaking that Sunday, June 14, 1925, when Kahanamoku, then 34, in the company of several surfers, including Gerard "Jerry" Vukce, his best friend and pioneer aircraft designer...

The "Duke" (who was born 125 years ago Monday) could see that trouble was brewing when massive waves and swells propelled by fierce winds began to lash the coast.

All of a sudden, one of his companions cried out, "That boat is in trouble," pointing to the 49-foot, 5-ton yacht Thelma attempting to enter Newport Harbor...

Coastal storms had come up suddenly during previous months, and just recently they had brought havoc and death to the very waters Kahanamoku and his friends were planning to surf.

A year earlier, on June 8, 1924, the 38-foot fishing boat Adieu, carrying 19 passengers and its captain overturned during a storm off Corona del Mar and five fishermen from Santa Ana drowned.

So the fears of Kahanamoku mounted as he observed the hapless Thelma struggle to stay afloat.

"Only a porpoise or a sea lion had the right to be out there," he later recalled, according to old press stories. "From the shore we saw the Thelma yawling in the water just seaward of where the breakers were falling.

"A mountain of solid green water curled down upon the vessel... spume sprayed up in all directions... then before the next mammoth breaker could blot out the view again, it was obvious the Thelma had capsized and thrown her passengers into the boiling sea.

The following day, in a dramatic front page story headlined, "Five Are Drowned When Waves Capsize Yacht: Twelve More Narrowly Escape As Swimmers Bring Victims to Shore on Surf Boards," the Los Angeles Times described the frightening scene.

"The swell, as it gained momentum, hurled into a mountainous wave and crashed over the bow, smashing the plate glass window of the engine room, flooding the compartment and stopping the engine."

Lottery results

Today's Mega Millions Estimated jackpot: \$55 million Sales close at 7:45 p.m.

For Monday, Aug. 24, 2015

Powerball: 11-17-26-30

Daily Five: 2-0-4-0

Daily Three (midday): 6-3-8

Daily Three (evening): 6-5-3

Daily Derby: (1) Moray Boag (2) California Classic (3) Lucky Charms Race time: 1:50.73

Results on the Internet: www.latimes.com/lottery Contact information: (800) 858-8379



BOB SHUMAN/ANTONY

DUKE KAHANAMOKU, born 125 years ago Monday, with his surfboard. The Hawaiian also won five Olympic medals, three of them gold, in swimming. Although Kahanamoku and others were able to rescue 12 people, five fishermen who were aboard the yacht drowned.

age and pounding waves. "Before the fishermen could put on life preservers and assistance could reach them, the boat was caught broadside in the teeth of the tremendous breakers and rolled completely over twice."

The sinking, said the newspaper, "resulted in the drowning of five passengers. Twelve others were pulled from the sea in a spectacular rescue staged by Duke Kahanamoku, famous Hawaiian swimmer, and others who braved the heavy seas on surfboards."

In another first-person description of his role during the Thelma tragedy, Kahanamoku was quoted in a Honolulu newspaper several weeks later as stating, "Neither I or my pals were thinking heroics... we were simply running... me with my board and the others to get their boards... and hoping to save lives. I hit the water very hard and with all the inward thrust I could generate I paddled until my arms begged for mercy."

"I reached the screaming and gagging victims and began grabbing at their frantic arms and legs. I brought one victim in on my board, then two on another trip, and possibly three on a third trip. Some victims we could not save at all. For they went under before we could get to them. Without the boards, we would probably not have been able to get to them."

Witnesses at the time said Kahanamoku was the first rescuer to reach the scene.

Of the 17 aboard the Thelma, Kahanamoku is credited with saving eight, all of whom were taken to area hospitals with serious injuries that included broken arms and legs. Two of his friends saved the other four, who also were hospitalized.

The five fishermen who died were from Riverside. They: Newport Beach Police Chief Jim Porter told The Times, "Kahanamoku's performance was the most superhuman rescue act and the finest display of surf-board riding that has ever been seen in the world. Many more would have drowned but for the quick work of the Hawaiian swimmer."

