

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Victor Bak Sung Kim

Victor Kim, the youngest of five children, was born in 1915 in the Pālama district in Honolulu. His father, Soon Kuen Kim, and mother, Mary Hong Kim, both immigrated to Hawai'i from the northern Korean province of Hwanghae-do in 1903. After working for Waialua Sugar Company, his parents moved to Honolulu's Buckle Lane, and ran a restaurant near Honolulu Harbor's Pier 16.

Kim attended Royal Elementary, Central Intermediate, and McKinley High schools, graduating from McKinley in 1934. It was at Royal where Kim first acquired his interest and experience in radio receiving technology. After graduating from high school, he worked as a radio technician in a Honolulu store.

In January 1937, Kim was recruited for his technical skills to be a colonist on Jarvis Island. He was the only non-Hawaiian on the team—Kamehameha Schools students Joseph Kim, Edward Young, and Kini Pea were with him on the island during his stay, which ended almost eight months later, in August 1937.

Kim attended Pasadena Junior College and earned an associate's degree. In 1941, he worked for the U.S. government as a civilian technician on Guadalcanal. That same year, he returned to Honolulu and worked at Hickam Air Force Base as a journeyman electrician.

In 1947, Kim started his own business, Victor Kim Electronics, Inc., in Kalihi, Honolulu. At the time of the interviews in 2002, Kim and his wife, Esther Oh Kim, were still operating the business. The couple raised four children.

Tape No. 38-1-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Victor B.S. Kim (VK)

Honolulu, O'ahu

March 6, 2002

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) & Ty Tengan (TT)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Victor Bak Sung Kim on March 6, 2002 for the Panalā'au oral history project. We're at his business in Honolulu, O'ahu, and the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Ty Tengan.

Okay, you know, Mr. Kim, what we want to do today is not get into the Panalā'au experience today. I want to just start off with asking you some questions or talk story about your early days.

VK: Personal.

WN: Yeah, and then the next time we come, when we meet at Bishop Museum, we can talk really in detail about your six months on the island.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Oh, yes. Okay, Mr. Kim, first of all can you tell us when and where you were born?

VK: Born in Honolulu, Buckle Lane, 1915.

WN: Tell me something about your parents.

VK: My parents, they were immigrants in the early 1901 or [190]3, a group that was brought in to work for the sugar company, Waialua Sugar Company.

WN: They were immigrants from—do you know what part of Korea?

VK: Northern Korea. Hwanghae-do. It's a North Korean province.

WN: Was that like a farming area?

VK: Yeah, all farming. That's why my parents came over here. That's why they were hired, they were ex-farmers. They're all farmers. And they worked at the sugar mill in Waialua for several years and then I guess the contract was over so they could leave the sugar mill. They came out to Honolulu and they started a coffee shop. [The] first Korean restaurant, that was down Pier 16, and that particular block was known as the Lee Lup lumber yard. The [present] City Mill used to be Lee Lup before.

WN: Yeah, yeah. Lee Lup?

VK: That's the original name of that City Mill [Co., Ltd.].

WN: Related to, that's Ai family, yeah?

VK: Yeah. So we had the restaurant there and served the stevedores. They come in for coffee and pastries like sweetbread, doughnut, cupcake in the morning. Then that evening, they come in for stew rice, twenty cents a bowl. Twenty cents those days, stew rice. I grew up over there for several years, and then those were the days that my sister and I were only five or six years old, we used to go to Pālama Theater. Pālama Theater where we went to [movie] show for, admission fee only five cents.

WN: What kind shows you went?

VK: Mostly Tom Mix.

WN: Tom Mix.

VK: Tom Mix.

WN: Cowboy, then.

VK: Cowboy picture.

WN: What else besides Tom Mix? You remember?

VK: Oh yeah, Buck Jones. And then the other cowboys, I forgot the name, they used to have an Elmo Lincoln. The old days, he used to be Tarzan. As I said, when we go there, we bought our snacks, five cents a bottle of soda and five cents *chow fun*. Those days, *chow fun*, five cents.

WN: Where did you buy the *chow fun* from?

VK: Next door to the theater.

WN: Oh yeah? Had a store?

VK: There used to be a Chinese restaurant there, so that's where we used to buy that.

WN: How much *chow fun* you could get for five cents?

VK: Oh, a cone-sized package about that tall.

WN: One foot tall.

VK: Yeah, not bad you know. You get full, eat one of those.

And, I used to swim in the waterfront, Pier 16. That's where we swim all the time. And then, in 1922 my mother got sick, so we had to sell the restaurant, and we moved up to Punchbowl. We lived on 'Auwaiolimu Street. In those days, that was just a road going up to the Chinese cemetery. Right now, the road goes through the back of Punchbowl. That road is 'Auwaiolimu [Street]. On top is Papakōlea, the Hawaiian settlement. Then, my mother passed away, then after that we moved back to Buckle Lane again.

WN: Same house?

VK: No. Buckle Lane, a different, small. The rental was cheap in those days, so my dad could only afford the cheap rent, after all, those [were] hard years. Nineteen twenty-six, '27, '28 are hard years.

WN: What do you remember about the first house that you lived in on Buckle Lane? What was it like?

VK: It was a two-story house building on the corner, before Liliha and Vineyard [streets]. (It was where Buckle Lane met Vineyard Street, 150 feet from Liliha Street.) It wasn't that flat before, there used to be a little gulch there, a little stream.

WN: This is Liliha and Vineyard, more the town side of Vineyard?

VK: (No, the Kalihi side.)

WN: What's over there now? You know?

VK: That's Mayor Wright Housing.

WN: Little further down.

VK: Mayor Wright across the street on the left side, that group of white buildings. The one by Vineyard and Liliha is flat. It's about fifty feet back there, which is the start of Buckle Lane that goes around and come out to Vineyard again. Across the street has always been Kauluwela School. That place all bulldozed, that's why you don't see the ditch.

There used to be a ditch there. So underneath that, I think, right now there's a water drainage system underneath there. And where Dillingham Boulevard is, Dillingham and King Street, that used to be a marsh. All bulrushes and swamp. Used to be a swamp.

WN: Dillingham [started] right there, yeah?

VK: Yeah, where Dillingham started to go, that's their place, that used to be all swamp land.

WN: They didn't have Dillingham [Boulevard] back then?

VK: No Dillingham.

WN: Oh, I see.

VK: To go across the [railroad] track, there used to be an overhead bridge. Over the bridge to go CPC [California Packing Corporation] and Dole [Corporation] canneries. Those were the old days. Right after that, went to Jarvis, came back. When I came back, I left for the Mainland because a friend of mine was going to the Mainland and I wanted to go to Cal Tech [California Institute of Technology]. So I attended the Pasadena Junior College. I didn't finish. After one year time, ran out of money. Then . . .

WN: I'll ask you that later. I want to ask you some more questions about Buckle Lane area.

VK: Buckle Lane, all right.

WN: Were there other Koreans living over there?

VK: Yeah, a few Koreans. A little ways down there used to be a Japanese teahouse. You remember that? There used to be a teahouse there. We were across from the teahouse. That's where our house was. It's a small teahouse.

After I came back from Jarvis Island [in August, 1937], my father had an operation so when I came back I paid off his medical bills with what [pay] I received down there. Small amount, but enough to cover the medical bill. Then I left for the Mainland and went to California. I attended Pasadena Junior College over there for a little over a year, and then I ran out of money. I met her [VK's wife, Esther Oh Kim], then we got married over there [in 1940]. Then my dad says, "Come on home." They want me home, so they sent me money and we came home. We went back to Buckle Lane, the same house here.

WN: Same house.

VK: Then, when I came home, then I applied for a job as an electronic technician at the Hickam Air Force Base. That's where I was. That year I came back [from California] was 1940. That's when, they bombed, '41 [i.e., the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor]. I stayed

at Hickam Air Force Base, and in 1941 they shipped me out to Guadalcanal, the Espiritu Santos, investigate all that electronic communication system on the aircraft in the 11th Bomb Group. They sent me down to check all the radio equipment. And when I got there, they said that the base command radio transmitter station was broken down, they couldn't use it. So I checked it. I fixed that for them, so they got communication onto the planes.

WN: Going back to the coffee shop, did you help in there at all?

VK: I was only about, six, seven, eight years old.

WN: What about your brothers and sisters?

VK: I just fool around, only play. My dad and my mother, yeah. My brothers had to mix all the dough, all the sweetbread, and all the cupcakes and biscuits. My brother did all the mixing. He mixed it early, then let it stand, the thing swells up. The yeast swells up the dough, then they cut it up to bake. They bake about one-thirty in the morning, they bake all the bread and all that. It's hard work.

WN: Bakery is hard work.

VK: Those Hawaiian stevedores come in and they eat the *kim chee* with stew rice, they went for it.

(Laughter)

Twenty cents. When they say *kim chee*, they were there.

WN: So, your mother used to make the *kim chee*?

VK: Yeah. She make the *kim chee*, she make all the *mandoo*. My mother's *mandoo*s were big ones, not small like this.

