

THE MAKUA VALLEY IS THE PREMIER TRAINING AREA FOR TROPIC LIGHTNING SOLDIERS OF THE 25TH INFANTRY. BUT BECAUSE OF ITS LOCATION ON THE ISLAND OF OAHU, MAKUA VALLEY IS ALSO A SOURCE OF CONTROVERSY. ENVIRONMENTAL CORRESPONDENT JAVIER HERNANDEZ EXPLAINS IN THIS REPORT...

THIS IS MAKUA VALLEY, MORE THAN 4-THOUSAND ACRES ON THE ISLAND OF OAHU, HAWAII. FOR THE SOLDIERS OF THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION A FEW HUNDRED ACRES ON THE VALLEY FLOOR ARE CRITICAL.

“THERE IS NO OTHER PLACE TO DO COMPANY LEVEL CALFEX WHICH IS AN ARMY REQUIREMENT. IT’S KIND OF A LEVEL OF READINESS, BEFORE WE PUT SOLDIERS IN HARMS WAY”

BUT THE VALLEY IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO LOCAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS.

“...WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE MILITARY LEAVE THIS VALLEY OR STOP TRAINING BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THIS IS AN INAPPROPRIATE PLACE TO TRAIN. THERE ARE A LOT OF CULTURAL SITES, ENDANGERED SPECIES, HAO – HAWAIIAN TEMPLES, AND SO ON.”

SO IN 1998 THE ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP MALAMA MAKUA SUED THE ARMY.... AND WON. ALL TRAINING WAS HALTED IN SEPTEMBER OF THAT YEAR. BUT TWO YEARS LATER, AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 11TH ATTACKS, AN AGREEMENT RESUMED LIMITED TRAINING.

UNDER THE AGREEMENT THE ARMY MUST PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE ENTIRE VALLEY. THIS STATEMENT IS A DETAILED STUDY OF EXISTING AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF LIVE FIRE TRAINING. MALAMA MAKUA MONITORS HAVE MONTHLY ACCESS TO THE VALLEY AND INSPECT THE VALLEY'S CULTURAL SITES AFTER EACH EXERCISE.

NEITHER SIDE IS COMPLETELY HAPPY, BUT ARMY LEADERS SAY SOME TRAINING IS BETTER THAN NONE AND THE ARMY'S INCREASED CONSERVATION EFFORTS HAVE NOT GONE UNNOTICED.

"THEY ARE TRYING. I HAVE TO GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE. THEY'RE TAKING THEIR FIRE PREVENTION ROLE MUCH MORE SERIOUSLY THAN THEY DID, LET'S SAY, BEFORE 1998."

THE ARMY ALSO PROTECTS AND MONITORS ENDANGERED PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN THE VALLEY.

NEXT YEAR THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS DUE. BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THAT STUDY, THE ARMY MAY BE FORCED TO FIND ANOTHER LOCATION. BUT IN HAWAII, HUNDREDS ACRES OF OPEN SPACE IS PRETTY HARD TO COME BY. JAVIER HERNANDEZ, OAHU, HAWAII.

