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George Prince Kaumuali‘i, the Forgotten Prince

Catherine Stauder provides considerable historical data on George Prince Kaumuali‘i, the first born son of King Kaumuali‘i, the last king to rule over the islands of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau. She discussed his military record and reached the conclusion that the royal prince and his missionary benefactors were less than honest in reporting his exploits in the U.S. Navy during the war of 1812. However, additional material gleaned from military and secular records indicates George Prince Kaumuali‘i may not have been such a lying rascal after all. The purpose of this article is to revisit the period in question, and consider some other documentation which has come to light that indicates that the Prince probably was indeed wounded in combat during the war of 1812, but the particular sea battle cited in the religious press is in error.

A brief chronology of George’s activities based upon Stauder’s article follows:

Jan. 1804 to July 1805: George left the island of Kaua‘i at the age of four aboard the Brig Hazard, an American trading vessel, under care of Captain James Rowan. His original Hawaiian name was Hume-hume, but his father, King Kaumuali‘i, suggested he be called George (after King George of England) when he went abroad. The lad was sent off alone by his father to obtain an education in America. The ship sailed first to the Northwest Coast of America, then back across the Pacific to China, the Indian Ocean, around Africa arriving in Providence, Rhode Island eighteen months after leaving Kaua‘i.

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1805 to about 1807: George lived with Captain Rowan in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he was enrolled in a private school under the instruction of Samuel Cotting.

1807 to 1813: Rowan spent whatever money was available from King Kaumuali‘i, and could no longer keep the boy. He turned him over to Samuel Cotting, George’s instructor, who reluctantly took him in. Shortly thereafter, Cotting quit teaching and moved to another town with the child who worked for Cotting in his trade as a joiner.

1812 to May or June 1815: Sometime during this period, George left Cotting. This is the period of the War of 1812, and a few months beyond. It is this particular period of time that is the primary focus of this research.

June 1815 to December 1815: George enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and was assigned to the USS Enterprise, travelling to the Mediterranean, but was not involved in any known sea battles.

December 1815 to Spring of 1816: Upon return to the United States, George was transferred briefly to USS Guerriere, in port, and transferred again to the Charleston Navy Yard where he worked for the Purser’s office.

Spring of 1816 to October 1819: George was “discovered” and taken under the wing of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). He was sent, along with Henry Opukahia and other Hawaiian youths, to be educated at the Foreign Mission School at Cornwall, Connecticut and three years later was placed aboard the Thaddeus with the first band of Christian missionaries to sail from New England to Hawaii.

George’s exploits during the war of 1812 are questioned by Stauder who concludes that George, either on his own initiative, or with the encouragement of his missionary benefactors, embellished the truth about his military service. George was hailed in the religious press as a military hero, severely wounded by a boarding pike wielded by a British seaman in hand to hand combat in the battle between the USS Enterprise and the British ship, Boxer, in one of the great victories for the fledgling U.S. navy in the War of 1812. Claims such as this undoubtedly opened the hearts and the pocketbooks of those sympathetic to the Foreign Mission School soon to open at Cornwall, Connecticut, and the first Missionary band to leave America for the Sandwich Islands.
Stauder concludes that George never was in military combat, and that his wound, if it existed at all, was definitely not from the battle between the Enterprise and the Boxer. A brief recap of quotations cited by Sauder to support this conclusion follows.

The Boston Recorder, on November 26, 1816 reported that George came to Boston and enlisted in the navy. The first vessel George served was the Enterprise. He was in this vessel in the action with the Boxer, in which he was badly wounded. He was afterwards on board the Guerriere, in the action with the Algerine Frigate . . .

