

“Everything changed!” – the ramification of the Second World War on the Canadian North

Raynald Harvey Lemelin, Michel S. Beaulieu and David Ratz

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to retrace past developments that occurred in the Alaskan and Canadian North as of result of the Second World War and illustrate the ramifications of these events in the Canadian and American political landscapes as it pertains to warfare tourism. The paper also intends to initiate a discussion on how certain narratives pertaining to warfare tourism are promoted, while others are overlooked.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper analyses the political, economic, socio-cultural and technological factors that resulted in tourism growth or the lack thereof in the Canadian and American Norths.*

Findings – *Warfare tourism, like most types of tourism, is expected to grow. Through this growth comes opportunities to expand and integrate the discussion pertaining to warfare tourism in the Canadian and American Norths while also providing a starting point for discussion about potential solutions to address warfare tourism and cultural dissonance.*

Research limitations/implications – *This viewpoint is dependent on literature reviews.*

Practical implications – *The relationship between Indigenous peoples and other marginalized populations in the Second World War and warfare tourism is a relatively new research area. For warfare tourism to become integrated into tourism policies and developments, a willingness to address cultural dissonance and integrate populations formerly marginalized in the Second World War will be required. This paper examines how northern and other marginalized voices can be integrated in future commemoration and interpretation strategies.*

Social implications – *The paper provides an opportunity to examine the growth and healing that can result from warfare tourism.*

Originality/value – *This interdisciplinary collaboration conducted by a military historian, a northern historian and a tourism research researcher provides one of the first examinations of the impacts of the Second World War in North America, and the relevance of these impacts to the interpretation of warfare tourism in Canada.*

Keywords *Second World War, Northern Canada, Warfare tourism*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

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Introduction

Historically, the commemoration of warfare tourism in the Canadian North has not been a priority of the federal government. This has in part been fuelled by the notion that no conflicts occurred in Northern Canada, and those that may have occurred were in the name of a nationalist Canadian vision founded on security, democracy and sovereignty (Neufeld, 2001; Schwenkel, 2006). In instances where site recognition does occur, it has largely been reserved for Euro-Canadian sites or those involving European exploration, for example, those sites related to the quest for the Northwest Passage, the Klondike Rush and the building of the Alaska Highway (Coates *et al.*, 2008; Neufeld, 2001). As Lemelin, Thompson-Carr, Johnston, Stewart and Dawson (2013) explain, this approach has resulted in historical and dialectical narratives in the Canadian North that are selective, partial, biased and distorted. However, collaborative approaches with federal and territorial agencies and Indigenous groups are changing these narratives and ensuring that a

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distinctly northern voice is being heard in commemoration and interpretation (Neufeld, 2001). Warfare tourism, as Lemelin, Powys Whyte, Johansen, Higgins Desbiolles, Wilson and Hemming (2013) and Lemelin, Thompson-Carr, Johnston, Stewart and Dawson (2013) suggest, can provide such opportunities.

Warfare tourism (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Lloyd, 1998; Smith, 1996) is a sub-component of dark tourism (i.e. the attraction of sites associated to death Lennon and Foley, 2000) which incorporates battlefields, airfields, war memorials and monuments, cemeteries, war museums and interpretive centres, warships, battle re-enactments and battlefield tours (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011). Internment, concentration, and prisoner of war (POW) camps are also included under the rubric of warfare tourism. Motivated by factors such as commemorative efforts (i.e. the centenary of the First World War, the 75th anniversary of the Second World War) and reinterpretations of warfare tourism through interpretive strategies, memoirs, novels, documentaries and movies, there are a variety of reasons why tourists visit these types of sites including commemoration and pilgrimage, entertainment and education (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Lemelin, Powys Whyte, Johansen, Higgins Desbiolles, Wilson and Hemming, 2013; Lemelin, Thompson-Carr, Johnston, Stewart and Dawson, 2013; Lloyd, 1998). Research indicates that warfare tourism can be emotionally cathartic, spiritual, meaningful, transformative and restorative (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Lemelin *et al.*, 2016; Lloyd, 1998).

