

Chapter 3

Cook to Kamehameha

Captain James Cook was one of the most famous navigators to ever sail under the Union Jack. He had been exploring in the South Pacific for many years before he ever saw Hawai`i. He had a far better knowledge of Polynesian culture and customs than any European of his time. Generally he was considered to be more humane and respectful of indigenous cultures than other explorers in the late 1700's. He was no doubt paternalistic by modern standards, but this was the era of going out to civilize the "savages". Cook made three voyages to the South Pacific. It is his third voyage with which we are concerned. He had already visited the islands of central Polynesia including Tahiti. In late 1777 he headed north to once again pursue that European dream of a northwest passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Cook was surprised when he came upon a group of islands in the mid-Pacific. He sighted the island of Hawai`i first but the northeasterly trade winds pushed him too far to the west to make a landfall. The same thing happened with succeeding islands until Cook finally ended up at Kaua`i on the western end of the chain. Cook was seeking fresh water and provisions and with his knowledge of the Tahitian language had little difficulty communicating with the many Hawaiians who paddled out to meet the ship.

He received a warm welcome and began trading for the needed provisions. He made an earnest attempt to keep all of his sailors on board since he was aware that many of them were infected with syphilis. He was not successful in this attempt and a new disease was released in the islands. He was surprised to find that the natives were mainly interested in trading for iron objects. Since these were uncharted islands he wondered how they were aware of the existence of iron. This has led to speculations that perhaps the British were not the first explorers to reach Hawai`i. The re-provisioning went on without problems until some of the Hawaiians were caught stealing iron objects. The rate of theft increased until Cook felt it necessary to leave. The two craft resumed their Northerly direction in search of the northwest Passage, but not before noting the location of the islands on their charts. Cook named the islands after his friend and benefactor, the Earl of Sandwich.

After a summer and fall of fruitlessly searching in Alaska for the "passage", Cook's two ships, the Resolution and the Discovery, headed south. It was at this point that a number of accidental occurrences caused Cook to arrive in

Kealakekua Bay in a manner that caused the natives to perceive him as the god Lono. As Cook neared Hawai`i he planned to make land-fall on Maui.

Unfavorable winds lead him to cross the channel to the island of Hawai`i. In his search for a good moorage he circled the island in a clockwise direction, ending up at Kealakekua Bay on the south Kona coast. He fulfilled three of the predictions for the return of Lono that had been prophesied by the kahuna. First he arrived during the makahiki festival in honor of Lono. Second he approached from the south. And third his large multi-sailed square-rigger looked like the cloud on which Lono was predicted to arrive.

Cook was undoubtedly surprised by his newfound status when he came ashore. In typical fashion, however, he put his position to good use and received many of his provisions for free without the usual bartering. After months at sea the crew was more than willing to take full advantage of this situation. Cook did not attempt to keep his men on board on this arrival as it would have led to certain mutiny. Many local women stayed on the ships and sailors took up quarters on shore. With this welcome, Cook even set up an astronomical observatory on shore to gather data on the constellations. His artist, John Webber, filled sketch books that were later published to illustrate Cook's journals. Unfortunately the British overstayed their welcome. After almost six weeks at the bay they had seriously depleted the resources of the region, and stealing was again becoming a major problem.

Cook then sailed north for Maui. Unfortunately a storm came up in the Maui Channel, which is common, and the Resolution was demasted. With no options Cook limped back to Kealakekua Bay for the necessary repairs. The Hawaiians were not happy about this turn of events and theft became a major problem from the outset. The situation was so tense that Cook fired his main cannons as a show of force. The scene became desperate when a group of natives stole a skiff during the night. Cook was outraged and dispatched a shore party including himself to take one of the local ali`i hostage to use as ransom for the return of the skiff. All went well at first and the chief came along without resistance. Then his wife started screaming and pleaded with him not to go. The chief then returned home and refused to go with Cook. Things rapidly deteriorated with the British being forced back to the shore. One of the Brits fired a musket loaded with shot at a native in reed armor. The gun misfired and the pellets bounced harmlessly off the vest. This gave the locals renewed confidence and they attacked with clubs swinging. Cook was killed by repeated blows to the head, and his body was taken. The rest of the British retreated to

