Spanish-American War Sites in Honolulu

This brief history of Spanish-American War sites in the Honolulu area was prompted in large part by my purchase on eBay of photos of two military hospitals established in Honolulu in 1898: Independence Hospital and Buena Vista Hospital. My curiosity as to what happened to these hospitals led to more research and, finally, a site exploration visit to Honolulu in June, 2004. The purpose of the site exploration was to try to locate military sites of the 1898 period, particularly the hospitals, and to compare the past with the present. The original hospital photos are now in the collection of the U.S. Army Museum of Hawai‘i at Fort DeRussy in Honolulu. My hope is that this paper will also encourage others with information to provide input so that more is known about this time in Honolulu.

The Spanish-American War

First, some background on the Spanish-American War of 1898. William McKinley was president of the United States, and the precipitating event was the explosion of the battleship USS Maine in the harbor at Havana, Cuba on February 15, 1898. War was declared on Spain on April 25, 1898, and the United States moved to do battle in several Spanish possessions. Regular and volunteer soldiers were

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transported to staging and embarkation camps at San Francisco and on the East Coast. The U.S. naval victory at Manila Bay in the Philippines occurred on May 1. The first Philippine expedition left San Francisco on May 25. The Cuba invasion force won victories on July 1 at El Caney and San Juan Hill. The Spanish fleet was destroyed on July 3 as it attempted to flee from Santiago, Cuba. The peace protocol ending the war was signed on August 12, and the formal peace treaty, the Treaty of Paris, was signed on December 10, 1898. Even after the fighting in Cuba ended, fierce fighting in the Philippines continued through the insurrection period.\(^1\) Ironically, more American soldiers died of disease than in actual combat during 1898 due to typhoid fever and malaria.\(^2\)

Meanwhile, Hawai‘i, particularly Honolulu, had gained strategic importance because of its geographical position relative to the U.S.’s new Pacific possessions, Guam and the Philippines. In the culmination of years of maneuvering by American residents, Hawai‘i was formally annexed to the U.S. in a ceremony at ‘Iolani Palace on August 12, 1898.\(^3\)

Honolulu served as a stopover point for the expeditionary forces sailing to the Philippines. There was no assigned garrison here until the 1st New York Volunteer Infantry regiment ("1st N.Y.") arrived in Honolulu on various ships between August 15 and September 3, 1898.\(^4\) The regimental commander, Colonel Thomas Barber, had arrived earlier on August 6 to select a camp site. The 3rd Battalion, 2nd U.S. Volunteer Engineers ("2nd Engineers") began arriving in Honolulu on August 14, 1898.\(^5\) The engineers were sent to build a military post and to survey strategic locations such as Pearl Harbor.

The 1st N.Y. returned to San Francisco beginning in late November, 1898 with the last units departing on December 10, 1898.\(^6\) The 2nd Engineers was stationed in Honolulu from August 14, 1898 until April 20, 1899.\(^7\)

The Racetrack Camp

A temporary camp was established on August 15, 1898 by the 1st N.Y. on the "infield" of the racetrack at Kapi‘olani Park.\(^8\) This was a one-mile racetrack with a large open infield. The first detachment of the 2nd Engineers arrived on August 14 and began laying out the camp.
The main body of the 2nd Engineers arrived in Honolulu on August 17. The two commands were camped alongside each other, as though they were one large regiment. The racetrack camp of the 1st N.Y. and 2nd Engineers was not named.

**Camp McKinley**

On August 27, 1898, Companies F, G and H of the 1st N.Y. arrived and camped on the Irwin tract of property at the foot of Diamond Head, just east of and visible from the racetrack camp (the “Irwin Tract”). This was the beginning of the move from the racetrack camp. On August 30, 1898, Companies C, E, I, K, L, M and a detachment of Company D moved to the Irwin Tract. The Irwin Tract camp was named “Camp McKinley,” in honor of the president, about August 22, 1898. On September 3, the remainder of the regiment arrived and also camped at Camp McKinley. The 2nd Engineers also moved to Camp McKinley and camped alongside the 1st N.Y.

