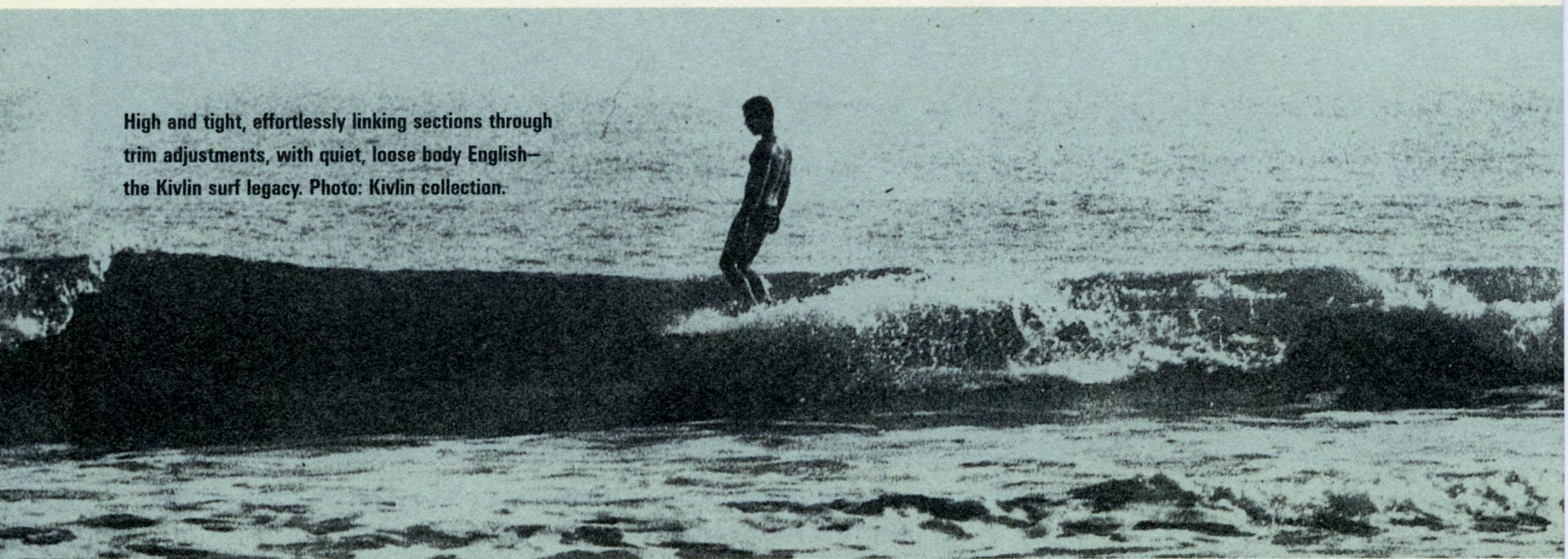


Matt Kivlin, Malibu Surfrider Beach, 4/98. While Kivlin is not one to hold memories in a maudlin way, it's a simple historical fact that his surfing at this point break formed the basis for California surf style. Photo: Jim Russi

High and tight, effortlessly linking sections through trim adjustments, with quiet, loose body English—the Kivlin surf legacy. Photo: Kivlin collection.



Matt Kivlin: A Precedent of Style

By Jeff Duclos

A 19th Century scholar named Lord Acton once imparted the following advice to all of those who would write about history: Don't. As Britain's pre-eminent historian of the time, he knew all too well the many pitfalls associated with recording historical figures and events. Written history, he said, is an encyclopedia of error. The history of surfing is illustrative of his point. Like other histories, it's full of distortions and conflicting theories. As with other histories, many principal characters of the past never appear in written annals, or at best are listed as minor footnotes. In the wash of time, much about the evolution of surfing has been concealed and many a fact has disappeared or dissolved into fable. But then, this is just a theory. And Matt Kivlin, the subject of this story, is the case in point.

Today, little is known about Matt Kivlin, yet he was a central figure in post World War II Malibu. He was the wave rider upon which Mickey Dora fashioned his style. He helped break the boundaries of surfboard design with Bob Simmons and Joe Quigg. Considered by many to be the best surfer of his day, he was the test pilot who took the Hawaiian hot curl riding style and transformed it into what became known as Malibu hot-dogging, paving the way for the era of high performance surfing that followed.

"He was very much a turning point figure," Joe Quigg told me. "If you had to name the most important people of the time on your five fingers, he'd be in there."

My first introduction to Matt Kivlin came in the early 1980s when I spoke with him for an article I was writing on Nick Gabaldon, a surfer whose death in 1951 at Malibu had long settled into obscure myth. Gabaldon was the country's first African-American

surfer. I found no one who would dispute this fact. He died during a big late Spring swell when he wiped out and was washed into the pier pilings. This is also true. In this age of segregation, I had also read that Gabaldon often had to paddle his board 12 miles to ride the Malibu waves. I've now come to learn that, though Gabaldon may have indeed paddled his board from Santa Monica to Malibu once, he did it because he was an athlete and thought it would be a challenge. His trek had nothing to do with being a black man, ostracized by white society. At the time, that particular image, though not verifiable, was just too good to leave out. I put it in the story.

