

# Waiting out the War on the Shore of Lake Superior Camp 100 and Neys Provincial Park

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Volume 115, Number 1, Spring 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1098787ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1098787ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

O'Hagan, M. (2023). Waiting out the War on the Shore of Lake Superior: Camp 100 and Neys Provincial Park. *Ontario History*, 115(1), 114–139.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1098787ar>

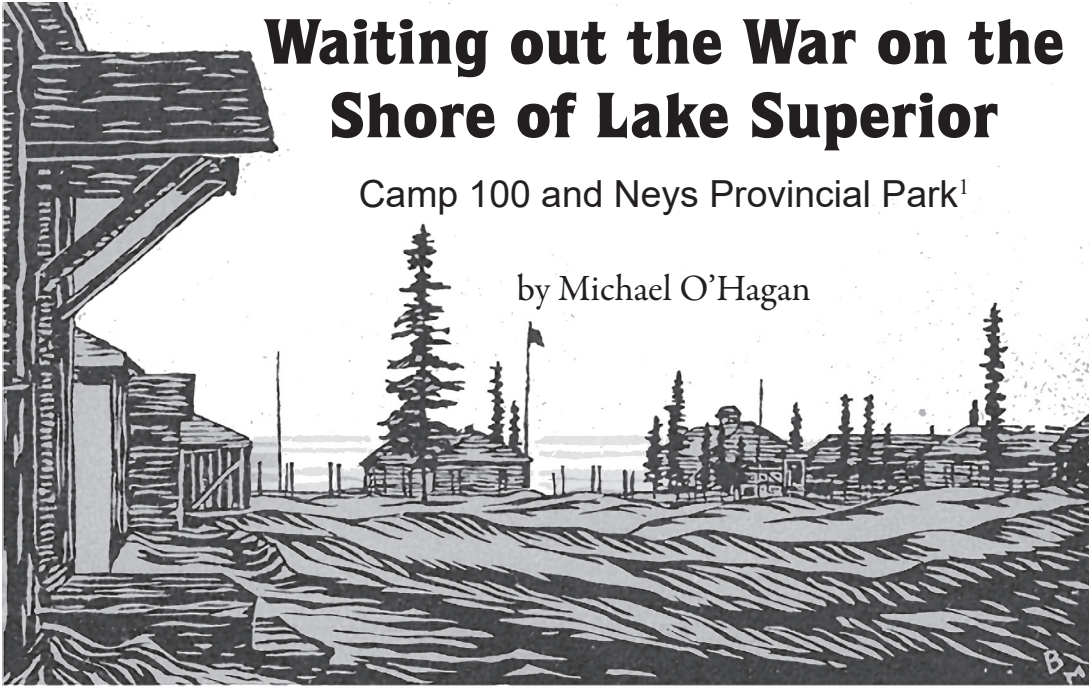
Article abstract

*More than 2,000 combatant POWs, EMS, and Civilian Internees were interned at Camp 100 in Neys Ontario during the Second World War. Camp 100 evolved as the war progressed and as the Department of National Defence adapted its internment operations. The camp was established to simply hold POWs until the end of the war, but over the years, continued to improve its facilities and, eventually, provided prisoners with an array of recreational and educational opportunities to both keep themselves occupied and help prepare themselves for post-war life. The camp was one of the few to hold combatant POWs, EMS, civilian internees, and Japanese-Canadian internees. It therefore provides an excellent case study for Canada's attempt to treat POWs humanely. The camp's final wartime stage as a "Black" camp reveals how Canada attempted to solve the problem of what to do with its thousands of pro-Nazi POWs. Although re-education measures were met with varied success, they were the beginnings of converting former enemies into future allies.*

# Waiting out the War on the Shore of Lake Superior

Camp 100 and Neys Provincial Park<sup>1</sup>

by Michael O'Hagan



*View from within the enclosure at Camp 100, 1941. Linocut print, author's collection.*

A small sign flanked by the remnants of two log booms marks the entrance to Neys Provincial Park along the Trans-Canada Highway, roughly halfway between Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie. From here, a windy road leads to the park's visitor centre, four campgrounds, and a long stretch of Lake Superior shoreline. Although this shoreline has been described as the park's "most outstanding" attraction, the visitor centre reveals another unique feature

of Neys Provincial Park: the remnants of Camp 100, an internment camp built to house hundreds of German Prisoners of War (POWs)—soldiers, sailors, airmen, seamen, and civilians—during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

Covering almost 5,500 hectares of the Coldwell Peninsula and adjacent islands, Neys Provincial Park has welcomed visitors from around the world since its establishment in 1965. Although the park is also known for its

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<sup>1</sup> This article intended to examine the history of Neys from the 1940s through to its establishment as a provincial park in the 1960s, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented access to numerous archival resources, particularly those pertaining to the Japanese-Canadian relocation hostel at Neys and the park's establishment. The article thus focuses primarily on Camp 100 and the POWs held there from 1941 to 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, "Neys Provincial Park Management Plan" (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2004), 3.

## *Abstract*

*More than 2,000 combatant POWs, EMS, and Civilian Internees were interned at Camp 100 in Neys Ontario during the Second World War. Camp 100 evolved as the war progressed and as the Department of National Defence adapted its internment operations. The camp was established to simply hold POWs until the end of the war, but over the years, continued to improve its facilities and, eventually, provided prisoners with an array of recreational and educational opportunities to both keep themselves occupied and help prepare themselves for post-war life. The camp was one of the few to hold combatant POWs, EMS, civilian internees, and Japanese-Canadian internees. It therefore provides an excellent case study for Canada's attempt to treat POWs humanely. The camp's final wartime stage as a "Black" camp reveals how Canada attempted to solve the problem of what to do with its thousands of pro-Nazi POWs. Although re-education measures were met with varied success, they were the beginnings of converting former enemies into future allies.*

*Résumé: Plus de 2 000 prisonniers de guerre combattants, marins marchands ennemis et internés civils ont été internés au Camp 100 à Neys, en Ontario, pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Le Camp 100 a évolué au fur et à mesure que la guerre progressait et que le ministère de la Défense nationale adaptait ses opérations d'internement. Le camp a été établi pour simplement détenir les prisonniers de guerre jusqu'à la fin de la guerre, mais au fil des ans, il a continué à améliorer ses installations et, finalement, a offert aux prisonniers un éventail de possibilités récréatives et éducatives pour les occuper et les aider à se préparer à la vie d'après-guerre. Le camp était l'un des rares à accueillir des prisonniers de guerre combattants, des marins marchands ennemis, des internés civils et des internés nippo-canadiens. Il constitue donc une excellente étude de cas sur les efforts déployés par le Canada pour traiter les prisonniers de guerre avec humanité. L'étape finale du camp en tant que camp "noir" révèle comment le Canada a tenté de résoudre le problème du sort de ses milliers d'internés pro-nazis. Bien que les mesures de rééducation aient connu un succès variable, elles constituaient le début de la conversion d'anciens ennemis en futurs alliés.*

natural beauty and connection to Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris, Ontario Parks has turned Neys' POW past into a defining feature—for a good reason. Neys is the only site of a Second World War internment camp protected within a provincial or national park in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The site received federal heritage designation in 2011, with a monument hon-

ouring Canada's commitment to accept POWs and internees from the United Kingdom. The camp's history has thus been incorporated into interpretive programming, displays, and media, but, like most of Canada's internment history, Camp 100 has yet to be studied in great detail.

