BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: LAMBERTO AQUI, retired hospital worker

Lamberto Aqui, Visayan was born April 16, 1897 in the province of Siquijor. He finished primary school in the Philippines. He learned some English there.

He arrived as a single man in Kealia, Kauai in December of 1921. Bert played baseball on the plantation and after attention at the Makee plantation dispensary for an elbow injury, he was asked to work in the dispensary. He had planned to use Hawaii as a stepping stone to the mainland and more education but continued to work at the hospital until his 1962 retirement.

He did not participate in the 1924 strike because his superiors stressed the importance of his position.

He is active in senior citizens affairs, has served as an interpreter when necessary, and lives with his wife Francisca in Kapaa Heights. They are parents of four children.
Tape No. 5-5-1-78
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Mr. Lamberto Aqui (LA)
August 18, 1978
Kapaa, Kauai
BY: Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: [This is an interview with Mr. Lamberto Aqui.] The date is August 18, 1978, and the interviewer is Gael Gouveia. This is Kapaa, Kauai.

First of all, can you tell me when you were born?

LA: I was born in Enrique Villanueva, in the province of Siquijor. Now, Siquijor is a province entirely; before, it was a sub province of Negros Oriental.

GG: What year were you born?

LA: I was born in April 16, 1897.

GG: And when did you first come to Hawaii?

LA: I came to Hawaii (December 22, 1921). We left our place in October of that year, 1921. And then, stayed in Cebu for one month. And then, again, we were held up in Manila for check up. Until November. Then, to Hong Kong another month. One of our passengers was...we were quarantined there for one month. So we [the ones not sick] enjoyed....

GG: You hadn't been exposed?

LA: No. We enjoyed going out. Playing with the Chinese students in the school ground and going into places. So then, after one month, we moved on to Taiwan for another three days. And then, to Shanghai for three days. Then, the next port was Nagasaki, and that's another three days. Then move to Kobe for another three days. And then, the last port that we stayed three days was Yokohama. Then we left for Honolulu, from that time.

We arrived on that Japanese boat, Tenyo-maru. It took us about 16 days, from Yokohama to Honolulu. At that time, some of the passengers on the boat got sick. They told me that they had
cerebral spinal meningitis. You know what is that? I guess the food on the boat was too oily. So we were quarantined again, on the boat.

GG: In Honolulu?

LA: No. When we arrived in Honolulu, the HSPA [Hawaii Sugar Planters Association] divided us into groups. We were all together, 500 passengers. I was sent to Makee Sugar Company, located in Kealia, Kauai.

GG: How many women and how many men, or do you remember?

LA: I couldn't remember. I was taken by the captain to be the interpreter for the immigrants in the boat, for any kind of problem that he wanted to ask. So I was the one that went up to the captain and asked so many questions. The second day in Honolulu, the 24th of December, we were told by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association office to come to--I was one of them--group assigned to come to Kauai. And the place where I get in was Makee Sugar Company. So, from that time on, I was working with every kind of works, such as cut cane, hoe hana, clean ditches, and so on. Whatever that luna or the head, the bosses gave me.

GG: You actually got to Honolulu? ....On Christmas Eve night?

LA: Yes. Because, I think we stayed one day, and then came to Kauai, and I started to work. The holiday was 25th, so the 26th, I started to work.

GG: And that was 1921?

LA: Yeah.

GG: Can you tell me about how you were recruited, in the Philippines? How did you decide to come to Hawaii?

LA: Well, our parents are very poor. I was still going school at that time. We couldn't finance ourselves because, you know, kind of hard. What my parents can give for one whole week was only, sometimes, not even nickel; to buy things like pencils and papers. So, a man who came back from Hawaii recruited people in our area to come to Hawaii for work.

GG: Do you remember his name?

LA: Yes. Francisco Ganjinjin. That man had come back and asked if anybody who is interested to go to Hawaii for labor. Then, I was one of them to apply for it.

GG: What did he tell you about Hawaii, or what did you hear about Hawaii?
LA: When people came back from Hawaii to our place—they said, "Really, it's good." Because this man had a gold watch and a suit, and really nice things that he showed to us; like watches, and so on. That (impress) us. Besides that, our main thing was to look for what is better for our (life). That's why I applied for (passage to Hawaii).

