

For Immediate Release

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Hawaiian Community Angered by Desecration of Burials at Schofield Barracks

Lihu'e, O'ahu. Representatives from several organizations concerned over the U.S. Army's recent disturbance of 'iwi kupuna (ancestral remains) visited the site on Schofield Barracks where a cultural complex was disturbed by Stryker-related construction. They were told by Laurie Lucking, cultural resource manager for U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii, that the area where the 'iwi kupuna was unearthed would be 'closed forever.' But military construction and training continue to destroy many other cultural sites in a large expanse of land sacred to native Hawaiians.

Leimaile Quitevis, former cultural monitor who documented many of the sites in Lihu'e and a member of the O'ahu Island Burial Council comments on the significance of the cultural site complex. "Hundreds of archaeological site features have been identified in the immediate vicinity of Stryker Brigade construction. In addition, more than 300 surface artifacts were collected by Army representatives. The massive amount of cultural properties located in this area help to paint the picture of the pre-contact land use of Lihu'e. The significance and importance of this landscape to Kanaka Maoli is limitless. Lihu'e was once the ruling center of O'ahu, hosting famous rulers and infamous battles. This history is important when evaluating and assessing the historic properties that have been identified. These sites are not isolated 'archaeological sites.' They are features, pieces of a puzzle, and parts of a whole. These sites are part of a complex that laments and praises the history and culture of our ancestors. Several bone fragments have been documented throughout the project area. None of these bones have ever been positively identified by a qualified osteologist. In addition clusters of artifacts are treated as isolated finds rather than actual sites. To date this project has damaged numerous petroglyphs, desecrated a minimum of two individual's graves and breached the site protective measures of Hale'au'au Heiau."

"The Army failed to do adequate cultural site investigations and consultations before drawing up and proceeding with its Stryker brigade plans," said Summer Mullins a representative from Kipuka, one of the three native Hawaiian groups involved in the 2004 litigation against Stryker expansion. This was the first time that she and many others were given access to the area once recognized as the seat of government for O'ahu ali'i. In the past, groups had made several requests for access that were ignored or denied by the Army.

She added, "This desecration was completely avoidable. It was not an 'inadvertent discovery,' as the Army claims. They need to be held responsible for their actions. The Army failed to listen to the strong concerns raised by cultural monitors and community members years ago about the cultural importance of the Lihu'e area. Our wahi pana and wahi kapu are not appropriate training areas."

"When our Kanaka Maoli people say do not disturb an area but their advice is not heeded, this does not constitute 'proactive dialogue.' Desecration was predictable. We are faced with the problem that the Army occupies a vast area that physically retains important cultural sites and burial grounds. No matter what, access to these sites must be guaranteed to our Kanaka Maoli people. It is their traditional right to visit, care for and continue passing on history to the next generation," said Terri Keko'olani of the American Friends Service Committee.

Representatives were angered by the Army's initial claim that they were protecting the discovery, as their actions painted a completely different picture. "The assertion that 'all work was immediately halted' is false. The contract archaeologist for Garcia and Associates (GANDA) ordered digging and grading to continue after the first 'iwi was found, a violation of Federal and State laws that call for all activity to cease. Earth moving activity stopped only after more bones were exposed," added Leimaile Quitevis.

According to Tom Lenchanko, spokesperson for lineal descendants of the area, "The families object to any process where our human remains are damaged, with no sensitivity to the lands of our Lo Ali'i - Lihu'e, Wahiawa and Helemano encompassing over 35,000 acres that is Kukaniloko. This is our national treasure. Our kupuna are all over that 'aina, and the military is blatantly disrespecting our ancestral burial sites."

"This is Hawaiian land, we all know that the US military has no moral or legal authority over our lands or resources," said Andre Perez of Hui Pu. "Relocating the bones of our ancestors for warfare training is unacceptable. It is the military who needs to relocate."

Noelani DeVincent, kumu hula and member of the Wahiawa Hawaiian Civic Club was heartbroken to see this sacred place ripped apart, "It was a really emotional experience to see such a huge wrong being done towards our people. It is our kuleana to right this wrong, but how can we trust the Army will take care of this place?"

Leimaile Quitevis added "Our kupuna are calling us to look to the lands of Lihu'e. We must kukulu kumuhana (pull our strengths) and work together to defend the bones of our ancestors and the rich history of this 'āina."

Other participants in the cultural access include Kai Markell and Kamoā Quitevis of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, William Aila of Hui Malama i Na Kupuna, Melva Aila of Hui Malama o Makua, and Kyle Kajihiro of the American Friends Service Committee.



Photo by Kai Markell at Lihu'e complex, Schofield Barracks. Many significant cultural sites are being destroyed by current Stryker-related construction.



Photo by Kai Markell at Lihu'e complex, Schofield Barracks. Concerned Native Hawaiians and community members inspect damage to cultural sites caused by Stryker-related construction.