I couldn't help but wonder if this had something to do with Kivlin being so reluctant to be interviewed, now that he was to be the subject. He was a man who'd been involved in making a little history and he had experienced first hand the problems writers have in getting the facts straight. "I read an article once on Lorrin Harrison, which I thought was quite touching," Kivlin told me at the outset of our interview. "One of the things he said was that I was building surfboards in 1936. I would have been seven years old at the time."

But I believe there's more to it than editorial distortions or mistakes. Like many a surfing pioneer (and nearly all scholars), Matt Kivlin seems to believe that what happened on the beach and on the waves is not of any lasting consequence. John Grissim in his book *Pure Stoke* perhaps defined this mind-set the best. "Very likely the surfer's significance in that early era has gone unrecognized," Grissim said, "because scholars of American history have always found it difficult to take seriously a subculture of mostly tanned, fit beach-dwellers who were noticeably free of existential angst, who pursued surf with great passion, and got laid a lot."



Malibu, July 1946. Trim comes to the mainland. Dave Heiser paddling out, with (left to right) John Larronde, Kit Horn, Matt Kivlin, and an unknown cruiser. Photo: Kit Horn collection.

"We'd get a gallon of cleaning fluid at the gas station, pile into Simmons' Model A, and go: Malibu and Dume to the North, Dana Point and San Onofre to the South."

Regardless of Kivlin's reasons, he couldn't have been more hospitable as he invited me into his Santa Monica architectural office last winter. I'd been wanting to write about him since our telephone conversation over a decade earlier. And, upon meeting him, it is easy to see why this man was once King of the Beach. Though now 68 years old, he looks amazingly fit. Standing 6'3" and dressed neatly in a crisp long sleeve shirt, khakis and a fleece vest, I could see why he was occasionally mistaken for a Hollywood movie star. Except with Kivlin, the character description "strong, silent type," is no act.

"He's not a gabby sort of guy," was how Dave Rochlen, Sr. described Kivlin in a recent telephone conversation. "He thinks things through. Matt's creative, but in a quiet and thoughtful way."

Rochlen believes that like a lot of young men who took to the beach in Santa Monica in the 1940s, Kivlin's taciturn demeanor and creative approach to things was greatly influenced by the imposing presence of Preston "Pete" Peterson. The archetype of the complete waterman, Peterson was a four-time Pacific Coast Surfing Champion, a surfboard designer who's credited with building the first foam-fiberglass board in 1946, a movie stuntman, a deep water salvage diver and lifeguard. "To my mind," said Rochlen, "no one has come close to the collective greatness of Pete Peterson." Though he was not a blood relative, Kivlin was related to Peterson by marriage (Peterson's brother was married to Kivlin's mother's sister).

But, unlike Rochlen, with Kivlin, Peterson's influence is harder to connect. "He's someone I knew my whole life," he said. "I'd see him at family gatherings or run into him at the beach. He had his own way of doing things and he was good at everything he did."

One thing that is clear is that it was Peterson who started him surfing. "I worked one summer at the Jonathan Club as a beach-boy," Kivlin recalled. "I met Buzzy Trent down there. He was a beachboy too. It was 1943 and I was 14. I had a paddleboard that I'd made in wood shop and Pete came by the Jonathan Club and asked if I'd like to go surfing at Palos Verdes. He took me to the Cove and pushed me off on a few waves and I was really hooked. It was a lot of fun."

Though the war was raging in the Pacific, North Africa and the Mediterranean, at home people were returning to the beach. "By 1943, the war had changed quite a bit," Kivlin said. "There wasn't a big threat of being invaded. The Jonathan Club operated just like a regular beach club would today. There was a lot of rationing and this and that, but we put out umbrellas and people went to the beach. Earl Warren was governor of California at the time and he brought his whole family down for the summer."

In 1942, shortly after the outset of World War II, Pacific Coast Highway was designated a military road. A sentry post was established at Las Flores Creek bridge and a pass was needed to go beyond the checkpoint. A civilian beach patrol guarded the shore. A cannon perched on the bluff above Sunset and its booming rattle could often be heard as practice shells were lobbed at targets towed through the bay. "I didn't see any of that," Kivlin said. "In 1943, I rode my bicycle from Santa Monica to Point Dume where there was an army base. There were gun emplacements and all, but people went to the beach. It was a long drive and there was gas rationing. You couldn't just fill up and go. There was a Coast Guard station in Malibu. It was right about where the restrooms are today."

Matt Kivlin was born and raised in Santa

Monica. He lived in a house near the corner of Westgate and Barrington. Buzzy Trent lived over on San Vincente and 9th Street. Kivlin's father was a home builder and his mother ran a small shop where she sold swim suits. Long before being dubbed "The Gidget," seven-year-old Kathy Kohner remembers her mother giving Kivlin and his teenage pals (Buzzy Trent and George Boeck) a ride to the beach in her Model A Ford — driving down the road toward Malibu with their surfboards sticking out the rumble seat.

