

The Irony and the Tragedy of Negotiated Space: A Case Study on Narrative Form and Aboriginal-Government Relations during the Second World War

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Volume 15, Number 1, 2004

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/012073ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/012073ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Lackenbauer, P. W. (2004). 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 / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 15(1), 177–206.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/012073ar>

The Irony and the Tragedy of Negotiated Space: A Case Study on Narrative Form and Aboriginal- Government Relations during the Second World War

P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER

Hayden White has stressed that all histories can be understood through their narrative forms. Using his categorization, Tragedy is the dominant plot structure employed in the historiography on Native-Newcomer relations. Mechanistic and reductionist in its treatment of the structure of relationships, White explains that “in Tragedy, there are no festive occasions, except false or illusionary ones” and any “reconciliations that occur at the end of the Tragedy ... are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world.”¹ For historians of Native-Newcomer relations who adopt this mode of emplotment, the protagonists are defined along “racial” lines: Aboriginal peoples on the one hand, and the “Euro-Canadian” (non-Aboriginal) camp on the other. This binary structure is conducive to asserting sympathetic claims for Native groups seeking recompense for the dismal legacies of colonialism, and the immediate need for a new (or a return to the old) structure of Native-Newcomer relations. This tendency to distil history “into the simple narrative structure of a protagonist’s conflict with and eventual triumph over opposing forces,” anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss has observed, can create 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.”²

1 Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 9.

2 Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 18. See also Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37/1 (1995), 173-93. For examples of this criticism, see Ann Carlos, review of Dianne Newell’s *Tangled Webs of History* in *Journal of Economic History* 54/4 (December 1994), 966-68; Douglas Cole’s review of *Tangled Webs of History* in *American Historical Review* 100/3 (June 1995), 978-9.

An “official” embodiment of this binary narrative of the relationship can be found in the massive final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The opening volume, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, is a quintessential example of the history of modern Native-Newcomer relations as Tragedy, with the potential for a Romantic outcome – a drama of redemption, “the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it”³ – should the government implement the commission’s sweeping recommendations. The structure is revealing. The opening sequence paints an idyllic, Eden-esque existence in pre-contact North America where Aboriginal societies “flourished and grew” in wealth and harmony. The early nation-to-nation relations with non-Aboriginal newcomers were rooted in co-operative exchanges and alliance systems. By the nineteenth century, the narrative continued, respect was replaced by non-Aboriginal domination. Aboriginal peoples’ loyalty to the Crown did not diminish, but reciprocal fiduciary obligations were simply cast aside and the doctrine of assimilation overwhelmed all else. An emerging “Renewal and renegotiation” phase following the infamous 1969 White Paper affirmed the need to profoundly restructure the relationship. This narrative is critical to the political recommendations made by the RCAP for Aboriginal self-governance and government restitution for ongoing duplicity and attempted cultural genocide.⁴

An entire chapter of the RCAP final report is devoted to Aboriginal peoples’ loyal contributions to the war efforts of the twentieth century, and the government’s refusal to treat these communities and their veterans properly. This victimization, the narrative explains, was also perpetuated through the coercive seizure of reserve lands for military use. The dramatic appropriation of the Stoney Point Reserve to create Camp Ipperwash in 1942 is the centre-piece of the RCAP’s case, but it is suggested to the reader that this injustice was not unique:

The term ‘land given up,’ which became part of the parlance of the IAB [Indian Affairs Branch] at the time, obscures the amount of negotiating and the pressure to comply that characterized land surrenders for military use. In many cases, even a lease was opposed by the band council involved. At Six

3 White, *Metahistory*, 8. White explains the interrelationship between Romance and Tragedy: “Comedy and Tragedy represent *qualifications* of the Romantic apprehension of the world, ...the former eventuates in a vision of the ultimate *reconciliation* of opposed forces and the latter in a *revelation* of the forces opposing man on the other. And it is possible for the Romantic writer to assimilate the truths of human existence revealed in Comedy and Tragedy respectively within the structure of the drama of redemption which he figures in his vision of the ultimate victory of man over the world of experience.” *Ibid.*, 10.

4 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), *Final Report v. 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

THE IRONY AND THE TRAGEDY OF NEGOTIATED SPACE

Nations, for instance, there was a great deal of opposition to the lease of land for a practice bombing range.⁵

According to the Royal Commission, these reserve lands were taken with the “compliance of the IAB, the very agency charged with protecting Indian land.”⁶

In her studies of Indian agents in Ontario, historian Robin Brownlie conceptualized local government relationships on reserves as “power contests” between IAB field officials and their “Native clients.” Agents prioritized “maintaining authority and control,” she concluded, and in core matters over lands and resources they were “unbending in their application of federal policy.” Any Indians who questioned government plans were “branded as troublemakers and subversives.”⁷ She also observed that agent John Daly’s “methods conformed well to the style of administration encouraged by the Department” and that as “a confirmed paternalist, he offered some protection to vulnerable individuals while opposing those who strove to assert self-determination.”⁸ Drawing upon Noel Dyck’s suggestion that “tutelage agents” needed to exercise departmental power to constrain Aboriginal agendas and control, she noted that Indian agents “were cast in a role in which they would arbitrarily and self-consciously exercise power over other human beings for no good reason.” In its “very nature,” Brownlie explained, the agents’ position “compelled them to quell any aboriginal attempts at political self-assertion.” She also generalized that some of Daly’s behaviour was shared with “his fellow agents,” and in particular that their “political agenda was shaped by their personal interest in maintaining Departmental control over the reserves.”⁹

The following narrative examines, in detail, the local power contest at Six Nations that the RCAP cited in passing. Rather than simply confirming the general thrust of the historiography in Native-Newcomer relations that reinforces a teleology of unbroken oppression and dispossession, this version of the story reveals a more complex situation than the pithy RCAP statement allows. In an era that stresses a plurality of voices of perspectives and multi-centric histories, it

5 RCAP, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, 584. There is no citation provided in the report for the Six Nations range negotiations. On Ipperwash, see P.W. Lackenbauer, “Combined Operation: The Appropriation of Stoney Point Reserve and the Creation of Camp Ipperwash,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 1/1 (Fall 1999), online publication.

6 RCAP, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, 556, 590.

7 Robin Brownlie, “A Fatherly Eye: Two Indian Agents on Georgian Bay, 1918-1939” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996), 20, 447-8. See also *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2003).

8 Brownlie, “Man on the Spot: John Daly, Indian Agent in Parry Sound, 1922-1939,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994), 63.

9 Noel Dyck, *What Is the Indian ‘Problem’: Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (St. John’s: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1991), 77; Brownlie, “Man on the Spot,” 85-6.

questions whether the dominant emplotment of Tragedy used to narrate Native-Newcomer relationships is too constraining to accommodate the diversity of historical relationships and experiences. Does a pre-figuration of the field along Tragic lines preclude the inclusion of events and voices, apparent in the record, that encourage a more Ironic emplotment? In seeking to elucidate “the reality of oppression” and create “more inclusive, and more authentic, narratives,” as Veronica Strong-Boag suggested, does a fixation on Tragic “victim-survivor” stories better equip us to “characterize the reality of the past,” address “pressing questions,” and create “meaningful memory for all Canadians?”¹⁰

* * *

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) would represent Canada’s primary contribution to a “limited liability” war effort, William Lyon Mackenzie King decided in December 1939. Although his government had repeatedly rejected British overtures to create an imperial air training program in Canada during the late 1930s, the onset of another major European conflict made it considerably more attractive politically. If the nation channelled its main energies into training Commonwealth pilots in its domestic airspace, conscription for overseas service would not be necessary. Furthermore, if air power theorists were correct, Allied strategic bombing might win the war without intensive ground operations. Few Canadians could be offended by the plan so long as the costs were manageable.¹¹

Canada was poorly prepared for war, and the federal government’s commitment to carry out an extensive BCATP required intensive preparations. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) had only five aerodromes when war was declared, with six more under construction. The original training plan called for sixty-four flying training schools, which obviously required a massive land acquisition and building program. The scale was well beyond the RCAF’s limited resources, so the Department of National Defence (DND) drew upon the expert assistance of other federal departments. Civilians with the Department of Transport (DoT)¹²

10 Veronica Strong-Boag, “Contested Space: The Politics of Canadian Memory,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994), 3-16.

11 W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force* v. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 191-219; Norman Hillmer, “Vincent Massey and the Origins of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* (Spring 1987), 49-55.

