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U. S. NAVAL AIR STATION



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From: Commanding Officer.
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1. In accordance with existing instructions, enclosure is forwarded herewith.


J. L. COTTEN.

Encl:
Historical Report

CC:
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HISTORY
Naval Air Station
PUUNENE, Maui, T. H.

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HISTORY
Naval Air Station
PUUNENE, Maui, T. H.

CHRONOLOGY

Pre-War Period 1939-1941

1939
August Commercial flying began at Maui Airport.
1940
March Maui Airport chosen as site for drone operations of Utility Squadron Three.
May VJ-3 arrived on Maui, commenced operations.
1941
April VF-2 used Maui Airport for training.

Organization Period 1942-1943

7 December VJ-3 alerted. Patrol and search flights instituted. Drone services temporarily curtailed.
11 December Commander John L. Murphy, USN arrived under verbal orders to develop Maui Airport into a Naval Air Station.
15,31 December Submarine surfaced in Kahului Bay and opened fire on town of Kahului. Maui's sole attacks of the war.
1942
25 January Naval Air Station, Maui commissioned, Lieutenant Commander Earl B. Wilkins, USNR, Commanding.
30 January Commander John L. Murphy, USN assumed command of NAS, Maui and Lieut. Comdr. Wilkins became Executive Officer.
22 February Carrier Aircraft Service Unit Four commissioned aboard.
1 March NAS Officers began standing Officer-of-the-Day watches, relieving VJ-3 officers and petty officers of this duty.
2 June First squadron, VF-72, arrived for training.
June USED and Army stopped work on air station. CPMS continued all work.
17 September Survey for second Naval Air Station on Maui authorized by Hawaiian Air Base.

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CHRONOLOGY

7 December Captain Murphy assigned additional duty as Prospective Commanding Officer, NAS, Kahului, Maui.

1943

26 February Maui District Shore Patrol established.

6 March 48th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion arrived.

15 March NAS, Kahului, Maui commissioned.

6 June ARGUS 10 arrived, began training squadrons in combat interception.

16 June Five Link instrument trainers ready for use.

16 June VJ-11 commissioned aboard by Commander Utility Wing Pacific Fleet.

5 July Two instrument instructors began working with pilots of Air Group Six.

10 August Navy Marketing Center established.

August Instrument instructors transferred to NAS, Kaneohe. Began "commuting" to NAS Puanene to instruct squadron pilots here.

1 September CASU-32 commissioned aboard. To be based temporarily at NAS, Kahului.

September Skeet and Trap ranges constructed.

October Ship and Aircraft Recognition Instructor reported to CASU-4 for duty.

28 October ARGUS 17 replaced ARGUS 10 in combat interception training.

23 November Land areas in excess of Navy's need for air station returned to Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company.

12 December Station chapel dedicated. Recognized by BuPers. Admiral Nimitz attended dedication.

Development Period 1944-1945

1944

February Air Support group arrived for training squadron personnel in air support procedure.

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CHRONOLOGY

1944

- 6 March CBMU-575 reported aboard. Took over work of Public Works Department.
- 19 April ARGUS 17 departed.
- May 127th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion replaced the 48th USNGB.
- 13 August Instrument instruction improved by the assignment of pilots, planes and maintenance personnel to NAS, Puanene under supervision of headquarters at NAS, Kaneohe.
- 11 September Synthetic "ground" training devices set up for use of squadron personnel; gunairstructor, 3A2, voice mirror, etc.
- 16 November Captain Junius L. Cotten, USN (Ret) relieved Captain John L. Murphy, USN as Commanding Officer of NAS Puanene.

1945

- 4 February Air Sea Rescue became the duty of three pilots specifically assigned under NAS, Puanene Operations Department.
- 1 May 127th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion departed.
- May Gun-camera method of improving pilot accuracy inaugurated by photographic and synthetic training divisions of NAS Operations Department.

HISTORY
Naval Air Station
PUUNENE, Maui, T. H.

NARRATIVE

PRE-WAR PERIOD 1939-1941

The Naval Air Station, Puunene, Maui, T. H. was the second Naval Air activity in the Fourteenth Naval District. The location was taken over gradually as a Naval Air Station from civilian use. At the time of the Navy's arrival the field was known as Maui Airport, a territorial airport from which Inter-Island Airways was conducting scheduled operations.

Commercial inter-island flying to Maui had been begun in 1929 by a small company which ceased operations after a few months due to lack of equipment and financial backing. On Armistice Day 1929 Inter-Island Airways Company, a subsidiary of the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, began scheduled commercial operations that have continued to the present.

