

BARKING SANDS ARMY AIR BASE WORLD WAR II HISTORY

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Preface

The Army airfield which became Barking Sands Air Base (AB) in World War II was originally known as “Mana Airfield,” built on land acquired from the Knudsen family by Kekaha Sugar Company located nearby at Kekaha. The grassy airstrip first came into being around 1921. The airfield is situated on a narrow, flat, sandy coastal plain (Mana Plain) in the north-south direction bordering the Pacific Ocean on the west in the Waimea District of Kauai at general coordinates: N22.030513° - W159.786587° obtained via “Google Earth” ©2009 Google™. Large sand dunes (Nohili Dunes) are found on the east and north.¹ The beach area is known as “Barking Sands” so-called by a sound made when walking upon the sands.

In 1938, all Work Project Administration (WPA) expansion of Territorial airports in the Hawaiian Islands was placed under the direction of the Honolulu District Engineer, Corps of Engineers. Construction of the airfield soon began using WPA funds under the direction of the district engineer.² The airfield was utilized by Inter-Island Airways the forerunner of Hawaiian Airlines, and on occasion by Pan American Airways.³

The U.S. Army acquired 549 acres, including the grass airstrip in 1941 which became “Mana Airport Military Reservation” by Governor’s Executive Order 945 dated June 10, 1941 issued by Joseph Poindexter.⁴ Additional land was acquired for a total of 2,058 acres. The airport experienced a great deal of military flight operations upon the onset of World War II.

The military reservation was under the overall command of the Hawaiian Air Force (HAF) headquartered at Fort Shafter, Oahu. The HAF was activated by General Order 37, October 28, 1940. This was the first Air Force outside the Continental U.S. (Maj. Gen. Frederick L. Martin, CG) with headquarters at Ft. Shafter, which moved to Hickam Field on July 14, 1941.

The HAF was redesignated as the 7th Air Force on February 5, 1942 (Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker); assigned to U.S. Army Air Forces, Pacific Ocean Area (USAAFPOA) on August 1, 1944.⁵ On August 1, 1944, Maj. Gen. Millard F. Harmon was appointed CG USAAFPOA with headquarters at Hickam AF, Harmon reported to Lt. Gen. Robert C. Richardson, Jr., CG, U.S. Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area headquartered at Fort Shafter, Territory of Hawaii for logistics and administration and to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief Pacific Ocean Area (CINCPOA) for operations except those of the 20th Air Force. General Harmon was appointed Deputy

Commander of the 20th Air Force, and reported directly to Gen. Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces in matters affecting the 20th Air Force.⁶

World War II Expansion

The start of World War II saw a feverous attempt to shore the defenses of the Hawaiian Archipelago with Kauai receiving its fair share of defense work. The advent of war with Japan saw the implementation of “Martial Law” on the Territory of Hawaii imposed by Lt. Gen. Walter C. Short, soon to be replaced Hawaiian Department Commanding General, who also became the military governor. The major islands were placed under a military district commander that reported to the Hawaiian Department commander.

Port Allen Airport (Burns Field) was closed to civilian airplanes and all civilian flights were routed to Mana Airport for the duration of the war.⁷

Two early warning radio detector stations (Radar) were constructed for the Signal Corps, manned by Signal Company Aircraft Warning Hawaii and successor units, at Kilauea and Kokee equipped with SCR-271 long range fixed units with their operating equipment and personnel housed in bombproof tunnels; Burns Field in Hanapepe and Mana Field were expanded; coast artillery fortifications were erected at Ahukini and Kaumakani to protect the harbors at Nawiliwili and Ahukini and Port Allen respectively; 150 concrete machine-gun pillboxes were placed around most of the island manned by the “Kauai Volunteers” a quasi-military unit formed at the start of World War II with mostly Filipino volunteers from various plantations on the island.⁸

Air Base Structures

It is not clear what structures were built at Barking Sands AB, commissioned shortly after June 11, 1942.⁹ It is the author’s premise that the usual air base theater of operations structures, i.e. base headquarters, air operations, control tower, barracks for enlisted men, officers quarters, mess halls, latrines, warehouses and storage sheds, chapel, dispensary, fire station, gas station, post exchange, movie theater, water distribution and sewage systems and pumps, electrical power lines and transformers including emergency power generators were included at Barking Sands AB. Also ground to air and landline communications including cryptographic and teletype and telephone equipment were installed together with structures to house them.¹⁰

Three underground splinterproof structures were listed in a 2008 EIS report for the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF), current tenant of the Department of Defense property at Mana; two functioned as command posts (CP), the other as a radio room. An above-ground structure identified as a telephone exchange was also mentioned.¹¹ These structures were common to World War II Army Airfields on Oahu.