Kahanamoku, who had won countless surfing trophies and five Olympic medals in swimming (three gold and two silver) between 1922 and 1924, received international acclaim for his heroics at the Corona del Mar tragedy and was given the nickname The Great American Hero and The Great Human Fish.

He appeared in 15 mo-



LOS ANGELES TIMES

'I reached the screaming and gagging victims and began grabbing at their frantic arms and legs.'

—DUKE KAHANAMOKU, in a 1925 newspaper interview

As for Vukce, Kahanamoku's best friend and longtime surfing companion who joined in the rescue of the Thelma fishermen, he was a Collect alumna and founder of Vukce Aircraft Corp.

On Jan. 20, 1928—21 years after the Thelma tragedy—Vukce was piloting a small, single-engine airplane while en route from New York to Los Angeles when heavy snow and winds forced it off course after a stop for fuel in Winslow, Ariz.

Attempting to land on the snow-covered desert floor, Vukce lost his bearings and crashed into a tree near Sedona. A nearby resident said he heard "an awful scream... then deafening silence... and then a loud bang."

"It took rescuers a day to reach the wreckage of the tiny Stinson SR-6C aircraft that contained the remains of Vukce, 38, and his sole passenger, his wife, Sylvia, 27. The couple had left their only child, 6-month-old Peter, in the care of a nurse at their home in Los Angeles.

Henley is a resident of Newport Beach, a longtime foreign correspondent and a member of the board of trustees of Chapman University. He wrote this story for Times Community News.

DROUGHT WATCH



BERNARD MANNING/LOS ANGELES TIMES



FARISAH M. SHERRY/ONLY IMAGES

THE MWD has rolled out a station on Pandora's website and app with more than 100 songs timed for five-minute showers. The songs, including "Purple Rain" by Prince, above, and "I Wish It Would Rain Down" by Phil Collins, aim to remind people to conserve water.

The soundtrack of your shower

BRITTNY MEJIA There's nothing like blasting Adele's "Set Fire to the Rain" to encourage water conservation—at least that's the hope of one Southern California water supplier. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has rolled out a "Water Lover's Station" on the Pandora website and app featuring many songs about water and rain, with the goal of getting people to take shorter showers. It's the MWD's latest effort

in its #TakeATurnCA water conservation campaign. Some of the songs on the list include "I Wish It Would Rain Down" by Phil Collins, "Water Runs Dry" by Boyz II Men, "Purple Rain" by Prince and "Bridge Over Troubled Water" by Simon & Garfunkel. There are more than 100 songs on the Pandora list, timed for five-minute showers. "Someone can pick their favorite song from the list, press play, turn on the shower and finish before the song ends," MWD General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger

said in a statement. "Whether you use the songs to time your shower or to listen at work, we are hoping this list will be a fun way to keep the importance of water conservation top of mind." In July, the MWD rolled out a \$1.5-million advertising campaign to remind people to conserve and to heed Gov. Jerry Brown's mandate for a 25% water reduction. The MWD is a consortium of 26 cities and water districts that provides drinking water to nearly 18 million people in parts of Los Angeles, Orange, San

Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties. Campaign efforts have included: wrapping the iconic sign at Randy's Diner in Inglewood to look like a faucet and advertising digitally on the radio and on TV, said Sheri Coffelt, an MWD spokeswoman. The agency also will put out a music-streaming playlist on the Spanish-language music service Ustream this summer. Coffelt said she planned to use the songs to remind herself to take shorter show-

ers, she added. T.C.'s "Waterfalls" is the Pandora playlist. To access the playlist, visit the Pandora website or download the Pandora app and search for "Water Lover's Playlist" in the create-a-station box. "It's a way to encourage people to take short showers and also to keep water on everyone's mind," Coffelt said. "It takes us all working together to really beat the drought." brittney.mejia@latimes.com Twitter: @brittney_mejia