GG: How much education had you had in the Philippines?

LA: I just finished primary school, and then I was going to eighth grade. But at that time, I was thinking of going to Hawaii, expecting that I can go to school in this area, to add more to what I have learned from the Philippines.

GG: Had you learned English in the Philippines?

LA: I had learned English in the Philippines, at that time. But it was not good because we use English only while we are in the school, but at home, [our native] dialect was used.

GG: But now, did the recruiter give you a bad time, because you had education or---because, from what I understand, they wanted mostly people with no education to come. Since you already went to school, did they try to tell you, "Well, you can't come Hawaii because..."?

LA: Oh no. It was because---well, anyway, I was told that if you have education, if you talk English [in front of the recruiters] that you start to go to anyplace, like Cebu, Manila, or any place like that, you'll not be accepted, you see. Besides that, if your look is like student, you cannot be accepted there, the same. But, in order that I could get in, I had to go and roughen my hand (makes rubbing, roughing noises) by having calluses on the back of the knuckles, so that when the inspector will see, "Oh, you are hard working man, so you can go." So, that's what I did.

GG: Where did you rough your hands?

LA: By going to the dirt and digging up (with bare hands and also handling) some kind of any rough thing. All the skin will come off from your knuckle, see. That's how I get it.

GG: And you didn't speak any English?

LA: No, I had to avoid it. Otherwise, I cannot get to Hawaii.

GG: And how old were you, at that time?

LA: I was 24 years old.

GG: And were you single man, or married, at that time?
LA: Single man, right.

GG: Let's see, you came to Kauai, and where were you assigned to live, when you first got here? You came to Makee Plantation, you said?

LA: At the Makee's Plantation, in the camp. They call it Ambling Camp. That ambling means "black." (New Hebrides people lived there.) Every camp in this place is a funny name. Like Pake [Camp]. Pake means Chinese.

Anyway, the place where I was taken first, I stayed only for maybe one week, with my relative. I moved to Kealia Camp. After few days, I joined the baseball organization competition. They had four teams, like Makee, Kealia, Spalding, and Kapaa. So we have competition every Sunday, at the baseball recreation park in Kapaa. I was taken in to pitch for Kealia team because in the school, I was pitcher in this hardball. I pitched maybe couple inning. Then because it was so long that I didn't practice throwing, I got strained muscles in my elbow joint.

GG: Pitcher's elbow?

LA: Yeah. Strained ligaments in my elbow joint. The next following day, I couldn't go to work because of that elbow. Then, when I went to the doctor, he just gave me rubbing liniment. As soon as I came out of the dispensary, he followed me and asked if I'm inter­ested to work with him. Then, I was thinking this an opportunity for me. So I accepted.

He told me to come the following day and talk things over. Then I was told the following day that I would be paid $36 a month. If you work 23 [days] in a month, then you'll get bonus. It'll be almost $40 a month, at that time. The doctor told me that, "You'll have free, $15 worth of food, boarding, free water, free housing, electricity, of course; laundry, all those things." So I was thinking, that was a good deal for me, rather than working out in the field, under the sun, hard work, and so on. I considered that that was good chance for me.

And then, I thought that after two or three years, I was thinking to get out from that place, to go to Honolulu. Because there was no school at night in this place. Then, I told doctor that I was going to quit. Doctor tell me, "I'm going to tell the plantation." But when he came back and he told me about it, well, "The plantation is siding [for] you $5 more for your salary. Don't worry, I give you some tip, too."

I said, "I don't know." At that time, the money was hard to find. So, I said, "Well, maybe I stay for few months more."

Then, I ask again. "No," again, he got the same way of arranging labor. So I get about $50 a month for once.
GG: What year was this, do you remember?

LA: About three years later.

GG: So this was right about 1924, then, you were making $50 a month.

LA: Then, the problem between the labor and then management, had come during that time, 1924. But I didn't know what month was that. During that time, there was a man from Honolulu, by the name Pablo Manlapit, trying to organize the labor union.

GG: Do you know the name of the union that he was trying to organize?

