New York Times, 19 June 2000: Journalist James Brooke explained to readers that Indians across the continent were hard at work ‘Stalk[ing] a Silent, Deadly Enemy in the Prairie’ – the dangerous residue of militarism in their own backyards: ‘It is a little known footnote to the military history of North America that when wars loomed in the 20th century, military planners in Canada and the United States repeatedly turned to the native peoples of the West and took control, through leases or outright expropriation, of large swaths of land for bombing ranges ... Brian Lloyd, a former British Army bomb-disposal expert who directs cleanup operations here, said: “In Canada, the military acted like a giant, using Indian land like stepping stones across the country. You find an Indian nation, and you find range contamination.”’ For members of affected communities, the use of their Indian reserves and traditional territories for military training represented more than a footnote. It is part of a ‘treadmill of destruction’ tying militarism to environmental and political injustice.1 With hundreds of millions of dollars involved in outstanding Aboriginal land claims against the military, and after decades of confrontation, the effects of past military activities continue to be felt in the present.

Landscapes are framed by human desire and human activity. They exist as cognitive constructs, dependent upon experience and purpose; they are the ‘intricate intimate intermingling’ of physical and cultural features. Human alterations to the earth – from tangible, physical changes to intangible processes such as naming and categorizing – are works of culture. In a multicultural society such as Canada, the conceptualization and construction of space can lead to both cooperation and conflict. As a result, landscapes are complex and often ambiguous.2 Competition for land, conflicting priorities for its use, and unequal power distributions have made Canada a country of contested spaces and places. Although generally overlooked by historians and geographers, the Canadian military has been an actor in these territorial contests.

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

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

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

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

In the 1990s, the rapid termination of the cold war ushered in promises of a ‘peace dividend,’ resulting in the dramatic reduction of North American armed forces, concomitant defence budgets, and military bases. Some communities have
faced the reduction or closure of their military base, and challenged decision makers with a cacophony of opposition. The most ominous impacts were economic: base closures meant the loss of jobs, population, and direct federal spending in local economies. Downsizing also generated questions about environmental liabilities, political favouritism, future redevelopment, and the loss of community identity.5

For Aboriginal groups claiming the land upon which military bases were situated, base closures represented opportunities to claim or reclaim Crown properties. Several major defence facilities had been established on Indian reserves. Most were situated on traditional Aboriginal territories that the Crown had acquired by treaty or that were still subject to outstanding land claims.6 The military itself was directly implicated in a growing number of claims, and Aboriginal activism in negotiations, through the courts, and on the ground raised a host of legal, political, socioeconomic, and environmental issues. The Department of National Defence/Canadian Forces seemed to be a national institution under siege by scandal, questions of purpose, and constant downsizing. As the military struggled to make sense of an uncertain, post-cold war era, its domestic presence was confronted by the aspirations of increasingly confident Aboriginal groups that sought restitution for past transgressions and asserted their own agendas for a brighter future.

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

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

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

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

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

**Terminology and Language**

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

The term ‘Indian’ carries a range of stereotypes and ideological baggage. When federal and provincial government officials used the word ‘Indian,’ it was the identifier defined by the Indian Act and later embedded in the Constitution. To employ another word in its place is to impart a different consciousness to policy makers than existed at the time.9 Some scholars choose to place the word in quotation marks to reaffirm the constructed nature of the label, but I trust the above explanation makes this unnecessary.

The phrase ‘Aboriginal lands’ held different meanings during the twentieth century. The most obvious refers to Indian reserves, which most non-Aboriginal Canadians assume to be synonymous with ‘Indian lands.’ This usage conforms to a traditional belief that Aboriginal activities should be segregated from non-Aboriginal ones and confined to reserves. Many Aboriginal groups, however, claim rights to vaster ancestral territories, and their land use patterns are not limited to their reserves.10 In recent decades, the non-Aboriginal community has expanded its concept of Aboriginal lands to include non-reserve lands surrendered by treaty, used by Aboriginal peoples for traditional pursuits, or showing evidence of historical occupation. As such, they are often referred to as ‘traditional territories.’

The phrases ‘Indian lands’ and ‘Aboriginal lands’ are tautological in their broadest interpretation – all of Canada could be considered traditional Aboriginal territory. This ambiguity encapsulates the complexity of Aboriginal land rights. More than 100 percent of British Columbia’s land mass is under claim, for example, because different groups’ traditional areas overlap. Because the concepts of
territorial and usufructory rights differ in law and have shifted over time, there can be no fixed definition of 'Aboriginal lands.'

Certainly government definitions, generally limited to reserve or surrendered reserve lands, have been much narrower than those of Aboriginal peoples themselves. Like so much in this study, the chasm between competing positions is telling. The amorphous term 'Aboriginal lands' thus accommodates perspectives that all parties may not acknowledge.

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

A Note on Sources

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

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

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

Furthermore, while opponents of schemes tended to vocalize or document their grievances, supporters seldom did so to the same extent. If events progressed according to plans, and co-operative relationships ensued, stakeholders had little incentive to carefully document these developments. Conversely, bureaucrats tended to pass large amounts of correspondence on problem areas – a function of self-protection and the realities of problem solving in a hierarchical structure. As a result, historians might see only the worst in the archival record: that problems were ubiquitous and harmony comparatively absent. Although the most problematic cases may produce the largest paper trail, they may not be the most representative of government practices or Aboriginal peoples’ responses. Historians read the corresponding gaps or ‘silences’ in the record according to their personal, philosophical, and theoretical predilections, but this sample of case studies suggests that decision making and experiences were more varied than most existing theories would predict. Historian Ken Coates has lamented that the study of
Native-newcomer relations tends to rely on ‘anecdotal and personal rather than systemic’ uses of evidence, and that the field lacks critical methodological debates. If so, the emerging historiographical consensus may be misleading in what it asserts based on theoretical assumptions, rather than what it might reveal using falsifiable evidence.¹⁶