The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa

June 1979
These are slightly edited transcriptions of interviews conducted by the Ethnic Studies Oral History Project, University of Hawaii at Manoa. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions which are not factual.

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# Table of Contents: Volume I

- **Dedication** .................................................. iii
- **Acknowledgments** ........................................... v
- **Introduction** .................................................. ix

- **Aquí, Lamberto** .............................................. 1
- **Batatas, Andres** ............................................. 17
- **Cabinatan, Exequil** .......................................... 37
- **Ganade, Isabel** .............................................. 71
- **Kiilau, Charles** ............................................... 113
- **Lagmay, Ignacia** ............................................. 157
- **Mande, Ambrosio** ........................................... 209
- **Ogawa, Masako** ............................................... 219
- **Oralde, Buenaventuro** ....................................... 235
- **Runes, Reverend Jacinto R.** ................................ 243
- **Ponce, Pedro** ................................................ 279
- **Ponce, Cresencia** ............................................ 301
- **Plateros, Mauro** ............................................. 341
- **Agbayani, Felomina** ......................................... 391
- **Detomal, Federico** .......................................... 403
- **Cortezan, Josefina** ......................................... 411
- **Crowell, Edwin** ............................................. 439

## Appendices
- **Chronology** .................................................. A-1
- **Bibliography** ................................................ A-10
- **Questionnaire** ............................................... A-12
- **List of Interviewees** ....................................... A-16
- **Map** .......................................................... A-18
- **Photos** ........................................................ A-19

- **Glossary** .................................................... B-1
- **Index** ........................................................ C-1
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume II

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University of Hawaii, Manoa

June 1979
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Table of Contents: Volume II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye, Lindsay</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fern, Charles</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kojiri, Junzo</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakiano, Agapito</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allianic, Dorotio</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigno, Columba and Dionisio,</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aipoalani, Sam</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous and Gregario Oroc.</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venyan, Sulpicio and Laurano Juabot</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceballos, Francisco</td>
<td>869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutao, Edward</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senda, William J.</td>
<td>885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivera, Dimitrio</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>A-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>A-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>A-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Interviewees</td>
<td>A-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>A-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>A-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>B-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>C-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

This collection of transcripts is dedicated to Filipino workers and their families who through struggle and hard work have contributed to the development of a better Hawaii.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the following people whose work and ideas were directly responsible for the success of the 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai project.

**Ethnic Studies Oral History Project Advisory Committee:**
- Diane Akau
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Most of all, we thank the Filipinos of Kauai and their families who so willingly shared their time and memories with the Project.
INTRODUCTION

The Ethnic Studies Oral History Project (ESOHP), established by legislative appropriation in January, 1976, was created to record and preserve interviews with individuals who have recollections of events, personalities, and places that would be of value to the community, teachers, students, historians, writers, and researchers.

Special effort is made to record history told by the working men and women of all ethnic groups who made Hawaii's land productive, who overcame differences between ethnic groups, and whose efforts to better the quality of life were realized through struggle and hard work.

In the past three years of operation, ESOHP has interviewed over 150 individuals on five projects including: Waialua and Haleiwa: The People Tell Their Story, Life Histories of Native Hawaiians, Remembering Kakaako: 1910-1950, Waipi'o: Māno Wai (Source of Life), and Women Workers in Hawaii's Pineapple Industry.

The Waipio Valley project represented completion of ESOHP's first major outer-island oral history project. This 1924 Filipino strike project continues a program of major outer-island oral history projects.

The 1924 Filipino strike was the most tragic in all of Hawaii's labor history, leaving 20 deaths in its wake. The tiny town of Hanapepe, Kauai was the scene of a violent confrontation on September 9, 1924 which claimed the lives of 16 Filipino strikers and four policemen. Ironically, the strike was least effective on Kauai and gained the support of only 600 Filipinos, including women and children, from four of eleven plantations there.1

Strikers were blamed for the Hanapepe Incident. National Guardsmen from Honolulu were rushed to the scene to quell the possibility of further fighting. Strikers and their leaders were arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Many were later deported to the Philippines.

Background Information

Filipinos were the last immigrant group to arrive to labor on Hawaii's sugar plantations. Between 1906 and 1924, approximately 31,229 Filipino men and 5,790 women were brought to Hawaii; about half of these after 1919.2 As newcomers, like other ethnic groups before them, they were given the least desirable jobs and housing and paid the lowest wages.

