

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONDUCTANCE OF FEDERAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN HAWAII

**Fred L. McGhee (Fred L. McGhee & Associates)
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In June of 2001 I found myself sitting in the office James Tayon (a.k.a. “Kimo Tayone”), P.E., Chief of the Environmental Flight at Hickam Air Force Base. I had been called in for a job interview. I was then employed as a temporary GS-9 transition assistance counselor at the Fleet and Family Support Center at Pearl Harbor naval station. The Air Force position for which I interviewed was a new one: an in-house GS-12 level archaeologist, the first such position in the USAF’s history in Hawaii. Also in attendance at the interview were Gary O’Donnell an architect and head of the environmental “planning” element in the environmental department, and Ross Cordy of the Hawaii state historic preservation division.

It was without question the most strange job interview I had ever been to, mainly because of Mr. Tayon, who persisted in asking me uncomfortable personal questions such as whether I had a belief in God, whether I was a practicing christian, and the like. It was one of those experiences you remember forever. I distinctly recall seeing placards of bible scripture strategically placed throughout Tayon’s office; in fact one sat right behind his head as we talked. This, combined with his Ted Haggard-like personal space sensibilities and tendency to wear too much cologne, made me feel as if I had been transported to a peculiar Air Force version of an archaeological Jesus-land, where questions of detail and CRM substance were obvious secondary considerations. In retrospect the entire affair seems bizarre and slightly creepy.

Cordy was there because Tayon wanted to make sure he would not be making a mistake in hiring me. I did not list experience in Hawaiian archaeology on my resume, because I did not have any. Although I had been to Hawaii and had even written about Hawaiian history and

archaeology topics before, I did so at a distance and was not in possession of field credentials that would entitle me to call myself a Hawaiian archaeologist. I did not necessarily see this as a deal killer, however, and told Cordy that I met the requirements of the official federal job description and that I felt that I could serve as a breath of fresh air. The job for which I was being considered was an administrative position that required good civil service leadership and management skills and the ability to understand archaeological subject matter, not necessarily years of field experience.

What I did have, is extensive federal service, including uniformed service as a naval officer, and an understanding of issues in indigenous archaeology. I also brought to the table something that was obviously on the mind of everyone there: my brown skin.

I knew I had just experienced something weird when after shaking hands, as I was getting up to leave the interview, O'Donnell blasted out of his chair and ran after me to apologize for the conduct of his boss. The personal questions he asked me were clearly inappropriate, O'Donnell acknowledged, but Tayon was someone who apparently sometimes had difficulty keeping his head screwed on straight. I left the meeting shaking my head, but still hopeful and willing to play on the team, given that this GS-12 job was a unique career opportunity and would instantly catapult me fairly high on the rung of the archaeological hierarchy in Hawaii. When I got the call a few weeks later asking me whether I would accept the position, I said yes without hesitation.

It was an interesting work environment. I was O'Donnell's colleague, not his subordinate, although it became clear that he did not like that arrangement and resented it greatly. Instead the environmental planning element chief—and my boss--was a young newly commissioned Air Force Second Lieutenant named Andrew Hoisington. Given my previous

military service, it was a role I also found uncomfortable, but one toward which I put forth a good faith effort at acceptance. Perhaps most importantly, I was assigned an archaeological assistant; Valerie Curtis, an employee of the state historic preservation division with years of Hawaii field experience. A few months earlier she had participated in a survey of Kahikinui on Maui along with Boyd Dixon and others.

By combining her field experience and local knowledge with what I brought to the table, it was felt, we could get the Air Force's archaeological house together in relatively short order. I was told that we had the enthusiastic support of our superiors and would have the cooperation of Air Force personnel in Section 106 matters.

My first six months on the job were busy ones. It quickly became apparent that I had not been hired for my leadership and management experience, or, for that matter, my archaeological skills. The choice to hire me was an affirmative action decision, and above all, it was a financial decision. It turned out that the base civil engineering squadron had been spending what it considered prodigious sums of money to the Honolulu branch of the Army Corps of Engineers for environmental compliance services, and came to the realization that it could simply hire an in-house archaeologist, whose job, as it were, would be to "stand over the hole and watch" as construction projects unfolded. But even this was not all: Tayon seemed to enjoy having a brown-skinned Ph.D. working for him and for the first few months put me to work generating office correspondence such as award packages because of what he perceived as my "articulate nature" and "superior writing skills."