LA: I think that was called Filipino Union? I don't remember what kind name of that union, but this is the Filipino strike. We call that, "Filipino Strike," because prior to this strike, there was Japanese and other, Puerto Rican strike that happened. But it didn't last too long because on account of among the strikers, they were drinking and busting up themselves. They lost that—you know, nobody has lead them to making arrangement with a group of people. So that didn't last too long.

GG: Do you remember when that was?

LA: Well, I didn't ask what year was that, but that was unsuccessful, too.

GG: Before you came?

LA: Yeah, before I came.

GG: I see. So maybe the 1920 strike.

LA: So, then, as I said, with him [Pablo Manlapit] he had a small box, 2-by-2 square feet. When he goes to the community, and then put that box on the land and stand up on that, when he delivers his speeches, like that, to avoid charges of the plantation, trespassing on plantation property.

GG: He stands on the box?

LA: Yeah.

(Laughter)

LA: I don't think you remember that, you [speaking to Mrs. Constance Estenzo] were just born in...

CE: [Constance Estenzo, present during interview.] Second generation.

GG: Did you ever hear him speak?
LA: Once, in Kealia, that place where that offices and store. People wanted to know what he's going to talk about. Also, management side find out, they was crowd.

GG: They went to listen to him, too? The management side listened too?

LA: I think I remember that, quite well, you know. Because the people are stopping the work, or maybe, aiding like that. Was aiding, you see. This Manlapit, they talk about.

GG: Was this actually on plantation property, where the store and stuff?

LA: Yes.

GG: It wasn't in the road.

LA: It was on the road, all right. But when you get into the camp, camp road, that's plantation property.

GG: Do you remember anything he said?

LA: No, I couldn't remember. He was speaking in Tagalog.

GG: Could you understand, at that time?

LA: Yeah, I understand that; Tagalog and Visayan is very close dialect--word that they talk is mostly derived from Spanish, you see. So, some words that he is using is mix up with Tagalog and Spanish. Even Visayan is mix up in that.

So, when he was talking about problems, the working conditions of the labor against the management. As soon as the response of the strikers siding--what I mean, the people, the intention of Manlapit's speaking, the people just like accepted his intention of getting the strike started. So, the voices of the people said, "Well, go right ahead." They start the strike few days later on.

GG: Do you remember what month that was, by any chance?

LA: I couldn't remember that month. But I think it was in the early part of the year, though. So, the plantation management, if the strike would start then, the people has to get out from the camp. Those who joined the strike. So, lot of these boys went out. Like some of them didn't like to go, because they were not so sure of their life, you see. Some stayed back. And mostly, the Ilocanos stayed back. But the Visayan and the Tagalog mostly went out. Except my brother--instead of going out from the plantation camp to Kealia Parish Hall or Kapaa strikers' headquarters, he went up my place and hide himself. Because he didn't want to join.
GG: He didn't want to work or strike, either one, eh?

LA: Well, he was given some kind of work in the field, in the plantation at that time. But I said, "No." He went couple days. But, you know, when the strikers are mean—what I mean, they will get you, see. And then, he might kill you because you don't want to join with the big force, you see.

GG: Where were the strike camps, where they went to?

LA: When these boys get out from the plantation, one of the priest in our Catholic parish offered the parish hall for these strikers, to house them. (Other strikers were at Kapaa at Hee Fat, old rice mill.)

GG: That was St. Catherine's at Kealia?

LA: St. Catherine, at Kealia. In here. Right at the cemetery [now]. So then, people in the plantation was so darn many. So some of them went to Kapaa, to form headquarters in there, where that First Hawaiian Bank right now is on the beach. That's where the place where that bushes was before, you see. So they had a headquarters.

GG: Did they have like a building over there?

LA: No, it was hao bushes. I don't know what is inside, but then mostly the hao trees, bushes, you see. And then, when I (see them, I pity their situation.)

GG: They put up tents, or makeshift kind?

LA: Well, anyway, I don't know because I don't go in there, you see. But when we pass, because we pass only at a distance. And we look at the boys, that guard-like, or security, or who are those people that people that come in.

GG: That was the strike guards, or the camp police?

LA: The strike. So that's why it was kind of hard for me to describe what is inside and so on. But we passed. We just imagine that that place in there was strikers, you see. The guard of the strikers' headquarters, or something like that. (We dare not go in. We might be harm by them.)

GG: Why didn't you go on strike?

