

## MARTIN IKUA PURDY, SR.

### Ulupalakua Ranch, Maui & Parker Ranch, Hawai`i



If there be no higher accolade than the endorsement of one's peers, hard evidence exists that Martin Purdy has earned that coveted distinction. No less than six Parker Ranch career paniolo - themselves worthy of notice - testified in writing that Martin's ". . . abilities as a skilled paniolo are deserving of recognition", and that he ". . . has contributed greatly to the perpetuation of the Hawai`i cattle industry and the paniolo culture and heritage."

Martin, the son of Ikua Purdy, who is widely known as Hawai`i's most famous paniolo, probably didn't think that he would leave his own mark on paniolo history. Described as "Always quiet and unassuming" by a noted historian, Martin's "humble yet effective role reflected the cowboy values so true of his heritage." Even as a senior cowboy at Parker Ranch, in an outfit that routinely branded 12,000 calves annually, Martin had earned the right to be the roper. but instead he voluntarily chose the tedious and back-breaking task of flanking the roped calves to the ground for branding, giving countless younger cowboys the opportunity to develop the special roping technique, the kihele loop.

While the Purdy name has become virtually synonymous with Parker Ranch, Martin is originally from Kaua`i. While he was still a young boy, his family moved to Maui and Martin grew up on Ulupalakua Ranch. At the age of 15 he started work on the ranch fixing fences and cleaning stables. It wasn't long before he joined the cowboy gang where he became a rough rider. Later he moved to the Big Island and in 1948 started as a paniolo at Parker Ranch. He eventually became an assistant foreman. His tenure there lasted 32 years and earned him the respect and admiration of paniolo who worked alongside him. To a true paniolo, there can be no greater recognition than that.

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Martin Purdy  
Oral History Interview  
Paniolo Hall of Fame  
Oahu Cattlemen's Association  
By Ilima Loomis  
Feb. 22, 2006  
Waimea

IL: Mr. Purdy, tell me about where you were born.

Doris Purdy: Hanalei, Kauai.

IL: Oh, Hanalei? And you grew up in Ulupalakua?

MP: Yeah. I work over there until I came here to Parker Ranch.

IL: And your dad was Ikua Purdy?

MP: Yeah. He was the world champion cowboy. I like be like him, but no can!

IL: No? How come?

MP: He was the best. I was the island champion for riding bull.

IL: You were? For big island?

MP: For Maui, I took champion there. That's all I can do! I also got one time the "all around cowboy" award.

IL: Tell me about your dad. Did you ever go ride with him?

MP: Yeah, I worked with him.

IL: You worked with your dad?

MP: Yeah. (Long pause.) Yeah, my dad show all the cowboys, the island cowboys how to work, how to run cattle, how to pick cattle, pick cattle to send away, up Mainland. (Pause) All I know I learned from him.

IL: What was your dad like? Was he a quiet man, or was he a fun-loving man?

MP: Quiet. He was a Parker Ranch foreman. From there he went to Kauai. The owner of Ulupalakua Ranch give him more pay, so he left Kauai and came to Maui.

*Martin Purdy was born on Kauai, but grew up in Ulupalakua and worked there. He became a cowboy when he was 18 years old.*

Later, I come Parker Ranch, work breaking horse for the ranch and on the cowboy gang until I retired.

IL: How old were you when you came to Parker Ranch?

MP: Twenty-seven years old. The foreman cowboy over here was, oh I forget his name. When I came over here, my job is breaking horses for a couple of years. Then I came cowboy, cowboy until I retire.

IL: How did you break the horse?

MP: You had to ride 'em, eh? And the horse gives you the job to do, boy! (Chuckles) George Purdy was the foreman of the breaking pen. George Purdy was my cousin. Yeah. And I stay here until I retire.

IL: When you were breaking horses, how many horses did you do?