I was making good money and was willing to overlook the fact that I had no office, no tools, and no genuine in-house policy support, but even I was somewhat surprised by this obvious conflict in job expectations. The job description was not written as a field tech position,

and given the fact that the Air Force had serious archaeological and environmental *management* issues to confront (such as unupdated and unmanaged cultural and natural resource inventories and policies), I saw this presumption to be ill-informed and ignorant, as well as indicative of an internal military culture that viewed archaeological research and environmental compliance in general, with disdain. Over time, I grew to understand what the new Bush administration reality in Washington, D.C. would mean for DoD environmental compliance in Hawaii. Among many other things, what it meant was the adoption of a strongly ideological anti-environment and pro-privatization rhetoric that characterized environmental regulation as “encroaching” on DoD’s operations. Although it existed beforehand, the level of vitriol dramatically increased after Sept. 11, 2001. All bets were off, and the Rumsfeld-led defense department saw and seized the opportunity to insert exemptions and alterations into a variety of environmental laws protecting migratory birds, marine mammals, endangered species, as well as historic sites. Where rules and regulations like the Sikes Act¹ could not be changed, the policy became to aggressively outsource these responsibilities via the government A-76 process and other mechanisms. The longstanding definition of “inherently governmental function” was loosened and redefined to now mean that “as long as somebody’s eyes in government had their eyes on it, that it was alright to outsource.” In practice this meant that it was not relevant whether the reviewers of documents were qualified to review the documents on their desk, as long as that person was a professional engineer and a governmental employee (either USAF or UACOE).

We are now largely familiar with the Bush administration’s outsourcing philosophies. They remain simple to understand and flow from a longstanding ideological hostility towards

¹ The Sikes Act, passed in 1960, governs natural resource management on DoD property. Until recently, DoD and the USAF held it to *also* apply to cultural resources on federal property controlled by DoD.

government, and by now have even been applied to the most sensitive of governmental functions at DoD and the State department. At about this time—this is early to mid 2002--the DoD definition of “encroachment” (a real estate term) also began to gather significant traction (show overhead). The most vivid recollection I have of that time period is a presentation at the 2002 Hawaii DoD environmental conference where a San Diego-based Marine environmental manager suggested that the “real” endangered species were not animals on the federal endangered species list, but the United States Marines. Under the so-called “War on Terror” the enemy had become “radical environmentalists” and their “encroaching” rules and regulations.

At the time I did not fully appreciate the irony in what this gentleman from Camp Pendleton was saying. We now know about companies such as Blackwater, Halliburton, and Bectel, and how they have become a virtual fourth branch of government. What is less recognized is the degree to which the federal government’s environmental bureaucracy was sliced and diced, and how former military officers used the revolving door that has become DoD contracting to pursue fat-cat contracts for their new bosses. Search the middle and upper management level rosters of the usual big environmental contractors: CH2M Hill, URS Corporation, Parsons, and now, thanks to the “new understanding” companies such as J.M. Waller & Associates (which was graduated early from the SBA’s 8(a) program, and you will find a smorgasbord of separated or retired military people, whose job is to use their influence to secure contracts.

I watched these developments with consternation and increasingly, with sadness. I saw the Air Force hiring Virginia and Texas based environmental consultants, for instance, who ignorantly kept boilerplate language in their Environmental Assessment drafts discussing the potential impacts of Air Force operations on Hawaii’s population of bald eagles. I saw

responsibility and accountability being shifted from government to business, and watched as business hired multiple levels of subcontractors, almost all of whom knew less than the ones before.

Jim Tayon, competent enough as a manager to realize that I had problems with “the new understandings” governing Air Force environmental management, tried to fire me at my one-year review meeting. Although he acknowledged that I had done a good job and had even won an employee of the month award, he said that “he was doing [me] a favor” by letting me go because he could tell, apparently by reading my mind, “that I wanted to be a college professor all along anyway.” I told him that my intentions were my own business and that in any case he did not possess the information or the authority to terminate my employment based upon the things he had said. After speaking with civilian personnel about whether I could be fired at the end of my one year probationary period, I was told that no, I could not be let go under such circumstances. I thus had bought myself another one year extension, and this is when the fun really began.

