

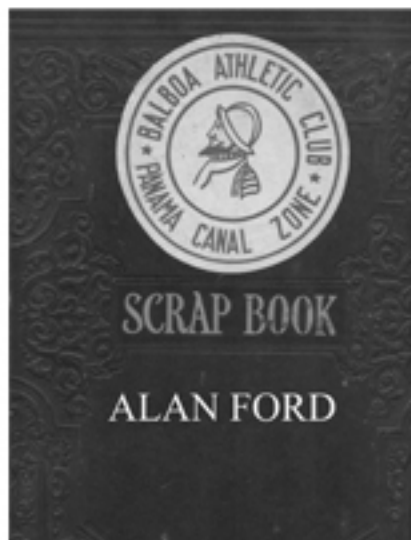
ALAN FORD IS ONLY 5 FT., 9 1/2 IN. TALL AND WEIGHS 170 LBS., BUT SWIMMING HAS GIVEN HIM THE POWERFUL BACK AND SHOULDER DEVELOPMENT OF A MUCH BIGGER MAN.

ALAN FORD OF YALE

THE SWIMMING CHAMPION MAKES A NEW WORLD RECORD BEFORE GRADUATING

Alan Robert Ford is the fastest short-distance swimmer in the world today. In his three years at Yale University, from which he graduated last week, he has equaled or broken 42 records. At 21 he has already swum 100 yards and 100 meters faster than any other human in history. Easy-going, mild-mannered Alan Ford was born and brought up at Balboa in the Canal Zone, where even the smallest towns have two or three swimming pools. His parents persuaded him to duck for candy bars when he was 3 years old, had him breaking local records when he entered Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania (LIFE, March 20, 1939). Drilled by famed

Swimming Coach "King John" Miller, Ford outswam Yalermen even then. At Yale he practically lived with Coach Robert J. H. Kiphuth, was meticulously trained up to his peak. Ford, who became captain, and his teammates won every dual meet except the last one, when a war-rich West Point team beat them 44-31. But a week later, before enrolling at Columbia University Midshipmen's School, Alan Ford swam a new record of 49.4 seconds for 100 yards in Yale's 20-yard pool, four-tenths of a second faster than Johnny Weismuller did it 17 years ago.



In the Archives of the International Swimming Hall of Fame

In February of 2007, Alan Ford became the latest honoree to donate his scrapbook to the Henning Library. Bruce Wigo had a chance to visit Alan and reminisce with him about his career as one of the great sprint swimmers of all time. For the complete interview and to see more photos, see "exhibits" at www.ishof.org

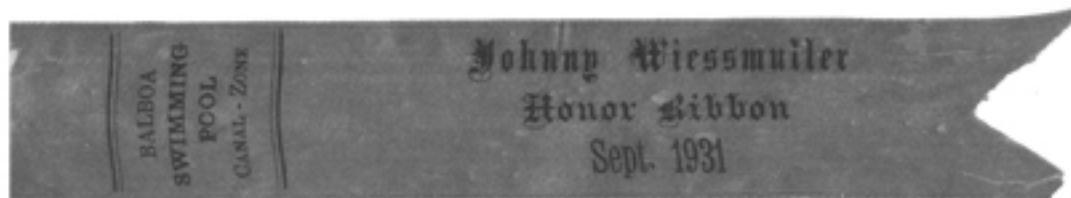
BW: Where and when did you learn to swim?

AF: I grew up in the Panama Canal Zone. My father worked for the Canal Zone as did his father before him. My grandfather was a locomotive engineer who moved to Panama in 1907 to help build the Canal. He was given a couple of medals from President Roosevelt. I don't remember when I started swimming, but swimming was an important part of life in the Canal Zone. There were so many rivers, lakes, beaches and every town had a pool.

kids swam and we had a coach who really knew how to keep us interested in swimming. He organized a lot of meets and he would go around and get businesses to give us prizes, like samples of toothpaste and soap. There were also a lot of famous people passing through the Canal, and he made sure we got to meet them, like Clark Gable and Johnny Weissmuller. In 1931 Weissmuller and Stubby Kruger passed through canal on their way to Hollywood. I was eight years old at the time and remember winning a ribbon, given to me by Weissmuller himself. Weissmuller and Stubby Kruger also put on an exhibition of swimming and the comedy routine that I later saw them perform at the Billy Rose Aquacade in 1939. That was very special.



The Balboa Canal Zone swim team circa 1930, aboard the USS Constitution as it passed through the Panama Canal. Alan Ford is front row, second from the left.



That's me in my navy uniform with Sir Frank Beaurepaire, Lord Mayor of Melbourne and Bob Kiphuth.

BW: You swam for Bob Kiphuth at Yale, what was he like?

AF: Bob Kiphuth was a very learned, self-educated man. I had a great rapport with Bob. He was a prolific reader and was knowledgeable on almost every subject: art, architecture, history, psychology. He was always surrounded by interesting people and exposed us to them, like Dr. Clement Fry, Head of Psychiatric Medicine at Yale or Sir Frank Beaurepaire, Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Australia. I'm not sure what his background was in swimming. His expertise was in physical conditioning and he was a tough taskmaster. He was also a great motivator. If he told you could do something, you believed him and this just wasn't in the pool. Bob was a great coach because he always stressed that there was more to life than swimming. If someone on the team wasn't doing well in the classroom, he would point to some former great Yale athlete (usually a football player) who tried to live on their sports laurels after graduating and ended up a failure.

