

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Henry C. Knell

Henry Cockett Knell was born in Kalihi, O'ahu in 1922. His adoptive father, Harry August Knell, was employed by Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, Ltd. Henry's adoptive mother was Bertha Smithies Knell from Honolulu.

Knell attended Kalihi Waena School through grade six and Kalākaua Intermediate School through grade eight, but left Farrington High School before graduation.

Knell went to Howland Island as a colonist as part of the twenty-first expedition. He departed Hawai'i on March 17, 1941 and, after a brief stop on Canton Island, arrived on Howland on March 28. Knell, Thomas Bederman, and Dominic Zagara replaced Louis Soares, Robert Lieson, and Waldron Henderson. The fourth colonist on the island was Joseph Keli'ihananui, who had been there since July of 1940.

On July 25, 1941, Knell and Zagara were badly burned when hydrogen when a weather balloon accidentally ignited during night observations. Fortunately, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Roger B. Taney*, already en route to Howland at the time, arrived three days later and removed Knell and Zagara. The two men were replaced by Elvin Mattson and Richard Whaley.

Less than five months later, on December 8, 1941, Keli'ihananui and Whaley were killed by enemy fire on Howland.

Following his return to Honolulu, Knell began working as a rigger at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. In 1945, he began working for the City & County of Honolulu, eventually becoming a painter in the building department. He retired with thirty-one years of service.

Henry and Hannah Knell raised six children in Kaimukī, O'ahu. Knell died in 2004.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Henry Knell (HK)

Honolulu, O'ahu

January 17, 2003

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Noelle Kahanu (NK)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Henry Knell for the Panalā'au oral history project on January 17th, 2003, and we're at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Noelle Kahanu.

Okay. Good morning.

HK: Good morning.

WN: Can we start by having you tell us when and where you were born?

HK: I was born in Kalihi, 1922.

WN: What were your parents doing in Kalihi?

HK: Well, what I know, I was adopted. I was adopted at about three months—no, less than three months. My real father was retired. My mother was---she was retired, too. But my adopted parents, one was working, and the other was a housewife. He was working at Steamship Line [Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, Ltd.] in Honolulu. The ones that go back and forth to the islands. That's what they used to be.

WN: What was his name, your [adoptive] father?

HK: His name was Harry Knell. Harry August Knell.

WN: And your mother's name?

HK: Bertha (Smithies Knell).

WN: He worked for the steamship company?

HK: Yeah. Inter-Island [Steam Navigation Company, Ltd.].

WN: Do you know what he did?

HK: Well, he was a purser on board. My real family, they had a home in Maui, Kahului. And I'd go up there and spend some time with my real brothers and sisters. See, my adopted family didn't cut me off from my (real) family. They always taught me about my family, my real family. And then since he was a purser on board, he would take me (to Maui) during vacation time, and I'd spend it up there. Waikapū and Kahului.

WN: Harry August Knell, where is he from?

HK: He's originally from Germany, I believe, and his family stayed in San Francisco. And he grew up in San Francisco then he came to Hawai'i. He worked for a pineapple company, doing office work. And then he got into the Inter-Island.

WN: And Bertha Knell, where is she from?

HK: She passed away a long time ago, years ago. She was from Honolulu.

WN: What was the name of your real family, biological family?

HK: Well, my mother was a Bertelmann and my father was a Cockett from Maui. That's about it, they told me. My grandfather was there too. But they all passed away.

WN: So you said you grew up in Kalihi?

HK: I grew up in Kalihi.

WN: What part of Kalihi?

HK: Right in the heart of Kalihi at King [Street]. You've got King, Mokauea [streets]. Mostly King Street by the theater [i.e., Kalihi Theater was located on the corner of King Street and Pu'uhale Road], I grew up over there. Over there used to have Bailey's Store, then they turned it into a shoe factory, and then they turned it into Moanalua Dairy [on King Street]. And that's where I was brought up, in Kalihi. I went to Kalākaua [Junior High School], after Kalākaua I went to Farrington [High School]. But I didn't graduate from Farrington. But all you got. . . . Let's see. You've got [colonists from] from Roosevelt [High School]. You've got boys from McKinley [High School]. And I told Noelle, how about from Farrington? I didn't see anybody from Farrington. So I want to include Farrington, too.

NK: Were there other colonists from Farrington? Or were you the only one?

HK: I don't think so. Only me. Because every time Roosevelt, Roosevelt, everybody from Roosevelt. (WN chuckles.) It's like Roosevelt was the only school. But I don't know why, I'm from Farrington.

WN: So what kinds of things did you do to have good fun growing up in that area?

HK: Kalihi district?