Some of the earliest flights were in amphibian planes which landed in Kahului Bay. It was amphibian planes that were flown to Maalaea Airport, the first airport on Maui. Maalaea Airport became a territorial airport but was eventually condemned by the CAA because it was too small for the type of planes landing there.

The site for the new airport was chosen from the air with due regard for prevailing winds, weather and terrain, by representatives of Inter-Island Airways, the CAA, Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company and Kahului Railroad Company. The site chosen became Maui Airport, later Naval Air Station, Maui, T. H. and finally Naval Air Station, Puunene, Maui, T. H.

Commercial operations were moved to Maui Airport in August 1939. The building which now Operations Building for the Naval Air Station, Puunene at that time housed a waiting room, dispatcher's office and a communications office from which for the first time radio contact was

maintained between the Maui Airport and planes in flight. This radio operator was also Maui's first aviation weather reporter, reporting his informal weather observations by telegraph to Honolulu. He, as well as the others, was an employee of the Kahului Railroad Company, the agents for Inter-Island Airways on Maui.¹ Air traffic at that time was approximately 8000 passengers a year.

Although operations had begun at the Maui Airport the WPA continued paving and grading runways and taxiways. Later a group of stateside firms working as Territorial Airport Contractors carried on the expansion and improvement.²

During 1941 the CAA planned and constructed a radio range station at Makana, Maui which began operation in March 1942. A CAA control station began operating from one room of the Inter-Island Airways building on June 31, 1942.

First Navy Activity

Early in 1940 Lt.(jg) T. W. South, II, USN was sent to the Hawaiian Islands to choose a location for the operation of Utility Squadron Three. He found Maui Airport to be the most satisfactory field in the Hawaiian Islands. He chose this location for its good approaches, its superior meteorological conditions, its proximity to Cahu and its convenience to the fleet operation area. A group of contractors operating as Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases began erecting buildings and facilities to house the squadron at Maui Airport.

In May 1940 VJ-3 arrived on Maui and commenced operations under the command of Lieutenant (now Commander) R. F. Jones, USN. VJ-3's function at this time was to furnish units of the United States Fleet with radio controlled aircraft (drones) to be used as targets for anti-aircraft firing. Control of traffic at Maui Airport was maintained by VJ-3 personnel.

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a truck and later from the tower. VJ-3's officers and petty officers also carried on the administration of all the Navy activities at this time.

A crew of one Chief Petty Officer and several men were caretakers for the installation which was an auxiliary field of Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor.

During 1941 VF-2 came to Maui for training purposes. The advantages of the field for training carrier groups soon became evident and additional quarters were built and runways were lengthened and paved. Maalaea Airport was leased as a possible auxiliary field for training purposes.

ORGANIZATION PERIOD 1942-1943

On 7 December 1941 when word was received that Pearl Harbor was being attacked all VJ-3 planes were kept in the air. Four were armed with .30 caliber machine guns and the remainder were armed with automatic rifles. VJ-3 was entrusted with the security of the auxiliary field. The station was continuously alert and patrol flights were instituted by VJ-3 planes. Bomb shelters and machine gun emplacements were built.³ Personnel aboard at that time totaled 150 Navy men, 7 Naval Officers, 200 Army men and 2 Army Officers.⁴

After the outbreak of the war, drone service was temporarily curtailed, and the squadron concentrated more on patrol and search flights, both submarine and rescue, as requested by the Commander Utility Wing Pacific Fleet and the Commander Hawaiian Sea Frontier. Normal operations were resumed late in March 1942 but patrol and search flights continued until the following year to be included in the daily operations. Utility Squadron Three continues to the present its operation of the drones as well as the daily mail flight to and from Oahu.³

Commercial flights were almost uninterrupted in December 1941.

Flights to Hilo were resumed on December 8 although flights to Maui were held up for three or four days. Flying continued on the same schedule but was now under military supervision. Armed civilian guards were placed on all planes and all baggage was carefully inspected. Maui's sole attacks of the war were on 15 and 31 December 1941 when a submarine surfaced in Kahului Harbor and opened fire in the general direction of the Maui Pineapple Factory.¹

Naval Air Station Puanene Origin

On December 11, 1941 Commander John L. Murphy, USN, Commander Utility Wing Base Force came to Maui under verbal orders of the Commander Task Force Nine to prepare for the basing on Maui of personnel and equipment of one Naval Aircraft Carrier Group and one Army Air Corps Heavy Bombardment Group. The expansion was to include the extension of the runways, additional housing facilities, increased fuel storage, an oxygen plant and preparation for the maintenance of planes to be based here. The new facilities were planned under a very definite plan of dispersion to eliminate the possibility of destruction of all of one type of facility or supply or personnel by a single bomb hit. The area required for these dispersed facilities was in excess of 2500 acres and included a section of the territorial highway, a plantation village of some size and an irrigation system reservoir, in addition to the extensive sugar cane fields.⁴

Because the Maui Airport figured in the emergency plans for both the Army and the Navy the planning and work of expansion continued for a time under the supervision of both. Hawaiian Constructors operating under the USED carried out the plans of the Army. They erected many of the frame buildings in the CASU and squadron areas and the supply buildings in the new Naval Air Station area. Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases

under contracts NOy-4173 and 3550 operated under the direction of the Navy. Standard building plans forwarded by the Commandant Fourteenth Naval District, were used wherever possible.