WN: So it was a coffee shop, so you folks served pastry and food?

VK: Coffee. And then regular meal.

WN: Stew rice, let's see what else, *mandoo* . . .

VK: Chop steak. Regular coffee shop menu. Hotcake, sweetbread, muffins, cupcake.

WN: So you folks served breakfast, lunch, dinner?

VK: Yeah. We lived upstairs, so they close the shop late. By the time they get to closing the shop, they're already half dead, my parents are so tired. And my three brothers always

used to help those days. But my brothers, my second eldest [brother] was attending 'Iolani [School] and my eldest [brother] was attending University of Hawai'i. The third one was McKinley High School.

WN: So besides *kim chee* and *mandoo*, any other Korean kind [of] foods?

VK: Mostly whatever coffee shop sell. You know, hamburgers and all that. Nothing special, but anyway we were the first Koreans to start a restaurant.

WN: Oh yeah, really?

VK: Back in the '20s.

WN: So you folks were the only ones serving things like *kim chee*?

VK: Yeah, well, we served it right over the counter. We never did commercialize it. If we had, then, boy, we wealthy, eh?

(Laughter)

They never thought of it, my brothers them. Too much work.

WN: What kind *kim chee* was?

VK: Regular. *Won bok* cabbage. Nowadays they use round cabbage, head cabbage, but those days was all *won bok* cabbage. They don't use head cabbage.

WN: What about like meat kind things, like *kal bi*?

VK: *Kal bi* is special order, people eat that. Stew rice most common because only twenty cents. You get the big plate stew with a couple of knobs of rice, twenty cents so, they get the stomach full.

(Laughter)

WN: You know what time they opened and what time they closed?

VK: We opened at six o'clock in the morning and closed at about five-thirty in the afternoon. That gives them a couple of hours to wash up the place, clean the kitchen, clean all the sinks and all that. Mop the floors. Don't talk about restaurant jobs. You tell me you can open restaurant, you can have it. (WN chuckles.) All you [do is] work, work, work. Restaurant . . .

WN: And then they had to start again at one-thirty in the morning?

VK: Yeah, you have to get up one-thirty, to cook, to bake the sweetbread, cupcake, all that. That's hard work. They only have about five, six hours sleep.

WN: Did they have hired workers in there or just your mom and your dad?

VK: No. Just family. Can't afford to hire people, it's a small restaurant. They only had about eight small tables.

WN: Did the restaurant have a name?

VK: Coffee Shop, that's all. (Chuckles)

WN: Had other coffee shops around or just yours?

VK: No.

WN: Just that one.

VK: That used to be—all the sampans used to dock right there, Pier 15. Between Pier 15 and Pier 16, used to get all the sampans. They all tie up over there, so there were a couple of stores around us, Japanese general stores, they sell things to the fishermen, but most of them they buy the *kiaue* wood for the *hibachi*. The fishermen buy that they take 'em on the boat. That's how they cook. Those days, they don't have any gas or automatic systems, all *hibachi*.

WN: Open fire on the boat.

VK: The fisherman hard work, too, those days.

WN: The fishermen were mostly Japanese?

VK: All Japanese. They all catch *aku*.

WN: *Aku* boat.

VK: Very few Hawaiians, mostly all Japanese.

WN: And the Hawaiians were the stevedores?

VK: Yeah. There were a couple of them, that fishermen, the Hawaiian. Most of them were stevedores. And those days, they don't have big trucks, so they had the big wagons with the big Clydesdale horses. You know the big Clydesdale horses, the big ones? That's to haul those carts around. All the HC&D [Honolulu Construction & Draying Company]. No such thing as big trucks those days. Nineteen twenties, all horse and buggy.

WN: From your house in Buckle Lane and the coffee shop that was on Pier 16, was it close by?

VK: No. Buckle Lane is about—you got Vineyard and you got Beretania Street, then you got Hotel Street. So there's three bridges, between Vineyard. . . . Vineyard and Kukui. Kukui to Beretania is a long block because that used to be the old Saint Louis College.

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

VK: You know, Saint Louis? That used to be that long block down to River [Street]. That was Saint Louis. Then you get 'A'ala Park, that's Beretania, and then you got King Street, then you got Queen Street where 'A'ala Market is, between King and Queen there's 'A'ala Market. That thing is all bulldozed today, there's no 'A'ala Market. So right after that, in the same area, was my parents' restaurant on the waterfront.

WN: So you were kind of right near the train station, too, then.

VK: Yeah, the railroad, O'ahu [Railway & Land Co.] railroad, it's about a half a block away. Then, the old Love's [Biscuit & Bread Co.] bakery used to be over there ['Iwilei and Prison Roads]. You know where the Salvation Army building is now? That used to be Love's Bakery.

WN: Kind of a neat place to grow up. All kind.

VK: Oh, that's best place. That's healthy, we swimming every day, jump in the water, swim. Catch fish, go to the pier, throw line, catch *āholehole*. Catch—under the piers, fish.

TT: What kind of friends did you have? Did you have a mixed group of friends? Or was it mostly . . .

VK: All my friends were Japanese, Chinese. Mostly Japanese, they all fishermen [families]. They all lived there. Then the barbershop and billiards. That's about most of it. And then, grocery stores, that's all. In the lumberyard, we played in, that's where I fell down, broke my arm. Fell off the stacks, they get triangle stacks, I fell off that and broke my arm. Today, crooked.

WN: That's where City Mill is now?

VK: Yeah, City Mill. Those days they called it Lee Lup lumberyard, not City Mill.

WN: No kidding.

Now, you said you used to go movies . . .

VK: Pālama Theatre, yeah.

- WN: . . . and swimming and fishing, what else you did to have good fun around there?
- VK: Over there? Well, fishing, that's about all you had. Every day either fish or swim, go school, come back, no time to go fishing, so you swim. Mostly swim, jump in the water.
- WN: Where? On the pier or. . . ?
- VK: Yeah, from the pier, jump in the water.
- WN: Did you play on the river?
- VK: Yeah, it's only about from here to there. About a hundred feet, the road, and then the pier. Right on the waterfront, so I go swimming every day.
- WN: That water was deep, eh, cause it's the waterfront?
- VK: Yeah, the boats come in. Pretty good-sized boats come in there. Swim there.
- WN: I know you said last time that you folks didn't dive for coins, that was mostly the Hawaiian boys that did that.
- VK: People dived for coins had to go to Pier 10 where they get the passenger lines come in. All the Hawaiian boys did that. That's their *kuleana* because these Hawaiian boys dive in, they get money. If you local boy go there and dive, tourists see you as Oriental, phoo you. You not a Hawaiian.
- WN: (Chuckles) That's the reason why you guys didn't do that?
- VK: The Hawaiians, that's their *kuleana*.
- WN: Did the Hawaiian boys tell you don't come or anything like that?
- VK: No, they don't tell. We just stay away. It's automatically understood. You don't mooch into their own territory, after all, they make their living out of that.
- WN: I know a lot of Kaka'ako boys were diving for the coins, boys that lived Kaka'ako side, too.
- VK: I don't know about Kaka'ako, but I know that every time the boats come in, the boys are all there diving for coins. You'd be surprised how those guys can dive fast. The coins went down pretty fast, so most of them go down to the bottom, pick up the coin.
- WN: And what, they used to put them in their mouth or something, huh?

VK: Yeah. Then they have their fingers free to pick up things. They don't have pocket, they only got those tights. Used to be the little Jantzen tights, so you don't have pockets in those things. And they not going stick it in the tights because they go slip out. Keep in the mouth a safe place for it.

WN: You have to be good then, yeah, cause it's kind of deep, huh, over there?

VK: You have to be long-winded, you got to be able to dive and hold your breath at least two minutes. You dive fifteen, twenty feet.

TT: Where did the tourists throw the coins from?

VK: From the deck.

WN: They had a ship.

VK: From the deck they throw it. With all that height, the coin goes down pretty fast, so they got to chase the coin.

WN: You said that your family had the coffee shop, and they had stew rice and things like that, what about at home? What did you folks eat at home?

VK: The coffee shop is our home, we sleep upstairs, so we ate in the coffee shop.

WN: So you folks actually lived where the coffee shop was?

VK: Yeah, upstairs. It's a three-story building.

WN: So this is not the Buckle Lane then.

VK: No, no, no. This is the coffee shop, right on the waterfront, Queen Street. Now, they call that Nimitz. They call it Nimitz Highway now.

WN: You know, what's there now where the restaurant and your house was?

VK: Nothing. They got the highway there now, Nimitz Highway. You know where the curb is? Pier 16.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: At home, you spoke English, or did you speak Korean?

VK: Where?

WN: At home.

VK: We don't speak Korean, we all speak only English.

WN: Your parents, too?

VK: They get pidgin English. They understand what we say. The only thing I know, a few words when they scold us, then we understand. (They spoke Korean and English.)

(Laughter)

Outside of that, mostly English.

WN: So you spoke to them in pidgin English.

