

# Walter A. Slater, Parker Ranch & SC Ranch, Hawai`i



A rancher's son, Walter Slater started his career as a cowboy while he was still a teenager in New Mexico. World War II was on, and like every other town in the southwest all the cowboys had gone overseas to fight, leaving the young boys to work the cattle and keep the ranches in business.

Walter spent the first part of his career managing ranches in Arizona and California. He came to Parker Ranch in

1971, when the ranch changed management. Moving to Hawaii, where cowboys are Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Filipino, Caucasian or all of the above, was a culture shock for the southwest native. The paniolo dressed, joked, and worked cattle differently from the cowboys he knew back home, and of course they talked differently too.

Once an old-timer called Walter's house and left the urgent message with his wife, Barbara, that "There are 'pipsis' in the shopping center!" Of course, he meant *pipi*, or cattle, had broken loose and were wandering around town, but Barbara wasn't familiar with the Hawaiian word. She thought he was talking about something quite different. "It kind of shocked my wife," Walter recalls, with a knowing smile.

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Paniolo Hall of Fame

Interview with Walter Slater

Aug. 11, 2003

Waimea, Hawaii

I: Maybe we can start with some background. Can you tell me the date of your birth?

S: November the 13<sup>th</sup>, 1928, in the little town of Hot Springs, New Mexico that's been changed to Truth or Consequences. It was changed in 1950. Ralph Edwards had a television show that he put on there for almost 50 years. And it's still Truth or Consequences.

My dad had a big desert ranch in New Mexico. Lots of acres and few cows. He only run about 500 cows I guess, but there was lots of country to run in. Big, desert country. It would take all day to ride to the back side.

It was high desert country. Elevation was probably from 4,200 feet to about 7,500 feet. Most of it was out of the mountains on big flats. When we'd get rains in the mountains it would overflow and come down the big gulches and then spread out and irrigate a lot of flat country. And then the cows would go there after the big rains. But our main feed in the spring was Yucca plants. These old cows would eat the Yucca blooms. And there was a feed there called tallow weed, and fillery, burr clover. It was just a big old high desert ranch. It took lots of acres to run a cow. We figured about 60 to 65 acres to the cow. Feed was sparse. The cow had to walk 15 miles to get a belly full.

I: What was your father's name?

S: James Slater. But everybody called him Buster, Buster Slater. That was his nickname, from the time he was a little boy.

I: What was the name of the ranch?

S: Slater Ranch was all. People didn't name their ranches there. But there was one great big ranch there that I worked on when I was a kid, the Victoria Land and Cattle Company, owned by Kern County Land Company in California. They had three ranches in New Mexico, two in Arizona, three in California and one in Oregon. That's the big ranche that I worked for when I was just a kid.

I: How did you get into being a cowboy when you were a kid?

S: It was forced on me (laughs). My dad had a big ranch and we had to work. That's the way I got started. And then (World War II) came along and I knowing a little bit about a cow, all the big ranchers would call me and I would go work for them when all the boys were overseas, fighting in the war. But that's why I got started. And then that was probably a real good experience for me, because later on, when I left New Mexico, one of the fellows that I worked for when I was a kid, I started to work for him again, full time, in 1953. And then he kind of pushed me along and I became assistant manager there, and then I left, and I was called back to run three ranches in California, for the same company. But he was the one that got me started in managing ranches.

I: What was his name?

S: Leland Larson. And then I went to work in California for a fellow named Justy Caire. And then the land company was taken over by Tenneco, and then Tenneco started selling the ranches. And that's how I got to Hawaii here. Came in with Ruble and Lent. And that was in 1971, and I've been here ever since.

I: When did you move from just working on ranches to being in management?

S: Well, it was 1954. The first kind of managing job I had was as wagon boss. They called it wagon bosses. I was head of a wagon that had 14 or 15 men that would go out and do all the cattle work. And from there to assistant manager on the same ranch, but I was still wagon boss too. And then I was managing ranches when I came back in around 1961 to California. I was running three ranches there, and then at the end I was at several ranches in New Mexico and Arizona just before I came to Parker Ranch.

I: The three ranches you managed in California ...

S: The San Emido Ranch, the Carrizo Ranch and the Valley Ranch. The San Emido Ranch had about 125,000 acres, and we had about 5,000 cows and we'd run about 20,000 steers after the rains started in the fall. Then we'd sell the steers in the early spring, put them in the feedlot, then we had the cows year round. But at the Carrizo Ranch we'd just run feeders. We'd get our steers out of Mexico and bring them across the border to the ranch there, and at the Valley Ranch it was mostly steers, we didn't have any cows down there. Before I got there though, the land company had about 50,000 or 60,000 acres of irrigated pastures, and they ran lots of cattle there until they found out that it wasn't profitable because they had a selenium and copper problem in the soil and the cows would turn yellow. They went back to farming, putting in cotton and cantelopes, watermelon, tomatoes. They had a big rose operation too. I guess they developed lots of different types of roses every year. But it was a big operation. They had probably 150,000 acres of farm. I even fed our cattle cantelopes from the packing sheds. The packing sheds would, in the summer when these cantelopes would ripen, they culled these cantelopes by size. If they were a little too big they couldn't fit the right amount in a box. And if they were too small they wouldn't go in either. So we got all the cantelopes that were too small and the ones that were too large, even though they were perfect melons. And we'd just haul them out in the pastures where we had these steers, and just dump them. The dump truck would just dump them and spread them out on the ground, and these old steers would come and just tromp in them, and they had cantelope juice clear up to their eyes. Every day we'd have four or five loads of cantelopes come in, maybe five or six tons of cantelopes to the load. And we had probably 700 or 800 steers in this one pasture. But after the season was over, these cantelopes would dry and form a rind. It would turn almost to solid sugar. So the steers would go back and root up these old rinds and just chew them. You could hear them eating them for a long way because they were hard and crunchy. But they really got fat on cantelopes. Really good feed. We fed a lot of carrots. Carrots is a really good feed for cattle too. But the fat would turn orange. So you had to feed them at least 90 to 100 days in the feedlot to get the fat from orange back to white. So you couldn't take an older animal. You couldn't put a 900 pounder in there, because you couldn't afford to feed him long enough to get the fat to turn back to white. But cantelope and carrots was really good cow feed.

