Battle Grounds
Studies in Canadian Military History

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Battle Grounds:  
The Canadian Military and Aboriginal Lands

P. Whitney Lackenbauer
This book is dedicated to Jennifer, my muse and my best friend.

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Maps, Tables, Illustrations

Maps

1.1 Towns and transportation networks in interior British Columbia, c. 1917 / 19
1.2 Kamloops Lake area, c. 1911 / 21
1.3 Area of Flick’s explorations in the Nicola Valley, 1911 / 26
1.4 Wadmore’s map of Vernon with overlap of local Indian reserves and lakes, 1911 / 30
2.1 Sarcee Indian Reserve No. 145 and Calgary, c. 1900 / 42
2.2 Plan of Sarcee Camp, 1915 / 53
2.3 Sarcee leases, 1921 and 1924 / 59
3.1 Artillery range used on Tyendinaga Indian reserve, 1897-1904 / 67
3.2 Camp Mohawk, 1917-19 / 73
4.1 Proposed airfield on Six Nations Indian reserve, 1939-40 / 86
4.2 Bombing range at Six Nations, 1941 / 102
4.3 Ranges on the Blood Indian reserve / 104
4.4 Aerodrome at Tyendinaga, 1944 / 109
5.1 Plan of Kettle and Stony Point Indian reserves, 1900 / 117
5.2 Landholders displaced by Camp Ipperwash, 1942-44 / 121
6.1 Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range, showing treaty boundaries and nearby Indian reserves / 146
6.2 Cold Lake First Nations structures and PLAWR boundaries, 1950s / 150
7.1 Sarcee Barracks infrastructure, 1960s / 186
8.1 Danger areas at Camp Ipperwash / 210
8.2 Training areas at CFB Goose Bay / 222

Tables

6.1 Indian Affairs proposed PLAWR compensation, April 1952 / 151
6.2 PLAWR compensation payments, 1955-61 / 163

Illustrations

14 Army troops on road to summer camp, Vernon, 1910
22 Colonel J.R. Vicars, 1905
27 John Freemont Smith, Kamloops Indian agent
34 Head of the Lake Chief Babtiste Logan, 1912
41 Sarcee (Tsuu T’ina) Chief Bull Head (Chula), n.d.
48 Big Belly, “Chief of the Sarcees” (Tsuu T’ina), 1911
50 Hon. Sam Hughes and Lt.-Col. E.A. Cruikshank
57 Sarcee Camp, 1915
61 Agents Thomas Murray and Harold McGill, 1934
69 Chief Thunderwater (Oghema Niagara), n.d.
70 Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of Indian affairs 1913-32
74 Members of 85th Squadron at Camp Mohawk, 1917
77 Camp Mohawk Headquarters, Eagle Hill, c. 1918
90 Harold McGill, director of Indian affairs, 1940
106 Fairey Battle training aircraft near Lethbridge, c. 1943
110 Masthead of No. 1 Instrument Flying School newspaper, 1944-45
133 Threshing bee at Stony Point, n.d.
135 Camp Ipperwash, c. 1947
167 Cold Lake residents Charles Blackman, Sam Watchapese, and Thomas Beaverfoot, 1963
172 CF-104 aircraft return from a bombing mission on the PLAWR, n.d.
188 Brig. Milton Gregg during Sarcee chieftainship ceremony, 1961
190 Sarcee (Tsuu T’ina) Chief Jim Starlight, 1965
199 Sweeping for unexploded ordnance at Sarcee, 1981
209 Jean Chrétien, 1970
216 Clearing the Sarcee training range during Operation BILBO, 1981
231 Confrontation at Oka, 1990
239 Stoney Point Aazhoodena First Nation sign, 2003
241 The Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation veterans’ memorial
243 An elder speaks at the Indian Claims Commission community session, 1992
New York Times, 19 June 2000: Journalist James Brooke explained to readers that Indians across the continent were hard at work ‘Stalk[ing] a Silent, Deadly Enemy in the Prairie’ – the dangerous residue of militarism in their own backyards: ‘It is a little known footnote to the military history of North America that when wars loomed in the 20th century, military planners in Canada and the United States repeatedly turned to the native peoples of the West and took control, through leases or outright expropriation, of large swaths of land for bombing ranges ... Brian Lloyd, a former British Army bomb-disposal expert who directs cleanup operations here, said: “In Canada, the military acted like a giant, using Indian land like stepping stones across the country. You find an Indian nation, and you find range contamination.” For members of affected communities, the use of their Indian reserves and traditional territories for military training represented more than a footnote. It is part of a ‘treadmill of destruction’ tying militarism to environmental and political injustice. With hundreds of millions of dollars involved in outstanding Aboriginal land claims against the military, and after decades of confrontation, the effects of past military activities continue to be felt in the present.

Landscapes are framed by human desire and human activity. They exist as cognitive constructs, dependent upon experience and purpose; they are the ‘intricate intimate intermingling’ of physical and cultural features. Human alterations to the earth – from tangible, physical changes to intangible processes such as naming and categorizing – are works of culture. In a multicultural society such as Canada, the conceptualization and construction of space can lead to both cooperation and conflict. As a result, landscapes are complex and often ambiguous. Competition for land, conflicting priorities for its use, and unequal power distributions have made Canada a country of contested spaces and places. Although generally overlooked by historians and geographers, the Canadian military has been an actor in these territorial contests.

A nation-state requires armed forces for security and to assert its sovereignty, and such forces need to practise and prepare for their fundamental purpose: war. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Canadian military trained on small parcels of land. Local militia facilities were designed to establish pockets of military presence across a vast country and to reinforce a growing sense of nationhood. In towns and cities, armouries and rifle ranges were built to serve
the local citizen-soldiers and to signal a community’s burgeoning importance. The military established central training camps close to growing communities and reliable transportation and communication networks, which allowed militiamen to gather annually to show the colours, perform drill, and learn basic tactics. These training establishments sustained both national development and defence across the vast continent.

The purposes, scale, and location of land used by the military changed as warfare evolved in the twentieth century. Historian John Childs explains that ‘the military appetite for rural land became voracious as the aeroplane, conscript armies, and long-range weapons devoured huge expanses of land for airfields, manoeuvres, and the practice firing of weapons.’ Technology brought more advanced and diversified systems and weapons, and the demands for space grew apace. As tanks and armoured personnel carriers replaced horses, mechanization required broader expanses to practise manoeuvres and test new weaponry. To create realistic training scenarios, parcels of land had to resemble those that might be encountered in combat. Canada’s natural diversity interested military planners, insofar as varied landscapes could simulate potential battlefield terrain.

Airplanes demanded even more space. Air forces require specialized technical training to perform their missions, and Canada’s vast geography and low population density made it an ideal location to train pilots and crews. During the First World War the Royal Flying Corps trained on several sites in Canada, and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was heralded as Canada’s most significant contribution early in the Second World War. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 also demanded national contributions, and the Canadian government saw allied training as a way to avoid the crippling financial and personnel costs of a large air force or standing army. A nation blessed with Canada’s geographic breadth could certainly offer space for training, especially when government budgets, the prevailing ‘unmilitary’ ethos, and a sparse population constrained more direct military contributions.

Canadian reactions to military activities have been mixed. Many communities and interest groups actively lobbied politicians to secure a military presence reflecting not just patriotic support for national security but the significant local revenues generated by military bases. Other stakeholders and communities opposed any military presence – especially when it competed with local priorities or demanded personal sacrifice. Even when the Ottawa technocracy determined optimum sites for training, using putatively objective criteria, individuals were hesitant and even defiant when asked – or forced – to give up their homes for so-called national interest.

In the 1990s, the rapid termination of the cold war ushered in promises of a ‘peace dividend,’ resulting in the dramatic reduction of North American armed forces, concomitant defence budgets, and military bases. Some communities have
faced the reduction or closure of their military base, and challenged decision makers with a cacophony of opposition. The most ominous impacts were economic: base closures meant the loss of jobs, population, and direct federal spending in local economies. Downsizing also generated questions about environmental liabilities, political favouritism, future redevelopment, and the loss of community identity.

For Aboriginal groups claiming the land upon which military bases were situated, base closures represented opportunities to claim or reclaim Crown properties. Several major defence facilities had been established on Indian reserves. Most were situated on traditional Aboriginal territories that the Crown had acquired by treaty or that were still subject to outstanding land claims. The military itself was directly implicated in a growing number of claims, and Aboriginal activism in negotiations, through the courts, and on the ground raised a host of legal, political, socioeconomic, and environmental issues. The Department of National Defence/Canadian Forces seemed to be a national institution under siege by scandal, questions of purpose, and constant downsizing. As the military struggled to make sense of an uncertain, post-cold war era, its domestic presence was confronted by the aspirations of increasingly confident Aboriginal groups that sought restitution for past transgressions and asserted their own agendas for a brighter future.

How and why did Canadian military training facilities come to include Indian reserves and other lands associated with Aboriginal peoples’ traditional and contemporary activities? The case studies in this book illuminate a century of relationships between government officials and Aboriginal communities, contributing to a better understanding of the land claims, court cases, and confrontations that arose during the last quarter-century. Despite the numerous land claims in recent years, the military’s acquisition and use of Aboriginal lands did not progress in a uniform manner nor follow a deliberate policy. Instead it reflected the interplay of broad structural forces, national and local priorities, and ad hoc planning regimes. The decision-making process of a complex federal bureaucracy offers insights into how government structure, and in turn the structures of the Aboriginal-government relationship, influenced the form, pace, and trajectory of development plans.

When the Department of National Defence sought a parcel of Indian reserve land for military training, it had several options. If it did not require freehold tenure, the department could propose a lease to the band through its Indian agent, which was also subject to the approval of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. When the military wanted to obtain outright title to land, it could apply for a permanent surrender through Indian Affairs, which would convene a band meeting to place the proposal before the band. If a majority of voting members consented, legal title could be transferred in return for payment. In cases where the federal government could not obtain band consent, it could unilaterally acquire the land using various legislative powers. Sections 57 and 60 of the Militia Act allowed the Crown to
expropriate lands or shooting privileges for military purposes. The military assumed that this authority applied to Indian reserve lands as well. Furthermore, section 46 of the Indian Act authorized the expropriation of reserve lands for public purposes (with cabinet approval). Finally, section 3 of the Expropriation Act authorized federal departments to take possession of lands required to construct or access public works. In wartime, the War Measures Act further empowered cabinet to seize property deemed essential to the 'security, defence, peace, order and welfare of Canada.' In all expropriations, National Defence was required to compensate the Indian band at full market value. 7

Aboriginal communities and individuals responded to government plans and activities in various ways, from explicit co-operation to staunch opposition and resistance. In turn, military occupation and use produced an array of impacts, from income, to internecine identity politics, to environmental degradation. A homogeneous Aboriginal experience cannot be constructed out of this patchwork of interactions without obscuring more than it reveals. Relationships between government departments and Aboriginal groups evolved over time, reflecting changes in public discourse and political and institutional priorities. Only by comparing detailed case studies in historical context can a more rigorous appreciation of the past be gained, respecting a diversity of experiences and the complex inter-relationships between space, time, and peoples.

The genesis of this book came amid controversy and confrontations between Aboriginal peoples and the military. Camp Ipperwash, Canadian Forces Base Calgary, the Primrose Lake (or Cold Lake) Air Weapons Range, and Goose Bay’s low-level flying areas are all contentious landscapes that garnered significant political and media coverage during the last decade of the twentieth century. All but Goose Bay have evaded critical scholarly attention. Why did the military occupy so many parcels of land claimed by Aboriginal groups in the 1990s? How were Aboriginal communities historically involved in these land transactions? What impacts did the military’s activities have on individuals, communities, and relationships? Finally, when and how did affected communities mobilize to reclaim or demand compensation for these lands and activities?

