The U.S. Army on Kaua‘i, 1909–1942

Following the annexation of the Republic of Hawai‘i by the United States in 1898, the U.S. Army viewed the Islands in a strategic context. They were seen to be the advance outpost in the western defenses of the mainland United States. The airplane was in its infancy and posed no threat, so land-based cannons were emplaced on O‘ahu to prevent naval bombardment of Honolulu and Pearl Harbor. Kaua‘i had nothing of strategic importance that required similar fortifications. It was enough for the Army to construct a harbor on the island suitable for receiving ocean going troop transports if an invasion were threatened.

The Army’s outlook changed when the performance of military airplanes improved. Advance warning and early interception of enemy aircraft approaching O‘ahu were needed. Kaua‘i’s location relative to O‘ahu became a factor, and in the 1920s the Army began to establish airfields on the island. Then, in the mid-1930s, senior officers began expressing the importance of keeping an enemy off Kaua‘i at all costs. They believed that the island could help feed O‘ahu in the event that Hawai‘i was isolated and that Kaua‘i must not be used as a jumping-off place to invade O‘ahu. While a battalion of infantry was assigned to Kaua‘i, little of the defense preparations was completed before the Japanese struck. Nevertheless, the Army’s immediate response to the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on O‘ahu included doing what it could to strengthen Kaua‘i’s defenses.


Secretary of War William Howard Taft visited O'ahu in 1905 to gather information on defenses needed by the new territory. President Theodore Roosevelt had charged Taft with leading a committee to report on strengthening port and harbor defenses. Taft's committee made its report in late 1905, and Congress made appropriations subsequently. The report called for fortifications to prevent bombardment of Honolulu and the naval base at Pearl Harbor. The Army's Corps of Engineers and Quartermaster Corps would do the construction, and they lost no time getting started.

By 1909 the O'ahu fortifications were well along, and the Army turned its attention to the outer islands. An immediate concern was the need for all-weather and deep-water harbors on every major island to facilitate landing of troops and materiel.

Kaua'i was a special case for the Army. The sugar plantations dominated the economy, and they had already invested heavily in harbor facilities. The plantations, including Lihue Plantation Company in the southeast, preferred shipping their sugar from Ahukini Landing in Hanamā'ulu Bay. Other plantations, from Koloa Sugar Company in the south to Kekaha Sugar Company in the west, shipped their product from Port Allen near Hanapēpē.

Investments in those facilities played a strong role in slowing the

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**Fig. 1.** Map showing location of Kaua'i relative to O'ahu. Kaua'i is ninety miles west-by-northwest of O'ahu. Also shown are locations cited in the text. (W. H. Dorrance)
Army's attempt to establish an all-weather deep-water harbor on Kaua'i.

In 1909, Port Allen was unsatisfactory for the Army's needs. Shipment to and from that port entailed lightering the cargo between the dock and steamers anchored offshore. No such transfers occurred in bad weather. Hanama'ulu Bay was too small to permit docking of large ocean-going transports. The smaller interisland steamers could tie up at the wharf in the bay, but larger vessels found maneuvering to be difficult in the harbor. In the Army's opinion, something more was needed.

Major E. Eveleth Winslow (1883–1928), district engineer of the
Corps of Engineers, visited Kaua‘i in 1909 and 1910 and inspected all bays and harbors to determine which was best suited to be developed as an all-weather harbor. He strongly recommended development of Nāwiliwili Bay. However, the sugar plantation interests were not wholly convinced, and as a result follow-up by the territorial government was slow to come.

The territory was unwilling to contribute to the cost of improving the harbor until it was established that the freight that would move through it would justify the investment required. The only entities on the island that could supply the traffic were the plantations, and they were content to stick with the existing arrangements. If the Army expected financial participation by the territory, it would have to win the support of the Kaua‘i sugar farmers. Several years of sparring over the issue ensued.

Finally, World War I accelerated action on developing the harbor. The 1919 Congressional River and Harbor Act specified appropriations for developing the harbor, providing the territorial government met certain requirements. These included: one, the Territory of Hawai‘i contributing $200,000 toward the expense involved, and, two, connecting plantation railroads such that the entire southern region of the island would be accessible to the harbor by rail.