I: So these were three ranches, but were they under one management?

S: Oh, same company. Kern Cattle and Land Company. It was English. At one time it was all owned by English people who had money invested in cattle and ranches in New Mexico and Arizona and California.

I: So how many acres in all would you say you were in charge of?

S: Oh, probably 200,000 acres in California.

I: What were the most valuable lessons you learned when you were managing that large area?

S: What lessons did I learn? (chuckles) Sell high and buy low. (Laughs) That was the biggest lesson. Don't buy anything that you can't sell for more money. When we were buying a lot of cattle we bought cattle from every place. We had a big feedlot in Bakersfield that would run 100,000 head of cattle. So we brought a lot in from Washington and Oregon and Northern California, Louisiana, Texas, everywhere to bring them in and feed them in the feedlot there. But the cattle that did the best for us on the feedlot and on the ranches were from Mexico. We had less problems with them than with any other cattle. Cattle that were brought down in the fall of the year from Washington and Oregon had a tendency to be right off of their mothers. They were big old fat bloomy calves with long hair, getting ready for winter in Washington and Oregon. You'd bring them to California and it was still maybe 95 to 100 degrees there and it would cool off to 55 or 60 degrees at night. There was a big change in temperature, so we had a lot of pneumonia. But you bring those cattle out of Mexico and they'd really do good. We might buy them 500 miles down in Mexico, and they might have to drive them 100 miles to get them to a railroad, then maybe ship them 300 or 400 miles on the railroad, so it might be 10 or 15 days from the time we bought them to the time they got to the border. If they crossed the border, those are the ones we bought. We bought them all in Mexico, but we didn't pay for anything until it crossed the border. So they might start off with 1,000 head of steers down there and only wind up with maybe 900. A hundred of them could die on the way, but we figured the ones that got to the border were tough little buggers, and then we'd put them in trucks and ship them to California, put them on pasture or put them right in the feedlot.

I: About how many head did the operation sell off each year?

S: Well, when we had the feedlot there with 100,000 head, the operation would turn over about two-and-a-half times each year, so we had about 250,000 head go through the feedlot. So that was a pretty big operation. Just before I left we shut the feedlot down, and now where the feedlot was at it's all homes. Homes all over places where I ran cattle 30 years ago. I went back and I didn't even know where I was at when I got into Bakersfield. And when Tenneco took over the ranch, all the building was on the east side of Bakersfield. All the west side of Bakersfield was all farmland that belonged to the Kern Cattle & Land Company. And then when Tenneco took over the land company, the first thing they did, they donated about 200 acres for a college. The college started there, and then they went to selling off land and the town just moved out on the west side. All the ranches that we ran cattle on is now homes. So Bakersfield has probably tripled or quadrupled in size in the last 30 years. But they knew how to operate and sell off land.

I: Was the cattle operation profitable during the time you were there?

S: Oh yeah. Mm-hm. They made a lot of money on the cattle. The prices weren't high, but we'd bring in feed by the trainload for that feedlot. We'd get it out of the midwest. A lot of it would come out of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Mostly we fed barley but once in a while we'd feed corn. Corn was always a little more expensive than barley, so barley was the primary feed that we fed them. Barley, and we raised our own alfalfa there in Bakersfield. But there's only one feedlot left in California that I know of, Harris Feedlot. There might be a little one someplace, but all the big ones have been shut down.

And where we sold most of our cattle was on Vernon Street, in Los Angeles. There must have been five or six big packing houses on Vernon Street. So the buyers would have come two or three times a week to the feedlot and buy whole pens of cattle. We fed them in pens maybe 200, 300, 500 and sometimes maybe we'd have 700 or 800 steers in one pen, being fed. And the packer would come out and buy the whole pen, and we'd sort out the fat cattle as they got fat and ship them as they needed them. If they needed one carload or two carloads, or three truckloads, whatever they needed we'd load them in trucks and send them to them. They'd send us their trucks and we'd just sort out the fat steers and send them down. But that was a big operation. It took lots of men, lots of cowboys around the feedlot there to ride 100,000 head. There's probably about 15 or 16 cowboys there at the feedlot, riding pens and sorting fat cattle.

I: What was the labor situation like?

S: Well, it was a lot easier to get cowboys then than it is now. At that time there wasn't as big a wage difference from laborers doing carpenter work and doing cowboy work. There was a difference alright, but not as great as it is today. You couldn't pay a cowboy 25 or 30 dollars an hour to work on a ranch, you know? They're still right on the bottom of the pay scale. But you can't compete with what you can get for a carpenter, a plumber or anybody. But it's hard to get good cowboys. There's a lot of them that just want to be, and do make good cowboys. There's a lot of boys where that's the life they'd like, and they'll work for whatever you can afford to pay them, just to be out on the ranch, doing what they like to do. They like horses, they like cattle, it's just their way of life. It's a life that I wouldn't want to change. I've had a good, good, good life, being a cowboy (laughs).

I: What years were you managing that operation?

S: From about 1953 to 1971. I came over here in 1971.

I: Can you tell me why you came over here?

S: Yeah. When Tenneco took over the Kern Cattle & Land Company they were selling off ranches. And I helped inventory cattle for people we'd sold ranches to. So I knew my job wouldn't last there, but maybe a year, two years or three years at the most, and then I'd be looking for something else. So I was coming back from the ranch in Arizona, and I dropped into Prescott just to visit with a guy I knew there, Jack Ruble. Ruble and Lent are the ones that took over management of Parker Ranch in 1971. When I was working on the ranch at Seligman, Arizona, Jack Ruble had a small ranch outside of town, and we got acquainted with him. He had kids about the same age as ours, so we became good friends. So I stopped by his office, and we visited a while. I said, "Jack, by golly, if you hear of anybody who needs someone to run a ranch for 'em, or whatever, keep me in mind, because probably in no more than a couple years I'll be out of a job." He said, "How'd you like to go to Hawaii?" I said, "Fine, let's go!" I thought he was kidding. He said, "No, I'm not kidding. We're going to take over the management of Parker Ranch. Might you be interested?" And I said, "Sure! Sounds like a good deal to me." He said, "Well, we're going over in a couple of weeks, and we'd like for you to come and look it over before you say if you'd want to or not." So I went back to the office and I told the general manager that I'd like to have a little vacation, because I hadn't had a vacation in two or three years. He said, "Sure, take off all the time you want." I said, "Fine. I want to go to Hawaii." He said, "Oh, that's great. That's a real vacation." So I got over here and spent two or three days and looked the ranch over. And it's such a pretty place, you know. It had rained, and every thing was green, and where I'd been raised was New Mexico and Arizona where you'd have to look a week to find a sprig of grass. I got over here, it's nothing but solid grass, grass even growing up out of the top of the fence posts. I thought, "Boy, this has got to be the best cow country in the world."

