

Militarized Landscapes in Twentieth-Century Britain, France and the United States

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Landscape &
Environment



The black smoke billowing from burning oil wells during the Gulf War of 1990-91 directed media and public attention towards war's environmental impact. Yet even before the first bomb is dropped, preparation for warfare materially and imaginatively reshapes landscapes and environments. Yet this form of military mobilization remains under-researched. This project seeks to rectify this neglect through a comparative analysis of the emergence, management and meaning of militarized landscapes. In particular, it will explore the role of military lands as reservoirs of biodiversity often superior in 'green' value to surrounding non-militarized landscapes subject to intensive agricultural practices and other customary forms of human encroachment. How and why have military authorities embraced nature conservation policies? The status of defence estates as landscapes emptied of human residents and civilian activities is another central ingredient of our study. We will also consider the challenges to militarized landscapes from those seeking access and a share of decision making and control. Of special interest here is the interplay between the imperatives of defending the nation and defending nature. The focus on British, French and American histories will bring out the common ground and divergences between national military cultures and the local, national and continental specificity of their expression and impact on the landscape, providing a vital historical perspective on highly topical questions of military power and environmental responsibility.

A Project Student will pursue a doctoral thesis on the 'greening' of Britain's Ministry of Defence, a post-doctoral Project Researcher (Dr Chris Pearson) will explore the militarized landscapes of post-1945 France, the Principal Investigator will examine the conversion of military sites in Colorado into wildlife refuges, and the Co-Investigator (Dr Tim Cole) will look at the consequences of landscape militarization for human communities through a case study of Tyneham in Dorset and the recent 'museumification' of this famous 'ghost village.' An international conference will be held early in the project's second year. Two external Project Partners will assist our investigations. The UK Defence Estates' Environmental Support Team will facilitate the work of the Project Student. Icon Films, an independent film company specializing in history and natural history documentaries, will collaborate with project researchers and the Defence Estates in the production of a TV proposal for submission to a commissioning body.