The Army's influence was clear. While connecting the plantation railroads would encourage shipments from the new port by the plantations, it was also true that connecting the railroads would facilitate moving Army personnel and materiel during emergencies. The requirement seemed reasonable since the connections required were short and every plantation railroad used the same 30-inch narrow gauge.

George N. Wilcox (1839–1933), missionary son and proprietor of Grove Farm Plantation, who had been influential in kingdom and then territorial affairs, stepped into the breach and purchased the entire $200,000 bond issue that supplied the required territorial funding. The Army had won a powerful advocate among the sugar planters. Not only was Wilcox proprietor of one of the largest sugar farms on the island, but he was a director of Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, the principal shipping company active in interisland trade. Wilcox's support was unflagging at a time when the other Kaua‘i plantations resisted development of Nāwiliwili Harbor.
After considerable negotiation, the plantation railroads were connected. The final connection between the rails of the Koloa Plantation and those of Grove Farm Plantation was made in 1930, making possible continuous railroad passage from Kekaha in the west to Anahola in the east (though I have found no evidence that any train made that lengthy trip). It was in July of that same year that the ss Hualalai became the first large vessel to tie up to the territorial dock in Nāwiliwili Harbor.⁶

In the years between 1919 and 1930, the Corps of Engineers constructed the 1,250-foot-long breakwater that protects the harbor. The Corps dredged the inner harbor to a depth that permits large ocean-going vessels to maneuver within the harbor and tie up to the wharf that was constructed by the territory.⁷

George N. Wilcox’s financial support of the Nāwiliwili Harbor development was an act of faith on his part. Until 1948, Grove Farm Plantation’s crop was milled by the Lihu’e mill and the Lihue Plantation Company continued to ship the mill’s product, including Grove Farm Plantation’s share, through Ahukini Landing. Yet Wilcox remained steadfast, and he and Grove Farm Plantation continued to invest in Nāwiliwili Harbor despite periodic work stoppages and failure of contractors to complete their work. The Corps of Engineers support continued through all the difficulties because the Army saw Nāwiliwili Harbor as being the principal all-weather port on the island.

Major Winslow was the senior Army officer present in the territory when he made his 1909 visit to Kaua‘i. Winslow was an exceptional Army engineering officer, and Kaua‘i was fortunate to command his interest at the beginning of this important time. Graduating first in his class from the military academy in 1889 he established a reputation of being the Corps of Engineers’ foremost expert on coastal defense fortifications. His word was well-respected back in Washington.⁸ Such was Winslow’s reputation within the Army that he was reassigned in April 1911 to supervise construction of fortifications to protect the Atlantic and Pacific entrances to the Panama Canal, then under construction.⁹

Kaua‘i has its principal deep-water and all-weather port, so important to sustaining the island’s economy, thanks to the initiatives of Major Winslow, George N. Wilcox, investments by Grove Farm Plan-
tation and the territory of Hawai‘i, and federal investments administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1913 Congress passed an act requiring that National Guard units conform to the organization and doctrines of the Regular Army in return for receiving equipment and training assistance. The territory had been struggling to establish units on Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Maui, and Hawai‘i with little success. Following the 1913 act, a battalion was organized on Kaua‘i, and the Army supplied Regular Army officers for training purposes.

The island’s population was about 23,000 at the time; 75 percent were foreign nationals ineligible to serve in the National Guard, and many of the remainder were ineligible through sex, foreign birth, or age. The Kaua‘i National Guard turned to prominent residents for leadership. Douglas Dwight Baldwin, manager of Hawaiian Sugar Company plantation at Makaweli, served as battalion commander for a time, and Frank Cox, manager of the Waimea Hotel, served as captain of one of the battalion’s companies.

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the conflict was far from the Territory of Hawai‘i. Nevertheless, the territory’s National Guard units were federalized and grouped into the newly constituted 1st Hawaiian and 2nd Hawaiian Infantry Regiments, which served out the war at Schofield Barracks on O‘ahu.