LA: I was told, by some of the strikers—came to harass you in the work. But I explained to them that according to the doctor's explanation to me, if I have to go, then all this dispensary and the hospital going to be closed. Then, the strikers cannot be treated, and so on, so on, so. So then, I don't know what happened to the strikers' decision but they didn't insist on having me out.
But I didn't like the idea to get out because my agreement between the contract and the management will be spoiled, and then I cannot go back free, back to the Philippines. That was another thinking again (of mine). But then, that was poor idea of mine, because I didn't go with the group.

GG: Were your countrymen angry with you, because you didn't go?

LA: No, no; I didn't....well, more likely, without any words saying that whether I agree or not, but I keep on working so they didn't bother me, see.

GG: If any of the strikers got hurt, could they still go to the plantation hospital for help?

LA: No. They were not accepted, because they were strikers, and so on. That's why, they lost their contract agreement. They violated the agreement of the contract. That's why, it was bad for me if I go out and then. But then, at that time, when the time was passing by and the length of time was getting little bit, you know, tired for the strikers, they organized a group of strikers. A committee to ask donation into the camp, so people can donate to the strikers' cause. (I gave can goods.)

When they get in there, they had noise that one of the supervisor had been tied up to the post, a German fellow. (Strikers tied him to a post.)

GG: Why was he tied up?

LA: Because, I think because he was the one that when the boys go to work---you know, every supervisors in that place, in the plantation, use hard word. What I mean, they give you word that, "You go ahead, go ahead," or something. (Said in very forceful, angry tone.) "Go over there, God damn, God damn." So, they use slang, hard word that is not---those poor boys don't understand what it is. Then, somebody will just say that he just used that swearing word, and make you go.

Besides that, in the plantation, if you stay off work without permission, or go to the doctor, the camp police will go up into your house, and bring crowbar and open the door. If you are not in the house, he look up the attic and look everywhere. And sometimes, they hide underneath the house. Because they have to get paper from the doctor, signed by the doctor, that he is sick. So he will be excused. But some of them, they don't. And they get tired, you know. And you are new to the work, especially you cannot speak English very good. That's how the boys get scared. Then, that's what I think, because that's how the plantation treated the boys in using that kind of word that they not used to. You know how it is, that ignorant people, they cannot make response. It's hard to understand, see.
So then, the news broke out into the camp; I mean, the striker headquarters. Time is passing on. And sometimes there's a problem break out in the headquarters. You know, when there is a problem, and they cannot solve their own themselves, that makes the strikers' morale low, when they don't understand each other, see.

And then, while at the parish hall, something had happened in there, too. And couple women delivered babies in that hall, attended by a midwife. I remember that, I think they are not allowed, they cannot be attended by the doctor in plantation because as I said, they are not covered anymore by the contract. So they have to go with their own--the midwife.

I don't know how long the strike had been going on, then they heard about this---as I said, like in Lihue, they have headquarters in there, too. But the biggest headquarters in Kauai was in Hanapepe. And the other strikers... did I explain to you about the other strikers that went to the beach, and get their living at fishing, and so on? They just, everyday fishing, just only fishing, fishing. That's how they lived.

GG: Did they donate their fish to the other strikers, too?

LA: Well, some of the strikers went to them to give the fish to the strikers. One of them is my uncle, see, fishing. The strikers just bring couple pieces of iron roofing down the beach and make-shift like. Then stay under the two piece of iron roofing.

GG: Sort of like a lean-to?

LA: Yeah, Just to sleep, and fishing. Well, anyway, when the time was getting little bit tired to the strikers. And then, big problem in Hanapepe had broke out--12 [16] strikers was killed in that trouble, and four police officers were all killed that same time. (Heard rumor, a cowboy was posted up on the hill overlooking the strikers' headquarters and did the shooting.) So, from that time on, when the strikers learned about the big problem, then their morale seems to be demoralized. And they begin to scatter, looking for any place that they can go. But while the strike going on for little while, there was a recruit from Los Angeles or Mainland, that there's opening of farm workers in there, that they wanted to recruit some of the boys to go. My uncle was one of them, and my cousin, the other cousin, went to Los Angeles.

GG: They were strikers and they were recruited by the man from Los Angeles?

LA: Right, yeah.

