

# The Passive Side of Conflict Archaeology: The 2016 to 2019 Excavations of a POW Mess Hall in the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp, Island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i

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## Abstract

The archaeological investigation of Prisoner of War (POW) camps offers a glimpse into the passive side of conflict archaeology; that is, those parts of conflict related to imprisonment of enemy combatants and not active areas like forts and battlefields. This paper presents the research and field operations conducted at the Honouliuli National Historic Site during the 2016 to 2019 field seasons as part of the University of Hawai‘i West O‘ahu (UH West O‘ahu) archaeological field schools, particularly focused on the discovery and partial excavation of a mess hall concrete foundation or platform associated with a POW population during World War II. Based on comparison with other mess hall platforms within the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp, the sizes differed, probably based on the population density in the administrative compounds, but the plans as well as the location of garbage incinerators appears to be a standardized plan. However, it appears that the massive influx of prisoners from the Pacific Theater may have taxed the capacity of prisoner areas such that specific mainland Department of War standards were not followed. However, the story of the POWs in this area needs additional work in various archives to understand the activities as well as relationships represented by these various prisoner areas.

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## Introduction

Conflict archaeology primarily examines the historical and archaeological remains related to wartime activities, particularly battlefields, fortifications, and weapons (e.g., Orser 2017: 73–76). However, one expanding area of inquiry is examination of incarceration of enemy combatants in a more passive role, that of prisoners of war (POWs). These prison camps represent state-level management of individuals that are imprisoned only because of their allegiance during a conflict. During the development of modern warfare in the 20th century, with the establishment of substantial armies and navies, battles created a need for the construction of purpose-built camps for the management of sometimes substantial numbers of captives. Through

the analysis of material culture, including remains of architecture, we as archaeologists can fill in the gaps in understanding the relationship between these captives and the enemy state that held them (e.g., Early 2013; Moshenska and Mysters 2011; Mytum 2013; Mytum and Carr 2013)

Associated with the internment of U.S. citizens, long-term resident aliens, and POWs during World War II, Honouliuli National Historic Site serves as a tangible reminder of the fragility of constitutional rights and the effects of martial law on civilian populations. As a POW camp, Honouliuli illustrates how the U.S. military managed and housed enemy troops' prisoners and conscripted laborers while balancing the conflicting goals of national security

and compliance with the 1929 Geneva Convention. As a note on terminology, while the site is designated the Honouliuli National Historic Site as per the U.S. Department of Interior, in order to reflect the dual nature of this camp for conflict-related prisoners and civilian internees, it is referred herein as the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp or as the Honouliuli Camp.

The excavations reported here were conducted between 2016 and 2019, as a continuation of previous archaeological field schools, under the auspices of the University of Hawai'i West O'ahu (UH West O'ahu). The key purpose of the UH West O'ahu field school included standard archaeological field training as part of the archaeology and forensic anthropology programs. The educational goals encompassed basic archaeological methods as well as presenting the history related to the World War II incarcerations of civilians and POWs and the social impacts in Hawai'i of the civilian incarceration during a period of martial law. Specific goals were to examine changes in previously discovered features and survey areas of the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp under a Hawaiian-Pacific Islands Cooperative Ecosystems Unit grant from the Department of Interior/National Park Service (DoI/NPS) that were either under-surveyed or not surveyed due to time constraints of the pre-2016 field schools. Previous UH West O'ahu field schools between 2008 and 2014 were directed by Drs. Jeffrey Burton and Mary Farrell and administered by Dr. Suzanne Falgout (Burton *et al.* 2014). While the focus of the excavation was exploratory and descriptive as per the directives of the archaeological assessment for the Department of Interior/National Park Service, larger issues related to prisoner segregation and possible spatially-related distribution of activities at the Camp, such as mess halls, housing, and latrines, can be examined.

The Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp was administered by the United States military as, while it housed slightly over 320 Japanese and Japanese American internees, it held over 4,000 POWs related to enemy combatants or conscripts to the Japanese military during World War II. The Honouliuli Camp was the largest and longest occupied camp in the Territory of Hawai'i, encompassing over 220 acres and opening in March 1943 and closing sometime in 1946 (Burton *et al.* 2014; Falgout 2014). This camp was different from the mainland internment camps as the Japanese and Japanese Americans were interned

based on martial law and not the Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on February 19, 1942. Executive Order 9066 required the incarceration and imprisonment of 100% of the civilian Japanese and Japanese American population within a 100-mile Exclusion Zone along the west coast of the mainland United States. For these specific ethnic populations of the Hawaiian Islands, less than 1% of the Japanese and Japanese American population were interned at the camp, primarily political and religious leaders, Japanese language educators, etc. This was done for primarily economic reasons as much of the ethnic Japanese population of Hawai'i was involved in the agricultural industry and incarceration of the entire population would have caused Hawai'i's agricultural economy to crash (e.g., Falgout *et al.* 2014; Scheiber and Scheiber 2016; Tsuru 2014).

The site was divided by the U.S. military into at least seven administrative compounds, designated using Roman numerals. These designations are based on a United States Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE) blueprint plan (U.S. Army n.d.; Figure 2) for the internment camp sewage system, starting with Compound I in the north and finishing with Compound VII in the southern areas of the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp. Compounds I to IV and VII were associated with POWs. A compound is a standard administrative unit within a prison camp and usually holds about 1,000 prisoners. Honouliuli Camp was designed for only 1,000 POWs, but by the time of the major campaigns in the Pacific Theater (1944 onwards), the number of POWs far exceeded that number to over 4,000 (Falgout 2014).

The ethnic and war-time theater composition of POWs at the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp was complex, but included some Europeans, Koreans conscripts and laborers, and Okinawan conscripts. Compounds I to IV were the main military POW areas, grouping a variety of ethnic groups; there is some evidence that the small cadre of Japanese officers were held in Compound I, but the vast majority of POWs were conscripts and forced labor from Okinawa and Korea. Very few Japanese officers were present and only 7% of the total population were Japanese enlisted military. However, within the areas of Compounds I, II, and probably III, any military were also segregated by rank. Officers and enlisted military POWs may not have mingled in terms of living quarters, including dining (Chinen 2014; Falgout 2014; Rosenfeld 2014).

Although the excavation is preliminary and incomplete, the examination of the material remains of the segregation and dining facilities provides the potential to understand the relationship of the prisoners to each other and the relationships to the power structure of the state that held them. Dining facilities are often not just used for eating but are areas of recreation and worship (although the practice of Buddhism was rarely condoned in POW camps; see Nishigaya and Oshiro 2014) as well as general gathering.

#### *Location*

The Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp is located on the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i, about 15 miles northwest of Honolulu, north of Highway H1, and west of the Kunia Road. This site encompasses approximately 160 acres and is located within Honouliuli Gulch, roughly 6 miles mauka (inland) from the coast. The gulch varies from about 500 to 700 feet wide at the camp location, with steep

slopes bounding the relatively flat floodplain, and is surrounded by commercial agricultural fields and ranch land. Elevation ranges from 280 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) along the Honouliuli Stream to the south to up to 520 feet AMSL on the slopes to the north (Figure 1).

#### **Field Methods**

Excavations of the POW mess hall foundation in Compound I were conducted using standard 1x1 m test pits with 10 cm arbitrary levels. Each unit had its own temporary datum located at the northwest (or highest) corner of each test pit. Standard archaeological techniques were applied to excavate the test pits with hand tools such as hand-picks, trowels, and shovels. All sediment was screened through 1/4-inch (6 mm) mesh hardware cloth. All artifacts were collected and bagged by provenience (site, compound, test pit, level/depth, etc.).



**Figure 1.** Overview of Honouliuli National Monument, view is northwest towards Compounds I, II, and III, from UH West O‘ahu Access Road; view in foreground is Compounds V and VI. May 2017. Photograph by William R. Belcher.

## Excavation Results

### *Compound I Description*

Compound I is the northernmost compound of the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp and represents the largest POW encampment. It is a relatively flat area, but the southern region of Compound I is heavily overgrown with guinea grass, while the northern section is relatively open with koa haole scrub trees (Figure 1). Based on a 1948 aerial photograph (Figure 2) and the 1943 USACOE (Figure 3) sewage map, the Compound I POW mess hall was accessed by one of the main roads extending along the eastern side of the property and was approximately 130 feet long and 75 feet wide.