Attempts at a historical study of

<sup>3</sup> The locations of several labour projects, or work camps, are located within provincial and national parks, including Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park and Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park and remaining buildings from Camp 30 (Bowmanville) are protected as a National Historic Site.

Neys began shortly after the park's inception, culminating in the Ontario Ministry of National Resources' first—and only—comprehensive narrative: James Mountain's 1974 manuscript, "The Inhospitable Shore." As Department of National Defence files were still classified, Mountain's account of Camp 100 remained incomplete, a factor he was well aware of; "it is somewhat disconcerting," he wrote, "to think that considerably more detail concerning the operation of the Neys camp might be available after the Federal Government lifts its restrictions." He, therefore, intended his account to provide an "adequate foundation for a future, more detailed version," but almost half a century later, that has yet to appear.<sup>4</sup> Ontario Parks still relies on Mountain's incomplete account, supplemented with informal interviews and some cursory studies from amateur historians. Yet, none of these sources rely on the long since-released archival records.<sup>5</sup> The present narrative, in existing literature and Ontario Parks programming, emphasizes Canada's humane treatment, suggesting POWs—mostly "high-ranking" Germans—"were treated and ate well," cut pulpwood for the Pigeon Timber Co., and, after the camp closed and the POWs returned to Germany, were al-

lowed to come back to Canada as immigrants. But the story of Camp 100 was—and is—more complicated than this.

One of the twenty-eight internment camps in Canada during the Second World War, Camp 100 (initially Camp W), was built simply to hold POWs in a safe location far from the front.<sup>6</sup> But as the war progressed, the camp's function evolved. In 1944, Neys was selected to hold some of the most fanatical Nazis in the country and thus became a central part of Canada's effort to classify, segregate, and re-educate POWs. Dividing Camp 100's wartime use into three phases, this article examines the POWs interned at Neys and their experiences to place the camp into the larger context of Canadian internment operations. In tracing the site's wartime and, briefly, post-war history, the article explores how the cultural legacy of Camp 100—or at least aspects of it—has been embraced as a central feature of the park's history.

When war broke out in September 1939, Canada began arresting German civilians deemed threats to national security, interning them at Camp K at Kananaskis, Alberta, and, later, Camp P at Petawawa, Ontario. Canadian internment operations remained

<sup>4</sup> James A. Mountain, *The Inhospitable Shore: An Historical Resource Study of Neys Provincial Park* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Historical Sites Branch, 1974), xi.

<sup>5</sup> See Sylvia Bjorkman, "Report on Camp 'W': Internment Camp '100' North of Lake Superior in World War II," *Ontario History* 89:3 (September 1997), 236–43; Eric Trump, "German POWs in Canada—Camp 100," *La Vale*, 20:6 (May 2014), 42–44; Peter Unwin, *The Wolf's Head: Writing Lake Superior* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Most sources suggest twenty-eight camps as the designations Camp 133 and Camp 10 were re-used. However, as these camps were at separate locations and operated under distinct conditions, I define them as separate camps.



*Members of the Veterans Guard of Canada who staffed Camp 100 at Neys. These were First World War veterans deemed too old to serve overseas but still able to render valuable service on the home front. Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 974.2.4g.*

confined to holding civilian internees and a small number of German Enemy Merchant Seamen (EMS). However, in June 1940, Canada accepted a British request to receive combatant POWs and civilian internees from the United Kingdom. Canada now required more internment camps. The Department of National Defence quickly converted existing facilities, like a former sanatorium and abandoned pulp and paper mills, to hold POWs. Camp R at Red Rock, for example, was built on property formerly owned by the Lake Sulphite Pulp and Paper Company and, opening in July 1940,

held German civilian internees and EMS. But the Department of National Defence also began the construction of two new, 600-man internment camps in Northern Ontario: Camp W (Neys), located adjacent to where the Little Pic River flowed into Lake Superior, was to become an officers' camp, and Camp X (Angler), on the site of Ontario's Highway Construction Camp No. 12, was to hold other ranks (ORs), those below the rank of an officer.<sup>7</sup>

Two hundred kilometres east of Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay), Neys was a Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) siding

<sup>7</sup> Both Neys and Angler had been suggested as locations for possible internment camps by the District Officer Commanding Military District 10, whose district consisted of Manitoba, much of Northwestern Ontario, and most of present-day Nunavut. LAC, RG24, Brig.-Gen. E. de B. Panet to Deputy Minister (Militia Services), 12 July 1940, HQS 7236-48—Director of Internment Operations, C-5393. For Camp R see Ernest R. Zimmermann, *The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior. A History of Canadian Internment Camp R*. Edited by Michel S. Beaulieu and David K. Ratz (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015).



approximately two kilometres inland from Lake Superior.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous peoples had travelled and lived along the shorelines for hundreds of years, and the fur trade and westward expansion brought Europeans to the area in the seventeenth century. Although mining initially brought settlers to the Neys area, pulpwood proved more lucrative. The Pigeon Timber Co. began cutting pulpwood operation at Neys in 1933, later establishing a headquarters and depot at the Neys siding, a rafting camp at the mouth of the Little Pic River, and numerous bush camps further north.<sup>9</sup>

From a security perspective, Neys provided many advantages for an internment camp. The area was well-isolated from the civilian population but remained accessible by rail. Sandy soil would likely deter tunnelling, and with Lake Superior to the south and hundreds of kilometres of dense forest in every other direction, escape was unlikely. Internment authorities also noted that POWs could be used to build the Trans-Canada Highway that was to run north of the camp. There were some drawbacks, including the region's extreme climate—especially in the winter—and the limitations of relying solely on rail access. In the event of a medical emergency or uprising, transportation

difficulties were inevitable. Despite this, authorities decided Neys' benefits outweighed concerns.

Construction of Camp W began in August 1940, and notwithstanding plans to have the camp ready by September, supply and labour constraints pushed the completion date to November. The POW enclosure, an 800ft. x 600ft. compound, included four H-Hut barracks, a kitchen and mess hall, a small hospital, a recreation hut, a barber and tailor shop, and a detention hut. Surrounding this were two ten-foot barbed wire fences, a warning wire six feet within the inner fence, and four guard towers, each armed with a machine gun.<sup>10</sup> Outside the enclosure were separate officer, Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), and other-rank (OR) quarters, an officers' mess, a kitchen and dining hall, an office, a tool stores and guard house, a hospital, a recreation hall, a supply depot, a barn, a garage, a powerhouse, a well, and a water tower with a guard post on top. The total cost was an estimated \$178,965.00.<sup>11</sup> Later additions to the camp included an icehouse, extra officers and OR quarters, a two-sheet curling rink, a POW education hut, and expansions to the guards' messes.