MP: Um, one day you ride about six, seven horse a day. What a job it is, working. Some people tell me, "You son of a gun, you sure can ride!" I say, "No, the horse no buck, that's why!" They come to the breaking pen, watch how I ride. They tell me, how I learn that? I tell 'em, I like cowboy, so I gotta learn how!

IL: How did you break the horse?

MP: We don't use regular bridle. Different kind bridle. You ride, if they like buck, you let 'em.

*Martin Purdy says he was told to tie his stirrups together under the horse, but he didn't do that. He felt that when his feet were in the stirrups and the stirrups were free, he could balance better.*

IL: How many cowboys did they have breaking horse?

MP: Three? No, four. (Long pause)

IL: Did you ever get hurt in the breaking pen?

MP: No! (Laughter) Had people come around look how Parker Ranch breaking their horses.

IL: They'd watch you?

MP: Yeah. (Laughter) They say, "You damn son of a gun, you can ride!" I tell, "Anybody can ride!" They say, "Go to hell!"

IL: Why did you leave Ulupalakua?

MP: Well, I had one cousin (here) who tell me, "You get better pay you come here." So I came. That's why I stayed till now. Not bad pay. Working Ulupalakua you get \$150 a month. Come here, \$250. Free house, free water.

IL: So first you worked in the breaking pen, then after that where did you go?

MP: Cowboy. Cowboy till I retire.

IL: What did you do as cowboy?

MP: Oh, drive cattle. Pick different cattle for market. You do what the foreman tell you.

IL: What part of the ranch were you on?

MP: Around here.

IL: Near Waimea.

MP: Yeah. Only Waimea, never go outside.

IL: So you would drive cattle.

MP: Yeah.

IL: Where did you drive cattle?

MP: All around here.

IL: Did you drive in day or at night?

MP: Mostly in the day. At night, only when we ship cattle to Honolulu, that's when we drive down to where we load the cattle, down the beach. Then the boat come. We rope the cattle, lead 'em in the water, and tie 'um on a small boat. Then the small boat, take the cattle to the big boat. 'Cause that big boat cannot come in, eh? Lotta people come watch how we handle the cattle. (Chuckles) They say, "You folks too good." I say, "The cattle tame, that's why!" You gotta rope 'em, lead 'em in the water, tie 'em on the small boat, small boat take 'em to the big boat.

IL: When you swam with the cattle, how many cattle would you take?

MP: Oh, you mean shipping? Hundred, two-hundred.

IL: Did they fight you?

MP: The cattle? Oh, no. If the cattle fight, we'd just pull them in the water with the rope. The cattle like run away, we stop 'em.

IL: Your horses. How did you teach your horses to swim?

MP: Oh, they learn by themselves. You force 'em in. You have to force 'em. The horse go inside. We take 'em in a deep place, where they can't use their legs, eh?

IL: How many guys work with you to ship cattle?

MP: Uh, about 15 cowboys. When we ship the cattle, we gotta drive down the beach. We drive in the morning, two o'clock in the morning. Then (some) guys stay in front of the cattle. Way in front, about hundred yard away from the cattle, for stop cars. Except, some cars, they don't stop. They think we're going to do something wrong! Sometime the drivers, they think you're going to rob them or what! When they go by, the cattle all split up. The foreman come and give me scolding. I tell him they don't listen. Cattle all scattered in there, and hard for bring back too.

IL: Now, you knew A.W. Carter?

MP: Yeah.

IL: How did you know A.W. Carter?

MP: When I start working. He's a nice man. He had management responsibility for the ranch.

IL: What was he like?

MP: Big man.

IL: Tall?

MP: Yeah. Nice man.

IL: Did he ride horses with you?

MP: No, but he's a very good man. (Long pause)

IL: So, A.W. Carter, was he a loud man or a quiet man.

MP: Quiet.

IL: Did he stay in the office, or did he go out into the field?

MP: No, he don't come out.

IL: He stayed inside?

MP: Yeah. You talk to him about what we doing. It's the foreman who's got to report.

IL: Did you become foreman?

MP: No, no.

IL: Who was your foreman?