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

HK: Well, of course, we got a gang hanging around the corner. And they always said, "Don't get into a gang, you'll hang around the wrong guys." But I don't believe that. If you're in the wrong gang, it's up to you to get out. Well I got out, and I met another gang. It was a nice gang. We'd play around, go swimming; we'd go to Kapena Falls. We'd swim up Kapena Falls. We'd go to Waikīkī, down at Public Bath and Kalihi Stream. When I was a little younger we used to swim in Kalihi Stream. I grew up around there. So you got good gangs and bad gangs, I went with the (both of them).

(Laughter)

HK: But I ended up with the good.

NK: (Chuckles) So would you go fishing? Fishing in the . . .

HK: Fishing? No, I don't go fishing. Only at Kalihi Stream for the . . . I forget what they called it now. Anyway, that was a long time ago. And I'm (going to be) eighty-one years old. Well, I got long time to think what I did.

WN: You said the fish was a what, *dojo*?

HK: Yeah, with the whiskers, eh? We'd go fishing for that at the Kalihi Stream. And fool around up there. That's about it. Hang around . . .

NK: My grandfather talks about going crabbing up Damon Tract . . .

HK: Yeah, we'd go crabbing second bridge, first bridge. And then over there, where Love's Bakery is now, that's where they butchered cows and pigs. We'd go down there and watch when we were younger. Hang around. Those days they used to hit the cows with the sledgehammer over the head. They put 'em in the stall and then hit 'em. That's about it, hanging around there.

WN: Among your friends, what kind of nationalities were around there in the group?

HK: Well, Kalihi had mostly Hawaiians and Portuguese and Japanese, plenty Japanese, and Chinese. There was only one Filipino family in Kalihi I knew of, two boys. We used to hang around over there, too, with them. That's the good side, see. It was all right, it was good. Oh, Kalihi corner that's where we used to hang around. Then we'd stick around the corner and every Friday night guarantee there was a fight across from where we were. Purple Inn was the name. There was a fight over there every Friday night. We were on the side watching them. That's about it, fooling around in Kalihi when I was young.

WN: Did you have like organized sports? Did you have like barefoot football and things like that?

HK: Well, they had barefoot football up there, they used to call 'em the "Thundering Herd." They played [against] Kaka'ako. I didn't play, but I was with the team. You know, when they travel, we go. There was Kaka'ako, Wahiaiwā, Kalihi, and there was another team. I don't remember. That's getting too far back.

WN: Did you folks go to the harbor to dive for coins, things like that?

HK: No, I couldn't because at the [Honolulu] Harbor, like the *Lurline* or the *Matsonia*, you cannot get in because the boys don't want you in there, see. So what we used to do, we used to catch the *leis*, when the *Mariposa* or *Lurline* (went out, we caught the *leis* when they) [passengers] threw it over onto the dock. Then we'd sell it back to the *lei* sellers.

(Laughter)

HK: To the *lei* sellers, that's how we make our loose change, too. Every Saturday.

WN: Where's the good place to eat around there?

HK: Well, there was a Japanese-food restaurant over there and, I don't know, but they liked me. So I'd go in, I'd talk story with them every time. I had a wristwatch I used to charge, only I could charge you know. They'd take my wristwatch and then when I had money, I'd go back and pay 'em and then they'd give me back my wristwatch. They were nice people. That's sushi and all that over there, you know, really nice. Then we used to help this [pig farmer]—up of Kam[ehameha] IV [Road] he used to raise pigs. We helped this guy go down to Pālama and get leftover tofu, and helped him put 'em on the truck. Because you gotta climb that Farrington hill, you know, with all that leftover tofu stuff. We helped him do that every time. We didn't get anything, but just the idea we're helping him. He got it for the pigs.

NK: You remember some of the family names of the kids that you hung around?

HK: Uh, yeah. There was Silva, Freitas, and the Filipino family Lagrimas. Oh, what's that guy's name? I think, I'll remember tomorrow..

(Laughter)

WN: That's okay.

HK: Instrument, that Hawaiian player.

NK: Alameida?

HK: Pua used to play with us. Pua Alameida. And every time they'd call on me to practice his *'ukulele*. We used to tease him, we had to pay to see him play. (NK laughs.) That's about it. We used to tease him all the time when we played. But then Pua got together with Johnny Alameida and if we wanted to hear him play, we had to pay. He played at Waikīkī, yeah. All that. Freitas was a good friend of mine. (His mother, Mrs. Hannah Freitas, took good care of me.) Freitas, the family was good. That's a good side one. (Chuckles)

WN: And the Isaacs family, yeah, are from around there?

HK: Isaacs, yeah. Isaacs used to be up by the park. Yeah, Henderson and all that. But the Isaacs and the Alos are the same family, you know. They played music plenty, too. And you got, what's that barefoot bar used to be?

WN: Mossman? Sterling . . .