According to an official New York state publication:

> The camp site was chosen by a Board convened for the purpose, consisting of officers of the 1st Regiment, New York Volunteers, and of the 2nd Regiment, Volunteer Engineers, and approved by Colonel Barber. It was near the only ocean-bathing beach on the Island and the reported site of a proposed Sanitarium selected by the resident physicians in the immediate vicinity of the best residential quarter of the Island. In addition it had shade in the park, a drill and parade ground on the racecourse, city water, and was accessible.

The troops used the bathing facilities at the Sans Souci Resort which was located on the beach at the southeast corner of the park. Newspaper articles indicated they were unhappy with the facilities. This beach is still known as Sans Souci Beach.

Kapi’olani Park’s racetrack closed in 1926, but approximately half the infield area of the racetrack remains an open area. The “Waikiki Shell,” an outdoor performance amphitheater, is in the north part of the racetrack infield. Monsarrat Avenue cuts through the north end of the racetrack site. The tennis courts on the west side of the park are about where the racetrack grandstand was located. The grandstand can be seen in a number of 1898 photos, and Diamond
Head is the most prominent landmark in many of these same photos. This landmark makes it possible to locate today approximately where such photos were taken. Residences have been built throughout the Irwin Tract, but enough trees remain so the views from the park and above from Diamond Head are similar to the 1898 views. The Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, produced to show most urban areas in the U.S., can be used to determine the stage of development in this location. The Irwin Tract area is not detailed in the 1914 edition, which means there were not many buildings in the area at the time. The 1927 Sanborn map shows street detail in the Irwin Tract area, but a 1926 aerial photo shows only a few buildings there.

**Camp Otis**

Camp Otis was a short-lived camp of Philippine expeditionary troops who arrived on the troop ship *Arizona* on August 27, 1898 and were left in Honolulu when the ship went on to Manila. The soldiers camped inside the racetrack at Kapi‘olani Park. The camp was later moved east within the racetrack to a point “nearly opposite Camp McKinley.”

Camp Otis consisted of detachments of the 3rd U.S. Artillery, the 10th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, the 18th U.S. Infantry and detachments of recruits for the 1st Colorado Volunteer Infantry, 1st Nebraska Volunteer Infantry (“1st Neb.”) and other units already in Manila. Camp Otis was abandoned about November 7, 1898 when the *Arizona* returned and the troops departed for Manila.

The camp was named after Major General Elwell S. Otis, U.S. Volunteers, the commanding officer in the Philippines in 1898–99. He followed General Merritt in commanding the Eighth Corps and was the commanding general of the Department of the Pacific with headquarters in Manila as of January 7, 1899. He was second in command to General Merritt when the Philippine expeditionary force and Eighth Corps were established.

When the 1st Neb. recruits arrived in Honolulu on board the *Arizona*, a newspaper reported: “The First New Yorkers are camped among the trees outside the east track. Their camp is known as Camp McKinley, while the camp of the troops from the Arizona is called Camp Otis, in honor of Major General Otis.”
The Military District of Hawaii and Camp Otis were established in September, 1898. Official orders of the time stated:

Hdqrs. Dept. of California, Sept. 4, 1898. For better administration and subject to the approval of the Secretary of War, the territory lately constituting the Hawaiian Republic is hereby constituted a Military District, to be known as the District of Hawaii, under command of Brig. Gen., Chas. King, U.S.V., with Headquarters at Honolulu. The officers in charge of supply depots in that city will, in addition, act as Chiefs of the Staff Departments they represent.