Underground splinterproof CP structures were built at former airfields situated at Kualoa (3) and Mokuleia at Kawaihapai (1); a similar above-ground CP is situated at Haleiwa at Puaena. Splinterproof concrete telephone exchange buildings are located at the former Haleiwa, Kahuku, and Kualoa Air Fields (AF) and Bellows AB. A concrete above-ground splinterproof CP and several concrete splinterproof personnel shelters were also found at Kualoa.¹²

Identified Barking Sands AB Engineer Work and Job Orders:¹³

Runway, taxiway and parking aprons: Job Order 21.0, Work Order 10.0 and XD-182. Install fuel storage tanks and system: Job Order 21.1, Work Orders 600.118-D-6.8 and 600.118-DR-7.0.

Construct ten magazine tunnels: Job Order 543-W Feb. 1942. Road to magazines: Job Order 385-W

Commanding Officers

Col. George R. Bienfang (1942-?) and Lt. Col. Stephen J. Rosetta (20 Nov 1944-?) It is not clear whether there were other commanding officers that served at Barking Sands AB during World War II.

Runways

In March 1942, Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, CG, Hawaiian Department and his engineer, Col. Albert K.B. Lyman met with Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker, CG, 7th Air Force to discuss airfield construction in the Hawaiian Islands. It was agreed upon to speed up runway construction and housing at Kahuku AAB, and pave the runways at Barking Sands as soon as a hot box asphalt plant was obtained and transported to the airfield.¹⁴

The airfield originally consisted of one runway in 1941 (16-34), which was lengthened and paved with asphaltic concrete after March of 1942. An additional runway (1-19), taxiway and a parking apron paved with asphaltic concrete were built during the war.¹⁵ Both runways were 6,000 feet in length by 200 feet in width. Each included taxiways and shoulders for a total width of 600 feet.¹⁶ Work continued on the parking apron on the east shoulder of Runway 1-19 into October 1944, date of completion is not known.

Based on the runways overall dimensions, they were built to accommodate heavy bombers of the B-17 and B-24 types and cargo aircraft of the C-47 and C-54 types.¹⁷

Aircraft Revetments

Eight aircraft revetments were noted at the PMRF formerly Barking Sands AB in a 2008 EIS report.¹⁸ One of the structures was unlike the others described as being “M” shaped, whereas the majority were “U” shaped. The services of “Google Earth” was used

to examine the extant revetments at Barking Sands, the “M” shape revetment appeared to be two “U” revetments built side by side with a common center wall.

A vintage picture archived at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland showed two earthen revetments at the base, the others were not shown.

Various materials were used in building aircraft revetments on Oahu using earth or earth sprayed with gunite, reinforced concrete or pierced steel planking (Marston Mat) reinforced with earth.

Aircraft maintenance was typically performed on dispersed hard standings at bases without hangers that were surrounded by revetments.¹⁹ Vintage NARA photographs do not depict hangers at Barking Sands; aircraft are shown on parking aprons.

Fuel Storage

The air field was provided with nine Aviation Gasoline (AVGAS) underground storage tanks with a total capacity of 650,000 gallons. The method of dispensing the fuel was the mechanical or “pump system” as opposed to the other two methods, hydraulic or “aqua system” and “gravity system.”²⁰ It is not apparent whether AVGAS was stored above or underground at the base from documentation at hand.

The nearest harbor, Port Allen, was located about 14 miles southeast. To facilitate delivery of AVGAS, a large concrete tank was built that connected to an underwater pipeline from an offshore tanker, which was ultimately abandoned. The tank was one of four others of the same design built in Hawaii, and the only one with a concrete “bombproof” slab 4 feet 4 inches thick.²¹

Ammunition Storage

Ten ammunition tunnels were dug some 2 miles east of the base on the cliff faces of Kamokala Ridge on 74.5 acres of land leased from the Territory of Hawaii at altitudes ranging from 245 to 330 feet above sea level. The tunnels, also known as “Kamokala Caves” are situated at general coordinates: N22.039336° - W159.755128°. An access road 15,570 feet long by 18 feet wide with a 4 inch thick crushed rock surface was constructed to the magazines.²²

Bombs were typically stored from 2 to 5 miles from runways, and fuses were kept in separate structures apart from the bombs.²³

The Kamokala magazines comprised six bomb storage tunnels 80 feet in length; two 55 feet long, and two that were 15 feet long.

Selected list of Army Air Forces flying outfits and dates assigned to Barking Sands AB:

Detachment of VP-11, May 20-22 to July 1, 1942. Five PBV-5 aircraft out of Naval Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Oahu for temporary patrol duty. Famous "Black Cat" squadron.

377th Air Base Squadron/Base HQ June 29, 1942 to Apr. 1, 1943.