The Veterans Guard of Canada

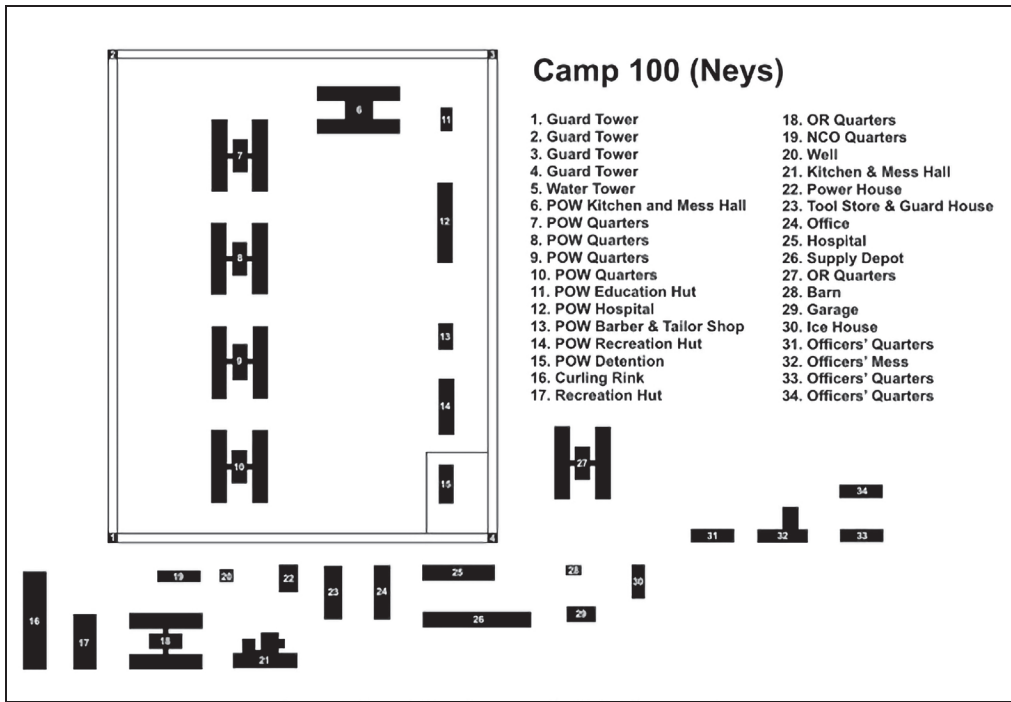
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<sup>8</sup> "Neys" is believed to be an abbreviated version of "Doheyneys," the name of a "sub-rock contractor" working on the line when the siding was established. Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, *A History of Geraldton Forest District* (Toronto: Ontario, Dept. of Lands and Forests, 1963), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Mountain, *The Inhospitable Shore: An Historical Resource Study of Neys Provincial Park*, 37 and 108.

<sup>10</sup> LAC, RG24, Brig. H.J. Riley to Secretary, Department of National Defence, 26 September 1940, HQS 7236-27—Treatment of Enemy Aliens. Schrieber, Ontario, C-5379.

<sup>11</sup> LAC, RG24, Col. D.E.S. to Chief Treasury Officer, 20 November 1940, HQS 7236-26—Treatment of Enemy Aliens. Neys, C-5379.



*Camp 100 as it appeared in 1943. Map by author.*

staffed the camp, a corps primarily composed of First World War veterans deemed too old to serve overseas but who could render valuable service on the home front. At Neys, a permanent camp staff under a commandant administered the camp while a guard company, which changed every three to six months, provided security.<sup>12</sup> Armed guards mounted patrols and manned guard posts and the four towers. Unarmed “scouts” patrolled inside the enclosure to prevent escapes, probed for tunnels, and watched for sus-

picious activity. All were expressly forbidden to fraternize with the POWs.<sup>13</sup>

The first prisoners arrived at Neys on January 25, 1941. Nearly all 241 officers and 199 other ranks were Luftwaffe (Air Force) pilots and crewmen, many of whom had been shot down during the Battle of Britain, with the remainder being Kriegsmarine (Navy) crews. They had just arrived from the United Kingdom and spent the last four days travelling from Halifax by train. They marvelled at

<sup>12</sup> The Canadian Provost Corps initially administered the camp until the Veterans Guard of Canada assumed responsibility for internment camps in June 1941.

<sup>13</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny, “Standing Orders—Camp 100,” p.2(a), 15 August 1945, HQS 7236-69-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Camp Standing Orders, Internment & Refugee Camps—Neys, C-5396.

Canada's size, with Luftwaffe pilot Eckhart Priebe recalling, "To us, it seemed, it would never end. Was there a country that big?" Arriving at Neys, the question "where were we?" was met with a simple response from a trainman: "We are in the middle of nowhere."<sup>14</sup>

The stark contrast to the world they had left behind continued as the POWs walked to the camp in what one described as "a kind of cold that few of us had ever experienced before." "We felt bewildered," Luftwaffe pilot Ulrich Steinhilper recalled, "by this new set of experiences and perceptions which assaulted our senses. The only comfort lay in glancing at the guards and realizing that somebody did manage to live here."<sup>15</sup> As they entered the enclosure and the gates closed behind them, Steinhilper and his comrades began to take in their new "home."

Treated in accordance with the *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 27 July 1929*, more commonly known as the 1929 Geneva Convention, POWs were entitled to a series of rights and protections to ensure fair and humane treatment. Prisoners in

Canada received monthly pay or allowances based on rank, were permitted to send and receive mail, and the Convention granted one POW to serve as the camp spokesman to represent the POWs in discussions with the Detaining Power and the Protecting Power, in this case, the Swiss Consul.<sup>16</sup> Medical care at Neys was to be provided by POW doctors and orderlies staffing the enclosure hospital or by visiting Canadian military physicians and dentists. Serious cases were to be transferred to Port Arthur.

Although the camp was well within the requirements of the Geneva Convention, it was, Priebe recalled, "not exactly a prisoner's dream."<sup>17</sup> The officers were dismayed to discover sparsely furnished barracks, shared living quarters, and no partitions between the toilets, accommodations atypical for officers' camps; even the "so-called recreation room," according to the spokesman, was "just a bare room containing, with the exception of a piano and a few primitive benches, nothing at all, and therefore absolutely unsuitable for 'resting.'"<sup>18</sup> Officers quickly forwarded complaints to camp staff and the Swiss Consul, and the POWs even

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<sup>14</sup> Eckhart J Priebe, *Thank You, Canada: From Messerschmitt Pilot to Canadian Citizen* (West Vancouver: Condor Pub., 1990), 85.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Steinhilper and Peter Osborne, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo: The Story of Germany's Great Escaper* (Bromley: Independent Books, 1991), 108.

<sup>16</sup> In its capacity of Protecting Power, representatives from the Swiss Consul maintained correspondence with and inspected camps across the country to ensure the detaining powers adhered to the Convention. See "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929.," International Committee of the Red Cross, <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305>> (accessed 7 May 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Priebe, *Thank You, Canada*, 86.

<sup>18</sup> LAC, RG24, Col. H. Stethem to Adjutant-General, Department of National Defence, 1 May 1941, HQS 7236-35-Policy-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Camp W, Neys, Ont., C-5387.



embarked upon a hunger strike until improvements were made.