### *Excavation in Compound I*

A main goal of the 2016 field school was to locate the mess hall in Compound I. The 2016 field school students took a standard distance and compass bearing from the known location of the mess hall incinerator (Feature I-5) to the middle of what should have been the POW mess hall based on the USACOE sanitation map. The students then excavated a 50x50 cm test pit and encountered a concrete foundation at approximately 70 cm below surface. Between 2017 and 2019, 16 additional 1x1 m excavation pits were excavated by the UH West O‘ahu field school students using the methodology described above. After the discovery of the concrete foundation, it was designated Feature I-7.

### *Stratigraphy and Sediment Description*

Laminar sediments occur over the foundation itself with at least four stratigraphic units of medium-to-coarse reddish brown clayey silts mixed with coarser particles of clay peds, coral gravel, and fragmented basalt rock (Figure 4). Artifactual materials were present within these sediments, and primarily included asphalt shingle fragments, agricultural plastic, metal (including nails, etc.), and glass fragments. Additionally, fragments of coral gravel (probably related to World War II-era road fill) and bioplastic used to cover the surrounding agricultural fields during fumigation were recovered throughout the soil column. The presence of laminar silts is primarily alluvial in origin and probably originated from a nearby erosional channel, which trends upward and northeasterly from the feature to the surrounding agricultural fields above Honouliuli Gulch.

### *Feature Description*

The exact size of the mess hall platform is unknown but, as stated earlier, based on the historical documentation it is thought to be approximately 130 feet by 75 feet. One interesting observation was a “stain” of a possible interior wall or other feature as documented on the concrete foundation. The excavations did not uncover the entire stain, but it is L-shaped with the long arm trending southeast/northwest and the short arm trending northeast/southwest. The long arm is approximately 3 inches wide and 24 inches long with the short base arm 8 inches in length and 3 inches wide; it is thought this represents some sort of interior wooden wall. Overall, the concrete foundation of Feature I-7 is level and is approximately 65 to 98 cm below the surface (see Figures 4 and 5). Various cracks are present over much of the exposed concrete, including pitting and spalling. The most conspicuous aspect of the foundation is a rough “track” system that is approximately 12 to 14 inches across with 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch furrows on both sides; the intermediate portion of this “track” is approximately 1/8-inch below the level concrete foundation. It is trending roughly northwest/southeast. On the southwest side are three shallow rectangular post holes that may have been created using 6x2 inch lumber with each measuring 1.5 inches by 5.5 inches and approximately 1 inch deep (see Figure 5). These post molds are spaced approximately 24 inches apart. The purpose of this portion of the concrete foundation is currently unknown but may represent some structural element or wall within the mess hall.

## Discussion

Currently, we only have a small “snapshot” of what this concrete foundation looks like as it, unlike the other foundations in the site, is buried under at least 70 cm of sediment eroding from the surrounding agricultural fields. Two other mess hall foundations are present on the national historic site; these allow us to compare the structures to examine size, construction, and specific function.

### *Feature I-7*

As suggested above, based on the 1948 aerial photograph and USACOE sewage maps, Feature I-7 is probably about 130 feet long and 75 feet wide and parallels one of the main roads along the eastern side

