

Target isle protest hui helped spur its cleanup

HSA
It's been four decades since the group made landfall on Kahoolawe

By Gary T. Kubota
gkubota@staradvertiser.com

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Walter Ritte Jr. can still recall when he first felt Kahoolawe's strong emotional tug.

It was January 1976 and he and Dr. Emmett Aluli, both Hawaiian activists, had just been arrested on the island.

"I could feel a tingling in my toes," Ritte said. "The island was saying it was dying. The island was calling out for help."

The Navy, which had used the barren isle for target practice since World War II, removed the two by helicopter, but Ritte returned repeatedly and was arrested several more times.

This month Protect Kahoolawe Ohana activists and their supporters are marking the 40th anniversary of the group's first protests, which they regard as a political struggle tied to the 1970s' Hawaiian Renaissance — a revival of long-suppressed and neglected traditional cultural identity expressed in everything from music, language and hula to Hawaiian voyaging.

"I think the key thing is the revitalization of aloha aina — recognizing the island's sacred nature, and the sacred nature and kinship between Native Hawaiian people and the land and the gods," said Ty Kawika Tengan, chairman of the University of Hawaii's Department of Ethnic Studies.

Ritte and Aluli were leaders of the PKO, which filed a



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A group of Molokai and Maui activists, including Walter Ritte Jr., standing middle, meets with Lt. Gov. Nelson Doi, right. Doi said he supported the return of Kahoolawe to the state and promised to help the group gain access to the island.

ISLAND

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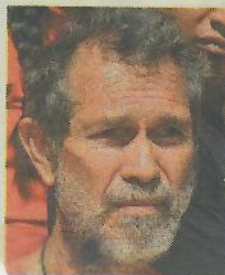
federal lawsuit seeking a halt to military training on the 45-square-mile island. In 1977 the court allowed training to continue but directed the Navy to prepare an environmental impact statement and undertake an inventory of Kahoolawe's historic sites.

The protests continued, and activists George Helm and Kimo Mitchell disappeared while crossing to Kahoolawe from Maui in 1977. A memorial in their honor stands today at the island's Hakoawa Bay.



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Walter Ritte Jr.
Hawaiian activist



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waiian Affairs for a fund that aims to provide training for cultural practitioners in 2016-17.

Nahoopii said the commission is prohibited from generating revenue through commercial activities on Kahoolawe.

Under state law the future plan for Kahoolawe calls for it to be among the first lands transferred to a sovereign Native Hawaiian entity recognized by the state and federal governments.

Aluli, the Protect Kahoolawe Ohana leader, said the successful movement to halt the bombing of Kahoolawe has had a rippling effect, spreading the concept of protecting and caring for the land. He said he's optimistic about the future of Kahoolawe.

Through their court fight, the PKO activists were granted access to the island to practice traditional religious beliefs. In the early 1980s their efforts led to the island, with 544 archaeological and historic sites, being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the early 1990s live-fire training ended, and the Navy turned over control of Kahoolawe to the state.

When an ordnance cleanup effort began in 1994, there was an understanding that the Navy would clear 100 percent of the surface and 30 percent of the island to a depth of 4 feet, according to the state Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission, which has authority over the island.

Ten years later 75 percent of the surface ordnance had been removed and 9 percent cleared to a depth of 4 feet. That added up to 10 million pounds of ordnance.

But a substantial amount remains and the cleanup has since stalled.

"The push for more UXO (unexploded ordnance) cleanup will have to come from our congressional delegation directing the Navy to continue the work and to provide the funding," commission Director Michael Nahoopii said last week.

"The federal government has a responsibility to help the state restore the island as a unique and important natural habitat."

However, Nahoopii acknowledges the political circumstances are different from those of the mid-1990s, when U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye was chairman of the defense appropriations subcommittee and no wars were underway.

These days KIRC officials and volunteers are focused on restoring vegetation to cleared areas.

The commission has \$1 million in state funds for fiscal 2016-17, in addition to grants and donations. Also, the state has provided KIRC with \$2.5 million to build a solar panel grid on Kahoolawe.

KIRC officials have asked state lawmakers to set aside a portion of the state's conveyance tax to restore natural habitat and maintain the island as a national cultural treasure. But the requests were met with resistance at the state Legislature, Nahoopii said.

The Protect Kaho'olawe Ohana has received \$129,100 from the state Office of Ha-

"As the technology improves and more Hawaii persons are trained in ordnance removal, the cost might not be as prohibitive," he said.

In retrospect, occupying the island was worth the risk, said Ritte, Aluli's co-leader.

He recalled that he and fellow Molokai resident Richard Sawyer, both experienced hunters, spent more than a month on the island, living off stashes of water, coconuts, wild goat meat and C rations left by Navy search teams that had been unsuccessful in their efforts to find the pair.

"We were actually following them around," Ritte said.

The two also walked on goat trails because they thought the paths were generally clear of ordnance and the goat traffic would hide their footsteps.

Ritte said he and the other activists were young and idealistic, and it seemed to them there was no reason why they shouldn't prevail in their efforts to stop the bombing and shelling.

"We believed what we were doing was right and what they were doing was wrong," he said.