BW: Weissmuller's 100 yard record of :51 seconds stood for 16 years and although tied four times, was never broken. Was it a psychological barrier? And what was it like to break his record?

AF: Well, first of all, I didn't think of it as a barrier. Bob Kiphuth and I both

felt it was just a matter of time before I broke the record and that I was capable of going under :50, which I eventually did. But having met Weissmuller as a youngster and

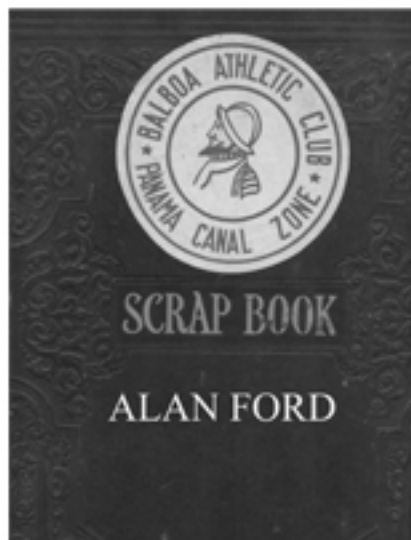
because he was a movie star and so famous, breaking his record was very satisfying.

BW: What kind of training did you do while you were at Yale?

AF: We'd start each season with 6 weeks of dry land work using medicine balls, pulleys,

Yale's Alan Ford Smashes Weismuller Century Swim Mark in Week's Top Event

Canal Zone Merman Navigates 100 Yds. in 50.7 at New Haven



In the Archives of the International Swimming Hall of Fame

AF: We'd start each season with 6 weeks of dry land work using medicine balls, pulleys, running and calisthenics. Kiphuth's dry land program was intense and it got us in great shape before we got in the water. We didn't swim during this period. Our swim workouts were nothing like they do today in terms of distance, but when we swam we swam all out. And our practices

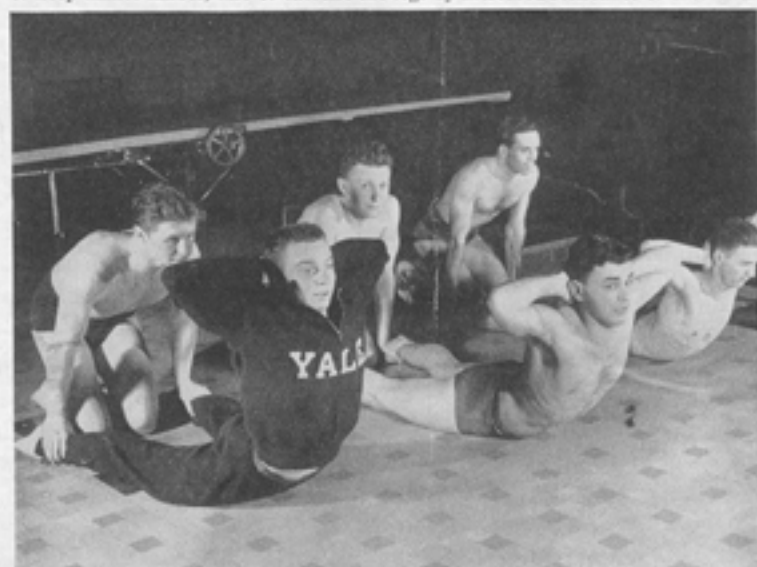
were never dull. Kiphuth was an innovator and we did something new and different every day. We only trained one and a half hours a day, but when we left practice in the gym or the pool we were exhausted.

BW: After you graduated from Yale in 1945, what type of training did you do to prepare for the 1948 Olympic Games?

AF: I didn't train. I got married the day after I graduated and took a job with Carrier Air Conditioning in Syracuse, NY. I didn't get in the water again until February of 1948, after Carrier assigned me to do some research for them at Yale. When I arrived in New Haven I went to see Kiphuth. I had always wanted to go the Olympics but I was in terrible shape and weighed just 130 pounds. Even so, Kiphuth believed he could get me in shape to make the Olympic team and win a gold medal. Bob started me out with dry land exercises to re-build my muscle strength and gain weight. Two months



Ford (right) and teammates. Rubber flippers on feet are used to teach swimmers to keep ankles limber, also to exercise the legs by increased resistance to the water.



Dry-land exercises are an integral part of Kiphuth's training regimen. This exercise strengthens the trunk and back muscles. Object is to stretch as high as possible.



1948 Olympic medalists in the 100 meter freestyle at the 1948 Olympic Games. L to R: Alan Ford, USA (silver), Wally Ris, USA (gold) and Alex Janey, FRANCE, Bronze.



Alan was featured in a "True Sport" comic article in 1948.



Left: Bev and Alan Ford at their condominium in Sarasota, Florida in March, 2007.

later, I finished second to Wally Ris in the Nationals. But I almost didn't make to London. In those days, we got no financial support and I ate as cheap as possible. I came down with tomame poisoning two days before the Olympic trials and was throwing up for two days. Fortunately I finished third in the trials and made it to London and the Olympic Games with just 6 months of training.