The following is a study of space and place, of peoples and politics, of personalities and power. It is about myriad relationships, some positive, some negative, some both. The focus is narrow, but the implications are not, for the complexity and contradictions that marked twentieth-century Aboriginal-government relations can be observed on the micro-level. Anthony Cohen has explained that the ‘consciousness of community is ... encapsulated in [the] perception of its boundaries, boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people in interaction.’ 8 When the military sought Indian lands, how did it perceive boundaries that were geographical, bureaucratic, and cultural? Which boundaries did Indian Affairs officials relax to facilitate military desires, and which did they erect? What
boundaries did Aboriginal communities perceive, and how did these change over time? Cohen explains that consciousness is developed through shared values and symbols of meaning. Why and how did the Canadian military become a symbol of oppression to Aboriginal groups over the last century? After decades of land claims and litigation regarding past and present military activities on Aboriginal lands, the relevance of these questions is unmistakable.

**Terminology and Language**

Any research dealing with Aboriginal affairs must grapple with the contentious issue of language. As a general rule, this book adopts language consistent with the contemporary documents, with prevailing bureaucratic and legal discourses, and with Aboriginal self-identification in correspondence and public statements at any given time. Thus, the names of communities and bands are those that were employed during the various periods under study. Despite its limitations and complexity, this approach ensures that language does not confer current expectations and legal considerations on a conceptually and contextually different past. Although changing identities and names may initially seem confusing, processes of identity designation and reformulation provide insight into evolving political, legal, and social awareness.

The term ‘Indian’ carries a range of stereotypes and ideological baggage. When federal and provincial government officials used the word ‘Indian,’ it was the identifier defined by the Indian Act and later embedded in the Constitution. To employ another word in its place is to impart a different consciousness to policy makers than existed at the time. Some scholars choose to place the word in quotation marks to reaffirm the constructed nature of the label, but I trust the above explanation makes this unnecessary.

The phrase ‘Aboriginal lands’ held different meanings during the twentieth century. The most obvious refers to Indian reserves, which most non-Aboriginal Canadians assume to be synonymous with ‘Indian lands.’ This usage conforms to a traditional belief that Aboriginal activities should be segregated from non-Aboriginal ones and confined to reserves. Many Aboriginal groups, however, claim rights to vaster ancestral territories, and their land use patterns are not limited to their reserves. In recent decades, the non-Aboriginal community has expanded its concept of Aboriginal lands to include non-reserve lands surrendered by treaty, used by Aboriginal peoples for traditional pursuits, or showing evidence of historical occupation. As such, they are often referred to as ‘traditional territories.’

The phrases ‘Indian lands’ and ‘Aboriginal lands’ are tautological in their broadest interpretation – all of Canada could be considered traditional Aboriginal territory. This ambiguity encapsulates the complexity of Aboriginal land rights. More than 100 percent of British Columbia’s land mass is under claim, for example, because different groups’ traditional areas overlap. Because the concepts of
territorial and usufructory rights differ in law and have shifted over time, there can be no fixed definition of ‘Aboriginal lands.’ Certainly government definitions, generally limited to reserve or surrendered reserve lands, have been much narrower than those of Aboriginal peoples themselves. Like so much in this study, the chasm between competing positions is telling. The amorphous term ‘Aboriginal lands’ thus accommodates perspectives that all parties may not acknowledge.

Neither water nor airspace can be divorced from the issue of Aboriginal rights, especially in light of traditional fishing and hunter-gather practices, and recent claims and lawsuits. Legally, airspace is the inviolable preserve of the federal government. Some Aboriginal groups do not agree with this interpretation: what happens in the air over a territory can have a tremendous effect on the land and activities beneath. Low-level flying controversies in Labrador and northern Quebec have made this abundantly clear. In this respect, air training activities are germane to several case studies that follow. Defence planning documents recognize that debates over fishing, offshore resources, and riparian rights may have future impacts on naval operations.12 Because the primary focus of this study relates to land and concomitant activities, however, it will not delve into water issues.

A Note on Sources
The Department of National Defence granted access to restricted files that may not be readily accessible to other researchers in the immediate future, but which were critical to understanding the last three decades. All of the documents cited are unclassified, and copies of my research notes and documents will eventually be deposited in the P.W. Lackenbauer Fonds at the Museum of the Regiments, Calgary. The director general Aboriginal affairs restricted file group 1003-Ipperwash was consulted extensively in 1997, but was renumbered in 1998. These files now exist as DND file 1003-18-12 v. 1-47.

Accompanying the growing historiography on Aboriginal-government relations is a vast body of research material produced for land claims. This ‘grey information, or unpublished research, created by consultants, band and tribal organizations, treaty and Aboriginal rights research centres, and federal and provincial state agencies,’ historian Frank Tough has explained, ‘far outweighs the research published by academics.’ Most of this material is not currently available to scholars, and will not be for the foreseeable future, existing in a ‘legal chill’ while court cases and claims wait in queue for settlement.13 The result is an inevitable duplication of research by scholars, who are denied access to evidence that they must try to amass independently. The options are to wait until the full body of relevant material is released (if ever), try to negotiate partial access to holdings with parties who are not dismayed at the thought of independent academic appraisal, or simply forge ahead autonomously. Consequently, most of the material presented herein is based upon an independent pursuit.14
Land claims reports have limitations as historical studies. Ottawa historical consultant Barry Cottam has noted the particularistic nature of claims reports, the expectation that historians involved will produce only neutral ‘facts and nothing but the facts’ (without explanation, context, or interpretation), and a focus on lawful obligation rather than the broader concept of justice. The Indian and Northern Affairs ‘brand of history’ is not academic history, he concludes, and historians need to ‘explore ways to build intellectual frameworks that could more closely unite the disparate universes of law, history and Aboriginal world views,’ to incorporate Aboriginal viewpoints into ‘mainstream history,’ and to undertake more research of Indian Affairs, the history of the land claims process, and the nature of the surrender process. Finally, they need to ‘offer more cogent assessments of the nature of oral testimony and its relation to the historical record.’ The legalistic and adversarial bent of the land claims process inhibits more balanced historical assessments, which the academy could potentially offer. If there is a benefit to be accrued from academic forays into questions of Native lands subsequently subject to land claims, it is in providing something more than the avowedly self-interested and particularistic agenda of claims research.

Scholars often note that institutional and historical contexts strongly influence bureaucratic perspectives on people, issues, and events. By extension, the documentary record is limiting. The writer of correspondence and memoranda projected biased assessments and interpretations, as does every other historical actor, and the evidence of these documents must be interpreted in context and compared to alternative perspectives. Positive assessments of plans, agreements, and relationships could be self-interested and distorted; so too could support for community aspirations or challenges to government positions. To invoke bias against one perspective and not another is selective and deterministic.

Furthermore, while opponents of schemes tended to vocalize or document their grievances, supporters seldom did so to the same extent. If events progressed according to plans, and co-operative relationships ensued, stakeholders had little incentive to carefully document these developments. Conversely, bureaucrats tended to pass large amounts of correspondence on problem areas – a function of self-protection and the realities of problem solving in a hierarchical structure. As a result, historians might see only the worst in the archival record: that problems were ubiquitous and harmony comparatively absent. Although the most problematic cases may produce the largest paper trail, they may not be the most representative of government practices or Aboriginal peoples’ responses. Historians read the corresponding gaps or ‘silences’ in the record according to their personal, philosophical, and theoretical predilections, but this sample of case studies suggests that decision making and experiences were more varied than most existing theories would predict. Historian Ken Coates has lamented that the study of
Native-newcomer relations tends to rely on ‘anecdotal and personal rather than systemic’ uses of evidence, and that the field lacks critical methodological debates. If so, the emerging historiographical consensus may be misleading in what it asserts based on theoretical assumptions, rather than what it might reveal using falsifiable evidence.
Acknowledgments

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My interest in Aboriginal-military relations began in 1996-97 while I was an undergraduate student working at National Defence Headquarters for the Director General of Aboriginal Affairs. As a policy analyst whose supervisors encouraged questions and creative thinking, I began to recognize the complexities of land claims, in stark contrast to the media’s bias and reductionism. Rem Westland, former Director General Real Property and Plans at National Defence Headquarters, challenged my fundamental assumptions and generously facilitated informal access to departmental records. Michael Graham, Gilles Champoux, and Michel Bouliane all shared their time and knowledge with me. Bob Crane, Mike Lahache, Caroline Kern, and Paul-André Massé all had formative influences on my thinking.

The chief and councillors at Tzeachten First Nation, the Chippewas of the Thames, and the Bay of Quinte Mohawks all supported this project with band council resolutions. Special thanks to Chief R. Donald Maracle, Lisa Maracle, and Trisha Rae for their reflections on the experiences and legacies at Tyendinaga.
Peter Manywounds provided insights into the Tsuu T’ina experience, and showed me around the former Sarcee training area and barrack site. Lt.-Col. Rick Williams at Area Support Unit Calgary clarified issues openly and frankly and shared crucial documents. Kelly Riley shared his vast knowledge on the Chippewas of the Thames. Sharon Bressette, Beverley Deleary, Ron Guidinger, Angela Maracle, and Frank Young also shared insights. Despite repeated attempts to contact by phone, fax, and email the representatives of each of the First Nations whose experiences are discussed herein, many did not reply. Voices from these communities could be obtained only through the media or documentary record. I hope they will be open to sharing their stories with me in the future.

Family makes me who I am. Special thanks to Ina and David Arthur for offering us a beautiful farmhouse in which I could write undisturbed, and for the peace and balance they bring to my life. My parents Paul and Paulette have never wavered in their interest, encouragement, and support for my life’s journey – whatever quirky paths it has taken. ‘War is not a game,’ my mother told me repeatedly as a child. I have learned to understand the wisdom in her comments, and I am pleased to have inherited her passion for questioning and debate. I thank my father for teaching me determination and diligence. My sisters, their spouses, and their children bring laughter and perspective to my life. Macy’s wagging tail and nudging nose, often forcing my hands off the keyboard, helped remind me when the work day was supposed to be over. The recent arrival of our son, Harrison, has given my life new meaning.

Last, but never least, thanks to my brilliant wife, Jennifer, for her long-suffering assistance, patience, dedication, support – and the exceptional maps found herein, which she drew, redrew, or modified from an eclectic range of sources. On our engagement, I joked that the inside of her engagement ring was etched ‘proof-reader for life.’ Had she believed me at the time, I hope she would still have married me. In our household, the errors in judgment tend to be mine. I hope there are not too many in this book, and if there are it is likely that I did not pay heed to her wise counsel.

Several pieces of this larger puzzle have been published previously. Chapter 3 appeared as ‘“Pay No Attention to Sero”: The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Imperial Flying Training during the Great War,’ Ontario History 46, 2 (Autumn 2004): 143-69. The Six Nations’ experiences during the Second World War formed the basis for ‘The Irony and the Tragedy of Negotiated Space: A Case Study on Narrative Form and Aboriginal-Government Relations during the Second World War,’ Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, n.s., 15 (2004): 177-206. Chapter 6 includes some portions adapted from ‘Combined Operation: The Appropriation of Stoney Point Reserve and the Creation of Camp Ipperwash,’ Journal of Military and Strategic Studies 1, 1 (1999): 1-29. Thanks to these journals for permission to reproduce sections herein.
Abbreviations

BCATP British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
BGS bombing and gunnery school
CFB Canadian Forces Base
DIA Department of Indian Affairs
DIAND Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
DMD Department of Militia and Defence
DND Department of National Defence
DSGIA deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs
IAA Indian Association of Alberta
IAB Indian Affairs Branch
ICC Indian Claims Commission
IEMR Institute of Environmental Monitoring and Research, Goose Bay
IMB Imperial Munitions Board
KSPFN Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
MD military district
PLAWR Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range
RCAP Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SFTS service flying training school
Battle Grounds
Introduction

The military have always required land reserved for their own special purposes.
— John Childs

DND/CF manages more than 10,000 individual facilities at hundreds of locations, maintains a fleet of more than 30,000 vehicles, and administers over 20,000 km² of land. An added consideration in our planning is that more than three-quarters of DND/CF’s locations are near communities made up largely of Aboriginal people.
— Department of National Defence

We lived off that land; that was our place. Our livelihood came out of there.
— Marius Athanase Iron, Canoe Lake First Nation

Much scholarly literature exists on Aboriginal contributions to the Canadian and American war efforts of the twentieth century. The studies converge around several dominant themes, mostly derived from anecdotal material. Aboriginal peoples are said to have enlisted in the armed forces in greater numbers per capita than any other ethnic group, and their soldiers earned a reputation for gallantry and tactical ability overseas. On the home front, Indian communities, in spite of poverty, gave generously of money and labour. The historical narratives uniformly stress that Aboriginal loyalty and patriotism during the world wars was beyond reproach. Nevertheless, the relationships between Aboriginal groups and the federal governments in Washington and Ottawa were severely tested when authorities tried to conscript Indian males for military service. Bolstered by treaty promises and claims to special status, Aboriginal opponents convinced federal officials to back down. For those who voluntarily served overseas and experienced equality with their non-Native comrades, the wars marked a coming of age. Soldiers returned home, however, to find social, economic, and political inequities unchanged, and they faced unequal treatment as veterans. The literature suggests that wartime experiences served as a catalyst for interwar and postwar Native political activism, validates Aboriginal sacrifice and patriotism in the ‘drums and trumpets’ tradition, and emphasizes the perpetual malfeasance of federal governments to protect their special rights and interests.
The theme of Aboriginal victimization finds ample support in mainstream Canadian war and society scholarship. For much of the twentieth century, this historiography was dominated by the conscription crises of the world wars and their effects on French-English relations. Scholars debated whether conscription was necessary and thus whether the resultant politico-cultural chasms were warranted. Recently, the literature has broadened to assess the negative impacts of the wars on other ethnocultural groups, emphasizing the internment of ethnic minorities and particularly Japanese Canadians. Most authors have concluded that entrenched racism, not legitimate security concerns, led to their evacuation and the expropriation of their property. Thus the Japanese Canadians have come to represent the quintessential victims of ‘Canada’s war.’