Following his initial surf session with Peterson, Kivlin abandoned his leaky paddleboard. "I found an old board somewhere that I patched up," he said. "It really wasn't a very good board. It was a balsawood board with a redwood deck. Buzzy had one made by an outfit called Pacific Homes Systems which I thought was really great looking. It was actually just a straight-sided, flat board."

"Matt had a terrible board," recalled Joe Quigg of those early days. "It was an old San Onofre board. He was so good, he still got all the waves." Rather than haul their heavy boards to the beach every day, the Malibu surfers began the practice of burying them in the sand, underneath the driftwood near the Coast Guard Station. Kivlin recalled how the South Bay crew, led by Dale Velzy, got wind of this and would occasionally drive up and poke sticks in the sand and try and find them.

"When I first started surfing Malibu, the break was all sanded in," Kivlin recalled. "The break at Malibu changes quite a bit at times. The creek dumps sand out at second point and sometimes it will build up a big bar that will curve around and fill in the whole area between the pier and the point. Some time in the early 1940s, there'd been a big storm and it had washed drift wood onto the beach. It was five feet high. There was no one to remove it, like there is now. If you looked out from the beach, the waves broke straight across. This was 1944 and the big surf came up. Everybody was going clear to the pier. It must have been 8'-10'. It was like a mountain for a 15 year-old kid just starting. At that time, maneuverability wasn't much of an item. You were just trying to make the wave."

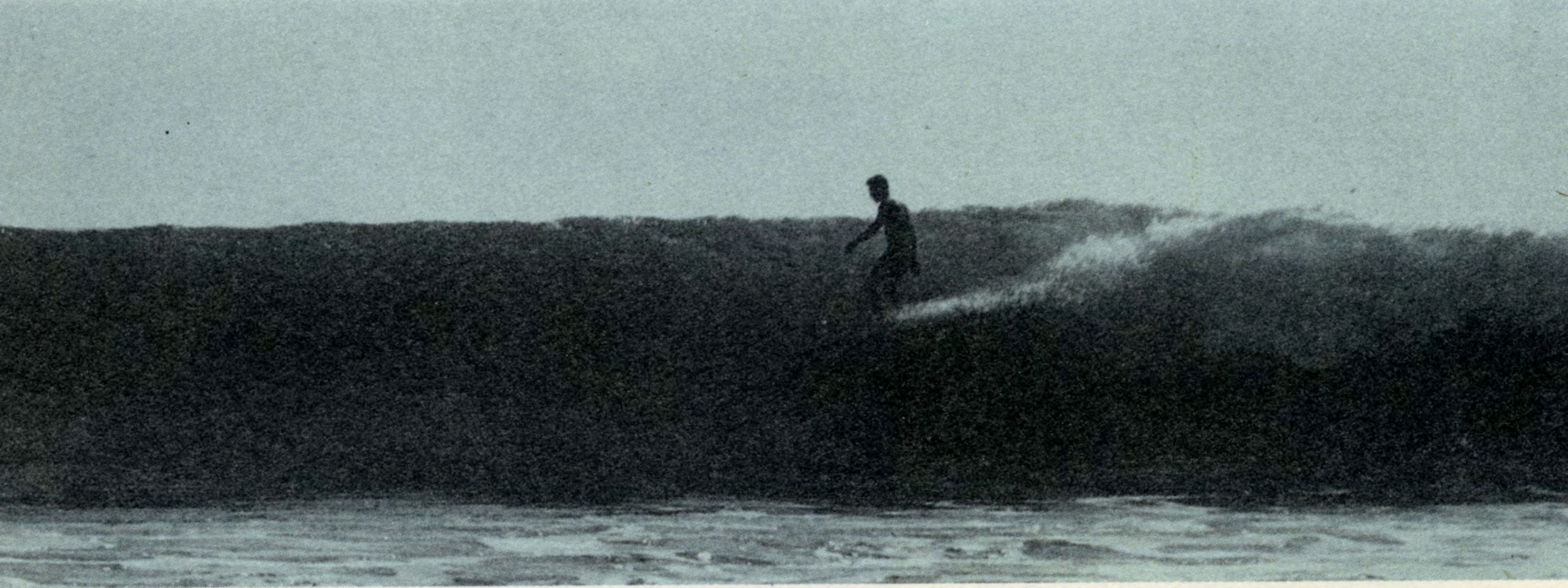
True style is something that's arrived at. Though a natural athlete, young Matt Kivlin was not quite there yet. "It was sort of tough then," he said. "There wasn't really anybody [during the war years] to copy. Everybody was gone, so you kind of learned from pictures in



the National Geographic or something. Gard Chapin was there [Mickey Dora's stepfather] and he was pretty good for that time. He was very showy, as I recall."

