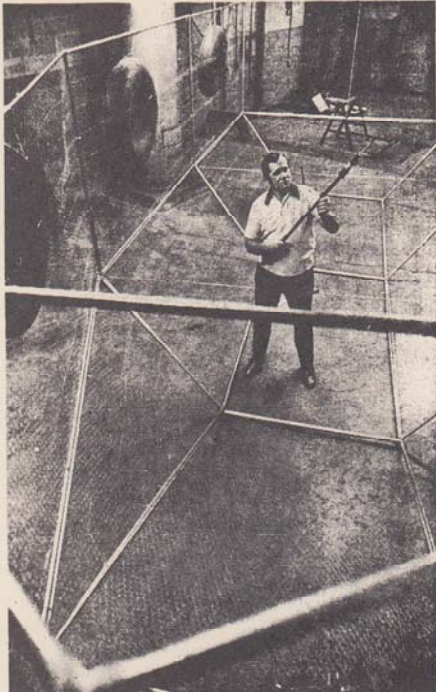


BIG SWIM BUILDUP

4/30/72

Walter readies for long swim--Newspaper clips in Columbus and Ft. Lauderdale paper follows Walter's progress. Date for Swim has been changed to week of June 12, 1972.



SHARKS? — Walter Poenisch, Grove City's 58-year-old endurance swimmer, holds a shark gun which he will use to keep deadly visitors away during a Cuba-to-Florida swim he plans in the spring. He is standing inside the 30-foot by 15-foot shark net which will be towed around him on the trip. The net was built by Columbus Electric Sales Co. (Dispatch Photo by Charles Hays)

NO REPLY FROM FIDEL

Poenisch Primes For Cuban Swim

Walter Poenisch, a 58-year-old Grove City man who thrives on challenges, wants to compete with Fidel Castro as well as sharks on his next swim.

Poenisch, who lives at 2210 Gantz Rd., plans to swim from Cuba to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., this spring. As the world's longest, strongest endurance swimmer, Poenisch said he was challenged to make the swim three years ago and is determined to do it.

HE RECENTLY sent a telegram to Castro "I want to swim from your island to Florida. For protection, I invite you to swim with me. How far can you go. I'm ready in April."

He has received no reply. Poenisch, working in a building on Columbus' South Side, is getting a shark net ready. He attempted the

swim twice in 1968 but failed because the shark net broke.

"I'll make it this time, you know," he said.

"IF I DIE, fine. I don't give a darn. That's how much this swim means to me." Monday, Poenisch inspected the shark net and sipped tiger juice.

Tiger juice, his own blend of health juices, skim milk, molasses and protein foods, is responsible for his great energy, Poenisch said.

The former Columbus baker, who turned professional swimmer at age 49, said he can't divulge the date of the swim because he fears the Cubans may seize the boat which is to tow the shark net.

"IT WILL BE dangerous," he explained. "It's something I have to do though." Several persons in the Columbus area helped build the net.

Poenisch will be attempting to break the present 105-mile distance record. He holds the two world records for endurance and distance. He boasts of pulling boats around, too. He has towed two boats loaded with people.

After the first 100 miles I'll have a band on hand to play music. That'll keep me going," he said. "You get tense out there. Music helps you."

POENISCH SAID three endurance swimmers will be in the boat to give encouragement.

He said he hopes to show youth in the country they need to keep in shape. He also expects to get personal satisfaction.

Oh yes, if Castro should accept the invitation, "I'll expect our president to do the same distance."

48 Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel, Sunday, April 30, 1972

'Swim Of Century' Set For June 20

By DAVE HEEREN
Sports Staff Writer

Walter Poenisch has chosen June 20 as the tentative date for his "Swim Of The Century."

It will begin just outside of Cuban territorial waters and culminate, hopefully, in Fort Lauderdale two days and 200 miles later.

Last year, when Poenisch revealed his intention of making the unprecedented ocean marathon swim, he said his goal was to leave from Havana and arrive at Fort Lauderdale.

Lack of cooperation by politicians has just about killed the Cuban start, while practicality has mitigated against the Fort Lauderdale finish.

Poenisch, whose nickname, "The Human Tugboat," describes some of his aquatic feats, still wants to swim all the way to Fort Lauderdale. But he isn't sure he can.

"I am just going to swim as far as I can," he said yesterday between workouts in the surf off Fort Lauderdale beach. "Even if I don't make it all the way to Fort Lauderdale, whatever I do will be a record. According to Buck Dawson (director of the Swimming Hall of Fame) there are no official records for marathon ocean swims."

No one ever has swam from Cuba to the United States.

When you consider the opposition, it becomes plain why even the confident Poenisch has reservations. If he manages to evade the Cuban gumbots, he will have to contend with fatigue, sharks and a monster called hypothermia.

What worries Poenisch most is sharks. He has collected all the material he can about them, and it is frightening.

"In my swim, I will be going right through what they call Shark Valley," he said. "I just hope I don't come up against any white sharks."

The white ones are the meanest. There are reports of them doing incredibly bold and vicious things. One had its belly cut

by man who dragged it into a boat; then, when they threw it back in the water thinking it dead, it ate its own innards. Another was shot twice, had its head rammed through with a stick, its body cut and still remained alive and sane. Another jumped into a boat and took a man's leg off.

When sharks are in a feeding frenzy, they have been known to eat their own tails," Poenisch says.

Sources of comfort to Poenisch will be his attractive young wife and a competent five-man crew aboard a boat obtained for the swim by his sponsor, Borden BBP Burgers.

For his swim, Walter will be surrounded by a "shark net" 30-feet long, 15-feet wide, and 15-feet deep. The net is made of chicken wire and field fence. But Poenisch says, "It is really just a bluff. A shark could tear it to confetti if he wanted to."

Night time will be dangerous. That's when fatigue sets in and sharks are difficult to detect. Walter hopes to have a diver with a dart gun with him in the net most of the time at night. The dart gun won't kill the sharks. But it contains a substance that causes a shark's tongue to swell up so it floats harmlessly to the surface of the water.

Hypothermia is a term designating the phenomenon in which the human body deceives itself. Thus, a freezing man feels warm, or a tired one feels he is capable of going on. Swimmers afflicted by this condition have been known to continue, unperturbed, until they died in the water.

Nutritionists have told Poenisch he will burn 4,000 calories every two hours in the water. He is counting on reserve energy built up in his bulky 225-pound body to help him endure. And he will drink his own health concoction called "Tiger Juice."

"Solid food is out," he says. "It starts the digestive process working and draws blood to the stomach. That takes strength away from the arms and legs."

For this swim, Walter will need all the strength he can get.



SURF RIDER — Walter Poenisch (top photo) works out in the surf off Fort Lauderdale beach for his upcoming attempt to swim from Cuba to the United States. Below, he removes goggles and smiles at the thought of a nice cool drink of "Tiger Juice," a health concoction of his own invention. Date for the swim is tentatively for June 20.

Staff photos by Matt Winters



Walters wife supplies him with his special health food mixture. Walter will take fifty gallons on Swim.

HE TRIED CUBA SWIM TWICE IN 1968