their ship. The Hawaiians believed that a person could gain the power of an enemy by taking possession of their body and some suspect that parts of Cook's body were eaten. After much dickering the British were able to gain possession of parts of Cook's body and no one knows what became of the rest. Later a monument was established by the British Navy at the site of Cook's death. They still return to the site and perform a ceremony in honor of the most famous explorer of the Pacific.

The British left with Captain Charles Clerke in command to return to England. Captain George Vancouver, a veteran of Cook's voyage, led several return expeditions to Hawai'i. The British came to be well respected by the Hawaiians in succeeding years. This respect is demonstrated by the fact that the Union Jack is located in the upper left-hand corner of the Hawaiian flag.

Now that Hawai'i was on the charts it became a major provisioning port for European and American merchants and whalers doing business in the Pacific. A few foreigners or haoles remained in the islands, and some became advisors to the ali'i in subsequent years. Others were idle beachcombers enjoying a carefree life.

One of the young Hawaiians who was present at Cook's death, and indeed may have landed the fatal blow, was a rising ali'i named Kamehameha. In the aftermath of the European "discovery" he rose to power, being the first Hawaiian to become king of all of the islands. He was both well versed in the arts of war and had the ability to see how to use the technology of the haoles to his advantage.

On the eve of Kamehameha's birth, it was prophesied that a male would be born who would overthrow the king. Like King Herod before him, the local king perceived the solution to be killing all male babies born at the time. Kamehameha's mother, who was a middle ranking ali'i, fled to the barren Kohala Coast of Hawai'i to give birth. The spot can be visited today above the powerful waves crashing to shore on the northernmost point of the island. Maui is visible across the channel on a clear day. His mother then hid the infant with relatives till he was six years old and the threat had passed. Kamehameha lived the life of an ali'i youth, spending countless hours in physical training as well as learning all of the protocols necessary to his position. It should be mentioned that Kamehameha was a massive man. From measurements taken of his cape, which still resides in the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, he was estimated to be almost seven feet tall and weighed over 300 pounds.

The main chief on the Island of Hawai`i at the time of Cook's visit, Kalaniopu`u, died in 1782. His choice for succession was unusual, and proved to be a recipe for conflict. He named his son, Kiwala`ō, as his successor but placed his nephew, Kamehameha, in charge of war by bequeathing him the talisman of the war god, Kūkailimoko. Since war was essential to the maintenance of power this created an immediate problem for his son. Was his father purposefully testing him? This would seem the case as it was unlikely that the two would share power. Avoiding immediate aggression, Kamehameha withdrew from the Kona region and established himself at Kawaihae near his ancestral home in Kohala. Kiwala`ō eventually attacked first and may ali`i defected from Kamehameha. The winner of the conflict remained unclear however as Kiwala`ō was killed in battle.

It was shortly after this that Kamehameha captured two Americans, John Young and Isaac Davis, when their ship, the Fair American was defeated in a naval battle. Rather than kill these enemies he put them to work for him. They showed him how to use the captured guns and cannon. Kamehameha had small cannons mounted on his double hulled war canoes. John Young became one of his most trusted advisors over the years. Young married several Hawaiian women and built a fine New England style home near Kamehameha's compound at Kawaihae.

