EDWARD S. LUTAO, retired plantation worker

Eddie Lutao, Sr., Visayan, was born on June 10, 1912 in Makaweli, Kauai, one of ten children of Cornelio and Incarnation Simolde Lutao.

He attended Makaweli School until the eighth grade and started work on Makaweli Plantation in 1924. During the Filipino strike his father, a supervisor, continued to work but collected food from neighbors and supporters and secretly sent it to the strike camp at Hanapepe via Eddie and his horse.

Lutao worked at a number of jobs on the plantation including kalai, cut seed, cut cane, field plowing, mule driver, painter, welder, and caterpillar driver. He retired in 1974 after nearly 50 years of plantation work.

He married Concepcion Villaros in 1937 and they had three children. He is an active sportsman, having hunted pheasants, played baseball and boxed in his youth (1937 Kauai AAU Bantamweight Champion). He still plays softball for the Kaumakani Senior Citizens team.
These are notes from an unrecorded interview with Mr. Eddie Lutao, at his home in Kaumakani, Kauai on September 10, 1978. Mrs. Lutao and Mrs. Fuertes, his sister, were present. Mr. Lutao is 66 years old, retired, a strong-looking man and a good welder and maker of knives, spoons, and other implements. He was reluctant to be taped because he was afraid that something he said might be used to take away his plantation home, especially now that he is retired. Mr. Lutao also didn't feel he had much information to contribute, but it became evident that he did have good information on how strikers received food. The following was reconstructed from detailed notes taken by the interviewer and has been approved by Mr. Lutao.

CT: What do you remember about the 1924 strike?

EL: Well, at that time I was only one dumb kid, 12 years old; what you expect me to remember?

I used to go down near Burns Field [near Salt Pond, Hanapepe] to feed my horses and give them cane tops. The plantation put guards with badge and guns to check anybody who went out of the camp. We used to live Camp 4.

I remember because the next year, when I was 13 years old, I went to work for 28 cents a day. Grown-ups were getting $1 a day. When I became 16, I was paid 50 cents a day; and then more when I became 17.

Anyway, food from the Japanese people came in to my father, and I would take it to the strikers. The police let me through because they checked my bags four to five times [previously] and saw I only had cane tops. So after a while they said, "Okay, you can pass through. You get only some opala in there." But inside I had rice, canned goods, sugar; because my father hustle, and the Japanese people good.

[At this point, I asked Mr. Lutao if he wouldn't mind being recorded. He again declined for several reasons.]
CT: Can you explain how you got past the guards?

EL: Well, as I said, I used to take cane tops to my horses down Burns Field. The fifth time I passed, the police said, "Go ahead boy." and the sixth time, they waved and said, "Go ahead."

Then my dad asked me, "The police don't check you no more?"

I told him, "No, they no ask me now."

So, in between the cane tops we put food. Look like had cane tops but had food inside.

CT: What kind of bag did you use to carry the food in?

EL: I used to carry on my horse four bag cane tops in the 100-pound barley bag. You know, the barley bag is bigger and wider than the 100-pound rice bag. So maybe I get two bag worth of food stuck in there with the cane top.

Pau hana time, I can take the stuff down. But I was scared too, you know, and I was thinking what to say if they catch me.

CT: How many times did you do this?

EL: About three or four times, maybe every other day. There were not too many strikers and the strike never last too long.

CT: How did your father get the food?

EL: The Okinawans and the Japanese bring 'em. You know, you can trust the Okinawans and the Japanese when you do something wrong. Not like the Portuguese, who might report you, eh?

CT: When did they bring the food to your father?

EL: They had to come nighttime. People were not allowed to come in the camp.

CT: Do you remember them actually coming to your house and what they said?

EL: Well, I don't remember all, but some. One man, he said to my father, "O-san, me get kaukau. You like? Hapai!"

CT: Did he yell or knock on the door?

EL: No. We had dog, so the dog start barking so we know somebody coming. My dad go out first and meet them.

They no come all one time; maybe one, two at time. Bumbai, the
Ilocano might squeal, eh? "How come Lutao house so many Japanese people coming?" All Visayan, you know, went on strike.

CT: How much food did each person give?

EL: Well, it depended. Some gave a bag, some canned goods.

CT: About how much food did you take very trip?

EL: Maybe 50 to 75 pounds one time.

CT: Exactly what was the route you took to deliver the food?

EL: From Camp 4, I ride my horse down and follow the rail by the old Japanese graveyard by the ocean. Then I look around and if nobody around, then I go by the strike camp, tie my horse to the garage. I tell the Filipino, "Food."

"Who give?"