VK: We try, it's pidgin Korean, not pidgin English. We try to talk in Korean to make them understand, but. . . .

WN: How much English could your parents speak?

VK: Regular working English, to run the business, how much to charge, what they [customers] want, and all that—simple questions. They learned that, but anything outside of that, regular conversation, they talk to anybody it would be pidgin.

WN: They didn't try to teach you folks or put you in Korean-language school?

VK: They did. They put us in Korean school, but go in [one ear] come out the other.

(Laughter)

WN: Where was the school?

VK: Korean Christian Church. They tried, but we local kids, we not going learn Korean. We all talk English. But the Japanese and Chinese, yeah, somehow they take control of those kids. They learn, they learn Japanese, learn Chinese, but not Korean. Korean kids are independent, so hardhead anyway, all of them.

(Laughter)

WN: What was church like? Did you go church every Sunday?

VK: I went to Sunday school at nine years old, and still to the same church, so now I'm the oldest member of the church now, the rest all passed away. They all look at me, "You old buck." They don't bother me. They know I'm the oldest member, so sometimes I say something, they listen. Normally, they don't.

(Laughter)

WN: What about at home, what kind chores did you have to do at home?

VK: Chores?

WN: What kind of work did you have to do at home to help out?

VK: Her?

WN: No, you.

VK: Me? I don't have any chores, she can do it, I don't help her.

WN: No, when you were growing up. With your mom and dad, and your sister . . .

VK: No, we don't have no chores. Every time what they do is, they kick us out, they say, "Get out of the way!" They tell you, "Get out of the way." So the restaurant, no. Playing all the time because I was eight or nine years old. There's nothing I can do. My brothers, yeah they have their own chores, like mixing the dough, clean the place, wash the sidewalk or mopping the floor. They did that, but not me. My sister and I, we never did.

WN: Sounds like you had good life when you were young.

VK: I had the best life.

(Laughter)

Play, eat, and sleep. Go [movie] show every time, because we got nickel to go show all the time. The other kids, they don't have that kind of money, not even five cents. We go show all the time, my sister and I.

WN: Your parents gave you the nickel?

VK: Oh yeah, they tell us "Go show." Getting us out of the way. If we stay in the restaurant, we're in their way all the time. (TT chuckles.)

WN: Okay, so you went Royal School. How was school for you?

VK: Well, Royal School, my principal was named Civil O. Smith. He's an Englishman with a white goatee.

WN: What's his first name?

VK: Civil. C-I-V-I-L. Civil, it's an English name. Anyway, that man, he taught us more than anybody else. You know, he built that machine that they push with the pen that makes the penmanship. The different kind of graph with the pen on the piece of paper on the

glass, you push this row, you push the row, the thing goes this way, automatically it goes in circles all the time and comes down to a point. I don't know what they call it, what kind of graph machine.

(Telephone rings.)

WN: Spirograph or something?

VK: I don't know what kind of graph they call that, but anyway, he designed that and we built it.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Civil Smith, yeah.

VK: That man, as I said, he designed the machine and we built it for him. And then, each eighth-grader, before we graduated, had to build a model ship. Either the *Constitution*, three-masted ship with all the small little cannons and all that. A regular model, now. You have to follow scale. Either you take that or you make a Viking ship. Finish it before the year, otherwise we don't get our diploma, so we did that. That man, he started the first audiovisual among all the schools. He sent me out with a projector to different schools to show a movie. In those days, the movies were all these Yale University historical movies. The American revolution, and all that. Regular movies, you know, when you show, same old thing what Hollywood does. The fighting, the war, and all that. They shoot guns; there was a lot of smoke and all that. So I had to go around and show it to the different schools, so he started that audiovisual.

WN: Had sound, too?

VK: No, no. Those days all silent picture. Come out with words every now and then.

He also sent me out to pick flowers, different flowers.

WN: What kind flowers?

VK: Any kind of flowers. He want jacaranda, American tulip, all that. He takes a picture of it. He keeps a record. He had a good record of these different flowers. Certain flowers I pick as a bud, he takes a picture of that. Twenty-fours, the thing opening up. That camera moves one frame at a time, so the flower opens up. He had that film. He kept a record of all different Hawaiian flowers. At Royal School, we had a balcony where the tourists used to come and visit, stay on that balcony. And on the bottom we had calisthenics. He had an old phonograph, he plays the music and we all exercise on the ground doing calisthenics for the tourists. Every Friday.

WN: How come tourists came to your school?

VK: That's the Royal School. That's why when they bulldozed the school I was surprised when they made the highway because that's all Royal. Only the royals went to that school. So when they bulldozed it, the mayor, he needs a kick in the pants. They can very well re-route the highway.

WN: Sure.

VK: So quite a bit.

WN: So you folks were doing calisthenics?

VK: Yeah, and after the calisthenics we went back. You see, where the balcony is, there's an auditorium. We all came back, the eighth-graders, into the hallway where the tourists sit on the sideline and we each went on to the blackboards and did a penmanship according to music. Penmanship, the fish. Penmanship sort of like this here. (VK demonstrates.) Something like that there, penmanship.

WN: Penmanship?

VK: Fish.

TT: Supposed to be a fish made out of letters. (Chuckles)

VK: So we had to do all this on the blackboard for the tourists. So that was part of the school year.

WN: Royal School was mostly what nationality?

VK: Anybody. [U.S.] Ninth Circuit [Court of Appeals] judge, Mr. [Herbert Y.C.] Choy—you know Choy?

WN: What is his first name?

VK: Ninth circuit court.

WN: You mean now, today?

VK: Hawai'i, he's retired now.

WN: Choy?

VK: Yeah. He's from the school.

WN: He's Korean?

VK: Korean, yeah. First Korean [American] judge, the ninth circuit court judge. He's from that school.

WN: So had Koreans, Japanese . . .

VK: Chinese.

WN: Hawaiian, Chinese.

VK: We had the Wing Coffee Company son, over there in the school. Some big contractors, some of these concrete, contractors were from the school, too.

WN: That boat you folks made, what was that made of? You know the ship?

VK: That's the *Constitution*.

WN: But what was it made of? How did you make the boat?

VK: Four-by-four block of wood, we had to shave 'em down. Drilled a hole, put the mast, then the crossbars, make the leather by the strings, and the bottom part where the string goes through was beads, regular beads.

WN: Oh, the small . . .

VK: Yeah, small beads, glass beads. That, real sturdy boat, was all model. Takes a whole year to make one. I don't know what happened to all the boats, they're all gone. I had one at home, but I don't know what happened to ours. What happened to our *Constitution* boat, Mommy?

VK's wife: I don't know. (Chuckles)

VK: They throw it away, someone *lōlō*.

WN: So this Mr. Smith, . . .

VK: Civil Smith.

WN: . . . was he like an electronics teacher, or what courses did he teach?

VK: He was the principal.

WN: Oh, he was the principal.

VK: He's the principal, so he spent all his money on the school. He buy all the equipment, all the projectors, all the machineries. The wood, maybe the [territory] paid for. But I'm trying to think of our carpenter shop instructor. His name, Miyagi?

WN: What shop instructor?

VK: Carpenter shop. That's where we make our boat. We either build boat or build a chiffonier. Little boat. In the carpenter shop you had all the big planes and all the sanders.

WN: Wow.

VK: Yeah, you shape the boat from a solid block of four-by-fours, shape out the bottom, make the top, make the small cannon. It took us one year to build one boat, so we had plenty time.

WN: What about your other subjects? What other subjects did you like?

VK: The other subjects, that was the only school that had what we called "QA."

WN: QA?

VK: Quick Arithmetic. Every day after lunch, the bell rings, raise our hand with a pencil, piece of paper, do a different figures of addition, subtraction, multiplication. The bell rings, get ready, the bell rings, begin. Do as many as you can, the bell rings, you stop. We had that training every day. That's why kids that graduate Royal School, all good in mathematics. That Civil Smith did that. No [other] school had that, but Royal School had Quick Arithmetic. So you can find out about that.

WN: Quick Arithmetic?

VK: We called it "QA." We had competition, too, among different classes. Who can finish the most in the shortest time. So that there, is one thing I learned, Quick Arithmetic, from the school. I learned my radio from the school because . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, you're talking about learning radio at Royal.

VK: Mr. Smith bought six sets of radio receivers. He called six boys into the office. He gave us a kit. We had to assemble the radio receiver, and it's a vacuum tube receiver too. But he spent all that money to buy the thing and make us assemble it, so we learn to assemble radio. That's how I started my radio. That was in seventh grade at that time.

WN: By radio, you mean two-way radio?

VK: No, no, regular receiver.

WN: Oh, just a receiver.