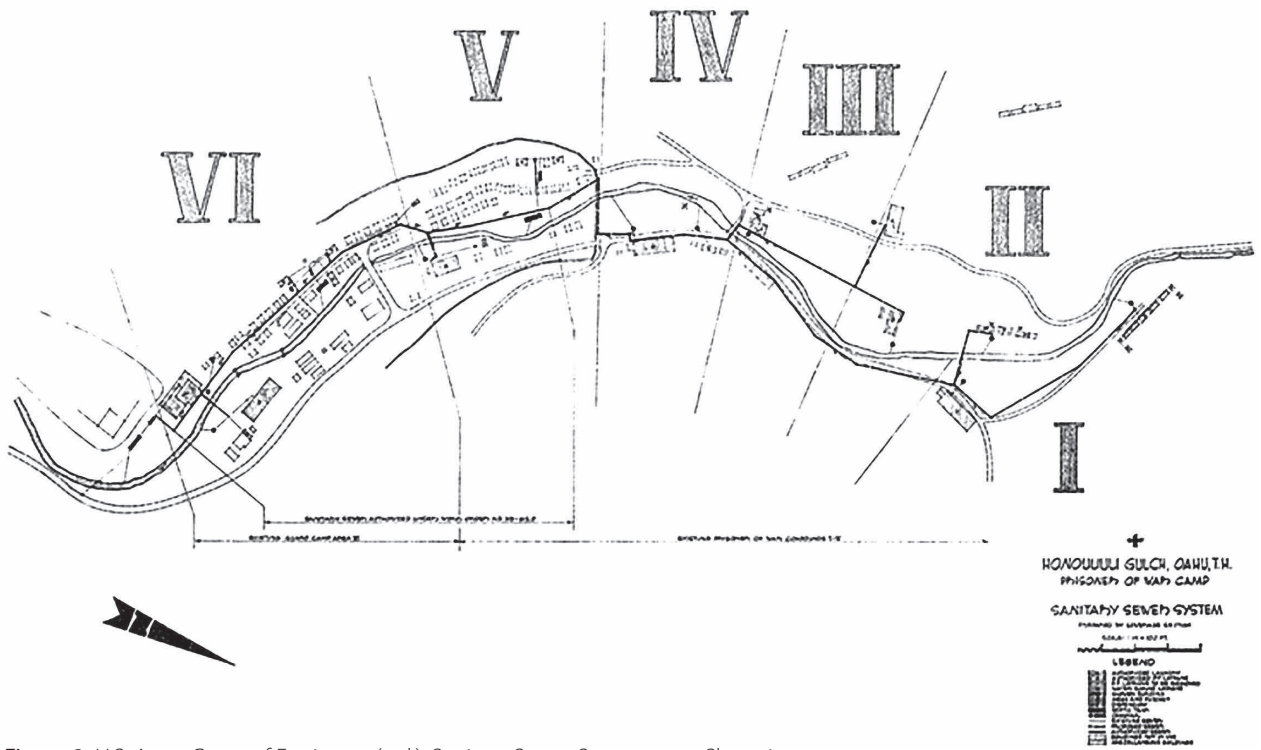


Figure 2. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (n.d.), Sanitary Sewer System map, Sheet 1.



Figure 3. April 1948 Aerial Photograph (UH Mānoa Geospatial Map Collection). Feature I-7 is circled in red.



**Figure 4.** Photomosaic of Section of Feature I-7 – East Wall, Trending North (left) to South (right). Photographs and mosaic by William R. Belcher.



**Figure 5.** Completed 2019 Excavation of Feature I-7, facing southeast. Photograph by William R. Belcher.

of Compound I. Associated with this mess hall is a single, relatively small garbage incinerator (Feature I-5), which is approximately 12 feet long, 3 feet high (although severely degraded) and over 4 feet wide.

#### *Feature II-1*

Located in Compound II (just across Honouliuli Stream from Compound I), Feature II-1 is another mess hall foundation that is oriented roughly east-west with the main slab measuring 103 feet long by 45 feet, and 2

inches wide (4,652 ft<sup>2</sup>). There are two extensions at the northeast corner. One extension, measuring almost 20 feet long and 16 feet wide (320 ft<sup>2</sup>) is roughly north of the main slab. The other extension, measuring 18 feet, 5 inches by 11 feet (203 ft<sup>2</sup>) is to the east. The main slab has a sloping apron surrounding it on the long north and south sides, and a raised concrete stem wall along the western end. Compound II also was a large POW holding area and has an incinerator that is virtually identical in size and shape to Feature I-5.

### *Compound IV Mess Hall*

Another small mess hall foundation existed just east and slightly north across the main road from Feature V-1. This mess hall has been identified from historic photographs. However, this specific mess hall was destroyed during construction of the Board of Water Supply facilities on the property. Two incinerators are seen in historic photographs (Belcher 2018).