12 In early 1940, Cabinet placed the responsibility for acquiring and developing BCATP aerodromes with the Department of Transport (DoT), who had overseen the expansion of Canadian civil aviation during the interwar years. The Lands Branch at Transport, which itself was not equipped to acquire all of the properties required, arranged with the Real Estate Legal and Land Surveys Department of Canadian National Railways to acquire lands after surveys were complete and the lands selected. DoT, “The Selection and Development of Airports for the British Commonwealth Joint Air Training Plan by the Department of Transport,” 26-7, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) 80/395.

defined the selection process to secure lands for air bases, ranges, and landing fields. Modern, “scientific” measures would ensure that political lobbying and patronage did not impede or influence the acquisition of optimum locations. A set of explicit, objective criteria ensured that the “aerodrome of democracy” would be free of unnecessary hazards, built with efficiency, and completed as cheaply and quickly as possible.¹³

As the BCATP began to take off in late 1939, Brantford civic leaders committed to assist the war effort in every possible way. “Canada has accepted its share of responsibility for the efficient conduct of the war and the achievement of ultimate victory,” the editor of the *Brantford Expositor* wrote on 3 September 1939. “There is no division of opinion among Canadians in regard to the justice of the British cause, and as a united people Canada is prepared to extend its maximum effort.”¹⁴ That night, under the monument to Joseph Brant in Victoria Park, Major R.J. Waterous – who had commanded the local 54th Battery before he was elected Mayor of Brantford in 1938 – gave a resounding speech to more than “four thousand loyal Canadian of this City,” pledging “that come what will, we shall do our duty in the defense of freedom and justice.”¹⁵ In the months ahead, Brantford residents learned that the air war would be pivotal and the “Empire Air Training Scheme” devised in Ottawa would be a major contribution. Not only would it bring material benefits to Canadians – a significance not lost on a mayor and a city preoccupied with civic financing and balanced budgets – but it would also reinforce the “solidarity of the Empire.”¹⁶ Unlike many Canadian communities, Brantford did not lobby for an air base¹⁷ – it had no need. It boasted a modern airport, unveiled less than ten years earlier by civil aviation authorities, and on 7 November RCAF officers came

13 J.A. Wilson, “Aerodrome Construction for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1940,” in *Development of Aviation in Canada 1879-1948*, 27, DHH 75/114; Rachel L. Heide, “The Politics of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Base Selection” (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 2000), 93-101; Douglas, *Creation of a National Air Force*, 225.

14 “The Call to Service,” *Brantford Expositor*, 3 September 1939, 4.

15 “Four Thousand Citizens Pledge Support to Empire,” *Ibid.*, 4 September 1939, 6. On Waterous’s military background, see *Ibid.*, 23 December 1939, 23.

16 “Empire Air Training Scheme to Be Pushed,” *Ibid.*, 1 Nov 39, 12; “Empire Air Training Conference is Opened,” *Ibid.*, 6 November 1939, 1; “From Deficits to Surplus,” *Ibid.*, 22 Nov 1939, 4; Solidarity of the Empire,” *Ibid.*, 19 December 1939, 3, 4. On Waterous’s “pay as you go” fiscal policy and his balanced budgets, see also Gary Muir, *Brantford: A City’s Century, 1895-2000* v. 1 (Brantford: Tupuna Press, 1999), 217.

17 See Heide, “Politics of BCATP,” 193, *passim*. On lobbying for BCATP bases, see also Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer, “The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 16/3&4 (Fall-Winter 1981), 133-44; and Peter C. Conrad, *Training for Victory: The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 14-22.

knocking on Mayor Waterous's office door.¹⁸ Brantford would be called upon to play its part in the BCATP.

Air authorities proposed to establish a Service Flying Training School (SFTS) in the city. For fledgling aviators just finished elementary training and still unfamiliar with "high powered machines with variable-pitch propellers, retractable undercarriages," and more than a hundred technical instruments in the cockpit, the learning curve at an SFTS was high and the room for error large. Therefore, before any final decision could be made, air officials needed assurance that two relief aerodromes could be developed efficiently and economically near the main base. Local authorities conducted preliminary investigations for a landing field at several locations, including a site on the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve just seven miles southeast of Brantford.¹⁹

The Six Nations of the Grand River had the largest population of any Indian community in Canada, numbering more than five thousand in 1940, and their reserve, comprising seventy-two square miles, was the largest in eastern Canada. The rural homestead settlement pattern on the reserve, and its close proximity to Brantford, made it attractive for a relief field. More than one thousand acres of cultivated fields and pasture land, covering five lots in Tuscarora Township, met all of the preliminary criteria. Transport officials found that the approaches to the proposed sites were good, requiring the removal of only a few trees and a few low buildings of the "inexpensive type belonging to the Indians."²⁰

In typical fashion, the delegated authorities had begun their surveys without informing either the Six Nations or Indian Affairs officials. The Indian superintendent²¹ at Brantford, Major E.P. Randle, had discovered the air force's interest while driving on the reserve in the course of his daily duties. He came across surveyors who explained that if a site on the reserve proved suitable he would learn of it through "some other sources." Randle reflected that their

18 Muir, 238-9; "Formally Opens Brantford Civic Airport," *Brantford Expositor*, 5 June 1930, 14; *Ibid.*, 8 November 1939, p.15. Although Waterous would neither confirm nor deny the RCAF's interest in Brantford at the time, it was obvious that they were discussing a BCATP facility.

19 Dunmore, *Wings for Victory*, 122-64; Airways Inspector to Controller Civil Aviation, DoT, 18 November 1939; Aerodrome Development Committee Minute No.19, n.d. (March 1940), Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 12, v. 2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; Smart to McGill, 2 February 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1. An SFTS required two emergency landing fields no closer than five miles and no more than twenty-five miles from each other or the main aerodrome. Therefore, search parties trying to situate an SFTS "had to find clusters of three aerodrome sites all satisfying the same technical specifications." Heide, "Politics of BCATP," 116.

20 V.I. Smart, Deputy Minister, DoT, to Dr. Harold W. McGill, Director, Indian Affairs Branch (IAB), 2 February 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1. On the Six Nations community at the time, see A.A. Shimony, *Conservatism Among the Iroquois at the Six Nations Reserve* (Syracuse University Press, 1994), 18.

21 At Brantford, the Indian superintendent performed the role of Indian agent.

“attitude was courteous and their explanation appeared to be quite satisfactory and reasonable to me,” and let them proceed because it brought no harm to anyone and “might bring some benefits to the Indians.” Several council members and individual Indians also observed these activities and approached the Randle, who assured them that Indian Affairs would place the matter before them if the air force wanted the site.²²

While Randle was in Ottawa in early 1940, however, local rumours began to circulate that challenged his assurances to the community. Six Nations “gossip” suggested that the government planned to select the site on the reserve and “did not have to either purchase or lease it, but could just take it over.” The threat of expropriation, even if a “somewhat absurd idea” in Randle’s view, generated “a good deal of excitement and resentment.”²³ Pre-emptively, a group of residents quickly despatched a petition to Ottawa protesting an “intended expropriation.” Their plea highlighted the historical experiences and patriotic efforts of the community, and recalled Sir Frederick Haldimand’s “sacred treaty” promises to safeguard Six Nations rights for subsequent generations. Already their land holdings along the Grand River had shrunk from over a million acres to 49,000, and population increase had already caused a local land shortage. “Far be it for the Six Nations to hinder any plans of the National Defence program,” they questioned, “but of the millions of acres of land lying idle in the Dominion ... why should it be found at all necessary to seek additional [Indian reserve] land?” If the government tried to take their land without consent, it would be “contrary to the Indian sense of British fair play and in direct contravention of the principles for which Canada and the British Empire is now fighting for its life.”²⁴

The Six Nations were already contributing patriotically to that war effort. The community was “second to none” in its pursuit of war work, an impressive number of men had enlisted in the armed forces, and the council had recently donated \$1,000 to the Red Cross. Community women had created a Red Cross unit, and individual Indian farmers had cultivated more acres during the previous season than ever before. “In the present national emergency,” the 112 petition signatories asserted, “neither the lands nor the people of the Six Nations are idle.” There could be no accusations of disloyalty or complacency. History “prove[d] that the loyalty of the Iroquois race ... saved the day for

22 Major E.P. Randle, Indian Superintendent, Brantford, to McGill, 31 January 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Miles Hill to MNR, Indian Affairs Branch (IAB), 12 January 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1. For a more detailed statement on Six Nations treaty rights and the Haldimand Grant, see Six Nations, *The Redman’s Appeal for Justice: The Position of the Six Nations that they Constitute an Independent State* (March 1924).

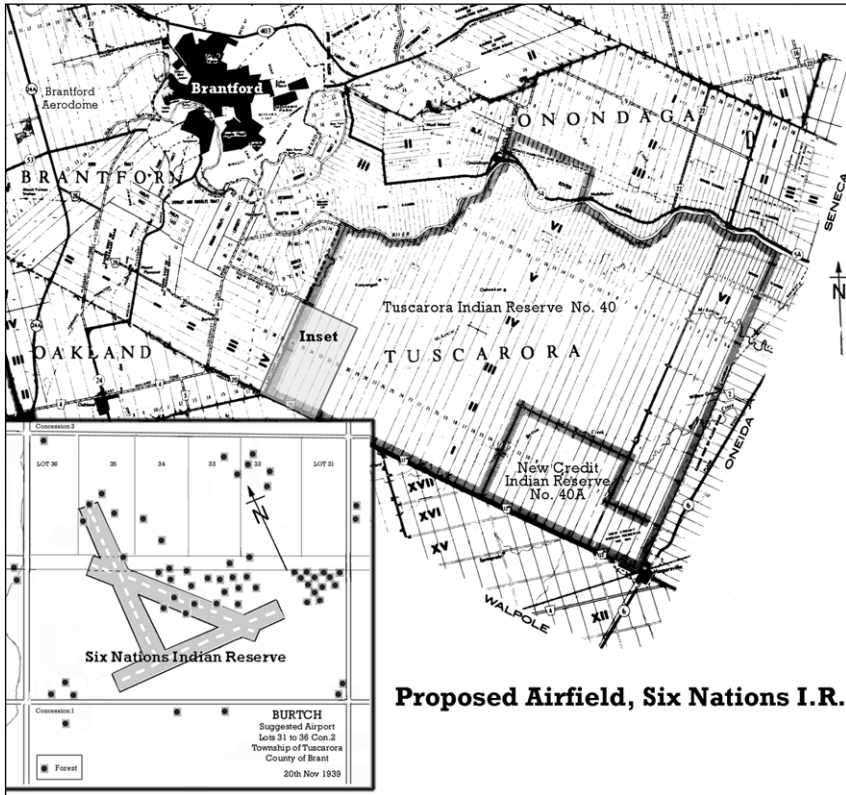


Figure 1: Proposed Airfield on Six Nations Indian Reserve, 1939-40²⁵

Britain in Canada,” the letter stated, citing the past record of devoted Six Nations service from the American Revolution to the Great War; this was sufficient reason to uphold the treaties rather than having them “ruthlessly set aside and regarded as ‘scraps of paper.’”²⁶ Indeed, readers of the *Brantford Expositor* had recently seen headlines touting the “Six Nations Loyalty Link

25 Map by Jennifer Arthur. Based on inside cover, C.M. Johnston, *Brant County* (Toronto, 1967) and “Burch Suggested Airport,” 20 November 1939, NAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

26 Hill to IAB, 12 January 1940. Some newspaper commentators had already drawn very similar conclusions. See, for example, Charles Clay, “Indian Giving,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 1939, in LAC, RG 10, v.6763, f.452-5, pt. 2. On Red Cross aid, see Minutes of Special Six Nations Council meeting, 23 November 1939, LAC, RG 10, v.1755, f.63-32 pt.35. On English Canadian media constructions of the Indian during the “Phoney War,” see R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the “Indian” and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 62-71.