Military historians have offered little to debates about the treatment of minorities in wartime, preferring to surrender the interpretation of home front matters to social historians. Apart from high-level political decision making in Ottawa, domestic developments receive scant attention in the military historiography, serving as little more than a perfunctory introduction to recruitment and training before units head overseas. The operational narrative tends to be written at the expense of other issues: ‘This approach to military history is all too common, and is largely responsible for the discipline’s poor reputation in Canadian universities,’ Terry Copp asserts. ‘Military historians are far too ready to focus on operational detail, weapons systems and the exploits of individuals without attempting to attach broader meaning to what they are studying. War becomes a closed system within such a historiography, and only those with specialized interests find satisfaction in such a pursuit.’ This observation can also be applied to military activities on the home front. Subjects like the establishment of military facilities might call for investigation, but professional scholars consider these histories ‘either too dull or too unimportant,’ historian Ronald Haycock has explained, and the ‘amateurs have concentrated on drama rather than analysis and description.’ This omission is unfortunate, because these sites represent a nexus for civil-military relations in a diverse country and an opportunity to explore reciprocal empathy and antipathy – or a mix thereof.

Several Canadian studies anecdotally describe the use of Indian reserves for military training, generalizing that these activities symbolized the government’s negligent protection of that which was most sacred to Aboriginal peoples: their lands. The preponderance of powers in the government’s arsenal, some studies argue, allowed it to take these lands and abrogate basic liberties and treaty promises. The final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), released in 1996, offered the following on the Second World War: ‘While status Indians were enlisting and raising funds, more Indian reserve land was being taken for military use. Indian land that was leased, bought or appropriated was used for many purposes, including airfields, army training camps, internment camps,
gunnery and bombing ranges, and coastal defence installations. This land was being taken with the compliance of the [Indian Affairs Branch] – the very agency charged with protecting Indian land – and sometimes against the will of the community involved. Some of it has not been recovered to this day. This passage stresses that Aboriginal lands were taken by (not given to) the military, and that Indian Affairs was not doing its protective duty. Although the RCAP cited a series of acquisition measures and purposes, the only example it elaborated upon was the appropriation of the Stony Point reserve in southwestern Ontario. Little in the report suggested that other communities across Canada might have consented to land use as a patriotic gesture. Instead, the RCAP accused Indian Affairs of aiding and abetting military’s thievery of Aboriginal lands. Paradoxically, it also heralded the military’s use of reserve lands as a key Aboriginal contribution to the war effort, alongside patriotic donations to war funds and charities.

The failure of the federal government to respect Aboriginal interests in the land, the RCAP implied, scarred Canada’s ‘just war.’ The 1942 appropriation of the Stony Point reserve for Camp Ipperwash served as the ultimate case of government perfidy, a travesty that could be viewed neither in isolation nor as an anomaly:

The issue is closely connected to the wider one of the government’s failings to serve Aboriginal veterans’ best interests. The ancestors of the Chippewas were allies of the British during the War of Independence and the War of 1812, and many served in this century’s two world wars. Like many other bands, the Chippewas saw land pried away from their control despite treaty guarantees. Many other bands were pressured into long-term leases or outright sale, but the residents of Kettle and Stony Point had to submit to appropriation, and the provisions to negotiate for a return of their land – which was presumably needed for ‘efficient prosecution of the war’ – were not acted upon after the war. The government invested great energy in acquiring such land, but it ignored or minimized its obligations after the war. Perhaps the government never understood the profound importance of land to Canada’s Aboriginal people and what recognition of their service would have meant to them.

The Royal Commission also pointed out that ‘in other instances, it was not reserve lands themselves, but lands that Aboriginal peoples occupied and used for traditional harvesting that were expropriated.’ For example, ‘First Nations and Métis people were forbidden to carry on traditional activities (such as hunting, fishing and trapping)’ after the Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range was established in the 1950s. Although some received payments when they lost their traplines, the loss of their ‘most productive harvesting lands’ devastated their local economies. The military still occupied Aboriginal lands in peacetime and had an obligation to settle Aboriginal grievances. In cases where the Crown had expropriated or asked communities to surrender reserve lands for public purposes, the commissioners
recommended that the government return the properties ‘to the First Nations communities in question,’ pay for environmental cleanup and monitoring, and negotiate additional compensation.\textsuperscript{20}

The number of Aboriginal land claims that had stacked up against the military by the mid-1990s was reason enough for the RCAP to target the Department of National Defence. The descriptions of military activities and their residual legacies resonated with the report’s main theme of federal neglect and duplicity as contrasted with Aboriginal peoples’ valiant efforts to protect their lands, their cultures, and their lives. The general conclusions asserted that unless Native-newcomer relationships changed, violent confrontations like those at Oka, Ipperwash, and Gustafsen Lake would become increasingly common. To build trust and chart a renewed nation-to-nation relationship, difficult legacies had to be reconciled. The title of the first volume of the RCAP’s final report, \textit{Looking Forward, Looking Back}, affirmed that future outcomes were contingent upon retrospective analysis of where things had gone wrong. Less than a century earlier, Euro-Canadian society had appeared convinced that the Indians were doomed to oblivion and had relegated them to the social and political margins. After decades of conflict with the federal government, however, Aboriginal groups were resurgent and the time had come for meaningful change. Their historical and contemporary plight was a vexation to the national spirit, a bold reminder that progress left victims in its wake. If the costliest royal commission in Canadian history was any indication, Aboriginal issues had emerged as a dominant consideration on the national political agenda. The report itself revealed a remarkable transformation in political and social discourse.

In her 1994 plea for ‘more inclusive, and more authentic, narratives,’ historian Veronica Strong-Boag encouraged Canadian historians to identify ‘the reality of oppression’ and to better ‘com[e] to terms with Canadian life’ by interrogating power relations in a past marked by incessant conflict. Stories of injustice and oppression would shatter the national historical consensus forged by political elites and instead create ‘meaningful memory for all Canadians’ based on the plurality of stories by ‘victim-survivors.’ She concluded that ‘the old history ... has rarely been equipped either to characterize the reality of the past or to address the many pressing questions of the day.’\textsuperscript{11} In some respects, the RCAP final report and recent scholarship on Native-newcomer relations show how far historians have come in realizing Strong-Boag’s vision. Oppressive power relations are now the central theme of most academic studies, which worship the holy trinity of race-class-gender.\textsuperscript{12} A new consensus historiography has emerged, structured around victim-survivors who have suffered at the hands and minds of the white, patriarchal elite.\textsuperscript{13}

The last three decades of scholarship have revealed beyond any reasonable question that structural inequalities and power hierarchies within the Canadian system have worked against Aboriginal peoples. Subjected to the repressive provisions
Introduction

of the Indian Act after 1876, denied political citizenship rights until the 1960s, their cultures and languages systematically challenged by policies aimed at assimilation, and their land base shrinking dramatically after contact, Aboriginal peoples now represent the quintessential David fighting the Goliath of big government, corporate capitalism, and the homogenizing influence of Western culture. Not surprisingly, scholars have adopted the advocacy mantle to painstakingly document the ills of past Aboriginal-newcomer relationships and so prescribe the need for remedy. Drawing heavily upon postcolonial theories, most scholarly literature is designed to bolster contemporary social and political movements. Does this better equip us to ‘characterize the reality of the past,’ as Strong-Boag promised, or to answer ‘pressing questions’ in a manner consistent with understanding the past on its own terms? Are historical conclusions verifiable or falsifiable in a climate of methodological pluralism, or merely accepted or rejected based on their conformity with prevailing theories and ideological assumptions? Academic activism has brought forward pivotal questions regarding the place of advocacy in scholarship, and the practical and philosophical tensions between the two.14 A few dissenting voices suggest that interpretative orthodoxy has stifled the academic study of Native-newcomer relations, replacing the old elite, white, male, centralizing narrative with one uniformly critical of Ottawa and non-Aboriginal society.15 Regardless of whether this assertion overstates the historiographical consensus, scholars must continue to test theoretical frameworks and generalizations using verifiable evidence in a systematic way.

Kerry Abel has noted that too few historians study Aboriginal-white relations in the twentieth century, with most preferring to focus on earlier, less politically sensitive eras. Recent studies indicate that this trend may be shifting, but for the most part they fixate on the coercive politico-legal apparatus constructed by the government to control and assimilate its Indian wards, and the discursive and theoretical underpinnings thereof.16 The words of Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs from 1913 to 1932, are commonly used to frame the quintessential dictates of federal policies. ‘Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question,’ Scott told a House of Commons committee in 1920.17 Prevailing approaches have yielded significant insights into coercive federal agendas writ large, yet there is a growing awareness that policy frameworks and rhetoric do not inherently represent the actions pursued. As Michel Foucault aptly summarized, power is contingent and is exercised – not possessed – in spatial, historical, and discursive contexts.18

‘Every culture, sub-culture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there,’ theorist
Sherry Ortner has observed. Recent studies stress that Aboriginal peoples were active agents who adopted strategies and adapted to changing conditions. Although the federal government denied them rights, Aboriginal groups and individuals exercised what levers of control they possessed in creative and effective ways. Individuals subverted the pass system, bands on the Plains and West Coast continued traditional practices like the potlatch and sun dance in varying degrees of secrecy, and families and students resisted the assimilation attempted in residential schools. Scholars have thus provided critical insights into Aboriginal strategies for dealing with unfavourable developments, but methodological frameworks built solely around concepts of agency and resistance to Euro-Canadian hegemony can overstate the case. To suggest that historical relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the state can be viewed only through a monocle of structural animus marginalizes aspects of negotiation, compromise, and accommodation. As one observer concluded, histories focused on exposing repressive strategies and practices share with most postmodern accounts a tendency to melt all evidence and plots into a ‘single Marxist or leftist-Hegelian narrative.’

In the historiography of Native-newcomer relations, this leaves scant conceptual space for negotiated terrain and historical middle grounds.

The politicization of identities in legal claims and the poetics of Aboriginal nation building have produced a growing set of frameworks predicated on ethnic dichotomies. ‘Rhetoric that constantly stresses the contrasts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, values, and lifestyles,’ political scientist Alan Cairns points out, ‘puts the two sets of people into separate camps, and normally accords the moral high ground to Aboriginal peoples.’ He observes that this ‘counter-attack’ simply reverses old Euro-Canadian rhetorical reliance on ‘good and bad,’ and that the corresponding tendency to ‘construct ideological walls around cultures’ minimizes points of convergence and denies the possibility of change. This rhetoric of ethnic contrast also inhibits appreciation of the ‘multiplicity of aspirations ... that exist within Native society.’

