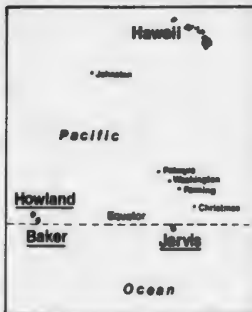




Landing men and supplies on Howland Island: In dangerous surf a towline was used to haul a longboat between the beach and waiting boats offshore.



Jarvis Island, Jan. 10, 1937: "Goodbye, we'll see you in three months."



**bob krauss**  
Advertiser columnist

Surfing in Hawaii at age 17, Richard Whaley had no inkling of the strange fate he was soon to meet in the Line Islands. More than forty years later and 1,000 miles away, his former companions remember.

## Castaways honors — 40 years later

With 48-star flag from Baker Island yesterday at Schofield, from left: Eugene Burke, Joe Kim, William Whaley, Solomon Kalama, Walter Burke.

Richard Whaley and Joe Kelihihahanui were the forgotten castaway heroes of World War II until yesterday.

They have lain side by side in a tiny cemetery at Schofield Barracks for nearly 40 years, their deeds unsung, their names unrecorded in Hawaii history books, their memories dim even among Kamehameha School classmates.

Yesterday they received recognition 1,000 miles from the barren coral atoll where they died on Dec. 8, 1941, during a Robinson Crusoe adventure that ended in war.

Survivors of that adventure gathered around the graves to say a prayer and spread the 48-star flag that was flying when a Japanese submarine and a bomber blasted their lonely outposts.

No one is better fitted to honor the names of Richard Whaley and Joe Kelihihahanui than their companions — other young men from Kamehameha School who were trapped under fire for nearly two months on their lonely islands.

"The bomber came over every day," said Walter Burke of Aiea, one of the survivors.

"We dug fox holes and stayed under cover. Early in the morning and late in the evening we caught lobster and squid to eat. It wasn't until Jan. 26, 1942, that the U.S.S. Helm, a destroyer, picked us up.

"Richard and Joe had to be buried on Howland Island where they were killed. Their bodies were moved to Schofield Cemetery in the 1950s. Very few people even know it happened.

"When they brought us back to Hawaii, they kept us at Pearl Harbor for a month before they let us go. Then they told us not to talk about it."

The strange story of Richard Whaley and Joe Kelihihahanui began in the 1930s, when Pan American World Airways was pioneering air travel across the Pacific.

"There was great interest in the U.S. Department of Interior in establishing United States possession for Pacific Islands that might serve as air

bases," said Abe Pilanala, director of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawaii, who is also a survivor.

"I believe the idea came out of the then Bureau of Air Commerce, a single desk at Interior. The director was Bill Miller. His idea was to colonize the uninhabited Equatorial Line Islands and establish American possession.

"In Hawaii, he met Bishop Estate trustee Albert Judd, who suggested that Hawaiian boys from Kamehameha Schools would make good colonists because they were disciplined."

The unique operation began in 1935. Some 135 boys participated until World War II put a bloody end to their occupation of Jarvis, Howland and Baker Islands.

"In the beginning, we lived in pup tents," said Solomon Kalama of Kailua, one of the colonists.

"There is no fresh water on the islands. A supply ship brought it in 52-gallon drums. If the sea was too rough to bring it to the beach in boats, they just dumped the barrels over the side and let them float in."

"You don't know how heavy a drum like that is until you try to roll it across a soft sand beach. There were only four of us on each island at a time."

"The drums were so heavy we didn't try to roll them across the island to the camp if they landed on the wrong side. We'd just walk across the island when we needed water."

Eugene Burke of Aiea, brother of Walter, said their main job was taking weather observations and sending back weather reports on a ham radio.

"There wasn't much to keep us busy," he said. "When I stood on top of Baker the first time, 20 feet above sea level, I said to myself, 'Can I make it out here for six months?' The challenge made it exciting."

Walter Burke was on Baker when the war broke

out. The colonists with him, all Hawaiians, were Blue Mahua, James Coyle and James Pease.

On nearby Howland Island, the colonists were Richard Whaley, Joe Kelihihahanui, Thomas Bederman and Elvin Matson.

"The four of us on Baker lived in a wooden shack we called the Government House," said Burke. "There was one on each of the islands."

"I got up on Dec. 8 at dawn and took the flag outside to raise it. There was a Japanese submarine about 100 yards off shore. I heard a 'whang' and a shell blasted the top off the government house."

"I ran inside and told the boys we'd better scuddle out of there. I tell you, we were four scared Hawaiians taking off across the island. Jesse Owens couldn't have run any faster."

"We hid all day. A bomber came over and dropped some bombs. I think it was the bomber that killed Joe and Richard on Howland. But none of us really knows how it happened because the other two boys never wanted to talk about it."