Welded in Wars: League of Iroquois Main Factor in Keeping Canada British,” and boasting of the community’s patriotic contributions to date.²⁷

The fusing of inviolable treaty rights to the Six Nations proud record of military service through the Great War was central to the signatories’ conception of loyalty and patriotism. About 300 men from the Grand River reserve had served overseas during the earlier conflict; several earned notable distinction, and eighty-eight made the supreme sacrifice. Voluntarism was one thing, but prescribed loyalty was another. Tensions had arisen over the issue of compulsory military service, leaving a distasteful legacy. The Six Nations regarded themselves allies of the Crown, not subjects. On the local level, Council vigorously protested the *Soldier Settlement Act*, defiantly arguing that the government had no right to locate people on the reserve and fearing that it would lead to an alienation of reserve lands. Fred Loft, a Mohawk veteran of the Great War, had cut his political teeth on the conscription debate and in the interwar years his association, the League of the Indians of Canada, fought for veterans’ rights, greater band control over properties and funds, and better education standards. It found many reasons for resentment, and after serving so loyally during the war the inequitable treatment of Indian veterans left much to be desired.²⁸

Despite these difficulties, the continuing relationship between the Six Nations and the military through the interwar years was not uniformly rooted in the bitterness of broken promises and shattered dreams. In 1930, Mohawk

27 H.M. Hill and Wm. Powless, “Six Nations Loyalty,” *Brantford Expositor*, 3 September 1939, 4; “Gift of \$1,000 Voted By Six Nations Indians,” *Ibid*, 15 November 1939, 5; “Six Nations Indians Form Red Cross Unit,” *Ibid*, 23 November 1939, 2.

28 James St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (1989), 9; McGill to F.L.C. Pereira, Assistant Secretary to the Governor General, 4 July 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1; Scott Trevithick, “Conflicting Outlooks: The Background to the 1924 Deposing of the Six Nations Hereditary Council” (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1998), 73-6, 85-9. On Six Nations opposition to conscription, see LCol R.H. Greer, District Military Representative for Administration of Military Service Act, Military District No.2, Toronto, to Secretary, Military Sub-Committee, M.S.A., Militia HQ, 15 November 1917; Captain A.R. Minard to Greer, 13 November 1917, LAC, RG 24, v. 6566, f.HQ 1064-30-34 pt.1. For Loft’s organized opposition in particular see Telegram, Gordon J. Smith, Brantford, to D.C. Scott, 13 November 1917, LAC, RG 10, v.6768, f.452-20 pt.1. On the League of Indians, see Peter Kulchyski, “‘A Considerable Unrest’: F.O. Loft and the League of Indians,” *Native Studies Review* 4/1-2 (1988), 95-113; James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999), 80-1, and E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 102-9. On the plight of Ontario Indian veterans, see RCAP, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, 554-6; Robin Brownlie, “Work Hard and Be Grateful: Native Soldier Settlers in Ontario after the First World War,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 181-203.

veteran Oliver M. Martin became commander of the Haldimand Rifles, a long-standing militia regiment with significant representation from Six Nations. Martin was commissioned as a colonel when war broke out in 1939, and later rose to brigade commander – the highest rank attained by a Canadian Indian. Many others from Six Nations had joined Martin in volunteering for overseas service when Canada declared war against Germany, and no one could deny they had reaffirmed their alliance with the Crown.²⁹ Correspondingly, the petitioners demanded that the government reciprocate.

The January 1940 petition encapsulated the legal and patriotic aspects of the airfield opponents' case, placing the onus on the federal government to respond. The Minister of Justice, in typical fashion, passed the petition to Indian Affairs. After all, a 1933 policy stipulated that Indians were not to contact IAB headquarters directly – never mind another government department – and were supposed to channel all disputes through their local Indian agent.³⁰ The band members who opposed the airfield proposition refused to accept this bureaucratic buck-passing and “beg[ged]” the justice minister to intercede on their behalf, framing their appeal as a legal matter warranting immediate attention “for we are in danger of losing our homes by this Survey [, the land being] the last of the Redman’s Heritage from our Creator.” Their final comment juxtaposed events at home with the tragedies abroad, saying “[s]urely this is not going to be another Poland.” Not only did the Six Nations people have a strong sense of their land, historical relationship with the Crown, and legal rights, but they also drew a compelling moral parallel between their collective security and the ostensible purpose of the war itself. In a war being waged over violations of international law and treaties, justice could not be denied to them because their own “Covenant Chain” with Britain promised “Liberty, Peace and Friendship.”³¹

At Indian Affairs headquarters, director Harold McGill pursued the trespassing complaints with the Department of National Defence (Naval/Air). The lack of information provided to either his field staff or the Indians had fed rumours that the government intended to take over reserve land “without consultation or ... consent.” The IAB was prepared to fully cooperate with military authorities under wartime circumstances, but there was no excuse for taking action without even the “courtesy of notification.” This approach would actu-

29 Enos T. Montour, *The Feathered U.E.L.’s* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1973)131-34; “Appointed to Command 4th Infantry Brigade,” *Brantford Expositor*, 28 November 1939, 6; “Brigadier Oliver M. Martin,” *Indian Missionary Record* 11/4 (April 1948), 2. In the 1920s, the Haldimand Rifles trained at a rifle range erected on a portion of the Mohawk Institute grounds known as the “Glebe” site. See LAC, RG 10, v.3224, f.547,596.

30 Brownlie, “Man on the Spot,” 70.

31 “The Petitioners, Iroquois Confederacy, Grand River Lands,” to Hon. Mr. Laponte [*sic*], Minister of Justice, LAC RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1.

ally delay the process and unduly burden Indian Affairs officials, he explained, rather than expedite it. While Indian reserves were technically Crown lands, they were “not public lands.” Therefore, the military needed permission before proceeding with their plans. “The Indians ... naturally look to this Department to protect their interests to the fullest extent,” McGill stressed, “and it is a matter of surprise to them that such action can be taken without first consulting with them and obtaining the necessary consent.”³² If land leasing process was respected, then there could be a quick resolution that was “entirely satisfactory to both parties.” It would be difficult to obtain the Indians’ requisite consent if the military did not give “some preliminary consideration” to “their ownership of these lands.” McGill recommended that some form of consultative procedure be established.³³

Senior officials at the DoT and DND quickly apologized and formally requested permission to proceed with their investigations. Immediately, Indian Affairs requested additional information so that the band council would be “in a position to intelligently discuss the matter.” Air officials insisted that they always wanted to investigate potential sites with as little publicity as possible, and IAB headquarters seemed to accept this explanation. Locally, however, Superintendent Randle began to question the wisdom of the airfield plan. “A large military training school on the Reserve might not in the long run be a desirable thing,” he suggested to Ottawa.³⁴

He seemed out of step with official plans that were taking shape. By mid-March, Transport agents had gone over the “Burtch” site in detail, found it suitable, drew up leasing plans for wartime, and proposed to work out compensation with “each individual owner”³⁵ on the Reserve for annual rent and loss of improvements. The military arrangement was designed to be temporary, and would not diminish the Reserve’s land base in perpetuity. Nevertheless, director McGill stressed that the band council should receive “a full explanation,” and that “an appeal to their well known patriotism” might help to secure their “consent and cooperation.” After all, once the Air Force finalized their

32 DIA to Indian Superintendent, Brantford, 25 Jan 1940, *Ibid*; DIA to DM, DND(Naval/Air), 26 Jan 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7615, f.13034-375, pt.2.

33 DIA to DM, DND(Naval/Air), 26 Jan 1940, LAC, RG 12, v. 2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; DIA to Indian Superintendent, Brantford, 25 Jan 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1. Early wartime arrangements with the Squamish band for Kitsilano reserve lands in Vancouver were held up as a best practice. See P.W. Lackenbauer, “Vanishing Indian, Vanishing Military: Military Training and Aboriginal Lands in Twentieth Century Canada” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calgary, 2003), 158.