The same newspaper article includes the text of a letter George wrote to his father, the king, dated Oct. 19, 1816. In this letter, George writes:

... I went to Boston and listed in the U. States servis, and I shipped on board the Brig. Enterprise, in order to go and fight with the Englishmen. After I went on board I went to sea then, and I was about thirty days from land before we met the enemis that we wear seeking after. We came to an Action in a few minutes after we hove in sight. We fought with her abought an hour, and in the mean time, I was wounded in my right side with a boarding pike, which it pained me very much. It was the blessing of God that I was kept from death. I then drafted on board the U.S. ship Guerrier. I went then to the Strects of Mediterrenean. I had a very pleasant voyage up there, but was not there long before we fell in with the barbarous turks of Algiers. But we came to an action in a few minutes after we spied these people, we fought with them about three hours, and took them and brought them up to the city of Algiers, and then I came to Tripoly, and then I came to Naples, and from thence I came to Gibraltar, and then I came back to America.

The London Missionary Register expanded on the wounding of the prince by reporting:

... He was in the engagement between the Enterprize and the Boxer, was one of the boarders, and while in the act of boarding received a wound in the side from a pike. The British sailor who gave the wound was about to renew the thrust, when he was disabled and slain by an American who stood by the side of the prince

Stauder’s research of the muster rolls of the U. S. Navy, and other documents for the period brought out some startling inconsistencies.
between the foregoing documents and the actual muster rolls and ship movements during the war of 1812. In particular, Stauder points out:

1. The name George Prince cannot be found on the Navy muster rolls for the *Enterprise* for the period of time when that vessel engaged in its battle with the British ship *Boxer*, which took place on Sept. 5, 1813;\(^5\)

2. The sea battle between the *Enterprise* and *Boxer* did not involve the crew of either ship boarding the other in combat—so it is unlikely George could have been wounded with a boarding pike;\(^6\)

3. The *Enterprise* engaged the *Boxer* on the 5th day after leaving its U.S. port, not 30 days as George indicates in his letter to his father;\(^7\)

4. The Navy muster roll data indicated that George Prince first came aboard the *Enterprise* in June of 1815, almost two years after its battle with the *Boxer*, and after the conclusion of the war of 1812! A tracking of the muster rolls shows him going with the *Enterprise* to the Mediterranean, and making a tour there. There are no reports of serious action between the USS *Enterprise* and the Algerians.

5. The *Guerriere* did engage in a fierce battle with an Algerian Frigate, but this battle took place on June 17, 1815\(^8\), a date where George is clearly aboard the *Enterprise* on the other side of the Atlantic and not yet in the battle area. George Prince wasn’t discharged from the *Enterprise* to the *Guerriere* in New York until December of 1815. He was there only a few weeks before being transferred to the Boston Navy yard where he was finally located by the missionaries.\(^9\)

Obviously, something is wrong with the published reports of George’s military service. Stauder’s research was based upon U.S. Naval muster rolls for the ships mentioned in the religious press. A more thorough search of military records of the period indicates that George Prince served two separate tours of duty. It was his second tour, beginning in June of 1815 after the conclusion of the war, that is documented by Stauder.

Stauder’s chronology indicates that George left the care of Samuel Cotting in 1813 and immediately hired himself out to a farmer at hard labor where he worked up until his enlistment in the Navy in June of 1815. This is based on a report in the Missionary Register that states:

> Here the Prince continued [with Cotting] till the spring of 1813; when, becoming discontented with his situation, he left his master, and went
to a neighbouring town . . . George next engaged himself to a farmer, in whose service, so far as can be ascertained, he labored hard and received much harsh treatment, with a bare subsistence. Here he continued till May or June, 1815 . . .

Stauder concludes that Mr. Cotting, who took over George’s care when the boy was given up by Capt. Rowan, treated George kindly and that Cotting was legitimately upset when he and Rowan were not given proper credit for the early training of the lad. She quotes Cotting’s letter written to the editor of the Massachusetts Spy which states in part:

It is not true that George was very much neglected by Captain Rowan; but he was treated with great kindness and attention, until a reverse in his situation rendered this impossible. I rejoice at the favourable turn in the fortunes of the lad, but regret that his new friends should have encouraged and aided him in addressing a letter to his father, so unfounded in many of its statements and devoid of gratitude for a single favor received during ten years of residence among a Christian people.

