

RETURN TO KEALAKEKUA BAY

FEBRUARY 1779

Captain Cook's Final Voyage: The Untold Story from the Journals of James Burney and Henry Roberts

During the fourth night, February 7, 1779, before they even reached Maui, a gale arose that split the rotten foremast that had been replaced at Nootka Sound. While carefully splinted in the past weeks in Kealakekua Bay, the repairs did not hold in their first test, a modest storm in comparison to what they could expect was ahead in the Arctic. The officers consulted on what to do, knowing if they returned to Kealakekua Bay the Hawaiians would not understand the problem. "All hands much chagrined," King reported, "and damning the foremast." Aboard the *Resolution*, Roberts tells a dramatic story of the gales that overwhelmed the ship and how they saved as many as a dozen Natives in nearby canoes swamped by the storm.

In stark contrast to their first arrival, this time a less enchanted island people coolly received the captain and his crew. Burney said Kalani'opu'u was "dissatisfied" with their return. There seemed to be a taboo about the ships and no women or chiefs came aboard. The reverence accorded the strangers had now turned to contempt and, when the people came to the ships, it was usually with theft in mind. A Native who had been caught stealing armorer's tongs was punished with forty lashes. Some of the people were insolent and for the first time the Natives carried weapons.

Burney described the theft of the tongs on the afternoon of February 13. Midshipmen Edgar and Vancouver gave chase. They could not recover the stolen item, but were instead attacked and beaten by a mob when they reached shore. Bloodshed was only averted when a chief emerged to restore order. At dawn the next morning, Burney told Clerke that the cutter, the large shore boat critical to coastal explorations, had been taken from its mooring alongside the *Discovery*. Cook was enraged. It was a matter that Clerke should have handled, as the boat was stolen from his ship, but "Clerke was then in a deep decline in his health," Ledyard wrote, "and too feeble to undertake the affair." So Cook took over, responding as he did in Tonga and Tahiti. His plan was to take the king hostage until the craft was returned.¹²

Unfortunately for Cook, the plan backfired after an angry mob assembled. Burney quoted the captain as he formulated the plan. He wrote, "Captain Cook, who was then leaving the Ship, seeing the Canoe ashore, said he was sure she could not escape, and being asked how the Cutter was to get her if the Natives made resistance, he answered there could be no great difficulty, for he was very positive the Indians would not stand the Fire of a single Musket. Indeed, so many instances have occurred which have all helped to confirm this opinion that it is not to be wondered at, if every body thought the same."

Burney and Roberts were among the few journalists who witnessed the death of Cook, Burney through his glasses on the deck of *Discovery*, and Roberts in the pinnace he commanded a few yards from shore. Phillips was the only one on shore who gave a formal report, which was recorded in Clerke's journal.¹³ But Burney and Roberts offer gripping eyewitness accounts. In shock from the death of the captain, Roberts described Cook as "equaled by few and excelled by none, justly stiled father of his people from his great good care and attention, honored and beloved by those who knew, or ever heard of him." Today there is a memorial to Cook on the volcanic rocks where he fell. Four marines and, by Burney's report, twenty-six Hawaiians were also killed in the melee.

The narratives continued in the aftermath of the clash as the hostilities gradually subsided and Clerke, who took command, first considered retribution, then decided on a more cautious approach. He engaged King, Burney, and Vancouver in shuttle diplomacy between the two ships and the shore to secure the remains of the dead captain and four marines for a proper burial. It took nearly a week, as the bodies were apparently distributed to the chiefs all over the island, but some body parts were returned. Clerke had them buried at sea in a solemn shipboard ceremony. Burney and Roberts wrote of the quiet observance at sunset on February 22.

Roberts concluded, like Clerke, that Kalani'opu'u played no part in the melee or its aftermath. The king was just as overwhelmed as the sailors by the captain's death and, after he recovered his wits, urged peace. Soon after Cook's few remains were returned, they learned the stolen cutter and captured firearms had been destroyed. Meanwhile, the broken mast was finally repaired and brought on board and the ships sailed for Maui a second time on February 23.