The application of discourse theory to the historian’s craft encourages scholars to stress perceived and constructed differences, as do metanarratives of colonization and genocide. The tendency is to distil history ‘into the simple narrative structure of a protagonist’s conflict with and eventual triumph over opposing forces,’ anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss has noted. This creates an inflexible Indian-white dichotomy that ‘renders invisible the complexity of historical interactions and the diversity of social groups ... the diverse and conflicting interests, and the ambiguities and incompleteness of domination and resistance that characterized the colonial encounter.’ Numerous discourses exist at different levels and at different times, and microscopic portraits reveal that Euro-Canadian authority cannot be treated as a monolith or a mechanical totality in which fragments add up to a tidy,
theorizable whole. Geographer Kay Anderson has revealed how racialization processes are uneven and invite comparative analysis. In her work, accommodation and resistance strategies reveal that hegemonic power is not a unilaterally imposed process, and that over time this recognition can stimulate the renegotiation of relations of dominance.24

‘The government’ is a term often employed in studies of Native-newcomer relations, but its implication of a unified actor can also distort the picture of decision making and operations. The federal government is not a monolith. Various departments have overlapping mandates, directed by individual politicians and civil servants. Nevertheless, when most scholars assess government activities they fixate on the rational-actor model, seldom willing to dive into the confusing depths of bureaucratic decision making.25 In her exceptional study, Sally Weaver revealed that the 1969 White Paper on Indian policy was the product of a ‘tangled and tortured’ process, driven by decision makers who developed a preoccupation with their own internal conflicts and power struggles. This competitive atmosphere featured heated exchanges and conflicting ideas and interests, confirming that ‘policies are often fought out rather than thought out.’26 The presumption of a coherent government vision, Weaver reminded us, can be very misleading.

If historians of Native-newcomer and civil-military relations conceptualize decision making as a process featuring multiple players, questions must be raised about normative frameworks used to assess government planning, options, and implementation. ‘Rational decision-making models work best, if they work at all, when there is a single decision-maker with a clear and ordered set of priorities and objectives, plentiful information, and comfortable time lines,’ policy scholar Leslie Pal writes. ‘In the real world of politics and administration, of course, there are multiple decision-makers with conflicting perspectives and priorities, information is in short supply or contradictory, and everything has to be done immediately.’ As a result, theories like incrementalism or ‘muddling through,’ in which decision makers undertake ‘successive limited comparisons’ in a halting and less coherent process, might better explain the realities of historical processes.27

In English Canadian history, political themes now ‘tend to be viewed from the perspective of the victim, or client group,’ Larry Glassford has observed, ‘rather than that of the elite politician, bureaucrat, or business leader.’ While questions still revolve around how conflict, power, and influence play out over time, the old macro-political paradigm has been supplanted by microanalysis into the ‘construction of a panoply of micro-memories.’28 The following case studies reflect both approaches, producing a series of individual but interconnecting narratives based largely on the documentary record. These event-driven narratives pay close attention to the inner workings of government, without being confined to deliberations in Ottawa.
Decisive determinism and adversarial relationships are a necessary if unfortunate corollary of the existing legal and claims processes, but they need not define the methodological boundaries of independent historical inquiry. This study was designed to test assumptions about Aboriginal-government relationships over lands by focusing on cases involving the Canadian military. I was tempted to examine only the most sensational cases that resulted in high-profile land claims and to dismiss cases where military interests did not clearly and unilaterally prevail. Rather than extrapolating from one or two examples using a priori deductive reasoning to suggest a ubiquitous experience, however, this book adopts a comparative framework to discern the preconditions, causes, and diverse contexts of federal decision making across a spectrum of examples. The multiple case study approach offers the breadth and depth of detail necessary to test historiographical assumptions derived from a few exemplary cases (generally selected based on an implicit screening process) or anecdotal evidence. By holding a variable constant—this study looks only at cases where the military asked to or did use Aboriginal lands for training—this methodology allows for a range of patterns and cause-effect relationships. The research questions and framework were designed to accommodate unanticipated themes and contradictions that emerged from the evidence. A chronological rather than thematic approach ensured that developments and arguments were not divorced from contexts. This approach helped to mitigate the tendency to ferret out cases or examples that fit comfortably within a dominant paradigm, or to ignore contrary findings. This intent provides the historian with an opportunity to reveal and minimize substantive biases affecting interpretations, and to lay the groundwork for further discussion on the basis of evidence, perspectives, and interpretation.

Although this book does not provide a full census of Aboriginal-military relationships over land, the following narratives provide a representative sample of processes and relationships across time and space. Appendix A contains a comprehensive list of Indian reserve lands that the military leased, rented, or purchased during the twentieth century. These range from easements for drainage ditches to sales of a few acres of reserve land to the appropriation of an entire reserve, in the case of Stony Point. This book explores all the major cases where reserve lands were acquired for military training. Negotiations and agreements of an intensely localized or technical nature (such as easements and rights-of-way) have been excluded. Expanded discussion of the purchase and expropriation of Fort William reserve lands for a rifle range, leases from the Enoch Cree and Chippewas of the Thames, the expropriation of several acres on the Kitsilano reserve for an armoury, and the Chilliwack and Chilcotin properties in British Columbia can be found in the dissertation that preceded this book. Most of the case studies in the following chapters relate to Aboriginal groups in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. This distribution is representative of the larger census of
cases and also reflects the high concentration of Indian reserves in those pro-
vinces, as well as the proximity of large reserves to urban areas with a sizable mil-
itary presence.

The main focus of this book is on formal interactions between government of-
ficials and Aboriginal communities. Another side to these stories – the side re-
membered and recreated in oral histories – calls for further elaboration. The limited
oral interviews cited here reflect how few communities replied to my repeated
attempts at communication. While claims and lawsuits remain outstanding and
the stakes remain high, Aboriginal communities may be wary of external apprais-
als that could jeopardize their positions. (One community member chastised me
for exploring the subject at all and told me that I ‘shouldn’t touch this topic with a
ten-foot pole. It’s none of your business.’) Undoubtedly, future oral community
perspectives obtained outside of the claims process and the media spotlight will
further understandings of Aboriginal-military relationships in multiple socio-
economic, cultural, and political contexts.

This book does not purport to offer a comparative study of military interests in
Canadian lands more generally. Aboriginal peoples were not the only landholders
affected by military manoeuvres and the establishment of training facilities, nor
were they alone in complaining about military behaviour and the bureaucracy’s
response to their concerns. Defence reports on military exercises are filled with
examples of violations of property rights, and of military authorities trying to
avoid paying restitution wherever possible. The absence of any systematic studies
on civil-military relationships over land use, however, precludes any meaningful
comparison of frequency and impact. Thus although the following case studies
highlight the disrespectful treatment of Aboriginal lands and people, they do not
prove that individual soldiers and airmen – or the military establishment more
generally – were less scrupulous when dealing with Aboriginal landowners. More
research is needed before conclusions can be drawn about the comparative hu-
man and physical impacts of military training on different populations and geo-
graphic areas.\(^2\)

The following case studies are arranged chronologically. Chapters 1 to 3 intro-
duce relationships between the militia, the Department of Indian Affairs, and In-
dian bands from the turn of the century to 1939. In an era dominated by notions of
the ‘vanishing Indian’ and the idea that seemingly surplus reserve lands near grow-
ing cities represented an impediment to national and civic progress, local authori-
ties overseeing the militia’s expansion sometimes looked to nearby Indian reserves
as an inexpensive and accessible option. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with military train-
ing on Indian reserves during the Second World War, assessing how receptive
communities were to military plans and the dynamics of federal decision making
in wartime. During the Cold War, operational requirements expanded and con-
tracted in several cycles. The rise of Aboriginal activism brought new challenges,
Introduction

questions, and heightened pressures for change in the last three decades of the century. Chapters 6 to 8 explore how competing interests in Indian reserves and traditional territories, and shifting political priorities, influenced Aboriginal-government relationships. ‘Historians who tread too closely on the heels of the present are likely to be kicked in the teeth,’ Desmond Morton once cautioned. ‘The dead have few to defend them; the living are easily aroused.’ Ignoring this sage advice, Chapter 9 explores shifting relationships through the 1990s, when the Canadian military’s fortunes seemed to wane and its extensive landholdings seemed increasingly anachronistic. Few officials would have anticipated this state of affairs at the dawn of the twentieth century.
Head of the Lake reserve near Vernon, British Columbia, July 1913: The military had been searching for a central training camp in south-central British Columbia for years, and had temporarily set up in Vernon. The year before, the Nkamaplix (Head of the Lake) band had refused the Department of Militia and Defence’s request to use one of its reserves a few miles west of the expanding city. Its idea quashed, the militia established a summer camp on a small parcel provided by the local government. The 1913 camp was the largest army gathering in the province’s history, and the cavalry, which required a large space for riding and practice outside of the camp, ended up for a short time on the Head of the Lake reserve. This surprised and upset some of its residents, who had not been consulted.

The list of alleged transgressions was long and varied. Jimmy Logan was driving his wagon home from his ranch when he was stopped and interrogated by a line of soldiers. Although they had no apparent right to question his actions on reserve lands, he replied that he was self-employed and had worked late. Perhaps in jest, the uniformed men informed Logan that ‘the government had sent them to look after things on the reserve, and to see that people did not work or travel late in the evening. Any one who did might get shot.’ Logan took their comments seriously. When several soldiers asked him to take them down the road he flatly refused, telling them to walk and to continue the work the government had sent them to do. At Black Town (s.n'thextán), witnesses claimed that militiamen had gone into a cellar and stolen bread, milk, meat, and jam. Another twenty or thirty had jumped over a tall fence and trampled wheat and oat fields. The mounted troops had spoiled much of the grass on the reserve, and Johnny Kurltein' ox's ranch and crops were badly damaged. Berry bushes had been crushed and fences pushed over in fields belonging to Babtiste Logan, Jimmy Louis, and Peter Bissette. It was no wonder that ‘all the people resented the intrusion of these soldiers.’

Indian Affairs officials soon discerned that the elected chief, whom one vocal faction of the band saw as a puppet of their department, had apparently agreed to the militia’s use of the lands. This unilateral decision seemed to amplify the insult to some community members, who wrote a letter of complaint stressing that the cavalry’s ‘trespassing’ represented another unlawful intrusion on their lives. It would not be tolerated if the positions were reversed:
What kind of outcry would be made in this country if we were to put on war dress, arm ourselves, and camp and ride over some white people’s lands, suddenly and without permission thereby alarming the people and rendering damage to their property, not to mention interfering with the people in their work, and stealing, yet this is what had been done to us, and we are expected to submit to it because we are Indians and are practically helpless. That an agent or some one else gave his assent would make no difference. We consider a grave injustice has been done us, and we do not want it repeated. We believe this whole matter is nothing but spite, and prejudice against us, because we are men and not subservient tools to the Inspector like [current chief] Lame Pierre ... We respectfully and consistently ask you look into this and other matters that we have brought before you so that we may not be abused by those in authority, by your officials. We want to live quiet, useful and good lives, but are not given the chance. We want our rights as men respected. We are against all kinds of graft, selling of our lands underhandedly, gambling, meanness, and slavery. Give us a chance.²
There is no single way to generalize British Columbia’s varied landscapes. From its jagged western coastline to its rocky interior plateau to the rugged Rocky Mountains on its eastern flank, the province’s valleys and drainage systems create a complex physiography. The ‘sharp peaks, steep slopes, and narrow valleys’ that dominate the mainland interior, historian Jean Barman has explained, ‘ensured that isolation would be a major motif for many of the province’s inhabitants.’ A large plateau, rocky and dry, bordered by mighty rivers, leaves little of the interior suitable for farming.\(^3\) The region’s human inhabitants embody this geographical diversity. Northwestern Aboriginal peoples represent myriad ethno-linguistic groups with complex social and cultural organizations, traditionally scattered in small settlements.\(^4\) Anthropologists have estimated that, at the end of the fifteenth century, half of all Aboriginal people in Canada lived west of the Rockies, concentrated along the coastline and river valleys. Their varied subsistence patterns and socio-political structures reflected their relative access to resources and to one another.\(^5\)

