

Interview with Susumu Tanimoto 8/5/96 Tape 1 side A

CL: I guess I'd like to begin with asking you what year you were born.

ST: 1918.

CL: 1918. And in Hilo?

ST: In Pahoia.

CL: In Pahoia. And I think you told me, what year did you tell me that you started working at [Hilo Country Club]?

ST: 1945.

CL: Okay. How did you happen to learn to play golf end up up there?

ST: Well before I went to the Country Club I never did play golf. But working there for couple of years then I took up golf cause I was on the golf course.

CL: So how did you go up there to work? What were you doing first?

ST: Well I was a heavy equipment operator all during the war and that's a tough job. The last job that I work was going up Kulani, Stainback highway.

CL: Oh you made that road?

ST: Yes, I was the one out there knocking all those trees with a D-8 that the Territory, first D-8 that came to the island. And when I reached up to Kulani, I asked for release and they did. Because then my son was born and I figured this is no way of making a living.

CL: It's hard on your back I think that yeah.

ST: It was. I couldn't eat too. Hard on your stomach too.

CL: So then when you went up to the Country Club what were you doing up there?

ST: Well I first went to the Country Club as a custodian and during that time there were nobody around. Everybody was drafted or either volunteered. So they didn't have any guy, any custodian. And for me it was lucky because my wife could be in the kitchen and I could take over the rest of the janitorial job and everything. That's how we started.

CL: And then you started playing golf.

ST: After a couple of years I started to play.

CL: And when did you start becoming a golf pro?

ST: That was after '58, 1958.

CL: So I guess my question is who was... that Country Club up there, what kind of membership did it have?

ST: Well at the time I was there, to begin with that golf course was put up by the plantations, all the C. Brewer and all the big fives. All the plantation managers were the members and directors so whenever we want something like fertilizer, we got it from the plantations. That's the only way we could have survived then. Mostly it was managers and the bank, the judges, the police chief and all those.

CL: Must have been mostly haoles then.

ST: Mostly haoles. Well when I first there they won't take any Orientals or any other nationality.

CL: So you had to be a member to play or

ST: Right. But towards the end they open it up to let the outsiders play. But they play only from 1:00 in the afternoon.

CL: What year do you think that was when they opened up.

ST: I don't remember.

CL: Would it be '60's after you

ST: Yeah right, after I became pro. That's why they made me the pro, to get all Orientals, all the doctors and lawyers and all the Oriental businessmen. So I did went out and I got a lot of the businessmen and professional men to join the club. And we were doing fine.

CL: I know that there was, the Hilo Municipal Course was also going?

ST: No, at that time, Hilo Municipal opened up 1958 or '59. And from there on the membership became low because they could play golf cheaper. So then we start struggling.

CL: It was rainy up there I think, yeah?

ST: Every year it's more than 200 inches. I used to take the reading and when it reached 200 I let it go. I say no sense. Too much.

CL: So was that another reason why people preferred Hilo Municipal?

ST: Right, because it rained more up at the Country Club. I don't know about today though but boy those days it rained I tell you.

CL: It still rains.

ST: I believe it still does, much heavier than Hilo. So that area is not suited for golf course.

CL: Yeah that's what I think too.

ST: Because of the rainfall it's hard to grow the required grass on the green. Whatever the grass that we were trying to put on the green, won't take all the rain. And even the fertilizer because it leaches, it washes off and oh my, all kind of problem up there.

CL: Do you know what year it closed? Were you still there?

ST: No, I left there. That's why they close. I left there in 19, in 1980, 80 something though. Anyway I wasn't happy with the club so I just resigned and... They hired another pro while I was still working there. That got me mad you know so I quit. And after I quit all the boys that I have brought them to the club, to let them join, they all resign too. So right off the bat gone. They had no income then. All the guys that I had recruited, they all resign when I resign and left the club. I think they operate about six months after I left.

CL: So would you say it's fair to say that the competition from the Municipal course was one problem and then when you left That was another?