Well, they offered me a job as kind of a consultant to Gordon Lent, who was going to be the manager here. So I took the job. But I have to back up -- my wife. They said, "You're going to have to bring Barbara over here. If she doesn't like it, well, we're not even going to think about you. But if she likes the place then we'll give you a job." So I sent for Barbara. She came right over and spent a week here and just fell in love with the place too. And the people were so nice. When she flew in, Kiyomi and Sammy Kimura met her plane and they treated her like royalty. Which was really nice, the ranch people coming to pick her up. And she stayed here for about a week, and we decided that we'd take the job. Well, that's how we got here.

And then probably five or six months after I got here, Rally Greenwell resigned, and Richard Smart called me into his office and asked me if I'd like to be livestock manager for the ranch, and I said, "Sure." Well, that's how I really got started with the ranch.

Then I was here seven years, and then I was **terminated** -- (chuckling) like a lot of other people have been terminated off Parker Ranch. But anyway, that's how I got here. And when I left here, when Gordon Lent left the ranch, about three years after he got here, and went straight to Hana Ranch. In fact, when they got here, they took over the management of Hana Ranch and Parker Ranch at the same time. Well, he had more interest over there so he left here, and then they brought in Don Hansen as general manager of the ranch, and I was working for Don. Don Hansen, myself, Jim Whitman, Gilbert Arafillis and another boy were all terminated at the same time. When we left, they gave Don and I the opportunity to take over the Keauhou ranch if we wanted. Buy the cattle and pick up the lease. Well, my wife and I thought about it for a while, and decided that we didn't want to take the offer, and Don kept his interest up and he sold his option to Dutch Schumann, of Schumann Carriage. And then I went to the Mainland looking for a job, and I found one over there. But I knew it would be out in the old, hot, hard desert out in Oregon, and I knew Barbara wouldn't like it, so I came back

here. And Don said, "Why don't you call Dutch? He's got this Paulo Ranch now, and he's looking for somebody."

So I called Dutch. In fact, I went up the next day and he was branding, and I helped him brand all day, and that evening I was working for Dutch. And I worked for him for 12 years until I retired.

I: Can we go back a bit to when you first came to Parker? Can you talk about what kind of condition the ranch was in when you arrived?

S: It was in good condition. There's nothing ever been wrong with the ranch. Probably it'd have been just about the same if it had been operated just like it was being operated. Of course, everybody that comes in wants to change something. Some of it was for the best, and some of it eventually turned right back to the way they were doing the ranch operation before. There was one big change I made that I thought was the best. When they had the Humuula lease, they were running their replacement heifers around the mountain. They'd haul them to Humuula and then just work them around the mountain and drive them back in to Mana. I changed that operation. I turned it into a cow-calf operation instead of sending the heifers around there. A lot of the animals were being lost over there. By not being handled -- they're just kind of pushed along -- by not being handled, they're kind of on the wild side, and they had a lot of other ranches to go through. And in order to get these cattle together they had to push the ones in the back to keep up with the ones in the front, and a lot of them died of exhaustion, coming around the mountain. I say a lot, I don't know how many, but if you lose one that's too damn many. But several would be lost every year coming around the mountain, due to exhaustion. So I turned it into a cow operation, and then I'd bring the calves into Humuholu, load them there, and then haul them into the Waikii section and get their weaning done there at Waikii and then we'd scatter them around through the ranch, wherever they needed their replacement heifers. Most of the feeder heifers went to Kohala, which is a good part of the ranch. Of course, Waikii is awful good when you get some rain. Well, it's all good when you get rain. But normally Kohala, I think, is the best section, all-around, every year, because it tends to get a little bit more rain.

I: When you arrived at the ranch, what would you say were the strengths and weaknesses that you had to work with?

S: That I had to work with? (Laughs) Learning how to talk to these cowboys around here. (laughs) When I came in, I know they did it on purpose, but they would talk a little pidgin, they'd talk a little Japanese, they'd talk a little Filipino -- every language. And they knew it! It was just all cowboy slang. It was just a different lifestyle, with the cowboys over here. They were a lot of fun. I think they enjoyed the pranks that they were pulling on me. But that was the toughest part, learning their expressions and what they really meant when they said something. They'd be sorting cattle in the chute, and they'd holler, "makapa!" Well, what the hell is a makapa? And I'd look, well it's an old cancer-eyed cow. You learn one word right after another, and you ask them what the word means, and gee, you can't remember all the words! So you slowly learn their language here. And in seven years, well, I was calling them a makapa too.

I: What kind of a reception did you feel?

S: I think I was pretty well accepted here. I've still got lots of friends, good friends. Two of my real good friends just died this year -- Yoshio Kawamoto and Jiro Yamaguchi. Yoshi ran the ranch up at Puuhue in the Kohala section. And gee, almost all the boys are gone now. Walter Stevens is gone, that run the Keamuku (sic) section; Henry Ah Sam, that run the Waikii section is gone, Jiro was his foreman; Danny Kanehu was a foreman at Waikii, he's gone; Tomo Fuji that had the division at Paauhau, he's gone; Charlie Kimura's left, but his dad just passed away, Yutaka.

I: So you felt accepted by the cowboys?

