Long ago hundreds of people lived in Mākua and the other eight ahupua`a, the valleys on the Leeward Coast, for centuries. They built impressive heiau, sacred sites. One had 4 terraces, another was more than 25 feet high, and one on the ocean side at Mākua had a swimming pool only for the ali`i. It was an important fishing village, and the valley was kept green by the farmers who conserved the stream water by building auwai, irrigation streams, and lo‘i patches to grow kalo.

That time ended when Europeans came to Hawai`i. They brought Christianity, which ended the kapu system. Sadly, they also brought disease which killed most of the Hawaiians living on all the islands. Eventually, no chiefs ruled the ahupua`a and few Hawaiians remained living in Mākua. New land owners, ranchers mostly, moved in. They planted sugar cane and built railways to move it. Many foreign people came to work on the ranches. They also brought new animals and plants, which killed many Hawaiian plants and animals. With new species and no Hawaiians farming, Mākua became more like a desert.

After World War I the US federal government, which had overthrown the Hawaiian Royal Family, began to take over Mākua to train soldiers for war. All the remaining people who lived there were asked to leave after the attack on Pearl Harbor. At this time all the ahupua`a from Mākua to Ka`ena Point were taken over by the military. It was a time of martial law in the islands.
In 1959 Hawai‘i was welcomed as the 50th state of the USA. This meant that Mākua was part of America, and would remain in the hands of the military.

The timeline on the right shows the constant struggle between people who want to live at Mākua, and the military who use the valley to train troops in case of US warfare. Over the years, full companies of soldiers, 120 people, with tanks, helicopters, guns and other artillery have practiced there for US battles in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and now Iraq.

Yet, all this time, people of Hawai‘i have been worried about Mākua and many try to make it their home. Hawaiians say it is a very special and sacred place. People who care for the environment say it is a place where plants and animals that live no where else in the world are becoming extinct.

In 2001, Mālama Mākua helped to win a court case against the military to make sure they protect what Hawaiians treasure most about Mākua – the ancient sites and the unique plants and animals.

Since returning to training at Mākua, the army already has discovered and destroyed a number of World War II explosives, including one 100-pound bomb; ten mortars; one rocket; and 95 rounds of artillery, such as bullets. Their clean up efforts continue, as do their live-fire training exercises.

Mākua Timeline

1200 - Earliest date first Hawaiians known to live in Mākua ahupua‘a in village of 400 or more people
1778 - Europeans come to Hawai‘i
1827 - few Hawaiians alive after plagues still fish & grow sugar
1875 - Ceremonies still performed in Kaneana Cave
1929 - Military takes Mākua & Kahanakaiki lands for “war games,” or training practice
1930 - Hawaiian offerings still made at remains of Mākua ko`a, fishing shrine
1941 - WWII, Army takes over Mākua to Kaena Pt. asking all residents to leave area
1943 - Mākua used for battleship shelling, aerial bombings and amphibious landings by Army, National Guard and Marine Corps
1949-51 - First time unexploded bombs removed
1959 - Hawaii becomes a state
1963-4 - Army gets 65-year valley lease for $1 to continue 120-soldier training activities
1965 - movie “Hawaii” filmed at Mākua but Army against keeping film’s buildings
1978 - state says it will evict 60 families living at Mākua
1983 - shacks bulldozed & people arrested
1990s - approx. 80 tons of ordnance removed each year
1996 - all people living at Mākua Beach evicted
1998-2001 - military training stops & environmental lawsuit won

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