78th Fighter Squadron, April 23 to July 31, 1943. Attached to the 15th Fighter Group, returned to Barking Sands from Midway Island, flew P-40 aircraft.

392nd Bombardment Squadron (Hvy.), 30th Bombardment Group, Oct. 20 to Nov. 10, 1943, flew B-24s, arrived at Barking Sands from March Field, Calif., and departed for Canton Island.

819th Bombardment Squadron (Hvy.), 30 Bombardment Group, Oct. 22, to Nov. 12, 1943, arrived Barking Sands from March Field, Calif., reassigned to Wheeler AAF, flew B-24s.

494th Bombardment Group (Hvy.): 864th, 865th, 866th and 867th Bombardment Squadrons (Hvy.), June 15 to Sept. 30, 1944, flew B-24s. Last B-24 outfits to leave the Z.I. for overseas deployment. Group reassigned to Angaur, Palau Islands.

1045th Signal Company (Service Group), July 1 to Aug. 1944.

USMC Tow Target detachment, arrived Barking Sands on Oct. 1, 1944 operated Martin JM-2 (B-26) aircraft.

Detachment 37, Army Airways Communications Squadron, Nov. 1944 to Dec. 1945, provided aircraft control and communications.

Air Combat Replacement Center (Provisional), Nov. 1944 to Dec. 15, 1945. Center formed with the assets of the 63rd and 91st Airdrome Squadrons. Combat aircrews enroute to forward areas were processed and trained in a variety of subjects which included: aircraft crash survival and gunnery. The center was at its peak in July 1945 when 2,000 crewmen were enrolled.

VMTD-1 commissioned Mar. 21, 1945 at Barking Sands, Kauai, Hawaii and on May 1, 1945 redesignated as VMJ-1 and assigned to the 3rd Marine Division, towing targets for Marine AA batteries over the Hawaiian Islands. The squadron was deactivated on Kauai in October 1945.

1168th Quartermaster Company assigned from July 1 to Sept. 15, 1945.

1386th Military Police Company assigned from July 1 to Aug. 15, 1945, provided security.

Detachment 18, 145th Army Airways Communications Squadron, Jan. 1946 to Jan. 1947, manned control tower and ran communications net.

Base Defenses

Three concrete World War II-era pillboxes and one steel turret were documented in a 2008 EIS report along with two gun emplacements at the PMRF.²⁴ It is not apparent from the report where the defensive structures were sited.

The pillboxes were of the square mass-produced design built in army engineer base yards and hauled to sites, except for those sites located on steep ridges, which were poured in place. The pillbox typically included four embrasures and was armed with a .30 caliber machine gun. They came in two basic sizes, eight or ten foot square, although some were larger.²⁵

Pillboxes were utilized for beach and perimeter defense against small party raids, or invasions, antiaircraft automatic weapons (AW) emplacements armed with 37 or 40 mm weapons and .50 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns, were primarily used for close in antiaircraft defense, with a ground defense secondary assignment.

Metal turreted pillboxes were mass-produced cylindrical defense works with a cast metal turret or cupola that was affixed atop the riveted armor plate body equipped with an air-cooled .30 caliber machine gun. The main body was buried in the earth with the turret above grade. They were typically employed for aerodrome defense by U.S. armed forces in the Hawaiian Archipelago, Alaskan Theater, and reportedly in England.²⁶

Anti-aircraft and perimeter defense structures have been examined by the author at three ex-World War II Army airfields on Oahu: Kahuku, Kualoa and Mokuleia.

The typical 37 or 40 mm AW emplacement included a mechanical gun director in an adjoining compartment at the rear, one concrete splinterproof ammunition bunker, and one concrete power generator shed that supplied power to the gun and director.²⁷ A separate concrete emplacement for one Browning .50 caliber water-cooled antiaircraft machine gun was provided; also one or two 60-inch portable searchlights and distant electric-controller unit were usually supplied to each battery of AW for target illumination. Radar set, SCR-268, was used to acquire target range and deflection data which was transmitted by cable to the mechanical gun director, which allowed the guns, and searchlights, to be directed at the target.

Kualoa Ranch, former site of Kualoa AF, included three AW gun emplacements and support structures described above, also a concrete pillbox (another had been destroyed after February 21, 1971) both were sited at the shoreline.²⁸ One AW emplacement with

support structures was found at the former Kahuku AB by satellite imagery using “Google Earth”, a metal turret pillbox was examined by the author at the former Mokuleia AF in 2000.

World War II pillboxes in the Hawaiian Islands were generally manned by infantry units; anti-aircraft AW batteries at airfields by Coast Artillery (AA) Regiments, and after December 1943 by AAA AW Battalions assigned to the Hawaiian Anti-aircraft Artillery Command a subordinate unit of the Hawaiian Artillery Command and successor commands.