S: Yeah, I think so. I didn't try to push them, tell them what they were doing wrong. You've got to kind of go with the tradition. You can't come in and just change everything. We built new corrals for them, put in pipe gates where the gates had been falling down. We started a welding crew. We started shoeing. The biggest problem the boys thought they had was in their horses. When I got here, most cowboys had 12, 18, 20 head of horses in their string. That's way too many horses. I've covered a lot bigger country than this with a lot less horses. So I finally convinced them. I got them all into the community hall, and I got up to a blackboard, and I explained to them that there are only 365 days a year, and you've got off Saturday and Sunday, so that's 104 days off. You get from 15 to 30 days vacation, that's off. You get 12 holidays. So I explained that they weren't riding any one of these horses more than 12 or 15 times in a year. Boy, they couldn't figure that out. They were using all those horses, but two-thirds of them were old retirees that were just lying around, or *hapa laka*, what they call half broke, and they wasn't riding him, because they was afraid of him, or he didn't get enough riding. So we cut the horses down to seven head of broke horses and one *hapa laka*. And they got by fine. Another reason they had to have so many horses was they didn't shoe their horses, and when one got lame, they would just get another one out of the pasture.

Rally Greenwell brought in a horse, a Morgan stud that would put real hard feet on the horses, which it did. They had hard-footed horses. That was working, but they had to learn to shoe their horses when we cut them down to eight, so we started a shoeing school. Jasper Ferguson taught our boys to shoe horses, he would give them each a week under his instruction, and finally all the boys on the ranch went through this shoeing school, and they shod their horses. And they didn't mind. It just meant a little chore. And a lot of them became real good horse shoers. Donny DeSilva was probably one of the better ones, but there were a lot of them that could really shoe horses real well. That's two things we did, the welding to build fences and corrals and stuff like that, and the shoeing school, we started that. We kept up with most of their traditions, their 4<sup>th</sup> of July horse races, and they had to have a few hours off for about a month before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to train their horses and feed them grain and hay. It was just a tradition, but we didn't stop that, and they had a lot of fun.

I: What would you say were some of the more controversial changes that were brought about during the seven years that you were on the ranch?



S: Controversial? The horses were the biggest problem, I think (laughs). With me, anyway. There were other things but it wasn't my problem. One of the biggest deals was with the ranch and the feedlot. Leonard Bennet was the manager of the feedlot, and he controlled the ranch. The tail was wagging the dog. It should have been the other way. The ranch should have controlled the feedlot, but it didn't work out that way. And I guess, what he always said, the money goes in the same pocket, so what difference does it make who makes the money, the feedlot or the ranch? He had loaned us money at 9 percent to operate the ranch! (laughs) It was quite a deal. That was one of the things, but it didn't pertain to me much.

And another thing. Shipping the cattle. On the Mainland we had a better deal on shipping our cull cows. Where in the fall of the year we could cull our cows and call up a buyer and sell them and get them off the ranch, here you've got to hold that animal for almost a full year to get the last calf, and after the last calf is born, you've got almost a full year to get rid of that cow, because you can't sell all your cows to market at the same time. So you're utilizing a pasture for 3,000 or 4,000 cows for a full year. If you had 4,000 cows for a full year, you have to figure you've got an average of 2,000 cows in a pasture. If you could have sold all those cows at one time, you could have run 2,000 more mother cows on your ranch. That was one of the biggest problems we had here. Just getting rid of your culled cows -- and your culled bulls, you know, you've got to run that old culled bull just the same length of time you do your cows. And then I'd set up shipping with Young Brothers a full year in advance, all the feeders were booked a year in advance, to get bookings, because Parker Ranch had first booking on Young Brothers. If there was space left, other people could get in. We shipped on Monday and Thursday every week, and we'd have feeders and cows going twice a week. Mostly the cows were once a week and the feeders were twice a week.

When we first started they'd load these cattle right on the barge, in pens on the barge, and that was quite an operation. When the weather was bad, the surge of the ocean would go way up and down, and the old chute that goes to the barge would go up and down maybe five feet. The animal would be walking up and all of a sudden going down and would have to jump off into it. The surge would come up and the chute would raise up with the barge, and then it would go down. So an animal going up there might be walking up a hill one minute and the next minute he's walking downhill to get into the barge. It was quite an operation.

I: It doesn't sound as efficient as shipping by train, or however you did it on the Mainland.

S: Oh no, no. We could ship anywhere. If you had a drought there, on any one of the ranches, in a matter of a few days you could get pasture somewhere else. It might be in Kansas or Oklahoma or Texas, but you could find grass someplace and ship your cattle out. If you have a drought here, you **live** with them. You can't get rid of them. There's no way you can afford to ship a cow from here to the Mainland, and it's getting tougher all the time to have this many cows, every one of them has to be slaughtered right here, and you can only use so much hamburger. And then all the prime cuts are sent back from the Mainland. And not many people are killing cows anymore, I think the Hamakua (slaughterhouse) has shut down, isn't it? Andrade, I guess, is about the only one left on this island that's killing cattle, isn't it? There might be a little plant in Kona but I don't know where it would be.

I: At the time you were there, who was the most powerful figure on the ranch? Who made the decisions?

S: Well, we'd have management meetings every Friday. Early in the afternoon, I'd say about 2:30, all the foremen and superintendents would come in, and we'd meet with them. And then after that meeting there would be Gordon Lent, myself, Jim Whitman, Doctor Bergin, Richard (Smart), if he was around. If he was in town, he would come to the meetings. But all the management was done by discussion. It would all be discussed and then we'd decide which way to go with whatever decision we were working on.

I: Was there any one person who had more of a leadership role, more power in the relationship?

S: Gordon Lent and Don Hansen made the final decisions, but it was always discussed with Richard, too, prior to making any big decisions. If there was a lot of money to be spent, we'd go to Richard with that end of it. But Don Hansen and Gordon Lent made the biggest decisions. But they listened to the foremen, they listened to the superintendents, they listened to me. The business manager was Jim Whitman at the time, Doctor Bergin would put in his input. Doctor Bergin would put on a clinic every year for the cowboys and foremen and supers, and had this health program going. So that was an important part, to keep the cattle healthy, give them all the shots they needed, and all the new things that needed to be done. When I started cowboying we didn't even vaccinate cattle. And then in New Mexico they had a big blackleg hit, and it killed lots and lots of cattle. Then we started using blackleg vaccine. But it was just a little, bitty, two cc dose of blackleg vaccine. And now they get shot after shot. Every few years you have to add new vaccines. It was a lot simpler a long time ago.

I: Did that team management approach work for you? Did you think it was effective?

