

# Army Road has an interesting history

*Editor's note: Those who travel around the Big Island can find the remnants of a bygone era nearly everywhere. This column attempts to explain the history behind some of them.*

**Q: Off Stainback Highway above the town of Mountain View is a side road called Army Road. Do you know anything about it?**

The story of this road began during 1962 when the Smithsonian Institution began its "Pacific Project" study of the ecology and migratory behavior of Pacific marine birds. The United States Army Research Office put up \$2,807,460 for this six-year effort.



## The Riddle of the Relic

Kent Warshauer

This study supposedly was for the investigation of the natural distribution of diseases by migratory birds, according to the Pentagon — but the real reason for this large expenditure was to find a remote spot for conducting experiments in chemical-biological warfare.

The idea was to find an island remote from civilization and inhabited by birds that did not migrate from the test area. Baker Island, a U.S. possession, was chosen for

this experiment due to lack of bird life. Plans for a jungle testing site were made as the U.S. Army convinced the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources to lease a parcel of land in the Upper Waiakea Forest Reserve.

This area was chosen by the military authorities based on a weather testing program and ionospheric survey conducted during September of 1961 at nearby Kilauea Military Camp. During the spring of 1964, Army officials appeared before the State Land Board explaining that this site was needed to test a helicopter landing pad that would be dropped onto the treetops.

The gullible state officials believed this, and unknowingly issued the U.S. Army a month-to-month permit June 10, 1964, so the Army's research specialists from Aberdeen, Md., could conduct "certain meteorological and tracer tests" in secret.

Kilauea Military Camp became headquarters for this operation, and a special laboratory building was erected there. This building, No. 82, can easily be seen by anyone passing on Highway 11 near the 30-mile marker. Preparations for the testing of anti-personnel biological stimulants in the forest reserve went forward to "determine

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T-H photo by Kent Warshauer

This sign along Stainback Highway marks the beginning of the old Army Road.

the vulnerability of the military complex to biological attack" according to a Pentagon spokesman.

This area became the site of a series of tests involving various deadly substances. From July 1964 to October 1967, an experiment was conducted with biological anti-personnel stimulants, code named "Yellow Leaf." Both bacillus globigii and serratia marcescens bacteria, along with fluorescent powder were released into the atmosphere.

A common spore forming bacteria, bacillus globegii was chosen for testing as it mimicked the feared anthrax bacillus excepting it didn't cause disease. The Army said the tests "proved so successful in the dense, jungle like area near Puu Makaala" that a five-year lease was requested for more extensive testing and observations.

In September 1965, general lease S-4012 was signed with the U.S. Army War Laboratory. On Jan. 3, 1966, the Army took possession of a one-acre plot (with a 1.5-square-mile buffer zone) for classified "meteorological" tests. The lease said the land was "to be used as a site to conduct classified meteorological and related tests," but the official announcement said the area would be used to create a "temporary jungle environmental test facility" to see how the humid, tropical climate affected scientific equipment and small munitions.

Under tight security, the contracting firm of James W. Glover, Ltd. built the new facility under the direction of George McEldowney, local manager. A road - Army Road - was bulldozed to the location, and a perimeter fence erected of three-strand barbed wire and posted "U.S. Government Reservation - No Trespassing."

A wooden boardwalk to the center of the property was built, and paths leading in different directions laid out, and marked with signs reading "300 meters" and such. In the center of the compound, two small shed-like buildings were erected to store equipment, and two massive 300-foot towers were built with the help of helicopters supplied by Honolulu-based Central Pacific Helicopters, which also flew in construction materials.

During construction of the steel towers, a helicopter crashed in the jungle, but security was so tight that neither the police or the Federal Aviation Administration were notified, and the accident was never

reported in the press.

Once the test site activated, armed Marines with German shepherds patrolled the area and no one was allowed near when experiments were under way.

Besides secret biological testing of germ warfare agents, newspapers later reported experiments were done using various nerve gases. Among the toxic portions were the nerve agent G-B or Sarin, the gas developed by the Nazis and made famous by Japanese terrorists in the subways of Tokyo. Sarin was tested during April-June, 1966, March-April 1967 and again April-May 1967.

They also tested the gas B-Z in May-June, 1966. Known as the "humane weapon," B-Z gas affected its victims in a manner similar to LSD. People under the influence of this gas would talk to water fountains and pray to fire hydrants. The Army concluded that it was not a reliable weapon as an enemy general under the effects of this drug could start a nuclear war, stand up and sing the Star-spangled Banner, or lie down and play dead.

Chemical samples were taken by truck to KMC's building 82, where they were analyzed by six civilian employees and about 40 military men dressed in differently colored overalls. The contaminated materials used in these experiments were then taken across the highway and dumped into a earth crack, where they remain today.

On Jan. 16, 1984, the western region office of the National Park Service sent Jim Huddleston to KMC to see what was being done with the toxic waste. Huddleston was rightly concerned about the danger of nerve gas and biological weapons. He was told the dump had been covered by the highway and left without discovering the waste's true whereabouts.

During April of 1969, Seymour Hersh, author of the book "Chemical and Biological Warfare," told Star-Bulletin science writer Richard Hout and military writer Lyle Nelson the Army had tested chemical agents in Hawaii. Nerve gas testing was reported in the Washington Post of June 29. Finally, on Aug. 11, 1969, the Army admitted the tests were held at Waiakea.

The statement said "The Army had conducted limited chemical tests under strict safety precautions to obtain defensive information."

A letter from the Army to U.S. Representative Patsy Mink disclosed the fact that both B-Z and G-B nerve gases had been

tested near Kulani Prison in the Waiakea Forest Reserve in 1966 and 1967. This was made public on Sept. 17, 1969. The Tribune-Herald then immediately sent a reporter to KMC and secured an interview with Major Paul L. Kirn, who'd taken command of the camp Sept. 11, 1969.

Jake Williams, the Tribune-Herald reporter, inquired where the troops conducting these experiments were housed and other questions that had pertained to the Kilauea Military Camp. Major Kirn, commanding officer of the camp replied "I don't know. If I did know, I couldn't possibly release the information. It would be classified information."

Opposition by the public over the use of nerve gas on the island was tremendous, as more facts became known about past, current and planned testing. From the governor, the mayor and outraged members of the State Land Board, pressure mounted on the United States Army. Kilauea Military Camp was buzzing with rumors.

Other secret experiments in death-dealing chemicals also occurred during late 1966 and early 1967 on a six-acre site between Stainback Highway and Saddle Road. Though this area is a watershed, the Hawaii Department of Water Supply was not notified of this activity and did not learn of it until Sept. 19, 1969.

Dow Chemical Co. conducted the tests to demonstrate the capability of one concoction to kill every growing thing in a jungle environment for Department of Defense officials involved in "Operation Ranchhand," the defoliant effort to denude Vietnam of jungle cover.

Dow claimed it was a compound named Tordon 101, but it was more likely a substance called Agent White. This spray was composed of a combination of triisopropanoilamine salt piclorin, a selective herbicide most effective on broad leaf plants, and the well-known chemical 24D, or DDT.

This mixture was known to have a high solubility in water and a high stability in the soil, and there was a strong possibility of its movement in surface and drainage water. The testing was done by spraying this substance on the jungle using crop dusters supplied by Murrayair, and chief pilot William Stearns refused any comment on the activity.

I have spoken to an eyewitness to the effects of this assault on the forest, and he reported everything in the experimental plot perished.