



Waikele Self Storage



Preserving History

Waikele Self Storage uses its naval site to serve today's military families.

By Mark Wright

In his brief speech to Congress on December 8, 1941, the day after the Empire of Japan had launched a surprise attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to it as “a date which will live in infamy.”

In the war's early days, ammunition and explosives were “stored in the open among the hills and valleys of southern Oahu,” according to a history of the area. Given the attack of December 7, this outdoor storage posed obvious risks. So, in June 1942, the commander-in-chief of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet ordered the construction of “underground ammunition storage of major proportions” in proximity to Pearl Harbor.

The Navy thus began digging about 120 tunnels through a 520-acre area bordering three large gulches in the Lualualei Valley, giving the Naval Ammunition Depot Oahu (NAD Oahu) rock-solid protection and a high level of security.

The Navy used the site for decades to store various types and sizes of ordnance, reportedly including nuclear weapons for a short period in the early 1960s.

After decommissioning the facility in the mid-'80s, the military emptied, cleaned and sealed all the tunnels. The site remained an unused reminder of an earlier era well after the end of the twentieth century.

Seizing an Opportunity

Several years ago, the military began allowing private companies to lease some of the caves, stipulating that their usage had to be low impact due to environmental concerns.

That's when a group of private investors saw an opportunity. Self storage experts Thomas and Carol Krendl partnered with Peter Cannon, Cully Judd and Mark Ambard to lease 22 of the tunnels in the Waikele area of the old NAD Oahu site and convert those spaces into rentable self storage.

“Self storage has always been a great product to do conversions with,” explained Thomas Krendl, CEO of Lodi, California-based E.I.M. Group, Inc. “I knew this one would be cost efficient, since the site was already in place with little or no use.”

The Krendls and their partners self-financed the project, and hired Temple, Georgia-based Janus International to build out the conversion.

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Since the subterranean facility was sealed during its long period of disuse, it stayed cool and dry, which meant no moisture-related remediation would be needed.

“When we walked in after all those years, the copper wiring looked like new, preserved since day one. So there were no issues with humidity or mold,” said Krendl.

The team developed the caves one section at a time, phasing them in until all 22 were built out and Waikele Self Storage was born.

“We decided to serve military families and personnel as our primary goal, and really price the storage space so they could afford it,” said Krendl.

Staying true to the site’s military heritage—and out of respect for the ships and sailors lost on December 7—they named every cave after a ship that had been based in Pearl Harbor and served in combat during World War II.

“We took all the B-row spaces and named them after battleships, then named the C-row caves after aircraft carriers,” said Krendl. “We painted them battleship gray and put a ship’s name above each door. Then we hired a historian on the island and had him create a battle lineage for each ship. We put a poster inside each unit showing the lineage of the ship it was named after.”

“Janus form-fitted the sheet metal to each wall inside,” said Krendl. “So now it’s like any other modern self storage facility,” except that all the units are naturally climate controlled. A generator provides electrical power for the all-fluorescent lighting.

It was as if the place had existed in a generations-long time warp. Apparently, that quality was also noticed by producers of the TV series *Lost*, who used parts of the old depot property for filming some of the show’s 2005–2007 episodes. In addition, Krendl said the *Hawaii Five-O* crew filmed two episodes nearby in late 2010 and early 2011.

Most of Waikele Self Storage’s customers are military personnel serving overseas. Krendl said 82 percent of their units are occupied currently, a number that’s strengthened every time there is a major deployment.

Military Roots

The facility’s military heritage runs as deep as the tunnels on which it was built. The site is a living reminder of past generations who served their country, especially those who had been stationed at Pearl Harbor or other nearby bases.

Krendl, who spent 17 years in the military himself as a warrant officer in the U.S. Army, said Waikele Self Storage has hosted several public events, including a special one



A poster inside each unit at Waikele Self Storage recounts the battle history of the ship after which it was named.

four years ago for members of the Marine Corps detachment that had guarded the depot.

“They spent a day with us. We had a historical tour, and the veterans told stories about things that happened here,” recalled Krendl.

The guard towers used decades ago by those same vets to watch over the depot are still standing.

Krendl said the guys in those towers had shoot-to-kill orders for any unauthorized entries into the “B” row of tunnels (units B1–B13), because those particular caves stored the Navy’s nuclear weapons. They had 2,000-pound steel doors, which remain in place today. Each of those doors had five locking devices, requiring five officers from different sections of the depot to unlock and open them.

“A separate cave was built to hold all the triggers for the munitions,” said Krendl. Another entrepreneur has turned that particular cave into a wine storage space.

To Krendl’s knowledge, the entire site is unique among U.S. military ammo depots. Depots at other bases are man made, not hewn from solid rock like at Waikele, he said. These bunker entrances are 250–400 feet below the top of the hill. (See additional photos at waikeleselfstorage.com.)

Krendl not only sees self storage as an ideal fit for this historic site, he also feels it’s a useful way to give back to those who serve and protect the U.S. The facility staff includes a mix of local Hawaiians and military spouses.

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“The military service members love it. They know it’s safe and secure,” he said.

Remembering December 7

All these years later, hundreds of people a day still take the Pearl Harbor tour and see the oil slick leaking from the USS Arizona, said Krendl.

“People feel a lot of respect when they visit Pearl Harbor and understand what happened there,” he said.

Annual observances of the attack remain popular around the region, and survivors hold a reunion that still attracts a lot of family members and fills up area hotels.

Waikale Self Storage holds its own week-long December 7 commemoration for customers to remember the sacrifices of those who were lost.

This facility that is literally rooted in an earlier era today provides a new generation of military service members with peace of mind by securing their belongings while they work to secure our nation. ❖



Janus International form-fitted sheet metal to each wall to convert the caves into modern self storage units.