The troops present in the District will be consolidated into two camps, one to be called Camp McKinley, consisting of the 1st New York Volunteers and Battalion of U.S. Volunteer Engineers as now, under command of Col. T.H. Barber, 1st New York Vols.; and another to be called Camp Otis, comprising all expeditionary troops temporarily in the District, and commanded by the senior officer of those forces present.23

The Military District of Hawaii and Camp Otis lasted only until early November, 1898:

Upon the arrival of the U.S. transport Arizona at Honolulu, H.I., the District of Hawaii will be discontinued, the Commanding Officer thereof turning over all records, etc., pertaining to that district to Col. Thomas H. Barber, 1st New York Vols., commanding Camp McKinley. Brig. Gen. Charles King, U.S.V., will then embark on the Arizona for Manila, P.I. with all officers and enlisted men designated in S.O. 111 and 118, c.s., D. Cal., and temporarily delayed in Honolulu; and including all others of the Expeditionary forces fit for duty and left at that station by transports other than the transport Tacoma. Upon arrival at Manila, Brig. Gen. King will report to the Commanding General, Department of the Pacific.24

**Convalescent Camp**

In late November, General Merriam reported on the health problems of the troops in Honolulu:

detachment, Nov. 10, leaving about 160 men in the hospital. Statement of sick in general hospital as follows: Typhoid cases, 1st New York Regiment, 63, and expeditionary troops, 48; total typhoid, 111; malarial fever and others, including convalescents, 1st New York Regiment, 99, and expeditionary troops, 102; total, 201. Total patients, 312. Gen. Merriam gives it as his opinion that the city of Honolulu is thoroughly infected with typhoid fever. He thinks that in a measure this is possibly due to the men that were sent from here with the disease, who were taken off the transports at Honolulu and put in hospitals there. Gen. King’s departure abandons Camp Otis, and Gen. Merriam says it will not be again occupied by troops. Camp McKinley has also been moved to new ground, and every possible sanitary precaution taken to insure the good health of the men.

The 1st N.Y. was moved to a camp site away from Camp McKinley because of malaria and typhoid fever. Dysentery was also a problem. Company E of the 1st N.Y. moved to Wai‘alae on October 22 on the north side of Diamond Head, about seven miles from Honolulu and three miles from Camp McKinley. Company H was moved October 27 and Companies A, B, C, D, F, G, I and L about November 4. The camp was on the Paul Isenberg estate on the beach at Wai‘alae. This camp became the regimental camp, at least temporarily.

A letter from a member of Company I of the 1st N.Y. while at this camp states: “The tents are pitched on the sandy beach at Waialie (sic) . . .” The discovery of “scores” of human skeletons on this camp site caused the “tall tale” that the camp was located where Kamehameha initially landed on O‘ahu and defeated the islanders.

This “health resort” camp was called Camp Kaalawai. One of the newspaper articles refers to Camp Kaalawai as being “around Diamond Head” in Wai‘alae, Kā‘alā‘awai Beach is on the southeast side of Diamond Head, south of Wai‘alae. There are numerous references to the camp being on the beach at Wai‘alae, so it is not clear why it was named after a completely different place.

German-born Paul Isenberg was an important businessman and major landowner on O‘ahu at the time. One account indicates his land stretched from Kapahulu Avenue to Kāhala Beach on the east shore of O‘ahu. While an 1897 map of Honolulu does not extend to the Wai‘alae coast, a 1920 map shows the Isenberg shore property
was where the present day Wai'alea Beach Park and Wai'alea Country Club are located. Keala'olu Avenue, which runs from Kalaniana'ole Highway to Kāhala Avenue, was named Isenberg Road in 1920 and the Isenberg property was north of where Keala'olu intersects with Kāhala. Wai'alea Beach Park or the Country Club was very likely the site of Camp Kaalawai.

SECOND CAMP MCKINLEY

The 2nd Engineers built barracks and other buildings for the new Camp McKinley just north of Kapi'olani Park. The south edge of the camp was only about a quarter of a mile from the park. The engineers moved to be near the construction site in early November, 1898. In early December, 1898, the first Camp McKinley was abandoned and the camp moved to the new barracks on Kapahulu Road. The barracks were occupied by the 2nd Engineers on November 27, 1898 although work on the camp buildings continued until March, 1899. This new Camp McKinley remained in existence until Fort Shafter was opened in late June, 1907. The garrison was either artillery or coast artillery troops during this period. The camp was located just south of Kapahulu, between Lēahi and Kana'īna avenues.