34 Randle to McGill, 31 January 1940, *ibid*.

35 Although the reserve was owned by the Six Nations as a whole, individual landholders held location tickets. The implementation of this system of tenure, like much else, seemed to politically divide the Six Nations community. Shimony, 19.

plans they would expect to clear up the details with “the greatest possible speed.”³⁶

On 14 March 1940, the Six Nations Council discussed the airfield matter at a special meeting. Brantford mayor Reginald Waterous, an ardent promoter of the training school who publicly stressed that “all matters must be subservient to the war,”³⁷ attended and placed his services at the federal government’s disposal. There were no military representatives in attendance, so he found himself presenting the Air Force’s case. He had his hands full. The council house was packed with excited band members, who peppered him with questions. Withdrawing to an adjoining room, Waterous and Randle’s deputy (filling in for a sick superintendent) read McGill’s detailed letter to council several times. It generated a “considerable difference of opinion” amongst the councillors, reinforcing the issue’s divisiveness. The chief asked Waterous to address the larger meeting, but the mayor wanted to hear some community discussion first.³⁸

Those with strong objections to the airfield project dominated the conversation. William Smith, a former Six Nations councillor, read the petition he had sent to Ottawa and explained his opposition at length. Waterous tried to “smooth away most of the objections raised” by explaining why the land was needed, but pessimism remained. Band councillors debated the various procedures that should or should not have been taken regarding the site, and lamented the lack of information they had been given. Finally, council took an impromptu poll of property owners to measure their opinion: five were in favour, nine opposed, and two undecided. Rather than face an unfavourable decision, Waterous astutely asked council to postpone their vote until after an Ottawa representative discussed “the exact arrangements” with individual property owners. Council agreed and the mayor effectively bought the federal government time. In a subsequent letter to DND, Waterous recommended immediate action to secure the band’s consent:

During the course of the morning I gathered from the remarks made, that there was a very definite feeling that the Indians would not receive fair treatment as to price, terms, etc., this feeling being based on past experiences. In order to

36 McGill to Randle, 7 March 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3, pt.1; McGill to Smart, 21 Feb 1940; Note to file, undated; Map of proposed layout, 6 March 1940; Superintending Engineer, DoT, to C.A.W., DoT, 12 and 14 March 1940; Deputy Minister to Colonel K.S. Maclachan, Acting Deputy Minister, DND (Naval and Air), 15 March 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

37 Quote from “Duration of War May Prove Too Long, Mayor Says,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 27 October 1939. In December 1939, Waterous was re-elected for the “wartime term.” *Brantford Expositor*, 5 Dec 1939, 1.

38 “Memorandum Dictated ... of a meeting of the Six Nation Council attended by R.J. Waterous,” 14 March 1940, *Ibid.*

THE IRONY AND THE TRAGEDY OF NEGOTIATED SPACE

overcome this feeling I think that the sooner a representative is sent here ... the better it will be. These are farm lands and it will not be easy for those who vacate to secure other suitable lands on the Reserve. These should be got in the very near future and at as early a date as possible.³⁹

Federal authorities agreed, and the DoT quickly despatched Canadian National Railways lands agent H.A. Palmer to meet with the Six Nations and negotiate leases for the airport.⁴⁰

The local Indian council did not wait for Palmer to arrive before reaching its verdict. On 4 April, William Smith raised the airfield issue at a band meeting and the councillors voted 8-4 against its establishment. This decision was not based on "any feeling of disloyalty to the Crown," their resolution explained; the potentially affected locatees were all farmers and it would disrupt their agricultural operations. The airfield would be counter to their interests – regardless of compensation. Council did not feel this refusal would be a major impediment to the war effort, repeating that in an area as large as Ontario there had to be other equally suitable locations. In Ottawa, director McGill did not strike down the resolution, nor did he confirm his agreement. Instead he sought more information. "In the meantime," McGill advised the DoT in careful language, "such further action as may be considered advisable in view of existing circumstances is ... a matter for discussion and decision of your Department."⁴¹

Repeated failures to change the council's opinion posed a problem in the days ahead. "After a perfectly fair, reasonable and friendly discussion," local superintendent Randle seemed prepared to take the Six Nations' refusal as final.⁴² In Ottawa, however, the Aerodrome Development Committee had recently approved the selection and development of the site. Its wartime process was deliberately designed to acquire the best locations without local political interference. The Superintendent of Airways noted that because this was Indian land it was neither necessary nor advisable to acquire it outright as they were doing elsewhere, but even the leasing option seemed much more difficult than anyone had anticipated. "It is evident that if you insist on an air field at Burtch," the chief land surveyor told the lease agent at Transport, "you must deal with the Department of Indian Affairs and expropriate the land. We cannot do anything regarding obtaining leases from the Indians through their local

39 "Memorandum Dictated," 14 March 1940; Minutes of Six Nations Council, 14 March 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.1755, f.63-32 pt.35.

40 Randle to McGill, 15 March 1940; D.J. Allan, Superintendent Reserves and Trusts, IAB, to McGill, 18 March 1940; Smart to McGill, 5 April 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

41 Randle to McGill, 11 April 1940, *Ibid*; Council Minutes, 4 April 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.1755, f.63-32 pt.35; McGill to Smart, 9 April 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

42 Minutes of Special Council Meeting, 10 April 1940, resolution 31, LAC, RG 10, v.1755, f.63-32 pt.35.

Indian Agent.” The Chief of Air Services asked the Department of Justice for its opinion. For his part, McGill, the Director of Indian Affairs, did not want to be implicated in any expropriation, but asked to be advised on developments which he could pass on to his local representative to discuss “intelligibly” with the band.⁴³ With rumours swirling, this seemed the most direct and reliable way to keep the community informed of what was transpiring.

Anxiety at Six Nations grew as newspaper and radio reports proclaimed Ottawa’s supposed plan to expropriate. Readers and listeners were told that the dozen Indian farmers directly affected all opposed the RCAF scheme, and their Council backed them by “unanimous vote.” This was an overstatement, but to readers of national newspapers the band’s dissent must have seemed warranted. Sympathetic articles highlighted the lack of government consultation, as well as an Indian Affairs official’s explanation that “while hundreds of farms have been surveyed in exactly this same way in the search for air sites, other farmers do not live in the same dread of having their land taken from them as the Indians do.”⁴⁴ The *Globe and Mail* portrayed William Smith as “a Mohawk of good education,” chosen by the affected families to act as their spokesman and to present their case to Ottawa. He spoke of treaty rights and loyalty, proclaiming that the Six Nations were “fighting for the same rights for which Canada’s soldiers went overseas to fight.” Convinced citizens wrote editorial letters against the injustice of expropriating Indian lands.⁴⁵

The Indian superintendent’s and newspaper reports suggested that the Six Nations were solidly against the airport. Brantford mayor Reginald Waterous did not believe this captured the essence of what was transpiring locally, and he sent a confidential letter to the director of aviation explaining that it was only a “certain faction” of the band that continued to protest against the airport. His informants suggested that the group known as the “Mohawk Workers” had instigated the fight, and they “seem[ed] to be against everything, particularly the Government.” Waterous also learned that about three dozen band members had held a private meeting to discuss the issue, but only three of them were landholders – at least one of whom was “distinctly in favor of the air-port.” Furthermore, the committee they selected to go to Ottawa to protest consisted of influential Six Nations sovereigntists Frank Miller, William Smith and

43 Chief Land Surveyor and Property Commissioner, Canadian National Railways, to Major C.J. Isbester, Right of Way and Lease Agent, DoT, 12 April 1940 and 18 April 1940; C.P. Edwards, Chief of Air Services (CAS), DoT, to Isbester, 18 April 1940; McGill to Smart, 18 April 1940; Aerodrome Development Committee Meeting No. 19, n.d., LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

44 Randle to McGill, 11 April 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

45 “Indians Withhold Land From R.C.A.F.,” *Montreal Gazette*, 15 April 1940, 16 April 1940; “Indians Refuse to Rent Farms in Air Scheme,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1940; “Indians Voting Against Scheme,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 15 April 1940; Joan Huntley, “Objects to Expropriation of Six Nations Lands,” *Globe and Mail*, 29 April 1940.

Chauncey Garlow, none of whom owned property on the site.⁴⁶ Obviously, the picture that Waterous painted was not black and white, suggesting that this was not simply a dichotomous case of the “Six Nations” opposing the “White government.” Most of the opponents were not landowners. Who was speaking for the locatees that supported the airport? More was transpiring behind the scenes at Six Nations than federal officials realized.

Mayor Waterous recognized that historical divisions and internal band politics had a role in the current controversy, an appraisal that was strikingly absent from the Indian superintendent’s assessments. Factional divisions along national, religious and political lines had always complicated Six Nations politics. Internal cleavages within the Grand River community over the validity of the “Traditional” hereditary versus the “Progressive” elective systems, for example, extended back decades. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Progressive or Reformer (“Dehorner”) faction had petitioned Indian Affairs for an elective council, reasoning that the Hereditary Chiefs were a “detriment to the advancement of the nation” and were undemocratic. Supporters of the Hereditary system responded that the Six Nations were already progressing under their traditional governance structure, and accused the proponents of an elected system of being “half-breeds who were under the influence of local Whites.” Both sides questioned the legitimacy, authority, and voice of the other. Traditionalists who supported the Hereditary Chiefs maintained this line well into the twentieth century, fearing that the election provisions of the Indian Act would negate their treaty rights.⁴⁷

The early interwar period brought the matter to a decisive point. Chief Deskeheh (Levi General), the leader of the Six Nations Hereditary Council, adopted aggressive “hardline tactics” to push the Traditionalists’ sovereigntist agenda. In the early 1920s he deposed rival chiefs from council and fought vociferously against Indian Affairs’ interference in local affairs. Deskeheh and his Traditionalist supporters took their Six Nations sovereignty fight – for an acknowledgement of their national status as allies, not subjects – to the courts, to Britain, and ultimately to the League of Nations in Geneva. These bold methods alienated some chiefs and community members, who organized into a Loyalist Association in 1922 to “straighten out affairs on the reserve and get rid of Levi General and his influence.” Relations between the pro-Sovereigntist Council and senior bureaucrats deteriorated further, and strident Council agitation asserting special Six Nations nation-state status resulted in an impasse. Amidst growing embarrassment nationally and internationally, the DIA aban-

46 Confidential letter, Reginald Waterous to Director of Aviation, DoT, 17 April 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; Trevithick, “Conflicting Outlooks,” 81, 95.