Another American who gained favor with Kamehameha was John Parker. Captain George Vancouver had presented Kamehameha with several cattle in the early 1790's. The king placed a kapu on these cattle and let them run free to multiply in the uplands of the island. With no natural predators the wild cattle increased their numbers to the point where they were trampling crops and generally terrorizing villagers. Kamehameha hired the young Parker, who had jumped ship, to bring the cattle under control. Through resourcefulness the former sailor was able to capture some of the cattle and eventually to domesticate them. Many of the other cattle were butchered and a new meat was introduced to the Hawaiian diet. Parker was given a few acres as a reward and expanded his holdings considerably when he married one of Kamehameha's granddaughters. He brought over Mexican cowboys to train the Hawaiians, who would come to be called paniolos, in the arts of riding, roping, and other cowboy skills. He built his ranch into the dynasty that is today the largest privately owned ranch in the United States.

At this time Kamehameha's ambitions turned from the island of Hawai`i to Maui. Both Maui and O`ahu were controlled by the king, Kahekili. While he was away on O`ahu Kamehameha attacked Maui. To avoid lengthy warfare the two signed a truce that both assumed would be temporary and Kamehameha

returned to the island of Hawai`i to consolidate his power there. His chief rival on the island was Keoua who attacked shortly after his return from Maui.

Kamehameha repulsed the invasion. While returning home via Mauna Loa there was an explosive volcanic eruption and Keoua lost one half of his troops.

Kamehameha and others took this as a sign that Madame Pele was opposed to Keoua who was severely disheartened by the event.

Kamehameha next decided to build a large heiau to Ku, the god of war. This heiau call Pu`ukoholā is still standing in Kawaihae and is part of the National Park system. It is the site of numerous cultural and religious events by Hawaiians and other Polynesians. Kamehameha built this impressive structure by creating a human chain almost 20 miles long, rocks were passed from hand to hand to the kahuna who oversaw their placement. Kamehameha invited Keoua to the dedication of this heiau. Since the heiau required a human sacrifice and the higher ranking the person the better, Keoua should have seen what was coming. He might have been so disheartened by his last defeat that he just placed his fate in the hands of the gods. In any case his canoes were attacked before they even came ashore and he became the sacrifice that gave mana to the heiau.

Kamehameha's control of the island of Hawai`i was never again in doubt. From this base he could pursue his dream of unifying the Hawaiian islands.

Kahekili, the king of Maui and O`ahu, then attacked Kamehameha. This was the first of a new style of warfare for Hawai`i. Both of the leaders possessed cannons and fought a major sea battle in the European style. After hours of shelling, the battle developed into a stalemate without a victor. Kamehameha's opportunity came when Kahekili died in 1794 and his sons fought one another for control of his territory. This played into Kamehameha's hands as he defeated his rivals one at a time. Perhaps the most famous battle of this campaign was the battle for control of O`ahu. Kamehameha forced his opponents up Manoa Valley, in present day Honolulu, and backed them up to a 1,000 foot pali or cliff where many fell or leapt to their death rather than surrender.

At this point he controlled all of the Hawaiian Islands except Kaua`i. Kaua`i is over 70 miles from O`ahu. The Kaua`i Channel is by far the largest stretch of open water between any of the Hawaiian Islands. The Kaua`i Channel is known for violent storms that spring up without warning. This gave the island a relative degree of isolation from the warfare that occupied the other islands. It was only a matter of time till Kamehameha made his move, which came in 1804. He attacked with a large armada, but a storm sunk many of his ships forcing a hasty retreat to O`ahu. After another futile attempt at conquering Kaua`i he signed a

treaty with the ruling chief that made Kaumuali`i the governor of the island. He agreed to pay an annual tribute to Kamehameha and thus the unification of the islands was completed.

The following years saw a period of peace developing on the islands. The monarchy was now solidified and the ali`i remained unified under Kamehameha's rule. He had wisely decided that from an administrative position it was effective to name a ranking ali`i to the position of governor of each of the major islands. One of his first appointments was to place a young ali`i named Boki as governor of O`ahu. Along with his wife, Liliha, he was to serve three successive monarchs in this capacity. Interactions with the Europeans and Americans increased dramatically during this period but Kamehameha's force of personality was able to keep them well under control. He died at the age of 70 in 1819, on the eve of the most far reaching invasion of all.