ST: Yeah. It was the golf courses coming up all over the place, that's competition. If they could play freely and cheaper, naturally they all go and play on the cheaper side.

CL: So going back to your early years there, when it was mostly big five managers, did the club house have functions?

ST: Yeah, they had.

CL: Can you tell me a little more about that, how often and what kind.

ST: Well mostly it was, all the functions like socializing was done at the Yacht Club, the same members. That Country Club was mostly for golf. And all the social gatherings, the same group, they all belonged to the Yacht Club. So that was the place where they did all the

CL: Okay. So the club house up there was just, how big was the club house?

ST: It was quite a big club house though. We could seat 250 for dinner, upstairs and one open floor you know. We could seat 250.

CL: And were there dinners there very often?

ST: Yes. We had catered to some you know class reunions and some weddings and things like that.

CL: And what about the members? Did you have like dinners along with golf or

ST: Very seldom, when we have big tournament. As I say all the other socializing was done at the Yacht Club.

CL: And how much tournaments was there those days?

ST: Well say we had about, we had the Hilo Open, we had the Island Champion, four or five big ones through the year. Cause we were the only golf club then, before the Muni came.

CL: Was there any golf courses in Kona?

ST: No. There was one in Volcano.

CL: The one that's there now.

ST: Yeah, one Volcano and one at Honoka'a and the Hilo Country Club. I think that was about, Volcano, the Volcano Country Club was, yeah.

CL: So did golfers from there come to the tournaments?

ST: They all did. This was the Island Championship we holding all the time. And when we had public links qualifying we used to have that too. So we had about four or five major tournaments. Because we were the only club sanctioned with the PGA then.

CL: And what about, did you ever have tournaments that included the Oahu?

ST: Yeah, Hilo Open.

CL: Oh, Oahu came over for that.

ST: Yeah. When we call it a Open it's not only this island.

CL: Oh. I'm kind of ignorant about that.

ST: We had that then every year we had one Hilo Open where we invited all the pros from Oahu and Kauai, Maui, all around.

CL: So would you say, were you the first golf pro on this island.

ST: No, there were lots of people before me. Jimmy Ukauka was before me.

CL: Ukauka?

ST: Ukauka.

CL: Is that a Hawaiian name or Japanese name?

ST: He's a Hawaiian, Hawaiian. I don't know, he's mix. I think he's got some English in him too.

CL: And he was at Hilo Country Club before?

ST: Pro, yeah. He was the one before I was. When he left, I took over.

CL: Did you learn from him?

ST: No actually way back when I was first, I wasn't a pro yet. We had a fella by the name Paul Han. He was the great trick shot artist. But at that time he wasn't that yet. He jumped off the boat, Merchant Marine, at the Hilo port and called the Country Club and say, Hey does somebody play golf over there? I say, what you mean, this is a golf course. He says, well I want to have a game. So I say, I ask him, I say, hey what's your handicap? He say, well I'm a pro. So I say, I'll fix you you bugga. So I called our best, which at that time was Carlsmith and Henderson. Boy did that guy get taken from them two. So after the game, I don't know, the two, they were the president and vice president, Carlsmith and Henderson, they offered him a job off the boat. Say you get off the boat and be the pro over here. So he took it and he stayed there for about year and a half. And this guy he couldn't play the game. He would lose to most any guy you know. But he could teach. He knew everything. He was a smart, brilliant guy. He could cook because he was on the Merchant Marine, he could do most anything. And likable guy, nice guy. And way back before he became a Merchant Marine, because of the likeness, the love of golf, he worked for all time in South Carolina. He's from South Carolina, he worked for one great known pro there and then he was fixing club and doing everything. That's where I learned

how to, he used to fix so I used to go in and watch him do it. He was clever. He could do anything that man and he was a good teacher too. Then after he left the Country Club he became world renown eh. Paul Han, trick shot artist. He made all the rounds around the world.

CL: Do you know how he spells his name?

ST: H-a-n.

CL: H-a-n. Sounds Chinese.

ST: Paul Han.