S: Sure. It was. You have an idea on something, and you want to bounce it off someone else, and if it's a good idea they'll come along with you and if it's a stupid idea they'll say, "Gee, you can't do that. Forget about it." The team approach is a great way for management to work. And all the big companies are going with that same approach now too. They're bringing in people off the assembly lines to get their ideas about what might work, what could help them. You know, a guy who sits in a white collar job, he doesn't know what the guy on the assembly line is thinking about, or what would improve his job. It's the same with the ranch. The cowboys had a big input on the ranch. They would say, "We need to have this whole fenceline taken care of up here. The cows are mixing." We'd discuss it, get the price. We had a priority -- we had a fencing crew too. If it was more important for this guy to be working over here than over there. But the supers, they would pull tricks too. They would think theirs was most important. So you had to kind of watch to see which fenceline needed to be fixed first, or which corral needed repair first. But Danny Kaniho was the great one. He could have a fencing crew working for him all the time. He was a powerful, big man, and he ran his division with an iron fist (chuckles). And when he wanted something, he wanted it right away. He didn't really want to wait very long. He was a great guy, and everybody liked him and respected him, but he didn't put up with any nonsense from anybody. And I guess his dad was a tough old guy too. I just met him, he was retired when I got here. In fact, when we got here, we hired five or six of the old retirees for security, and we'd put two of them together, and two of them would go to Kohala and two would go to Mana, and two would go to Waikii, and a couple would go around to Humuula, checking. They were complaining about cows being slaughtered and cows disappearing. But these old fellows thought that being hired back was the greatest thing that ever was. They had a little say. I remember Joe Pacheco, he was a great guy. Well, they were all real great fellows. But he had the biggest laugh, and was always happy. Just like his picture, that's how he looked, every time you'd see him. He was

really a nice guy. But all of them were nice guys, but him especially. He had that big laugh, and he was a big man, you know. Just real jolly.

I: Your job at the time, that was livestock manager. What did that job encompass?

S: Well, I was in charge of all the cows and horses on the ranch.

I: So that wasn't for any particular section.

S: No, the whole ranch. But, I had good men. I had Charlie Kimura, he was excellent, he had the Mana division. Henry Ah Sam had Waikii. And Yoshi had Kohala division. Walter Stevens had the Keamuku (sic) and Humuula sections. So I had real good men to start with, and they'd been here for years, so they knew what was happening. It wasn't too hard for me, because whenever you've got good men working for you, it makes your job a lot easier. And the foremen were all good boys too. Danny Kanihu was a strong foreman. And Charlie Stevens. He was a foreman under Charlie Kimura. Real strong boy. And everybody liked them. They were well liked in the community, and all the cowboys liked them. You hardly ever heard of any grumbling around Parker Ranch cowboys. Maybe they learned from years working here not to grumble (laughing), maybe they wouldn't be around. But they were real great guys.

I: You mentioned the change you brought about in the horses. What were some of the other big changes that came about during your period.

S: Big changes? Not really too many changes. One thing we did when we first got here. They had a purebred herd of registered, polled Herefords, and a small bunch of Angus. Well we had a liquidation sale and we sold the registered bulls and the cows and the Angus. And then we brought in bulls from the Mainland. Which was probably a mistake. And it wasn't really a mistake on the management's part. When they come over here, they met with Leonard Bennet. Leonard Bennet said he needed a carcass that weighed 500 to 550 -- no more than 600 pounds. So Ruble bought all these bulls from Mitchell Ranch in New Mexico. They were kind of more on the compressed side. They were shorter, heavier -- but they didn't grade well. And the Parker Ranch cattle weren't a good grading animal to start with. Well, it didn't help. That was the biggest mistake when the management came in, was bringing Mitchell bulls. They just wasn't accepted well here. The cowboys didn't like them -- they were small, they weren't as big, as masculine looking as the bulls that they'd had. But then when Don Hansen came in, I told Don that what we needed was a change in the bull battery that was here on the ranch. He was from Colorado, had a ranch in Colorado. He knew some bull breeders there that had real good bulls. The first thing we did when he got here, we had a meeting with Richard (Smart), told him our problems, and so we started buying bulls. We bought bulls from the T-Cross Ranch and the Kettle Ranch, in Colorado. And then we bought bulls from Pruitt Ray, in southern Arizona. We bought bulls in Washington, we bought bulls from Montana.

So we just changed the looks of the cattle here. When we got here there were a few horned cows, but most of them were polled cows. We changed to horned cows. Why we did that? You just get a better selection of horned bulls and big numbers than you can polled bulls. There's no big ranches that can give you 100, 150 head of polled bulls from one ranch. So you'd have to go to 10 breeders to find 10 bulls here and 10 bulls there. It's easier to get all horned bulls. So that's what we brought in.

And then after we left, well, they went through several different changes. When I first left, and Don left, they went into four different breeds. Now it's mostly Angus-Hereford, and I see some Charolaise coming in now. So they've got three breeds again. But -- change, you know?

I went on a trip, three years ago now, to Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and back to Washington state. And on that trip, I only saw one bunch of Hereford cows. All the rest of them were black cows, or European breed. There's just not very many Hereford cattle left. They're out of fashion now (laughs). You just don't see very many of them anymore. But the ones I saw were really good cows, on this one ranch. He's a hard-headed old bugger, he's not giving up on his Herefords! (laughs) But for desert country, I don't think you can beat Hereford. They're hardy. You take Hereford, with the Brahma cross, and they're **really** good desert cows. They'll go a little farther for water. When we had the big drought here, when I was at Paauilo, the cows that started going down hill first, and died first, from the drought, was Angus. They're just not as hardy a cow. And you can see why. When you go to Scotland and Ireland, all these black cows have been raised in little old pastures that's 10 or 12 acres, and they're fed in the winter, and they've got excellent grass all summer. They just weren't bred for desert country. And the old Hereford cows on the Mainland have been in the desert country long enough to get acclimated. And she knows where to go to get something to eat. But they just last longer than the Angus. That's been my experience.

