

Army in for Fight Over Makua

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t the end of the coastal road that stretches west from high-rise Honolulu, this secluded valley cradles some of the rarest Hawaiian plants left in the wild, as well as the precious remnants of an ancient culture.

It also harbors more unexploded ordnance and spent bullets and bombs than anyone can guess.

The Army seized Makua for target practice during World War II--and has never let go. The valley's broad, rolling terrain, sweeping up from a white-sand beach to the sheer cliffs of the Waianae Mountains, gives troops a chance to practice war as it is fought.

But community activists, armed with federal environmental laws, are mounting the toughest challenge yet to the [military's](#) use of Makua. And President Bush's recent decision to stop the Navy's target bombing on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques has emboldened them.

"Makua means 'parent'--this land is part of our family," said Leandra Wai, president of Malama Makua, or "Cherish Makua." "We have to take care of her." The group has filed suit in U.S. District Court to block live-fire exercises in the valley until any environmental effect can be fully studied. A hearing is scheduled for July 9.

The suit comes at a tough time for the Defense Department, which is grappling with civilian assaults on its use of practice ranges--from the highly publicized Vieques to the lesser-known Farallon de Medinilla, a target island near Saipan where seabirds recently became the object of a protective lawsuit.

Military leaders say they are being pressed on two fronts: As housing development bumps up against once-remote training grounds, nearby residents object to the noise, dust and danger of live-fire exercises. And, urbanization also means that swaths of undeveloped land held by the military have become critical refuges for endangered species that must be protected.

"Our military increasingly is faced with defending more lawsuits than [it is with] defending our nation," Rep. C.L. "Butch" Otter (R-Idaho) complained during a recent congressional hearing concerning training range restrictions.

In Hawaii and Puerto Rico, environmental concerns are layered with the emotional issue of native culture.

More than a decade ago, then-President Bush halted bombing of the island of Kahoolawe, a top amphibious training ground for the military that had become the poster child for the Hawaiian rights movement. As in Puerto Rico, political considerations ultimately overcame the military's strategic concerns.

Hawaiian activists now are setting their sights on Makua, a once-thriving valley that looms large in Hawaiian legend. It is home to at least 34 endangered species, including the last *Cyanea superba* plant occurring naturally in the wild, and one of the largest colonies of endangered Oahu tree snails.

Only a quarter of the 4,000-acre valley has been surveyed because of the danger of unexploded ordnance. But archeologists have uncovered more than 100 cultural features, some dating to 1200. On a bluff overlooking Makua Beach are the lava-rock remains of Ukanipo Heiau, a temple complex listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

When the military took over in 1942, environmental concerns were nowhere on the radar screen. Troops used Makua to practice ship-to-shore shelling, naval and aerial bombing, amphibious landings, tank assaults and all manner of artillery fire. Chemical waste was burned in open pits until 1992.

As military maneuvers inadvertently triggered a series of wildfires in the 1990s, the federal Fish and Wildlife Service and Malama Makua got involved. One 1995 fire, set by authorities as a prescribed burn, got out of control and charred half the valley. The Army halted training in September 1998, when an errant mortar round scorched 800 acres and came close to an endangered plant population.

Since then, the military has created a sophisticated wildfire prevention system and put \$1 million a year into environmental efforts at Makua. Botanists, for example, have sprouted hundreds of *Cyanea superba* seedlings and reintroduced them in safer areas.

On May 15, the Army announced it would resume training in Makua this summer; its environmental assessment concluded that it could do so while protecting rare species and cultural sites. Military officials said the exercises would not involve the most flammable ordnance, such as tracers and certain missiles, and would redirect artillery to avoid sensitive areas. The training area and number of soldiers involved also has been scaled back.

But Malama Makua is demanding a full environmental impact statement, required by law when there is "potential for significant impact."

"The potential for catastrophic damage is extremely high," said David Henkin, an attorney for the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, which represents the nonprofit group. "It's not a question of if. It's a question of when."

Waianae harbor master William J. Aila Jr. has doubts about military promises. The Army forcibly evicted his

uncle, rancher Ivanhoe Naiwi, from Makua during World War II, pledging to return his land in good shape six months after the war's end.

Naiwi died eight years ago, still waiting for the Army to make good on its promise. He is buried less than 100 yards outside Makua's military gates.

"I just want the Army to tell the truth," Aila said. "What is the cumulative impact of 60 years of military use? What's in the air? What's in the water? What's in the soil?"

The Army contends that any further delay will imperil its troops. It describes Makua as the only training range in Hawaii wide enough and deep enough to allow companies of 140 soldiers to assault a mock enemy under realistic battlefield conditions--with the sights, sounds and smells of live fire around them.

"To use a football analogy, it's OK to throw passes and run plays. But until you get the whole team together and run offense and defense 100 yards, you really can't synchronize a team," said Col. Rodney Anderson, commander of the 25th Infantry Division Artillery, based at Schofield Barracks on Oahu. "We've witnessed a steady erosion in readiness since the range was closed."

Despite passionate opposition concerning Makua, the military does enjoy support along this rural coast, where native sons and daughters often serve in the armed forces. Sen. [Daniel K. Inouye](#) (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, warns that the stakes are high at Makua--for Hawaii and for national security.

"A shutdown of live-fire exercises would almost certainly necessitate the Defense Department removing all combat forces from Hawaii, which would include [the Marines](#) at Kaneohe and the two brigades at Schofield Barracks," Inouye said in an interview. "If these units cannot train, they won't be ready for war."

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