HK: Sterling Mossman, yeah. He was about my age, playing around. Sterling. And he came to be a policeman. He played barefoot ball.

WN: So what was Kalākaua School like for you?

HK: Well, (chuckles) Kalākaua School was the good and the bad. You had good guys from— Kalākaua School used to get guys from Pālama, Kalihi. You got 'em from Kalihi Uka, you got 'em from down Kalihi Kai. That was the only intermediate [school]. Had ruffians in there, too. But if you mind your own business and you're with the right gang, you're all right. But it used to be rough, Kalākaua. They used to come from Waipahu, too. And then we *wen* break up to Farrington, McKinley [i.e., dispersed to different high schools]. That's when everything broke up, so that's all right.

WN: What elementary school did you go?

HK: Kalihi Waena.

WN: Kalihi Waena.

HK: Yeah, up to the sixth grade. And then you go to Kalākaua, then Farrington. Before, from there you go to McKinley. But they built Farrington [in the 1940s] where the Kamehameha School [for] Girls [was located]. Farrington took over [the site]. Then they [Farrington] moved across the street. Then everybody [i.e., Kamehameha School for Boys and Girls] moved up the mountains [i.e., Kapālama Heights]. During my time, too, there was Wedemeyer from Kalihi Uka. We used to play football, too. Up with the “mountain goats,” we used to call ‘em. Mostly Portuguese lived up there. So we call ‘em “mountain goats.” We’re from down King Street. And Wedemeyer used to play. I knew Wedey.

WN: Oh, Herman?

HK: Yeah. And Wedemeyer, I think he was the only different nationality playing (football) I think. I don’t know if he was Portuguese, but he was from up Kalihi.

WN: Okay, so you went Kalākaua, then you went Farrington.

HK: Yeah.

WN: Yeah. And you didn’t finish Farrington.

HK: Yeah, I didn’t finish Farrington.

WN: Then so what happened after that?

HK: Well that’s when I went out from Farrington. I met good and bad, see. We fooled around like I told you before.

NK: So how did you find out about the colonization project?

HK: Well, my real brother’s wife found out about this [expedition], down the [Line] Islands. And she went to see—I don’t know who—but the [U.S.] Coast Guard people called me in. They gave me the treatment and wanted to know everything about my health. And they checked my teeth, everything. Even my urine, checked all that out. And then they said, “Okay,” I passed. But at that time, they wanted the local boys to go. Like Kamehameha boys, because they ate fish, and in case they ran short of food, you got fish and lobster. And, I never cared for I never cared for fish or lobster. So, they said, “Okay, we going down. You’re on the waiting list, but you’re going down anyway on the [USS Coast Guard cutter], *Roger B. Taney*.”

So shall I go on from there?

NK: How old were you, and how much time had passed from when you left Farrington to when you went on . . . ?

HK: I was about nineteen, I think. And then on the *Roger B.*, we got on board at, I think it was Pier 5. And then we went over to Pearl Harbor. We stayed at Pearl Harbor. And from Pearl Harbor we went down the islands [departing Hawai'i on March 17, 1941].

Shall I go on from when we got to the islands?

NK: Okay.

HK: Well, we got to Canton [Island], first. Now Canton [was under] English and American [jurisdiction]. Okay, now, they had boys down there for the [Pan American] China Clipper to land in the lagoon. They had Hawaiian boy divers who were blasting to make room for the China Clipper because of the coral over there.

Okay, we went. The captain took us, he says, "Okay boys, you guys go see friends at Canton." We went over. Then, of course, those guys were Hawaiians and they had beer. Pea used to be down there. He was, I think, not Kini Pea. Kini Pea was the youngest one.

WN: Oh, William Pea.

HK: The oldest one. He was the headman at that time down there, with the local boys, the divers. And of course they had the big barrel, you know *da kine* barrel they used for *kālua* pig, they put 'em in and fill it up with Pabst Blue Ribbon. At that time Pabst Blue Ribbon was in bottles. So we stayed over there. So the captain on board the ship invited the English people to dinner and a movie on board ship that night. So they sent the boat over to pick them and us up. But the boys, we didn't go on that boat. (Chuckles) The motor launch. And then after the movies, the captain sent the motor launch over to pick us up, they brought back the English people. And we still didn't want to go. The Hawaiian boys were having a good time.

NK: Were you singing, playing music?