There was a “false start” on the second Camp McKinley. Construction on two temporary barracks had actually begun east of Kapahulu Road. These were subsequently torn down and the materials moved to the new site. A map shows the location of the “false start” location along Kapahulu but without any cross street identified. It was probably near Kapahulu and Pāki Avenue in order to minimize the intrusion on the park.

The area of the second Camp McKinley is not detailed in the 1914 Sanborn Insurance map but is in the 1927 edition. The camp headquarters building appears in the 1927 map but no other buildings appear to have survived to that date.

The site of the second Camp McKinley is now covered by businesses along Kapahulu Avenue and residences in the other areas of the site. During a site tour in June, 2004 led by Judith Bowman, Curator of the Army Museum of Hawaii, we followed the camp map around and across the perimeter of the camp to look for possible
remains. A boundary marker/fence post and parts of a fence base and pillars made of volcanic rock along Kana'ina Avenue may date back to the camp.

Hospitals

Local hospitals were used for the sick soldiers until Independence Park Hospital was established on August 15, 1898. The Red Cross also established a hospital for soldiers in the Child Garden Building on Beretania Street in June, 1898. The Independence Park Hospital was located in a dance pavilion at Independence Park, southeast of the corner of Sheridan and King Streets.

The Independence Park Hospital was closed in January, 1899. A November 1, 1898 letter from a member of Company I of the 1st N.Y. reports that General King had visited the military hospital at Independence Park and officially condemned the place as a hospital site because of the heat and humidity.

![Fig. 1. Independence Park Hospital, Honolulu, late 1898, looking southeast. U.S. Army Museum of Hawai‘i.](image-url)
The Independence Park pavilion appears on the 1897 map of Honolulu but not on the 1901 map. The building was likely burned after being occupied by typhoid patients in order to reduce any possible contagion. The site today is covered with business establishments along busy King Street, with no indication a park was ever there.

In October, 1898, concern over conditions at Independence Park Hospital and the large number of sick soldiers required that additional hospital space be obtained. The overflow required the use of local hospitals and a hospital camp on the Dow lot on the south slope of Punchbowl. The Nuuanu Valley Military Hospital, at a spot known as Buena Vista, was established in early November, 1898. The hospital was also known as Buena Vista Hospital. It was located at the former John Paty home, known as Buena Vista house, which was on the east side of Nu'uanu Avenue at Wyllie Street. The Paty house was immediately south of Rosebank, the home of F.A. Schaefer. Cottages and other buildings on the Paty property were also

**Fig. 2. Buena Vista Hospital, Honolulu, late 1898, looking north. U.S. Army Museum of Hawai'i.**
used for the hospital. In addition, frame buildings for hospital wards were constructed.

Buena Vista had become available from a developer who purchased the Paty property. John Paty had died in 1897. According to an advertisement that ran several times in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser in early August, 1898, the new owner was dividing the property into eight lots for development.46

F.A. Schaefer purchased the “Buena Vista Hospital” premises of over five acres from Charles S. Desky in early 1900.47 The property was leased to the government until July, 1900.48 As indicated, Schaefer also owned Rosebank, the property immediately north of the hospital. Schaefer completely rebuilt his home Rosebank into a grand mansion in 1900.49 The addition of the Buena Vista property to the south later gave him a better view of the ocean once the hospital buildings were gone. The hospital was still being used in late 1904 although it was then called the U.S. Army Hospital.50 It was likely used until the Fort Shafter Hospital was opened in July, 1907.

The hospital site area is not detailed in the 1914 Sanborn Insurance map but is detailed in the 1927 map. The 1927 map indicates that a different house was on the Paty property site. This house is also in a 1952 aerial photo. The new house was southwest of the Buena Vista house site. Buena Vista Hospital, like Independence Park Hospital, was likely burned or otherwise destroyed rather than reused.

The site of the John Paty home, the primary building when Buena Vista Hospital was established, is now covered by the Nu’uanu-Pali Highway interchange, just north of the Community Church of Honolulu at 2345 Nu’uanu Avenue. This interchange was built in the late 1950s or early 1960s.51 A cottage on the east side of the church reportedly dates back to one of the prior houses on the site. It may have been a servants’ quarters. Palm trees still stand where the entrance road into Buena Vista was located. The palms and entrance road are visible in one of the 1898 hospital photos.