The reciprocal nature of internment in the Second World War meant that failure to accommodate some requests could result in repercussions for Allied POWs in Germany. Staff at Neys thus agreed to improve accommodations, but, as Director of Internment Operations Colonel Hubert Stethem noted in one report, not all complaints were justified:

They (the officers) are consistently endeavouring to provoke the authorities as much as possible, and show little or no cooperation. They objected to their transfer to Canada; they objected to the location of the camp, as they considered it should be situated close to one of the large centres, and they made various protests to the Protecting Power... The attitude of these officers is so provocative that it is impossible to ascertain any concrete or satisfactory reason for their actions.<sup>19</sup>

Though authorities thus dismissed many complaints, one was justified. Officers' camps were normally allotted a group of ORs to work as orderlies, batmen, and kitchen staff, but with 199 at Neys, the ORs far exceeded the usual complement. After numerous complaints, authorities transferred all but sixty-five ORs to Camp E (Espanola) in March, but the transfer failed to solve Neys' biggest problem: it was ill-suited as an officers' camp.<sup>20</sup> Considering the semi-private and private accommodations and

superior facilities Canada's other officers' camps offered, authorities began reconsidering Camp W's purpose.

In the meantime, the POWs adapted to their new surroundings, but, as Steinhilper explained, this was not an easy transition.

[Internment] was such an abrupt contrast for us. The Luftwaffe aircrew had experienced the ultimate freedom—that of the skies. The Kriegsmarine men had also roamed the vast expanses of the sea and had felt that freedom. Now, for all of us, the furthest we could go was the 700 metres around the perimeters of the compound. I suppose I quickly developed a sympathy with the lions and cheetahs now in our zoos who had once enjoyed the freedom of the African plains and now spent their days pacing up and down behind the bars of their cages, trying to make some sense of the faces that looked in on them from the outside.<sup>21</sup>

Trapped on the shore of Lake Superior, most tried to make the best of it. Priebe described, "We had to console ourselves with beautiful sunsets, brilliant northern lights and the daily whistle of the CPR transcontinental train..., a constant reminder that somewhere behind the miles of bush, rock, lakes and blackflies was the great wide world."<sup>22</sup>

The arrival of recreational supplies did much to boost morale at Neys. International aid organizations, namely the International Committee of the

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in John Joseph Kelly, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947" (Master's thesis, University of Windsor, 1976), 99-100.

<sup>20</sup> LAC, RG24, Col. H. Stethem to Col. C.N. Coates, 17 March 1941, HQS 7236-91-1-100-T.E.A.—Visits by Representative of Protecting Power to German P/Ws-Neys, C-5413.

<sup>21</sup> Steinhilper and Osborne, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo*, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Priebe, *Thank You, Canada*, 94.

Red Cross (ICRC) and the War Prisoners' Aid (WPA) of the YMCA, dedicated themselves to improving the lives of POWs, with the ICRC focusing on camps' living conditions and the WPA on recreational, educational, and religious needs. With this support, prisoners established a small orchestra, choir, and theatrical troupe to entertain their comrades, while a film projector from the WPA allowed POWs to hold regular showings. More athletically inclined prisoners turned to sports, namedly soccer and handball, but soon discovered the enclosure's sandy soil hampered these activities. In July 1941, the commandant permitted groups of POWs—"honourbound" not to escape—an hour of supervised exercise along the beach. Some braved the cold waters while others remained content with a brief respite from the enclosure.<sup>23</sup>

Although no prisoners took advantage of this relative freedom to escape, the subject was very much on the mind of many. Several had made attempts during the train voyage from Halifax, with one, Franz von Werra, succeeding in evading capture.<sup>24</sup> At Neys, POWs established the "Ausbrecherkomitee" (the Escape Com-

mittee), which required escape plans be submitted and evaluated on their feasibility as well as prisoners' linguistic ability, physical condition, and contacts in the still-neutral United States.<sup>25</sup> Prisoners were aware success was marginal, but escape served two undeniable benefits: it provided prisoners with a purpose and allowed them to remain active participants in the war. Tunnelling began almost immediately, with POWs digging through deep snow drifts, but a sudden bout of warm weather that revealed the tunnels thwarted their efforts. Undeterred, they resumed tunnelling once the ground thawed and, at one point, had at least three tunnels under construction. Guards, aware of these efforts, used large corkscrew-like devices to probe the soil for tunnels to attempt to catch those responsible and confiscate their equipment.<sup>26</sup>

While guards succeeded in preventing most escape attempts, Neys' environment foiled others. During a blizzard, for example, the Ausbrecherkomitee forbade POWs from attempting an escape as they believed it suicidal to navigate in the "freezing and totally disorienting nightmare of freezing snow and ice."<sup>27</sup> The few POWs who managed to break out were

<sup>23</sup> LAC, RG24, No. 10 "A" and 10 "B" Coy., Veterans Guard of Canada, War Diary, 7 July 1941, Part 1, Vol. 15367,

<sup>24</sup> Jumping from the train near Smith Falls, Ontario, von Werra crossed into the still neutral United States, where the German Consul eventually smuggled him into Mexico. Travelling by ship to Spain, he returned to Germany in April 1941. He returned to active service but disappeared over the North Sea in October 1941. See Kendal Burt and James Leasor, *The One That Got Away* (New York: Random House, 1957).

<sup>25</sup> Steinhilper and Osborne, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo*, 120-21.

<sup>26</sup> LAC, RG24, D.D.E.S. to D.E.S., 16 June 1941, HQS 7236-35-Policy-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Camp W, Neys, Ont., C-5387, RG24, LAC; *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

all recaptured in a matter of days, while one POW, Lt. Martin Müller, was shot and killed during his escape. Müller, who had already been caught in two tunneling attempts, managed to escape from the guard room in the early morning of 30 June 1941, but, after evading his pursuers throughout the day, guards finally caught up to him twenty-five kilometres west of camp. Müller, ignoring orders to surrender, attempted to flee but was shot and killed.<sup>28</sup>

Though no POWs escaped from Neys, their time there was cut short thanks to the completion of a new officers' camp, Camp 30, near Bowmanville, Ontario. In November 1941, the POWs packed their belongings and most of their escape equipment, concealed in the false bottom of a box of books. They had no choice but to abandon a new—and undiscovered—tunnel but hid cryptic clues throughout the camp for the next occupants to find.<sup>29</sup> The 246 officers and

thirty-five ORs left Neys for Bowmanville on 22 November 1941, with the last thirty ORs leaving for Camp 23 (Monteith) the following day.<sup>30</sup>

The camp—now renamed Camp 100<sup>31</sup>—began its second phase with the arrival of 597 German Enemy Merchant Seamen (EMS) and Civilian Internees on 26 November 1941, from Camp 23 (Monteith).<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the previous occupants, they were all non-combatants. The EMS—crewmembers of civilian ships belonging to enemy nations—had served aboard various German merchant vessels: the *Pomona*, seized at the London docks after Great Britain declared war on 3 September 1939; the *Bahia Blanca*, which sunk after hitting an iceberg near Iceland; and the *Cap Norte*, captured by the HMS *Belfast* while returning to Germany disguised as a Swedish vessel.<sup>33</sup> Nearly all the civilian internees had been detained in the Unit-

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<sup>28</sup> Müller was buried at the POW cemetery at Angler, alongside the graves of those killed during an escape attempt from that camp in April 1941. These graves were relocated to Kitchener, Ontario in the 1970s as part of an effort to consolidate the graves of German POWs in a single cemetery. LAC, RG24, "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry assembled at Internment Camp 'W', Neys, Ontario on the 3rd July 1941," n.d., HQS 7236-80-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Court of Inquiry—Neys, C-5397.

