



# Media Release

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*“Malama na Koa”*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Soldiers Complete Work at Famed Waikiki Landmark**

**FORT DERUSSY, Hawaii** — U.S. Army Reserve engineers have been busy at the U.S. Army Museum of Hawaii for the last two months, restoring the structure and increasing its size.

The engineers’ efforts have given the museum an additional 7,400 square feet of space for displays, administrative offices and storage, according to Capt. Timothy Nelson, the 980th Engineer Battalion officer in charge of “Operation Akamai Builder.”

“It’s the biggest thing we’ve done in 30 years,” said Victoria Olson, executive director of the Hawaii Army Museum Society. “This whole effort, which is the restoration of an artifact, would never have happened without the Army Reserve.”

The museum, located on Waikiki Beach, was originally a coastal artillery battery and became a museum in 1976, with the building itself being the largest artifact.

The facility ran into problems two years ago when it was denied recertification due to limited space to house the artifacts it had collected over time.

Army museums are inspected periodically by the U.S. Army Center for Military History to ensure that they are properly maintained and meeting the needs of patrons. Because of the lack of space for future growth and the ability to store more artifacts in the coming years, something had to be done, according to Judith Bowman, museum director.

Engineer units from Texas, New Mexico and Puerto Rico came to the rescue, working long hours to breathe new life into the structure.

Additions to the museum include a public room for lectures and an expansion to the research library, as well as space for new exhibits for the overseas contingency operations taking place in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to Olson.

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“Before 2004, the last time combat troops from Hawaii were deployed was Vietnam, so exhibits only went up to that time period,” Olson said. “Now we have the means to put up displays of the newest conflicts our troops have served in, as well as an exhibit for the Spanish American War, for which we previously lacked the space.”

The restoration mission was a unique opportunity for the Reservists because the museum is easily accessible by the public, unlike a construction project in Afghanistan, according to Nelson.

“These Soldiers are building something in a place that they can share with family and friends years into the future,” he said. “Most of the projects that we do are (overseas) ... most of the Soldiers never have the opportunity to share what they do directly with their family and friends.”

Olson remarked on the work ethic of the Soldiers and the job they have done as nothing short of astounding.

“It’s amazing what they’ve accomplished in such a short amount of time,” she exclaimed. “I’ve never seen a group of people work so hard.”

For Bowman, the project has been a godsend, enabling the museum to grow and flourish.

“I’m still pinching myself,” she said. “I’ve been waiting 20 years for this.”

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**MEDIA NOTE:** Media wishing to learn more about the Fort DeRussy construction project may contact Sgt. First Class Joel Quebec of the 211<sup>nd</sup> Mobile Public Affairs Detachment at 808-280-1473. A Media Advisory is forthcoming for the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony which will be held July 6, at 11 a.m., at Fort DeRussy. If you would like to R.S.V.P. now for the ceremony on Tuesday, please contact Loran Doane at 808-656-3157.

### **PHOTO CUTLINES:**

20090625-A-7260R-467 - Pfc. Joe Valadez of the 302nd Engineer Battalion out of Texas applies mortar to a wall being constructed at the Hawaii Army Museum, June 26. The Soldiers are participating in Operation Akamai Builder, which calls for the renovation and expansion of the museum. (Photo by Sgt. Joshua Risner)

20090627-A-7260R-797 - Pfc. Garrett Krohn, of 302nd Engineer Battalion, welds a railing at the Hawaii Army Museum during Operation Akamai Builder in Honolulu. The operation is intended to renovate the museum. (Photo by Sgt. Joshua Risner)

20090627-A-7260R-804 - Sgt. Charles Hunziker and Capt. Kenneth Dodson of 302nd Engineer Battalion, look over plans and plot their next move during Operation Akamai Builder, in Honolulu. Their mission is to renovate the Hawaii Army Museum in Waikiki. (Photo by Sgt. Joshua Risner)