In recognition of the upcoming 75th anniversary of the Second World War, we focus our analysis on the war and the ramification this global conflict had on the Canadian North, and indirectly, on the American (i.e. Alaska) North. The authors are well aware, and recognize, how many aspects of the history of the Canadian North are integrally linked to the colonization and post-colonization of the north and the history of security and sovereignty in Canada. As such, we examine how the militarization of the north through large infrastructural projects like the Alaskan Highway, the Aleutian Campaign and internment camps irrevocably transformed the north. Due to the similarities of our case studies and what these areas look like at the beginning of the Second World War, the north includes both the provincial and the territorial areas of Canada (Graham, 1990; Hamelin, 1979), and the state of Alaska in the USA. We also examine how memories of these events are interpreted and integrated (or not) into Canadian commemorative processes. By providing various perspectives of specific events that occurred in the Second World War, we add to the discussion on warfare tourism. We also suggest that the management and interpretation strategies offered at these sites provides opportunities for a better understanding of these events.

The Second World War

For Canada, the Second World War began in 1939 and concluded in 1945 (VAC, 2017). Roughly 1.1m men and women had served in uniform for Canada, and 47,000 men and women died during the war (VAC, 2018). In addition to the men and women who enlisted, the north during the Second World War provided energy for manufacturing, minerals, lumber, pulp and paper, agriculture and fish to the war effort (Zaslow, 1988; Morrison, 1989). By the conclusion of the war, Zaslow (1988) argues, “the North had acquired an elaborate array of transportation and communication facilities, and much new information had been gained regarding the nature of the region and the problems of living and working there” (p. 210). As a result, the north would be forever changed (Lackenbauer, 2011).

Although conflicts and battles during the Second World War occurred around the world, few Canadians are aware of the battles that occurred in North America. Indeed, very little is known of the Aleutian Campaign, the existence of POW camps in the provincial norths and the massive infrastructural projects that were constructed as a result of security and sovereignty reasons in North America. As a matter of fact, concerns regarding the defence of the Atlantic, Pacific and even Arctic coastlines resulted in various development projects like the Alaskan Highway, the North-West Staging Route and the “Crimson Project”. The latter, for instance, led to the planning of airfields and radio stations 800 km apart across the north to address distance limitations of aircraft at the time (Zaslow, 1988).

Entire military complexes in Goose Bay in Labrador and the Pas, and Churchill in Manitoba were established, while in other instances places like Prince Rupert and Whitehorse were transformed into commercial and shipping hubs (Zaslow, 1988). Each of these projects also required the deployment of massive workforces composed of military and civilians (Coates and Morrison, 2005; Hamilton, 1994). By 1943, Coates and Morrison (2005) writes, “tens of thousands of people once more flooded into the Yukon, upsetting the economic and social structure and setting the territory on a new course” (p. 223). Much of the airfields and meteorological stations tied to the Second World War and often expanded during the Cold War still figure prominently throughout Northern Canada today. These infrastructural projects brought the north into more constant and, comparatively, reliable contact with the rest of Canada and the world. It also led to dramatic economic, social and cultural changes in the communities designated for their construction, including others “flocking enthusiastically to take up the employment opportunities and markets for their produce and services” (Zaslow, 1988, p. 228). These developments also led to more direct forms of territorial expropriation and assimilation policies such as residential schools. However, the often-contentious relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Second World War as it relates to expropriation, colonialism and land rights is a relatively new research area (Lackenbauer, 2007).

Apart from these massive infrastructural projects, there is, as stated earlier, a general impression that no battles were fought on Canadian soil or in Canadian waters. Yet as Sarty (2012) and Zaslow (1988) attest, numerous naval battles, sometimes at the cost of Canadian lives, occurred in Canadian and allied (i.e. Newfoundland) waters of the Atlantic, where German submarines were attacking and sinking Allied shipping on a regular basis. In 1942, Japanese submarines shelled the Estevan Point Lighthouse in British Columbia and Fort Stevens in Oregon (Coyle, 2002). The same year, Japanese planes bombed Dutch Harbor in Alaska and Japanese troops occupied the islands of Attu and Kiska, two of the westernmost islands of the Aleutian chain in the Alaskan panhandle (Cohen, 1981, 1988; Zaslow, 1988). Although the shelling of the Estevan Point lighthouse was unsuccessful, this event along with the Aleutian Campaign in Alaska would have profound ramifications for Indigenous peoples and for Japanese–Canadian citizens, and for the north in general. These impacts are discussed next.

The Aleutian Campaign

The Aleutian Campaign, also known as the “forgotten war” (Chandonnet, 1995; Cohen, 1981, 1988) and the “thousand mile war” (Garfield, 1982), began in 1942, when the Japanese Imperial Army bombed Dutch Harbor and established two military bases on the islands of Kiska and Attu in Alaska. The Aleut, the Indigenous peoples living on these islands, were removed and incarcerated in detention camps back in Japan (Estlack, 2014). Frightened by the possibility of potential attacks on the North American mainland from these two bases, the American and Canadian governments opted to remove the Japanese Imperial Army from these two islands in 1943 (Cohen, 1981, 1988). Before beginning their attacks, American forces relocated many of the remaining Aleut from the surrounding islands to the Alaskan mainland; there they were interned in camps and detained for the remainder of the war (Estlack, 2014).