VK: All-wave receiver, shortwave—regular broadcast and shortwave, was the plug-in type. So he bought the kit for us to assemble, and we learned how to assemble radio. Besides that, we used to make crystal receivers. We wind our own coils, plug in the crystal, cat whiskers [i.e., metal wire], to receive the broadcast stations. We did that. He did teach that to us, he make us do that. Those were the days when you had the best training for boys, no other school had that. So when you figure, we have audiovisual, no other school had that. You had the QA, no other school had that. We assembled radios. We had the auditorium group singing, the same day that the tourists came Friday. Then we had the blackboard penmanship, and then we had the outside calisthenics. No other school had that. That's Royal School. You talk to any elder people that were at the Royal School, they'll tell you all about that.

WN: He sounds like a real interesting man, this Mr. Smith.

VK: He was sharp.

WN: You said he was British?

VK: Yeah, Englishman. Goatee, white, you know.

WN: No kidding.

VK: He wore white suit all the time, just like a typical British. His friends were Cooke, Castle, all the Big Five [families]. He was a member of that Pacific Club. Those days, no more locals in there, only the big *high makamaka Haoles* in there. He was a member of that group. Now they take locals, Hawaiians, and all that. Before, they never did.

WN: You mean the Pacific Club that's on Vineyard [Street]?

VK: Yeah, those days were only *Haoles*. No more local, not even the Hawaiian king can go join that club. All that British, English people. Now they accept anybody.

WN: Right. But you said that Mr. Smith had you folks build a ship, and then you built the radio and stuff, was that only a few of you or was that the whole school did that?

VK: Only few of us. He just pick out—we were in the certain grade level, only the boys.

WN: Why do you think he picked you?

VK: I don't know. I made over a B average, you see, that's why.

WN: Did you show interest in this kind of stuff? Electronics?

VK: Oh yeah. Anyway, I started off picking flowers for him, so that's how he got familiar with me. So every time I pick a flower, he gives me fifty cents.

WN: Fifty cents!

VK: Yeah, I got paid.

WN: That's good money, that.

VK: He wasn't a piker, but he was strict, that old man. And those days, the Royal School, we had to wear tie. All the boys wear white shirt, tie.

WN: Every day?

VK: Just like an English school.

WN: Was it only boys at that school?

VK: No, girls. But the boys had to wear tie.

WN: What did the girls wear, do you remember?

VK: Regular dress. I think I still have a picture of the school graduating class.

WN: How did you do in the other subjects like English, social studies?

VK: I had a B average. Every time they gave me an A, I played dumb, go back to B class.

(Laughter)

WN: How come?

VK: More fun, B class. A class, those guys, that teacher was strict on English. (TT laughs.) That Herbert Choy was in the A class all the time. That's why he's a lawyer today, he graduated. I think he's still living. Herbert Choy.

WN: And then you went to Central Intermediate [School] after eighth grade.

VK: From there, Central.

WN: How was that?

VK: Just nothing. Easy, just go right through.

WN: But didn't have anything like Mr. Smith.

VK: Nothing special. That school never had any kind of special projects, just sort of academic, and then go to McKinley [High School].

WN: How was McKinley?

VK: McKinley not bad, too. Had a lot of fun, ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], those days had ROTC.

WN: Was your principal named Miles Cary?

VK: Miles Cary was the principal, yeah.

WN: You remember him at all? What do you remember about him?

VK: No, I never did get to know him very well. He was the principal for Central for a while, too, before he went to McKinley, Miles Cary. McKinley, I graduated there. That's where I had a lot of fun.

WN: What you mean by "fun"?

VK: We go dancing. You know, high school dancing, dancing group, picnic, and all that. That's fun.

WN: Where did you used to have the dances?

VK: In the nighttime we used to go to the old Armory, Wai'alae Country Club, O'ahu Country Club. Those are all old buildings, eh? And the [Alexander] Young Hotel roof garden. Before, used to have Young Hotel over here on Bishop Street. Upstairs roof garden used to have ballroom dancing.

WN: Wow, fancy kind places.

VK: Yeah. Regular. And Central YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], that Nu'uanu, YMCA, they got big auditorium. Nu'uanu YMCA, they get dancing. We had a lot of fun.

WN: You know the Armory, the Armory was where the State Capitol is?

VK: Hotel Street. Where the State Capitol is now. Our capitol is sitting right on the Armory.

WN: They should've kept that, yeah?

VK: The Armory? That's an old wooden building. That was the National Guard [building]. That's where I used to go National Guard meeting. I was in Headquarters Company, and I was the radio operator for the National Guard. I got some old pictures of that. I don't know what happened to our picture.

VK's wife: Don't ask me.

WN: At McKinley, did you keep up your radio?

VK: McKinley? Yeah, I was the ham radio operator. Amateur radio operator. That's how I got [to serve on] the Panalā'au [expedition], somehow they got my name.

WN: How did you get into the ham radio operating in high school?

VK: I figure, I wanted to talk to people far away, so the only way I can do that would be to go into ham radio where we build our own equipment. Just like the whole Panalā'au, when I went down to Jarvis Island, all in parts. I had to assemble it when I got there. Assemble it, and get on the air the same day. See? On the receiver, I had to buy a ready-made one.

National Guard days, I was radio operator there, too. You got that dot-dash-dot-dash, dot-dash.

WN: Morse code.

VK: Morse code, yeah. Direct the firing from Koko Head.

WN: So that's how it was before? Was all Morse code? That kind of . . .

VK: Yeah, all Morse code. There's no voice, voice is high class, costs a lot money. You need extra equipment for that. Morse code is the simplest, cheapest.

WN: So when you say ham operator, it was all Morse code back then?

VK: No, they had voice, but very few. Most were all Morse code.

WN: So you were doing that at McKinley?

VK: Yeah, at McKinley, ham radio operator.

WN: Did you have any teacher there that taught you those kinds of things at McKinley?

VK: Teacher?

WN: Yeah.

VK: No. Teachers, they're not interested. They only teach us how to read and write. We had to go shop, so when I went to the McKinley shop I had to take up machine shop work, how to run my lathe. That's why I still got the lathe back there, I own a lathe.

WN: You got a lathe back there?

VK: Yeah, I get a lathe back there. Eleven-inch lathe. I get drill press. I had my machine shop training from McKinley High School. So I repair all my things, I make things.

WN: Who was your shop teacher, you remember?

VK: He was an old Irish man—tall, skinny, lanky guy. He was a fussy duck, too. You know, machine shop instructors, you got to be exact. You off half a point, he says, "No. You make it over." So we got good training.

WN: Maybe that's good, yeah (chuckles).

VK: Today, my son he's sort of in that different experimental group. They have all these model craft, not model, but robo . . .

WN: Robotics.

VK: Robotic class, he's in it.

WN: Oh, he's a teacher?

VK: Yeah, he's a teacher. They come to me for parts every now and then, so I give them the parts. It costs money, the parts, and the kids don't have too much money.

WN: So, while you were at McKinley, who did you communicate with?

VK: What? In radio?

WN: With the radio, yeah.

VK: All over the world. Whoever I can contact with. I'll show you some.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 38-3-2-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Victor B.S. Kim (VK)

Honolulu, O'ahu

March 16, 2002

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN), Ty Tengan (TT), and Noelle Kahanu (NK)

WN: We're at the Bishop Museum Library and I'm Warren Nishimoto and Ty Tengan, we'll both be conducting the interview today. [Noelle Kahanu (NK) is also present.]

So, Victor, we ended up last time talking about McKinley High School and I know you graduated in 1934. Can you tell us what you were doing between the time you graduated and the time you went to Jarvis?

VK: After I graduated McKinley High School, well, I got a job as a radio technician in one of the radio stores in Honolulu. I did service calls and all that. And after that the [U.S.] Department of Interior approached me and asked me if I was interested in being the radio man for expedition down the South Pacific. So, I said, "That's interesting. Sure, I would." So, I left my job and signed up with the Department of Interior for that expedition to South Pacific. [The U.S. Department of Commerce, between 1934 and 1936, was initially responsible for recruitment. After 1936, responsibility for overseeing the Panalā'au project fell to the U.S. Department of Interior.]

WN: Do you remember who was it that came up to you?

VK: By telephone. It came from Mr. Black himself.

WN: Do you remember what he told you about this expedition?

VK: That they were sending four boys down to each island and that three of them would be Kamehameha School boys, and that I'd be the outsider. And, since I have the knowledge of being a radio operator, amateur radio operator, so they say well, I'll be useful for the expedition. So, I said, "Yeah, I'm willing to go." So they sent me to the navy yard [i.e., Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard] to study little bit about aerial balloon sounding. That was my job down on Jarvis. The radio equipment, well, the equipment all disassembled. We

had to take it [onto Jarvis] in components. So it had to be assembled that day, put up roughly with antenna and then transmit the first day's report to Pearl Harbor. After a month or so, they told me that I had to radio some report to Palmyra Island, to the Pan American ship, *North Wind*. The *North Wind* would take my report and in turn radio to the Pan American survey flight to Auckland, New Zealand. So when the plane flew over, [the captain] used my report from what I had taken in Jarvis Island, the wind direction, the speed, at different elevations. So when the captain flew by, the *North Wind* radio to him because they had the communication between those two, I didn't have the communication with the airplane itself, so I had to go to *North Wind* indirectly. They used my report every day until the survey was over for the Pan American.

