

# Sunday Focus

## Kaula: forgotten

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*Special to The Advertiser*

The Island of Kaula was one of the five Hawaiian Islands seen by Captain Cook during his first visit in 1778. Following Cook's death during the second visit in 1779, Kaula was the last island seen when the expedition's vessels departed from Hawaiian waters.

Today, Kaula has been virtually forgotten by the people of Hawaii and remains practically unknown to the outside world. There can be little doubt that the U.S. Navy would like it to stay that way. To them, the island is known as the Kaula Rock Target.

Kaula covers 136 acres (four times the size of Ala Moana shopping center) and is located 20 miles to the southwest of Niihau and 150 miles to the west-northwest of Honolulu. The island rises abruptly to an elevation of 550 feet and has been described as appearing like a huge sea turtle on the horizon.

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt set aside nearly all of the small volcanic and coral islands in the northwestern portion of the Hawaiian chain as a sanctuary for wildlife. Millions of migratory sea birds, as well as seals and turtles, depend on these islands for breeding purposes. The result of Roosevelt's farsighted conservation action can be seen today as the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most outstanding natural preserves in the world.

ONLY TWO OF THE northwestern islands, Kaula and Midway, were not covered by the Presidential Order of 1909. Both of these islands should have been. Apparently there was little reason or incentive at the time to have strategically located Midway officially declared a sanctuary. By 1909 the island had been colonized for some six years by the Commercial Pacific Cable Company. Midway's massive albatross populations were therefore already safe from the Japanese feather poachers that were slaughtering hundreds of thousands of birds on the other small islands in the chain.

The reason for not including Kaula in the sanctuary perhaps will never be posi-

tively known. The importance of Kaula as a nesting site for numerous species of sea birds was well-known to the Hawaiian people. Possibly this information was not available to President Roosevelt, thereby causing the island to be simply overlooked and forgotten. Another possibility is that Kaula's steep cliffs may have been regarded as a natural defense against feather poachers. Federal protection may not have been thought necessary in order to ensure the birds' continued well-being.

This explanation would seem to be the most reasonable, as the first known landing on the island by a non-Hawaiian did not take place until 1920. Even then, the individual was unable to reach the summit.

WHATEVER THE ORIGINAL reason for not including Kaula in the Presidential Order of 1909, the result has been, and continues to be, the destruction of nesting sea birds by military bombs and gunfire. The events that brought about this incompatible and intolerable use of public property provide an interesting lesson in land acquisition and environmental degradation.

In December of 1924, Territorial Governor Farrington signed Executive Order 173 which set aside Kaula Island for public purposes as a United States Lighthouse Reservation under the control of the Department of Commerce. During the summer of 1925, personnel of the Lighthouse Service succeeded in building a trail to the island's summit. On the top, two stone structures were found that were thought to be religious shrines. A shelter cave with a low stone wall across the entrance was also discovered.

These findings confirmed the reports of Captain Cook that early Hawaiians periodically made visits to Kaula.

Due to unfavorable weather conditions, Lighthouse Service personnel were not able to make another landing on the island until the summer of 1932. At that time an automatic gas light was constructed and put into service. The first and only published survey of the island's flora and fauna was also conducted in the summer of 1932. Results of this survey appeared in a Bishop Museum report and