In the late eighteenth century, the northwest coast was one of the least-known areas of the world to Europeans. Coastal communities had the earliest encounters with Russian, Spanish, and English explorers and traders, and by the mid-nineteenth century the newcomers were becoming well established in their fledgling Pacific colonies. James Douglas, who became governor of the Vancouver Island colony in 1851 and of the new mainland colony of British Columbia when it was created in 1858, had to deal with the complex issues of Aboriginal title and the pressures of settlement without a clear policy from England. Douglas acknowledged that, even if the Crown owned absolute title to the lands, the Indians had proprietary rights, and he concluded fourteen treaties with groups living on southern Vancouver Island. After Douglas’ money ran out, the British Colonial Office refused to recognize Aboriginal title. Bereft of financial support after 1861, his administration could not conclude additional treaties with coastal and interior groups. The broader title issue was thus left in abeyance.\(^6\)

Based on the general framework laid out in the British Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Crown claimed title and sovereignty over all territorial holdings in British North America but set aside, or reserved, tracts of land for the ‘the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection.’ Legal title to Indian reserves was vested in the Crown, which held the lands in trust for the Indians. Douglas’ reserve policy was prepared to grant as much land as the Indians requested, in sites of their own choosing, recognizing that the coastal Indians were not farmers and would need more land to survive. Furthermore, he felt that the close proximity of these groups to non-Indian communities would lead to their advancement and eventual assimilation. Douglas’ successors were more austere in their vision. Subsequent reserves were significantly smaller, and the Douglas reserves were reduced considerably over time.
Reserves came to represent relatively tiny ‘compartment[s] into which whites relegated Aboriginal people,’ geographer Cole Harris has explained, ‘surrounded by clusters of permissions and inhibitions that affected most Native opportunities and movements.’ In 1881, a decade after British Columbia joined Confederation, the federal Indian agency system was superimposed on the province although the province’s reversionary interests in its Indian reserves remained unclear. Within four large BC agencies, Indian agents presided over band activities, imposing law and order on the reserves, attempting to civilize and assimilate the Indians, and thereby allowing settlers to colonize the frontier.7

Scholars have documented federal Indian policy development during the nineteenth century, and have argued that the same overriding approach to managing the so-called Indian problem continued into the twentieth. The Indian Act, first passed in 1876, legislated powerful controls over status Indians and assigned the administration of Indians and reserve lands to the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA, which remained under the auspices of the Department of the Interior until 1935). In an epoch dominated by cultural hierarchies and paternalism, ‘protection, civilization and assimilation’ governed federal Indian policy.8 At the turn of the twentieth century the small department was controlled by a highly centralized headquarters in Ottawa and a network of inspectorates and field offices across the country. DIA bureaucrats controlled band funds and membership, oversaw band councils and resolutions, and presided over access to natural resources located on reserves. As to reserve lands, Indian Affairs was expected to play the dual role of federal negotiator for land surrenders and protector of Indian interests.9

After the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, the non-Aboriginal population of British Columbia expanded and the Indians were pushed further to the margins. While the more than 1,000 reserves allotted from 1878 to 1910 became an integral part of the province’s cartography, they confined Aboriginal societies in numerical decline to make way for non-Native settlement. Cole Harris summarizes: ‘One human geography was being superseded by another, both on the ground and in the imagination.’ As elsewhere, Aboriginal cultures seemed anachronistic to the rhetoric of progress and rugged self-determinism that defined evolving imperial, national, and provincial identities.10

The self-assured ideology and military might of the British Empire projected power even in remote regions like the northern Pacific coast. The Royal Navy’s presence was well established there by the late nineteenth century, and gunship diplomacy had played a role in establishing British authority over the region. The Pacific squadron began to make use of Esquimalt – a Salish-named harbour on the southern shore of Vancouver Island – in 1846, maintaining a proper naval establishment from 1865 to 1871. From this base, warships moved up and down the coast, kept the ‘Indians in awe,’ and supported an Indian policy of ‘crisis management’ to protect Hudson’s Bay Company traders, missionaries, and settlers. Under
the shadow of the white ensign, early Canadian governments felt no need to establish a replacement or supplemental naval presence.11 There were a few militia units in the new province when it joined Confederation, but indifference in both London and British Columbia produced companies that were ‘weak in morale, strength, armament, and training.’ As such, the defence of the Pacific coast remained with the Royal Navy and a few coastal batteries established to protect southwestern Vancouver Island.12

The Royal Navy needed to train to maintain a high state of efficiency. When the old rifle range at Esquimalt could not accommodate the improved Lee Metford rifle used by the navy around the turn of the century, the British Admiralty established a range at Goose Spit on the east coast of Vancouver Island. The BC government agreed to lease its portion of the spit, but fourteen acres of the range were an old burial ground allotted to the Comox band in 1876. Although the superintendent general of Indian affairs was reluctant to transfer this small Indian reserve to the navy because it was a graveyard, the Comox band seemed open to the idea. In 1896, it agreed to a surrender provided certain conditions were met: ‘a written guarantee that the graves of their relatives would remain undisturbed for all time’ and assurances that the reserve would not be sold to nongovernment interests. The BC Indian commissioner and some band members discussed the matter of monetary compensation, ‘but this the majority of the Indians would not listen to as the veneration in which they hold their dead is of such a strong nature that no pecuniary consideration could tempt them to so far forget the memory of their departed as to be indifferent to the disposal of their former burial ground.’13 Despite hesitancy at Indian Affairs, the Comox band agreed to the imperial guarantee, were given free access to the graveyard at all times, and granted a deed allowing the Navy to use the site for as long as required. Afterwards, it would revert back to the band. Iron targets were built and used regularly until the British forces withdrew from Esquimalt and gave up Goose Spit in 1905. The young Dominion now had to provide for its own defences and train local units. A local regiment, acting on its own initiative, moved the targets to Nanaimo, and the Comox graveyard returned to solemn silence.14

Early in the twentieth century, the Department of Militia and Defence (DMD) became a more complex organization and sought a more widespread military presence. The militia’s colonial roots extended back to les milices of New France, and it had evolved through centuries of imperial struggles and influxes of settlers. During the Victorian age, the military hierarchy vested ultimate power in national headquarters at Ottawa, but regional and local command structures were dispersed across the new Dominion. By 1891 twelve military districts were responsible for regional command and administration. If the militia had been a ‘glorified police force’ with haphazard training, Sir Frederick Borden, the minister of militia and defence from 1896 to 1911, breathed new life into his dilapidated portfolio. His
Militia Act reforms asserted the Canadian military’s growing independence, and he committed to getting the volunteer militia onto rifle ranges and training areas to build a self-contained citizen army. The Non-Permanent Active Militia grew rapidly as Parliament increased budgets and authorized new battalions to accommodate an enlarged force. To be viable, the new volunteer units needed practical training, and they were taught to behave like soldiers at the week or so of annual summer militia camp. At district camp they learned musketry, heard lectures on tactics, and conducted tactical manoeuvres. Soldiers completed regimental drill, and depending on their unit might attend medical or ordnance lessons, participate in signalling training, simulate bombing, or practise field engineering. To accommodate these ongoing activities, the militia required firing ranges, instructional buildings, and extensive manoeuvre areas across the country.

British Columbia’s maturation into a strong, settler society demanded self-defence capabilities, and propelled inhabitants of towns like Vernon, Rossland, and Kamloops to push for a more tangible military presence. British Columbians who had served in South Africa also stirred patriotic fervour and whipped up pressure to expand and consolidate the existing militia establishment. DMD began to authorize units in the provincial interior. In southern mainland British Columbia, the search for a central training area and rifle ranges raised the militia’s interest in various Indian reserves that dotted – and in some cases dominated – the landscape near growing population centres. The delays and discontinuities in the following stories reveal how military authorities struggled in their attempts to acquire reserve lands in the southern interior before the Great War.

As early as 1905, the district officer commanding Military District No. 11 (which covered British Columbia) had identified two possible sites for a provincial training area. One was near Kamloops, a prosperous and growing city blessed with a pleasant climate and rail accessibility, strategically located at the confluence of the Thompson River’s north and south branches (see Map 1.1). Another was a more remote site at Tunkwa Lake to the south. Militia officials ponderously deliberated these options at headquarters, but they indicated in typical fashion that they wished to obtain grounds while the land remained inexpensive and the country was not completely settled. DMD took up the matter with the Department of the Interior, aided by the Kamloops Board of Trade and other local boosters who tried to convince Ottawa that the location near their community was the most favourable. But the militia’s discussions proved fruitless. Interior’s priority was finding space for settlers, not the fledgling militia, and townships suitable for agriculture would not be available to the military. Indeed, DMD’s proposals seldom received a reply, and ‘the delay difficulties and changes in attitude with which the Militia Dept. is confronted in its dealings with the Department of the Interior’ frustrated the inspector general and the chief of the general staff.
Given the holdups, frustrated local officers took matters into their own hands. In 1908 Capt. John Vicars of C Company, Rocky Mountain Rifles, in Kamloops, found an ideal campsite, but defence officials in Ottawa learned that several portions had already been taken up as homesteads, making it unusable. At every turn, settlers pre-empted militia plans. In early 1910, with Vicars’ latest option off the table, the district military engineer identified another location near Kamloops. Across the Thompson River lay ‘an ideal site’ with ‘a natural stop butt rising perpendicularly nearly 3000’ and level from target site to extreme firing point.’ The only problem was that the land was on an Indian reserve, and for that reason the engineer had not considered it previously. Because there seemed to be no other choice, he investigated more closely, but presumed that it was ‘impossible for the Department to secure a site which includes part of the Indian Reserve.’ Instead, he supposed the militia would have to settle for a more distant and ‘unsatisfactory’ site owing to the realities of ‘Western land values.’ Headquarters in Ottawa was less certain that the site was off-limits, however, and promptly asked Indian Affairs for guidance about securing a rifle range.¹⁸
It was not surprising that the Kamloops reserve attracted the militia’s interest: it contained more than 33,000 acres and dominated the local landscape (see Map 1.2). Mount Paul towered over the North and South Thompson Rivers, its slopes a natural set-up for a rifle range. The long, rolling Schiedam Valley, which ran along Paul’s Creek, was also attractive as a potential manoeuvre area. The reserve belonged to the Kamloops band, a Secwepemc (Shuswap) community that had been allocated a considerable parcel of reserve land in 1876, including some prime agricultural and grazing land. In 1911 their population stood at 242, a slight increase over previous decades but a far cry from their precontact numbers. The reserve was well-known to localsettlers, who lobbied to take over the reserve (or at least have it moved) when the band’s cultivation efforts failed. Chief Louis later explained to a royal commission that external considerations—particularly water supply stolen by non-Indian ranchers and a lack of machinery—caused the band’s shortcomings. Although local efforts to remove the band to a new location failed, they reveal that the militia was not alone in its interest. 19

The Kamloops reserve, like others in the province, was also encumbered by title issues. Chief Louis fought tenaciously for legal recognition along with other chiefs from the interior, who formed intertribal political organizations to lobby Ottawa and London. Although these efforts did not succeed, they reinforced the Indians’ belief in their unalienable land rights. The provincial and federal governments were deadlocked in their own title debate, which compounded the uncertainty, creating a situation where bands could not be paid for land surrenders. The BC government maintained that it had a reversionary interest in all reserves, and therefore in any surrendered lands (and subsequent proceeds). This tumultuous political and legal environment made some Indian agents loath to propose any sale of reserve lands. While scholars tend to highlight the DIA’s encouragement to sell off allegedly excess lands in British Columbia during this period, they fail to acknowledge how perceived joint ownership placed the two governments in a perpetual stalemate in which one party could not sell without the concurrence of the other. More often than not, their interests were divergent. 20 Not surprisingly, this chaotic situation affected the militia’s plans for Kamloops. The secretary at Indian Affairs explained that it was not in his department’s interests to sell any portion of British Columbia’s Indian reserves while the jurisdictional dispute continued, and denied DMD’s request. 21

When the Militia Council asked Indian Affairs whether it should wait for legal developments so that the militia could use part of the reserve, it met with a more receptive response. The tone of the DIA officials shifted when they realized that the militia wanted only to ‘use’ a portion of the reserve. With Indian consent, some land could be leased to the militia for an annual fee, so long as the agreement could be cancelled at any time. The district commander agreed with his chief engineer that the site was ideal, and recommended accepting the DIA’s conditions.
MAP 1.2 Kamloops Lake area, c. 1911

Sources: R. Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 123; Kamloops Lake, Topographical Survey of Canada sheet no. 92, 1928, with DND markings, attached to Williams to Perry, 5 November 1932, LAC, RG 10, v. 4048, file 357,520; C. Flick, sketch map to Director of Engineering Services, Ottawa, 6 December 1913, LAC, RG 24, v. 6322, file HQ 67-23-1, pt. 2
Indian Affairs headquarters informed the local Indian agent that it was ‘anxious to meet the wishes’ of the DMD and instructed him ‘to consult the Indians and arrive at an understanding with them as to the terms under which the said license might be given,’ including helping them identify an acceptable site.  