JOURNAL OF JAMES BURNEY

Friday, February 5th, 1779 The light Winds continuing, made very little progress. In the Evening were becalmed and near the Shore. Hoisted our Boats out to tow off.

Saturday 6th At 4 in the Afternoon, a fresh breeze suddenly sprung up from the NE. The Canoes all left us, making towards the Land which was about 10 miles distant. In less than an hour the wind increased to a Gale and we lost sight of the Resolution to the Northward of us. At Midnight were within 3 Leagues of the South Side of Mowwhe. Stood backwards and forwards till Morning.

Sunday 7th At Daylight not seeing the Resolution and the Gale continuing, stood back to the SE to get under the Lee of Owhyhe. At 1 after noon saw the Resolution. Towards Evening the Weather Moderated. All Night Standing off and on near the NW part of Owhyhe.

Monday 8th In the Morning, being to Windward of the Resolution, took all the Sails in and set our Rigging up afresh.

Afternoon, running to the Southward along the West Side of Owhyhe. Find a Current against us. In the Night the Resolution hailed us that they had sprung their Foremast.

Tuesday 9th The Resolutions Boat came on board and informed us the Head of their Foremast was so badly sprung as to make it necessary to get the Mast out and that their Old Leak had broke out afresh, on which accounts Captain Cook was bound back to Karacacooa Bay again, there being no certainty of finding a Harbour at Mowwhe, and the Road at Atoui too exposed a place for getting a Mast out. The Indians likewise have been Sufferers by the late Gale. On the afternoon of the 6th, when we lost sight of the Resolution, their Pinnace had been sent to Sound near the Shore. In her return to the Ship they found a Canoe upset and the people trying to bale her out, which they were unable to do, the Sea running high. The Indians were taken into the Pinnace and carried on board of the Resolution, glad to escape with the loss of their Canoe. The next morning they picked up another Canoe in which was 3 men and a Child, whom they took on board and hoisted their Canoe into the Ship. In the Night, a fresh breeze from the NE with Squally Weather.

Wednesday 10th At 2 in the Morning, the Resolution having made too free with the Shore, found themselves very near Breakers and made the Signal of Danger. Both Ships hauled off till near Daylight and then ran along shore again. In the Forenoon being moderate Weather and in sight of Karacacooa Bay, many Canoes came off to us with Provisions. The Indians told us that 8 Men in a double Canoe were lost in the bad Weather.

Thursday 11th At 6 in the Morning the Resolution anchored in Karacacooa Bay, as did we 2 hours after, nearly in our old Birth and Moored the Ship. The Natives flocked about us with Hogs, Vegetables, Curiosities, etc. as formerly.

Friday 12th The Astronomers Tents were erected at the same place as before. A great many Canoes arrived in the Bay from the Northward, Kerrioboo with his followers amongst the

rest. He was very inquisitive, as were several of the Owhyhe Chiefs, to know the reason of our return, and appeared much dissatisfied at it.

Saturday 13th The Resolutions Foremast was taken out and hauled up on the Beach between the Tents and the Watering Place. All the Carpenters of both Ships were set to work to repair it. This Morning, an Indian snatched away a pair of Tongs from the Armourers Forge, with which he jumped overboard and put them into a Canoe. Our Boat was so quick after him that he had not time to get in himself but was seized and brought on board, though the Canoe escaped. He was severely flogged and kept in Irons till the Tongs were sent from the Shore to procure his release. Our Launch Watering on shore this forenoon was much disturbed by the Indians who threw Stones and played other Mischievous Tricks, which made it necessary to have a Guard when she was next sent.

In the Afternoon the same unlucky Tongs were again stolen and in the same manner by an Indian who jumped overboard and got into a Canoe with them. They were fired at with Muskets from the Ship but without execution, whilst Mr. Edgar, our Master, [and Midshipman George Vancouver] in the Small Cutter pursued them to the Shore near the South point of the Bay. Parrear, the Indian Chief before mentioned, was in Captain Clerkes Cabin when the Theft was committed and immediately left the Ship, promising to get the Tongs restored.