HK: Oh, they played music, everything, you know. So they had to send an extra launch. And finally we went back. So when we got back, we sailed on. The captain said, "No more stops at Canton for the Hawaiian boys." And I don't know what happened after that, the next trip after, I went down. Then we went to, I think, Jarvis. No, no, I'm not sure if it was Jarvis or Howland. [HK landed at Howland.] Anyway, I was happy that I was a sub[stitute], but what I saw was four black spots on the island as we came over the horizon. I said, "Oh, boy, I don't want to stay over here." (Chuckles) One reason I was a sub, so far nobody coming home. [Substitute colonists were to stay on the ship and be ready to take someone's place]. About that, I was happy. Then we go to Howland, this

[Louis] Soares, I think, changed his mind. He's going home. Then they looked this way. (NK chuckles.) There's only me. I got off. They put everything on the beach: water, the food, canned stuffs. We got everything on the beach, boom! (claps hands), they're [i.e., the ship] gone. We had to bring 'em up [to the campsite], four of us. But after the ship left, I'll tell you, I was nineteen, I cried because it went over the horizon, and I was left there with three guys. And I don't know them and they don't know me. Just "Hi, hi, hi." And I had to stay with them. As soon as the ship left over there—the boat sailing away—those guys, their shorts came right off. Because they're used to, nude, eh. Took me two weeks for my shorts to come off. Two weeks. And I cried when that ship left.

And [Tom] Bederman was the headman over there out of the four of us. And Bederman was a good headman. Oh, he was the best. I know. The way he put all the canned stuff together, he'd call your name, you go over there, and you'd pick two or three. Only depends on what Bederman got down on the paper. You pick, you put 'em on your pile and go. Because we had meat saved. They gave us plenty meat, and we had kerosene, all that stuff. They gave a kerosene icebox. Then we cook all the meat we could and Bederman separated all the cans and juice. And I may be mistaken, they sent down a barrel of salmon, salt salmon. I don't know why they sent the salt salmon when we had plenty [fresh] fish, you know, but they sent that down. And I was absent on that. They could pick what they want. You eat all you want, your canned stuff. If you want to eat three cans one day, it's up to you. But that's all you get because Bederman separated everybody. And then that was it. I stayed on the island, then got to know them.

NK: So, who were the other colonists?

HK: Bederman, Joe Keli'ihananui, and myself, and [Dominic] Zagara. There were four of us on that island. Now, I hate to say this, but three of us was always together. You see, I think at that time there wasn't too many messages, I mean, you know that code, who can run the [Morse] code. Bederman was good at that, and Zagara. Zagara, I think he was [once] in the [military] service, he got out. So he was good in sending [Morse] code. We had to send the weather [report] back to Wailupe [on O'ahu]. The fire station used to be across over there in the water, yeah, Wailupe. So that's why Zagara was with us. Three of us together mostly all the time. Zagara had a dog, and he was mean to the dog. And no use argue and fight over there just because he was mean to the dog.

Before, for Amelia Earhart, they made the [air]field over there [on Howland]. They said she was supposed to land there, which she didn't. They had a common house. There was a bed, and Joe used to sleep on the bed all the time. That's why we used to tease him that he's sleeping on Amelia Earhart's bed. (Chuckles) We used to tease Joe that. [In 1937, Amelia Earhart was due at Howland from Hawai'i as part of her around-the-world flight. Both colonists and military personnel built a landing field and accommodations for her use. Earhart's plane vanished en route.]

And then down there we had to write a log. Just like they're writing a book. You know, that's the Kamehameha boys. And that's another thing. The Kamehameha boys, they're always together. So naturally they're all good friends. And what they wrote in there, oh my gosh. And what I wrote, "I did the same thing yesterday, today. And tomorrow, I'm going do the same thing." What I going do, write what? "I went out fishing; I went out looking for shells. Today I was looking for shells. Tomorrow I'm going look for shells." [HK had a beautiful shell collection and upon his return to O'ahu gave it to his sister.] So what I going write in the log? I got all jammed up on the log. Not only me.

And then cooking. We take the weather. And now, of course, you know who's my partner, it was Zagara. We take morning reading and night reading. And we go fishing. Of course, either I'm the bag boy or I carry the lantern on my head. (Chuckles) And I refused to go sometimes, but Bederman saved the *āholehole*. He cut 'em up, and put garlic, ginger, shoyu. And then we fry 'em, he'd tell me, "You try 'em." I tried it. I liked it. So that's how they'd make me go. And lobster, we go for lobsters. Lobsters, we can eat all day, lobsters. You know, after you cook 'em, cut it up, put it in the icebox. Anytime you want to eat lobster, you just open the icebox and eat lobster. And breakfast, one time, I cook; next time, Zagara cook. Take weather, I read the chart. Zagara take the readings, you made a chart, and then sent it to Wailupe, for Pan Am[erican Airways]. That's when the China Clipper used to land down there, Canton. [Canton became a hub of central Pacific air movement during and shortly after World War II.]

WN: You're talking about the logs. Were you folks required to . . .

HK: Logs? Yeah. (Chuckles) We were required to do logs. And then when they come to my page, oh, "Went looking for shells." What I going say? "Went fishing?" Same thing. "I looked at the skies." What, "Fill up the balloon." And not easy (chuckles) write down in the log but I had to, yeah.