In the event infantry and anti-aircraft troops were unavailable, air base ground personnel were utilized for base defense under the direction of a ground defense officer appointed by the base commander.²⁹

Identified Infantry Units Stationed in the Vicinity of Barking Sands AB:

Det., 3rd Battalion, 299th Infantry Regiment, less Companies L and K, plus Company C, 298th Infantry Regiment, federalized Territory of Hawaii National Guard outfits under the command of Lt. Col. Eugene Fitzgerald were assigned to protect Kauai until the arrival of reinforcements, shortly before Dec. 7, 1941 to sometime in early 1942. Units guarded airfields at Barking Sands and Port Allen, including harbors at Port Allen and Nawiliwili until the arrival of the 40th Infantry Division.³⁰ The 299th Infantry was inactivated on June 20, 1942 and its personnel and assets were transferred to the 298th Infantry.³¹

Company A, 165th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division, upon arrival at Hawaii, reassigned to the 40th Infantry Division. Company A manned and built beach defenses at Barking Sands from Mar. 16 to Oct. 1942.

Company K, 40th Infantry Division; Regimental HQ located at Kalaheo, company assigned to Barking Sands area from Oct. 1942 to sometime in 1943.

Detachment, 389th Infantry Regiment, 98th Infantry Division, assigned to defend Kauai upon arrival on Apr. 19 to May 26, 1944, supplemented with the arrival of a sister regiment, the 390th. Both regiments reassigned to Oahu where the division underwent training for the invasion of Japan.³²

Notable Events at Barking Sands AB:

Maj. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Asst. C/S, AGS in a memo dated June 11, 1942 to the Secretary of War (Sec War), informed him that Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, CG, Hawaiian Department reported the establishment of Barking Sands AB and requested that an air base squadron be stationed at that location.³³

Brig. Gen. Thomas T. Handy, for the Asst. C/S, AGS informed Sec War on June 14, 1942 that the 377th Air Base Squadron would be activated locally for Barking Sands Air Base.³⁴

January 1943 saw a milestone made with the transfer of the 78th Fighter Squadron (FS) equipped with 24 P-40K1 "Warhawk" aircraft that made an 1100 mile overwater from Barking Sands northwest to Midway Atoll where they replaced the 73rd FS. The squadron had flown to Barking Sands from their base at Naval Air Station Kaneohe Bay. The 78th FS was accompanied by four LB-30s (cargo carrying version of the B-24); the flight took an average time of 7 hours and 15 minutes (Buckland).³⁵ The return trip was made on April 23, 1943 reversing the earlier route.

The Air Combat Replacement Center (Provisional) formed in the latter part of November 1944 (USAF Hist. Research Agcy.).³⁶

The A-26 School opened in June 1945.³⁷ The A-26 was a twin-engine attack-bomber used in the interdiction role.

Base swimming pool opened in March 1945. Visited by a representative of the Sperry Gyroscope Company, which manufactured analog computer bomb sites and ball turrets used in B-17s and B-24s. New site for a localizer range inspected.³⁸

A Chevrolet 1.5 ton E-5 "Truck Turret Trainer" arrived on base by July 12, 1945.³⁹ This vehicle was of the G506 truck series with a Martin 250CE twin gun turret fitted to the body of the vehicle, the same turret used on the A-26, Martin B-26 and B-24 Liberators.

By August 1945, the base received a "Jam Handy Trainer" which consisted of a gun camera equipped with a lead computing sight designed to simulate combat operations on a large screen.⁴⁰ The camera gun allowed students to fire at aircraft in simulated combat scenarios; it was equipped with a built-in mechanism that indicated on film where the point of aim was and where it should have been. Cost per unit was \$2,065.50.

Concluding Remarks

The airfield was in operation by the HAF as Mana Airport in 1941. The date that Barking Sands AB was commissioned was sometime soon after June 11, 1942.

Its first documented commanding officer was on board sometime in 1942; the first unit recorded in this essay was the detachment of Navy PBY-5s of Patrol Squadron 11 (VP-11) on May 22, 1942. The first recorded air base squadron was the 377th activated at Barking Sands sometime after June 14, 1942.

Barking Sands AB was redesignated as Barking Sands Air Force Base on March 26, 1948.

In 1948, the Air Force chief of staff declared Barking Sands Military Reservation surplus, which was disapproved by the Department of the Air Force which recommended the acquisition of 200 acres adjacent to the reservation.⁴¹ Barking Sands Air Force Base was renamed in 1954 to Bonham Air Force Base for Major Carlos W. Bonham, CO of the 199th Fighter Squadron, Territory of Hawaii Air National Guard who died in a mid-air collision with another F-47 near the air base.

The base continues to soldier on as the Pacific Missile Range Facility of the Department of the Navy. The only active runway is number 16-34.

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