<sup>29</sup> Steinhilper and Osborne, *Ten Minutes to Buffalo*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> LAC, RG24, "Internment Operations, Numbers Interned, Camp 100," 22 and 29 November 1941, HQS 7236-53—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—I.O. 8A & 8B—Correspondence Re- Returns—Strengths—Neys, C-5374.

<sup>31</sup> The use of letter designations for internment camps was abandoned in favour of a number system in October 1941, with the military district number serving as the first one or two digits. Camp "W" located within Military District No. 10, thus became Camp 100. LAC, RG24, Letter from Lt.-Col. E.H. Minns, 15 October 1941, HQS 7236—Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368.

<sup>32</sup> LAC, RG24, "Internment Operations, Numbers Interned, Camp 100," 29 November 1941, HQS 7236-53—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—I.O. 8A & 8B—Correspondence Re- Returns—Strengths—Neys, C-5374.

<sup>33</sup> "Empire Merchant (British Motor Merchant)," U-Boat.net, <<https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/ship/464.html>> (accessed 31 March 2021); "FLEEING NAZI SHIP SUNK BY ICEBERG," *New York*



*German civilian internees and EMS at Camp 100 in 1942, with Lake Superior in the background. Rudolf Müller photographs, Author's collection.*

ed Kingdom. Some, like Rudolf Müller, had left Germany when the Nazis rose to power but were deemed suspect regardless of where their loyalty lay, while others, like high-ranking Nazi Party member Edwin Gülcher, were staunch Nazis and considered “exceptionally dangerous.”<sup>34</sup>

As non-combatants, the EMS and civilian internees generally proved less troublesome than the combatant POWs they replaced, for they did not feel they had a duty to escape or resist authority. Most focused on finding ways to pass the

time for, as EMS Heinz Blobelt recalled, “The only way to endure life in a POW camp is to always have a task to complete.”<sup>35</sup> Most turned to work, studies, and sports, activities made possible with the help of the WPA and ICRC.

The new prisoners wasted no time in preparing the camp to their liking. Educational courses at Camp 23 (Monteith) had provided POWs opportunities to improve their education in preparation for post-war life, so establishing educational facilities at Neys became a top priority.

*Times*, 12 January 1940; “The Belfast Boarding a German Merchant Ship,” Imperial War Museums, <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/38874>> (accessed 31 March 2021).

<sup>34</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.G. Carruthers to HQ, MD2, 27 June 1945, HQS 7236-47—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Returns to Britain and Releases, C-5392,

<sup>35</sup> Heinz Blobelt, “Recollections of a Former Prisoner-of-War,” 3 September 1996, Thunder Bay Military Museum (Thunder Bay, ON) in the file, Prisoner of War Camps, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society.

Only a day after their arrival, prisoners built two classrooms in the dining hall and the “University of Neys” was born. Classes began 2 December and almost half the camp enrolled in courses over the following months. Lessons taught by the prisoners were divided into four categories—Technical, Nautical, Highschool, and Modern Languages—while correspondence courses offered through the University of Saskatchewan provided additional offerings.<sup>36</sup> The POWs quickly outgrew their facilities, prompting them to build an education hut in the compound in the spring of 1943.<sup>37</sup>

Sports also proved especially popular, and during the winter months, POWs flooded part of the enclosure to create separate rinks for hockey and skating. Equipment was either hand-made or provided by the WPA or ICRC. As the snow and ice melted in the spring, the POWs were dismayed to discover the sandy soil was ill-suited for summer sports, but, undeterred, they set to work to improve the

grounds. In time, they established an improvised soccer field and even succeeded in building a tennis court.<sup>38</sup> Continuing the practice of parole walks, the commandant permitted supervised hikes and swimming parties, a welcome break from life within the enclosure.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to improving the sports grounds, prisoners turned to hobbies, including gardening. In addition to planting grass and trees, they added flower beds, gardens, and blueberry patches, which not only helped supplement the camp’s kitchens but contributed to both the “practical beautification” of the camp and reducing drifting sand.<sup>40</sup> In September 1943, the commandant reported “artistic” flowerbeds and thickets, green lawns with “rustic railings,” had now “displaced the stretches of desert sand.”<sup>41</sup> Gifted craftsmen, converting the detention hut into a hobby shop, busied themselves in art and handicraft, including painting, woodcarving, sculpting, metalwork, linoleum cutting, and knitting.

<sup>36</sup> Course offerings included Training for Mate on Big Ship, Mate on High Sea Fishing, Ship’s Engineer, Ship-Machinists, Second-Machinists German, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, English, French, Spanish, Gymnastics, Latin, and Swedish. University of Toronto Archives, Hermann Boeschstein Fonds, H. Boettcher, “German Camp—School, Canada, Camp 100, Report of the time from 29 June 1940 to 1 June 1942,” n.d., B1984-0014/001 (09)—Davis Reports 1942-43.

<sup>37</sup> University of Toronto Archives, Hermann Boeschstein Fonds, Dr. Jerome Davis, “Report of Work in the Canadian Internment Camps During the Months of April, May and June 1943,” n.d., B1984-0014/001 (10)—Reports—Boeschstein and Others 1943.

<sup>38</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director POW, 3 June 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.

<sup>39</sup> Archives of Manitoba, Consulate General of Switzerland in Canada, “Memorandum concerning Inspection of Camps 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 31 and 100 during October, 1942,” 3 November 1942, 7. POW—Swiss Consul/External Affairs Reports—Corresp, 1942–1945, Volume 1, MG6E2—Canada—National Defence—Streight, Harvey N. (Col.).

<sup>40</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director POW, 7 July 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.

<sup>41</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director POW, 6 September 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.



*Max Wadebul with Mischka. Rudolf Müller photographs, Author's collection.*

Lacking ways to showcase and sell their work, they went so far as to request delegates give advance notice of visits so proper exhibitions could be arranged.<sup>42</sup>

In their free time, POWs took in concerts and performances by the camp's small orchestra and theatrical group or watched films provided by the WPA. Pets also became an important aspect of POW life, providing POWs with much-desired companionship. Most camp animals were cats and dogs from Monteith, but the POWs also acquired a black bear, whom they named Mischka.<sup>43</sup> Her origins are unknown, but she became a popular addition to the camp and lived with the POWs in the enclosure.

Despite opportunities for recreation and education, not all POWs were content at Neys. In mid-1943, for example, seven elderly EMS asked to be exchanged or moved to another camp "subject to less sudden and violent changes in temperature."<sup>44</sup> A few tried to escape, but these attempts proved rare. In June 1943,



guards discovered early signs of tunneling under a hut, resulting in two POWs being sentenced to twenty-eight days' detention.<sup>45</sup> The EMS and internees never did find or decipher the clues to the tunnel left behind by the officers in 1941, but the guards finally found and destroyed it in May 1942.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> University of Toronto Archives, Hermann Boeschstein Fonds, Dr. B.P. Spiro, "Report–December 1942–January 1943," n.d., B1984-0014/001 (09)–Davis Reports 1942-43.