At the same time the Resolutions Pinnace, which was at the Tent, seeing the Bustle, rowed along shore and joined in the Chase. The Thief got first on Shore and immediately put the Tongs with a Chissel and the Lid of a Harness Cask, that had been stole but not missed, into another Canoe, which came out and delivered them to the Small Cutter. Mr. Edgar then thought of returning to the Ship satisfied with what he had got, but seeing the Resolutions Pinnace at hand and Captain Cook walking that way from the Tents, he thought he might safely venture to seize the Canoe in which the Thief had landed. For this purpose he got on Shore and was pushing her off, when Parrear, to whom it seems the Canoe belonged and who probably was the contriver of the Theft, laid hold to prevent him, which was resented by one of the Pinnace's men striking Parrear with an Oar.

A Crowd of Indians, who had been by the water side all the time, and till then quiet, immediately began to throw Stones. There being no Arms in either Boat, the Pinnace men were so roughly handled that to avoid the Stones they all jumped into the Water and swam to some Rocks at a little distance. Mr. Edgar and one of our midshipmen, Mr. Vancouver, who were on shore, fared very little better, till Parrear ordered the Indians to desist, and told our people to go on board with the Boats. This they would gladly have done but all the Pinnace's Oars had been taken away. Parrear said he would fetch them, but he was no sooner out of Sight than the Mob began to throw Stones again.

Mr. Edgar on this, attempted to walk towards the Tents, expecting to meet Captain Cook, but was prevented by some Indians who said they would lead him to Parrear. He followed these people and soon met Parrear and another Man with an Oar and a broken one. He was conducted back to the Boats and put off, rowing towards the Tents. In their way thither, Parrear overtook them in a Canoe and brought Mr. Vancouvers Cap, which

had been lost in the Fray. He then asked if he might come on board the next morning and whether we should hurt him for what had happened, being promised he should suffer no harm if he came. He went away paddling towards the Town of Kavarooa, where Kerrioboo lived.

Captain Cook, who at the beginning of the disturbance was at the Astronomers Tents, ran round alongshore towards the Boats with Lieutenant King & 2 of the Marines, but was misled by some of the Indian Chiefs, and did not know any thing of the ill usage of the Boats till he returned to the Tents, by which time it was dark and too late to take any notice of it.

Sunday 14th At daylight our great Cutter, which had been moored to the Buoy of the Small Bower Anchor, was missing, and on examining, the Rope which fastened her was found to have been cut. This Theft was the more easily committed as the Boat was left full of Water to preserve her from the Sun, which made the upper part of her Gunnel even with the Water's edge.

Captain Clerke having informed Captain Cook of this, Orders were given for our Launch and small Cutter to go armed to the South Point of the Bay and prevent any of the sailing Canoes going out, but not to molest the small ones. The Resolution's great Cutter was sent in chace of a large Sailing Canoe that was making off, their small Cutter was dispatched to guard the West point, whilst Captain Cook himself prepared to go with his Pinnace and Launch to the Town of Kavarooa with an intention to bring Kerrioboo on board.

The Canoe chased by the Resolutions great Cutter was not overtaken, but her retreat cut off in such a Manner that she was forced to the nearest Shore within the South point of the Harbour, where the Indians hauled her up, the Cutter not being able to follow for the Rocks. Captain Cook, who was then leaving the Ship, seeing the Canoe ashore, said he was sure she could not escape, and being asked how the Cutter was to get her if the Natives made resistance, he answered there could be no great difficulty, for he was very positive the Indians would not stand the Fire of a single Musket. Indeed, so many instances have occurred which have all helped to confirm this Opinion that it is not to be wondered at, if every body thought the same.

A little before 8, Captain Cook landed at the Town of Kavarooa with the Lieut Philips of the Marines, a Serjeant, Corporal and 7 privates, in all, reckoning himself, 11. The Indians made a Lane for him to march along, having always shewed great respect to both Captains, however insolent they may have been at times to others. Captain Cook had scarcely got on Shore when the Boats near the South point of the Harbour fired several Muskets at some large Canoes that were trying to get out, by which an Indian Chief named Nooenemar was killed. The first notice we had of this was from 2 Indians that came off to the Ships in a Small Canoe to complain of it, but finding they were not attended to, they enquired for Captain Cook. Being told he was at the Town of Kavarooa, they went thither.