American forces supported by the American and Canadian navies attacked Attu in May 1943; lasting 18 days, the battle resulted in 5,000 casualties (3,329 American casualties, 2,351 Japanese casualties) (Cohen, 1981, 1988). On 15 August 1943, after three weeks of bombardment, an invasion force consisting of American (30,000) and Canadian (5,300) troops landed on Kiska. For the Canadians this consisted of the 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade (which included Canadian conscripts), the 1st Special Service Force (a joint USA–Canada special forces unit), and the Royal Canadian Air Force. Since the Japanese troops had previously slipped away, no combat occurred. However, “twenty Americans and four Canadians died, and fifty Americans and one Canadian were wounded as they shot each other in the fog or tripped mines and booby traps” (Cohen, 1981, 1988).

The Aleutian survivors believed the evacuation and subsequent internment was their contribution and sacrifice to the war effort (Estlack, 2014). It would take the persistence of a younger Aleut generation who would not stay silent to seek restitution for the survivors. In 1988, the

American Congress passed a bill (i.e. Public Law 100-383) providing compensation for the evacuees and an apology from Congress and the president on behalf of the people of the USA (Estlack, 2014). To this date, neither Japan nor Canada have apologized nor provided any restitution for the internment and/or the destruction of Aleutian property and places of worship on Attu and Kiska. Despite being one of the deadliest battles to occur in any theatre of the Second World War, the Aleutian Campaign or the “thousand mile war” (Garfield, 1982; Wynne, 1969) and the internment of the Aleuts are rarely discussed or integrated into warfare tourism or Arctic tourism, thereby giving credence to the nomenclature of the “forgotten war” (Chandonnet, 1995; Cohen, 1981, 1988).

Prisoner of war and internment camps

POW camps are generally defined as centres where enemy combatants are detained. Yet, in Canada, civilians as well as prisoners of war were detained in centres officially termed internment camps. Technically, civilians are held in “concentration camps” and during the First World War, sites where civilians were interned were referred to as such, but the term is not generally applied in historical literature to the facilities set up in Canada, largely due to the association of the term with the camps set up by the Axis during the Second World War.

Broadly speaking, the detention of either prisoners of war or civilians in Canada was termed an internment operation, though officials and later scholars often differentiated between the two categories, typically only describing civilians as internees (Auger, 2005). However, Canadian officials added to their own idiosyncratic interpretations of international law, which led to their classifying the enemy aliens transferred from Britain as Prisoners of War Class I and Class II. Although prisoners of war and civilian internees are in many ways different, and although they were subject to different international rules regarding their treatment, in some situations in Canada the two groups were held in the same facilities. It is for these reasons that the two related phenomena are often classed together as one field of study (Cinanni, 2009; Zimmermann, 2015).

POW and internment camps operated in Canada from September 1939 to October 1944 and though none were located in the Canadian Arctic, they were located in the peripheral provincial north. Throughout this time, Canada would host approximately 35,000 detainees throughout 26 main camps, and hundreds of smaller compounds located in the northern forest, on farms and in factories. Various national parks in Western Canada (Riding Mountain NP in Manitoba and Banff and Jasper NP in Alberta) and what would later become provincial parks (e.g. Neys Provincial Park in Ontario) were used to incarcerate “possible threat to public order” and “potential source of civil unrest” and conscientious objectors such as Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists and Hutterites in internment camps (Waiser, 1999, p. 2).

Using powers granted under the War Measures Act, nearly 22,000 Japanese–Canadians were forced to relocate to various internments camps across Canada (Adachi, 1976; Roy *et al.*, 1990; Roy, 2007; Stanger-Ross and Sugiman, 2017). In many instances, women and children were sent to different internment camps throughout the country, while the men were sent to various labour camps located in the western provinces and Northern Ontario. While POW camps were established to incarcerate captured military personnel, and these camps were regulated by the Geneva Convention, internment camps had no such regulations. Therefore, internees had their movements restricted, their letters censored and they had to pay for their own internment (Auger, 2005; Zimmermann, 2015). While German POWs began to be sent back to Europe after the Second World War concluded in 1945, restrictions remained in place for Japanese–Canadians until 1949. Almost 4,000 were exiled to Japan in 1946, “a country,” Stanger-Ross (2007) explains, that few of them had visited before. It would not be until September 22, 1988 that the Government of Canada delivered an apology and provided compensation totalling over \$300m dollars for the survivors (CBC, 2018).