GG: Did he recruit very many of the strikers?

LA: Well, I don't know how many thousand only, that he had recruited
for the vegetable farm, but not all that could go. But some of
them went their own, to the Mainland purposely, to look forward
for their own better life than what they have in here. Because
they never win no strike or anything, what they wanted. Like my
uncle had work in that vegetable farm for three years, and he
went back again to the Philippines, he was wealthy.

GG: Can we go back to the trouble at Hanapepe? What did you hear about
that, and who did you hear it from; as to what happened at Hanapepe?
When they had the shooting, how did you get the news?

LA: Well, some of these people (our patients bring the news to us),
how do you call....security guard at headquarter. What I mean, the
people are just passing words and so on, from headquarters to
headquarters, something like that, see. So some of them have
automobile, riding going back and forth. So that's (how news spread
out), or maybe it was on radio broadcasting. We had the radio, at
that time, eh. I think we had the radio station at that time. I
don't really know how they get the information. But then, because--
who was that; Charlie Fern was the one that keep up the news all
the time, in the island of Kauai. Ever since that time. I remember
that he was the one umpiring baseball games between teams, competition
in Kauai, see. That's how I remember. Did you say that how this
communication was given, get into the other headquarters? Well,
that's what it is, maybe that was radio station or...

GG: Word of mouth? What did you hear happened there, or do you recall?

LA: What did I hear? Well, when I heard about this thing, someone had
told us that there had been shooting that day, and then the County
officials going into the headquarters in Hanapepe and try to get
explanation, probably, I don't know. But then, there was no under­
standing between the two, and then someone--you know how this, if
the two, like you and I are talking, then some of these other
outsider, they don't understand, thereby, they start to shoot or
something. Something disturbed. And then, this County had posted
one cowboy. I heard if that this is true. That, they had posted
one cowboy up on the hill overlooking the camp. In case of a
trouble, then he was the one that supposed to shoot. But the
police officers that went in there, I think it was Crowell, the
chief of police in Waimea side. Luckily that when the shooting
started, well anyway, he played 'possum on that killing, when some
of the police officers already on the ground, he went on the ground,
too. Some of the Filipinos had cane knife. Well, probably that
was his intention, to just lie down with the dead, to save his
life. So that's how.

Anyway, that's what they told us after that. Then, what happened
to this thing, as I said, lot of these strikers broke out because
they think that they have no way of getting any result of the
strike. So then, they will find their way out or what. To my own opinion, lucky that this thing had happen...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

GG: ... good lesson to labor. Can you explain what you mean?

LA: Yeah. Labor had benefited, and also the plantation. Because this man, Pablo Manlapit, I think he had the gut, a strong man that has will power. But the way I understand this kind of a problem, the strikers or the labor, and also the management, should be thankful to that man [Manlapit] that awakened everyone to the plantation. And also, the management benefited today on like mechanizing equipment for the plantation. Also, the labor side are getting more benefit out of that man's intended trouble to the plantation. That, I should be thankful to him too, just the same, although I wasn't a striker, I'm not against the strike, I'm not against the plantation either. Because I was a supervisor in the plantation, and what we have meeting every time, every month, we will know what is going on, the plantation management against the labor.

So, when this thing---there was another strike again, in Kealia. I think, few years ago after that. It was because of a second assistant manager.

There was also, a camp police who was over-charging the people that moving here and there, see. From plantation to plantation, they ask for housing, so on, like that. Anyway, according to information--this is all rumor now--that the camp police charge the people that come in so much and so on, which is not authorized by the plantation. But, you know how it is.

GG: Trying to make extra money.

LA: If I can scrape up, put in my pocket, without anybody knowing, well, that's good. But it was bad because that's what the people been saying all around, that he's not supposed to do that.

That manager had so much trouble with the labor, the way he work with the labor--he's using only mostly swearing words, in that kind of harsh way. One time, I was out in the camp because I had to see a patient. And just happen that he was following me on a narrow road, dirt road, and all the dust was flying up when he was following. He was blowing his horn. He was blowing his horn again. And you know the bushes on the side. Then, I had my car at that time, I bought a car, Model-T, 1924, I think. So I had to run my car on the bushes. He had passed my car, and he swear at me, "Ah, God...so and so, so and so." He had his wife with him.
Well anyway, mind you, this man, I tell you, when I was in the hospital, I was an x-ray technician. Then he had knee trouble, and I'd have to have care, x-ray his leg. Then he remembered, I think, "I guess this is the man, eh." Well, he hoomalimali, came, so on.