About half an hour after this, we heard the firing of Muskets on Shore, which was

followed by the Resolutions Pinnacle and Launch firing. With Glasses we could see Captain Cook receive a Blow from a Club and fall off a Rock into the Water. The Ships then fired, but at too great a distance to make certain of any particular Mark. The Boats soon after came off with an account that Captain Cook and 4 of the Marines were killed and their Bodies in possession of the Indians.

The particulars of this Misfortune gathered from those who were on the spot, are as follows. When Captain Cook with his party landed, the Indians made a Lane and some of them brought Hogs which they offered him. He enquired for Kerrioboo and his 2 Sons. The Indians immediately dispatched Messengers and the Boys came, who conducted them to Kerrioboo's House.

Having waited some time without, Captain Cook doubted his being there. Lieutenant Philips went in to see and found Kerrioboo just awakened. He came out to Captain Cook who after some enquiries appeared perfectly satisfied that Kerrioboo was innocent of the Cutter's being stolen, and desired he would go on board with him, to which Kerrioboo readily agreed, and they walked down towards the Boats. Kaoowa, the youngest of Kerrioboo's Sons, who was a great favourite of Captain Cooks, went before and got into the Pinnacle.

When Kerrioboo came near the Water Side, 2 Chiefs and an old Woman who was crying, Stopped him, and made him sit down. He then seemed irresolute and frightened. At this time our people began to suspect Mischief. The Marines were stationed on a Rock close to the Water Side that they might not be surrounded by the Natives, who were seen to be arming themselves whilst an Old Man, who seemed to be one of the Priesthood was singing to Captain Cook and Kerrioboo as was thought to prevent suspicion. Captain Cook then let Kerrioboo go and said he was not to be forced on board without killing a number of People.

The Old Chief was immediately taken away and no more seen. Captain Cook likewise was about to give orders for embarking, when he was provoked by the insolence of a man armed with a thick Mat and a long Spike, at whom he fired with Small Shot, which neither penetrated the Mat nor frightened the Indians as was expected. Another Man with an Iron Spike came near Mr. Philips who, suspecting his intentions, drove him back with the Butt end of his Musket. 2 or 3 Stones were then thrown and one of the Marines knocked down. Captain Cook who had a double Barrel Gun immediately fired with Ball. The Serjeant said he had shot the wrong Man, on which he told the Serjeant to Shoot the right. The Indians gave a general Volley of Stones and began to close on our people. Captain Cook therefore gave orders for the Marines to fire, which they did amongst the Crowd and were seconded by the Boats. The Indians at first gave back, but directly after, before the Marines had time to load again, advanced.

Captain Cook called out to take to the Boats. The Pinnacle was near the Shore, but distant from the Rock where the Marines Stood 10 or 12 Yards and this Short Space was uneven Slippery Rocks, so that being pressed upon in their retreat, they were obliged to take to the Water. Captain Cook in coming down was Struck by an Indian behind him with a Staff on which he turned and beat the Man back with his Musket. He was again

followed and received at the same instant a Blow on the Head and a stab with a Spike in the Neck, which tumbled him into the Water. Being no swimmer and stunned with the Blow, he turned towards the Shore again and a Number of Indians Surrounded and dragged him on the Rocks, where they Beat and stabbed him in several places, snatching the Daggers from each other out of eagerness to have their Share in killing him. Four of the Marines were killed, one of them on shore (Thos Fatchet) whom nobody knew what became of, the other three in the water, viz. James Thomas, Corporal, John Allen and Theophilus Hinks, private. The Corporal had loaded again and received a stab in the Belly when up to the middle in the Water. He fired at the Indian who gave it and directly after fell dead. They were all dragged on shore.

Of those that escaped the Lieut of Marines was wounded in the Shoulder by a Spike, the Serjeant received a slight wound, and one of the Marines, [John] Jackson, was struck in the Face with a Stone, but which he is in danger of losing an Eye. Being unable to swim he would probably have been drowned or fell into the hands of the Indians, had not Lieut Philips jumped overboard out of the pinnacle and assisted him. The People in the Boats, at first had so little apprehensions of any danger from the Indians, that when the firing began on Shore, the Pinnacle [Henry Roberts in command] put close in to the Rocks to let Kaoowa Land, as he was much frightened and asked to go.