By the summer of 1944, Allied forces had entered Rome and the Normandy invasion was well underway, when a wiry, angular young man with a crooked left arm named Robert Wilson Simmons landed at Malibu for the first time. Recording what followed is a bit tricky. With perhaps no other figure in surfing's history is it harder to sift the facts from fable than with Bob Simmons. Most reports say he just appeared one day. As it was once

Kivlin, half a century ago, cruising Santa Monica with the board pictured in the opening color portrait (page 50). He had just returned from Hawaii and was beginning to utilize big, rakey fins of his own design to defeat spin-out problems in large surf. Photo: Kivlin collection.



The line that changed California from a chest flexing, straight-off affair to an exercise in down the line solutions and perfect positioning. Matt Kivlin, Rincon. Photo: Kivlin collection.

"The Malibu style was set by Hawaiian Hot Curl riders — stall, run to the nose, and shoot the curl. We brought that style back here. Before that, everybody kind of stood on the tail..."

described: leaning against a fence post, wearing dirty white denims, high-top tennis shoes and a purple plaid wool jacket stained with food.

Simmons' left arm was locked in a fixed position, the result of a bicycle accident. While in the hospital during his recovery from the accident, his bed was next to a surfer who filled Simmons' head with surf stories and encouraged Simmons to take it up as a form of therapy. By the time he showed up at Malibu, Simmons had become so stoked with surfing that whenever the waves were good he'd take a leave of absence from his job as a machinist and mathematician at Douglas Aircraft. "He had been in a bad accident and he was probably still recovering from that," Kivlin said of Simmons' arrival on the Malibu scene. "He was always pretty thin and a lot of the muscle in his arm had atrophied. He had a hard time paddling and he was out there struggling, trying to catch waves. No one paid him much attention for a long time, but he was the kind of guy you'd pay attention to after awhile. He hung right in there."

Described by some as belligerent and sarcastic, Simmons quickly developed a reputation as surfing's first trash talker. "Simmons was a rebel, a provocateur," recalled Rochlen. "He was angry. But, brilliantly angry." "Simmons was like Timothy Leary," said Quigg. "He had some kind of hold over people. He was a very radical talker."

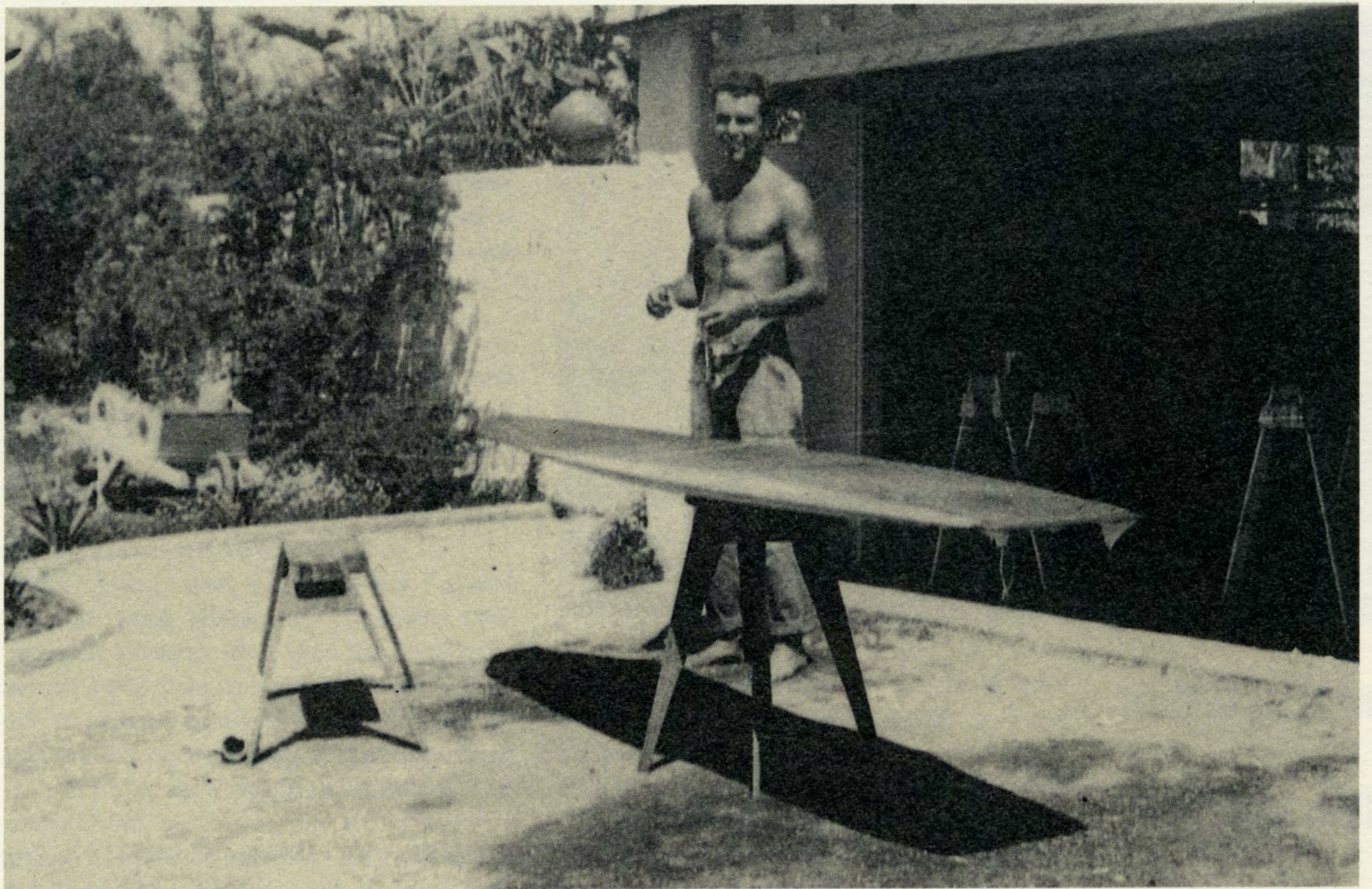
What may have initially attracted these young men to Simmons the most was the fact that he had a car. "Such as it was," remembered Kivlin. "He'd pick us up — Buzzy, Porter Vaughn, "Bo-Beck" [George Boeck] and Kit Horn — and we'd buy cleaning fluid at the gas station. We'd get a gallon of that stuff [for the gas tank] and pile into Simmons' Model A, four-door convertible sedan and go: Malibu

