

HISTORIC HAWAII

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Courtesy of Hawai'i State Archives

Ford Island in 1925 showing U.S. Army's Luke Field on left side and the growing Navy facilities on the right side.

Historic Ford Island
Moku'ume'ume
Historic Structures of Ford Island

Moku'ume'ume

by William H. Dorrance

Few people know the history of the island in Pearl Harbor named Moku'ume'ume. In fact, very few people know the island by that name because almost everyone calls it Ford Island. This is a story of that island.

Moku'ume'ume is a small island located in Pearl Harbor on the Island of O'ahu. It is entirely surrounded by water deep enough to accommodate deep draft ocean-going vessels. The island measures about 1.4 miles long and 0.70 miles wide in a roughly elliptical shape. Its surface area is about 500 acres.

Moku'ume'ume means "island of 'ume'ume," a game that the Hawaiians played. The game began with a gathering of commoners and chiefs around a bonfire on the island. As evening fell the leader chanted a lascivious song. Couples formed a ring about the leader and the fire. As he chanted, the leader used his swatch of a wand to touch a woman and then a man. The couple then retired to spend the night together. While participants might have been married, they were not considered married during the game. In other words, 'ume'ume was a short-term mate swapping. At daylight the game was over and all players returned to their respective mates. The coming of the missionaries in the 1820s brought an end to this game. The influential Spaniard, Francisco de Paula Marin, took possession of the island around 1810. He raised sheep, hogs, goats and rabbits on the island to supply his profitable ship provisioning business.

Following a turbulent era of unsettled land ownership during the early Hawaiian Kingdom, ownership of the island passed to a trust formed for the son of prominent Honolulu physician, Dr. Seth Porter Ford. Thus, the mod-

ern-day name for Moku'ume'ume was established. His son, Seth Porter Ford, Jr., took possession of the island about 1885.

"Ford Island" is roughly translated as "Poka 'Ailana" in Hawaiian, and some native Hawaiians did refer to the island by that name.

In 1891, Ford sold the island to the John Ii estate. This estate had vast landholdings in and around Pearl Harbor. Judge John Papa Ii (1800-1870) was a native Hawaiian of noble lineage who had served kings Kamehameha I, II, III and IV.

Mr. Charles A. Brown married Judge Ii's daughter and heir, Irene. He man-

aged the estate from 1887 to 1916 after which his son, George Ii Brown, managed the estate.

The Ii Brown Family is well-known to dedicated golfers in Hawai'i. Francis Ii Brown, another son of Charles A. Brown and Irene Ii Brown, was a champion amateur golfer in the islands in the years before World War II. The magnificent golf course at the Mauna Lani Resort on the Island of Hawai'i is named for Francis Ii Brown who generously gave his time and resources to support the sport.

In 1899, the O'ahu Sugar Company leased Ford Island from the Ii estate. The company planted some 300-odd



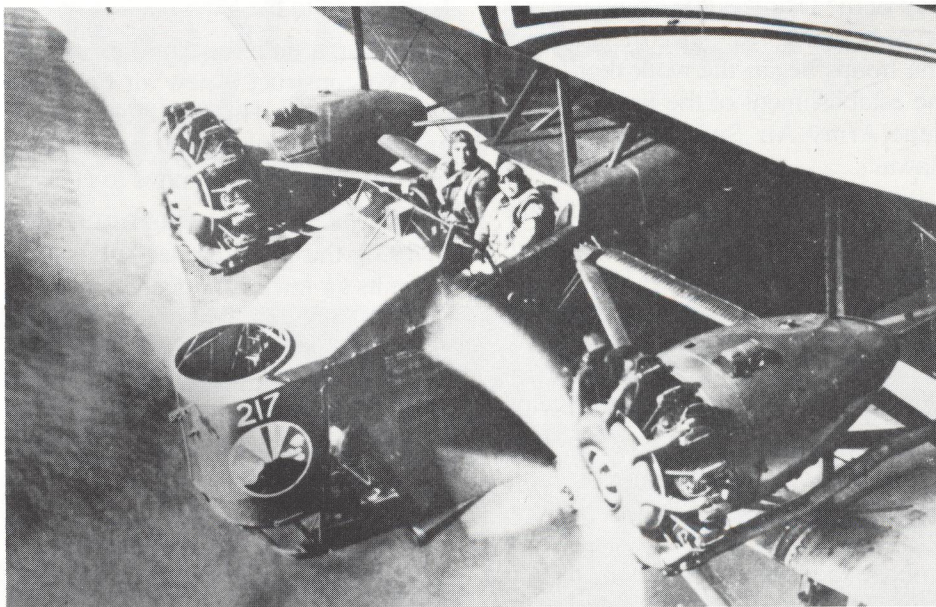
Battery Adair in 1919 showing the two-gun casements located on the northeastern side of Ford Island. The guns were removed in 1925.

acres of sugarcane on the island. Docks were built on the island and on Waipi'o Peninsula to facilitate transfer of cane harvests by barge on the way to the mill at Waipahu.