On Sunday, 25 January 1942 the Naval Air Station, Maui was commissioned under Lieutenant Commander Earl B. Wilkins, USNR. Five days later Commander Murphy returned with orders to duty as Commanding Officer and Lieutenant Commander Wilkins became the Executive Officer. VJ-3 officers and petty officers continued the actual administration of the air station until the first of April, when enough Air Station officers were aboard to stand its watches and conduct its business.⁵

CASU & Commissioned

During February 1942 Carrier Aircraft Service Unit Four was commissioned aboard for the purpose of strengthening the defense of the Hawaiian Islands and to develop a mobile carrier aircraft maintenance unit capable of being transferred to duty aboard a carrier or to some forward base, upon short notice if necessary. Since its commissioning CASU-4 has been responsible for all aircraft maintenance and routine checks, all servicing of planes on the line, loading of ammunition, bombs and rockets, upkeep of all ordnance, radio and safety equipment and furnishing of supplies for the squadrons.

A detachment of Marine veterans of Pearl Harbor arrived in April to form the station Marine guard. Lt. K. C. Lovell, as Public Works Officer, began a job that was eventually to touch nearly every Navy shore establishment south of Oahu. It was eventually recommended that the Navy acquire title to the land area held by the Army, the Territory and the Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company and needed for the Naval Air Station. These areas are now held under a lease with the option to buy, for which prices have not yet been determined. The lease on Maalaea Airport was renewed, not for the purpose originally envisioned but for

a moving target machine gun range as a part of the training facilities of the Naval Air Station.

Demands for equipment for Maui apparently received some priority. For example, a generator set was transferred from Wake Island to Maui, telephone exchange equipment intended for Midway was diverted to Maui and the aircraft utility shop which finally arrived on Maui was originally planned for Midway and later for Samoa. Divided authority for the construction program led to certain delays in the acquisition of equipment and in the progress of construction. After five months of this bilateral construction program Commander Murphy wrote to Lieutenant Commander Powell "Lack of progress on the construction of this station has been such that as of this date no more planes could be based here than could have been based here prior to the outbreak of the war. This situation is intolerable and must be rectified!" Within weeks thereafter the firm of Hawaiian Constructors had stopped work, the USED had withdrawn and further expansion of the air station was carried on entirely by the Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases under the Navy's direction.

By midyear of 1942 the Navy had permission to control traffic on the section of the Puunene-Kiehi highway which was eventually to be completely inside the naval reservation. Plans had been made for an adequate water supply, power supply and sewage disposal and material for 40,000 feet of fence for enclosing the air station was requested. Building in the CASU and squadron areas was completed except for utility connections. The acquisition from the Army of the land area needed for the Naval Air Station continued to be a difficult problem of correspondence.

Second Naval Air Station Planned

Early in this year Lt. South, II was again surveying. This time it

was to choose a location for a second Naval Air Station on Maui. His recommendation was that any new field be built in the cane fields of Puunene valley starting from scratch.⁷ When in October the site for NAS, Kahului was chosen it was in the cane field area adjoining the shore of Kahului Bay.

In June 1942 fleet aircraft units began using the Naval Air Station Maui as a training station. VF-72 arrived with the first of the F4F's that kept the station occupied for the rest of the year.

During the second year of operation building continued, in the hands of the 48th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion. The moving target machine gun range at Maalaea Airport was cancelled as was the oxygen plant, but new training functions and safety measures were inaugurated and developed. An additional crash and rescue boat operated by NAS personnel was stationed at Kahului harbor and private telephone lines to the crash boat dock at Kihei were acquired. A radio transmitter building housing nine transmitters began operation.

New Training Facilities

Five Link instrument trainers originally shipped to Maui for a Fighter Director School, were uncrated and set up by personnel on detached duty from NAS, Kaneohe. ARGUS 10 arrived to train squadron personnel in combat interception. Two instrument instructors arrived to give instrument flight instruction to squadron pilots during their stay at Maui. The skeet and trap range was built primarily for the use of squadron personnel. An officer reported to CASU-4 as instructor in ship and aircraft recognition. Late in the year ARGUS 17 replaced ARGUS 10 in fighter director training. Four tracts of land were returned to Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company and the present outlines of the Naval Air Station were established.

