



The Battle of Nu'uaniu

"**You probably wouldn't have bet** on Kamehameha, if you had been alive at the time, because he is definitely the junior branch of the great family."

"It's probable that given the war technology available, and the balance of power among family dynasties at that time, that some outside influence had to enter the picture before any king could actually conquer the universe. And it's the West and their Western weapons, with a few excellent fighting men, who tilt the balance towards one of the several ali'i who might have ruled the world."

During the period when Western ships were first arriving in the Hawaiian Islands, Kamehameha managed to "convince" two seamen, John Young and Isaac Davies, to remain with him. Like other major chiefs in the Islands, Kamehameha worked to accrue western guns and cannon. But unlike the other chiefs, Kamehameha had these skilled men to use them.

"**The story actually starts with** the battle of Kepaniwai on Maui in 1790," explains **Jerry Walker**, who teaches *lua* (Hawaiian military arts) in Nu'uaniu. "After that battle, Kamehameha sent two emissaries over to O'ahu; one to talk to Kahekili and the other to seek out a *kahuna* here, who told him to go to Kawaihae and build the *heiau* at Pu'u Kohola. There Kamehameha's rival Keoua was sacrificed, and that allowed Kamehameha to unite the Big Island. "Subsequently, he went through Maui and the islands of Moloka'i and Lana'i. And when Kahekili died, that provided Kamehameha an opportunity in the early part of 1795. So it was almost a 5-year process."

After the battles between Kalanikupule and Ka'eo, described by Jim on the **Old O'ahu** page, Kalanikupule turned on the two British sea captains that had helped him, killed them and took their ships. "But in the process of going to the Big Island, the bosuns' mates had an insurrection," **Jerry** continues, "they regained their ships and turned Kalanikupule and his troops loose to swim back to O'ahu."

"The British seamen subsequently went to the Big Island and told Kamehameha, so Kamehameha got a lot of their arms, and he prepared for the next couple of months to make war on Kalanikupule."

"**As we look from Punchbowl out** easterly at Diamond Head and Kaimuki's backbone, this is where the majority of Kamehameha's troops progressed after they landed. A small portion of Kamehameha's troops came through the Waikiki area—those that had landed in the forward part of Diamond Head—but the vast majority of the troops came directly from the East, through Kahala and Kaimuki, marching to the front of Punchbowl where they were to engage the O'ahu forces. The O'ahu forces were organizing around what is now Thomas Square, where the Ward Estate and McKinley School are located."

"**There were four heiau** located along the base of Punchbowl: one at the Royal School, one where the Central School is now located; one up above the freeway behind Queens Medical Building and one to the front at Alapai Street. The O'ahu forces mustered in an arc across these, and here was the first engagement of the battle."

"Some of the O'ahu troops then went toward Pearl Harbor, but the majority then proceeded up towards the O'ahu Cemetery area. One of Kamehameha forces went around Punchbowl and came down the Papakolea Flats to engage the O'ahu forces as they were going up the valley."

"**Up toward the mountains, you see** Tantalus and Manoa Valley. Some of Kamehameha's forces were sent up in back here and along Pauoa Flats and the ridge to engage the cannons that Ka'iana had set up on the Nu'uaniu Pali ridge line. Some went up through the back of Manoa—he sent the best bird catchers who were used to going through that type of area—but mostly they went through Tantalus."

"After the initial engagement in front of Punchbowl and the Queens Hospital area, they then moved across and up through Kawananakoa School, then up to the area where O'ahu Cemetery is located."

"This is where the chief [Ka'iana](#) and his brother were killed, and Kalanikupule was wounded. And then they moved up through the Royal Mausoleum area, further up where the Philippine Consulate is, and up to the Dowsett area for their next engagement."

"**Ka'iana's wife was with** a number of women who were sharpshooters, and it is said that it was her group that inflicted heavy wounds on the O'ahu forces. At that point, the O'ahu forces were already on the move up to the higher area, and then with Ka'iana dead, they would sacrifice him and then continue the battle after that."