During his continuance under my care, a period of six or seven years, no means were spared to give the young Prince all the advantages of education which the publick schools, in the various situations where he was placed, afforded.

George’s response to Cotting’s letter is found on file at Harvard with the records of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Here, George indicates in colorful vernacular that he had a completely different opinion of his treatment as a young child.

To Capt. Cotting

Few days since I have heard that you have made a report that I was treated with the most tenderest and affectionate care. It is contrary to any of what you have reported. Sir, I am now going to give you a piece of my mind. Upon the subject you publish I have always said whenever I got able and power that if you ever come into my reach I would level you to the face of the earth. Sir, if you ever come into my presence and God give me power, I will yet.

The last winter I lived with you, you treated me shamefully. I will pay you for it whenever I have the privilege. But it will be very dear to you,
you may depend upon it. You are a dirty low life shameful poor averi-
cious rascal. You have not only abused me but you have your fellow
mortals . . . You tried to enlist me in the Army. That was a mean dirty
trick; not only that but many others. You did not let me attend the
schools as I had ought. That was Capt. Rowen entention when he com-
mitteed me to your care. But no, after you had got under your protec-
tion, you used me like a dog more than a human being. Yes you put me
to all the hardships that any human being could have. You publish in
the public papers that you educated me. It is a falsehood, it is an abso-
lute lie, and you are the father of it. Sire, I mean to write the same I
would speak to your face. You audacious villain for trying to run down
my character. If I am worthy of the title of Prince I am not going to
be trodden under foot by such a dirty scoundrel as you are . . . I may
have the opportunity of letting you have a few very solid knocks before
I leave this part of the world.

I now leave you as I found you as big a rascal and as big a villain as
ever. I believe you are hasten to everlasting destruction. If it be the Lord
will may you not.

I your enemy 12

There are documents that show George left Cotting in the spring
of 1813, but instead of hiring out to a farmer until 1815, he found his
way to Newburyport, Massachusetts where he enlisted in the U.S.
Marine Corps. The name George Prince appears at Newburyport as
a private in the United States Marine Corps assigned to a naval vessel
which had just completed construction, the USS Wasp. 13

There were very few significant sea battles during the war of 1812
that involved hand-to-hand combat. This is the type of battle in which
a crew member might sustain an injury with a boarding pike, a long
spear designed for close combat situations. One of the most deadly
boarding battles at sea was that of the Sloop of War USS Wasp vs. the
HMS Reindeer. Here, the historical account comes very close to what
George described in his letter to his father.

The Wasp left Portsmouth on her maiden combat voyage on May
1, 1814, coming into her first action on June 2nd. (George’s letter
states he was 30 days out prior to action). During June, the Wasp
defeated the British vessels Neptune, William, Pallas, Henrietta, and
Orange Boven. It was on the 28th of June that the Wasp encountered
the Reindeer. 14 The Reindeer ran her bow over the Wasp and fierce
hand-to-hand combat occurred on the decks. According to a British account of the engagement, there were both U.S. Navy and Marines aboard the *Wasp* who were killed and injured:

Out of 173 men and two boys in complement, the *Wasp* had two midshipman and nine seamen and marines killed and mortally wounded, and fifteen petty officers, seamen and marines wounded severely and slightly.¹⁵

A vivid account of the *Wasp/Reindeer* battle can be found in Theodore Roosevelt’s book *The Naval War of 1812*. He writes:

