

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. 239

Acknowledging the contributions and sacrifices of the young men who served as colonists on behalf of the United States in the Federal occupation of the islands of Howland, Baker, Jarvis, Canton, and Enderbury from 1935 through 1942, facilitating the United States claim of jurisdiction over such islands.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 26, 2011

Mr. AKAKA (for himself and Mr. INOUE) submitted the following resolution;
which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Acknowledging the contributions and sacrifices of the young men who served as colonists on behalf of the United States in the Federal occupation of the islands of Howland, Baker, Jarvis, Canton, and Enderbury from 1935 through 1942, facilitating the United States claim of jurisdiction over such islands.

Whereas in the mid-19th century, the Guano Islands Act (48 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.) enabled companies from the United States to mine guano from a number of islands in the Equatorial Pacific;

Whereas after several decades, when the guano was depleted, such companies abandoned mining activities, leaving the islands open to British exploitation;

Whereas in the 1930s, military and commercial interest in Central Pacific air routes between Australia and California led to a desire by the United States to claim the islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis, although the ownership of such islands was unclear;

Whereas in 1935, a secret Department of Commerce colonization plan was instituted, aimed at placing citizens of the United States as colonists on the remote islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis;

Whereas to avoid conflicts with international law, which prevented colonization by active military personnel, the United States sought the participation of furloughed military personnel and Native Hawaiian civilians in the colonization project;

Whereas William T. Miller, Superintendent of Airways at the Department of Commerce, was appointed to lead the colonization project, traveled to Hawaii in February 1935, met with Albert F. Judd, Trustee of Kamehameha Schools and the Bishop Museum, and agreed that recent graduates and students of the Kamehameha School for Boys would make ideal colonists for the project;

Whereas the ideal Hawaiian candidates were candidates who could “fish in the native manner, swim excellently, handle a boat, be disciplined, friendly, and unattached”;

Whereas, on March 30, 1935, the United States Coast Guard Cutter Itasca departed from Honolulu Harbor in great secrecy with 6 young Hawaiians aboard, all recent graduates of Kamehameha Schools, and 12 furloughed army personnel, whose purpose was to occupy the barren islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis in teams of 5 for 3 months;

Whereas in June 1935, after a successful first tour, the furloughed army personnel were ordered off the islands and replaced with additional Kamehameha Schools alumni, thus leaving the islands under the exclusive occupation of the 4 Native Hawaiians on each island;

Whereas the duties of the colonists while on the island were to record weather conditions, cultivate plants, maintain a daily log, record the types of fish that were caught, observe bird life, and collect specimens for the Bishop Museum;

Whereas the successful year-long occupation by the colonists directly enabled President Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 7368 on May 13, 1936, which proclaimed that the islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis were under the jurisdiction of the United States;

Whereas multiple Federal agencies vied for the right to administer the colonization project, including the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, and the Navy Department, but jurisdiction was ultimately granted to the Department of the Interior;

Whereas under the Department of the Interior, the colonization project emphasized weather data and radio communication, which brought about the recruitment of a number of Asian radiomen and aerologists;

Whereas under the Department of the Interior, the colonization project also expanded beyond the Kamehameha Schools to include Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians from other schools in Hawaii;

Whereas in 1937, in preparation for Amelia Earhart's arrival on Howland island, the colonists constructed a landing field, readied a shower and bedroom for her, and pre-

pared a performance for her, but she never arrived, having disappeared en route to the island on July 2, 1937;

Whereas in March of 1938 the United States also claimed and colonized the islands of Canton and Enderbury, maintaining that such colonization was in furtherance of commercial aviation and not for military purposes;

Whereas the risk of living on such remote islands meant that emergency medical care was not less than 5 days away, and such distance proved fatal for Carl Kahalewai, who died on October 8, 1938 en route to Honolulu after his appendix ruptured on Jarvis island;

Whereas other life-threatening injuries occurred, in 1939, when Manuel Pires had appendicitis, and in 1941, when an explosion severely burned Henry Knell and Dominic Zagara;

