



News Release

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Past commander visits PTA

POHAKULOA TRAINING AREA, Hawaii—Years may pass by, but it seems times have not changed at Pōhakuloa Training Area (PTA), according to a former commander of this Army installation.

Robert Bonthuis, now a U.S. Army retired colonel was on vacation on the Big Island when he decided make a side visit to PTA, Feb. 12. He was the PTA commander from 1980 to 1981.

Bonthuis, recalls his memories during his PTA command.

At that time, the former Lt. Col. Bonthuis was in command of 130 active duty Soldiers, majority were noncommissioned officers and just a handful of civilian employees.

“Range control, operations, military police and the NCO and Officers’ Club were handled by uniformed personnel,” Bonthuis remembered. “The handful of civilians worked as maintenance personnel and two game wardens that were attached to the military police.”

The past brought memories of what it was like at PTA in the 1980s.

“The Army used to take Soldiers by bus from Hilo to PTA and back, and it cost fifty cents for the roundtrip,” according to Bonthuis. “Quonset huts are still here as they are in the

past. I remember that C-141 planes used to fly in and out of Bradshaw Army Air Field, dropping off personnel and equipment from Oahu and trained at PTA.”

“Epoxy floors were the norm for the barracks and PTA got water from the springs at the adjacent Mauna Kea,” he added. “We had a person who checked the water every so often using chemicals to make sure that the water was potable.”

Bonthuis recalled his assignment here were memorable.

“The best of times were when Soldiers would gather at the Officers’ Club on some Fridays, and we just got together and celebrated those who were leaving us or just newly arrived at PTA,” Bonthuis said. “However, one of my saddest moments here was the time when five Soldiers from the 25th Division Artillery died after their 105 millimeter artillery accidentally blew up in the breach.”

After serving at Pōhakuloa, Bonthuis departed PTA for inspector general school and became the inspector general for 5th Army in San Antonio, Texas, where he retired from the Army in 1986.

The former commander noticed some changes at PTA.

“Civilianizing the positions here at PTA is a positive thing because there is a sense of continuity as the mission of training Soldiers still goes on,” Bonthuis said. “I do still think that the commander still needs to be someone in uniform, but also needs to be directly in charge of all directorate personnel working at PTA. Now that I think is a good idea.”

Bonthuis currently lives at home in Oswego, Oregon.