At 3:36 Captain Blakely [of the *Wasp*] finding his enemy did not get on his beam, put his helm a-lee and luffed up, firing his guns from aft forward as they bore. For ten minutes the ship and the brig lay abreast, not twenty yards apart, while the cannonade was terribly destructive. The concussion of the explosions almost deadened what little way the vessels had on, and the smoke hung over them like a pall. The men worked at the guns with desperate energy, but the odds in weight of metal (3 to 2) were too great against the *Reindeer*, where both sides played their parts so manfully. Captain Manners [of the *Reindeer*] stood at his post, as resolute as ever, though wounded again and again. A grape shot passed through both his thighs, bringing him to the deck; but, maimed and bleeding to death, he sprang to his feet, cheering on the seamen. The vessels were almost touching, and putting his helm aweather, he ran the *Wasp* aboard her port quarter while the boarders gathered forward, to try it steel with steel. But the Carolina captain had prepared for this with cool confidence; the marines came aft; close under the bulwarks crouched the boarders, grasping in their hands the naked cutlasses, while behind them were drawn up the pikemen. As the vessels came grinding together the men hacked and thrust at one another through the open port-holes, while the black smoke curled up from between the hulls. Then through the smoke appeared the grim faces of the British sea-dogs, and the fighting was bloody enough; for the stubborn British stood well in the hard hand play.¹⁶

An examination of the Naval Muster rolls for the *Wasp* includes not only Naval enlisted men, but a small contingent of U.S. Marines.

On December 8, 1813 the name George Prince appears as a Marine private assigned to the USS *Wasp*. He remained on the *Wasp* muster
roll until April 14, 1814, just two weeks before she sailed for her encounter with the *Reindeer.*

He is shown as “Discharged” to the Portsmouth Navy Yard, on April 14th, but his name does not appear on the Marine Corps or Navy muster rolls at Portsmouth for April, May or anywhere beyond that date. Note, that in the terminology of the muster rolls, “Discharged” or “Detached” to a facility or ship does not mean termination from military service, but is often a term used for being transferred to another station. A paper trail can be followed where a party is “discharged” from one muster roll to a particular vessel or location, and then appears on the new location muster roll the same or next month.

If George were transferred to Portsmouth Naval Yard on April 14th, how does one explain the fact he does not appear on the Portsmouth rolls from that date forward? Servicemen who desert are usually indicated on the muster roll with a notation of desertion. There is no such notation for George Prince—he simply did not serve at Portsmouth. If he were terminated from service, there should be a notation on the muster roll that he was honorably or dishonorably discharged. One plausible explanation would be that in the haste of forming the battle crew, the Marines reconsidered the transfer of George and immediately recalled him to duty on the *Wasp,* which was soon to sail. There was a small contingent of Marines that did sail with the *Wasp.* In this event, George’s recall information should be shown on the muster roll of the *Wasp* of May, 1814 forward. The *Wasp* muster rolls were filed onshore through April of 1814, and subsequent muster rolls were prepared aboard the ship at sea. Unfortunately, the remaining muster rolls of the *Wasp* after April, 1814 are lost forever. The ship never returned to the U.S. after her departure in May of 1814. The *Wasp* sailed across the Atlantic for her encounters with the British, all of which took place near the English Channel. After her battle with the *Reindeer,* she put in for repairs at L’Orient in France. After discharging wounded and being refitted, she sailed again for battle in the Atlantic. The *Wasp* sank in the Caribbean around October of 1814, apparently the victim of a severe storm. The muster rolls which could prove whether George Prince was once aboard went to the bottom with her.

Of the *Wasp*’s original crew, the only ones who would have sur-
vived would be the seriously wounded who were put off the ship in L'Orient, France, or transferred at sea to a friendly vessel to return to America after the bloody engagement with the Reindeer.