Whereas in 1940, when the issue of discontinuing the colonization project was raised, the Navy acknowledged that the islands were “probably worthless to commercial aviation” but advocated for “continued occupation” because the islands could serve as “bases from a military standpoint”;

Whereas although military interests justified continued occupation of the islands, the colonists were never informed of the true nature of the project, nor were the colonists provided with weapons or any other means of self-defense;

Whereas in June of 1941, when much of Europe was engaged in World War II and Imperial Japan was establishing itself in the Pacific, the Commandant of the 14th Naval District recognized the “tension in the Western Pacific”

and recommended the evacuation of the colonists, but his request was denied;

Whereas, on December 8, 1941, Howland Island was attacked by a fleet of Japanese twin-engine bombers, and such attack killed Hawaiian colonists Joseph Keliihananui and Richard Whaley;

Whereas in the ensuing weeks, Japanese submarine and military aircraft continued to target the islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis, jeopardizing the lives of the remaining colonists;

Whereas the United States Government was unaware of the attacks on such islands, and was distracted by the entry of the United States into World War II, which delayed the retrieval of the colonists;

Whereas the 4 colonists from Baker and the 2 remaining colonists from Howland were rescued on January 31, 1942, and the 8 colonists from Jarvis and Enderbury were rescued on February 9, 1942, 2 months after the initial attacks on Howland Island;

Whereas, on March 20, 1942, Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, sent letters of condolence to the Keliihananui and Whaley families stating that “[i]n your bereavement it must be considerable satisfaction to know that your brother died in the service of his country,” and subsequently urged the families to submit claims for compensation;

Whereas in April 1942, the claim of the Keliihananui family was denied because there were no “qualified dependents” to submit claims;

Whereas during the 7 years of colonization, more than 130 young men participated in the project, the majority of

whom were Hawaiian, and all of whom made numerous sacrifices, endured hardships, and risked their lives to secure and maintain the islands of Howland, Baker, Jarvis, Canton, and Enderbury on behalf of the United States, and 3 young Hawaiian men made the ultimate sacrifice;

Whereas none of the islands, except for Canton, were ever used for commercial aviation, but the islands were used for military purposes;

Whereas in July 1943, a military base was established on Baker Island, and its forces, which numbered over 2,000 members, participated in the Tarawa-Makin operation;

Whereas in 1956, participants of the colonization project established an organization called “Hui Panala‘au”, which was established to preserve the group’s fellowship, to provide scholarship assistance, and “to honor and esteem those who died as colonists of the Equatorial Islands”;

Whereas in 1979, Canton and Enderbury became part of the republic of Kiribati, but the islands of Jarvis, Howland, and Baker still remain possessions of the United States, having been designated as National Wildlife Refuges in 1974;

Whereas three quarters of a century later, the Equatorial Islands colonization project has been nearly forgotten;

Whereas May 13, 2011, marks the 75th anniversary of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order proclaiming United States jurisdiction over the islands of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis, islands that remain possessions of the United States; and

Whereas the Federal Government has never fully recognized the accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices of the

colonists, less than 6 of whom are still alive today, and most of whom are in their 90s: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) acknowledges the accomplishments and sac-
3 rifices of the Hui Panala‘au colonists and extends
4 appreciation on behalf of the people of the United
5 States;

6 (2) acknowledges the local, national, and inter-
7 national significance of the 7-year colonization
8 project, which resulted in the United States extend-
9 ing sovereignty into the Equatorial Pacific;

10 (3) recognizes and commends the accomplish-
11 ments, sacrifices, and contributions of the more than
12 130 young men, the majority of whom were Native
13 Hawaiian, who participated in the Equatorial Pacific
14 colonization project; and

15 (4) extends condolences on behalf of the United
16 States to the families of Carl Kahalewai, Joseph
17 Keliihananui, and Richard Whaley for the loss of
18 their loved ones in the service of the United States
19 and apologizes for the lack of compensation afforded
20 to these families.

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