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## Writer revisits Battle of Nu'uauu Pali

*Oahu's defeat came far from steep cliffs of Ko'olau, he says*

By **John Windrow**  
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Neil Dukas stood at the overlook at Punchbowl cemetery yesterday where so many warriors are resting and explained his theory of the Battle of the Nu'uauu Pali.

He swept his hand to indicate the area near The Queen's Medical Center and St. Andrew's Cathedral and said: "This is where they do or die. ... I think the meat of the battle, the bulk of the dying, the real hard fighting occurred there."

Many people assume the major fight took place at the Pali Lookout, Dukas said, but that was merely the sad ending for defeated warriors from O'ahu and Maui after the battle had already been lost below Punchbowl and up in Nu'uauu Valley.

As a military historian and author who served at Canada's Military Staff College, Dukas considers the Battle of Nu'uauu Pali comparable to Yorktown, Gettysburg or the Little Bighorn as a formative event in American history.

Dukas, who once lived in Nu'uauu and now lives in Marin County, Calif., said he has researched written and oral accounts of the fight, and talked with dozens of Hawaiian kupuna to hear traditional accounts of the battle.

His illustrated guide book to the battle that unified Hawai'i is scheduled to be published by Mutual Publishing next year.

Back in the time of Kamehameha, there were four heiau in the area below Punchbowl, he said.

They were well fortified positions where the Maui chief Kalanikupule and his 9,000 troops from Maui and O'ahu took on Kamehameha, leader of the Big Island. Kamehameha's 14,000 troops had landed several days before on the coast of what is now Kahala, near Diamond Head, in April, 1795.

After spending a few days organizing, Kamehameha's army engaged some of Kalanikupule's forces at the site of Thomas Square. Then the fighting moved to the area below what is now the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl.

Dukas said the battle is sometimes described as a rout, but it was not so one-sided.

The defenders were outnumbered, but were experienced warriors, Dukas said, and well entrenched and well prepared.

Kalanikupule knew his enemy, having fought Kamehameha before. Both sides, he said, had Western muskets and cannons.

"They were fighting on their home ground and had the high ground," he said. "So why did they lose? What went wrong?"

Kamehameha's forces managed to pull a successful flanking maneuver through Papakolea around the rear of Punchbowl Crater that threatened to cut off Kalanikupule from his fortified positions farther up Nu'uauu Valley, Dukas said.

He theorizes that Kalanikupule was able to thwart the flanking movement and prevent being caught between two forces. But he had to withdraw up the valley, falling back in an orderly retreat, while fighting a series of defensive actions.

"They abandoned their positions at Punchbowl to counter the flanking movement," Dukas said.

Dukas thinks Kalanikupule then split his forces deliberately, sending a force to 'Ewa to draw off some of Kamehameha's army, so the number of soldiers that pursued him up Nu'uauu Valley would be reduced.

"It was a strategic withdrawal, not a rout," Dukas said. "And the troops who headed to 'Ewa didn't just panic and run, they were a decoy movement."

## 'THREADS UNRAVEL'

But things went from bad to worse for Kalanikupule. He made a stand behind a stone wall in a heavily terraced area at what is now Judd Street and Nu'uaniu Avenue.

It was there that Kaiana, a young chief who had defected from Kamehameha and joined Kalanikupule, was killed.

Kalanikupule himself was badly wounded somewhere in the area between Judd and Jack Lane. The Maui chief then left the fight.

"In battle the threads begin to unravel and then things go bad very quickly," Dukas said.

On the way up the green valley toward the Pali cliff, the street names of Laimi Road, Ahipuu and Puiwa Road recall the strongholds where the remaining warriors made a series of delaying actions so their families and camp followers could try to escape.

Dukas said that the last organized stand by about 1,000 troops took place in an area off Nu'uaniu Pali Drive across from the entrance to Ginger Pool.

"It was the last opportunity for their loved ones to escape off the side trails," he said. "After that the ridges are too steep. They can only last so long. They know they're going to die."

And die they did.

The last of them leaped or were forced off the magnificent Pali Lookout, which is now marked by a plaque with a reproduction of the heroic scene painted by the artist and historian Herb Kawainui Kane.

"Pali is the final sacrifice," Dukas said. "It's sad in the sacrifice that it took on both sides, joyous in the beginning of a united Hawaiian nation."

Interest in the battle remains strong, Dukas said, and he hopes his book helps people learn more about it.

"People see me taking pictures and notes and when they ask me what I'm doing, they're very enthusiastic. I meet people who say: 'My ancestors fought in that battle, on the losing side.' There's a thirst for this."



Military historian Neil Dukas, left, shares his tale with Hawai'i Pacific University professor John Hart at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Dukas has written a guidebook to the Battle of Nu'uaniu Pali.



Dukas says Kalanikupule lost the fight to Kamehameha below Punchbowl and up in Nu'uaniu Valley, not atop the Pali.

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