I'll give you another little deal. You drive down the road here, and Parker Ranch has got some Brangus or Angus bulls in a pasture, along with some Charolais. The Angus is right down on the flat, every time I drive by, and the Charolais is up on the side of the mountain getting something to eat. You watch. When you go down the road, you look, and you'll see all those Angus bulls, right down on the flat. They're just too damn lazy to walk up the hill to get something to eat. And all the Charolais bulls are up on the side of the mountain. Where there's some feed. (chuckles)

I: Maybe you can talk a little bit about how your experience on the Mainland, running that big ranch, prepared you to work here. Were you able to draw from that experience? Or was it pretty different?

S: Oh sure, you bet. You learn something everywhere you go. If you quit learning, you're dead! (chuckles) But I learned stuff when I was just a little kid, that you just carry with you the rest of your life. My dad told me one time, and I'm pretty sure it's right, he said, "You can only turn a cow herd around two-and-a-half times in a lifetime." So if you get started wrong, you've got another one-and-a-half times to get your herd right, before you die. And I think he's pretty right. One-and-a-half times, in a lifetime, that you can turn around a herd.

I: Why is that?

S: Well, you're 10 or 15 years into a project before you know you're wrong. And then you've got to start over. And if you don't get it right that time, well, you only can get halfway through the next period. If you make one mistake, you don't know it for 10 or 12 years, a real mistake. You think you're doing alright, but if it's wrong, then you've got 10 years wasted. You start over, and there's another 10 years to develop what you're trying to do. So what's good today might not be good tomorrow.

I: You only get so many chances.

S: You only get so many chances, in a lifetime, to turn a cow herd around. And make it a good one, or half-good, or sorry, or whatever it might be.

I: What were some of the conditions that you had to work with here that were different from what you had experienced on the Mainland.

S: You didn't have to pray for rain here. (laughs) That was the big deal, saying a little prayer for rain, to fill the stock tank, or to get enough grass, without having to ship your cows. In New Mexico and Arizona, when we weaned a calf that weighed 400 pounds, we thought we were doing really good. You get out here and you wean calves 550 to 600 -- I've weaned cows at S.C. Ranch at 650. So there's a big difference. So the callouses come off my knees when I got here -- I didn't have to pray so much! (laughter)

I: It sounded like there was an economy of scale that you had to work with on the Mainland, with so many animals, so much feed available that wasn't available here. How did you cope with the poorer transportation capabilities that you had here, and the smaller amount of everything that you had to work with?

S: Well, it's really tough here. If you don't get rain, it's really serious. One time here we shipped in a lot of feed to save a lot of cows, and we fed a lot of molassas that we could get down here at Kawaihae, when the sugar mill was going. But now you can't get the molassas, because it's not around, and you can't afford to ship it in from other places, because it's just too expensive. And the freight is so high now -- if you had a big drought here, that lasted a long time, a lot of these cows are going to die, because you can't afford to get them out of here. And then I don't know what's going to happen then. But if it doesn't rain for a couple, three years here, these cows are going to die. There's no way to get them out of here. And I don't know -- it's going to be pretty serious. It's really tough. Really tough. Because you can't get them all killed. And then when a cow starts to get really poor, she's emaciated, and nobody wants to eat the meat. So it's really tough.

On the Mainland you can call up a trucker. You can send your cows to where the grass is at. One thing we did find out though, if you send a cow off to grass, you can't afford to bring her back (on the Mainland). You can't afford to put two trucking bills and a pasture bill in a cow, and bring her back. You better start over, buy cattle

in your area. But you can't afford to ship that cow, say from California to Nebraska or Texas or Oklahoma or Colorado.

(Change tape)

I: So you were saying that, on the mainland, when you shipped that cow out you'd just....

S: Sell it wherever we'd ship it to. You can't afford to bring that cow back.

I: It sounds like in Hawaii you don't have as many drought problems as you do on the mainland, but when you have them, they're more serious.

S: That's right. You don't have any wiggle-room here. You can only kill so many cows. The kill plants can't kill - if they can kill 100 cows a week, then that's the maximum they can kill. If it's 200 a week, that's all they can kill. But if you've got 5,000 cows out there that need to be dead, what do you do? You can't do anything. They're just going to die. Because you can't afford to bring feed in, it's just not in the books. It's a big problem. So the main thing is just don't overgraze your country, and just have a lot of old, dead grass laying around that they can keep alive on.

I: Was overgrazing an issue during the time you were here?

S: It was okay. When I first got here, it looked like there was just lots and lots of feed. Which there was. It was green. I learned one thing from Rally Greenwell. We were in a meeting one time, and he mentioned that you always want to have some grass left over. Because you'll need it some day, because there'll be a drought, and these old cows can live on that old, dead, kikuyu just to have something in their belly. A little salt and water and this old, dead grass will keep them from dying.

I never overgrazed, never believed in overgrazing. In fact, I don't believe in this savory (intensive grazing) system, either. Where they cut up all these pastures in little bitty pastures and rotate their cows. Intensive grazing.

I: You don't believe in that? How come?

S: (Pauses) Well, I'm an old hard-head from the west. And the bigger the pasture, the better your cows. In fact, in New Mexico and Arizona, there's places where they have the (intensive) system going, and it seems to be

working. **They** think it works. But, the way I'd like to run a cow, is when you wean your calves in the fall, cut your replacement heifers on the cow, look at the mother, see what she looks like, sort them off, turn that heifer back with her mother until March. And that old cow will take that calf back to the home range, that she was in. That old ranch in Arizona that I ran had a million acres. 500,000 acres in each pasture. You put that calf back with her mother, and turn them out, and she'll go back to the home range. So that heifer knows exactly where she can go when she becomes a mother, to get some feed. Work the back country. Your heifers learn where to go, and if you mark these cows, you'll see that one cow might have two or three heifers following along, that'll stay in a group. The mother's calf, and her calf, and there might be three or four cows that's out of the oldest cow there, in this country. But you separate that heifer, and don't put her with her mother, and put her in that country -- she's raised up here on this mountain, in the summertime. She was born there and raised there all her life -- she doesn't know where to go when you turn her out onto the winter range. She's lost. But if she goes that way with her mother for three or four months, well she knows where to go. She knows the trails to get to where she can get something to eat. But the (intensive) system, I don't know. I ran just as many cows, and I had bigger calves.

I: Sounds like it might also depend on the quality of the range and the type of terrain?