The whole of this affair, from Captain Cooks leaving the Resolution to the return of the Boats, happened in the Short space of one Hour. 9 Stand of Arms with Iron Ramrods, besides Captain Cooks double Barrel Gun and Hanger, fell into the hands of the Indians.

On Notice of our defeat, the Boats stationed near the Points of the Harbour were recalled and a strong reinforcement sent to Lieut King at the Tents and Soon after Orders to Strike them and get the Resolutions Foremast off. Many Indians being seen assembling to the right of the Tents, kept firing with our great Guns to disperse them, and a large Party of our People were posted on the Morai, which overlooked that part of the Beach where the Mast lay, to protect those who were busied in launching it.

About 1 every thing came off from the Shore without any other molestation from the Indians than a few Stones, in return for which, some of them were shot who ventured nearer than otherwise they would have done, from an Idea that their Armour (thick Mats Soaked in Water) were Musket proof. Notwithstanding this, an Indian of the priesthood named Kerrikaer, well known amongst our People, remained with them till the Tents were struck and supplied them with Drest Hogs, Cocoanuts and Water.

The Indians were observed to be very carefull of conveying away their Dead. Proofs of great courage were shewn by 2 Men in carrying off a dead Body from within reach of our Fire.

At 4 in the Afternoon the Boats were sent to the Town of Kavarooa to demand the dead Bodies. On approaching the Shore, Stones were thrown which fell short. Lieut King went in with our small Cutter waving a white Flag, whilst the other Boats lay on their Oars. The Indians left off throwing and waved a white Flag in return. They had already made a number of little Stone Breastworks to screen them from our Fire Arms, and

during the conference they several times counted our numbers. In answer to the Demand, some Chiefs said that tomorrow the Bodies should be brought, of which, word was sent to Captain Clerke.

An Old Man named Kooaha, whom we have all along taken to be the Chief Priest, had the confidence to swim off and get into the Boat, where he remained some time. He had an Iron Dagger in his Hand. This is the same man who performed the Strange Ceremonies when Captain Cook landed at our first coming here. The reason given why the Bodies were not Delivered to Night was that they were carried some distance up into the Country.

At another part of the Town, however, the Indians made Motions which we thought Signified they were cut to pieces, and one Fellow came to the Water Side flourishing Captain Cook's Hanger with many tokens of exultation and Defiance. Orders soon after came for the Boats to return.

After Dark, a Guard Boat was stationed to row round the Ship, lest any of the Indians should swim off and attempt to cut the Cables. They were very busy on shore all Night, making much noise, running about with Lights, and Howling, as we supposed over their Dead.

Monday 15th In the Morning Kooaha, the Chief Priest, came in a Small Canoe alongside the Resolution, and desired that Captain Clerke or Mr. King would go on shore for the dead bodies. He was answered we expected they would bring them. He came off 3 or 4 times in the course of the day and always with the Same Message.

It being suspected the Indians were collecting a number of Canoes behind the NW point of the Harbour, the Resolutions pinnacle was Sent to look but found none. The Indians threw Stones at the Boat as She went alongside.

In the Afternoon Lieut John Gore was appointed to command the Discovery, Captain Clerke having taken the command of the Resolution. Likewise, Mr. William Harvey was appointed 3rd Lieutenant of the Resolution.

At 8 in the Evening, 2 Men came off in a Canoe, one of them Kerrikaer, who was with our people in the Morai when the Mast was getting off. He brought with him a Small bundle in which was the flesh of one of the thighs of our late Commander. He said the body had been burnt and the limbs distributed amongst the Arees or Chiefs as trophies; that what he now brought was secretly and without their knowledge. He advised Captain Clerke to give no credit to Kooaha, the Chief Priest, none of the Indians being inclined to peace except those living in the Towns round the Bay, who were most likely to be the sufferers. The account he gave of the loss sustained by the Indians was 20 killed at Kavarooa and 6 from the Morai at Karacacooa, besides many wounded. Amongst the dead were 6 Chiefs, 2 of whom were Kanine and his brother, the former of greater consequence than any of the rest. He had been a constant visitor to the two Ships, in particular to the Resolution, where he exercised his authority in keeping his countrymen orderly, the same as Parrear had formerly done on board our Ship. At 10 Kerrikaer was conducted past our Ship by the Resolutions boat, lest we should fire at him in his way to

the Shore.

