

Military Presence in Hawai‘i

The following information is taken from the Atlas of Hawaii, published in 1998. What this means is that the numbers, particularly the financial numbers are not going to be accurate for the present day. Nevertheless, the picture that is painted of the significant presence the military plays in Hawai‘i remains very true today in 2010.

“The military is an important component of the population and economy of Hawaii. The nearly 100,000 military personnel and dependents make up 8 percent of Hawaii’s population, the highest proportion of any state in the country. Military expenditures of \$3.2 billion in 1994 accounted for 9 percent of the Gross State Product (GSP), placing Hawaii second only to Virginia in proportion of GSP contribution from the military, and almost three times the national mean. Military payroll contributed \$2.4 billion to the state’s economy in 1994, and major military contracts for construction and services added \$803 million. The 17,000 civilian employees of the military, with an annual payroll of \$670 million, account for almost 3 percent of Hawaii’s workforce, the highest percentage in any state.

Hawaii is the headquarters for the command in chief, U.S. Pacific Command, and all five services are represented. Army personnel make up 44 percent of the total, navy 25 percent, Marine Corps 15 percent, Air Force 12 percent, and Coast Guard 3 percent. In addition, in 1995 almost 5,000 residents were members of the Hawaii National Guard. In 1994, 116,000 residents were veterans and 13,000 (in 1993) were retired from one of the military services.

Military personnel in Hawaii are almost wholly concentrated on Oahu: of the 44,000 active duty personnel in 1994, fewer than 200 were assigned to other islands. Although there are about 100 military installations, 78 percent of personnel are stationed at just four of them: Schofield Barracks, Pearl Harbor, Kaneohe Marine Corps Base, and Hickam Air Force Base. Most civilian personnel (77 percent) work at Pearl Harbor, Hickam Air Force Base, Tripler Army Hospital, and Fort Shafter Army Base. Pearl Harbor and Schofield Barracks account for 53 percent of military expenditures in Hawaii, with 38 percent of the spending for prime contracts at Pearl Harbor.

Military activities and facilities such as housing, weapons warehouses, and airstrips require large areas of land. The military owns or controls more than 200,000 acres, about 5 percent of the state’s total land area. The army has the largest landholdings: approximately 150,000 acres. Although Hawaii Island has the largest acreage devoted to the military (102,000 acres) much more significant are the roughly 80,000 acres the military controls on Oahu – a staggering 21 percent of the island’s limited land area. The military also has a distinct influence on Oahu’s population composition. In 1990, 71 percent of military personnel were Caucasian, 17 percent African-American, and only 8 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders. This contrasts markedly to the state’s overall population, of which 33 percent are Caucasian, 2.4 percent are African American, and 62 percent are Asian/Pacific Islanders. Most Active duty military personnel are men (88 percent). Their median age is 27, compared to the state’s median age of 35.

Hawaii's central Pacific location has had a strategic military importance for more than half a century, and it is the key to explaining the large military presence. Hawaii played a major role as a base of operations during the three major wars in Asia during the twentieth century – WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. Moreover, Pearl Harbor was the site of one of the most significant events of the 20th century – the surprise bombing in December 1941 that thrust the United States into World War II. Pearl Harbor came to symbolize the need for military preparedness, which will likely assure a continuing military presence in Hawaii.

In a decade and a half, the number of active duty personnel in Hawaii has decreased 28 percent from 61,019 in 1980 to 44,193 in 1994. During this same period the number of dependents decreased only 15 percent, indicated a change toward more personnel having dependents accompany them to the state. Several reasons may account for the decrease in numbers of active duty personnel. The United States has not been involved in a major war in Asia; therefore, reduced levels of operation have been possible at Hawaii bases. Likewise, the end of the cold War has resulted in a decline in number of military personnel as part of national defense cutbacks. Despite the decline in personnel numbers, expenditures for the military in Hawaii increased from \$862 million in 1977 to \$3.2 billion in 1994. In constant dollars (adjusted for inflation), however, this increase was less dramatic from \$1.4 billion in 1977 to \$2.2 billion in 1994.

The future presence of the military in Hawaii will probably be shaped by U.S. withdrawal from bases in Asia. The reduction of the U.S. Military presence in Okinawa or South Korea, for instance, may prompt the transfer of some military personnel to Hawaii. Alternatively, continuing reductions in defense spending could further reduce military expenditures in Hawaii. While the state possess the advantage of a mid-Pacific location, training and maintaining military personnel and their dependents in Hawaii are significantly more expensive compared with other states.”

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