47 Wayne Daugherty and Dennis Madill, “Indian Government Under Indian Act Legislation, 1868-1951” (Ottawa: THRC, DIAND, 1980), 46-50; John A. Noon, *Law and the Government of the Grand River Iroquois* (New York: Viking Fund, 1949), 48-50, 64-5.

doned its longstanding policy of neutrality and deposed the Traditional Hereditary Council in 1924.⁴⁸

The imposed elective system allowed Indian Affairs to reassert some control over the reserve. Reform-minded “Loyalists” amongst the Six Nations, and even government officials, acknowledged that a majority in the community backed the Hereditary Council and harboured deep resentment towards the Canadian government. The “Mohawk Workers” – a political group committed to Indian rights and the restoration of the Hereditary Chiefs and traditional form of Six Nations self-governance – took shape, and continued to promote the confederacy in domestic and international venues wherever possible, emphasizing Six Nations sovereignty and resisting any perceived threat to their remaining political influence. For their part, the Hereditary Longhouse Chiefs continued to assert that they alone represented the legitimate voice of the people.⁴⁹

Six Nations was a complex, politically factionalized community. For his part, Randle’s correspondence reflected his focus on the elected council. In mid-April he convened a special meeting to try to open up a more direct approach to discern community opinions. “After a prolonged discussion in a somewhat excited atmosphere, with a good deal of bitter hostility only just held under control,” Randle finally secured – by the narrowest of margins – a resolution that authorized H.A. Palmer, the Transport representative, to interview individual landholders. This was a major concession, given the council’s previously adamant refusals. Randle hoped that every property owner, “whether for or against the landing field, would by these means have a fair opportunity to judge better the value or the non-value of the proposition to him personally, [rather] than in the heated atmosphere of the Council Chamber.”⁵⁰ This was a remarkably neutral tone, and carefully concealed his personal opinion on the matter.

Palmer’s discussions with the residents allowed the federal government to get a better sense of what was causing all of the local apprehensiveness. Assisted by two Six Nations members, he encountered obvious “bitterness in some cases.” It was not the proposal *per se*, nor the air training program generally, nor a lack of patriotism that seemed to make locatees hesitant to lease their lands. “Really at the back of the unwillingness of the Indians to consent to the landing field,” Randle explained, “is a belief that the suggestion is the

48 Trevithick, “Conflicting Outlooks,” 84, 95-106; Richard Veatch, *Canada and the League of Nations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 91-100; Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 110-34.

49 Trevithick, “Conflicting Outlooks,” 84; Sally Weaver, “Health, Culture and Dilemma: A Study of the Non-Conservative Iroquois, Six Nations Reserve, Ontario” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1967), 76-79, 91; Shimony, *Conservatism Among the Iroquois*; Noon, *Law and the Government*, 61.

50 Special Council meeting report, Ohsweken, 18 April 1940; Randle to McGill, 29 April 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

thin edge of [a] wedge, and then finally though the property is only leased from them, it will never be returned at the conclusion of the war. Every effort has been made by myself to allay these fears but they still persist.” “Inopportune” radio and newspaper announcements had created the impression amongst band members that the field would be built on their lands with or without their consent. Some community members believed that Randle and Indian Affairs were not acting in a frank and forthright manner. In a sharp tone, Randle stressed to his headquarters that lines of communication and “proper channels” were essential. “It is my belief,” he reiterated, “that if the situation is not irritated, that finally we can win the voluntary relinquishment of the property by the Indians, which I am sure the Department will agree is the most desirable way of achieving what is required.”⁵¹

Unfortunately, for federal officials, local irritants were impossible to contain. In late April, seventeen different contractors trod over locatees’ lands in response to a public call for tenders. These violations occurred before Palmer’s negotiations were completed, suggesting to locals that the government’s mind had already been made up. In response to the resulting fury, federal authorities ordered the contractors to cease their inspections for the time being and promptly recalled all of the airport plans. They decided to change the layout to avoid select farms and allow as many residents as possible to occupy their buildings for the duration of the war, in hopes that this would “pacify” some of the most “strenuous objectors.” But too much damage had been done.⁵² The general superintendent of Indian agencies, Martin Christianson, went to Brantford to assist with negotiations, armed with the personal belief that “the quieter we can keep the Indians the better for all concerned.” Although he reassured headquarters that satisfactory negotiations would obviate the need to expropriate,⁵³ the latter course seemed increasingly likely as time wore on.

On 3 May 1940, C.P. Edwards, the Chief of Air Services, documented that Transport’s slow progress might necessitate “expropriation in order to get the work started.” A legal opinion from Indian Affairs supported this option. McGill concluded that “if the Indians persist in their present attitude there is

51 *Ibid.*; “Interviews Indians About Airport Site,” *Ottawa Morning Citizen*, 25 April 1940; “Indian Land Sought: Ottawa Wants Air School on Six Nations Reserve,” *Montreal Gazette*, 25 April 1940.

52 Minutes of Council, 18 April 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1; Palmer to Edwards, 23 April 1940; Randle to McGill, 29 April 1940; Chief Land Surveyor, CNR, to Superintendent of Airways, DoT, 29 April 1940; McGill to Edwards, 30 April 1940; Telegraph, District Airway Engineer, Hamilton, to Civil Aviation, Ottawa, 30 April 1940; District Inspector, Civil Aviation, Toronto, to Controller of Civil Aviation, DoT, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; “Tries Coax Indians Permit Air School,” *Edmonton Journal*, 25 April 1940; “Interview Indians Regarding Property,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 24 May 1940.

53 M. Christianson, General Superintendent of Agencies, to Randle, 1 May 1940; Edwards to McGill, 3 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

ample statutory authority to take over the area desired for war purposes,” referring to the *Indian Act*, *Dominion Expropriation Act*, and the *War Measures Act*.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the final decision would await one last attempt to reach a consensual agreement at Six Nations. Palmer, Christianson and Randle were closest to the front, and each believed that they could still obtain landholder and council consent. Based on agreements Palmer had reached with more than half of the affected locatees – representing more than 60 percent of the land required – he felt that there were still grounds for optimism. Even the Indian Affairs officials conceded that the rental terms were “generous in every shape and form.”⁵⁵

To the government’s chagrin, the Six Nations council on 8 May 1940 again upheld their rejection by a narrow margin. The final campaign to secure decisive local consent to the landing field had failed on account of the “strong minority” of property owners still opposed to it. Palmer and Randle paid tributes to one another and applauded the fairness of the consultative process, but both acknowledged that any further efforts to negotiate with the Indians would be futile. “Apart from the property owners concerned, feeling ran high among the Six Nations people of the Reserve in general,” the superintendent explained, “and there was without question a good deal of bitter and open hostility to the scheme leading to much controversy among themselves and much mistrust and suspicion.” Randle’s comments also showed an awareness of the internal political pressures that council had to balance when determining their own stand on the airfield question:

The members of the Council have all the way through the negotiations behaved well, showing common sense and being fair and reasonable in their arguments and courteous in every way to Mr. Palmer and myself. Nevertheless they were in a most difficult position, assailed by the most bitter opponents whom it is impossible to reason with, who carried with them a lot of those not able to reason themselves. Consequently the Council in making their decision were[,] in my opinion, conscientiously governed by what they felt in the long run the best for good will and orderly progress among their own people on the Reserve.

Palmer summed up their collective opinion when he stated that “everyone agreed that it would be a mistake to attempt to force this project on the Six

54 W. Cory, Solicitor, Department of Mines and Resources (DMR) to McGill, 30 April 1940; McGill to CAS, 1 May 1940; CAS to Mr. Matthews, 3 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

55 Confidential, Palmer to Colonel F.F. Clarke, DoT, Montreal, 4 May 1940; Chief Land Surveyor and Property Commissioner to Superintendent of Airways, 6 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; Randle, Superintendency Report for April 1940, 6 May 1940; Randle to McGill, 9 May 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

Nations Indians.” They recommended that the government pack up its plans for the airfield and take them elsewhere.⁵⁶

Air authorities accepted this local advice and backed down from expropriation. On 14 May, the Deputy Minister of Transport informed National Defence that negotiations had “completely broken down” and that it was “not possible to expropriate the site and, in any case, it would be undesirable, due to the present hostile attitude of the Indians.”⁵⁷ There is no explanation why he deemed it impossible to expropriate; previous Indian Affairs appraisals suggested ample statutory authority, and internal DoT correspondence referred to this possible course of action the previous week. The real rationale seemed to be an unwillingness to coerce the local Indians any further. It would be the Indians’ loss, internal correspondence asserted, with one marginal note callously commenting: “down the rat hole with them.”⁵⁸

The Chief of Air Services “expected that there will be a change of heart when [the Indians] discover that the field is going elsewhere, but the picture will not change if the alternative is OK.” In anticipation of a possible impasse in negotiations with the Six Nations, Transport officials had hastily explored alternate sites in early May. Surveyors turned their attention to private property southwest of Burtch Corners, which had been explored in a cursory manner the previous fall.⁵⁹ This confirmed earlier statements, voiced by Six Nations opponents, that other suitable plots of land existed in the region. Indeed, the RCAF changed its tune and concurred that this new site seemed preferable – it could be purchased rather than leased, and then resold after the war. The Aerodrome Development Committee accepted this recommendation, after being reminded that “the selection of a new site in place of that previously selected was originally made necessary through the Indians refusing to co-operate in the rental of their lands.”⁶⁰ All told, the local resistance had succeeded in denying the air force the use of reserve lands.