**Camp Cemetery**

According to newspaper articles, many of the soldiers who died in Honolulu were buried at the Nu’uanu Cemetery, now known as the O’ahu Cemetery, at 2162 Nu’uanu Avenue.52 This is just south of
the Buena Vista Hospital site described above. At least one soldier was buried in the King Street Catholic Cemetery at 839 South King Street.\textsuperscript{53} News accounts don’t mention any cremations, although this would have been a way to try to avoid further sickness. These Honolulu burials are a mystery. Existing cemetery records do not reflect the initial burials, let alone disinterment for shipment of remains back to the U.S. mainland.\textsuperscript{54}

**Camp Langfitt**

This camp was established at Pearl City by Company I of the 2nd Engineers during its survey of Pearl Harbor and was occupied from September 27 to October 19, 1898.\textsuperscript{55} It was named after Major William Campbell Langfitt, commanding officer of the battalion of the 2nd Engineers. The camp was at Remond Grove, an early picnic and recreation area.\textsuperscript{56} The troops camped inside the large dance pavil-
Remond Grove was south of Kamehameha Highway, east of Lehua Avenue and primarily north of the H-1 freeway in the vicinity of Sunset Memorial Cemetery.

**Camp Gulstan**

This was the name given to the Waikiki chapel named in honor of Catholic Bishop Francis R. Gulstan:

About 300 members of the N.Y. Regiment attend divine service at the Chapel at Waikiki every Sunday. This chapel was build through the efforts of the Catholic ladies of Honolulu. They call the place Camp Gulstan after Bishop Gulstan. It is a pretty structure, built of cocoanut leaves, like the native 'lanai.' Palms and cut flowers adorn the altar. Several tables are fitted up with writing materials. A tank of ice water and an abundance of literature make it a comfortable place of rest for the weary soldier.

Mass is celebrated each Sunday at 8:30 a.m. by Rev. Father Valentine. A choir composed of soldiers enliven the services. Those wishing to go Sunday can meet at guard house at 8 o'clock. All are welcome.

**Camp Sague**

On November 8, 1898, Companies K and M along with a small group of men from Company I of the 1st N.Y. sailed from Honolulu to Hilo on the island of Hawai‘i, and from there marched to the Kilauea volcano. The troops landed at Waiakea in Hilo and stayed in a large warehouse for one night before going to the volcano. The detachment returned to Honolulu on November 27.

A November 24, 1898 letter from a member of Company I of the 1st N.Y. indicates the camp was near the crater of the volcano, about two miles from the Volcano House “in a large [koa] grove with lots of dead wood on the ground.” The camp was named after Major John Sague of the 1st N.Y. who was in command of the detachment. The troops were in this camp for only three days.

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While there are few, if any, man-made remains at any of the Honolulu sites, the open space at Kapi‘olani Park with Diamond Head in
the background and the remains of the palm drive at Buena Vista provide a basis for visualizing several key military places in Honolulu during the Spanish American War. If you survive the climb, with a little imagination, you can still see the tents and cooking fires of Camp Otis and the first Camp McKinley from the top of Diamond Head.