Utility Squadron Eleven, off-spring of VJ-3 was commissioned aboard and trained for two months before leaving.⁸ New measures for the health and pleasure of Navy personnel included a moving picture theatre with a seating capacity of approximately 700, a picnic and recreation area within the limits of the station, a Navy Marketing Center and the Shore Patrol. In December Admiral Nimitz attended the dedication of the new chapel.

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD 1944-1945

Still more facilities were offered squadron personnel during the following year. A support air control unit began training pilots in air support phases of amphibious landing operations, the instrument flight training program was expanded and synthetic training devices including gunairstructor were installed.

The 127th Construction Battalion replaced the 43th Construction Battalion as constructors for the station and CBMU-575 arrived and assumed the duties of the Public Works Department. VJ-3's swimming beach on Kamaole Bay became the Navy Beach for the use of all NAS, Puunene personnel.

The present year has seen the departure of the 127th Construction Battalion and the improvement of air-sea rescue arrangements. Three pilots are now permanently assigned to air-sea rescue duty where formerly NAS, Puunene and NAS, Kahului on alternate days provided a standby pilot as a rescue pilot.

Senior Naval Officer Present On Maui

Because of relative rank as between commanding officers of Naval Air Stations (permanent Naval units on Maui) Captain Murphy became Senior Naval Officer Present. On 21 May 1944 he was designated Commander Maui Group Local Naval Defense forces, and as such had many responsibilities on Maui not directly connected with the Naval Air Station. At one time he had additional duty as prospective Commanding Officer of NAS, Kahului.

The functions of the Shore Patrol, Navy Marketing Center, Navy Freight Office and Fire Marshal were established under the authority of the Senior Naval Officer Present or were transferred there later from the Naval Air Station. The Naval Air Stations Kahului and Hilo depended on this parent station until their own activities were firmly established. The Public Works Department under Lieutenant Lovell supervised surveying, procurement and actual construction for both air stations.

Even the departments and divisions of the Naval Air Station have been utilized by other naval units on the island since the time when the Naval Air Station, Maui was the only base here. Most important, the air-sea rescue planes and crash and rescue boats of the Puunene Operations Department are at the call of all aircraft in the Hawaiian Islands. In addition the chaplains, the disbursing officer, the legal officer and the legal assistance officer, and the educational services officer find it necessary to do an appreciable amount of travelling to extend their respective services to the other Navy, Marine and Coast Guard units on the island. The dispensary, officers club, ship's service, laundry, bakery, photographic laboratory, supply department and post office, while not carrying their services to the location of the other military units, find a very large part of their work to be for the direct benefit of those units.

Captain J. L. Cotten relieved Captain Murphy in November 1944 as Commanding Officer NAS Puunene, Senior Naval Officer Present, and Commander Maui Group, Local Naval Defense Force.

A contrast between the size of the Naval activity at NAS Puunene now and in December of 1941 when Captain Murphy first arrived is probably best shown by the personnel aboard at the two times. On 12 December

about a month before the time of commissioning, the station on board personnel numbered 7 officers and 150 enlisted men, including VJ-3. On 1 July 1945 the station on board count was 206 officers, 2,465 enlisted personnel. Fleet Air Detachment numbered 359 officers and 333 men making the total based at Naval Air Station Puunene 565 officers and 2,798 men including seven Navy nurses, eight WAVE officers and 92 WAVE enlisted personnel.⁹ Total aircraft on board - 271.¹⁰

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References

1. Interview with Mr. William R. Faris, Station Manager for Hawaiian Airlines at Maui Airport and Mr. George Tam, Radio Operator.
2. Interview with Mr. A. H. Wong, Deputy County Engineer, County of Maui.
3. Commander Utility Squadron Three confidential letter serial 0137 dated 7 June 1945.
4. Commander Utility Wing restricted letter CUW/N1 dated 12 December 1941 to Commandant Fourteenth Naval District. (appendix B)
5. NAS, Puunene, Maui station log.
6. Memo from Commander Murphy to Lieutenant Commander V.A.A. Powell, Public Works Officer, Fourteenth Naval District, dated 28 May 1942.
7. T. W. South, II (Commander Utility Squadron Three) VJ-3/N1 to Commander Brown dated 13 March 1942.
8. NAS, Puunene War Diary, June and August 1943.
9. Monthly Station Report of On-Board Personnel, NAS, Puunene, Confidential, 1 July 1945.
10. Monthly Station Report of On-Board aircraft, confidential, 1 June 1945.
11. Commandant Fourteenth Naval District secret letter serial 00214 dated 10 April 1944, Subject: NAS, Puunene, Additional facilities approved for construction.