Pablo Manlapit emerged as a leader among a segment of the Filipino population, primarily Visayans. After initiating the first Filipino


2Ibid., p. 2.
newspaper in Hawaii and working as an interpreter and a lawyer, he became a labor organizer. In the 1920's, he urged Filipinos to "request" the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (H.S.P.A.) to double the basic minimum wage, to proportionately increase the wages paid skilled and semi-skilled employees, to abolish the bonus system, to pay equal wages for men and women engaged in the same kind of work, to set an eight-hour day and pay time and a half for overtime, and to recognize the principle of collective bargaining.3

Cayetano Ligot, another leader and Labor Commissioner from the Philippines, claimed that working conditions were not as bad in Hawaii as in the Philippines. He counseled Filipinos to be content and work hard for their wages. His efforts convinced the Ilocano population not to join the 1924 strike.

Principal Filipino groups in Hawaii (Visayan, Tagalog, and Ilocano) were divided by background, culture, and language. For Filipinos as a whole, there were the additional problems of an overwhelming proportion of single men compared to women, scant education, a general lack of community roots, and the lowest status jobs, almost totally on plantations. These problems and hardships were part of the context in which the 1924 strike took place.

Project Objectives

The primary objective of the project was to attempt to supplement existing documentation, by examining through oral history the events, social and economic conditions which might have led up to the strike, particularly from the point of view of those directly involved (strikers and non-strikers).

The secondary objective was to gather general information on the economic and social conditions, lifestyle, culture and customs of Filipinos on Kauai in the 1920s.

Methodology

Before interviewing was initiated, research of existing materials was completed (see Bibliography).

Newspapers of the day, the Kauai Garden Island, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, and Advertiser all carried stories of the event sympathetic to the perspective of plantation managers and owners. The strikers are characterized as malcontents led by self-serving outside agitators who would use whatever means necessary, including threats and violence, to accomplish their ends. The Hanapepe Incident is blamed entirely on the strikers and quotes to substantiate this are taken from interviews with the policemen involved.

Court records and documents which may have provided insights from the

3Ibid., p. 19.
perspective of the strikers have been routinely destroyed along with other records of the same era.

Dr. John Reinecke's unpublished manuscript and Alohalani Boido's preliminary research for Dr. Bob Cahill were particularly useful. Local historians and Filipino resource persons were consulted in developing the project. A chronology and guide questionnaire were completed (see Appendices).

Chad Taniguchi and Gael Gouveia travelled to Kauai between March, 1978 and June, 1979 to identify potential interviewees and conduct unrecorded preliminary interviews and recorded interviews. Meetings were arranged through senior citizens' centers, the ILWU, and Filipino community contacts to locate potential interviewees.

Lists of names from court records, newspaper accounts, and personal recollections were circulated in an effort to find direct participants in the strike. A complete list of arrestees, 130 in all, could not be located. Eventually a number of strikers who had been arrested after the Hanapepe Incident, tried, and found not guilty were located and interviewed. Other interviewees included wives of strikers, a striker who had been arrested and released before the trial because he volunteered to return to work, and various individuals who had some connection with the strike.

The compelling need for oral history was underscored when the interviewers found that several more key participants had died or become senile within the last five years. Two interviewees died during the course of the project.

The total number of interviewees who released transcripts for publication included 25 men and nine women (two of whom are listed as anonymous). There are 45 hours of recorded interviews. (A listing of interviewees is located at the end of this volume.)

The final sample of interviewees is by definition biased and not representative of all strikers. It does not include those convicted and later deported or those who became dissatisfied with plantation life on Kauai and left. It includes those found not guilty and released, by definition only peripherally involved in the strike organization and decision making, and those who for whatever reasons elected to stay on Kauai rather than return to the Philippines, leave for the Mainland, or move to another island.

The County and plantation authorities, who were older than the Filipino strikers at the time, have for the most part passed away.

Some Observations

It is hoped that the following observations will shed some light on a complex subject and assist the reader in understanding the transcripts. The observations are not intended as a comprehensive summary of information
in the volumes or of information regarding the strike.

1. Reasons for Strike Participation

Several strikers mentioned that it was difficult to save and send money home, especially for workers with families. Even single men who usually paid Japanese or Filipino women to do their cooking and washing found saving difficult. Since their overall goal was to save and return, they felt that it would take too long at a dollar-a-day and saw the two-dollars-a-day wage demand as a way to speed the process. Several interviewees spoke of subtle or direct threats which convinced them to join the strike. Several of the strikers interviewed stated that they joined the strike simply to go along with other strikers. This can be explained by the strong friendship, kinship, language, and cultural ties with other Visayans which were developed and strengthened in the alien environment of Hawaii. The Visayans also tended to live in houses or camps with other Visayans, intensifying the peer pressure to strike. Similar group ties existed among the Ilocanos, none of whom joined the strike.