CL: Okay, let me show you this map of the golf course. It's not a really wonderful map. It's a sketch map that the archaeologist who went through made this map. You know the Country Club Estates now up here yeah.

ST: Yeah, right.

CL: And I guess that's on the lava.

ST: It's all on the lava. Because right on the 7th fairway as soon as we leave this fairway that's all lava.

CL: Okay. You don't have an old score card or anything that would have a map of the course do you?

ST: No, I really don't. I should have kept but that time I never thought. A lot of people ask me, you have any card? No I don't.

CL: You got any idea of anybody who might have?

ST: Hard to say eh. No I won't know of anybody.

CL: Well we'll have to operate from this then I guess. You know this is the Country Club road here and I think the club house is up in this [northeast] corner.

ST: Right.

CL: And then down over on this [east] side is old cane.

ST: Yeah.

CL: And then I guess below was cane too, or not.

ST: Way before I got there must have been. All the golf course was cane they tell me. Before the Plantation took over this land this was all cane I hear.

CL: The guys I talked to said there was never cane up there but they could be wrong.

ST: They're wrong because at the golf course I used to have seen the furrows, you know the bumps.

CL: Yeah. You use to do what with the bumps? Oh you used to see the furrows.

ST: Yeah. They were cane rows I believe, yeah? And that still remain. They tell me when they first build that thing all the plantations send their mules, not caterpillar now, with mule they use harrows, and dug up all that and level it up for a golf course. But certain places the thing remain, you know the rows that they furrow, they cut. So they must have been cane before. And that's all real soil. There's no rock on that Country Club golf course.

CL: Yeah. Well it's pretty early. It was before any of those guys.

ST: Well I really don't know but I figured it was cane because the flume came right through the golf course. Underground though.

CL: Okay. That was another question. Did you see it?

ST: Yeah. Well we used to take some of the water on where the fourth green was. It was exposed, you know, crossing the river. So we took the water.

CL: Oh, where's the river on here? I know there's a ditch down here but...

ST: Yeah, that's the one.

CL: That's the one.

ST: This is the ditch that came through. And this used to be a warehouse where we kept all the machinery, the grass mower and all.

CL: Okay, great. And then now where was the flume?

ST: Well this is the club house? We shot here, up here was the one, two, right across this ditch here.

CL: The one here? You can mark the old greens.

ST: Well this is the club house, number one green was somewhere around here, number one this. Then you walk across, this is number two. They shot right across this river to the corner of this. This was number two. Then along side this going up, all the

fence up till here, was number three. Now they walk across, this is the forest again yeah. Now the tee back, and we go way down there, this is number four. Now after we finish this four, we had a bridge there across.

CL: Maybe they got wrong.

ST: This river, this four was over here. Number four was here. After we finish that there was a bridge and this is the flume. It came through all underground. And it was exposed right here to cross the river. It was a flume, water flume, plantation.

CL: They did talk about it had been buried by the, when they bulldozed the course I guess. Or they didn't bulldoze. I guess they dug it up with the plow.

ST: Then come across and come over here, come way up number five. Now this was the next one go down to this corner here, number six. Now number seven was right along side this, number seven. Now number eight was the tee here, come between this two palm trees, number eight. Now walk here, number nine, the tee is here, came all the way back down and around here. This was number nine.

CL: Yeah, back to the club house. Oh good. So nine holes.

ST: Nine holes.

CL: Okay, that's great. I think this must be the, there was no more, only just this one bridge, right.

ST: Only one bridge. Well we had another bridge, one we crossed from number one to number two. We had one small bridge there.

CL: Up here?

ST: Yeah. There's a small bridge there, down in the hollow yeah. Right across.

CL: So do you remember a road down here?

ST: Yeah, the Sweet Kimi's used to live on here.

CL: Kimi's?

ST: Yeah. Senator Kimi, right here. Senator Kimi, his home was there.

CL: How you spell that?

ST: K-i-m-i.



CL: Okay. And was there another bridge down this side somewhere.

ST: That no I don't know.