and Point Dume to the north, Palos Verdes and Dana Point and San Onofre to the south."

From the beginning, Simmons took a scholarly approach to surfing. Stories abound of how he would study coastal charts looking for the right bottom contours and swell directions as he theorized about new surf sites. It was this research that initially led Kivlin, Simmons and company to Rincon in 1946, a winter spot that would soon be anointed as the Queen of the Coast. "He'd get out his coastal charts and look to see where there was a reef or rocks and we'd drive there and take a look," Kivlin recalled. "He [Simmons] was out there looking all the time. He had charts of every place in the world and he collected these coastal pilot books that described each section of the coast. It was like a hobby." Circled on Simmons maps were such far-flung California surf spot discoveries as Tijuana Sloughs and Ventura Overhead.

Shortly after the war ended, Kivlin, Vaughn, Quigg, Trent and others built the original shack at Malibu, initially as a wind break and a place to change, later to be used as a staging area for Hawaiian style "Hula Luau." "I remember VJ Day," said Porter Vaughn, providing an historical footnote to the times. "August 15th, 1945. The surf had come up big at Malibu and we were sitting out there bemoaning the fact that there were 12 guys out."

Even with its post-war awakening, for a time surfing spots in California remained like islands unto themselves. Surfers lived in relative isolation in small worlds revolving around a favorite break. To the north was Santa Barbara, Malibu and the South Bay, to the south was Orange County and San Diego. But with the end of gas rationing and restrictions on travel, and with young surfers like Kivlin now coming of age, it was not long before



these surfing worlds were linked. All too soon, surfers everywhere were on safari to stay.

Once the war was over, it was only natural that the waves of Hawaii would beckon. "Tommy Zahn had gone over there in 47," recalled Kivlin. "He wrote us about all the waves and the places he'd been, so Porter Vaughn, Joe Quigg, Dave Rochlen and I went over on the Matson Line [aboard the S.S. Lurline] in 1948. It was the cheapest way to go and you could take all your stuff. It was late Winter, early Spring. We mostly surfed Waikiki, but there were some big days there. Rabbit Kekai ruled the beach down there. He was the King of Queens, you might say."

Gone was the sight of Hawaiian beachboys riding the smokers, standing motionless like bronzed statues of Mercury, feet buried in the churning foam, as so vividly chronicled by Jack London at the turn of the century in *The Cruise of the Snark*. The waves were in perpetual motion and now, so were the beachboys. "When I first saw Rabbit Kekai, he was light years ahead of anybody I'd seen," said Kivlin. "The Malibu style was set by those Hot Curl riders -- stall, run to the nose and shoot the curl. We brought that kind of style back here. Before that, everybody kind of stood on the tail and maneuvered the board around. To accommodate this new style, we began making the front of the board kind of pointy, so it wouldn't pound. The center was flatter and the tail kicked up so it would be maneuverable,

kind of like the longboards now."

Following the lead of the Hawaiian beachboys, the mainlanders were taking a radical turn toward performance surfing. "The islands trip was critical," said Quigg. "All of a sudden, it became important who could turn the best, or look the best."

Within a few years, the ideal would no longer center around sheer guts and big wave heroics, but on maneuverability and a new standard of performance, all of which prompted radical changes in equipment.

Simmons' original contributions to surfboard designs in the post-war era were modifications he made to the redwood boards of the time. He applied scooped out plywood wedges to the nose of the board to counter its tendency to pearl. He put soft balsa on the deck to ease knee paddling and experimented with flatter tail blocks. "People forget that Simmons spent his first five years building heavy, redwood boards," noted Quigg.

While Simmons was concentrating on creating a new generation of redwood boards that were stronger, more streamlined and faster, in 1949 Kivlin began toying with different war surplus materials. This eventually led to the development of the "sandwich board," an innovation for which he is rarely given credit. "You couldn't buy any wood right after the war," Kivlin recalled. "So we cut up these old surplus life rafts and made side rails with the balsa wood, then we filled the inside with

"Matt is an innate artist," says Dave Rochlen.