WN: And cooking, did you know how to cook from before?

HK: No, I never knew how to cook. But there was meat over there, you fry the meat. But most of the time, those guys like Joe and Bederman, they liked fish. That's how they used to bribe me to go. They cut up the fish, soak 'em in shoyu, you know, and then fry it.

WN: Did you folks dry fish, too?

HK: Oh, yeah. We dried plenty fish. But the fish down there had worms. You know when you cut 'em open, you see the worms. But you dry 'em and you eat 'em like that though—no more worms. (Chuckles) But it tastes good. And the birds, they're humbug when we're cleaning. They come around, the boobies, the frigates. See, the frigates, they

cannot dive for fish. What they do is they steal it from the boobies. The boobies had duck feet.

And we call home. Bederman made us change around the poles on the island so we can call home and talk to the family. But I didn't call. You see, you call, you leave a message to the people. I think we had one in Nu'uauu, and we had one in Kapahulu. We'd call and leave message to call certain-certain people to come talk back and forth. And we usually talked with [people on] Enderbury back and forth. Any more questions?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

NK: . . . come off the boat with you? Were the three guys already there or did some of them come off the boat? They were fresh.

HK: You mean different island?

NK: Yeah, because I think some guy, I think you guys were placed—Suarez came off and Robert Lieson and Waldron Henderson.

HK: Henderson?

NK: They all came off Howland?

HK: Yeah. Oh, no.

NK: No?

HK: Just me on Howland.

NK: So who was already on Howland?

HK: Bederman. [Tom Bederman and Dominic Zagara arrived Howland May 28, 1941, replacing Louis Suarez and Robert Lieson.]

NK: Okay.

HK: Joe and Zagara.

NK: Oh. Okay. The book is wrong then. [According to E.H. Bryan's *Panalā'au Memoirs*, HK arrived on Howland March 28, 1941. Waldron Henderson left Howland March 25; Robert Lieson left Howland May 27, 1941.]

HK: Yeah. And I think Soares, I think I took his place. I took Soares's place. [Louis Soares left Howland May 28, 1941. HK actually took Waldron Henderson's place.]

NK: Okay.

HK: Now this is the next one. Who took my place?

NK: It was [Richard] "Dickie" Whaley and Elvin Mattson.

HK: Mattson? Oh, two of them.

NK: The two of them took your place and Zagara's place after the accident.

HK: I thought [James] Riley took my place way back. But now I found out since we got together. You know what I mean?

WN: According to this, Riley was on Enderbury.

HK: Enderbury?

WN: Yeah, until February 7th, 1942.

HK: Forty-two?

NK: Yeah, he was one of the "forgotten eight." He's one of the ones that came off. That's why Paul [Phillips] knows him. [The last remaining colonists were not picked up from Jarvis and Enderbury until February 1942, two months after the Japanese attacked Howland, ending the colonization experiment. Hence, they were known as the "forgotten eight."]

HK: Yeah.

NK: Because the last expedition picked up the boys from Jarvis and Enderbury.

HK: That's the picture. You saw that picture they gave me.

NK: Yeah.

WN: According to the book, it says you left Howland on July 28, 1941.

HK: August.

WN: August? Okay. And then Dickie Whaley and Elvin Mattson came on that same day that you left.

HK: Yeah. Well, who else came home then from Howland? Was it only me? Who else?

NK: Was Zagara.

WN: Zagara.

NK: That's why, you know, because six months after you left, the island was bombed. So I mean, in a way . . .

HK: I was lucky.

NK: . . . so then the accident, was lucky, because one of the ones that replaced you guys [Whaley] never came home.

HK: Yeah. I was lucky. I have to say that before somebody else says, "Hey, you were lucky." I say, "Hey, I was lucky."

NK: So how did it happen?

HK: I came home.

NK: No, the accident.

HK: Well, it was that night for me to tie the lantern; you open a paper lantern. Zagara's night to fill up the [weather] balloon and hold the balloon. Now the gas lamp was right on the desk where they keep the log book. And Zagara hit the lamp. But I was sitting there like this [on the desk, and the balloon] burst. I got burned here and here [pointing to his body and arms], and on my face. And some of my hair and my nice beard I was trying to save. Although there were little patches, here (chuckles) and there. So what Bederman did, he had a couple of cases of cod-liver oil. No, not cod-liver oil.

WN: Castor oil?

HK: Castor oil, the blue bottle. So he went over there and open 'em up, and started pouring on me. Now before that, the government said, "Anything happen, don't contact the ship." I don't know how come, they must have passed Canton. (Chuckles) They came to Howland first. And I slept that night with castor oil on me. But in a couple days, I think, I woke up, looked outside, we saw the ship all colored up in war colors, you know . . .