For that element within the Six Nations who resisted the airfield, the federal government’s unwillingness to use all of the available legal tools in its

56 Randle to McGill, 9 May 1940; Telegram, McLean to Controller of Civil Aviation, DoT, 8 May 1940; H.A. Palmer, Right of Way Agent, DoT, Toronto, to Clarke, 11 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1; “Indians Vote Against Defence Dept. Plan,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 May 1940. The actual results of the 8 May vote were not recorded.

57 Deputy Minister, DoT to Acting Assistant Deputy Minister (Air), DND, 14 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

58 W. Ross MacDonald, M.P., Brantford, to CAS, 11 May 1940, and Marginalia, 14 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

59 *Ibid*; S.S. Foley, District Inspector, Southern Airways, Hamilton, to Controller of Civil Aviation, DoT, 2 May 1940, 5 May 1940; reply, 3 May 1940; Superintendent of Airways to Chief Land Surveyor and Property Commissioner, 10 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

60 Aerodrome Development Committee Minutes, 4 July 1940, *Ibid*.

wartime arsenal should have represented an undeniable victory. Instead, local protests continued to filter into Ottawa. “Whenever the Canadian Government wants anything from our people, they take it, without any regards of honor,” one petition asserted. This conclusion seems peculiar in light of the government’s decision, as was the petitioners’ characterization of Randle as a man bent on “causing much trouble and disturbance among our People and ignoring our sacred rights.” Understandably, the superintendent had no idea why these individuals were still agitating when the proposal had been explicitly abandoned.⁶¹

Historical overviews often stress how federal officials exploited internal divisions within Indian bands and used coercive “divide and conquer” tactics to get their way.⁶² In this case, the government displayed no such inclination. In fact, some community members were thoroughly dismayed that the government officials had *sold out* their interests to an unruly minority. Resident Nettie Doctor, writing on behalf of several landholders, sent a letter to the local member of parliament immediately following the 8 May meeting. She complained that the council had voted against the scheme, despite the support of thirteen landowners compared to only eight opposed. The former held 496 acres, and the latter group only 304 acres. To her, this seemed very disproportionate.⁶³

Doctor not only questioned the logic behind the council’s decision, but also the character of those Six Nations members who resisted the plan. “The people who hold these 304 acres are not the least bit loyal,” she asserted. Although one woman would lose her home, there was “nothing sentimental” about her opposition to the plan: it was “just a plain case of being bound to stop the air field and thereby hinder the war effort.” The letter writer’s frustration did not end there. “Bill Smith was again the chief speaker at the Council,” she explained, but he was “neither a land owner nor a councillor.” What right did he have to represent the band’s interests? Furthermore, she did not agree with the local officials’ depiction of the meeting as a respectful affair. Apparently, Smith had viciously accused “the government men of bribery and dishonesty [and] openly insulted Mr Palmer and Major Randle.” Her point was clear:

Are you as a government going to let these people rule here or are you going to show them that they must obey the law and help bring about an end to the

61 Similarly, William Smith continued to actively oppose the government’s plans. See Hill to their Majesties, 28 April 1940; “In the Great Spirit We Trust,” Cayuga Longhouse, 4 May 1940; W.J.F. Pratt, Private Secretary to Minister, to Deputy Minister, DMR, 17 May 1940; William Smith to William Lyon Mackenzie King, 17 May 1940; Hill to Crerar, Minister of DMR, 20 May 1940; McGill to Pereira, 10 June 1940; Randle to Secretary, IAB, 20 June 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

62 See, for example, Brownlie, “Man on the Spot,” 67.

63 Nettie V. Doctor, Hagersville, to W. Ross MacDonald, 8 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753, pt.1.

THE IRONY AND THE TRAGEDY OF NEGOTIATED SPACE

present war[?] If they are allowed to triumph in this thing they will sneer more than ever at the Canadian Government. They (the agitators) claim that you can't appropriate and dare not make any arrests.⁶⁴

The government's reputation seemed to be at stake. The official decision not to proceed with expropriation, following her logic, would lead to disorder and undermine government credibility locally.

Isaac Doctor, a Mohawk veteran of the Great War who "maybe [felt] things a little more keenly than non-combatants," believed that the government's decision to go elsewhere was anything but a victory for "loyal" community members. His impassioned letter of 30 May 1940 explained to the federal air minister that the Six Nations reserve was perpetually divided between two rival factions: the "Loyalists" who maintained an allegiance to the Crown and to Canada, and the "Mohawk Workers" who followed "the old hereditary chiefs and do not think we belong to Canada or should have anything to do with the Canadian Government." Most residents had been willing to lease their lands for the war effort, Doctor asserted. The others had fallen victim to lies circulated by the "subversive" Mohawk Workers led by "traitor" William Smith, and were "made [to] believe that someone wants to put something over on them." Unfortunately, no one connected with the military had visited the reserve to disabuse them of this notion.⁶⁵

Doctor's reflective message was not that the government had been overly imposing, but that the majority of landholders had been sold down the river by negligent Indian Affairs officials who backed down too easily. When the elected band council decided against the establishment of an airport at the 8 May meeting, the "self-serving and unpatriotic" spokesman of the Mohawk Workers made the meeting a raucous affair. "Outside influence and bribery" accounted for the negative outcome of the vote, Doctor asserted, and supporters of the airfield had not intervened because they believed the superintendent and inspector "would take the talk for what it was worth and stand by those who were loyal." Doctor and other "Loyalists" visited superintendent Randle to "see what could be done." He had advised them to keep a low profile "until the excitement abated" and to let developments take their course. They had followed his recommendation, knowing that Indian Affairs headquarters could refuse to sanction the resolution. "We thought [Randle] intended to stick by those who are loyal and believe in him and the Govt," Doctor explained. When later they had looked into the matter, they were profoundly disappointed:

64 *Ibid.* For a newspaper perspectives citing "sentimental reasons," see "Indians Reject Air Plan," *Montreal Gazette*, 9 May 1940, and "Indians Spurn Proposal for Air School on Reserve," *Edmonton Journal*, 9 May 1940.

65 Isaac Doctor to Hon. C.G. Powers [*sic*], 30 May 1940, LAC, RG 12, v.2328, f.5168-753 pt.1.

He told us that it was “all off” at his recommendation. He said that he asked the Indian Dept. to let it go. The Mohawks Workers say that he was afraid to go ahead with it. One of our neighbours says Major Randle told him before Christmas that there would be no Airport here as he would not sanction it. It looks as if he is working for the subversive element ... instead of those who are loyal and wish to help their country.

I called on some of the Councillors who voted against it and two of them said that if they thought Canada wanted the field they were more than willing to vote for it. Another one, who is a [Company Sergeant-Major] in the Dufferin Haldemads [*sic*] Rifles said that since the recent turn of events in Europe he wondered if they had done right.⁶⁶

At a time when newspapers documented German armoured columns streaming through the Low Countries and into France, the lack of guidance and confusion prevented the majority of landholders – willing to lease their land – from “doing their bit.” The Six Nations had “always [been] ready to serve their King in time of need,” Doctor reflected, and they would “be very sorry that they turned this chance down when they realize that the country really needed this property.” From his perspective, the decision to back down on the airfield plan was a big mistake. “Please help us to help the Six Nations people to again be proud of themselves and stand on the right side,” he pleaded. Abandoning the Loyalist cause and pandering to the forces of disloyalty would “hinder recruiting and all patriotism on this Reservation,” Doctor warned, and if the government did not support the Loyalists they would no longer “find it pleasant to live here.” His appeal ended with a flourish that reinforced his strong sense of history and resolve for justice. He had been asked “by the loyal land owners to write this letter as a last stand as we feel ... that like Leopold of the Belg[ian]s, Major Randle, as our agent, deserted us in our hour of need.”⁶⁷

Isaac Doctor’s letter outlined a self-described “Loyalist” perspective on what had transpired at Six Nations. The government’s unwillingness to act decisively to acquire the airfield site revealed not only the perceived – and self-imposed – limits to federal power and resolve, but a tangled web of relationships and divisions. It would be easy to misrepresent the opposition encountered at Six Nations as the clear opinion of a besieged and unified community – the portrait painted by the hereditary council and “Mohawk Workers” – that triumphed over the bellicose wishes of the wartime establishment. While this would be a compelling picture of successful Indian agency and the carriage of justice, it would also belie alternative views within the community. Superintendent Randle repeatedly placed the proposal before the Six Nations, so he could be characterized by some as an instrument of government coercion

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Ibid.*

and oppression. To others, he was overly compliant to the alleged voices of disloyalty.

Perhaps Randle's approach represented an appropriate response to countervailing pressures, in which he ultimately convinced the military to take its plans elsewhere in the face of a divisive local debate. In essence, all of these conflicting appraisals could be sustained based on selective readings of the archival record. Certainly Randle was not the "quintessential organizational man" described by Noel Dyck; he did not uniformly throw his weight behind the government's plans. His engagement on behalf of the community, while careful and subdued, carried influence in Ottawa. Although Randle was a "military man" (all the superintendents at Six Nations from 1907-52 had military backgrounds),⁶⁸ he did not uncritically genuflect before the altar of wartime sacrifice and categorically dismiss local Indian concerns. In the months and years ahead, he went on to display similar support when the Six Nations faced the divisive issue of conscription.⁶⁹ His ambiguous approach to local governance issues seemed well suited to the delicate situation at Six Nations, and as the circumstances of the war shifted he – like the band – adapted.