# bird island also bomb

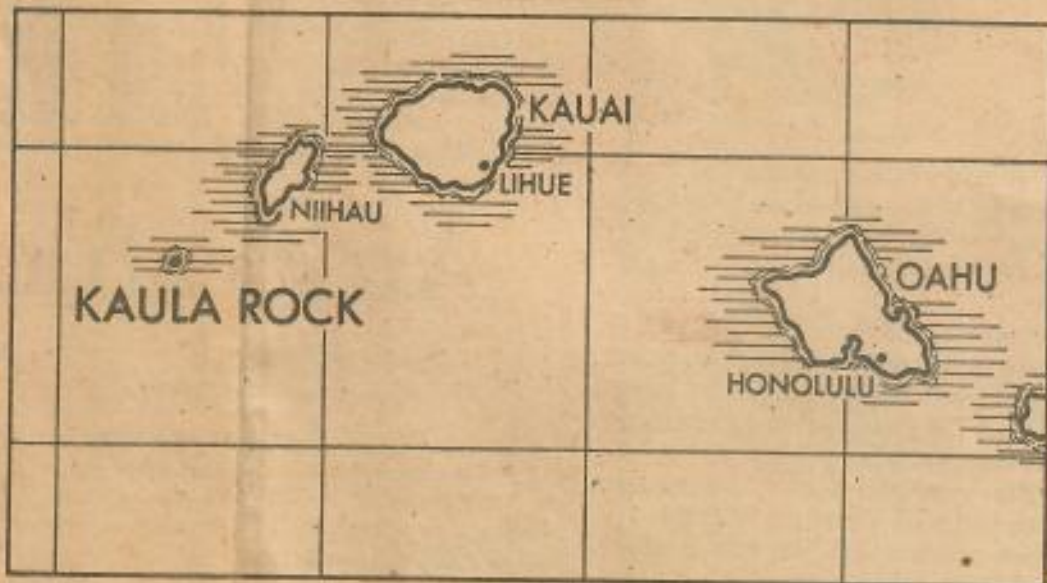
revealed that 15 species of plants and 14 species of sea birds were present.

**AMONG THE BIRDS** in greatest abundance were noddy and sooty terns, red-tailed tropicbirds, blue-faced, red-footed and hooded boobies, and frigate birds. White terns, petrels and shearwaters were also found. The biology of Kaula was clearly typical of the other isolated islands in the northwestern portion of the Hawaiian chain.

Practically no information about Kaula is available for the 25 years following installation of the automatic light. It seems

which show that the Territorial Government, Congress or the President ever granted approval for bombing, or was even officially notified of this action. Between 1952 and 1965 the Coast Guard continued to hold jurisdiction over Kaula and, at the same time, apparently raised no objections to the military's delivery of all kinds of ordnance. In addition to the standard bombings, strafings and use of high intensity flares, this ordinance also at time included torpedos and Regulus missiles fired from submarines.

Beginning in the 1960s, residents of



safe to assume that, except for yearly maintenance visits, the island and its sea birds were left in peace. In Washington, however, one significant event did take place during this period that would ultimately affect the island's safety. In 1939, the Lighthouse Service of the Department of Commerce was integrated into the U.S. Coast Guard.

In 1947, 25 years after installation, the Kaula light was permanently closed down. This action extinguished the island's hope for remaining unmolested.

**THE FIRST ADMITTED** bombing and strafing by Navy and Marine Corps aircraft started in 1962. This was apparently initiated with the blessing of the Coast Guard. However, no records can be found

Kauai started to voice opposition to this senseless killing of sea birds, many of which are valuable to fishermen for locating schools of fish and detecting ocean current changes. People living on Kauai seemed to be the most concerned, probably because at night they could actually see what the military was doing. For most other residents in the state, Kaula was out of sight, and out of mind. In 1961 the Kauai Board of Supervisors officially asked the Navy to halt the bombing. Their request was promptly and quietly rejected, as many other such requests have been during the years that followed.

**IN EARLY 1965**, members of Hawaii's congressional delegation were called upon for aid in the matter. In response to an

# target

inquiry by Rep. Patsy Mink, the Department of the Interior (administrators of the National Refuge System) stated that Kaula has "... impressive value as a nesting area for certain sea birds ..." and that it is "... highly desirable that the Island of Kaula be considered for National Wildlife Refuge status as an addition to the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge."

Further, Mrs. Mink was told that everything possible would be done to have the island incorporated into the Refuge. Unfortunately, the Department of the Interior subsequently dropped the matter, after being told by the Navy that Kaula was vital to the war effort in Vietnam. Conservation groups on Kauai also agreed to stop campaigning against the Navy, after being told the same thing.