So, this man here, he had a problem with one Portuguese man--he's still alive, too, you see. And he pick up the word, because this Portuguese man, he talk without, you know. He just, "blah," and so on, the Portuguese.

Bumbai, the manager went to him and ask, "Would you come with me. I'll give you party, I'll bring you to party." But this poor Portuguese, who would think a good word like that would get a bad result. So he [the manager] went pick him [the Portuguese] up some secluded place, just give 'em good beating, you see. [About 1926.] And then, this Portuguese man, he was all bruises. Then, maybe instead of telling him good words, well, he just give 'em a good licking. "Don't do that," or something. "Don't tell," or so and so. Then, eventually, this man [the Portuguese] had come out, and told secretly to the people, I suppose. The Portuguese and the Filipinos, and so on. That's what had happen on this kind of problem.

This strike, all the boys in the camp had to form a strike, you see. And when they had a meeting, these boys' meeting in the camp, I heard about it. And then, because the manager was a friend to my boss, the doctor, and he's right across to the doctor's home, you see, he hide to sleep over night [at the doctor's]. You know where is Kumukumu Camp, eh? That's the strong one, too, Kealia, and so on. So, they didn't work on that following day, because of the camp police and that second manager.

So that morning, the boys were all out picketing at the Makee office. About 1 o'clock that afternoon, our dispensary in Kapaa, the Hawaiian Cannery dispensary, and I always go with the doctor, you see. I was surprised that the boys were all gathering around the office. And then, when we came back from the dispensary in Kapaa at about 2 o'clock, I suppose it was--then, we stopped by the office. All the people talking and so on. The first manager or head wanted that second manager to apologize to the workers. But he was so darn hard headed, he didn't want to say one word. So then, after that, nothing. There was just clear up. Father Morris came in there and talked to the boys in a nice way and so on. And cool off and so on.

GG: Did that second manager ever apologize?

LA: No, he didn't apologize, not even one word. So that's why, still there. What I mean, the thinking of--people's mind is still not clear. Because if he did say, "Oh, excuse me, I will not do that. When we talk each other is better." Make you understand. Well, anyway, he didn't do that.
Then, again, the office in there--because that was the office of Makee Sugar Company, because still going on--he wanted, that second manager to be the boss of that area, see. But another man--he's still there--was already known as the second boss in the plantation. Then, there was a problem between him and this other fellow....they were rolling their sleeves, and the one asked him to come out from the office, go out on the road and settle up the trouble. No, no fight. Of course, that second manager was big and tall, you know. But being like that, well, probably he was trying to avoid.

Then, when the camp policeman was out and deported to the Philippines--he was deported, you see. And then, a Portuguese was taking the place of the deported man. Pretty soon, all this kind outside talk said that there was a problem between the Portuguese and the man that was going to fight with the second manager. And then, in the office, they said that the Portuguese came out and rolled his sleeves and wanted to come out and settle the trouble outside. (Laughs) That was a good one. There was no trouble.

GG: I think maybe we'd better begin to finish up today. And when I come back again, in September, then I'd like to come and bring you the transcript and maybe finish up at that time.

One more thing about the 1924 strike, I wanted to ask; did you see any of the arrested men when they were at the courthouse or at the jail, or anything? The Hanapepe strikers?

LA: No, I didn't. So, I don't see.

...thinking today, that all these University graduate will be taking up our places hoe hana in the field. I'm telling you.

GG: That's right. Not enough jobs.

LA: This day, passing on the road, those people working the road, with the dirty shirt. And yet, what they earn is more twice than the pay of PhD. That's what we had been talking in our plantation meeting. They said that, "Well, now, we don't know today. We are just in big trouble. But later on, all this kind of problem that the strikers and so on, we can see how the educated and not-educated people are going to be just like this way. Today, the uneducated people are working the lowest class of classification. And tomorrow, we don't know when tomorrow is going to come, that well-educated fellow, PhD or doctors will be going back and work for that job.

END OF INTERVIEW