WN: Camouflage?

HK: Camouflage. Oh, we got all excited. But I think Bederman took a good look, he says, "That's the Roger B. [Taney]." And that was lucky. So doctor came, checked me and Zagara, and said we better go home.

NK: How was Zagara's burns?

HK: Zagara was burned on his face. That's about it.

WN: So you were worse off than him?

HK: I was, yeah. I got over here and over here [pointing to his body and arms].

WN: Your body and your arms.

HK: Yeah.

NK: I think the beard saved your face.

HK: (Chuckles) Yeah, that's how I came home. But [holding] the lantern was my job. If I was holding the [balloon], Zagara would get it more, I think.

WN: How big was the balloon?

HK: Oh, big. *Da kine* bubble dancer, I think. You dance (chuckles) with the balloon, the *wahine*.

WN: Oh.

HK: Them bubble dancers. Big balloon. Yeah. Of course, too, on the islands, the tide go down so fast, that what we did, we put bait. You see, we had leftover meat, because you can't eat all the meat they gave us. And we'd go out and drop 'em, tie 'em to the reef, and then we'd come up, we'd have a sledgehammer, we'd come up and tie 'em around the sledgehammer. From the government house, we looked down; we'd see the hammer. If the hammer went down, bite, and we'd catch sharks like that. We'd go out when the tide was down. The tide came back fast. And we'd catch the shark and then clean 'em, and then we'd dig a hole and we'd bury 'em. Ants eat 'em up, leftover meat. [The jawbones and teeth] comes out nice and clean.

NK: So, were there a lot of bugs on the island? Ants, flies?

HK: Ants, ants, plenty ants. That's how we cleaned our shark teeth. The jaws. We'd dig a hole and put 'em in. Ants eat 'em up or the hermit crab. That's another one. Like Bederman and I, we slept outside under the rain shed, you know, water catch. And we got the peach can, like that, we put 'em [underneath] the legs of the bed. We made our own bed, Bederman and I. And put the cans so the crabs cannot come up. If we go and sleep outside, the crabs crawl up. We slept outside with the army blanket. It was good. I wish we could go again. That's how good it was.

NK: So, do you remember when they [Richard Whaley and Joe Keli'ihananui] were first killed?

HK: Ah . . .

NK: Was there coverage in the newspaper? Do you remember?

HK: No. I didn't know that. I heard from [Killarney] Opiopio and them. That's how I heard. That's how far back I was left out, you know.

WN: You were back here [Hawai'i] already when you found out.

HK: Yeah, yeah. I was back here. But I wasn't strong with the other people. I was out by myself. Like all the—I don't know what happened to Hartwell [Blake]. Hartwell was a good friend of mine. I know quite a few [have] died. Like [Daniel] Toomey died, yeah? Toomey was a fireman, too, yeah? Yeah, I think he was a fireman. Ali's father, Oliver Roberts, I knew him good. He died. That's about the guys all I know. They all passed away, mostly all of them. That's my side. Your side, like your [grand]dad and them, who's left on your [grand]dad's side?

NK: Arthur Harris, George Kahanu, Sproat.

WN: [Emanuel] "Manny" Sproat.

NK: Manny Sproat came a little bit later.

WN: Abe.

NK: Abe Pi'ianai'a.

HK: Pi'ianai'a, I know Abe.

NK: James Carroll.

HK: Because the homestead [Department of Hawaiian Home Lands], Abe was head of the homestead. See, I know Abe. But your [grand]dad and them, I don't know. And I believe, they only heard about me. That's all. Or they don't know me. In fact, I never heard about them.

WN: Joe Keli'ihananui, you knew him.

HK; I knew him from down there.

WN: Right, right. How did you feel when you found out about what happened?

HK: Well, gee that's when it hit me. Joe was a good Joe, too. He was a good guy. So was Bederman. (I didn't know about the other guys, so I don't have anything else to say). So that's it.

- WN: You know when you saw the *Roger B. Taney* coming with the camouflage, like that, you knew that war was about to begin?
- HK: Well, we knew that we're not supposed to contact the ship. So we didn't know who's that outside there.
- WN: Did you know why though, you not supposed to contact the ship?
- HK: I don't know why. Maybe because of the war, they said [that]. I don't know why they said, "Don't contact the ship."
- NK: They told you that when they dropped you off?
- HK: Pardon me?
- NK: When did they tell you not to contact the ship? When they dropped you off? Or when you were recruited?
- HK: No, no. When I got burned or before I got burned, they said, "Don't contact the ship" to the island boys. So one reason why, I think, they thought that we were put on the island, like spies or what, I don't know. Maybe that's why the Japanese bombed over there. I don't know. But why did they pick Howland? Why didn't they pick Jarvis or Canton or some other? Canton was big, but they had hotels over there. Why did they pick Howland? Maybe because Amelia Earhart was talking too much about landing [there].
- NK: So when you left Honolulu, you know that was 1940, right?
- HK: Yeah.
- NK: Or forty-one? I mean, you know there were already rising tensions in the Pacific . . .
- HK: About war?
- NK: . . . about war, right, when you left.
- HK: I didn't think about that. I didn't think about war.
- NK: And they didn't bring it up?
- HK: I know my family never thought about war. They were probably happy I left to the islands.
- WN: I guess in those days, it was still a European war. It wasn't in the Pacific, yet.