With the coming of World War I, the U.S. War Department was concerned about the defenses of the large and growing U.S. Navy establishment at Pearl Harbor. Ford Island was selected as a site for land-based guns to defend the harbor.

In 1916, two small parcels of land on the island were acquired from the Ii estate by the War Department. These sites were selected as casements for two batteries of 6-inch rifled guns. Each battery consisted of two guns. The locations were at the southwest and northeast corners of the island.

Battery Boyd and Battery Henry Adair



U.S. Air Force photo

Two Army aviators fly in an open cockpit Keystone bomber, the same model stationed at Luke Field.



U.S. Army Museum of Hawai'i photo

were completed in mid-1917 and were the first presence of military on Ford Island. The two batteries served the U.S. Army until 1925, by which time they were deactivated and the guns removed.

In the fall of 1916, the War Department decided to augment the coast defense of O'ahu with the newly formed 6th Aero Squadron. The commander, Capt. John F. Curry, was sent to O'ahu to select a site for his squadron. Because he was told that his initial complement of aircraft would be flying boats he looked for a location near water. He recommended Ford Island.

In 1917, the War Department concurred with Curry's recommendation, and he was directed to negotiate the purchase of the island from the estate.

The O'ahu Sugar Company surrendered its leasehold in late 1917 at which time the purchase by the War Department was completed. It was understood by the War Department that both the Army and the Navy could use Ford Island.

The first contingent of Army personnel arrived in September 1918. The last crop of the O'ahu Sugar Company was yet to be harvested. Nevertheless these first troops began the work that led to the establishment of the first independent Army Air Service station in Hawai'i.

In 1919, the new station was officially designated "Luke Field." The station was named for World War I ace Frank Luke, a U.S. Army fighter pilot who was killed in action over the Western Front. The first contingent of pursuit planes and bombers was soon delivered by ship.

Luke Field developed into a sizeable base. It was noted for its gymnasium, post exchange and the convenience of on-base facilities. In addition, regular ferry service made transportation to and from the island a simple matter, and it made Honolulu an accessible city. Luke Field was a pleasant duty station for the Army's airmen.

By 1932, the two squadrons of the 5th Composite Group were assigned the modern Keystone bombers. These lumbering, fabric-covered, twin-engine biplanes had a top speed of 111 miles per hour. They landed at a speed of 57 mph, and could carry a load of 2000 1-lb. bombs a range of 800 miles at the most. Such was the state of our strategic bomber forces then.

The Keystone bombers were used well into 1935. At full strength the Army had 210 various models of Keystone bombers. All were similar in appearance and performance. The U.S. military had half of these bombers stationed in the Panama Canal Zone, the Philippines and Hawai'i. Such was the strategy at that time.

In 1935, there were 66 Keystone bombers stationed at Luke Field assigned to the two squadrons of the 5th Composite Group. By late 1935, it was apparent that the island was becoming too crowded for joint Army and Navy operations so a deal was made. The Army would take possession of the Navy's field near Sunny-

vale, California, and in return it would give North Island in San Diego and Ford Island to the Navy.

At the same time the Army purchased land to construct a new air base that would become Hickam Field. It was understood that the Army was to occupy Ford Island until a move to Hickam Field was possible.

In 1937, the Army earnestly began to move its air force contingent across the bay to Hickam. Because there was great attachment to many of the buildings at Luke Field, some, including the gymnasium, were moved by barge to the new station at Hickam.

By 1940 the move of Luke Field's personnel and buildings to Hickam Field was complete. The Army's presence on Ford Island had ended and Luke Field became a memory. Ford Island was now the exclusive property of the U.S. Navy.

It is well known that Ford Island played an important role in the attack on Pearl Harbor because the bulk of the U.S. Pacific Fleet was anchored near the island. Not very well known is that aircraft on the ground at Ford Island were also destroyed.

Of the 70 aircraft on the ground at Ford Island when Pearl Harbor was attacked, 33 were destroyed. Despite this the air base remained operational

during the attack, and commercial telephone service to shore was not disrupted.

World War II was the busiest time for Ford Island. At least one squadron of the useful PBV flying boats was stationed there, as were numerous other types of Navy aircraft. The runway grew until it covered the entire center of the island. Hangars and auxiliary buildings filled almost all available space.

With the advent of earth satellites and improvements in range and speed of modern aircraft after the war, it wasn't necessary to have a large Navy air base near Pearl Harbor. The Navy didn't need to depend on the lumbering flying boats to support the fleet, and Ford Island Naval Air Station became obsolete.

In 1962 the Navy officially deactivated Ford Island as an air base. Today the island's old housing serves as naval housing, and some of the buildings serve as a home base for a few operational commands. Most of the facilities supporting the air base have been largely abandoned to minimal maintenance.

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View of Ford Island from 'Aiea Heights circa 1910-1920.