WN: You were doing that for the whole time you were there?

VK: Well, only once a day, radio to *North Wind*. That's all they want, one day report because the survey flight took several days' preparation.

WN: What was in the report? What kind of things did you say?

VK: Mostly numbers. Different elevations, angles, azimuth readings at a given time. So that determined the wind velocity, the elevation is how high the balloon is ascended.

WN: How long did it take you to learn how to do the balloon sounding?

VK: The report—the balloon sounding?

WN: You had to go to training, right?

VK: Balloon sounding, yeah, in the navy yard weather department.

WN: Was it difficult to learn?

VK: No. Because, the theodolite is an instrument similar to the surveyor's transit, you know. Only thing is the transit goes straight ahead. Of course, they had azimuth reading too, but they don't take elevation reading. But the theodolite does take a vertical reading.

WN: When Mr. Black called you, do you remember what he told you, what you would be doing, or what the expedition was?

VK: He just said that if I was interested. As a young guy, well, they say three Kam[ehameha] School boys and myself, that's four of us. So, I felt that since we're all about the same age, it would be a good idea, something different.

WN: So he didn't go into anything about why you were doing it or anything like that?

VK: No, just that as a young guy with a lot of get-and-go [get-up-and-go]. You know what I [mean], get going, get going, that's all. Get away from the [Hawaiian] Islands for a while. They said was [for] three months, but we ended up with six more months [January 19-August 2, 1937] because of the Amelia Earhart flight that year, that she didn't get to Howland Island at all. She was supposed to land on Howland Island, so we waited for all the searching that they did. So everything just stood still, just waiting, that's all. At the end of the search, then they said that we could leave, go home. So the *Itasca* came and picked us up. The [U.S.] Coast Guard cutter, the *Itasca*. We went down on the *William J. Duane*; we came back on the *Itasca*. [Amelia Earhart's plane disappeared en route to Howland Island from New Guinea, in 1937.]

WN: So you weren't just going there as a—well, you know with the Kamehameha School boys, I know they had some rules, like you had to be kind of strong physically and healthy and so forth. Were you in good shape at that time?

VK: They gave us a quick physical check so they say we're healthy enough. The Kamehameha School boys, of course, they're all big boys, too. So, none of us were sickly. So we endured the stay of six months or more, see.

TT: The other thing was that they also mentioned that they wanted to have men there who knew how to fish and dive. Was that something that was asked of you, if you knew how to do fishing and diving, that kind of stuff?

VK: Well, all our fishing was done on the surface, because the coral reef, there's small little shallow lagoons and the lagoons are full of *āholeholes*. Thousands of them, and when you look into the school, you see sharks, posted in four different locations. One shark goes through and gets his fill, then the other one goes through, they all take their turn. Somehow, the sharks are corralling in the fish, the *āholeholes*. You watch that, you give them credit. They're not dumb, the sharks. So all the fish was on the surface, you don't have to dive. If you dive, it's kind of dangerous anyway because there's a lot of sharks out there, and we catch those sharks. Of course, we cut the fins off, dry the fins, shark fins. All the *āholeholes* we catch, we catch thousands of them. The boys clean it out, and then dry it. I think, one day's time, the fish is dry, so we stack it. There's no flies, so the island is clean. If you drop anything on the ground, the hermit crabs will eat it up. They clean up anything. Even the saltwater soap, the big cake, the brown saltwater soap, if you leave it on the ground overnight the hermit crabs will eat that all up. They clean that soap and all.

WN: Saltwater soap?

VK: Yeah. That's what you use for wash.

WN: That's what you folks used?

VK: Yeah, because that's all we have is saltwater. We're not going to use drinking water for bath.

WN: Wow. So how did you folks, did you folks make the soap?

VK: No, it's all ready, it's navy soap.

WN: Oh, I see. Soap that you use.

VK: Yeah, that's what the navy use, saltwater soap.

WN: (Laughs) Excuse me. Okay.

VK: We have time to go excursion, go around the island, survey, and visit the [flock] of tern bird, you know. Got different kinds of tern, the regular tern, and another flock of booby birds and another flock of frigate birds. The big black birds, you know. When you watch the flight of the boobies, they fly out in the morning, and in the evening they fly back. As they fly back, you see one of the frigate birds grab on to the booby tails and shake it, you know, until they let go whichever they want—one fish, yeah. And the frigate birds dive for that fish and catch the fish before it hits the water. They're pirates. They don't fish for themselves, they steal it from the booby birds. You watch that, it's interesting.

WN: Before you went, did you know how to fish and things like that?

VK: No. Only kind of fish I know is at the waterfront with the pole, you know. Nothing, nothing. We don't use any net or anything like that. But, at Jarvis Island, we just lay a net and chase the fish right into it. If you want to eat lobsters at night, the tide is low, you see the lobsters on the reef with the antenna out of the water. With a scoop net you place it back of the lobster, you kick the front of the lobster and back right into the net so we don't have to pick it up. You want to catch fish, we throw some line in, catch some red snappers, but they're a little tough to eat, those red snappers. If you fry them they just curl up like rubber. Can't eat that.

WN: So *āholehole* was the main fish you folks ate?

VK: Yeah, we can dry that to send back home, eh, if we go home. And the shark fin, of course, we suppose we commercialized a little bit, but I don't know what they did with it. So we caught the fish and dried the fins.

WN: And you folks took the fins home, too?

VK: No, I didn't take. Somebody was supposed to go sell it and then we divide the profit, but I never saw anything like that.

(Chuckles)

WN: What else besides *āholehole* you folks ate?

VK: *Pāpio*, catch *pāpio*, throw line *pāpio*. You see, the reef down there, when you stand on the reef, there's a hole, you look down, underneath the reef is all sand, you see fish going back and forth. At different levels, you see different fish. On the top level you see red *menpachi*, all the red *menpachis*. A little lower, you see these *pāpio* going around, so we catch the *pāpios*.

WN: Wow. How far out was this hole? How far out?

VK: The channel underneath?

WN: Yeah.

VK: It goes right out to the reef, out to the ocean. So, you see those stingrays coming in too, underneath there, the sharks coming in on the bottom. So actually, it's a big cave, is what it is. So we didn't have to do much work to get the fish. We could eat fish all day long if you want to eat fish. Of course, all the food that they sent in, the *poi* came in cans, and we had rice, of course. Bags of rice, we cooked that for our dinner and in the morning for breakfast. They sent us big slab of bacon. We had no place to put it, so we hang it up in the middle. We keep the crabs away from it. So when we eat breakfast, we bring it down, slice it. That's what we have.

WN: How long would one slab last?

VK: It last quite long, maybe about three weeks, because we don't eat too much bacon.

WN: (To TT) You have a question?

TT: Oh, I actually have one quick one. Did you take ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] when you were at McKinley? Were you in ROTC at McKinley?

VK: Yeah. We had to take that.

TT: Was that a factor? Did they ask you if you were in ROTC?

VK: We had to join ROTC one form or another, but I had already joined ROTC, yeah. That was part of our program at McKinley.

TT: When the people ask you about coming on the project for the Panalā'au, was your being in ROTC a factor? Did they ask you if you were in ROTC before, or they didn't really care about that?

- VK: No. Mostly is our health, and as a radio operator. Because they didn't have any radio operators at Kam[ehameha] School, so they had to take one outsider.
- WN: What did you tell your parents about what you were doing?
- VK: Well, the only thing I had was my dad, my mother passed away earlier, so I had my dad. He's the type, he says, "If you want to be adventurous, it's up to you." (Chuckles) Anyway, I'm glad I did because when I came back, see, my dad was ill for a while so we had the doctor bill for surgery, so when I came back, well, I paid that up with my money from [the project].
- WN: That's another thing, did they tell you how much you were going to get paid?
- VK: No.
- WN: Oh. So you didn't know you were going to get paid.
- VK: No, we [later] found out that we going get paid three dollars a day, so, we were pretty happy.
- WN: So who were the names of the other three boys in your group?
- VK: The other three boys were, Kini Pea, there's Joe Kim, and Edward Young, and myself. Four of us.
- WN: Tell me something about those three guys. What were they like? What was Kini Pea like?
- VK: Well, Kini Pea, he was sort of a quiet fellow. We all, none of us would get out of hand. We're all so amiable among all four of us, you know, no arguments. If we proposed to do something, we all agreed. Nobody said, "Nah, I don't want to." Nobody refused anything. So if we proposed one project, we all did it so we got along very well. We didn't have a single fight at all. That was surprising. We all had to clean fish together.
- WN: Was there a leader among any of you folks?
- VK: We more or less relied on Joe Kim. I think he was the senior among the Kam School group. This is more or less their project, Kam School, so I just went along. I tried to be amiable, not to stir up any kind of fight or anything, you know. Get along. Especially when you're on a small island like that, where you going, eh? (Chuckles) So, we got along very well.
- WN: Yeah, no fights at all?