NK: Did they teach you how to identify aircraft, or were you supposed to keep a lookout for, you know, planes or anything in the area?

HK: No. (Pause) I'd be happy to come back again if you guys want to think of something new to ask me.

NK: No. Let me ask you this, what did you think your purpose on the island was?

HK: To take weather [data] and to save [i.e., colonize] the island to the United States. Same like Canton; half was for United States, I don't know, half for the English. That's what the English was there for. That's the belief, to take weather. I don't know what else.

WN: How many days passed, again, from between the time you got burned to the time you actually . . .

HK: The ship came there? About three days. [HK was burned July 25, 1941; he left the island July 28, 1941.]

WN: Three days. And during that time, did you feel that your life was in danger?

HK: I just felt hurt.

WN: All you had was the castor oil on you?

HK: Mm-hmm [yes]. That's what's different those days. Nowadays they say put water, ice water or something on you, right?

NK: Do you have blisters?

HK: Oh, yeah. The blisters popped. It's all over here [pointing to body and arms].

NK: Are you glad you went, though?

HK: Pardon me?

NK: Are you glad you had that experience?

HK: Oh, yeah. I wish I could go again. I bet everybody wish they could go again. No? Everybody. I know I wish. I can go down there and visit or stay there if everything is happy down there for me. (Chuckles) I liked it.

NK: What did you like about it? The weather?

HK: Yeah, the weather and you mind your own business. You do what you want to do. That's good, that's really good. I don't know about what your [grand]dad thought about that. But I think it was good. What island was your [grand]dad [George Kahanu] on?

NK: Jarvis.

HK: Jarvis. Oh, Jarvis, you got like mountain hills on Jarvis. But where I was, it was flat.

NK: Everybody says their island is the best island.

(Laughter)

HK: Yeah? Is that right?

NK: Yeah. Even Paul [Phillips] says that. That Jarvis was the best island.

HK: Yeah?

NK: But then you talk to people on Howland, they said their island was the best.

HK: Oh, yeah. They can't beat Howland. Howland Island, you go over there, you wave, the guy wave back at you. You go across the island. No matter where you go on the island, you wave, the guy wave back. One black spot waving back.

WN: That's good.

HK: Talking about black spot, I think I was the blackest of them all.

(Laughter)

HK: Yeah. But took me a hell of a long time to take off my pants.

(Laughter)

HK: Took me a hell of a long time to put it on. On board the ship, we sleep nude. Well, of course we're not on the bed. We're on the deck, it was good and I liked it. I wish I could go down there and spend couple months.

NK: If that opportunity came up, would you go?

HK: I would go, but I would take my wife.

(Laughter)

NK: Would she want to go?

HK's wife [Hannah]: I don't think so. I don't know. I'd have to think about it.

(Laughter)

HK: I would go, tell you the truth. I would go to Howland Island, not Jarvis. (Chuckles) Not Enderbury. I don't know what happened to Baker. But they said that's the best island? I think ours was the best island. Canton was good. Just like city life over there, Canton, at that time.

NK: You know Paul Phillips has some very strong views on how the federal government treated the colonists, especially the ones at the very end, like you folks. You know, I think that he feels that you all were placed in a very dangerous situation and . . .

HK: Well, I wouldn't know that. Well, he's strong on this, but he's the one who called me up to come over to see you. He's really strong.

NK: I mean I think part of it is how he was treated when he returned. So do you feel like you were treated well on your return? That they took care of your medical needs? They . . .

HK: Um, no. They didn't take care of my medical needs. I got better at home, and [the wounds] started drying up, but it left scars. That's why my sister-in-law was grumbling. She was mad. I'm not no movie actor but . . .

NK: You didn't have any medical attention?

HK: Ah, only from the doc when I was coming home, the doc on board.

NK: On the ship.

HK: That's about all I know.

NK: So they didn't take you to Tripler [Army Medical Center] or . . .

HK: No, no.

NK: . . . for follow-up or anything? No, they dropped you off?

HK's wife: You were neglected in that case because they didn't come back to you. After all, you were injured on the island.