"He was always carving on something and he seemed to come by it quite naturally." Kivlin's garage shop, when there was simply no alternative to keeping it real. Photo: Kivlin collection.



San Onofre, 1948. This photograph of Kivlin and Buzzy Trent taken by Kit Horn documents a trip taken by the trio to 'Nofre. "After Malibu, the slow waves at San 'O gave us some trouble," relates Horn.

One thing that set Kivlin apart from Simmons, and to a lesser degree, Quigg, was his ability as a wave rider. In the eyes of many, he was unmatched at the time.

foam. It was just something to hold the insides together. We built a big table to clamp them down -- it was all kind of Simmons' idea. I'd shape and fiberglass the rails and do the deck planing. There was a little input from me as to what the board should be shaped like. We sold them for \$35 and sold quite a few. They were kind of a temporary thing. I'd be surprised if there were any that didn't de-laminate in a year."

"The plywood board was Matt's idea," Quigg stressed to me. "Matt talked Simmons into going into business building them. He thought it would be a good lifeguard rescue board. Now, everyone refers to them as Simmons' boards, but it's not true. It was Matt's idea."

When speaking of Simmons, Kivlin, who knew him as well as anyone, chooses his words carefully. "An unusual man," is how he referred to surfing's enigmatic "Mad Scientist." "His [Simmons'] brother was one of the Cal Tech heroes. He developed the strain gauge to record stress in aircraft. The patent was very lucrative for Cal Tech at the time and he sued them after the war."

Like most working relationships with Simmons, the Kivlin/Simmons one was an uneasy alliance. "We worked out of my mother's garage, but we didn't get along real well," Kivlin said. "Simmons had tried working out of his own house, but he didn't get along with his brother, so he opened a shop in Santa Monica at 20th and Olympic among a bunch of sheet metal shops. He built a little box in the back which was his room and he lived there. There were other shops available and they were very reasonable, so I rented one and Joe [Quigg] rented one. Joe and I did a lot of things together. We got along real well. I'd build some boards. He'd build some boards.

We'd try something a little different each time and take them down to Malibu, one-or-two a week, and try them out. We'd go surfing at Malibu every day at five o'clock. If they worked well, someone would usually come up and ask to buy them."

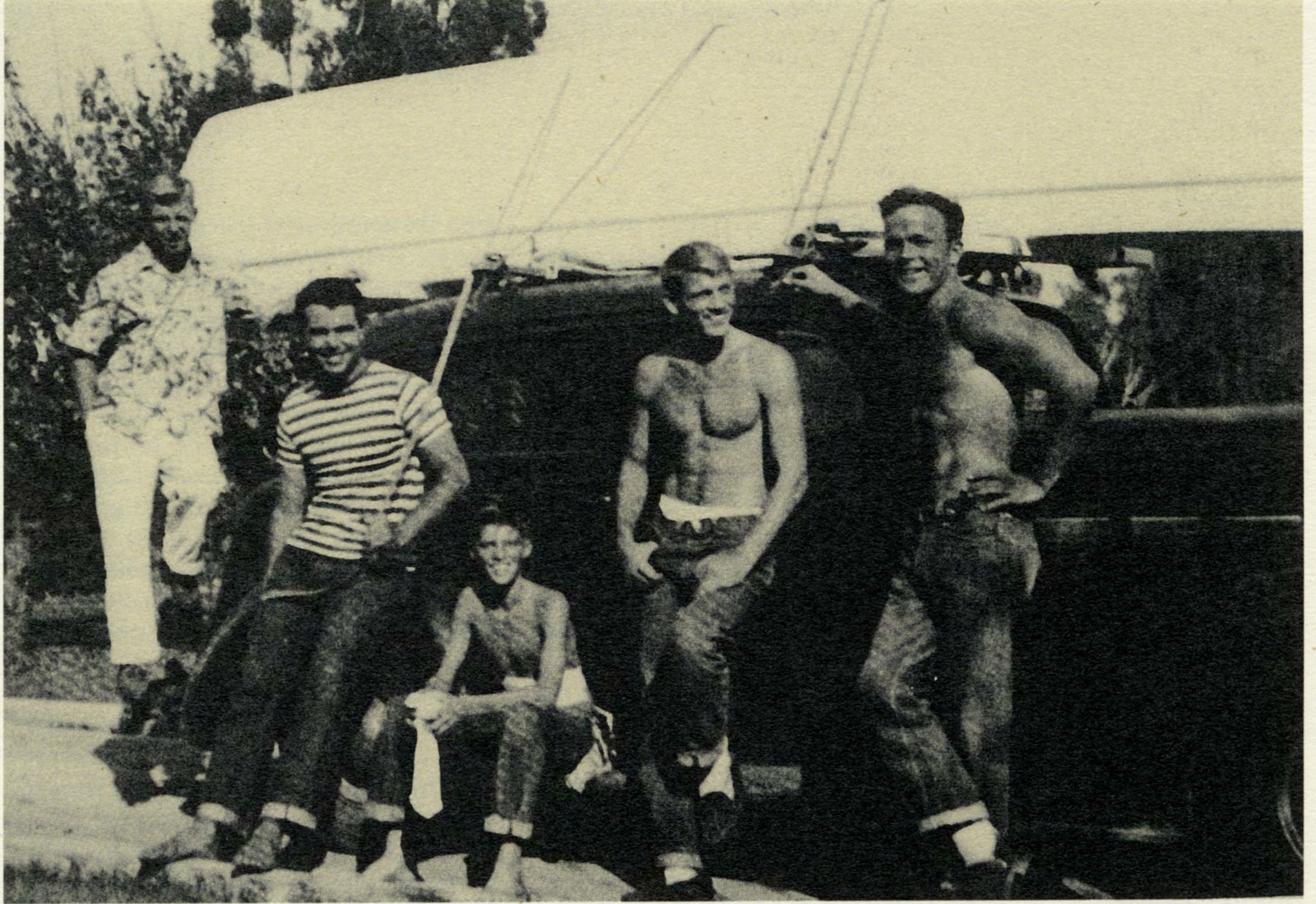
"Joe and Matt were the studs on the beach," recalled surfing great Mickey Muñoz, who arrived on the Malibu scene in 1950. "Simmons was almost the opposite personality. He wasn't a party guy. Matt loved parties. He loved the ladies. He was a regular guy. But Matt respected his [Simmons'] mind, because he was a brilliant thinker."