- VK: No fights at all, no argument. So, my stay on the Jarvis Island was very, very nice.
- TT: In terms of your arrival, if you could look at that picture again, this is a really famous picture that's on the cover of the book [E.H. Bryan, Jr., *Panālā'au Memoirs*], what did it feel like when you guys were just on that island and at that moment when you guys were just waving?
- VK: Well, since we were on that beach there and the skiff was going out, we know that we won't see them for several months so we just waved goodbye. We know that they have to leave us anyway, so what are you going to do? So, that was fun. My stay at Jarvis Island was very enjoyable. I enjoyed it.
- WN: Where did you folks start off? Where did you launch from in Honolulu?
- VK: Where we left?
- WN: Yeah. Where in Honolulu did you leave from?
- VK: We left on the pier. The *William J. Duane*, there was a Pier 5, I think, eh, coast guard pier.
- WN: And then you know where you went from there? Did you go straight to Jarvis?
- VK: No, from there we went to Fanning Island. Fanning Island, that's a British island, and on that island, there was a British hospital. We stopped there, and from there we proceeded down to Jarvis.
- WN: What was *William J. Duane* like? What kind of ship was that?
- VK: It's a fast streamline, it's one of the new ships that the coast guard had at that time. The *Itasca* was sort of an old lady, you know.
- WN: So it carried you four, but did it carry any of the other . . .
- VK: Yeah, the other islands. Baker Island, Canton Island, and Howland, all those. All the boys just changed at the same time. All went down in one group.
- TT: How long was the trip?
- VK: About two days. It was about a thousand miles from here to Jarvis, I think it was about two days. Coast guard cutter is very fast.
- WN: I was wondering how you felt. I mean, you're not going to see Hawai'i or your home or your family for six months, you remember what went through your head at that time?

- VK: No. We had that adventure feeling, so you don't worry. You don't know what's going to happen, so you have to go and find out, that's all. I found that it was a very pleasant stay on that island.
- WN: Do you remember how you felt when you first saw Jarvis?
- VK: When I first saw Jarvis, I said, "Oh my goodness, that's a bald-headed island, (chuckles) there's no trees." Not a single tree.
- WN: Is that what you expected?
- VK: No. I expected at least one or two coconut trees or something. But you don't see anything, just flat. You see a lot of brushes on the shoreline, that's all. You see a lot of birds flying around.
- WN: And when you got there, what structures were already there?
- VK: Well, the tower was there, that you saw. And there were two old shacks and there was a new house that we stayed in, we lived in. The structures were already there when we got there.
- TT: Could you identify them on that picture?
- VK: Yes. The one on the right is what we stayed and lived in, the others were all old shacks. The middle house was where we took all the fish and cleaned underneath. We always stayed in the old shack.
- TT: The one with the flag?
- VK: The one with the flag is just the observation tower. That's all it is.
- WN: So there was one place for you folks to stay.
- VK: One house.
- WN: One house. What was in that house?
- VK: There were a couple of bunks made already, so we sleep on the bunks. You don't find any bed over there, it's all bunks, eh? So it was comfortable.
- WN: Okay, bunks, and what else? Was there a kitchen in there?
- VK: One or two chairs, and table, that's all.
- WN: What about kitchen?

- VK: We don't need the kitchen facilities. We cook [in] the kitchen in the old shack, on an old kerosene stove. That's all there was, kerosene stove.
- WN: That was separate from the house?
- VK: Yeah. Of course, my radio equipment, well, the army supplied the gasoline generator to charge the batteries. They supplied the batteries and then the dynamo, that's to convert low voltage to higher voltage to run my power for the transmitter, is all supplied by the army. And the radio equipment, the transmitter I had to assemble myself. That's my own equipment, and my receiver was my own equipment, too. That's the only thing I supplied for the expedition, my own equipment. Because the requirement was that I have equipment. That's why they want us amateur operators [on the expedition] because we have [our own] equipment. They don't have to take any bulky equipment, we just assemble it down there. And then when we left, we just disassembled it, that's all.
- WN: So that equipment was your own?
- VK: Yeah. It's our own.
- WN: You actually paid for it.
- VK: My own equipment that I brought down. So it was more like my contribution for do the expedition.
- WN: Did they ask you beforehand, can you bring your own equipment?
- VK: Yeah. They ask me if I got equipment. I said, "Yeah, I'll bring my equipment down." It's more or less all voluntary, yeah.
- WN: I'm wondering if you said no . . .
- VK: If I said no, then I'm out because they want boys with equipment. Kam School didn't have the equipment. The Bishop Museum had a good handling in that whole expedition too, eh? It's Bishop Museum.
- TT: Did you meet with any of the Bishop Museum people before you came down or did you only meet with other people?
- VK: No, I never met any of them. Only thing I know is that the Bishop Museum asked some of the boys to do a little bit of research for them down there. Look for this, look for that, whatever they can find that would be some sort of artifacts or something that would contribute to the history of the island. The only thing we had was the old *Amaranth*, so they tried to extract as much information as they can from the *Amaranth*. The *Amaranth*,

that's old coal-carrying ship. I heard lately, that they took all the old lumbers and built their shack or something with the old lumber. That's boys that went down later. When we were down there, we didn't even touch it. We left it as is, as sort of a souvenir as a shipwreck on that island.

WN: What was on the *Amaranth*? What was left of the *Amaranth* when you got there?

VK: Nothing. Just hollow, because it's pretty well broken up. It's all wood, so the waves must have pounded it all to pieces. And the things that they were carrying, all the black coal, that you find it all over the beaches around the island, yeah. So the ship was full of coal when they got shipwrecked. Only thing, we didn't make use of the coal.

WN: Yeah, I was going to ask you.

VK: We had to make fire, but we didn't have to use the coal stove. We had the kerosene stove, so why try to burn coal?

WN: When you first got there, what kinds of supplies, you remember you folks having?

VK: When we first got there, supplies, you mean what the government supplied us? Well, canned *poi*, canned vegetable, canned fruit, rice, bacon, a few eggs. Eggs cannot last too long down there, so . . .

WN: Can opener.

VK: Can opener. They open the cans, how you open the can (chuckles).

WN: And the water.

VK: Water came in fifty-gallon drums. They was stacked on the outside, back of that observation tower, a whole line about twenty barrels of water. So, that's about over a thousand gallons of fresh water. So there was enough for us for three months. The ships come down every three months with new supplies.

WN: The supply ship came every three months?

VK: Yeah, they change. Anyway, that's the timetable for the expedition. Each boy stay on the island for three months. They were supposed to leave after three months, but since the Amelia Earhart search we were delayed three months. We stayed there six months. Over six months.

WN: After three months, did you want to come home?

VK: No. We didn't care, we didn't even think about it. We just wondered what happened to Amelia Earhart, that's all. Through my radio, dit-dot-dash, the amateur boy in Honolulu told us that they're looking for Amelia Earhart. So the news was through my own, and of course, we heard the radio. The radio we were listening to was KGU.

WN: Oh, you folks could listen to KGU?

VK: Yeah, radio, we carry the small portable radio.

WN: So you could get music and things like that?

VK: Yeah. We not interested, we rather go sleep. (Chuckles) But, if you like to listen to music, you listen to whatever you can. But I myself, I'm not much of a music lover so if I'm tired, I go to sleep.

TT: Did people ever play music? Did they bring down instruments, guitar, 'ukulele or anything?

VK: No. Nobody brought their instruments, I think nobody had time for that. They rather go out and scurry around the island, see what they can find, or go out fishing.

WN: Okay, so we're talking about the government supplying canned *poi*, and vegetables, and what else did they provide? Tools?

VK: No, we don't need tools. Whatever tools they had there, was already there. Few hammers, saws, that's about all. Some nails. But, we didn't have to build anything, so we didn't use it. Only what I used most was just theodolite, the instrument for my balloon sounding observation. That's all. That I take, carry in and out, eh? Bring it along the path, set it up, take my sounding, take it back in. The next day, take it out, put it up, same thing. That's my job there. So, that's the easy job. No problem.

WN: What about like nets, fishing equipment, anything like that?

VK: No. That's all they had, is the, not just to put the net across, you don't need any fishing pole or anything like that. Of course, to catch the shark you get that rope, you get a big hook on the end, put a fish on it, throw the line, and the shark grabs it. You catch the shark, pull it in. Only way we can drag the shark in is bring it in through the channel where the boat comes in. There's no way you can drag the shark over the reef, because the shark weighs over a hundred pounds, some of the big ones.

WN: How far out did you go out to catch the shark?

VK: We don't have to go out, just throw the line. They come in the channel. You don't go out after them, that's dangerous.

WN: There's only one channel.

VK: Yeah, one channel. So whatever shark comes through there, we catch that, that's all. We don't go out on the reef, that's dangerous.

WN: And with the shark, you only took the fin off? You folks didn't eat shark?

VK: Yeah, I cut the fins off, throw it [the carcass] back in. It's a little mean, it's cruel, but at that time, you don't think about being cruel, you only think about the shark fin. Today, you think back, you say, "Well, that's being cruel."