Not having legal or organizational justification to fire me, Tayon began to look for other mechanisms to accomplish this goal. The method eventually applied was the RIF; the “reduction in force.” The justification for the existence of my position was now no longer valid: for one thing, I had demonstrated that I was not going to be Jim Tayon’s little brown boy and work on his pet projects. More importantly, I had initiated a more professional and competent relationship with the Native Hawaiian community, and I sought to actually hold the Air Force to its own stated and long held environmental management standards by asking project initiators to actually “take into account” the foreseeable effects of their projects on the human environment. I suggested to almost anyone who would listen, especially Tetra Tech, Earth Tech, and people at

the Corps of Engineers, that the Army's Stryker Brigade EIS and the Air Force's C-17 EA were not in legal compliance with NEPA. For this, and for other actions I undertook, I began to receive a reputation in some circles, for being abrasive, challenging, "not a team player," and worst of all, insubordinate.

In the spring of 2003 I received my RIF notice. This, combined with the death of my sister, made for trying times. My relationship with O'Donnell and Curtis also deteriorated to the point of unworkability. To make a long story short, Curtis accused me of "not having field skills at a level where I could act as a solo archaeologist," of "making changes in the her work and then claiming it as my own," and for inappropriately hiring an archaeology firm (T.S. Dye & Colleagues) without proper authorization. O'Donnell, who at by this point actually been formally appointed my supervisor due to Tayon's retirement, accused me of a litany of sins, including "unnecessarily calling attention to my doctorate and using provocative words that mis-characterize and insult the listener" and "not taking direction well."

I technically did survive the RIF; although my archaeological job description no longer existed because the position was eliminated. I was given the opportunity to work instead in the restoration branch of the environmental department for a gentleman named Todd Lanning, where I was told that I would be working on Excel spreadsheets and ensuring that the department's environmental assessment tools and funding would function properly. I took some time to think about it, went on an extended leave, and eventually declined the offer.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are at least two sides to every story, and mine is certainly a personal version of events. But I do wish to share some of what I consider to be "lessons learned" from the experiences that I just outlined. In some ways, they parallel the experiences of other former

government employees who resigned or left the civil service because their ability to do their job was compromised by the radical philosophies put into place by the Bush administration, such as Ann Wright, Joseph Wilson, and others.

Firstly, I'm happy to see that the Society for Hawaiian Archaeology has taken a stronger stance regarding the joke that the state SHPD has become. I hope that some of the things I have shared provide some insight into how the department's already visible decline accelerated once the "new understanding" at the federal level was put into place. In the present political environment I worry that we are now—in the words of Tom King--in the "NEPA and Section 106 document generation business" where our industry and research survival is being held hostage by ideologues with political agendas that run counter to the intent and spirit of the environmental laws that form the basis for a viable archaeological private sector.

I also feel somewhat sorry for people such as O'Donnell, who not only countenanced but enabled the implementation of "the new understanding" within their own spheres of responsibility. Those of us who have worn a military uniform and have worked as civil servants do not consider it cliché to point out that our loyalty is *and ought to be* to the constitution of the United States, not to whoever happens to be president or secretary of defense. Perhaps because I had already *had* the experience of having George. W. Bush as my governor, I was not hoodwinked or fooled into believing the phony rationale for making "encroachment" a matter of national security. I fully understood what the Karl Rove inspired dismantling of even the "idea" of a federal government role in protecting the environment would mean. I also understood what the muzzling of government scientists on subjects such as climate change—and yes on archaeology too was all about. What disappointed me most of all is that whenever I read and pointed out the actual words of NHPA and NEPA to people like O'Donnell, their response often

bordered on incredulity. To them, it seemed self-evident that you did whatever your bosses said, no matter *what* your bosses said and did. Whenever I challenged the clearly flawed logic and theory behind the nonsense, I was accused of being a snotty, self-righteous, superior-acting academic wanna-bee and worse.

I considered it a great honor and privilege to serve as the Air Force's first staff archaeologist. In spite of the things I have just said in my paper, I recall my time in that position fondly and remain appreciative of the unique opportunities that were afforded me. I decided to give this talk because I wanted to set the record straight and also to hopefully furnish some insight into the inner workings of federal agency management and lack thereof. If you have found some of the things I just said to be laborious or self-indulgent, I ask you to forgive me, but also to consider the gravity and implications of some of the points I was making.

Going forward, it is my hope that I will be able to make a contribution to erasing the last six years of DoD environmental mismanagement and establishing newer and better policies and procedures that fulfill the intent and spirit of NEPA and NHPA and strike a more common-sense balance that is not based on lies, deception, fraud, abuse, and waste.