"Somebody."

"Where from?"

"Camp 4."

"Ilocano give?"

"Why, Ilocano no like strike."

"Who give?"

"Somebody." I no like tell them, eh; bumbai my father or the Japanese get in trouble, eh.

CT: Did you speak to them in Visayan?

EL: No. "Pidgin" English, eh? That time, I hardly can talk Visayan; only 12 years old. But now Visayan okay. Ilocano too.

CT: Did you decide on your own that you should not mention where the food came from?

EL: Well, my father was giving me the hint already. "You no tell them who give the food. And if you get caught by the police, you tell them that's for when you go fool around your horses, you like some canned goods for eat." But I was thinking, they no going believe me because what one kid doing with all that kaukau?

CT: When did you deliver the food?

EL: After school, about 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock. I like come home
before dark, eh. I no like pass by the graveyard after dark. I hear all kind stories about ghosts and what not.

CT: How late did the guards stay out?

EL: Well, I think had shifts. And must be they stay 24 hours because you only put day time, no make sense, eh. Must be they change the guard.

When I pass, they tell me, "You go holoholo, you go see horse?"
"Yeah, horse must eat, eh?"

"Okay, you go. No make fire cane, eh? No make trouble." Big Hawaiian guards.

CT: How many guards were there?

EL: Every camp had guards, I think. Camp 4 entrance had two guards by the gate. But this is strike time only. After the Hanapepe shooting, no more guards and I'm free again to go visit my horses.

CT: Do you know if there actually were cane fires set?

EL: No cane fires, never happen. Only after they cut the cane, for burn the rubbish.

CT: How long would it take you from Camp 4 to the Hanapepe strike camp?

EL: If I ride fast, five minutes. I make that horse fly.

CT: But if you had food in the bag?

EL: Then I go slow because I no like the kaukau fall out, eh? Maybe take me 45 minutes one way.

Then I tied my horse by near the Mormon church. I tell the Filipino, "Kaukau over there. Go get." I make them carry the food.

"Who give?"

"Somebody."

"Who give?"

"Somebody."

So third time they no ask, they go take 'em.

"Who give?"

"Who? Somebody! You fella no like, I bring home!"
CT: You know, your father was a supervisor and didn't strike. Were you ever pressured or teased about that by others?

RF: (Mrs. Fuertes) Teasing? No such thing as teasing my brother. He was the big bully boy for Camp 4. Everybody scared him. He used to go make us play hooky and go swim in the reservoir. He told me, when the supervisor come, go duck my head under the water then close my mouth and hold my breath, even though I couldn't swim. So instead, I stick my head above the water, because I couldn't breathe, and cry, cry, cry. So they catch us. And we had big grapevine our house. All the kids come and eat. My brother hide behind and after the kids start eating some, he yell and scold them. Everybody run away.

EL: Yeah. But when the strike pau I feel good because no more guard. I can go how I like.

RF: My father was the mouthpiece for the Filipinos. "You like job, go see Lutao." Because he could speak English and write. But he would get mad if he get job for somebody and they only loafing around.

CT: Can I ask you again what you did with the horses? Were they your horses?

EL: No, I only had one horse. See, the plantation every Saturday would bring the horses and mules from all the camps in to rest on Sunday. They had maybe 500 horses and mules all together.

Anyway, during the weekday, I go and ride 'em; break 'em in and if I like ride 'em, okay.

Boy, I didn't think I would remember all these kind things. But when you ask the question I start remembering.

Camp 4 used to have the Chinaman, he cook food for the Filipinos and Chinese bachelors. Good food. He ring the bell, made from part of a rail--good sound. During the day, sometimes they bring the hot food to the fields, too. Good food. Except you got to watch out New Year's time, because they catch all the cat and dog and put 'em inside. You can tell the cat, only muscle.

RF: Yeah, he used to be naughty boy.

EL: I go drink okolehao. The Chinese, they smoke opium. One time I try. Make my head fly. The Chinese, they used that. Pay day, strong. Come end of month, no more already, just like they going die. Pay day, strong again.

The Chinese call me, "Alok, lapuwale boy."

CT: What that mean?
EL: Kolohe boy, rascal boy.

RF: He go steal peanuts. Steal bread from the Portuguese, sometimes four loaves. We go under the house eat 'em. Then bumbai, the Portuguese lady, she so nice, she give me one loaf and tell, "Here, go give your mama." Even if she know, maybe, my brother wen take some already.

Bread was cheap, only 5 cents. That Takahashi man used to make saimin, bread, manju, doughnut in Camp 4.

END OF INTERVIEW
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume I

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