HK: I was on my own. In fact, (chuckles) the day we got in [to Hawai'i], the next day we got together with Mike McCorriston, David Hartwell, myself, and I forget who the other guys were. We got together, we went down the bank to get some money, and we were going to have a good time, you know. But (chuckles) every time I think of this, I laugh.

David, he sold [feather] *lei*, so when he came down on King, turn the corner to the bank—on Bishop, coming down—the wind hit, you know, because you got the Bank of Hawai'i, and you got the hotel, you got a gust of wind coming in from down below. And he's left with the *lei* (chuckles) all the feathers fell down. Oh, I used to get a kick. Every time I'd tease him. (Laughs) And it takes time. Like Joe, he takes his time making a feather *lei*. I don't know how Joe's turned out. But Hartwell, swoosh, in the wind. The bird never died, the bird was flying.

(Laughter)

NK: So Joe Keli'ihananui sold feather *leis*, too?

HK: Yeah, yeah. Joe used to sell. That's why I say, I don't know how Joe's turned out. I used to tease him, too. Hard on the eyes, you know. Oh, I never forget that day (chuckles) he turned the corner. I used to tease him.

NK: So what did you do after you recovered?

HK: What I did? Well, I got in Pearl Harbor [Naval Shipyard] and worked Pearl Harbor till I got the RIF [Reduction In Force]. I was a rigger at Pearl Harbor. So they told me I could be sandblaster, and then I can go back to be—they called me back when everything was settled—to be rigger. I said, "I'm not going wait that long." Sandblasting is some job. You know underneath the ship, we sandblast. Not for me. So I quit. Yeah, fool around until I met my wife.

WN: When did you folks get married?

HK: We got married (chuckles) August.

WN: August what? What year?

HK: I know her birthday is September 18. August—don't tell her I forgot.

NK: We'll take that part out.

HK: Well anyway, this year made fifty-seven years, we're married. Fifty-eight, I think.

WN: So you worked Pearl Harbor, where else did you work?

HK: Well, we got married. Her father was working for the City [and County of Honolulu]. Now since I got RIFed from Pearl Harbor, and I married his daughter, and her father was good with Mayor [John] Wilson, I got in the city (chuckles) as a laborer. Then I worked myself up to Building Department as a painter. We'd go around painting schools and all that. And I retired, thirty years working for the city. And they gave me

thirty-one because of my sick leave. (We had six children: Keith, Harry, Raymond, Donna, Kathi and Cy.) And we're still happily married. Of course, we argue with each other now and then but we're still married.

NK: One last thing and it came out at a meeting, so I just wanted to ask. I remember that you mentioned at one point the issue of Punchbowl. Do you remember?

HK: Yeah, well, we were talking about burial down there, that's right. And then you're supposed to be buried at Punchbowl. [There was some discussion regarding colonists and their right to be buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.] That's why I asked Oliver Robert's daughter—he died—I asked her where her dad was buried. You remember when she came with me that night—oh, she came by herself that night but we met out there. He was buried Punchbowl. I said, oh yeah, [because] he was in the [military] service. That's why he got buried at Punchbowl. Now at that time, we went down—I never signed papers or the talk was about when you die, you'll be buried at Punchbowl. You're working for the government then, see. That's what they said. But I don't know, like Dan Toomey, I don't know where he's buried. I don't know the rest of them.

NK: Do you have the paperwork? You have things from when you first signed up?

HK: You mean to go down [to the Line Islands]?

NK: Yeah.

HK: No, I don't remember that. All I remember, they gave you thorough check-up. And then they want you go, then next get a paper and bring you back in. Your teeth are all right. And at that time I went to Dr. Ching. He was a good friend of our family. And he fixed my teeth. I had one filling. And then the same day, or maybe the next day, we were going. At that time, I never used to drink much. The boys got together, they said, "Let's go have a few before we go." So there was a joint on Beretania [Street]. A tiki joint we went inside there. And I had to use the bathroom in the back. Well, I left, and I wasn't feeling high or drunk but I had to use the bathroom. I just passed this *wahine* sitting there, and I said, "Excuse me, can I pass?" The boyfriend, he got burn up the way I asked. I just asked, "Excuse me." The guy gave me one punch and my filling came out. And it was too late for me to see Dr. Ching to put back (chuckles) my filling. So I went down there with a filling I put back. (Chuckles) It was all right, but oh I worried, because they're not going to send down a dentist. They're not going to send a ship down there. It was something else.

Mom, when we got married? August, yeah?

HK's wife: Yeah.

HK: See. Told you.

WN: August what year?

HK's wife: Forty-five.

WN: Forty-five. Yeah, he was right. He said fifty-seven years married.

HK's wife: Yeah.

HK: Okay.

WN: Thank you very much.

HK: You're welcome.

NK: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

**HUI PANALĀ'AU:
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in the Pacific, 1935–1942**

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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