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Big aloha welcomes Hokule'a

By ROBERT HOLLIS
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Under showers of flowers, kisses and hugs from long-separated families and friends, the Polynesian canoe Hokule'a and its crew of 14 returned to Honolulu yesterday after its second 6,000-mile roundtrip voyage to Tahiti.

More than 500 well-wishers crowded the shoreline at Magic Island under occasionally showery skies as the 60-foot, double-hulled canoe docked at 1:05 p.m. accompanied by a flotilla of 30 pleasure craft and a Coast Guard escort.

While Gov. Ariyoshi and Mayor Fasi looked on, scores of long-separated loved ones clambered aboard the Hokule'a to embrace crew members, most of whom were deeply tanned after 22 days at sea.

"I'm a little lost," said Charles Nainoa Thompson, the 27-year-old part-Hawaiian navigator who successfully guided the canoe to the Society Islands and back, using only traditional methods of plotting the ship's position and course.

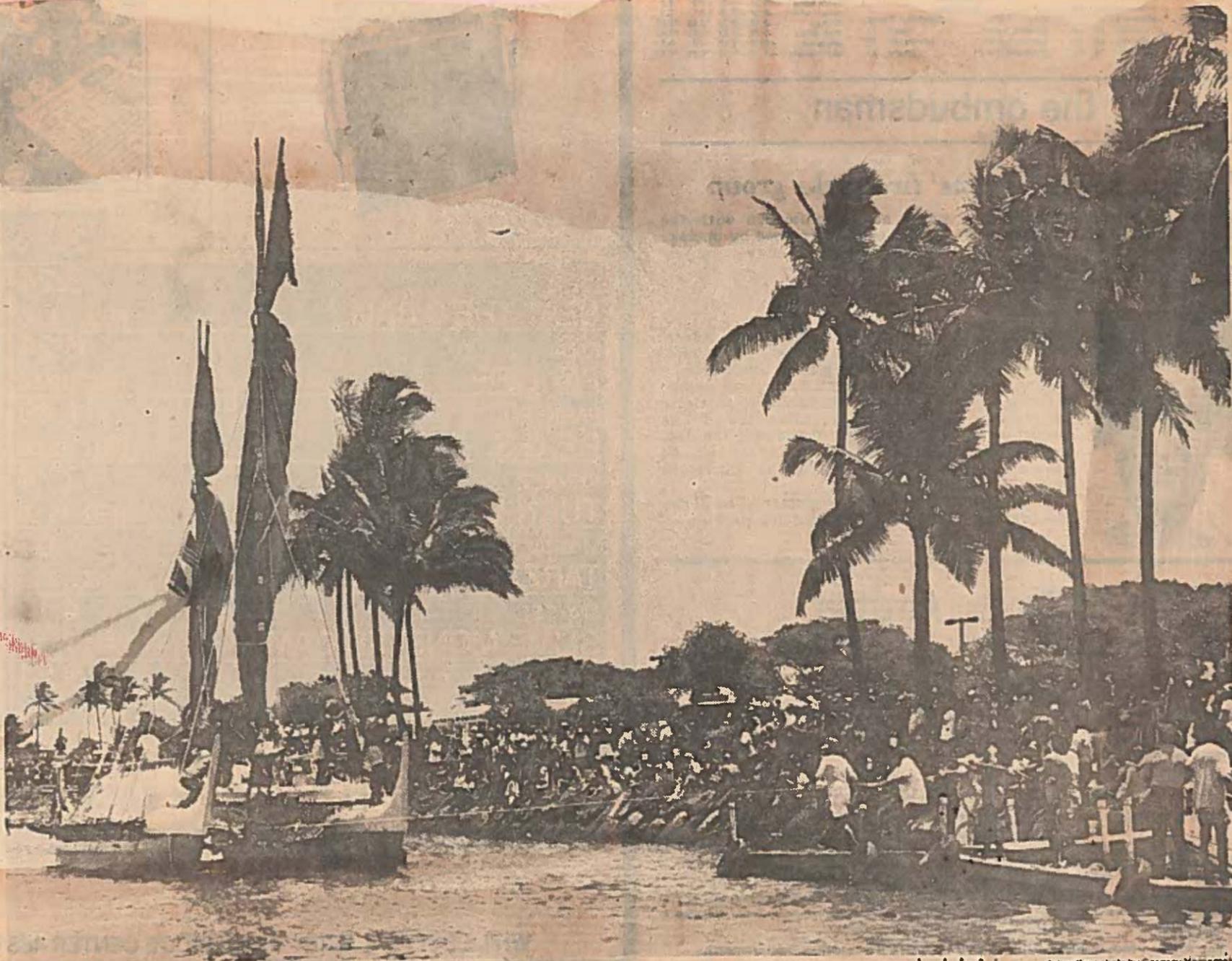
"I didn't expect all this," he added as he walked slowly through the cheering crowd while leis and kisses were showered on him.