2. Lack of Experience and Organization on the Part of the Strikers

Most workers were young to begin with, in their 20s and early 30s. The H.S.P.A. policy of bringing in largely illiterate, uneducated workers from peasant backgrounds limited the degree to which they could broaden their experience through reading. This also placed them at the mercy of others for even the most routine transactions, a fact observed by the interviewers when some legal agreements had to be marked with an X. Most spoke Visayan and a crude Pidgin English and found themselves fighting for wage and job improvements in a Territory where the dominant language was English. The laws, courts, and official business were conducted in English, usually by haoles and Hawaiians older than they.

Many had no experience with a strike in the Philippines or in Hawaii. Those interviewed had no conception of what it might take to win or how long they were expected to stay out. Although officially called the High Wage Association, none of those interviewed recalled a name for the organization. No dues were paid or memberships kept.

3. Regional and Cultural Differences among Filipinos

The principal Filipino groups in Hawaii in 1924 were the Visayans from south-central Philippines and the Ilocanos from the north. They spoke different languages and could not easily understand each other. Tagalog was not the common language it is today. There were differences in cultural practices and attitudes. In general, Visayans had been in Hawaii longer as a group than Ilocanos.

Antagonism between Visayans and Ilocanos seems to have been strong
then and exists even today although on a lesser scale. One Visayan man in charge of recruiting workers from other plantations made it a policy to reject Ilocanos in the belief that they would only bring trouble.

Pablo Manlapit, a Tagalog, cultivated a base of support among Visayans. Cayetano Ligot, Labor Commissioner from the Philippines, an Ilocano, had the support of the Ilocano population.

4. Visayan Leadership and Outside Support

Although Manlapit was well known as the Territory-wide leader of the strike, little is known about local leadership. It was interesting to find that some of the Kauai strike leaders were not connected with plantation employment and became leaders partly because they owned cars. Since telephone communication was limited and mobility was required to organize the strike and to collect and distribute donations, access to transportation was a necessity.

In 1924 only a few hundred people on Kauai owned cars, and for a Filipino plantation worker to own one would be very unusual. He would have needed another source of income, such as a part-time business or gambling. There were hardly any Filipino storekeepers or small businessmen, those roles having been occupied by Chinese and Japanese entrepreneurs. It is probable that some of the strike leaders who owned cars were also involved in gambling. The accusations of dishonesty leveled at some of these leaders by the plantation-oriented press and even the workers themselves are understandable, although not proven. These accusations weakened the strike by casting a cloud over the sincerity of the strike leaders and the judgment of the strikers.

Most Filipino priests, ministers, nurses, policemen, interpreters, and social-worker types were too closely aligned with the plantation/government structure to provide leadership or assistance and were often antagonistic to the strike.

Several interviewees mentioned that Japanese plantation workers and families contributed toward strike support.

5. The Hanapepe Incident

(The following is an account of what happened before and during the Hanapepe Incident.)

Two Ilocanos pedaling bicycles into Hanapepe were caught by the striking Visayans and held at the Japanese School strike camp.

That night, Deputy Sheriff Crowell and a policeman went to get the two Ilocanos released, but the Ilocanos themselves refused to leave.

On the grounds that the Ilocanos were in physical danger and had
been intimidated into saying they would not leave, Sheriff Crowell consulted the County Attorney and employed a little-used and since-abolished law that allowed the Ilocanos to be arrested for their own protection.

Late that night, the strikers held a noisy march in Hanapepe town.

The next morning Sheriff Crowell went to the strike camp with the arrest warrant for the two Ilocanos, supported by Hawaiian hunters deputized as policemen.

After some negotiations between Sheriff Crowell and the strikers, the two Ilocanos were released into his custody. As the police returned to the area several hundred yards away where their cars were parked, they were closely followed and pressed by a large group of strikers armed with cane knives, sticks, and a few pistols. Fighting erupted just before the road to Camp 2. Several of the policemen climbed atop a small bluff and began shooting into the crowd of strikers. The strikers quickly dispersed, many fleeing into a nearby banana patch. When it was over 16 strikers had been killed, and nine were wounded; three policemen were dead of gunshot wounds, and three were wounded by knives, one mortally.