Already the world seemed a very different place by late June 1940. Hitler's forces had conquered Northwest Europe in six short weeks. Canadians were shocked and dismayed at the realization that Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone to face the Axis powers. This revelation hit home in communities all across Canada, including the Six Nations reserve. On 20 June, the elected band council reversed their previous decision by a narrow margin and passed a new resolution expressing their willingness to lease the airfield "in view of the gravity of the situation facing this country and the Empire." This offer was not accepted – Transport had feverishly prepared plans for the new site and was not going to reverse its decision again – but the Six Nations' gesture demonstrated a discernible shift in local opinion.⁷⁰

Canada's "limited liability" war effort was jettisoned that summer, the BCATP thrown into overdrive, and conscription for domestic service intro-

68 For the depictions of the quintessential Indian agent, see Dyck, *What Is the Indian 'Problem'?*, 77 and Brownlie, "A Fatherly Eye," 30, 35.

69 See, for example, LAC, RG 10, v.6769, f.452-20 pt.6; R.S. Sheffield, "'In the Same Manner as Other People...': Government Policy and the Military Service of Canada's First Nations People, 1939-1945" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1995), 94-5, 105.

70 Minutes of special meeting, 20 June 1940; Randle to George E. Wood, M.P., 20 June 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1; "Indians Reverse Airfield Vote," *Toronto Star*, 20 June 1940; "Indian Council Favors Airfield," *Brantford Expositor*, 20 June 1940; "Indians Favor Airport," *Globe and Mail*, 21 June 1940; and "Indians Permit Airfield at Last," *Edmonton Journal*, 21 June 1940. William Smith immediately petitioned to organize a delegation that would visit the prime minister and governor general before anything could go forward. Smith to King, 24 June 1940; Smith to Earl of Athlone, 25 June 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

duced. Compulsory military service caused serious concerns in Aboriginal communities across the country, but most remained committed to winning the war.⁷¹ At Six Nations, for example, the elected council “cheerfully and readily” leased part of its Glebe property in mid-1940 for an army mobilization and training camp. The nominal rent meant foregoing several hundred dollars in annual commercial rent and suggested a newfound spirit of cooperation with military authorities.⁷² Indeed, local men and women continued to enlist in high numbers and the community’s patriotic contributions drew significant media attention.⁷³

After the fall of France, strategic bombing seemed the only short-term strategy to prosecute offensive action, and bombing training became a BCATP mainstay. No. 5 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) opened in Brantford on 11 November 1940, and began to churn out graduates. By the fall of 1941, the scope of training demanded a practice bombing range to serve the school and No. 16 SFTS in Hagersville.⁷⁴ Despite the earlier failure to secure an airfield at Six Nations, air authorities again approached Indian Affairs about a potential lease of reserve lands that October. When surveyed by air, two alternative sites proved unsuitable and a seven hundred acre tract on the reserve seemed the best area for a range in the vicinity.⁷⁵

This time, Superintendent Randle encountered little resistance when he placed the matter before the elected Six Nations council. Their relationship with the air force had evidently warmed. For example, earlier that year the Mohawks had made Group Captain B.F. Johnson, the commanding officer of No. 5 SFTS, honorary chief “Da-Ha-Daha” (“One Who Flies”),⁷⁶ and they had

71 See Michael D. Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle: National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources during World War II* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 37-50; Stevenson, “The Mobilisation of Native Canadians During the Second World War,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1996), 205-226; Scott Sheffield and H. Foster, “Fighting the King’s War: Harris Smallfence, Verbal Treaty Promises and the Conscription of Indian Men, 1944,” *UBC Law Review* 33:1 (1999), 53-74; Hugh Shewell, “Jules Sioui and Indian Political Radicalism in Canada, 1943-1944,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34/3 (Fall 1999), 211-41; Sheffield, *Red Man's on the Warpath*, 71-84. For a telling local testimony, see William F. Powless, “Indian Viewpoint,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 17 July 1943.

72 LAC, RG 10, v.6829, f.503-8-2 pt.1; Memorandum of Agreement, 20 January 1941, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Indian Lands Registry (ILR) instrument X17474; “Military Training Centre on Glebe Property,” *Brantford Expositor*, 13 August 1940.

73 See, for example, “Six Nations Indians With the Dufferin and Haldimand Rifles,” *Brantford Expositor*, 4 January 1941; “Reveal Indians Most Generous,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 31 December 1941; “Six Nations Indians Serve Loyally in Canada’s Forces,” *Ibid.*, 26 June 1942;

74 F.D. Van Luven, “Date Seen Significant For Air School Opening,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 November 1940. For basic overviews of these schools, see Paul Ozorak, *Abandoned Military Installations* v. 1 (n.p.: self-published, 1991), 23-4, 90-1.

75 See correspondence on LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

76 “Group Captain Johnson to be an Indian Chief,” *Brantford Expositor*, 16 May 1941; “Colorful Ceremony at Air Training School as Indians Confer Names,” *ibid.*, 21 May 1941; MacInnes to Randle, 7 October 1941, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1.

THE IRONY AND THE TRAGEDY OF NEGOTIATED SPACE

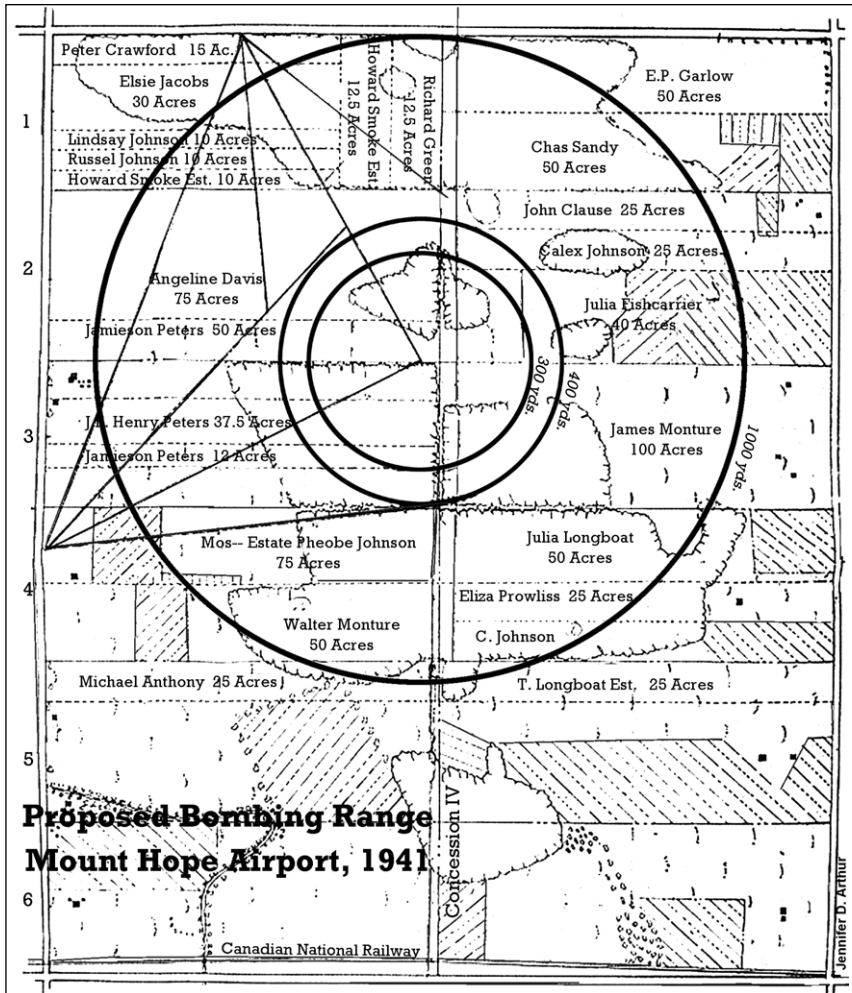


Figure 2: Proposed Bombing Range at Six Nations⁷⁷

77 Map by Jennifer Arthur. Based on DoT, Air Services Branch, "Plan of Property Required for Mount Hope Target," 16 December 1941, INAC, ILR instrument X17478.

already reversed their opposition to military activities on their lands with the change in wartime context. The Six Nations of the Grand River now seemed to confirm their avowed support.

So long as the locatees agreed to air force leasing arrangements, Six Nations council was amenable to these plans. Randle met with the individual landholders at a public meeting that month, and with “very little discussion or discord” arrived at a tentative agreement with nineteen farmers in Oneida Township. Before the end of October 1941, Transport acquired options from each of the residents agreeing to lease their lands.⁷⁸ The elected Six Nations council still wanted to maintain a formal say in the matter and asked to sign a general agreement consenting to the wartime leases. This was irregular, but considering their goodwill Randle felt that this request was more than reasonable. He asked that the Branch consider the council’s position “as a little honour and dignity conferred would help greatly.” On 21 November, council passed a resolution approving the agreements reached with the respective “owners,” and declined when asked if it wanted any of the compensation paid into the general trust funds.⁷⁹ The arrangements had been reached in remarkably short order, and to the apparent satisfaction of everyone directly involved.