### *Feature V-1*

Feature V-1 is a large mess hall foundation and is one of the most recognizable and accessible of the features in the site as it sits adjacent to the paved road that runs the length of the southern half of the property. The feature is smaller than the others as it served the civilian Japanese/Japanese American and European-American population of Compound V, serving over 320 people. Oriented northwest-southeast, the main part of the slab measures 71 feet, 2 inches by 38 feet, 8 inches (2,752 ft<sup>2</sup>). Surrounding it is a six-inch-wide perimeter/foundation sill to support posts or a superstructure. The sill is flush with the slab, and surrounding the sill is a 2-foot-wide concrete apron that slopes down to the original ground surface, about 5.5 inches lower than the top of the sill.

A partition wall across the southern end of the main slab is indicated by an expansion joint, the stain of the wall base, and a vertical steel rebar set as anchor bolts for the old wall. The large room north of the partition, measuring approximately 59 feet, 1 inch by 38 ft, 8 inches, would have served as the main dining room. The smaller room south of the partition was the kitchen, at 11 feet, 6 inches wide by 38 feet, 8 inches long. There is a doorway, estimated to be 5 feet wide, just east of center in the partition wall. There are floor drains near both the east and west walls of the kitchen, probably indicating possible food preparation and dishwashing areas.

The USACOE sewage plans and the mess hall platforms described above represent a standardized plan for the concrete foundations for these buildings. These were probably based on standardized plans for POW camps that were approved by the Department of War/Defense established on requirements of the 1929 Geneva Convention. Most of the POW camps on the mainland United States follow a standardized blueprint, although construction could vary depending on local needs (e.g., Kuranda *et al.* 1997; Marsh 2014; Thompson 1993; US War Department 1945).

The basic feature of the plan is the compound. A camp consists of one or more compounds surrounded by two wire fences. Compounds are separated from each other by a single fence. Each compound houses four companies of prisoners or approximately 1,000 prisoners. The housing and messing facilities are equivalent to those furnished to the United States troops at base camps as required by the Geneva Convention. These facilities consist of five barracks, a latrine containing showers and laundry tubs with unlimited hot and cold running water, a mess hall, and an administrative building for each company (Major Maxwell S. McKnight, Office of the Provost Marshall General; Marsh 2014:22).

However, as noted from the descriptions above, the POW compounds at Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp deviated from this standard substantially. Compound I inmates were housed in canvas pyramidal tents, fed military rations, and had pit toilets. Additionally, unlike POWs on the mainland, the Japanese military POWs at Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp were not granted permission to work outside of camp (Burton 2014; Falgout 2014) due to security risks. The number of POWs at Honouliuli far exceeded the 1,000-person “cap,” probably related to the surge after the opening of the camp that resulted from the Pacific campaigns. The deviation in construction is likely related to rapid expansion of camp areas within the Honouliuli Gulch to accommodate the large number of prisoners. In many ways, the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp may reflect an expedient solution to housing large numbers of prisoners, similar to the appropriation and repurposing of abandoned military camps, fairgrounds, agricultural dormitories, etc. for satellite camps on the mainland US for specific work parties and labor for the farming communities of the Midwest (i.e., Marsh 2014).

Dining areas and mess halls were main areas of congregation and would be repurposed for a variety of activities during non-meal or meal preparation time, particularly with the deviation from standard POW camp plans, which would include a recreational hall. Additional archival research is necessary to fill in some of the gaps, although Falgout (2014) does an excellent job in examining the transfer of prisoners and the ethnic and military composition of the prisoners at the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp. The examination of extant historical records may create a fuller picture of the use of the dining facilities and other activities related to the various POW compounds.

## Conclusions

In summary, between 2016 and 2019 the UH West O‘ahu field school, in cooperation and assistance with the National Park Service, was successful in training over 50 students in archaeological techniques and methodologies. One focus of the field school was the excavation of Feature I-7 in Compound I, a POW mess hall foundation. The foundation had been buried from continuous sheet wash from the surrounding agricultural fields to a depth of between 68 and 95 cm. There are three 2x6 post molds and a track system documented in this foundation of unknown function. Comparison with other mess hall foundations on the property suggest that the large, roughly rectangular foundations (often with extensions or infrastructure for water or kitchen facilities) are mess halls and are usually associated with garbage or kitchen waste disposal with at least one standardized incinerator. Mess halls were focal points for activities outside meals, including a variety of recreation, craft production, and gaming. Thus, the continued excavation and understanding of the mess hall areas of the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp may elucidate these more intangible activities of the camp in concert with additional archival research.

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