MP: Uh, George Purdy. I was assistant foreman. I assisted him.

IL: Now, when did you start bull riding?

MP: When I was around 21.

IL: You did rodeo?

MP: I took champion. I like go mainland, but the war break out, so I never go.

(Tape ends)

IL: Tell me about when you won, for bull riding.

MP: When I was young!

IL: Here, or Maui?

MP: Maui, (Pause) That's how I learn ride. So when they get rodeo, my dad says, "You think you can?" I say, "Yes." He says, "Try. No be scared now." But that bull can buck, boy! They used to tell me, "You son of a gun, you sure can ride." I say, "Anybody can, not only me." But everybody all fall off!

IL: Why did you like bull riding?

MP: Well, they give you something when you pau! (Pause) I play sports too. That's why I get all these trophies.

IL: What sports did you play?

MP: Baseball. Baseball, basketball, all that. Water polo. A lot of fun.

IL: Do you remember when A.W. Carter died?

MP: Ah, 1949.

IL: Did they have a funeral for him?

MP: Ah, everybody go to his funeral.

IL: Did you stay working in Waimea?

MP: Yeah.

IL: How big was the area? The section where you worked?

MP: Oh, around here. I worked in the breaking pen, training horse. George Purdy was the foreman. I work under him.

IL: Did you ever do branding?

MP: Yeah.

IL: How did that work?

MP: You had two people one cattle. Can brand easy, eh? One rope the head, one rope the leg. That's how. (Long pause)

IL: Mr. Purdy? I heard you fell in a foxhole one time.

MP: Yeah.

IL: Yeah, what happened?

MP: The horse was galloping and I never see the hole! It was kinda dark. Then one friend came and said, "What you doing in the hole?" I tell, "No tell me, 'What you doing'! Take me out!" (Laughter) Yeah. I don't know how the horse never see the hole. It was in the morning, about four o'clock in the morning. We take cattle for ship Honolulu. Yeah. (Long pause)

IL: Mr. Purdy. You had a family? How many kids do you have?

MP: Children?

IL: Yeah.

MP: I have four. Two girls, two boys. They're all married now.

IL: Did any of them become cowboys?

MP: No.

IL: No? What do they do?

MP: They get different kind jobs. Yeah.

IL: Martin, when did you retire?

MP: Quite long ago ... hmmm. About 20 years, I think. Nov. 21, 1980. (Long pause)

IL: Now, today you play music?

MP: Yeah.

IL: What kind music do you do?

MP: Guitar, ukulele

IL: Slack key?

MP: Yes, I can play slack key.

IL: Hawaiian music?

MP: Yeah.

IL: How did you learn to play?

MP: My brothers. They never show me, but I watch how they play. (Chuckles) I stay there and listen. I say, "I'm going to listen to how you play." They tell me, "Go away!" So when they go, I would play their guitar. But they slack all the keys. Then I try to play. Later they tell me, "How did you learn how to play guitar?" I tell them, "You folks!" "But, we never show you!" "I listen at the door how you folks play." They say, "We get rascal kine brother!" (Chuckles)

IL: Is there anything else we should talk about?

*Martin Purdy's father used to hunt wild cattle on Puuwaawaa. He went out during the day and brought the cattle back to the ranch.*

Doris Purdy: Why did they try to catch them?

MP: Get rid of them!



DP: What would they do with them?

MP: Send 'em to the market. Yeah. The ranch get their own slaughterhouse. They sell the meat.

DP: It would be pretty tough meat, wouldn't it?

MP: Yeah.

IL: What did your dad teach you about wild cattle?

MP: You follow what he do. He no tell you what to do. The only thing he tell you, "No scared."

DP: Another thing about the work day, did you have any particular hours?

*Martin Purdy worked "Hawaiian Time," just worked until the job was done, then went home.*

*Purdy thinks the cowboy life is a hard life, but a good life.*

IL: Well, Martin. Thank you for talking to me.

MP: Thank you for coming.

End of tape.