This fortuitous development, however, had already been rendered moot. Indian agent Archibald Irwin was surprised when he consulted the heads of the different military units in Kamloops and learned that the reserve lands were no longer required. Captain Vicars had erected a combination range on nonreserve land, which apparently fulfilled the local militia’s needs and obviated the need for a lease with the band. This entirely local decision was unknown to DMD officials in Ottawa, and reflected the decisive personality of the local commanding officer. Vicars, a towering man with penetrating eyes and a bushy moustache, had immigrated from Ireland at age three and befriended a young Sam Hughes (the future defence minister) during grade school in rural Ontario. They shared a lifelong friendship, even though Hughes ventured into Ottawa politics while Vicars went west, took up a homestead, became a railroad surveyor, then settled in Kamloops in 1892. He became a city alderman and warden of the provincial jail, but like Hughes his heart lay with the militia. Also like Hughes, he was a man who got things done. As the ranking officer of the local infantry company, Vicars wanted to ensure that his men were well accommodated. DMD headquarters discovered that Vicars and other
members of the local gun club had built a range, complete with targets and telephones, east of the city on provincial lands and paid for its construction themselves. When queried, they asked the military to acquire the land to make their arrangement permanent.23

The subsequent internal cleavages that erupted in the DMD ranks in the summer of 1910 exposed the divergence between the local and national establishments. The district officer commanding was encouraged by the local initiative and suggested the military purchase the newly built range. The master general of the ordnance in Ottawa refused, believing that the Indian reserve site would be much safer. Vicars was furious, and fired back that there was no suitable site on the reserve ‘within a reasonable distance’ of the city, and that whoever had reported this ‘intentionally wished to deceive the Department and for selfish motive.’ Vicars wrote that a road ran near the possible target site and that spring thaws left the area underwater. Indifferent to local politics and unconvinced by Vicars, the master general of the ordnance remained convinced that the reserve offered the most appropriate training milieu. This squabble continued through the autumn, when the officers all agreed on a third site north of the Thompson River and west of the reserve. Safety concerns about this location, however, affirmed the district engineer’s earlier assessment that the reserve represented the only suitable location for a range.24

In late 1912, faced with a barrage of evidence that the existing Kamloops rifle range was dangerous, the district officer commanding again raised the prospect of the Indian reserve. ‘There is an exceptionally good site for a rifle range on the North side of the river,’ Col. R.L. Wadmore reported, ‘a site which would permit indefinite expansion.’ He continued with an eye to the future: ‘Kamloops is a railway junction of considerable pretensions and is likely to develop into the most important centre between the Coast and the Rockies. It is therefore considered that it would be well worth for the Department to take up now the question of acquiring on the Indian Reserve a site of sufficient size to provide for future expansion. The Indian Reserve site has been reported on from time to time and was at one time offered to the Department for use “during pleasure of the Indians.”’ Though there had never been a formal offer, the Indian agent’s verbal consent had suggested that the land would be available. Wadmore blamed the previous failure to secure rights to the reserve on Vicars and his self-interested fear of losing the money that he and his friends had invested in the range. Vicars’ argument that the reserve site could not be used because of a road seemed inexplicable, as an alternative and shorter route already existed. Furthermore, the militia’s footprint could grow from this sort of location, and Wadmore strongly recommended that DMD immediately negotiate ‘purchase, exchange or lease’ of the property.25

Now it was Ottawa’s turn to quash the reserve proposal. When the deputy minister approached the new minister of militia and defence, Sam Hughes stated that
it would ‘be impossible to get such valuable land as that on the North of the Thompson River[, nor would] the Indian Department consider the transfer for a moment.’ Perhaps the discouraging developments at Sarcee (described in Chapter 2) contributed to this conclusion. More likely, Vicars had contacted his good friend Hughes, who was never afraid to make a firm decision based on limited evidence nor wary of trusting a militiaman’s judgment over Permanent Force assessments. Instead, the department declared that Vicars’ range would be expanded, with no mention of how the safety problems would be resolved. With that, the matter of a rifle range on the Kamloops Indian reserve was laid to rest.26

With respect to a central training camp, however, Vicars was remarkably keen on the Indian lands. During the summer of 1913, he visited the Schiedam Valley, which runs through the centre of the Kamloops reserve behind Mount Paul, with several members of the local corps. ‘I may just tell you at once, old man, that I am still more enthusiastic than ever I was over this site,’ he reported to Hughes. ‘I think I am right in saying that it is the best site in British Columbia for a permanent military camp.’ He took photographs to show that the valley possessed ‘unlimited space’ for the infantry, cavalry, and artillery. He also met with Indian agent Irwin on his own initiative, and asserted that a lease would not require any formal survey. Irwin, burdened with a ridiculously oversized agency since 1897, seemed agreeable. Vicars confidently told Hughes that the Indians would let them use the site for a ‘nominal rent,’ and encouraged him to come and see for himself.27

There was no reply. When Hughes and Vicars rode the train across Canada together the following January, the minister said he had never seen the report. Vicars promptly sent another copy, and informed Hughes that the photos were probably ‘pigeon-holed some place in the Department.’ (Indeed, they were not located until 1918.) Nevertheless, the fraternal network prevailed again – at least temporarily. In 1914 DMD asked Indian Affairs for permission to use the Schiedam Valley for a two-week summer camp, anticipating about 1,800 cavalry and infantry men. The Indian agent responded that the band had no objections, and agreed to $100 remuneration. The Kamloops Standard reported that it was ‘a foregone conclusion’ that the permanent camp would be built at Schiedam Flats, and even though the actual location would depend ‘on the decision of the Indian Department,’ the new local Indian agent, John Freemont Smith, anticipated that ‘no trouble will be met with from the Indians themselves.’ Having the camp near the city would ‘add another asset to its already valuable attractions,’ the newspaper boasted, bringing money and ‘prominent notice all of which cannot but have highly beneficial results.’28 But after plans were set to hold the regional camp in Kamloops, DMD abruptly changed course and moved it to another location. Despite all of Vicars’ recent boosterism to promote the Kamloops reserve, even his interest now seemed drawn to another site in the Nicola Valley.29
The Kamloops Standard article had acknowledged ‘various conflicting reports’ about other potential campsites, including Nicola and Vernon. After all, Kamloops was not the only community with an energetic officer trying to bring the district training camp to his area. Lt.-Col. Charles Flick was another quintessential militia officer who had learned his soldiering in South Africa, where he was well decorated and mentioned in dispatches. He brought this experience to Merritt, about 270 kilometres northeast of Vancouver, and was appointed commanding officer of the 2nd Regiment, 31st British Columbia Horse in April 1911. He immediately recruited eight experienced officers and established his headquarters in Merritt, with squadrons dispersed in Kamloops, Salmon Arm, and Walhachin. Flick then set to work to bring the units up to a high state of efficiency. As a veteran of the battlefield, he focused on fieldwork and horsemanship. Such practical training required space, and accordingly he set out to find suitable local lands.

Like most other settled areas in southern British Columbia, the Nicola Valley around Merritt was dotted with Indian reserves of various sizes and shapes (see Map 1.3). This was traditional Interior Salish territory, and the Sce’exmx (‘people of the creeks,’ known in the early twentieth century as the Lower Nicola or Nicola-Mameet band) inhabited thirteen reserves along the Nicola River watershed. Indian agent appraisals lauded the band as ‘progressive Indians’ who were ‘excellent workers’ making good use of their 31,000 acres of farm and grazing land. Although some worked as labourers and cowboys, in 1910 the local agent regarded the band as ‘among our most advanced farmers.’

Despite these agricultural activities, Flick turned to one of their reserves for his training needs. In late November 1911, just months after the 31st British Columbia Horse was created, the deputy minister at DMD approached Indian Affairs about fifty acres near the southeast corner of the Shulus reserve (Nicola-Mameet No. 1) that it wanted for a rifle range. Following the usual process, DIA asked the Indian agent whether the Indians would be willing to surrender the land or would simply allow the military to use it. Since an agent had not yet been appointed to the Lytton agency by mid-1912, the inspector of Indian agencies asked John Freemont Smith, Irwin’s replacement at Kamloops, to look into the question.

Smith was a remarkable man. Born in 1850 in the Danish West Indies, he was well educated, widely travelled, and after immigrating to British Columbia undertook a flurry of economic endeavours. He began his career as a shoemaker in Victoria, then moved to the interior and was a rancher, prospector, explorer, land speculator, freelance writer, and postmaster. He moved to Kamloops in 1898, where he and his wife became socially active. That he was black did not hold him back. He spearheaded the local Conservative Association and Board of Trade, served as city alderman and city assessor, and was appointed the local Indian agent in 1912. Several attributes worked in his favour. ‘He had many Indian friends’ from his
MAP 1.3   Area of Flick’s explorations in the Nicola Valley, 1911

former pursuits (he had taught shoemaking at the Kamloops residential school), and he was Catholic like most Secwepeemc. Smith faced perplexing issues as agent: the land title issue remained unresolved, and the local chiefs ardently championed their legal cause and grievances. Secwepeemc delegates participated in the formation of the Interior Tribes of British Columbia, created to resolve the Indian land question in the province, and then the Indian Rights Association of British Columbia. Their focus was on defending land rights, not alienating reserve lands.

On 1 July 1912, agent Smith visited the Shulus reserve and met with the Lower Nicola band to discuss a sale or lease to the military. Chief Tom Knowiska (Peters) and the twenty-four men in attendance quickly reached a decision. ‘They with one voice rejected the proposal to either sell or lease,’ Smith reported, ‘claiming that the land was given [to] them by the Queen for their use and not to sell again, and that they would not agree to sell any portion of their Reserve.’ Their decision, however, did acknowledge the militia’s needs. The band members were ‘perfectly
willing’ that a small acreage on the reserve be used for a military camp for ‘as long as they wish.’ Furthermore, they would not accept any compensation whatsoever for the use of the land. Most likely they wished to ensure that no one could later intimate that they had sold it. Smith wrote that this proposal ‘came direct from the Indians themselves.’ The only stipulations were that no liquor could be brought onto the reserve, and that the Indians would pasture their horses and cattle when the ground was not used for rifle practice. The entire band showed solidarity by unanimous decision – witnessed by two visiting chiefs.14

DMD ‘very gratefully’ accepted the band’s generous offer, but its plans were delayed and Flick did not erect the range that summer. Nonetheless, Chief Knowiska reassured the militia that it could use the property, and agent Smith planned to visit the reserve in the spring so that he could help lay out the range and fix the fence lines. He invited the chief to be present. When Smith wrote to Flick in late December to inform him of the arrangements, the response was less than gracious. ‘I, as a Justice of the Peace for the Province, a Canadian militia officer and a good Conservative, have consistently refused to recognise this appointment of a nigger to an Indian Agency,’ Flick noted with outrage. Indian Affairs replied that Smith was an agent like any other, but Flick disagreed: ‘The Canadian Militia is a military organization of whitemen who represent the Anglo-Saxon race, and men of colour have nothing to do with our deliberations ... His colour, race and ... his negro-Siwash family are notorious. We, in the west, have an idea that races subject to the whiteman are better when governed by a whiteman.’ Flick demanded that when the rifle range matter came up again, a white man be sent to deal with him. The deputy superintendent general in Ottawa did not tolerate such bigotry and reiterated that Smith should receive the same consideration as anyone else, but Flick’s unwillingness to deal with Smith was a strand in the complex web that inhibited progress.35

Newly appointed Lytton Indian agent Harry Graham eventually completed the rifle range arrangements with DMD, and went over the ground with Flick and several Lower Nicola Indians in late June.36 All agreed to an ‘absolutely safe’ parcel that ran north through poor, pine-covered grazing country and into a hill. The plans were drawn up accordingly, but the range never went forward. District training issues remained uncertain, and senior militia officers hesitated to commit to any particular location in the Nicola Valley. Furthermore, Flick had been busily probing around the central interior and identified several other Indian reserves for potential rifle ranges and a central training camp. From Princeton in the south to Salmon Arm in the northeast, the range of his interests was as broad as his ambition. In the spring of 1913, he approached Indian Affairs to secure shooting privileges over the Salmon Arm reserve, but the McKenna-McBride commission refused any talk of alienating reserve lands to the military while title questions remained unsettled.37
The local militia suffered from its lack of training options, but whenever Flick reported problems or proposed new opportunities ‘a flippant telegram from Ottawa ... was the only result.’ Senior DMD officials were typically apathetic, except when Flick’s investigations became expensive. When B Squadron of the 31st British Columbia Horse was transferred from Salmon Arm to a Vancouver suburb in 1914, the local incentive for a range disappeared. More generally, Flick’s overzealous ambition and inability to promote any one option undermined his credibility with national headquarters. Ottawa’s parsimony and indecision also meant that his regiment did not acquire the local ranges he coveted. Despite militia growth during the period, Flick was clearly frustrated with the lack of support for his local initiatives.