Is it possible the previously quoted press reports about the prince were accurate in substance, but not in detail? Note there is no mention in the articles of George's serving in the U.S. Marines, nor on the Wasp, yet there is muster roll evidence that he did so. If one were to substitute the battle of Wasp vs. Reindeer for the erroneous indication that George was in the battle of Enterprise vs. Boxer, we will find the original newspaper accounts and George's letter falling into place. Turning back to the contemporary record of the time, the Boston Recorder article of November 26, 1816 gives an interesting clue as to what probably happened. It states:

After the war ended, [in December 1814 with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent] George was again thrown upon the world; and without any means of obtaining a livelihood, or any one to care for him, ragged dirty and in want he was again [emphasis mine] enlisted, and employed as a servant to the Purser of the Navy Yard in Charleston.20

The word “again” in this report indicates George had two separate tours of service. After receiving a medical discharge from the Marines upon his return to America, George could well have hired himself out to a farmer for a few months where he struggled to make a living until he decided to re-enlist in June of 1815 aboard the Enterprise.

A question arises as to whether someone could serve in two separate branches of the armed forces during that period. The George Prince on the Wasp was a Marine private, while the George Prince on the Enterprise was a Navy landsman. Landsman is a rank given to someone who has little or no experience as a seaman. Marines aboard navy ships primarily performed guard duties, sniper assignments and close quarter combat. A marine, therefore, did not necessarily learn the ropes of sailing a ship. In response to a query, a letter received from the Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, states:

It appears that George Prince may well have served in both the Navy and the Marine Corps during the War of 1812 . . . Although not a common practice in the early eighteenth-century (sic), servicemen occasion-
ally enlisted in the Navy, Army, or Marines, after fulfilling their obligations in a different service.\textsuperscript{21}

Note that if George were fabricating his military story, a serious scarring wound from a boarding pike would be difficult to lie about and not be discovered by those who lived with him in close quarters for several years.

The missionaries hoped for a happy ending—first, the Christianizing of the young prince, then the return of the converted Prince to his homeland to be reunited with his father, Kaumuali‘i.

Up to the point of his “discovery” by the missionaries, George’s personality had been forged in an atmosphere of oppression, hardship and danger. To be sure, they found him to be quite intelligent, and likeable when he was in a good mood, but they also found his volatile personality a difficult one to tame. All his life, George had been an outsider, whether as a little Hawaiian-speaking boy among the raucoius sailors on the trading ship, \textit{Hazard}, which brought him to New England, or as a dark-skinned lad among white children in a private school in Worcester, or as an unwanted burden to his guardian, Samuel Cotting, who sought to pass the boy off to the State. Even in military service, George was a foreign citizen fighting alongside patriotic Americans against the enemies of the United States.

Sadly, this misfit status of the prince would continue for the rest of his life.

At the Foreign Mission School at Cornwall, Connecticut, several other of his countrymen were also in attendance. With the exception of George, these Hawaiian-speaking boys were being trained to speak English. George, however, needed to learn Hawaiian. His “royal” status was not lost on his fellow native students, who understood only too well the significant difference this would mean between them once they returned to the islands. They would be commoners, and George might one day rule over them.

When the pioneer Missionary company to the Sandwich Islands was formed in the autumn of 1819, three years after George was taken under the care of the ABCFM, four Hawaiians were selected to return to Hawaii aboard the ship \textit{Thaddeus}. Three of them, William Kanui, Thomas Hopu, and John Honolii were baptized members of the
church and considered "pious" by the religious authorities. The fourth Hawaiian was George Prince Kaumuali'i. The Missionary Herald of April 1825 would later record in retrospect regarding his status:

George was never, we believe, considered as pious... It was thought that George should accompany it [the missionary company aboard the Thaddeus]; not that any religious influence was expected (his character even then not authorizing such expectations) but because he was the son of one of the principal rulers... He was, however, in no sense a missionary, nor was he regarded as sustaining any relation to the Board, nor has the board been in any degree responsible for his conduct.22

This distancing of the ABCFM from George took place after he failed to line up to their stringent, puritanical definitions of proper, civilized, Christian conduct. It has a far different tone than earlier, glowing reports of the Prince’s progress and character, which appeared during the preparation time for the mission to the Sandwich Islands in 1816 to 1819. What actually happened to disillusion the missionaries?