Tuesday 16th About 2 in the Afternoon, a Small Canoe came from the town of Kavarooa and stopped near the Resolution. After looking at her some minutes, an Indian in the middle of the Canoe stood up and put Captain Cooks hat on, making many flourishes and antick gestures expressive of defiance and derision. He was fired at and a boat manned to chace him, on which he made towards the Shore, where he was received with great Shoutings by a crowd of Indians. 3 great Guns were fired which dispersed them.

Notwithstanding this, the Old Chief Priest came from the town of Kavarooa almost directly after and paddled several times about the Ships, asking for somebody to go on Shore. Two boys likewise swam off from the Town of Karacacooa, each of them holding a Spear and singing or rather repeating a set prayer. Being permitted to come on board, they delivered their spears and asked to stay with us. Not understanding the meaning of their errand, they were sent on shore again.

Wednesday 17th In the morning, carried out small Anchors and warped the Ship nearer to the town of Karacacooa so as to command the Watering place. At 9 the Launches of both Ships were sent with the Resolutions Casks and with them the other boats Armed.

At their landing and during the whole time of watering they were pelted by the Natives from their houses and from behind Stone walls with which many of the houses are surrounded. Although a constant fire of Musketry was kept up at every man that was seen and several great guns fired from the Ships, all this did not prevent Kooaha from coming off to the Ships with the same pretext as before. From the Ships he went to the beach near our waterers to whom he offered a Pig. Being turned away, he landed at the houses beyond the Morai and was afterwards seen amongst the Stone throwers.

At Noon the boats returned with 2 launch loads of water. Our Stock of fresh pork and vegetables being out, Served Salt provisions and biscuit again.

During dinnertime, our small Cutter was stationed near the well to keep off the Indians lest they should play tricks with the water. In the Afternoon, Lieut Rickman was sent again for water, with orders in case of Molestation to set fire to the Town.

The Indians beginning with their Slings, the boats were directed to keep out of the way of the great Guns and a constant firing was kept up from the Ship for about 15 minutes, after which our people landed and set fire to the houses between the watering place and Morai (about 60). 7 or 8 Indians were killed and one taken prisoner, who was sent on board the Resolution and afterwards released.

The well where we watered being at the foot of a Steep hill, a Crowd of Indians got on that part right over the waterers and rolled large Stones down, some of which came very near and made our people run to get out of the way, which always produced a loud Shout. Among these people we saw Parraer and none appeared more busy. A wall piece was fired from the Ship but would not carry the distance. Except this, the Waterers met with very little disturbance the rest of the day, scarce an Indian appearing within reach of a Musket. The inhabitants of the Town beyond the Morai were seen carrying their things

away inland.

At 5 in the Afternoon, the Indians on the hill having been for some time quiet, about 12 of them walked down to the Waterers, each holding a white flag and a Sugar Cane. At the head of these people was Kerrikaer with a very small pig. He said he was sent by Kerriboo to desire peace. One of our boats took him off to the Ships. At Sunset, the waterers came on board and soon after Kerrikaer was landed again. We learnt from him our great Cutter had been Stole by Parrears people and that she was broke to pieces the day after Captain Cook was killed. In the Night Canoes came off to the Ships with Bread fruit, Sweet potatoes, etc.



Henry Roberts, “Ka’ra’ca’coo’a [Kealahou] Bay in the Island of O’why’he [Hawai’i],” February 1779. Roberts drew his charts of bays and harbors with precision and careful penmanship, but this is probably his most well-known, as it formed the basis of the official chart of the bay published in the third voyage journal. Roberts Journal p. 45, Vol. II, Dixon Library, State Library of New South Wales, DLMSQ 151-52 and DLMSF 2.