Interpretations differ as to what actually caused the specific events mentioned above. The capture of the two Ilocanos was explained by the press as another example of intimidation and use of force by strikers. A few interviewees have contended that the Ilocanos were caught because they had taunted and teased the strikers.

It is probable that these two Ilocanos were being held against their will. Efforts to free them were the legitimate responsibility of the civil authorities.

At this point, however, several factors enter into the picture. First is the level of frustration and disappointment that must have been felt by the strikers after weeks on strike with little or no success. Second is the apparent willingness of Filipinos to fight, often discounted as a stereotype, but which was true to some degree. A third factor is the reputation of Sheriff Crowell as a strict, no-nonsense disciplinarian with a temper.

Add to these a language barrier, cultural differences and perceptions on both sides and it is possible to see how a minor confrontation could develop into the violent incident that it became.

Exactly what was said or done to start the fight, exactly who fired the first shot or thrust the first blade will probably never be known. There was too much chaos and confusion during the melee and most of the principals involved are dead or deported.

Attitudes of Interviewees

Although there was some apprehension as to whether people would be
willing to speak freely about a sensitive subject, most of those approached were open and very willing to talk once the purpose of the project was explained. Credit for this must be given to the resource persons who opened doors for the Japanese and haole interviewers, and to Rev. Ed Gerlock, interviewer/translator, whose sincerity and fluent Visayan helped interviewees feel comfortable and relaxed.

There were instances of hesitancy and fear:

One man, who had lied about his actions in order to escape conviction, became alarmed when the interviewers asked detailed questions and took many photos. He asked whether the interviewers intended to turn him in to be jailed.

Another retired man who had helped smuggle food to strikers as a boy did not want to be recorded for fear that plantation management would retaliate and move him out of his plantation cottage.

One woman who moved in with and eventually married another man after her first husband had been deported declined to sign a legal agreement but gave verbal permission to use the transcript.

Another woman gave verbal permission to use the transcript but did not want to sign anything because of ill feelings and resentment towards Japanese due to the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in World War II.

One man asked that his transcript be destroyed because it could have a tangential negative effect on a relative's political career.

One woman became so insecure about trusting her own memory that she asked that the transcript not be used at all.

These examples are listed to give the reader an idea of some of the difficulties encountered.

**Cautionary Notes on the Validity of Oral History**

Oral history is a search for truth and as such, an awesome responsibility. Oral history has a proper place in a system of evidence, experience, and analysis that produces good history. Properly used, it can make important contributions to understanding the past.

The oral history interview, however, must not be confused with the original event or even with the memory of the event.

Historians clearly must be careful about using recollections as evidence. They must understand that a recollection is itself a complex piece of evidence. Three levels are included. There is the initial event or reality, there is the memory which is a selective record at least one step removed from reality, and there is the further selective and interpretive account recalled from memory by the witness/narrator. Furthermore, when an interviewer deliberately questions a person to solicit information as
evidence, a fourth level of selection and potential for intrusion enters the process. The questions that an interviewer asks and the apparent purpose of his interviewing have a direct bearing on what is being called up from memory, and why."

In view of the above, the reader is reminded that the Hanapepe Incident took place 55 years ago. Interviewees, generally between 70 and 80 years of age, were asked to recall an incident which some may not have given serious thought to in several decades.

Memories can and do fade over time--how much, is the subject of other physiological and psychological studies. For the most part, interviewees were candid, open, and honest in terms of their own experiences. In a few instances, interviewees were incorrectly pushed by the interviewers to answer questions which they did not have knowledge of, and they responded with answers which may not be valid. Each interviewee spoke from his own perspective and sometimes sought to promote his own experience or validate his personal position.

Variations in accounts did occur, for example, the stories of Isabel Ganade and Mr. Mauro Plateros who were married to each other at the time of the 1924 strike and who lived in the Hanapepe strike camp--she said they lived upstairs; he said they lived downstairs. Clouded memories may account for the differences.

It must be noted that within the context of these interviews, certain factual errors were recorded and allowed to stand, for example:

---Mr. Andres Batatas mentioned that 13 Filipinos were killed in the Hanapepe Incident when in fact the number was 16.

---Mr. Exequil Cabinatan suggested that the National Guard was on hand on Kauai sooner than they actually arrived.

Other unverifiable or questionable information exists within the transcriptions, for example:

---Mr. Buenaventuro Oralde mentioned a Kilauea man having been killed in the Hanapepe Incident.