On the eve of the Great War, Flick of Merritt and Vicars of Kamloops agreed that two provincially owned acreages in the Nicola Valley would be ideal for a central training camp. These ‘last large areas available in B.C.’ were so well located that Flick’s squadrons could march there and the Canadian Pacific Railway touched its northwestern boundary. An Indian reserve lay in between ‘many thousand acres’ of open range country, but Flick advised Minister Hughes that it could be ‘expropriated as only a half-a-dozen Indians are living there now.’ His vision did not accord these Aboriginal residents special privileges. If DMD acquired the lands immediately, it would have ‘some 60 square miles of well-watered grazing country’ that it could lease for revenue when not in use: the military could obtain ‘a Western Petawawa for nothing.’ Vicars added that the valley was not suited for agriculture but was ‘splendidly adapted for military manoeuvres, and at the very least the militia could lease the Indian reserve to make the area a single military block.’ Once again these bold local visions did not carry the day. Interest in the site was intense but fleeting, and headquarters remained loath to commit even as the country stood on the precipice of war.

The episodes at Kamloops and in the Nicola Valley, although markedly unspectacular, demonstrate the internal bungling and conflicting interests within the DMD. Local, regional, and headquarters officials seemed to work at cross-purposes, precluding any militia training on the most suitable sites in the area. Individual personalities also obstructed rational decision making. Indian Affairs, while unable to support any sales of BC reserves while land issue remained outstanding, was open to discussions and even amenable to limited leasing arrangements. Apparently, so too were the Kamloops and Lower Nicola bands. Yet the question of a permanent campsite remained unresolved, and DMD remained non-committal, seeking only a temporary solution.

Ultimately, the militia secured a tentative district training camp in Vernon. Located in the northern Okanagan Valley near the northeastern arm of Lake Okanagan, Vernon was integrated into the continental railroad network and served
as the northern port for paddlewheel steamboat operations in the valley. An irrigation system drew settlers to the region, which became a thriving centre for the Okanagan fruit industry. As in other interior communities, civic expansion was paralleled by a growing militia presence. In 1908 DMD authorized a cavalry squadron under the leadership of Boer War veterans, and two years later Vernon became the headquarters of 30th British Columbia Horse, a cavalry regiment formed to recruit squadrons across the Okanagan. The local establishment could not keep up with enlistments, and B Squadron was soon overstrength. Local leaders, caught up in the enthusiasm, also felt that their community would be ideal for a central district training camp.

MAP 1.4  Wadmore’s map of Vernon with overlap of local Indian reserves and lakes, 1911
Sources: R. Cole Harris, Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 242; Paul M. Koroscil, British Columbia: Settlement History (Burnaby, BC: Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, 2000), 42; ‘Subdivisions of Estates in the Vicinity of the City of Vernon BC Compiled for Mutrie and Mutrie Real Estate and Financial Agents, Vernon,’ April 1907, stamped District Engineer, MD 11, Victoria, 7 November 1911, traced with proposed cavalry and infantry camps and filed in Director of Engineering Services Office, 20 December 1911, LAC, RG 24, v. 6322, file 67-58-1 pt. 1
In late 1911, while the search for a provincial camp was in full swing, district commander Colonel Wadmore visited Vernon to see what he could find. The city had leased its exhibition grounds on Mission Hill to the militia that summer, but this parcel was too confined for a district camp and neighbouring land was increasingly scarce and expensive. The local cattle ranching era was drawing to a close, and most large-scale landowners had already sold to developers. The emerging fruit industry drove up land prices throughout the Okanagan, which made unbroken tracts of land increasingly rare. Overlaying a map showing the patchwork of subdivisions surrounding the city, Wadmore identified a prospective infantry camp about three and a half miles west of Vernon (see Map 1.4). He ‘did not know of any better place in the Province’: the railway ran within 900 feet of the site, water was readily available for drinking, bathing, and horse watering, and nearly 20,000 acres of ‘splendid manoeuvring country’ was accessible nearby. The site also fell on an ‘empty’ Indian reserve, across from Okanagan Landing.42

The Head of the Lake people were an Okanagan band that historically had pursued a seasonal cycle of hunting, fishing, and gathering. One of their major traditional winter village sites was Nkamaplix, located at the head of Okanagan Lake. In the nineteenth century, they had encountered non-Indian fur traders, then Oblate missionaries, gold miners, and eventually ranchers. The Indians retained the right to hunt and fish on unoccupied Crown lands, but non-Indian settlement and externally imposed political regimes confined them to their reserves while they tried to establish a viable agricultural economy. Although originally quite expansive, the Nkamaplix reserves had been reduced significantly in the late 1800s, and the government had ‘cut off’ the band’s 25,000-acre grazing commonage because it was ‘lying in a wild, waste condition.’ Relegated to ten reserves of varying sizes around the northern part of Lake Okanagan, the band pursued farming and stock raising, but its limited lands prevented expansion and made the Nkamaplix marginal players in the market economy.43 Growing poverty and despair contributed to alcoholism and a reputation of lawlessness and immorality. While politicians described the local militia as ‘a live active body of men ... trying very earnestly to make a progressive movement,’ the Indians living near Vernon were characterized as ‘the worst in the country.’44

The regional military staff was optimistic about their prospects for securing access to Wadmore’s site on the Priest’s Valley Indian Reserve No. 6. Eighty-three acres seemed to sit idle, apparently unused ‘by the Indians for either camping or the purposes of cultivation.’ If the militia could secure access to at least half of the reserve, the site could accommodate the 1,000 men and 380 horses anticipated for the 1912 summer camp. The master general of the ordnance and chief of general staff in Ottawa thought this was a fine proposal. At the very least, it would be a suitable place to train until they acquired a permanent camp. But there were obstacles in their path. The Indian agent in Vernon, J. Robert Brown, refused to act
without the guidance of DIA headquarters, and DMD officials were perplexed by the ‘technical difficulties’ associated with using reserve lands. Requests had to go through official DIA channels in Ottawa. Militia authorities applied to use the lands, but became frustrated as months passed and they heard nothing from Indian Affairs.45

The response, when it finally came, was not positive. Regional inspector T.J. Cummiskey had met with the Nkamaplix to discuss the proposal in late December 1911. Chief Babtiste Logan and the band refused to allow the British Columbia Horse to camp on their reserve. The reason was not recorded, but the local context suggests a plausible explanation. Since Logan had taken over as chief, the reserve economy had deteriorated and the community was demoralized. Compounding these frustrations, Inspector Cummiskey strongly pressured the band to sell off reserve lands. Logan was adamantly opposed to any land sales, and became embroiled in a bitter political struggle with Inspector Cummiskey that eventually saw the chief deposed. The militia, of course, was oblivious to all of this. In early March 1912, Indian agent Brown held another meeting with the band, who again refused permission. Minister Hughes spoke to his cabinet colleague to see what could be done about this ‘old Indian Reserve,’ but nothing came of his political appeal. Indian Affairs simply passed along the negative response to the militia, and left district officials scrambling to solve their ongoing training dilemma.46

DMD accepted the Nkamaplix band’s refusal as final. There were no discussions about expropriating the property, and senior defence officials simply instructed district authorities to find other lands. The City of Vernon, anxious to have a militia camp in the community as a local economic depression set in, offered – free of charge – the exhibition grounds immediately south of town that the militia had previously used for local training. DMD could not resist, considering its failed negotiations for the reserve lands and repeated hesitations to select a permanent site. In the summer of 1913, cavalry and infantry regiments from across the BC interior hosted their first militia camp at ‘Camp Vernon’ on Mission Hill. It was the largest militia gathering in the province’s history.47 Although the grounds could not accommodate all of the training activities, some were conducted on privately owned ranch lands and, in one case, on Indian lands through informal local arrangements.

Although the soldiers were satisfied with their successful summer exercises, some furious Nkamaplix band members sent their concerns to Ottawa. Some five hundred soldiers of the British Columbia Horse had entered onto the Head of the Lake reserve in June, camping there for two or three days without permission. The letter writers alleged that the cavalry ‘used our property as if it were their own,’ and the complaints painted a grim picture. ‘They disturbed us, broke the peace of our homes, and interrupted us in legitimate pursuits,’ the signatories asserted, claiming to speak on behalf of the whole band. ‘They frightened many of the old
women, who left their houses, and took refuge under the banks of the Creek for fear of getting shot. We understand the soldiers gave orders that none of us were to travel around on the reserve in the evening otherwise we would take chances of getting shot." These band members questioned who had granted the military permission to be there.

The Head of the Lake reserves were in political turmoil, as a result of internal factionalism and Indian Affairs’ interference in band politics. In 1909, after the local agent had deposed Chief Pierre Michel (Hlakay or ‘Lame Pierre,’ as he was known to a rival faction because of a withered leg) on trumped-up grounds of intemperance, Babtiste Logan was elected chief. An opposing faction, including Michel, soon accused Logan of matrimonial infidelity and, after he fought with Inspector T.J. ‘Whiskey’ Cummiskey, Logan was deposed on dubious grounds. Chief Pierre was reinstated but factionalism intensified. It was Logan’s supporters who complained about the military’s presence and suggested it was a conspiracy by Inspector Cummiskey, the chief, and outside supporters to have the soldiers ‘overrun our reserve to overawe us, and make us submissive to Mr. Cummiskey.’ Their characterization of events was partisan. They felt that neither the elected chief nor the inspector had the right ‘to impose on us by opening our homes, and lands to soldiers or any others without our consent,’ which could be obtained only at a general band meeting. They denounced the ‘high handedness’ of the inspector and his ‘clique,’ and called for the removal of both Cummiskey and Chief Pierre – the latter to be replaced with the ‘proper chief Babtiste Logan.’

Indian Affairs forwarded the Nkamaplix complaint to Cummiskey in Vernon. Given his interventionist role in local band politics, his strict demands for Indian obedience, and his past friction with Logan, Cummiskey’s dismissal of this dissenting assessment is no surprise. The complaint can be read as a testament to military transgressions, a local chief’s complicity in the desecration of his community, and blatant disregard for due process. Or it can be seen as an expression of entrenched political factionalism, in which one group simply used the militia as the means to discredit a reviled inspector and a rival chief. The elected chief’s consent to the militia’s presence may have reflected a genuine spirit of co-operation – Chief Pierre Michel had adamantly upheld Okanagan land title and these rights were unaffected – or mere compliance with the inspector’s coercion. He may never have consented at all. Given the tumultuous band politics of the time, the documentary record’s silence, and the obvious partisanship of the inspector and Logan’s faction, definite conclusions are impossible.