Despite explicit landholder agreements regarding the range and the elected council’s clear consent, some supporters of the Hereditary Council convened a separate meeting and passed resolutions against an air force presence. Following the same lines of argument they had used to oppose the airfield the previous year, speaker Chauncey Garlow wrote to the Governor General in late 1941 protesting “any sort of Military training on our Domain,” contending that because the land was held in common no single individual could consent to its alienation. Although the petition again called on the Crown to intervene as “the pledged protector of our people,” Indian Affairs assured the Queen’s representative that Garlow had no connection with the elected band council and was merely a member of a group “opposed to all supervision by the Government of Canada” whose recent activities had “bordered on the subversive.” The elected

78 Randle to Secretary, IAB, 15 October 1941; Yates to McGill, 31 October 1941; Randle, 3 November 1941; MacInnes to Randle, 15 November 1941, *ibid.* Transport authorities obtained three more options in early November, augmenting the range area an additional 87.5 acres. Waterous was not involved in these negotiations, having resigned as mayor in September 1940 to serve as Director of Material Resources in the National War Services Department. “Brantford Mayor Appointed to Important Wart-Time Post,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 26 September 1940.

79 Randle to Secretary, IAB, 3 November 1941, 21 November 1941; Allan to Chief Treasury Officer, 18 December 1941; McGill to Randle, 19 December 1941, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1; PC 9923, 19 December 1941, INAC, ILR instrument X17476.

council had already agreed to a lease and therefore the matter was a fait accompli.⁸⁰

At this point in the war, Indian Affairs would no longer entertain dissenting political opinions from the Hereditary Council in the face of clear landholder and elected council consent. After all, in his notes the local Indian superintendent observed contentment, not dissent, at Six Nations. The final arrangements were put in place without incident and Randle recorded that the “Indian land owners concerned [were] well satisfied with the compensation and rental they received.” In early 1942, about sixty Indians found employment clearing timber off the practice range, and the BCATP schools in the area began to use the range for training operations soon thereafter.⁸¹ Minor issues would arise from time to time that frustrated band members, but no voices or developments questioned or jeopardized the air force’s use of the lands.

* * *

The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs ... In chronicle, this event is simply “there” as an element of a series; it does not “function” as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such

80 Chief Chauncey Garlow, Speaker, Six Nations Council, Onondaga Long House, to Governor General of Canada, 27 December 1941; MacInnes to Pereira, Asst Secretary to the Gov. Gen., 16 January 1942; T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary, IAB, to Randle, 20 January 1942, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1. In his earlier letter, Doctor expressed concern that a “fifth column” might emerge, and noted that some of Smith’s adherents already refused to stand at attention when “God Save the King” was sung. After the government decided to take their airfield elsewhere, Smith and some of his “associates” were indeed suspected of trying to make a radio broadcast from Buffalo to draw attention to their alleged mistreatment over the airport question. Apparently, they had “openly stated” that they intended their message to reach Berlin. In light of the known Nazi propaganda attacks on North American Indian administration, crafted to stimulate sympathy amongst the Indians, this allegation was not insignificant. Smith to King, 24 June 1940; Smith to Earl of Athlone, 25 June 1940; McGill to Randle, 28 June 1940; MacInnes to Randle, 12 July 1940; McGill to Sir Shuldham Redfern, Secretary to Governor General, 18 July 1940, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1. On alleged subversion in North America see Sheffield, *Red Man’s on the Warpath*, 71-73; Kenneth Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 33-60 and Jeré Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 12-33.

81 Six Nations Superintendency Monthly Report, 17 February 1942; E. Burns, Treasury Office, IAB to Mr. McCrimmon, 16 October 1942; G.W. Yates, Assistant Deputy Minister, DoT, to C. Camsell, Deputy Minister, DMR, 20 October 1942, LAC, RG 10, v.7755, f.27032-3 pt.1. Lease no.33993, 25 November 1942, INAC, ILR instrument X17513. It was not until late 1942 that an official lease was executed in Ottawa, but this was an administrative delay rather than a functional one and had little bearing on actual operations. The official lease was for 869.1 acres.

a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.⁸²

Hayden White's reflections on history as narrative help to situate the preceding story in historiographical context. Before historians can mobilize their historical evidence, they "must first *prefigure* the field," White suggests, "as a ground inhabited by discernible figures."⁸³ The subsequent transformation of chronicle into story demands the suppression of "non-events" that do not fit with the author's mode of emplotment, their choice of argument, and the ideological purpose or function of the story they are telling.

After a careful reading of the documentary record, the preceding case study suggests that the RCAP's victimization narrative is misleading. It neglects to mention that a Six Nations faction *successfully* opposed a government proposal to use reserve lands for an airfield, and convinced federal officials to abandon a chosen site. Internal band dynamics, the form and nature of opposition, and the government's decision to back down rather than expropriate, revealed that the military's will did not always prevail. Six Nations opposition was complex and layered. Therefore, the RCAP applied a highly selective and reductionist transformation of the documentary evidence to sustain its usefulness in a Tragic emplotment.

Perhaps most disconcerting, given the prevailing historiography, are marginalized voices such as those of the Six Nations "Loyalists" – local government supporters – present in the archival record. It is striking that Randle never documented their conversations in his correspondence with headquarters. The Indian superintendent and other federal officials devoted time and energy to explaining the rationale of those who opposed the airfield, but concealed assurances they gave to local stakeholders who supported the military's plans. The complexity that the Doctors' letters suggest, however, should not be summarily discarded simply because it complicates the Tragic narrative.

For "Loyalist" community members, the government's *acquiescence* to local critics seemed an incredible injustice that pandered to forces of disloyalty on the reserve and represented an abhorrent display of weakness. If the "political agenda" of Indian agents "was shaped by their personal interest in maintaining Departmental control over the reserves," as Brownlie generalized, then Randle's actions seem strangely anomalous.⁸⁴ Superintendent Randle did not throw his full weight behind the planned airfield, despite it being a clear priority of the federal government. Rather than coercing the elected council to consent, Randle questioned the plans themselves and appeared sympathetic to

82 White, *Metahistory*, 7.

83 *Ibid.*, 5, 30.

84 Brownlie, "Man on the Spot," 85.

the position asserted by anti-government “Mohawk Workers.” During the heated debate, one of the most vociferous critics of the scheme accused the superintendent of being duplicitous. Based on the outcome, it appeared that on-reserve supporters of the airfield actually had the more compelling argument in this respect.

Written correspondence by some members of the Six Nations community suggested that Randle was co-opted by disloyal local elements, and that the superintendent himself was subverting government control. On a politically divided reserve, however, government officials seemed caught in an impossible position. There is no single “Six Nations” voice for the careful observer to rely upon without privileging one local Native perspective over another. And it would be inherently problematic and patronizingly selective to denigrate the voices of those band members who supported a lease by suggesting that they were less “Indian” than those who opposed it, simply by virtue of their willingness to support what they perceived to be a legitimate wartime request.⁸⁵

The RCAP report’s brief description of Six Nations lands serves its broader plotment of Tragedy. The situation is explored and useful only to the extent that it highlights the mechanistic process of pernicious bureaucrats stealing Indian lands. The statement is simple and apparently unambiguous: “In many cases, even a lease was opposed by the band council involved. At Six Nations, for instance, there was a great deal of opposition to the lease of land for a practice bombing range.” Devoid of context, extricated from internal debates, and situated in a teleology of oppression, this simple appraisal serves to highlight ongoing government perfidy and the need for contemporary restitution and restructured relationships.

The history of Six Nations-military relations over the use of lands for air training might be better cast within the trope of Satire/Irony. A contextualist position prioritizes context: why events occurred is best explained “by the revelation of the specific relationships they bore to other events occurring in their circumambient historical space.” The threads that linked the opposition at Six Nations need to be traced outward, rather than reduced or cut off.⁸⁶ Ironic satire challenges the idea that a single anecdote can adequately represent the whole and predicts a liberal rather than a radical ideology, seeing more complexity in past relationships. Cast in an Ironic tone, this case study challenges assumed “laws” in the historiography pertaining to Indian agent behaviour and

85 Scholars like Lisa Tuhiwai Smith might say that these “Loyalist” individuals suffered from a colonized mindset, and thus can be safely ignored or pitied. See, for example, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed, 1999). This attribution of “false consciousness” is limited as an intellectual tool, however, due to its inherently tautological nature – it cannot be “proved” or “disproved” on the basis of evidence, and thus must exist as assertion.

86 White, *Metahistory*, 17-8.

government coercion. Refusing to “provide the kinds of formal coherencies one is conditioned to expect from reading Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy,”⁸⁷ it does not proclaim any certain answers. It does, however, raise implicit questions about assumptions in the prevailing meta-narrative.

A rigid methodological and theoretical framework built solely around agency and resistance to hegemonic actors and structures, narrated as Tragedy, denies complexity and marginalizes aspects of negotiation, compromise, and accommodation. Tragic histories that focus on exposing repressive strategies and practices thus share with most “postmodern” histories a tendency to melt all evidence and plots into a Marxist or leftist-Hegelian narrative.⁸⁸ A framework predicated on binary ethnic dichotomies that contrast “Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, values, and lifestyles,” political scientist Alan Cairns explained, “puts the two sets of people into separate camps, and normally accords the moral high ground to Aboriginal peoples.” By simply reversing the old Euro-Canadian rhetorical reliance on “good and bad,” however, the dominant narrative of Aboriginal-government relations minimizes points of convergence and inhibits appreciation of the “multiplicity of aspirations ... that exist within Native society.”⁸⁹ In this light, the Tragic form seems Ironic indeed.

87 *Ibid.*, 28.

88 F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* cited in Elizabeth Churchill, “Tsuu T’ina: A History of a First Nation’s Community, 1890-1940” (Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary, 2000), 550 en.13.

89 Alan Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 60, 98-99. Cairns takes the latter quote from John Borrows, “Negotiating Treaties and Land Claims: The Impact of Diversity Within First Nations Property Interests,” *The Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 12 (1992), 233. For a more theoretical articulation of this point, see Ortner, “Resistance and Ethnographic Refusal.”