While U.S. air power was breaking the Soviet blockade of Berlin, the boys at Malibu were breaking the redwood barrier. It wasn't exactly White Sands or Los Alamos, but Kivlin, Quigg and Simmons were on the beach at Malibu, developing the new, light weight "rocket bombs" that would take surfing to the next level. Simmons was pouring over newly released wartime information on aero- and hydrodynamics. Experimentation with balsawood and post-war fiberglass technology was reaching a fevered pitch. Quigg was fashioning the first fiberglass fins. Scoop noses, dropped rails, slot rails and different tailblocks configurations were being tried. Surfboard design had entered a new realm, out of which came the Simmons Spoon, (a 10 foot board of solid male balsa) the Quigg "Hot Curl" Finless Balsa, Quigg's "complete package" Balsa Chip and the board that became known as the Kivlin Malibu.

As a board-builder, Kivlin helped bridge the gap from the early hard-core Simmons approach of big, heavy boards, Rochlen told me. "Matt was also a quick shaper," Rochlen added. "With Quigg, you could wait awhile. Consequently, Matt put more boards in the water. When they're talking about Malibu boards of that time, they're probably talking about Kivlin boards."

"He was a good craftsman," recalled Bing Copeland, one of the best board builders of the 1960s. "Simmons made big, round boards. I had a Kivlin board and it had pretty radical lines, with a flat bottom and a pointy nose. It was a real departure."

Yet Kivlin is quick to give Simmons his



due. "There are a lot of people around who are good idea people," he said. "Simmons always had his own ideas and they were pretty clever. Simmons did a lot with fiberglass and balsa boards. He had a lot of trouble paddling. If you hold your elbow stiff and try and get it in the water and paddle, you can see where you'd want to have something other than a big, heavy board. When he finally got that light board, it was a lot easier. Then he brought in flat bottoms, concaves, twin fins and scoop noses, because he had a lot of trouble [with] pearling. As with most people who design things, a lot of what he did was design around his own capabilities. If you want to do better, you come up with something that you think will work better."

In the area of surfboard design as it relates to performance, Kivlin also had more than a few ideas of his own. "Matt is an innate artist," said Rochlen. "He was always carving on something and he seemed to come by it quite naturally. I believe he could have been a sculptor. He also helped as a personality. He was more sociable than Simmons. He was having more fun. Matt could create a party atmosphere."

"Matt had quite a following," said Quigg, noting that Kivlin was responsible for drawing both smitten young women and gremmies to the beach. "All this leads to riding style. When you bring women and kids into the picture, it affects riding style."

One of those young men was Bobby

"Flea" Patterson. By the age of 12, Patterson was tearing up the inside waves at Waikiki. He and his two brothers had been raised in an orphanage and, in the early 1950s, Kivlin recalled that Bobby somehow got Tommy Zahn to sponsor him so he could come to the mainland. He quickly made his way to Malibu and teamed up with another hot, young surfer, Mickey Muñoz. "They were neat kids," recalled Kivlin. "What the heck. Somebody had to put up with them."

One thing that set Kivlin apart from Simmons and, to a lesser degree, Quigg, was his ability as a wave rider. In the eyes of many, his skills were unmatched at the time.

Kivlin's trips to Hawaii had not only inspired a new approach to surfing, it had instilled in him the Hawaiian spirit. For Kivlin, surfing was not an act of rebellion, it was a dance. "He pioneered progressive surfing," said 1960s master stylist Kemp Aaberg. "Matt Kivlin innovated the style that I call performance cruising. He was a real gentleman, with a mature demeanor, who seemed to enjoy surfing without a lot of yahoo around it. Looking at guys before that time, they were happy they were just moving."