WN: So I know you folks caught *āholehole*, and you folks dried it, how else did you folks prepare fish for eating?

VK: Whenever I feel like eating. Whenever we want to eat fish, not every day. We going to eat fish, we just fry it and eat it. The *āholehole*, we dried that and that's stacked away, in a box, to be shipped back to Honolulu when get chance.

WN: And then what else, besides fish?

VK: That's all we had, dried fish.

WN: What about lobster? Lobster, you had?

VK: Lobster, whatever we catch we eat that for dinner.

WN: How did you folks eat that?

VK: We just boil it. So, everything, you just cook over the kerosene stove.

TT: Any turtle?

VK: No. We don't catch turtle, we never did catch turtle. Because after all, the Hawaiian boys, they look at a turtle, they sort of a sacrilegious that they don't want to kill turtle, eh. So, normally we see turtle, we just let them go, they just swim by.

TT: Squid?

VK: No, we don't, you have to go out to the reef for the squid, you know what I'm saying, kind of dangerous. The sharks are out there all the time.

TT: You guys didn't have any spears or anything?

VK: No. We didn't have any spears. We don't want any kind of a weapon around anyway. It's best not to have weapon in case somebody might get hotheaded, you never know what might happen. So, no weapon.

WN: Okay, let's change tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Did you folks write letters home?

VK: How you going to mail a letter?

WN: I thought maybe the ship would pick it up.

VK: Once in every three months. When they come, we ready to ship ourselves out, we carry the mail ourselves.

WN: You didn't get any mail?

VK: No.

TT: What about communicating over the radio that you were using?

VK: Only for that report I send in every night. That's all. Outside of that, I cannot talk to outside world. Only I talk to one guy from Vancouver. I think, somehow he heard me, he called me, so I answered him. He was the only guy that I talked to the outside world. I cannot talk too long on the radio because I have a small battery and the generator it just lasts only so many minutes. That's all, and we have to recharge, you see, so we cannot do any talking. So, I radioed to *North Wind* and then back to the navy yard, and that's it. They're all limited because it's USCG [United States Coast Guard], yeah.

WN: At any time, did you folks ever sit down and talk about why you folks were there?

VK: No. They all know why they're there. They all know that they're colonists so that's it.

WN: So, you knew that, too?

VK: Oh yeah. They say we occupy an island, so who else would occupy anything, colonists, huh.

TT: At that time, did you guys use the name Panalā'au, or was that something that came afterwards?

VK: Afterwards. They said we going to form an association or something, [Hui] Panalā'au. Then we all got together, we had one gathering, that's about all that I can remember.

WN: Medical supplies, what kind of medical supplies did you have?

VK: We had one box of first aid kit. If was anything more serious, I had to radio. But, none of us got seriously hurt, you see, that's why there's no need for me to ask for emergency service.

WN: Did you folks get sunburned?

VK: You go out there naked every day, pretty soon you don't feel the sunburn. You just dark, that's all. (Chuckles)

TT: Would you guys ever be completely naked?

VK: No, we got shorts on.

(Laughter)

WN: Must have been hot though.

VK: Well, you got a breeze. You got a wind breeze all the time, so you don't feel the heat. If there's no breeze, then you feel the heat, but there's always breeze. That's why we don't smell the guano, too, the breeze takes all the smell of guano out in the ocean.

TT: Did you guys ever talk about the older guano colony that was there or did you see any of the remains of their colony?

VK: No, only the graves. The six graves there, the people who had worked over there and died there.

TT: Would you guys stay around that area? Was that located by your camp or was that on a different part?

VK: A little ways out. Away from the camp.

WN: What was nighttime like?

VK: Nighttime, we all had Coleman lamps, so we just stayed up a little while, and then turn it off, go to sleep. That's all you can do is sleep, what you going do? There's no night club or anything like that.

(Laughter)

NK: Did you play cards?

VK: We don't play cards. I never did, maybe the other boys did. If I'm sleep, they're out playing cards, I don't know. Anyway, you have to use a gasoline lantern, so we sort of conserved the fuel. Anyway, we cannot be too extravagant with whatever we have.

WN: We're just trying to figure out what you folks did all day and all night, you know. It must have been really lonely, yeah?

VK: Well, as I said, we go roaming around the island looking for things, that's all, during the day. Come back, eat lunch, and go back out. Go out to the *Amaranth*, look around, visit some of the bird colonies. Outside of that, I didn't have any fixed duties outside of my own radio operating, and that balloon sounding that I did. What the other boys did, they went by themselves, so whatever they did, I didn't question them what they did. So, actually, I don't know what they actually did. They may be doing reports and all that, I don't know.

WN: Being the only non-Hawaiian, did you feel different from the other three or anything like that?

VK: No. They didn't treat me any different, so why should I? We're all amiable, so we all got along so.

WN: Do you remember any storms or bad weather?

VK: No, only once in a while, rain. That's all. Outside of that, we don't have any real tropical storms as they talk about. We out of the hurricane belt, so I don't know. Every night was pretty comfortable, it wasn't cold. So, we didn't have to have thick blankets or anything like that, so whatever we had, single blanket, we go sleep on that. It's okay. It's comfortable.

TT: At night, what were the stars like? Could you see a lot of stars at night?

VK: Yeah, it's clear, it's nice and clear. If you don't have any moon, you see all the stars. If the moon come out, well, you see part of it. But most of the time, you don't take notice. It's a balmy weather, so we're comfortable. We don't have to worry about the weather, no wind, no rain, just for go to sleep. That's all. We enjoy ourselves.

WN: I'm wondering, did you have a girlfriend at the time that you went?

VK: No.

- WN: Did the other boys have, do you know?
- VK: I don't know. Some of them talk about it, but I don't think they were real girlfriends, maybe acquaintances. They don't talk about it, so we don't talk about girlfriends.
- TT: What kinds of things would you guys talk about?
- VK: We hardly talk, except what we have to do, that's all. Where we're going, what we going to do the next day, go here, go there, that's about all. Outside of that, we don't have real sit down and converse, we don't have that. We didn't have that. We each did our job during the day and that's it.
- WN: On the radio, did you communicate with the Howland Island and the Baker Island radio person?
- VK: No. My communication mostly with the *North Wind* and Honolulu, that's all. As I said, we cannot chitchat and use up all the batteries. We have to use it for our purposes, and that's it. If we had unlimited power like this here, you know, you could sit up and talk, stay up all night and talk if you want to. But since our battery supply is limited, you cannot waste the battery hours.
- TT: At the time, did they tell you that there was this kind of competition with England, the British, for the airways, and that was one of the reasons you were there?
- VK: No, they didn't say anything like that. Nothing political.
- TT: Nothing political.
- VK: They keep us out of politics, we're just there to do that and that's it. We found out later, the following year, when the new maps came out, then we see "U.S." on the island. Before that, there's no "U.S." So, now since the U.S. claimed it, it was under the U.S. government now, and so all those islands have "U.S." on it so it make us proud, eh, so we were part of it.
- WN: Did you put the flag up every day?
- VK: No. Kamehameha School boys did it, that's their job. (Chuckles) They love to do it anyway.
- WN: While you were there, the supply ship came just once?
- VK: Yeah. Three months they give us new supplies and they told us we're not going home, the ship not going home, [because] they were looking for Amelia Earhart [whose plane disappeared en route to Howland Island from New Guinea]. All the coast guard was

looking for Amelia Earhart. If they were going back to Honolulu, they'd probably take us, and change us, but since they out there looking for Amelia Earhart, we [had to] stay on the island, but they brought us fresh supplies.

WN: Did the people that brought the supplies get on the island, too?

VK: They come on the [row] boat, yeah. The sailors, they bring the supplies in.

WN: Oh, sailors. How did you feel about seeing a ship with new faces?

VK: Hmm?

WN: How did you feel about seeing a boat with people, coming on the island? Was that like a good change for you?

VK: The new group came in, then we knew we have to go, just change. Happy to go home too, because we stayed on the island six months.

TT: Was there any point where you really started to miss home?

VK: No. I didn't have any girlfriends or anything like that, only thing I knew I had was my parents, my father, and I knew that he was sick. So, as I said, I paid his doctor bills when I came back.

WN: How much time do we have left? I think we can finish this. Okay, do you have any more questions before we start getting into the going home part?

TT: No, that would be the part where they had the court, right?

WN: The what?

TT: King Neptune's court.

WN: Oh, why don't you ask that?

TT: No, I think that's coming after.

WN: Okay, so do you remember the ship coming to take you guys home?

VK: The *Itasca*.

WN: How did you feel? Did you feel happy? Sad? Anything?

VK: Well, we're happy that we're going home. After all, six months on that island, you know, you don't see other people except for only three or four of us. So, we're happy to

go home. Some of the boys, after they came back over here, joined up and went back again. In other words, they liked the place, they liked it. In my case, I left here, went Mainland. I left from there, I wanted to go to school.

WN: When they came to pick you up, were the new boys on the ship?