NOTES
1 This timeline is based on the chronology in Stan Cohen, Images of the Spanish-American War (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., Inc., 1997) v.
2 Battle deaths were 332; other deaths in service were 2,957 according to Patrick Sherry, “Casualties During the Spanish American War,” www.spanamwar.com/casualties.htm. The Department of Veterans Affairs web site, www.va.gov, indicates there were 385 battle deaths and 2,061 other deaths. Other sources may have slightly different numbers but the ratio of death from diseases to combat deaths is very high.
3 State Historian, The History of the Empire State Regiment in the War with Spain (Albany: Published under the direction of the State Historian, 1903) 23.
4 State Historian, Empire 21–23.
5 William Venable, The Second Regiment of United States Volunteer Engineers (Cincinnati: McDonald & Co., 1899) 104.
6 State Historian, Empire 24.
7 Venable, Second Engineers 104–106.
8 State Historian, Empire 21.
9 Venable, Second Engineers 104.
10 State Historian, Empire 22.
11 State Historian, Empire 22.
12 State Historian, Empire 22–23
13 The Weekly News Muster, October 15, 1898: 5; October 29, 1898: 4. This was the weekly newspaper published by the 1st N.Y. while in Honolulu (hereinafter News Muster). It was published from September 24, 1898 to November 26, 1898, a total of ten issues.
14 Robert Weyeneth, Kapi‘olani Park: A History (Honolulu: Kapi‘olani Park Preservation Society, 2002). This is a good source on the history of the park but is not accurate with respect to how long a military camp was located within the park.
15 Map Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii Mānoa (hereinafter UH Map Collection).
16 Omaha Evening Bee, September 26, 1898; General Order 16, Department of California, September 22, 1898.
17 There are two photos of Camp Otis on pages 47 and 54 in: Picturesque Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Philippines (Springfield, Ohio: Mast, Crowell and Kirk-
patrick, 1899 (Farm and Fireside Library No. 168)). Page 47 shows Camp Otis inside the racetrack. The photo on page 54 is captioned “Camp McKinley and Camp Otis, . . . Camp McKinley in the foreground among the trees and Camp Otis in the open ground beyond.” This photo shows Camp McKinley in the Irwin Tract and Camp Otis inside the racetrack.

18 *HG*, November 1, 1898: 3.
19 *Omaha Evening Bee*, September 26, 1898; Camp Otis section in “Post Office in Paradise,” www.hawaiianstamps.com/garrison.html
20 The November 7, 1898 *Hawaiian Star* reported the abandonment of Camp Otis and the boarding of the transport Arizona.
22 *Omaha Evening Bee*, September 26, 1898.
23 General Order 16, Department of California, September 22, 1898.
24 Special Order 150, Department of California, October 6, 1898.
26 State Historian, *Empire* 23.
27 *News Muster*, October 29, 1898: 5; November 12, 1898: 3.
28 Scrapbook of newspaper clippings and other items of Company I of the 1st New York in the author’s collection (hereinafter Scrapbook). The newspaper clippings are from the Middletown, New York newspaper (probably the Daily Argus) and are letters from one or more soldiers in Company I. Dates provided are the date of the letter in each article. November 8, 1898 letter.
29 *HG*, October 28, 1898: 1 and November 8, 1898: 2.
32 *Hawaiian Star*, November 8, 1898.
33 *HG*, December 2, 1898: 7.
34 Roster of Troops booklets for the Department of California and Pacific Division, Army War College Library, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
38 PCA, August 16, 1898; *HG*, August 2, 1898: 5.
39 *HG*, June 26, 1898: 3.
41 According to the *HG*, January 10, 1899: 2, the Independence Park Hospital was “practically abandoned.”
42 *Scrapbook*, November 1, 1898 letter.
43 *Hawaiian Star*, November 2, 1898: 1; PCA, August 16, 1898; *HG*, August 2, 1898: 5.
Hawaiian Star, November 19, 1898: 1.

The history of Rosebank is in Else Waldron, Honolulu 100 Years Ago (Honolulu: Fisher Printing Company, 1967), beginning on page 59.

For example, see the PCA, August 6, 1898.

HG, November 22, 1900: 5.

HG, November 22, 1900: 5.

Waldron, Honolulu 100 Years Ago: 63.

HG, November 22, 1904: 7.

Various road maps of Honolulu before and after the interchange appears on the maps.

News Muster, HG and other newspapers.

Thomas Hannan was buried in the Catholic Cemetery as reported in the News Muster, October 29, 1898: 6.

Research by Nanette Napoleon, Honolulu, cemetery research specialist

Venable, Second Engineers 109.


News Muster, October 29, 1898: 8.

1895 Map of Pearl City, UH Map Collection

News Muster, October 1, 1898: 10.

State Historian, Empire 23.

State Historian, Empire 23.

Scrapbook, November 24, 1898 letter.