<sup>43</sup> "Mischka" has been frequently misidentified as "Nellie," one of two bears at Camp 23 (Monteith). University of Toronto Archives, Hermann Boeschstein Fonds, Dr. B.P. Spiro, "Report–October–November, 1942," n.d., B1984-0014/001 (09)–Davis Reports 1942-43.

<sup>44</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director, POW, 15 June 1943, HQS 7236-91-1-100–T.E.A.–Visits by Representative of Protecting Power to German P/Ws–Neys, C-5413.

<sup>45</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.G. Dorval to Director, POW, 21 June 1943, HQS 7236-44-100–Treatment of Enemy Aliens–Escape Plans & Correspondence–Neys, C-5389.

<sup>46</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. R.H. Duvar to DOC MD10, 25 May 1942, HQS 7236-35–Policy–Treatment of Enemy Aliens–Camp W, Neys, Ont., C-5387.

The primary complaint at Neys remained a lack of paid work. A small number of POWs were employed to help keep the camp operational, but more of them wanted employment than there were opportunities available. As the POWs remained under British authority, Canada had not yet approved outside work, a decision that frustrated many. Even the Swiss Consul lamented that Canada was not taking advantage of this cheap labour.<sup>47</sup> A solution presented itself when Camp 42 (Sherbrooke) began employing EMS and civilian internees in workshops producing articles ranging from boxes to army huts. Over half of the 639 POWs at Neys volunteered, most citing limited work, severe winters, and the inability to play sports as their reasons to leave.<sup>48</sup> Twenty-six civilians and 316 EMS were transferred to Sherbrooke in January 1943 and replaced by 348 EMS.<sup>49</sup> Although most of these new arrivals had declined work, the coming months would prompt many to reconsider.

By mid-1943, prisoners at Neys were approaching their third or fourth year of internment. Germany's defeat in North Africa, the subsequent Invasion of Sicily, and Allied bombing campaigns were

shaking hopes of a German victory and an early end to the war. As increasing numbers of POWs across the country requested work, Canada finally approved the employment of POWs in voluntary, outside work, primarily in the struggling agricultural and logging industries. Although eager, POWs were not willing to accept all types of work. A proposal to use EMS from Neys in gold mining, for example, was initially met with enthusiasm, but the 20¢ per day wage proved an insufficient incentive for them to leave camp for harsher living and working conditions.<sup>50</sup> The proposal was shelved; however, the POWs soon received a more attractive offer.

In August 1943, the Pigeon Timber Co. requested to employ 300 POWs from Camp 100 to cut fuelwood on its nearby limits. The Department of Labour, deeming the work appropriate, approved it, and 150 volunteers started working on 7 September. The POWs, ferried from Camp 100 to the worksite every day, worked eight-hour days for 20¢ and had a half cord quota per man, with a 10¢ bonus for each additional quarter cord up to a daily maximum of 50¢.<sup>51</sup> The work prompted a significant

<sup>47</sup> Archives of Manitoba, Consulate General of Switzerland in Canada, "Memorandum respecting POW and Internee Camps inspected in March, 1942," 30 March 1942, 7. POW-Swiss Consul/External Affairs Reports-Corresp, 1942-1945, Volume 1, MG6E2-Canada-National Defence-Streight, Harvey N. (Col.).

<sup>48</sup> LAC, RG24, Translation of letter from Carl Witt to Consul General of Switzerland, 31 May 1942, 5-2-2-P/W. Personnel-U.K. P/W's & Internees-Work and Employment, Volume 6590.

<sup>49</sup> LAC, RG24, "Numbers Interned, Camp 100," 9 January 1943, HQS 7236-1-10-100-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-I.O. 8A & 8B-Correspondence Re- Returns-Strengths-Neys, C-7374.

<sup>50</sup> LAC, RG27, E.S. Doughty to Col. Fordham, 5 June 1943, File 611.1:21-3-Prisoners of War Labour Projects-Policy, 1943-1944, Vol. 156, T-10128.

<sup>51</sup> LAC, RG24, Col. H.N. Streight to Major Barton, 16 September 1943, HQS

increase in morale, with POWs grateful to be outside the enclosure, even for the day. A month in, Commandant Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval reported,

The exercise of body and mind in the typically German deep appreciation for the natural beauty of the Virgin forest in which they have to cut even roads of approaches resulted in very sincere expressions of appreciation of this opportunity to get themselves fit again to take their places in society as productive workers once a war is over.<sup>52</sup>

The program's success prompted the company to propose transferring 100 POWs to live and work in one of its bush camps north of Neys. The Department of Labour agreed, and 108 selected volunteers left for Pigeon Timber Co.'s Camp 77 in the first two weeks of November.<sup>53</sup> No different from those employing Canadian woodcutters, Pigeon Timber Co.'s camps were simple and rustic, with POWs generally living in log or panel buildings with no electricity or running water. Security remained minimal, with kilometres of forest replacing the barbed wire fences and a small detachment of

guards to supervise. As an added incentive, woodcutters received 50¢ per day.<sup>54</sup> Prisoners praised the relative freedom of bush life in letters mailed to Germany and reports sent back to Camp 100, reports which netted additional volunteers, but those remaining at Camp 100 soon began preparations to leave.

As part of an effort to consolidate camps and make room for POWs arriving from overseas, EMS from across Canada were to be consolidated at Camp 23 (Monteith) in late 1943.<sup>55</sup> Reactions proved mixed. Some EMS were excited to be reunited with friends and shipmates, while others regretted "abandoning" the hard work they had done improving the camp and "The University of Neys" with a library of 10,000 books, many of which were being left behind for the WPA.<sup>56</sup> Regardless, on 30 November 1943, 605 EMS and one internee set off for Camp 23 (Monteith) and nine internees for Camp 22 (Mimico).<sup>57</sup> Those working for the Pigeon Timber Co. remained in the bush but now came under the administration of Camp 23 (Mon-

7236-34-3-16-T.E.A. Dept. of Labour-Work Project-Pigeon Timber Coy. Ft. William, C-5383, RG24, LAC; Col. H.N. Streight to Commandant, Neys, 9 October 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-16-T.E.A. Dept. of Labour-Work Project-Pigeon Timber Coy. Ft. William, C-5383.

<sup>52</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director POW, 5 October 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-100-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Intelligence Reports & Correspondence-Neys, C-5416.

<sup>53</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.G. Dorval to OC, No. 22 Coy., VGC., 5 November 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-16-T.E.A. Dept. of Labour-Work Project-Pigeon Timber Coy. Ft. William, C-5383.

<sup>54</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.G. Dorval to Director, POW, 6 November 1943, HQS 7236-34-3-16-T.E.A. Dept. of Labour-Work Project-Pigeon Timber Coy. Ft. William, C-5383.

<sup>55</sup> LAC, RG24, Col. H.N. Streight to D.A.C., 22 June 1943, HQS 7236-Policy, Treatment of Enemy Aliens, C-5368. (C5368\_4993).

<sup>56</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. C.O. Dorval to Director POW, 29 November 1943, HQS 7236-94-6-100-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-Intelligence Reports & Correspondence-Neys, C-5416.