VK: Yeah. When they came six months later, yeah, the new boys came.

WN: So, they came to pick you up, and at the same time...

VK: Yeah, changed hands.

WN: Do you remember meeting them?

VK: Yeah, said, "Hi." That's all and took off.

WN: You didn't give them any advice?

VK: Nope. You don't tell them anything,

TT: While you were there, did you meet any other boys that were not from Kamehameha?

VK: No. All Kamehameha boys there. I don't know whether the ordinary radio boys took weather [readings]. I don't know, I don't think they did. But, I was about the only one that I know of that did that. Maybe the other boys did, I don't know. That was my job, so that's it. Take the balloon sound and radio back to the *North Wind* and navy.

WN: What did the balloon sounding look like?

VK: The balloon sounding? You inflate the balloon. Big balloon, you inflate it and you let it go and you take the time you left it, how many minutes, you look through the instrument, after so many seconds you look at it, you record the direction of the balloon. The theodolite, the reference point is north, just like a theodolite, north, from there then if you move, there's a difference in angle, from north. So that's what you record, send for that first minute, and then you go again, and that thing moves again, moves back. It doesn't go one way, it goes back and forth. At different elevation, you have a different wind direction. You got the azimuth that gives you the direction it's going, and the elevation, how high it's going and how fast.

NK: The pictures of these like sticks with kind of round. . . .

VK: That there, maybe it's later, maybe it's something else. That probably has a radio time recording. In my time, I was the old-fashioned, balloon, and the theodolite. Now, they all go up by radio. So they track it by radio now.

TT: One of the other experiences that you mentioned before is the King Neptune's court when you crossed the equator and you had to get initiated.

VK: Oh, that there is a shellback initiation that we all were introduced, all the Kam School boys and myself, were introduced by the sailors on the *Itasca*. They really introduced us into being a shellback, they gave us the works.

(Laughter)

WN: What was the works?

VK: Everything you can think of. Whacking the rear-end, feed you this—something that's unpleasant to swallow, mostly as initiation.

TT: When was this done?

VK: Right on the equator.

TT: After you were picked up on the *Itasca*?

VK: Yeah, well, we were traveling. Crossing the equator, the old shellback, the initiation is done when you cross the equator. When you're in the equator, they give you initiation.

TT: And was it only the students or was it anybody who was first time on the boat?

VK: Anybody who's first time.

TT: So even other. . . .

VK: If there were other people, yeah. But, right then, only the Kam School boys and myself.

WN: So, when you got to Honolulu, do you remember what you felt when you got to civilization?

VK: Well, felt good to be home. You know, after all, you been away for so long. Always happy to come home.

WN: Did you lose weight?

VK: No. I was about the same, I maintained my weight. After all, we had good food. All the food we want to eat, eh. We didn't starve.

WN: What about medical, any kind of medical problems did you have?

- VK: No. Only probably a little scratch or nick or something, use a Band-Aid. Outside of that, nobody got sick.
- TT: Was there a big crowd waiting for you or was there nobody waiting for you guys?
- VK: Just the coast guard cutter coming in, get on the deck and so.
- TT: Your families, there?
- VK: No, nobody, because we weren't on a pleasure trip. This is a job.
- WN: Do you remember like your first meal back home or your first shower?
- VK: Yeah, felt good to get that warm bath. After all, you don't have warm bath down there, it's all cold water. All heat is for cooking only, so cannot boil water. So, when came home and got a good hot bath, it felt good—and sleep in a soft bed.
- WN: Your experience on the island, what would you say is the best part of being on the island?
- VK: The best part of being on the island is feel good that we doing something, we doing something. You cannot put your finger on it, but it's a feeling that we're there for some purpose. The real purpose I didn't know, only thing is that we know we're doing something. And we found out after we come back, what we were doing, see, that we're doing that for the government. So, they call us colonists. Outside of that, I thought we were just occupying an island like a squatter, you just squat on an island. But in this case, they call us colonists. They give us a technical name, colonists.
- WN: So was that better for you? You felt better about it afterwards?
- VK: Yeah. At least, we knew we did something.
- WN: What about the worst? What was the worst experience about the whole thing?
- VK: There isn't anything because everything was so pleasant all the time. We didn't have any arguments or fights to make it unpleasant. We were all congenial, we got along, and everything was amiable, so I cannot criticize any of the boys.
- WN: What would you say you learned from the whole thing? How did it affect your life?
- VK: It showed me how to get along with people. When you're on a lonely island with only four boys, you either get along or else you'll be an outcast. And if you're an outcast, it'll be terrible, you won't have anybody to talk to, nobody to have conversation with, nobody to get along with. So, we all got together and we all got good feeling to each

other. No hard feeling at all. So, that's the most important thing that I learned, that I got along with people. I found out I can do it, so that's it.

NK: When you say that you finally found out your real purpose for doing that, how did you find out? Did they tell you on the way back? Did they tell you that your occupation is going to enable us to claim the island or

VK: They told us that before we went down there that we're going to occupy an island, only four of us. Of what purpose, I didn't know, just the idea that we would occupy an island. They didn't say, give us the name, or any kind of term. When we came back, then we found out that we were colonists. That term, that word, never in our mind as we went down.

NK: So colonist was after you guys finished your trip?

VK: Yeah.

NK: That you realized you were colonists.

VK: Mostly when the [Bryan] book came out.

NK: The book didn't come out till the '70s.

VK: Well, when the book came out, that's why I found out that we're colonists. Outside of that, we're just occupiers, that's all.

NK: And then, you know, you called Jarvis bald-head island when you first saw it, that never have any trees or anything.

VK: Just barren.

NK: Did they tell you what island you were going to go to, did they describe it?

VK: No.

NK: All you knew was

VK: We got there, they said, "This is Jarvis. Your home for the next three months."

TT: After you got back, did they keep in touch with you, did they let you know what was going on with the project or let you know how things were going?

VK: No, they didn't. When they call me to get together as a group, that's the only time.

TT: That was later.

VK: Outside of that, I was out, I didn't get any connection with anybody because I had to leave anyway, go to the Mainland, so whatever happened after that, announcements made, I don't know.

TT: So the other boys on the island, you never kept in touch with?

VK: No. Right now, I asked her if she [NK] got in touch with the other boys. Usually you can't get in touch with them at all.

NK: I don't think that they're

VK: You don't think they're alive?

NK: Did you know [Carl] Kahalewai? One was the radio operator for Howland and then the other one was . . . [inaudible].

VK: Howland be Yau Fai or Lum King?

NK: No, actually this one was on Jarvis after you. He's the one that had the burst appendicitis.

VK: No.

TT: Did you hear about the boy who died on the island from appendicitis [Carl Kahalewai] the next year?

VK: No. I wasn't here. I was in the Mainland. So what the boys did, the radio operators of the island, just to keep communication in case anything happened. That's all, eh? And, they didn't get a job like my job, where I have to take balloon sound. They didn't have that. So I was about the only one. So, in my case, they had the Pan-American survey flight in mind, I think, so.

TT: Did they let you know that Amelia Earhart was coming or did you only find out after?

VK: Oh yeah, we heard.

TT: And then she got lost.

VK: Yeah, we waited there. We hope they find her, so we can get home. They looked all over, over three months. They didn't find any clue. In the meantime, we had enough supplies so we didn't worry. The red light blinking, what is that?

NK: Five minutes. Couple more minutes.

WN: Anything you want to say about your experience? What you want to tell your children? Your grandkids about what you folks did?

VK: Well, I have the pictures that will tell them practically everything. That barren island, four boys, we all had to live for three months together without fighting, squabbling, arguing. We never did. We just got along, so I really enjoyed the Kam School boys. I, as an outsider especially, you would think that those three would gang up on me, but no. They didn't. That was really what I appreciated, they took me as one of their own, as a Kam School boy, so we got along fine.

WN: Plus, you were probably a little bit older than them too, yeah?

VK: I don't know, I was twenty-two years old, I don't know what they are.

TT: They're around there. You were all about the same age, right?

VK: About the same age, yeah. If they're all alive, they'll be eighty-years-old like me.

WN: For this project that we're doing here at the museum, what do you want people to come away from this project seeing and what type of ideas do you want people to see when they look at all the pictures of the islands and the stories? What do you think is the most important thing for people today to know about?

VK: I think mostly, at least the government relied on the Kam School boys, local boys, to occupy the island. Not a Mainland boy, all local boy, so that's what I have really appreciated. Maybe if we had outside boys from the Mainland maybe then we won't get along, then you get a lot of arguments, they're not congenial. Kam School boys, they're all trained up there, they got to keep their nose clean, eh? (Chuckles) So they, in turn, passed it on to me. So, I got along with them. Private school boys always have better training than the public school. (Chuckles)

WN: Maybe not all of them.

VK: I had a sample of that private training because at that Royal School I attended, we had to wear tie. Every day the boys got to wear tie, no other school had tie on except for the Catholic schools, eh. So you see, we had some discipline training right there. Okay?

WN: Okay, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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

**Center for Oral History
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