---A few interviewees mentioned that Ilocanos joined the strike.

These statements appear to be incorrect based on available information. The historian or writer is urged to check further before quoting these and other statements as fact.

Interviewing in Pidgin English and Visayan/Ilocano

Pidgin English as a means of verbal communication is valid and valuable. Unfortunately, much of the flavor and meaning are lost when it is transcribed, and it is unintelligible to those who do not speak it. On

paper, use of pidgin also tends to make the interviewees sound uneducated and inarticulate, just as English speakers would sound trying to speak Visayan with no training.

When interviewed in their mother tongue, the interviewees speak extensively, articulately and the reader gains a totally different, more positive perception of the interviewee as a person.

Transcripts included in this volume are in Pidgin English or English translations of Visayan and Ilocano. The translations are almost, but not always, literal, or word for word.

Transcript Usage

A number of aids for ease in using these transcripts are included at the end of this volume. These include a glossary of all non-English terms used (underlined in transcripts), Pidgin English words (not underlined), and a detailed subject index.

Appendices at the end of the volume include:

-- A Chronology relevant to Kauai and the 1924 strike period.
-- A Bibliography of sources consulted by the interviewers.
-- A guide Questionnaire used by the interviewers.
-- A Map of the area in Hanapepe where the incident occurred.
-- A List of Interviewees.
-- A Photo Section with pictures of individual interviewees and some historical and contemporary photos of Kauai and Hanapepe.

A biographical summary precedes each interviewee's transcript. The tape number on each transcript corresponds to the number of the cassette tape from which the interview was transcribed.

All interviewees were encouraged to read their transcripts and make any deletions or additions they considered necessary before signing the following legal release:

In order to preserve and make available the history of Hawaii for present and future generations, I hereby give and grant to the University of Hawaii Ethnic Studies Oral History Project as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Project Director shall determine, all my rights, title, and interest to the following: Tapes and edited transcripts of interviews recorded on (date), Biographical Data Sheet dated _______, and Notes of untaped interviews (date).
All interviewees with the exception of two signed the above legal release. The two who declined to sign gave verbal permission for the ESOHP to use the tapes and transcripts for educational and scholarly purposes. The two have been listed anonymously.

The majority of the transcripts are almost verbatim from the actual taped interviews. Minor editing was done by the ESOHP staff to make the transcripts easier to read. Staff additions are in brackets [ ]. The staff made no changes which compromise the flavor and authenticity of the interviews.

In a few cases certain parts of the transcripts were omitted and the corresponding portions of tape erased at interviewee request. A few other interviewees made grammatical or syntactic changes in their transcripts. Several interviewees attached additions or explanations. These changes have been incorporated into the final transcript. Interviewee additions are in parentheses ( ).

These transcripts represent the statements which the interviewees wish to leave for the public record.

Spelling of some individuals' names may vary, for example:

--Insut, Insot
--Lorenzo, Laurencia
--Vasques, Basquez
--Callarde, Ilarde

Variations may be attributed to different spellings used by plantation recordkeepers, newspaper reporters, interviewees, and translators.

Transcript volumes are available at the following places:

**Oahu**
- Hawaii State Library
- Kaimuki Regional Library
- Kaneohe Regional Library
- Pearl City Regional Library
- University of Hawaii at Manoa Hamilton Library
- Ethnic Studies Program
- Honolulu Community College Library
- Kapiolani Community College Library
- Leeward Community College Library
- Windward Community College Library
- Hawaii State Archives
- Hawaii Foundation for History and the Humanities
- Ethnic Studies Oral History Project

**Hawaii**
- Hawaii Public Library
- Hawaii Community College Library
- University of Hawaii at Hilo
- Kona Community Library
- Kauai
- Kauai Regional Library
- Kauai Community College Library
- Lanai
- Lanai Community Library
- Maui
- Maui Regional Library
- Maui Community College Library
- Molokai
- Molokai Community Library
The staff of the Ethnic Studies Oral History Project believes that understanding the contributions of Hawaii's multi-ethnic working people will foster within individuals a positive ethnic identity and an appreciation of the proud heritage of all Hawaii's people. We look forward to continuing the work of recording, developing, and popularizing the people's history of Hawaii.

Chad Taniguchi, ESOHP Coordinator
gael gouveia, Research Coordinator
Vivien Lee, Research Associate
Henrietta Yee, Administrative Assistant

Honolulu, Hawaii
June 1979