<sup>57</sup> LAC, RG24, "Internment Operations, Numbers Interned, Camp 100," 4 December 1943, HQS 7236-53-Treatment of Enemy Aliens-I.O. 8A & 8B-Correspondence Re-Returns-Strengths-Neys, C-5374.

teith). Although the company would continue to rely heavily on POW labour, Camp 100 provided no further bush workers; more POWs instead came from Camp 23 (Monteith), Camp 132 (Medicine Hat), and Camp 133 (Lethbridge). Camp 100, empty and surplus to requirements, closed on December 15, 1943.

Camp 100 remained empty for the next eight months, but its third and final wartime phase began with its reopening on 15 August 1944. Two factors led to this result: the arrival of thousands of POWs following the D-Day landings, and a nationwide attempt to classify, segregate, and re-educate POWs. Up until 1944, Canada had focused on detaining POWs. However, as the war turned in the Allies' favour, authorities were now tasked with finding effective methods not only to classify prisoners according to their political leanings but also to re-educate pro-Nazis to become cooperative, democratic citizens in a post-war Germany.

For the duration of the war, internal pro-Nazi, Gestapo-like groups controlled most internment camps in Canada. Internment authorities referred to these pro-Nazis as "Blacks," with anti-Nazis designated as "Whites" and those

in between as "Greys." To combat Nazi influence, the Department of National Defence established the Directorate of Prisoners-of-War Intelligence—known as MI7—and tasked it with the political classification, segregation, special investigations, and re-education of POWs.<sup>58</sup> With thousands of prisoners arriving in Canada in the latter half of 1944, authorities hoped to disrupt Nazi influence in Canada's largest camps, Camps 132 (Medicine Hat) and 133 (Lethbridge), by transferring the leaders and other influential POWs to a single camp. Empty and suitable for the task, Camp 100 became Canada's first "Black" internment camp for other ranks.

In mid-1944, intelligence officers at Medicine Hat and Lethbridge began reviewing personnel files, censorship reports, and information obtained from anti-Nazi informants, eventually identifying 896 Blacks in Camp 132 and seventy-nine in Camp 133.<sup>59</sup> Adjusting for Camp 100's limited capacity, 420 prisoners from Camp 132 and sixty from Camp 133 were transferred to Neys, arriving on 13 September 1944.<sup>60</sup>

Who were these prisoners? As of November 1944, there were two medical officers, 464 ORs, and two customs officials in Camp 100, with an average age of just

<sup>58</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. A.G. Wygard, "History of the Organization, Functions, and Operations of MI 7," 28 February 1946, HQS-S9139-7-P/W. Classification—M.I. 7 Policy, C-8437.

<sup>59</sup> The difference between the two camps is not an indicator of the level of Nazi influence in Medicine Hat but instead an indicator of how intelligence-gathering and classification varied from camp to camp. LAC, RG24, Col. R.O. Bull to GSO3 Intelligence, HQ MD13, 15 August 1944, HQS 9139-132-P/W. Classification—Medicine Hat, C-5366.

<sup>60</sup> This number included twenty-four POWs already working on various labour projects and two in hospital. LAC, RG24, "Weekly State, Camp 100," 16 September 1944, HQS 7236-1-10-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—I.O. 8A & 8B—Correspondence Re-Returns—Strengths—Neys, C-7374.

under 30.<sup>61</sup> They included “very strong Nazi partisans,” at least one participant in the 1924 Bierhalle Putsch, Nazi party members, SS veterans, and former Hitler Youth and Labour Services (RAD) leaders.<sup>62</sup> Some had been interned since 1940, many had been captured in North Africa, and a few had only arrived in Canada following capture after D-Day. Though authorities had not yet identified them as such, four of the POWs transferred to Neys—Bruno Perzonowski, Willi Müller, Heinrich Busch, and Walter Wolf—were responsible for murdering fellow POW Dr. Karl Lehmann in Medicine Hat just before their transfer.<sup>63</sup>

The POWs at Neys were aware they had been transferred because they were, or suspected to be, “Super-Nazis.”<sup>64</sup> The former leaders at Lethbridge and Medicine Hat quickly assumed control at Neys, establishing what intelligence staff referred to as “The Supreme Command,” a group of fanatics dedicated to Nazism and faith in a German victory. Under the direction of Erich Schinnerling, the group included Nazi Party Member Rudolf Hampt, “Minister of Education” Dr. Kurt Gerhardt, “News-Digester” Ernst

Gurbar, post-master and censor Jürgen Borchert, as well as various henchmen and “secret police.” They controlled everything inside the enclosure, restricting access to news, strictly monitoring the camp newspaper, ensuring educational courses adhered to Nazi ideals, and censoring all incoming and outgoing mail. Keeping a constant watch for “traitors,” the pro-Nazis threatened to punish anyone who spoke out against their cause, and, according to new Commandant Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, they would “stop at nothing, that is to say prefer annihilation to final defeat.”<sup>65</sup>

Neys proved a stark contrast to the Alberta prairie the POWs had left behind. Otto Worm appreciated the transition, describing his new surroundings as “marvelous.” Heinz Schmidt echoed this, informing his family he was now in a “beautiful part of the country, forest, mountain, lake.” Hans Hagdorn took a more sarcastic tone, writing he was now “in the wild woods,” but “the Tommy was considerate again and put barbed wire around us to not let the wild animals near us.” But the move from Medicine Hat and Lethbridge was not without its

<sup>61</sup> An additional sixteen POWs working on various labour projects were attached to the camp. LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “I.R. for month of October 1944,” 4 November 1944, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>62</sup> LAC, RG24, Capt. H. Smith to Camp 133 Commandant, 22 August 1944, HQS 9139-133-P/W. Classification—Lethbridge, C-5367.

<sup>63</sup> An anti-Nazi, Karl Lehmann had actively spoken out against Nazism in Medicine Hat and thereby became a target of the camp Gestapo. See Daniel Duda, “Ideological Battles in Medicine Hat: The Deaths of August Plaszek and Karl Lehmann,” in *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War* (Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995), 303-312.

<sup>64</sup> LAC, RG24, 2/Lt. Paul F.O. Black, “Intelligence Report for December 1944,” n.d., HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.

<sup>65</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “Intelligence Report for March 1945,” 5 April 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.



drawbacks; as Hans Schneider described, “the surroundings of this camp consists of forest and water and they are not as inconsolable as the steppes of Alberta. Yet, for the present we don’t get anything out of this... in our centre of this small camp is lots of sand like the heart of Africa.”<sup>66</sup> Like the predecessors before them, they soon set to improving the camp.