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**Fig. 3.** U.S. Army transport *General Royal T. Frank* outbound from Honolulu Harbor. This vessel, launched in 1900, was 165 feet in length and displaced 601 tons without cargo. (U.S. Army Museum of Hawai‘i; photo circa 1935)
Included were many of Kaua‘i’s native sons who were inducted with the Kaua‘i battalion. Some of Kaua‘i’s young scholars had their schooling interrupted to serve in the Army. Among them was Lindsay Anton Faye, later manager of Kekaha Sugar Company, who served out the war in the Field Artillery. Except for accelerating interest in improving Nāwiliwili Harbor and this short period of military service by native sons, World War I had little lasting effect on Kaua‘i.

When the Army inactivated the mine planter General Royal T. Frank in 1919, it assigned the little ship as an interisland U.S. Army transport. This ship performed yeoman service transporting personnel and materiel among the islands, and when seen within Kaua‘i’s harbors signified the Army’s presence somewhere on the island.

The U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps made an appearance on Kaua‘i in the 1920s when a auxiliary airfield was constructed on a 3,500-foot strip located on territorial land on Puolo Point that forms the western boundary of Port Allen near Hanapēpē. The Corps lengthened and macadamized the dusty airstrip and constructed quarters for a detachment of five men and housing for a radio transmitter-receiver. The airfield was officially named Burns Field on the Port Allen Military Reservation after deceased Army aviator Second Lieutenant J. S. G. Burns.

The five plantations and pineapple cannery that shipped product from Port Allen continued to press the territorial and federal governments to improve that port. They were joined in their appeals by the shipping interests, who saw the advantages to improving the harbor in order to eliminate the costs involved in transferring cargo between the wharf and steamers anchored offshore. At last, the River and Harbor Act of 1932 recommended the needed improvements, the local interests put up $200,000 as their share of the cost, and a suitable breakwater was built and the harbor dredged under the direction of the Army’s district engineer Major Stanley L. Scott. After 1935 Kaua‘i had two deep-water, all-weather harbors.

During this time the presence of the Army on Kaua‘i depended upon the weekend drills and summer maneuvers of the Hawai‘i National Guard. Finally, in 1935, Major General Hugh A. Drum, commander of the Hawaiian Department of the Army from March 19, 1935, until July 30, 1937, requested that the War Department
supply 23,000 troops to garrison the outer islands, including Kaua'i. Drum’s request was rejected on the grounds that the Army’s mission in Hawai‘i was “only to hold Oahu against attacks by sea, land and air forces, and against hostile sympathizers.”

The maritime strike in the winter of 1936–1937 emphasized O‘ahu’s vulnerability. It was clear from the strike that if O‘ahu were isolated during wartime, some 85 percent of its food requirements would be cut off. General Drum again requested troops for the outer islands. Again his request was denied on the grounds that “if the fleet was in Hawaiian waters no enemy would dare attack Oahu [!]” The Army’s Hawaiian Department was left to its limited resources and did what it could.

In 1939 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) efforts in the territory were placed under the administration of the Army’s district engineer. Shortly thereafter the WPA cadre on Kaua‘i began constructing an Army airfield at Barking Sands under the direction of the Corps of Engineers.

Early in 1940 a visiting Army group from headquarters recommended that sites be prepared in the Islands to receive certain secret “radio aircraft-detection devices” newly developed by the Army Signal Corps. In July 1940, the Corps of Engineers began preparing a site at Kóke‘e to receive a 109-mc SCR-271 radar with a range of 100 to 150 miles.

On October 15, 1940, the 298th and 299th Regiments of the Hawai‘i National Guard were inducted into federal service. In May 1941 Major General Walter Short, commander of the Hawaiian Department from February 7, 1941, to December 17, 1941, put the 3rd Battalion of the 299th Infantry Regiment under the direction of the commander of the newly created Kaua‘i Military District. Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Eugene Fitzgerald served as Kaua‘i district commander until a higher-ranking Army officer appeared on the scene after the Japanese attack.