S: I don't think that has anything to do with it. When I was at S.C. Ranch, our calves would range from 550 (pounds) to 650. They put in a bunch of pastures up there now, and their calves are down to 400, 450, sometimes 500. And they're not running that many more cows. I was weaning as much weight as they're weaning. They're running more cows. But it might be the best. Because they're shipping all these cattle to the mainland now, and you can get more in a truck at 450 pounds than you can at 650 pounds, so my theory might be wrong. But I still like to see that great old big calf.

I: It's hard to depart from what you get used to.

S: That's right. I'm just an old-timer, and hard headed! (laughs) But in New Mexico, like I said, if you raised a 400-pound calf in New Mexico or Arizona, you had a pretty good calf. When I was going to New Mexico A&M, the old professor there that was head of the cattle department, he said, if you had a cow that weighed 1,050 pounds, and if you weaned a 525-pound calf on a real good ranch, that got from 25 to 30 inches of rain, that was an ideal cow for New Mexico. A cow should wean half her weight. If she weighs 1,200 pounds, her calf should weigh 600 pounds. If she weighs 900 pounds, the calf ought to weigh 450 pounds. The cows are getting smaller. When you put them in these groups, all these cows are getting smaller. Especially when you breed them at yearlings. Then they just never grow up to be as big a cow. So they're probably right to have this (intensive) system. Weaning a smaller calf, they can get more calves into one of these containers to ship to the Mainland. But when you get them to the Mainland you've got to put that extra weight on them anyway. You've got to pay 25 or 30 cents a pound for gain. That's what it was a few years ago. Have them gain over here, and ship less cattle, you can get them into the feedlot quicker, get your money back.

I: At the time that you were here, were they already shipping to the Mainland, or did that start later?

S: No. The only cattle we shipped to the Mainland was to fill planes. When we shipped bulls over we would wean off a bunch of calves and ship them back to the Mainland and sell them. But we didn't send cattle to the Mainland. We needed more cattle here, in fact.

I: Were they still slaughtering in Honolulu?

S: Yeah. A lot of our cull cows were slaughtered here on the Big Island. Miko Meat slaughtered a lot of our cows, and Jill Andrade slaughtered cows for us. And we'd sell big, fat cows to Frank Food, to make hot dogs and sausage and stuff. But all of our feeders went to Oahu, and the biggest part of our cull cows went over there too.

I: Did you work personally with Richard Smart very much? Or was he working more with the top managers?

S: On the management team, I was in on all the management decisions.

I: I mean, did he work more with Ruble and Lent directly?

S: They had meetings, of course, the top management and Richard Smart. And then Leonard Bennet at the meat company, they had their special meetings. But if there was a decision that pertained to the cattle or the horses, I was always in on it.

I: What kind of goals did Richard Smart set for the ranch?

S: Well, it was going to be put into trust....Well, he's had so many different ideas that it would be hard to say. But it was always going to be set up into a trust, going to HPA and Parker School. That was the last few years. But prior to that, it was all going to be turned over to the Parker Ranch employees at one time. But I think that was just a passing fancy. It didn't last.

I: Was he very involved with the day to day operations that you had to deal with?

S: None. He never told me a thing to do. He just okayed what I wanted to do. He was very good. He didn't challenge anything. Anytime Gordon Lent or Don Hansen or Leonard Bennet wanted to do anything he was more or less pretty compatible. He went along with most everything.

I: He listened to his advisors.



S: Yeah. It's what he hired them for. He might turn around and fire them, but he listened to them while he had them.

I: What about that turnover? I've heard from several ranchers on this island that the effects of the frequent turnover in managers in the latter years of Parker Ranch were a big challenge for the ranch.

S: It was. It was a big challenge. It was real tough. Every management has an idea. And if they go along with their program long enough it's going to be a good program. But if you start a program and you're only there seven or eight years, you're just getting into your program when you're gone and somebody else comes in with a new idea. So every time you start a program, it affects the whole ranch. It affects the morale of the boys. It's just really not a good situation to change managements. If you'd stayed with a management 25 years, or 15 years or 20 years, it'd have been a lot better than changing managers every four or five years. Because you no more than get started with a program before somebody says, "Well, I don't like that. I'm managing this place now, and I'm going to change everything." When you come in as part of a management team, you think you might be there for 20 years. But we didn't have any idea that management changed that often.

I: So that came as a surprise to you?

S: Yeah, it did to me. I thought I was pretty well set. And all at once I'm out! (laughing) I'm out in the cold! (laughing) Lookin' in!

I: Did you have any sort of impression or feeling about the reason for those frequent changes?

S: No, not really. I've got some thoughts, but I'm not going to say. It was just a big power play. The ones that had the closest ear to Richard won. That's about it. A power play.

I: Tell me about how you got terminated.

S: Well, I was sitting in my office. And in came one of the trustees, and he fired me. (laughs) And Don Hansen at the same time. We were having our little meeting, Don and I were having a discussion, and he came in and fired me, and then went in and fired the business manager, fired two other fellows. Richard at the time had had a heart attack in California and was in the hospital. (In 1978). That's when the power play started. I think maybe they thought he was going to die, and they would take control of the ranch. He didn't die, but they took control anyway. They convinced him that the manager wasn't doing a good job for him, and they decided they better take over. Which they did. And that's fine. I'm happy for them (laughs). I got a better job anyway!

I: Which trustee was it that came and talked to you?

S: I just thought of his name. It'll come to me in a little bit.

I: What did he say to you when he came in?

S: He just said they'd decided to change managers of the ranch, and we were out. It was a shock to both Don and I. And a big shock to Jim Whitman. Jim worked for Richard a lot more years than Don and I had. I imagine he'd had 15 or 20 years when they fired him. So that's the story.

I: So there was no warning in your mind, or signs of trouble?

S: No. Maybe Don might have had some, but I didn't. I thought everything was going pretty smooth. But apparently it wasn't. (laughs) Apparently it wasn't too smooth.

I: Tell me about where you went after that.

S: I went to work for Dutch (Schuman).

I: Was that right away?

S: Right away. Within two weeks after I was fired from Parker Ranch I went to work for Dutch, running his ranch.

I: Did you have any previous relationship with Dutch Schuman?