In the decade that would follow, a division would exist between two wave riding camps: the stylists and the radicals. It is a division that continues to exist today. While surfers of the early 1960s like Kivlin protégé Bobby Patterson were able to bridge both are-

Kivlin's Connections,
left to right: Porter
Vaughn, Kivlin, Ricky
Grigg, Carter Pyle,
Buzzy Trent. Photo:
Kivlin collection.

With Kivlin out
of the picture,
it was up to
Dale Velzy to
further refine
surfboard design,
and to transform
board building
from custom
crafting to mass
production."

nas, Phil Edwards, a power surfer of unmatched grace, emerged as the spear carrier for the stylist faction. Leading the charge for the radicals was Dewey Weber, with his fast footwork, shredding moves and hard, critical turns. It became Edwards, "the Rudolph Nureyev of surfing," versus Weber, surfing's "Mr. Bojangles." Yet the forerunners for this controversy can be found a decade earlier.

By the dawn of the 1950s, carving the lines of demarcation on the waves of Malibu was Kivlin, the smooth, functional stylist and wild upshot Leslie Williams, cranking the big cutback turns -- both on lightweight boards, well under 10 feet. Yet even as the seeds of these competing styles were being planted, the arena was becoming congested. In 1954, three years before ground zero of the "Gidget" mass media explosion, it was estimated that there were as many as 1,500 surfers in the southland.

As more people made their way to Malibu's Surfrider Beach, the focus of attention shifted from the ocean to the beach. A new crew emerged of surfers who were not only leading the way with their "wilder style," but applying its approach to both the crowded beach and zoned out break. The original shack was eventually replaced by the structure soon to be immortalized by Frederick Kohner and his spunky "girl midget" daughter. Decorated with wine bottles and a pennant that said "San Quentin Prison," and surrounded by a picket fence, it became the stomping ground of the Uptown Surf Club. Collecting unemployment checks and drinking wine became the mode, hijinks the ultimate experience. Easter Sunday communion was soon being observed with a bottle of T-Bird and a loaf of Langendorf bread. In the words of Malibu native Bill Cleary, "Essence had turned into image."

The watermen of the past no longer had the spot to themselves and they were now going their separate ways. Matt Kivlin soon faded from the scene. Joe Quigg had long since relocated to Hawaii, with only an occasional sojourn to Santa Monica and Newport Beach, all the while faithfully building upon his well-earned reputation as one of world's finest designers of various water craft. In 1954, four years before polyurethane foam became commercially available, Simmons drowned in big surf at WindanSea at the age of 35. With Kivlin, Quigg and Simmons out of the picture, it was now left to craftsmen such as Dale Velzy to refine surfboard design further and to trans-

form the enterprise of building boards from custom crafting to mass production.

Like many a surfer of his day, Kivlin first set sail, moving south of the Malibu pier and becoming active in the Malibu Outrigger Club. A close friend of Windsurfer inventor Hoyle Schweitzer, this form of wave riding would eventually follow. "I've gone on to other things," Kivlin said, noting that he hasn't been on a surfboard in over 30 years. "I got interested in sailing catamarans. In the 1980s, I started windsurfing. That was tremendously exciting. If the wind blows, I go windsurfing. If it blows 16-18 knots, I go. I also try to swim three times a week."

"Surfing is not just standing up on a surfboard," Muñoz reminded me. "Matt's always been around the water. As more people got into shaping boards as a business, he knew it wasn't going to be his career." Like his father, Kivlin became an architect and a home builder (he built Walter Hoffman's home in Mexico). A competitive swimmer in college, Kivlin also competed for a time in rough water swims and continues to spend a fair share of his Winter months on the ski slopes with his family (he has four grown daughters, one from a first marriage, three from his second).

Though he's remained near surfing's periphery, nonetheless, today he is rarely recognized and few surfers know his name. "You say he's not a legend. It's to his credit," Rochlen said. "Just take a look at some of those who are. While a guy becomes a surfing legend, another guy [Kivlin] becomes an architect, marries and has a family, and does it beautifully and gracefully."

Yet, as surfing moves into the new millennium, it would be a shame if Matt Kivlin's considerable contribution were to remain unsung. "He had a huge impression on me back in those Malibu days and he still dazzles me," Muñoz said. "He helped take surfing to a higher level. He was right on the leading edge of modern surfboard design. Even today, his lines would be considered good lines."

But if Walter Hoffman were to write Matt Kivlin's legend, he might eliminate all puffery and put it in the kind of simple terms an unassuming man like Kivlin could appreciate. He might say it in the way he said it to me: "A great surfer and a super guy." ■

Upper: Kit Horn, ski filmmaker Warren Miller, and Kivlin slide in synch on a clean Malibu south swell, July, 1946.

Photo: Kit Horn collection.

Lower: Malibu, 1946. Photo: Kivlin collection.