Just before the December 7, 1941, attack the Army’s presence on Kaua‘i consisted of personnel assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 299th Infantry Regiment (less Companies K and L); Company C, 1st Battalion, 298th Infantry Regiment; detachments of no more than five enlisted men each at Barking Sands and Burns Field airfields.
(Barking Sands airfield was still under construction by the WPA); and
a small detachment of the Aircraft Warning Service. Totaling no
more than 800 men, it was far from enough to defend Kaua‘i should
the island come under attack.

The Japanese attack on O‘ahu occurred December 7, 1941. Mar-
tial law was declared throughout the territory, and Lieutenant Colo-
nel Fitzgerald became military governor of Kaua‘i in addition to his
command of the Army troops on the island. He distributed his troops
in accordance with official Army doctrine.

5 e. Defense of Islands other than Oahu

Forces available preclude a determined defense of Islands other than
Oahu. Units of the Hawaii National Guard [federalized in late 1940],
stationed on those Islands will prevent civil disturbances, protect land-
ning fields used by our troops and resist landing attacks. . . .

Accordingly, Lieutenant Colonel Fitzgerald sent one detachment
to Barking Sands, a second detachment to Burns Field, and a third
detachment to protect Lihu‘e.

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Fig. 4. Six powerful 155-mm guns of the 55th Coast Artillery Regiment (Tractor
Drawn) on parade at Schofield Barracks in 1935. (U.S. Army Museum of Hawai‘i)
Wake Island came under Japanese attack, and the Army feared that Kaua‘i’s turn would soon come. Something other than the two 75-mm field guns on the island was needed to oppose enemy attempts to invade Kaua‘i. This point was emphasized on the night of December 30, 1941, when Japanese submarine I-3 surfaced off Nāwiliwili Harbor and fired fifteen projectiles at the harbor’s facilities and surroundings, causing limited damage but frightening the inhabitants. The range and power of the submarine’s 5-inch deck gun far exceeded that of the 75-mm field guns; the submarine could fire at onshore targets with impunity.

More powerful artillery had arrived on Kaua‘i the morning of December 28th but was far from Nāwiliwili Harbor when the attack came. On December 27th, personnel of Battery D, 55th Coast Artillery Regiment (Tractor Drawn), had been loaded on the General Royal T. Frank at O‘ahu and dispatched to Kaua‘i. Four guns with tractor-tugs, limbers, and ammunition were transported on an accompanying barge. Upon disembarkation, Battery D moved to a position near the McBryde mill at Numila and established “Camp Kauai.” Battery D’s 155-mm GPF guns out ranged the submarine’s guns, and the gun pointing was far more accurate. Unfortunately, it took time to emplace such guns, and they weren’t close enough to Nāwiliwili Harbor.

The point having been made that concentration of coast artillery at one location was fruitless, Battery D then established additional firing positions near Ahukini Harbor and Nāwiliwili Harbor. While the four GPF guns were an improvement over two 75-mm field guns, the artillery defenses were far from satisfactory, and an invasion was feared.

It didn’t help that the valiant little General Royal T. Frank was torpedoed off the Big Island on January 28, 1942, while transporting troops to Hilo. Twenty-two men went down with the Frank, and forty-two survivors were rescued and deposited at remote Hāna, Maui, where they were treated at the Kaeleku Plantation Company clinic.

Following a review of the situation by President Roosevelt, on December 17, 1941, the forces in Hawaii had been placed under the top command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, and General Delos C. Emmons succeeded General Short as commander of Army forces subordinate to Admiral Nimitz. General Emmons made known his
concerns about the weakness of outer-island defenses to Nimitz. As a result, during December 1941 and January 1942, the Navy made available several guns, with appropriate ammunition, for the defenses of O‘ahu’s neighbor islands.29

The Corps of Engineers prepared emplacements for four of these guns on Kaua‘i. Casemates for two two-gun batteries of 7-inch guns were prepared. Two casemates were located near the shore between

![Battery commander's station](image-url)
Ahukini Harbor and Nawiliwili Harbor, and the other two casemates were located near the shore northwest of Port Allen and Burns field. Each casemate was thirty-two feet wide by seventeen feet deep and was protected by a foot of reinforced splinter-proof concrete overhead cover topped with earth. Each of the two-gun batteries was supported by a plotting room, a battery commander's station, and two ammunition magazines constructed of reinforced concrete. The plotting rooms and magazines were protected and concealed with an earthen blanket. Little survives of these substantial fortifications.