S: I'd met him one time. Just one time. And he's probably one of the best bosses I ever had. When I went to the ranch there, he'd just taken over the state lease, and he'd just taken over the Keahau (?) that was part of Parker Ranch. And there had to be lots of improvements made, and he wanted to get everything in tip-top shape. Any project that I wanted, I'd better have enough manpower to start on it when I mentioned it. Because he'd always say, "Okay, do it." If I wanted to build a fence or a new water catchment, or a barn, or whatever -- he'd go along. He wanted his ranch to be the best ranch in Hawaii. I learned right away to have enough

manpower to start that project, because he'd come back the next week, "Well, how are we doing on the fence or water tank, or barn or corral? What? You haven't started?" He was always disappointed (laughs) that I didn't have the first stake out. He wanted it done. So I learned right away that if you mentioned something, he was going to say yes, and I better have somebody ready to do it. If I wanted to build a barn or corral or fence or water catchment, whatever it was, have the manpower to start it right the next day. He wanted things to roll and get done.

I went to buy him bulls from Colorado. He bought bulls from Kettles and T-cross, and for all the years that I was there I kept buying these Kettle bulls, and I had a real good bunch of Hereford cows. Maybe, almost the best in the state. When I left there. I was the first one to bring in the embryo transplant, too, to the state. And then shortly after I started mine, Monty (Richards) started embryo transplant at (Kahua Ranch), but we started a few days **quicker!** (laughs) And then we brought in Charolais and Salers. And it was great to see those Hereford cows with a snow-white baby. (laughs) When they hit the ground, that old cow would look back and think, "Well, I don't know about that one. Where'd **he** come from?"

I: How many cows were you working with at that time?

S: About a thousand.

I: That's your breeding herd?

S: Yeah.

I: And how many acres were you on?

S: 8,000.

I: What was the approximate elevation that you were at?

S: At Paauilo it was about 2,500 to 7,000. It was a good little ranch. It was part of the Kukaiau lease. It was a state lease that Dutch got. And then the ranch down at Volcano, it's right above the Volcano golf course? Up the mountain there. It ran from about 4,000 feet to about 6,000.

I: So you had two sections?

S: Two sections, one at Volcano and one here at Paauilo.

I: 8,000 acres was the total?

S: No, no, the one at Volcano had 12,000 or 14,000, but there's only about 5,000 or 6,000 acres at Keauhou (?) you could use. The rest of it is all lava flow.

I: What were the biggest changes that you brought about in that area.

S: Didn't do too much to Keauhou. It was so run down. We ran it for two years or three years and then sold it to Kenny Dillingham. We improved the ranch more here at S.C. Ranch. Put in all new pipe lines. It was a state lease, and for the last few years, Kukaiau didn't do any improvement or improve their corral areas. It was just kind of dilapidated and fell down. They wasn't planning on getting it back anyway, or bidding it in. So their fences was bad, their water was terrible, their corrals was about to fall down, and so when we got there, we started putting in a lot of new fences, cross fences, waterlines, new troughs, new water catchments and a pumping system that picked up water from the county at Paauilo and pumped clear to the about 6,000-foot elevation. Had four pumping stations along the line, then had laterals along the main line, to water pastures on both sides of the ranch.

I: What was it like going from a big ranch with so many resources like Parker, to a much smaller one.

S: It was a lot easier (laughs). You didn't have to ride as far for one thing. (laughs) No, it was easier. You only had one person to think about, and that was Dutch. And he was always so congenial, such a great guy, and never said no to most anything I wanted to do, and that's the way he wanted it. He wanted somebody to come in and really develop his place and leave it in tip-top shape. And brand new corrals and new barns -- I had to plan for a barn one time, and he looked at my plan and said, "That's a good-looking plan, but just double the size." "Well, what are we going to do with a barn double that size?" Well, I doubled the size -- all I wanted to do was have a place to put our tools, our fencing tools and our generator and whatever we might have, and be able to bring a car in under a shed, and fix a tire without getting out in the rain. He said, "Just double the size." Well, about two years after that I doubled the size again. And then the next year I put in another deal on the other side. So it's four times bigger than what I originally started with right now. He can park all of his equipment, all his horse trailers, he's got two or three horse trailers, and four or five trucks, a big tractor, a skip loader, and he's got all kinds of equipment and he can put it all under a shed now and get it out of the rain.

I: Was the ranch profitable, or was he putting his own revenue into it?

S: It was profitable as a ranch, but he put so many different things into it that he was spending a lot of his own money. But if you'd have taken all the expenditures out, all the extras that we put in, it would have been a

profitable ranch. But he wanted the best barns, he wanted the best corrals, he wanted everything to be the best. He loved people to come up and look at the ranch. He loved to put them on the horse and take them up to show them the good cows. And then we put up a stable up there, a training arena, a big round corral, and I think the stable is 14 stalls. He loves to train horses, for his wife to get the best. He'd ship his horses to the Mainland, and she would ride in the snaffle-bit futurities over there, and here in all the horse shows. Every time somebody would come he'd try to get them on a horse. If they wasn't very good riders he'd take them a long ways and get them just as sore as he possibly could. (laughs) When they got off their horse they didn't feel too good. But he loved to show his ranch to different people, loved people to come, and knew people all over the country.

I: You retired in 1990.

S: Yeah.

I: Why did you retire then?

S: I just wanted to get my social security, that I'd paid all those years (laughs). And I'm just about to beat them! Yeah, if I last another couple of years I'm going to be ahead of them. Let's see, that's 13 years. That's pretty good.

I: Just to wrap up, maybe we could finish by my asking you what do you think your best time in ranching was?

S: Well, Paauilo, working for Dutch. Well, there's no special time, but I can remember more things that happened, and more good times with Dutch than most any other place I ever worked. But I've enjoyed my whole life. It's been hard, really tough. I was born right before the Depression, so times was pretty darn hard back then. So I learned to work when I was pretty young. Had to work. But Paauilo was probably the best time. One of the nice things about working up there -- when I retired, Dutch kept me on the payroll for five years. I'd go up and help him brand in the spring, and help them calve out their heifers, and when they started shipping in the fall I'd go help them wean their calves. But I stayed on the payroll for five years after I retired. So he was awful nice to me.