The complaints, however, were quickly forgotten. Cummiskey did not pursue the matter, and could not because he was soon fired. The following year, the British Columbia Horse made brigade camp at Vernon, and two prominent local officers asked A. Megraw, the new Indian Affairs inspector for southeastern British Columbia, if they could camp for one night on the Head of the Lake reserve. The
two-day mock battle and bivouac among the hills were the most important part of their annual training exercise. They promised not to parade on the reserve, use the lands for daily manoeuvres, or cross into fenced lands. The officers told Megraw that ‘they had done so last year and no objection had been made by the Indians nor any others.’ Both parties, ignorant of the strong complaint registered the year before, made arrangements. In fact, Megraw suggested that, with the agent unavailable and annual training already under way, the militia ‘had better go ahead as they did last year’ without discussing it with the band. This activity might actually benefit the band, he told his superiors: ‘I know this is somewhat irregular, but I think it is justifiable under the circumstances, and I think that in addition to other means which we are employing, and the principles which we are trying to inculcate for the uplift of the Indians, this one of inspiring a little patriotism and love
of country should not be neglected. In fact I would like to see a few of the young men among [the Head of the Lake band] enlist in this local corps, and I believe it would do the whole of the band a lot of good, if a few of them could be induced to do so.’ J.D. McLean, the assistant deputy secretary at Indian Affairs, agreed and approved his action.52

When war broke out in 1914, the Nkamaplix band answered the call to colours, needing no inducement to do their part. ‘The Indians of British Columbia are not of so warlike a disposition as those of the central and eastern parts of the Dominion,’ D.C. Scott reflected after the war, ‘and they are of a conservative type of character that renders them averse to leaving their homes upon any venture of an unfamiliar nature.’ Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the Nkamaplix patriotic record was beyond reproach. When the exemption tribunal for the Military Service Act visited Vernon, they found that every unmarried man in the band eligible for service had already enlisted. Apparently, prewar military activities on their reserves did not inhibit wartime contributions. ‘Patriotism now became the order of the day,’ in historian Jean Barman’s characterization, and residents from the Okanagan, Nicola Valley, and Kamloops flocked to recruiting centres.53

The first enlistees gathered on makeshift campgrounds to be carted off to Sam Hughes’ bustling central mobilization camp at Valcartier. In late April 1915, however, the military announced a change in policy. Overseas troops would now be trained at district camps across Canada. The Kamloops Standard trumpeted that the training camp would be located in the area because military authorities considered the Schiedam Flats – on the Kamloops reserve – the ‘best site.’ Minister Hughes had mentioned it by name, the editors claimed, and it was an ‘open secret’ that a Schiedam camp would be arranged momentarily. All the other locations being considered – a range near Savona, Camp Vernon, and Flick’s proposed site near Merritt – had ‘drawbacks which do not exist at this ideal camp ground.’ City authorities sent a flurry of telegrams to politicians and military leaders promising free electricity as further inducement to choose Kamloops. But yet again, it was not to be. Camp Vernon was overly confined and wet, and had not even ranked as a potential permanent camp before the war, but it was a known commodity. As a result, it became the training and recruitment centre for nearly 3,500 men in 1915. Soldiers wallowed in mud of ‘a most tenacious and slippery variety,’ although these conditions were nothing compared to what lay ahead in the bloody wastelands of France and Belgium. Vernon remained the central mobilization camp, and its numbers continued to swell.54

In the years ahead, Kamloops continued to lobby to have the mobilization camp moved to the Schiedam Valley. Civic and militia leaders stressed their city’s enlistment record, transportation advantages, and the fifty-six square miles of ‘ample ground, unfenced and uncultivated’ that could easily handle up to 20,000 troops.
This was contrasted with ‘the cramped conditions’ at Camp Vernon. The Kamloops Indian reserve still seemed perfect. ‘Infantry can be manoeuvred over the whole of the Reserve,’ Colonel Vicars explained, ‘cavalry over nine tenths or more of it, and the same with field or horse artillery, even the heaviest of guns may be taken to the tops of the mountains.’ He was sure that, in due course, the valley would be chosen. A local deputation went to Ottawa to plead the case to the politicians, but it would have been inefficient to transplant a central camp in wartime. The selection of a permanent training area would have to wait until the conflict was over.\(^{35}\)

The end of the war, however, did not bring any greater certainty. Local militia units operated on minuscule budgets during the interwar years and actual numbers fell well below authorized establishments. Regiments like the 5th British Columbia Light Horse in Kamloops persevered, its ranks ‘recruited mostly from local ranch hands with a strong sprinkling of Indians from the Kamloops & Chou Chou reserves.’\(^{36}\) The only bright spot in the BC militiaman’s year was two weeks of summer camp – still held at the ‘temporary’ Camp Vernon when funds were available – and authorities renewed their prewar search for a more suitable site in the late 1920s. As predicted, urban expansion and settlement had made the task more difficult. Unbroken tracts of accessible land in southern British Columbia were much scarcer than in the decade before.\(^{37}\)

As the search dragged on, the military repeatedly returned to the prospect of the Kamloops Indian reserve. Its Schiedam Valley had ample space for magazine, ordnance, and camping purposes – and was characterized as being good for little else. In 1929 defence officials argued that ‘Chinamen’ leased a small portion of the reserve for farming, but otherwise it was undeveloped and had ‘been a disappointment to the Indians.’ If this was the case, the military queried, ‘would it not be possible to reserve some area elsewhere for use as an Indian Reserve, leaving the present Reserve available for reservation for the Department of National Defence?’ The deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs was not convinced that a permanent move was feasible. ‘I think it would be difficult, if not impossible, to arrange for the transfer of the Kamloops Indians to another locality,’ D.C. Scott explained. ‘They have been living on these lands for many years and you will know how attached Indians become to localities.’ He would not bother the band by putting forth a relocation proposal – city officials had already tried to take over the reserve for soldier settlement. He would, however, discuss a potential lease. Negotiations proceeded, and although correspondence stressed the need for haste, incessant delays frustrated progress.\(^{38}\)

When the military renewed its interest in 1932, the Indian agent at Kamloops, W.J. Ferguson, carefully pointed out that the Indians used – and valued – the land that the military coveted. Sixteen Indian families lived on the eastern part of the reserve, and the millions of feet of timber in that section supported ‘a large part of the Band.’ Furthermore, non-Indian ranchers had once ‘paid as much as $3000.00
a year for the privilege of running their stock’ on the reserve, and the Indians were now grazing more than a thousand horses and hundreds of cattle on the lands that the military claimed were valueless. Ferguson concluded that a military lease ‘would seriously affect the livelihood of these Indians unless the grazing and timber values were reserved and the Indians recompensed in full for any damage to these values.’ The agent’s loyalties and sympathies rested with the band, not the militia, and he made this clear to his superiors.  

The new deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs, Dr. Harold McGill, had a practical awareness of military culture and activities as a Great War veteran – and more recently as Indian agent at Sarcee, where the militia had leased reserve land. He refused to make a hasty decision, but eventually instructed a reluctant Ferguson to negotiate with the band about a long-term military lease. Defence officials then let the matter drop when asked about potential rent. Everyone seemed frustrated by the military’s chronic indecisiveness. When internal reports reiterated the need for a new district training camp two years later and the military again found Indian Affairs open to a rental agreement, practically all of the Crown land around the reserve had been taken up. The military had missed its window for the Kamloops reserve, as it had for other reserve lands. The Camps Development Committee placed a high priority on acquiring a central BC camp in 1939, but could no longer recommend any specific sites. As another war dawned, the military again made do with Camp Vernon despite years of assessments deeming it unsuitable.

‘Civilization in Canada, as elsewhere, has advanced geometrically across the country,’ Northrop Frye suggested in 1971, ‘throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up the farmlands into chessboards of square mile sections and concession-like roads. There is little adaptation to nature ... Canadian cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it.’ This imagery of the linear, ordered colonial advance is pervasive: newcomers encroached on traditional Aboriginal territories, dispossessing Aboriginal peoples of their lands and rights while simultaneously pushing them to the margins of society. But these processes did not necessarily transpire in a uniform or even a rational manner. In viewing race relations, historian Sarah Deutsch notes, it is ‘problematic ... to create a history that shows Anglos united, pressing forward usually swiftly and always surely toward their aims, maximizing order and domination as though they always knew how and where to find each.’ The search for order, coherence, and generalization can conceal rather than illuminate complex geographies of power.

The absence of inevitable progress in this chapter fits within a theoretical conceptualization of ‘new history’ that recognizes historical experience as ‘fundamentally discontinuous, open-ended, and unpredictable in outcome.’ Relationships
were influenced by internal and external considerations, contradictions, quarrels, and chronic indecisiveness. Clearly there was nothing organized or coherent in the extension of Canada’s military presence into interior British Columbia. There is a tendency, particularly in Native-newcomer relation histories, to focus only on federal actions that lead to dispossession and eventual land claims. Ignoring unrealized federal plans, however, perpetuates a distorted sense of the militia’s power, the coherence of its decision making, and the depth of its fixation on Indian reserve land. The militia’s inability to become a more permanent fixture on Indian reserves in British Columbia before the Great War affirms that the selection and acquisition of military sites was not the simple product of institutional cultures or linear bureaucratic machinations. Although the various situations in British Columbia shared factors with most land surrenders – such as demographic and financial pressures, racism, and internal band divisions – the outcome was different. This suggests that the ambiguous line between necessary preconditions and causes must be scrutinized more carefully than the existing literature allows.

Historians often speak of bureaucracies as homogenous, rational actors, but the role of individuals in identifying options and pursuing particular courses of action must be acknowledged. Local militia officers in mainland British Columbia, trying to secure land to train and house their units, investigated prospective sites and devised proposals. They also confused decision making. Their inability to convince the central headquarters to establish a permanent training camp on their sites in mainland British Columbia was the by-product of contextual forces (like the federal-provincial entanglement over land title) but also the result of conflicting personalities and political agendas. Outcomes were never predictable. Even when Indian Affairs and Indian bands agreed to leases for lands that met the militia’s topographical criteria, the militia chose to set up a district camp on available but avowedly deficient non-Indian lands. Contemporary developments in Alberta, similar in lofty aspirations and disappointments, ultimately proved more fruitful. Nonetheless, Sarcee Camp was also the product of a tangled and tortured process influenced by competing priorities, missed opportunities, and shifting political, military, and local contexts.
Governmental Uncertainty: 
The Militia and the Sarcee Reserve, 1908-39

Indian Office, Sarcee reserve near Calgary, 14 April 1915: When T.J. Fleetham, the new Indian agent at Sarcee, received his copy of the Calgary Herald, he could hardly miss the front-page headlines:

- Plan Great Rifle Range on Reserve
- Line of 250 Targets to be Erected by Canadian Engineers
- Will be Purely for Service Training
- Arrangement Will Permit 750 Men to Shoot at Same Time

The project sounded grand. Fleetham read that military engineer Lieutenant-Colonel Lowe had investigated the proposed site for two days and suggested ‘the big military camp’ at Sarcee would boast ‘the largest rifle range in the middle west.’ Entire battalions could practise at the same time. Reporters informed Calgarians that construction was imminent.¹

This was the first that Fleetham had heard of the military’s intentions for the Sarcee reserve, and he promptly contacted Indian Affairs in Ottawa. He presumed that the proposed area was the northeast corner, the portion closest to Calgary that had been surrendered two years earlier, but he wanted more information. He reminded his superiors that ‘great care’ would have to be taken against ‘stray bullets across the river.’ J.D. McLean, assistant deputy and secretary of Indian affairs, was also unaware of the military’s plan. He immediately queried the Militia Council: ‘I beg to inform you that the Department has been advised by its local agent that your Department is erecting targets, etc., on the Sarcee Indian reserve, and I have to request that you will be good enough to advise by whose permission such action is being taken, as no authority has been given either by the Department or its local agent. I would point out that the Indians will expect to be paid for any use of their land.’² By the time his letter reached local military authorities in Calgary, the reserve was bustling with activity and infrastructure was being constructed at a feverish rate.³

Just west of the Red River the Canadian Shield diverts north, its rocky and heavily forested contours yielding to the great interior plains of the North American heartland. Although the term ‘prairie’ connotes a featureless, semi-arid flatland, the reality is more diverse: broad plains and undulating terrain with hills