CL: I think maybe this, they saw a bridge. It's probably the one that you're talking about.

ST: Up here no bridge. Up here was all forest already back there. No, no bridge.

CL: Cause I know that's in the wrong place.

ST: This is the bridge. We cross, after we finish number four we cross over to number five. It's when we went through here. And tee off there, way up.

CL: This is four right?

ST: Yeah. Then you cross this and go through the rough, and tee off over here, way up on the hill. This is a big hill. Cardiac hill we used to call it.

CL: This one.

ST: This one coming up. Cardiac hill. Yeah, par five eh. Then we shoot down straight, and walk across straight, straight on the upper boundary, number six par three. Then we go on this extreme end, number seven. Then we come up. This is a two line of palm trees that you coming through. Yeah, then the nine hole you come right down and turn around, lug leg ready from the club house.

CL: This one I gotta change. So they saw one other little shack, somewhere around like here.

ST: We had a shack on number four, number three is along side, we came up number three. Number three is here, right? And when you walk across right on this four tee was a shack. A rain shed. It's a rain shed.

CL: Get out of the rain.

ST: Yeah, that's all it was. We had one over there and we had one at the seven. Yeah, rain shed.

CL: Makes sense.

ST: And we had one up at number five. This right here, rain shed. There, that's all.

CL: So was there any other special features of the course?

ST: No, nothing else.

CL: Nothing ornamental or

ST: No.

CL: Aside from the palm trees, was there any other trees planted, any other kind?

ST: No. The palm trees are still standing over there.

CL: Yeah I think so. They said they saw.

ST: And this club house is still there although it's all run down. The framework is still there, the stone at the front of the club house. Yeah with the year 1924 or '25.

CL: That's one the, is it on the wall?

ST: Yeah, wall, yeah.

CL: Like a foundation wall.

ST: Yeah, right. I hear, I haven't gone back to that, although I live only not even a mile away but I never went back to check because the way I left the place. I didn't want people to think that I had some vengeance or something you know. So I never did go back and see. But now the people tell me you cannot drive through. For a while you could have you know come through this road and cut up here and come in here and right in front of the club house turn around.

CL: Oh yeah, like this.

ST: Yeah right. But they tell me all this is all plugged with old cars and rubbish and all, cannot. So when you drive through you can see the front wall big. Like this, big high wall, the year when they built. Well I still say that was one of the nicest club house. Too bad though. And we had a bar. I don't know somebody must have taken the bar. We had a bar there. All with hard wood, koa. Oh one of the best. Real, real old timer.

CL: So was just one story?

ST: Two story, like this basement. That's where we had all our everyday doing. You know golf, golf shop, lunch. We serve lunch on the, upstairs was purely for big gatherings, dance.

CL: Oh had dances too?

ST: Oh yeah.

CL: Ever have bands up, must have bands up there then.

ST: No, well we used to hire every weekend or whenever, whenever needed we used go out and hire a band.

CL: What kind of bands?

ST: Oh swing instrument sometimes. Sometime brass. We had lot of groups you know four or five guys and group. Mostly it was the Hawaiians yeah.

CL: Oh they played Hawaiian music.

ST: Yeah Hawaiian music.

CL: I was curious if it was Hawaiian music or jazz or what.

ST: No, no. No more that brass jazz music. Oh probably had but they cost so much.

CL: Let's see, one other thing is a little bit farther over. Must be past here. One of the guys said he saw a pond. But that's not probably part of the golf course.

ST: A pond?

CL: Yeah.

ST: No.

CL: Must be for some other purpose. Well I can't think of much else. Let me just check and see if my supervisor had any other ideas. Oh I do want to ask you a little bit more about that flume. Water was still running though it in '45?

ST: Yes.

CL: Do you know where it came from?

ST: I didn't check. But it was the plantation that made, they were using that to flume the cane.

CL: Yeah, cause I know there was, maybe I can show you on this. Although it might not help. There was two flumes.

ST: Through the golf course?

CL: No. One, like here's, I'll just stop this for a minute. (end of interview)