George returned to the Islands with all the outward trappings of a proper Christian—dressed up in coat, cravat and ruffled shirt of New England society as he played the bass viol accompanying the hymns sung before King Liholiho (Kamehameha II) on the quarter-deck of the Thaddeus the first Sabbath after reaching the islands. Through a whirlwind courtship of only a few days, he married Betty Davis, the half-Hawaiian daughter of the Englishman, Isaac Davis, who had been poisoned in retaliation for thwarting a plot to assassinate George’s father, Kaumuali‘i, on O‘ahu several years before.23

George had an emotional reunion with his father, but then, in the disappointed eyes of the missionaries, forsook many of his civilized, Christian ways. Mercy Whitney, one of the pioneer missionary team wrote in her diary about two years after George returned:

For a short time after our arrival, he appeared to interest himself in our welfare, but soon began to grow indifferent, and has adopted one native habit after another, till one would scarcely suppose he had ever seen civilized societies, much less dwell among them. It is said he eats his raw fish and poe like the other natives.24
Ironically, George’s father, Kaumuali‘i became more and more influenced by the missionary teachings until he was considered a virtual convert by the time of his death on O‘ahu in May of 1824. By then, Kaumuali‘i had been kidnapped from Kaua‘i by Liholiho, and forced to marry the matriarch of Kamehameha’s line, the powerful Ka‘ahu-manu. As such, by the time of Kaumuali‘i’s death, it was presumed that Liholiho, then absent in England, had full royal authority over all the islands, including George’s hoped-for inheritance of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau.25

By this time, George had taken back his birth name, Humehume, and used this name among his own people. “Humehume” means to tie up, as tying up the *malo*, or girding the loins for battle. After the death of his father, George made one last attempt to live up to the name Humehume by tying up his *malo* and leading a rebel band of warriors seeking to overthrow Liholiho’s military rule over the Russian Fort at Waimea, Kaua‘i.

This final military skirmish proved to be a disaster. Kalanimōkū, the commander of Liholiho’s armies, successfully defended the fort, and shortly thereafter, a last ditch effort by George and his men to fight off Kalanimōkū’s armies ended in a bloody rout in the valley of Hanapēpē, with George, his wife and infant daughter barely escaping on horseback with their lives. His wife and daughter soon were captured, but George eluded the searching armies for several weeks before being found alone, naked, virtually starved and in a drunken state high in the rain forest.

Kalanimōkū showed the rebellious prince mercy by sparing his life, relegating him to house arrest, and moving his family to Honolulu. However, by this time the spirit of George P. Kaumuali‘i was broken. A few months after his capture, at the young age of twenty five, George succumbed to the ravages of influenza, dying on May 3, 1825. Levi Chamberlain described his funeral, which was held, not in the church, but at the graveside with a short service offered by Hiram Bingham:

George Taumuarii was interred this afternoon in the common burying ground. His funeral was attended by his wife and thirty or forty natives . . . All that remained of this once favored youth—of high hopes and flattering prospects was then committed to its narrow lodging; and dust to dust pronounced by the hollow echo of the coffin as the earth was quickly thrown in upon it by the many hands that had been waiting.26
To this day, there is no known memorial of George Prince Hume-hume Kaumuali‘i’s final resting place.

NOTES
2 Stauder 32.
3 Stauder 33.
4 Stauder 34.
5 Stauder 35.
6 Stauder 35.
7 Stauder 35.
9 Stauder 35–36.
10 Stauder 38.
17 Microfilm Publication Number T829, roll 136 (USS Wasp) National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
18 Rebecca A. Livingston, letter to the author 3 July 2000.
20 Stauder 32.
22 The Missionary Herald (Boston) April 1825.
23 John Papa Ii, Fragments of Hawaiian History (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press 1959) 89; Stauder 40.
24 Mercy Whitney, “Journal,” The Journal Collection, HMCS.
26 Levi Chamberlain, “Journal,” The Journal Collection, HMCS.