In March 1965, Rep. Spark Matsunaga publicly announced that jurisdiction of Kaula had been officially transferred from the Coast Guard to the Navy. The island's "give-away" therefore took place without organized opposition, in the name of national security. It is interesting to note that throughout the crisis of World War II, the bombing of Kaula and its sea birds had not been considered necessary by the military for "national security" or "defense readiness."

**KAULA WOULD AGAIN** have drifted out of public eye after Navy acquisition, had it not been for the pilots of two Sky-raidiers from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga enroute to Vietnam. On the night of Oct. 5, 1965 these pilots became "confused" (as it was later explained) and dropped eight 250-pound bombs on Niihau, 32 miles from their intended destination of Kaula. Fortunately, the explosions took place in an unpopulated area.

Nearly two days passed before the Navy publicly announced the incident. In the meantime, members of Hawaii's congressional delegation were informed through newspaper sources. Senator Hiram Fong accused the Navy of "gross carelessness," and Mrs. Mink renewed her call for an end to bombing, both for the safety of people and the sake of sea



# Forgotten bird island

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birds. Senator Daniel Inouye expressed "anger and dismay." In the end, however, the Navy refused to halt bombardments, even long enough for an investigation of the incident.

Little else was heard of Kaula until August 1971, when the Navy conducted a two day environmental survey of the island with the help of State and Federal biologists. Rather than reflecting a sudden change of attitude, this survey was prompted by a direct request from former president Nixon. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that statements be filed outlining the environmental effects resulting from actions that are federally funded. Military bombardments of islands and sea birds come under this category. A newspaper article announced the completion of the two-day survey; however, in the following months and years no reports were made available and an Environmental Impact Statement was never filed.

ALTHOUGH the exact status of Kaula's environ-

ment presently remains a mystery to the public, fishermen in the area report that sea birds still nest, or at least attempt to nest, on the island. This would suggest that the island is not now, nor has it ever been, the barren or worthless "rock" to which it is sometimes referred.

The recent renewal of

efforts to have the bombing of Kahoolawe stopped should also encompass the Island of Kaula. Hawaii's forgotten bird island should no longer continue to be forgotten. A reasonable, but definite, date should be set for halting all bombardments. This should be on or before January 1978.

the 200th anniversary of Kaula's European discovery. Following the cessation of destruction, the island should at long last be transferred to the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge where it belongs. This seems the least that could be done after 23 years of military use.

B-2 Honolulu Star-Bulletin Thursday, January 1, 1976

## LETTERS to the Editor

### Bombing of Kaula

Navy and Marine Corps officials in Hawaii must surely have breathed a sigh of relief for the sparse news coverage given to a recent announcement by the Army. Tucked away on page I-6 of the Dec. 17 Star-Bulletin, a short article entitled "Rest in Peace" told of the Army's annual 100-

day moratorium on artillery practice near the Nisqually River system in Washington State. The purpose of this halt to bombardments is to permit the undisturbed development of eggs spawned from a million salmon. Further, an Army spokesman was quoted as saying that "the Army is going to continue to train as it always has, sensitive to spawning, sensitive to wildlife, sensitive to everything that goes on in the environment."

Residents of Hawaii may well ask what similar commitment has been made by the Navy and Marine Corps to responsible weapons training. Such a question can best be answered by calling attention to Kaula, a small island located 30 miles southwest of Kauai.

Kaula is well recognized as an important ancestral nesting site for 14 species of Hawaii's sea birds. In spite of this fact, Navy and Marine Corps aircraft bomb and strafe the island for practice. Apparently it is of little concern to those in charge of this destruction that sea birds are fully protected by federal laws and international treaties.

A demonstration of respect for Hawaii's wildlife is long overdue in this matter. The Navy and Marine Corps should follow the Army's excellent example by also making a meaningful commitment to responsible weapons training.

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