Unlike in Europe where internment camps were preserved by the Allies and subsequently transformed into educational and interpretive facilities (Reynolds, 2018), POW and internment camps throughout Canada were dismantled, transformed into lumber or mining camps or simply abandoned thereby basically erasing these establishments from the landscape and the general

consciousness (Zimmermann, 2015). However, in recent years some scholars and communities have tried to address this part of Canada's past (Zimmermann, 2015). For Northern Canada, the Second World War, through conflicts, internment camps and the construction of roadways, railways and airways bringing and the installation of communication technologies, irrevocably transformed the north. How these transformations are remembered and sometimes commemorated, as we discuss next, is subject to interpretation.

Discussion: the commemoration of the Second World War in North America

The commemoration of warfare tourism is a delicate, arbitrary and often controversial process. As stated earlier, few Canadians, or Americans for that matter, perhaps with the exception of Pearl Harbor, are aware of the legacy of the Second World War in North America, and many are surprised to hear that naval battles did occur in North American waters or that one of the deadliest battles of the Second World War actually occurred in North America. Others might be aware that POW and internment camps were located throughout Canada and the USA, but since so few remnants of these places remain, the exception being the Sunshine Valley Tashme Museum in British Columbia, which was established to remember and honour Japanese–Canadian internees or Camp Hearne, a reconstructed POW camp located in Hearne, Texas, the memory and interpretation of these places is sporadic at best and often marred in myth and narratives, which have very little to do with actual historical accounts.

Unlike in Europe where the visitation of battlefield, internment camps and other sites associated to the Second World War provide various interpretive services to visitors, the commemoration of warfare tourism in Canada is largely relegated to specialized museums like the War Museum in Ottawa or regional museums, special exhibits in visitor centres, historical plaques or interpretive panels (such as the ones located in Kluane National Park commemorating the completion of the Alaskan Highway) and guided hikes to former POW camps in Ridding Mountain National Park (Parks Canada, 2010).

In Neys Provincial Park, historic plaques, guided hikes and a small exhibit in the Neys Provincial Park visitor centre are all that remain to remind visitors of the POW and internment camps in Northern Ontario. The community of Red Rock, in Northern Ontario, does, however, include an exhibit about Camp R in their Red Rock Marina Interpretive Centre (Zimmermann, 2015). In Alaska, the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area was designated in 1985 (National Park Service, 2016), and a peace monument was established on the island of Attu by the Japanese Government in 1987 (National Park Service, 2015), and in 2002, the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Visitor Centre was opened on Amaknak Island (National Park Service, 2018).

It could be argued that the peripheral locations of some of these events mean that they can be easily forgotten, yet the argument of distance does not hold much sway when one considers how many Canadians make annual pilgrimages to the battlefields of the Second World War in Europe. What appears to be at play in Canada is a combination of the literal and physical erasure of Second World War infrastructures throughout most of Canada, the exception being Northern Canada, distance and travel patterns and cultural dissonance, where certain narratives are perpetuated while others are forgotten. For example, some historical markers like the one established at Neys Provincial Park commemorated the POW camp, but do not identify the internment of Japanese–Canadians at this site, thereby commemorating one part of our history while disregarding other, perhaps more uncomfortable narratives.

The works by Lemelin, Powys Whyte, Johansen, Higgins Desbiolles, Wilson and Hemming (2013) and Lemelin, Thompson-Carr, Johnston, Stewart and Dawson (2013), Lemelin and Baikie (2013) and Lemelin *et al.* (2016) suggests that provided it is presented in a respectful fashion, there is a general openness and even willingness by tourists to learn about this contested heritage and warfare tourism. Therefore, although it is unlikely that Canadians will change their pilgrimage patterns from Europe to Northern Canada, it does not mean that these conflicts or areas need to be erased from the Canadian consciousness. For example, special and travelling expositions and social media provide various opportunities to learn about warfare tourism (Lemelin and Johansen, 2014). Inspiration could also be sought from Europe, where battlefield tourism is a significant

economic generator, with dozens of companies, some of them Canadian, offering various themed tours aimed at specific wars, battles and countries. While such a business in Canada might not be on the same scale it is still something that is feasible where the communities involved, and the tourism industry collaborate to promote educational and commemorative warfare tourism.

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