"That night we sneaked back to the Government House. The shells had blasted everything. But we saved some tin from the roof and made tin shades for our fox holes. We covered the tin with brush so the bomber couldn't see us."

"That bomber was based in the Marianas Islands. It was a big, four-engine flying boat that came over every day around noon."

"We saved as much of the food as we could. The rats had gotten into the sugar. There was a little coffee. It's easy to live off the land there. We had plenty of dried fish. You can pick up squid and lobster with your hand."

"For greens, we picked palolo leaves."

"That Christmas we had lobster for dinner. We sang Christmas carols under the moon that night. I wasn't sure we'd ever get picked up and I expected the Japanese to land any time."

"When the U.S. Navy ship came, I thought it was Japanese and told the boys to stay hidden."

The ship put a boat over and started rowing to the beach. I thought, 'Oh boy, we've had it now.' Then I saw blond hair and I knew they weren't Japanese."

At the last minute, Burke cut his foot on a piece of iron, he said. He was bleeding so badly he was afraid of attracting sharks if he swam to the boat and the Navy officer in charge refused to row to quieter water.

"It was Blue Mahua who swam back and got me to swim to the boat," said Burke.

"During the whole time we were being bombed, I kept the flag. Before we left the island, I buried it in a gunnysack and piled stones over it. In 1943, I went back to Baker to help build the airstrip."

"The first thing I did was find the rock pile and dig up my flag. I brought it home and have kept it ever since."

Burke said he went to Howland Island with some of the construction crew to find the graves of Whaley and Kelihihahanui. Later, the bodies were taken to Schofield and reburied.

Somehow, nobody ever got around to arranging public recognition for two of America's early casualties of World War II. So their friends decided at a reunion last week that it was time to honor the memory of their fallen comrades.

They are all in their 60s, those Kamehameha School boys who used to surf on redwood boards.

The party included William Whaley, brother of Richard, well known as a former professional baseball player. The former colonists present were the Burkes, Solomon Kalama and Joe Kim.

Eugene Burke spoke over the graves for the group.

"At this time it is appropriate that we say a silent prayer for these two. They are with us in spirit. They fill our hearts with pride. They gave their lives for us."

For a long time the survivors stood beside the graves talking story, remembering.



Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, with map of the Pacific that shows the route of their last flight.

## Everyone showed except Amelia

It would have been the biggest party ever held on remote Howland Island but the guest of honor, Amelia Earhart, never showed up.

Instead, the world's most famous aviator disappeared in the Pacific to spawn the biggest search and rescue operation ever assembled up to that time. Two young men from Hawaii found themselves shanghaied on one of the ships.

Solomon Kalama and Eugene Burke, former Kamehameha School students, reminisced last week about Earhart's mysterious disappearance and their unexpected part in the search for her.

Kalama and Burke were stationed on Howland, a bleak coral island near the Equator, as colonists in June 1937 when Earhart neared the end of an around-the-world flight. She was to land at Howland after flying from New Guinea

for their well-known quest.

"There were four of us living on the island in a wooden shack called the Government House," said Kalama. "It had two rooms, a bedroom with four bunkhouse style bunks and a living room where we kept the radio."

"There was no wall paper, just bare boards."

"One of the mothers sent us mosquito curtains. We put them up in the windows of the bedroom where Kalama was going to sleep. They were the first curtains on Howland."

"We also fixed up a shower for her. It was made out of a 53-gallon oil drum raised up with a pipe leading to a number 10 tin can with nail holes punched in the bottom. That was the shower head. We built a wooden floor and hung canvas shower curtains."

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Itasca, which served as a supply

ship, was on hand for the big arrival.

Kalama still has in his scrapbook the orders issued aboard the ship on June 29, 1937, for Earhart's arrival. Uniform of the day was to be white trousers, white jumper and white hat. Tennis shoes were optional.

The crew of the Itasca had prepared a musical review for the famous pilot with an opening chorus from "Merry Widow." The lyrics go like this:

"Amelia, Amelia,  
"We wait for you,  
"Amelia, Amelia,  
"You are now due,  
"Amelia our own dear Amelia,  
"Our Aye . . . Voo . . . Aye . . . Tri."

The cast included an emcee of the island, native troops, a Mr. Brawell, the crew of the ship and Amelia herself.

Kalama and Burke said while they were waiting for the arrival,

they went out to the Itasca to get groceries.

"We were eating ice cream when the captain suddenly ordered the anchor raised," said Kalama. "He said we've got to go out and look for Amelia."

"They stopped all shore parties and took the boats in. There was no way for us to get back to the island. The next thing we knew, we were at sea."

"We were there for several weeks, steaming among the Gilbert and Ellice Islands looking for Amelia Earhart. We wanted to search in the Carolines but those were under Japanese control and we couldn't."

"I remember we ran out of gas and the U.S.S. Colorado, a battleship, had to give us some. They say it was the biggest air sea search in the Pacific up to that time."

— By Bob Krauss