"The battle then ran from the Dowsett Highlands up through the upper highlands, ending up at Luakaha, where approximately 300 individuals made their last stand so that the main body of what was left could escape over the *pali*, or over the hills into Kalihi or Manoa, or wherever else they could escape."

"This is the area where the last 300 soldiers dug in to allow the remaining O'ahu troops to descend over the *pali*. Looking to the left and right sides of the valley, you can see it was extremely difficult to climb and get away, so most of the escape was done earlier, when they were coming up the valley, primarily going over the left side towards Kalihi. "Up the mountain to our right is Pauoa Flats, where the riflemen Kamehameha had sent shot at various O'ahu forces as they retreated up the valley. In the back, we can see the two notches up on the right. That's where the O'ahu forces placed their cannons. Or, if nothing else, that is where they placed the observers to direct the cannon fire."

"There are different stories about these notches. One is that they were places to roll rocks down on people that were coming from the windward side. The other story is that those notches were used to bring canoes over. "If you look at the other side, it's kind of impossible to bring canoes up and over that, so it's more my guess that those were already pre-existing and were previously used more to roll boulders and rocks down upon people coming up from the windward side. "To have a force in a matter of a couple of days dig that out to place cannon, I think would be a little hard to do, given the time they had."

"The cannons here were brought by Ka'iana as well as Kalanikupule. They had traded for them with merchants and seamen who had come by, and they had traded subsistence items—water, pigs, vegetables, fruit— for knives, muskets, powder, and cannon. "The story goes that Kamehameha sent people up from Manoa and Tantalus, who came up over the top and came down onto the position to neutralize it. Some of the stories go that the cannons did fire from here and did hit the Dowsett-Queen Emma area with cannon shot. And once they stopped firing, Kamehameha knew that his men had silenced those guns. "Kamehameha's own cannons were still located down in the lower Dowsett and Nu'uaniu Streets area. So the only thing they brought up here was just rifles, because, by the time they got here, the battle was already over."

"The Nu'uaniu pali (cliff) is the final spot, the last of the 6-mile battle that started below Punchbowl and ended here. The O'ahu forces were defeated, either peacefully by jumping, or in actual hand-to-hand combat. Kalanikupule and many of his forces did escape over into Kalihi and other areas. But there were 300 soldiers who fought to the end to delay, so that the main body could escape over to the windward side. "Herb Kane's picture depicts one possibility that is probably eight or nine different scenes rolled up into one. This was an ongoing battle, so there wouldn't have been a great mass choking the valley. There would have been maybe a few hundred at a time, arriving here at different hours until all of the O'ahu forces were here. And the Hawai'i army captured many prisoners too. So not everybody went over. "

"Many people would rather have decided their own destiny. That is, to fight and die in battle versus being captured and turned into a slave, or be sacrificed. It would preserve the *mana* or energy for your bloodline if you were to die or go in battle, rather than to be captured and humiliated by having your bones made into fishhooks or other things of that sort."

"The name of the battle in Hawaiian is *Ka-lele-a-ke-anae*," **Stephen** interjects, "which is *the leaping of the anae*, the mullet fish. The text under the painting here at the Pali Lookout says it refers to the men forced off the cliff. But the name tells you something else."

"In 1897, when they were building the Pali Highway," **Jerry** continues, "excavators counted approximately 800 skulls, so, it's a better guess to say that there were at least up to 800-plus people who lost their lives going over, either jumping or in battle or just trying to escape."

"A number of them did escape. Some went up Pacific Heights, but primarily they went up Alewa and over into Kalihi and escaped to Aiea and through there. Others went up over the pali or went up to Kalihi and then went over into Kane'ohe. A lot of them went down the old trails on the pali, of course. "Kamehameha's wife Ka'ahumanu had come over with him. She was not in the main battle, she was back in Waikiki and the other areas. And a number of the O'ahu chiefs and families that did escape went to her to ask for protection, and she gave it. So many of those who did escape and get to her were granted life."

"This is the last major battle that Kamehameha fought. This united all of the islands other than Kaua'i, and, from this point on, for the next 20-some odd years, there was peace, other than the preparation for the battle of Kaua'i." Kaua'i ceded its sovereignty peacefully to Kamehameha in 1806, without that battle ever occurring.