The vessel and its crew were reported fit following the "really fast" return trip from Tahiti that began May 13, said Hokule'a skipper Gordon Pihai.

"The trip down was a lot longer," he added. "The trip home was just a nice sweet sail."

Most crew members described the

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Advertiser photo by Gregory Yamamoto

The 60-foot Polynesian voyaging canoe Hokule'a is pulled into its Magic Island berth at the end of a line.



Coast Guard photo by Bob Barton

The voyaging canoe Hokule'a, in the home stretch of its second ocean crossing to Tahiti and back, passes Diamond Head (above) with an escort of several pleasure craft from Honolulu. The canoe's skipper, Gordon Piihana, (right) tries to shield his son and daughter from rain showers yesterday during homecoming celebrations at Ala Moana park.

crossings as among the most exciting experiences in their lives.

"I've done a lot of wild things in my life like jumping out of airplanes," said Marion Lyman-Meresereau, one of two women crew members on the trip to Tahiti, "but this has to be number one!"

The Polynesian Voyaging Society of Honolulu financed the construction of Hokule'a and organized the second successful voyage of the canoe to the Society Islands, thought to be the home of the first Polynesian discoverers of the Hawaiian archipelago.

"This the the first time in 200 years that a Hawaiian has navigated a canoe by the sea and the stars," said Marlene Among, who served as the spokeswoman for the Voyaging Society during the 2½ months the canoe was away from Hawaii.

On the first voyage of the Hokule'a to Tahiti in 1976, she said, the return trip to Hawaii was made using modern navigational instruments.

Thompson's navigational abilities — using only the stars, currents and sea swells to determine the vessel's direction and position — were praised by his fellow crew members.

Thompson described the trip as a "great learning experience" and said yesterday he still has much to understand of the techniques used by Polynesian explorers over the past millennium.

Thompson was in complete control of the Hokule'a's course but was accompanied by Mau Pialug, the master Micronesian navigator who is his teacher. Pialug was the navigator during the first voyage to Tahiti.

The first crossing in 1976 was successful but marred by dissension and fisticuffs among members of the crew. Another attempt to reach Tahiti in 1978 ended in tragedy when the Hokule'a swamped during heavy weather in the Molokai channel.

Crew member Eddie Aikau was lost when he attempted to paddle his surfboard from the stricken vessel to land to fetch assistance for those who stayed with the flooded canoe.

The others were later rescued by the Coast Guard and the canoe was towed back to Honolulu.

Two hand-lettered signs memorializing Aikau and Kahoolawe Ohana member George Helm, who was also lost at sea in an unrelated accident, were attached to a chain across the walkway that led to the Hokule'a's berth.

There were no bad feelings among the crews on either leg of the 1980 trip, said Steven Somsen, of Kailua who was the Hokule'a documenter.



Advertiser photo by Gregory Yamamoto