These powerful guns could hurl a 153-pound projectile to a range of 15,000 yards (8.5 miles). Ammunition magazines were constructed about one mile to the rear. Two of the magazines for the Port Allen defenses survive. One magazine is located in a Gay & Robinson cane field adjacent to a substantial monument erected in 1938 by Makaweli Japanese and dedicated to the memory of highly respected plantation manager Benjamin Douglas Baldwin (1867–1928). The other mag-

Fig. 6. Baldwin Monument erected by appreciative Japanese plantation workers located in a Gay & Robinson cane field. A World War II ammunition magazine is located next to this monument. Baldwin served as battalion commander for the Hawaiian National Guard on Kaua'i while managing the plantation. (W. H. Dorrance)
azine is tunneled into the northern wall of the gulch formed by the Hanapēpe River.

Detachments of Battery D, 55th Coast Artillery, serviced the guns when the emplacements were completed early in 1943.32

Lieutenant Colonel Fitzgerald turned over his district command and military governor’s office to a newly arrived general when the 27th Infantry Division arrived. Units of the division began arriving at Kaua‘i April 8, 1942. The Division’s 54th Brigade, Brigadier General Alexander E. Anderson commanding, along with the Brigade’s 108th and 165th Infantry Regiments, took defensive positions around the island and General Anderson succeeded Lieutenant Colonel Fitzgerald as military governor and district commander.33 More than 7,000 Army troops then occupied Kaua‘i, and the island’s population had reason to feel more secure.

When the Japanese attempted to invade Midway Island the first week of June 1942, they were soundly defeated by the combined forces of the Army, Navy, and Marines. Four large Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk, and the Japanese fleet was weakened to a state from which it never recovered. It took several months for the implications of the victory at Midway to affect operations, but it became clear that Kaua‘i was secure. By mid-1943 the thousands of Army troops occupying the island were training for jungle warfare and the tactics to be used in the far-off Pacific Theater of Operations. To all intents and purposes, Kaua‘i’s war scare was over.

NOTES


3 Erwin N. Thompson, Pacific Ocean Engineers: History of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific (Fort Shafter: Corps of Engineers, circa 1985) 58.
6 Krauss and Alexander, *Grove Farm Plantation* 305.
7 Thompson, *Pacific Ocean Engineers* 58–59.
8 Cullum, *Biographical Register* 510.
9 Cullum, *Biographical Register* 510.
14 War Department, *General Order No. 8, August 19, 1933*.
15 Thompson, *Pacific Ocean Engineers* 78.
18 Thompson, *Pacific Ocean Engineers* 78.
20 Thompson, *Pacific Ocean Engineers* 80, 81.
25 War Department, “Hawaiian Defense Project Revision 1940,” Adjutant General’s Office, War Department, Washington, D.C., report declassified from SECRET.

27 Historical Data Sheet and Station List of the 55th Coast Artillery Regiment (Tractor Drawn). Organizational Records Section, Military Personnel Records Unit, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo. The writer is indebted to William Gaines for retrieving records on Battery D, 55th Coast Artillery Regiment (Tractor Drawn), from the St. Louis depository and for supplying a brief history of the unit while it was stationed on Kaua‘i.


30 Richardson, “Historical Review.”

31 There are two circular metal medallions embedded in the column. The upper medallion has a bust of Baldwin surrounded by the words “Benjamin Douglas Baldwin 1867—1928,” and the lower medallion has the words “Erected In Loving Memory by the Makaweli Japanese 1938.” Benjamin D. Baldwin, nephew of pioneer planter Henry Perrine Baldwin (1842—1911), managed the plantation from the early 1890s until his death while it was operated by Alexander & Baldwin as Hawaiian Sugar Company, Inc.

32 Morning Reports of Battery D, 55th Coast Artillery (Tractor Drawn), 1940—1944, Organizational Records Section, Military Personnel Records Unit, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo.