Forced to leave much of their educational supplies, instruments, and sports equipment behind, the POWs immediately requested help from the WPA and the ICRC. In the meantime, the commandant approved two-hour parole walks to compensate for the lack of recreational opportunities. Escorted by unarmed guards, these walks allowed prisoners to hike, pick blueberries, collect plants and fish, and even hunt with homemade slingshots.<sup>67</sup> These walks, Detlef Bieseke recalled, were “a kind of salvation from the desolate, narrow camp built on fine-grain sand.”<sup>68</sup> But recreational supplies soon arrived, including a film projector and enough instruments for the POWs to piece together a twen-

ty-piece orchestra. The prisoners busied making improvements to the sports field, adding an ice rink in Winter 1944, basketball and soccer fields in April 1945, a “jumping facility” in June, and a tennis court in August. Although the WPA and ICRC met most requests, some equipment, such as hockey sticks and skates, were unavailable or restricted, so the POWs improvised and made their own.<sup>69</sup>

Morale increased as the German army launched an offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944, but as the attack stalled, so did many prisoners’ faith in a German victory. Detlef Bieseke, now in his third year of captivity, recalled,

We were in a terrible situation, mentally stunned, mentally disturbed and defenseless. We did not know what was going on with us. We thought of our ancestors in the homeland, and with each passing day, fear for them and terror over the crushing of the whole nation grew larger, over what soon came to all Germans with the... unconditional surrender, increasingly incomprehensible. We could not believe it. We did not go with the times; we had not been able to.<sup>70</sup>

Commandant Lt.-Col. Sweeney report-

<sup>66</sup> LAC, RG24, 2/Lt. Paul F.O. Black, “Intelligence Report for December 1944,” n.d., HQS 7236-94-6-100–Treatment of Enemy Aliens–Intelligence Reports & Correspondence–Neys, C-5416.

<sup>67</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “I.R. for month of October 1944,” 4 November 1944, HQS 9139-4-100–P/W. Classification–Camp Intelligence–Camp 100–Neys, C-5365.

<sup>68</sup> As these privileges contravened regulations, they were later withdrawn, much to the POWs’ disappointment. Detlef Bieseke, *Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem* (Berlin: Oberbaum, 2003), 196.DE”ISBN”:”978-3-933314-28-4”language”:”German”note”:”OCLC: 723208745”publisher”:”Oberbaum”publisher-place”:”Berlin, DE”source”:”Open WorldCat”title”:”Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem”author”:”Bieseke”given”:”Detlef”}”issued”:”date-parts”:”[”2003”]”}”locator”:”196”}”schema”:”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

<sup>69</sup> Requests for skates were repeatedly denied without explanation. LAC, RG24, “Sportreview for Camp 100 (From October 1944 to September 1945)” n.d., HQS 9139-4-100–P/W. Classification–Camp Intelligence–Camp 100–Neys, C-5365.

<sup>70</sup> Bieseke, *Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem*, 7.DE”ISBN”:”978-3-933314-28-4”lan



*Taken from the guard post atop the water tower, this photo shows Camp 100 with the kitchen and mess hall in the foreground. Although this was taken in 1942, the camp would have appeared much the same in 1944. Note the soccer nets up in the sports field. Rudolf Müller photographs, Author's collection.*

ed that some considered suicide, possibly because they would have to answer for what they had done in the war but more likely because the “superior” and “invincible” Nazi regime had proven anything but that. Although the “Supreme Command” stood fast, mandating POWs use the Hitler salute under threat of punishment, Sweeney and the camp intelligence officer, Lt. Black, believed they were trying to project a camp united under

Nazism. However, both suspected this would be short-lived.<sup>71</sup>

Spring provided some welcome distraction from the war as prisoners continued parole walks while others gathered shrubbery to beautify the camp. The commandant allowed the POWs over three acres of garden space outside the enclosure, and they soon began growing an array of vegetables and flowers.<sup>72</sup> Even though POWs like Paul Borath believed

guage”.”German”,”note”.”OCLC: 723208745”,”publisher”.”Oberbaum”,”publisher-place”.”Berlin, DE”,”source”.”Open WorldCat”,”title”.”Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem”,”author”.”{{“family”.”Bi eseke”,”given”.”Detlef”}}”,”issued”.”{{“date-parts”.”[[“2003”]]}}”,”locator”.”7”}}”,”schema”.”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

<sup>71</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “Intelligence Report for February 1945,” 6 March 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365, RG24, LAC; 2/Lt. Paul F.O. Black to GSO 3, 7 April 1945, HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.

<sup>72</sup> LAC, RG24, Wilhelm Wendt to Ernest L. Maag, 23 March 1945, HQS 7236-83-7-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Welfare Matters—I.R.C.—Neys, C-5403.

converting the dunes to gardens was an “unproductive and foolish undertaking,” even he admitted it provided “exercise to the body and mental distraction and diversion from the grave fate of the homeland.”<sup>73</sup>

By April 1945, camp staff realized that not all POWs at Neys were pro-Nazi as initially suspected. Re-classifications identified forty-four anti-Nazi POWs, among them former journalist Detlef Bieseke. These men lived in fear of their fellow POWs, as any transgression could be punishable by death. Turning themselves into protective custody was not an option, Bieseke explained, for they would be labelled traitors. This would endanger not only themselves but their families in Germany as well. In the meantime, they bided their time, sticking together and ensuring at least one man stood watch during the night.<sup>74</sup> No one knew to what extent the Supreme Command was willing to go, but after guards seized a handmade crossbow from within

the enclosure that month, violence was apparently not out of the question.<sup>75</sup>

Fortunately for Bieseke and the other Whites at Neys, they did not have long to wait. The news of Hitler’s death arrived in late April, although many refused to believe it until seeing “HITLER DEAD” emblazoned in the headline of *The Globe and Mail*. The news, Bieseke recalled, made it clear “that everything would be different, that the world has changed in one fell swoop. A year, perhaps an age [had] come to an end.”<sup>76</sup> News of Hitler’s death was quickly followed by the German surrender. Commandant Lt.-Col. Sweeney first informed the acting Spokesman, Bruno Perzanowski, and POW Doctor Laubscher before announcing to the rest of the camp. Although the intelligence officer noted the news was “received with indifference and no apparent sign of emotion,” the war in Europe was over.<sup>77</sup> There remained, however, much work to be done.

Nazi control at Neys did not end

<sup>73</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “Intelligence Report for March 1945,” 5 April 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>74</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney, “Intelligence & Interpreters Report for April 1945,” 4 May 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365, RG24, LAC; Bieseke, *Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem*, 229.DE” ISBN”:”978-3-933314-28-4” language”:”German” note”:”OCLC: 723208745” publisher”:”Oberbaum” publisher-place”:”Berlin, DE” source”:”Open WorldCat” title”:”Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem” author”:{{”family”:” Bieseke” given”:”Detlef”}}, issued”:{{”date-parts”:[[”2003”]]}}, locator”:”229”}}, schema”:”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

<sup>75</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney to GSO 3, MD10, 25 April 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>76</sup> Bieseke, *Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem*, 230.DE” ISBN”:”978-3-933314-28-4” language”:”German” note”:”OCLC: 723208745” publisher”:”Oberbaum” publisher-place”:”Berlin, DE” source”:”Open WorldCat” title”:”Tödliche Obhut ein Kanadisches Requiem” author”:{{”family”:” Bieseke” given”:”Detlef”}}, issued”:{{”date-parts”:[[”2003”]]}}, locator”:”230”}}, schema”:”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

<sup>77</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeney to CSO 3, MD10, 9 May 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

with Germany's surrender. Camp staff intensified classification efforts, dividing POWs into four groups: pro-Nazi attempting to maintain control, those emphasizing cooperation with Russia, pro-Democratic POWs, and those still discussing their fate. Authorities instituted a series of changes aimed at dismantling Nazi control, banning the Nazi salute and the accompanying "Heil Hitler," displaying swastikas, and displaying portraits or paintings of Hitler while increasing re-education efforts through showings of newsreels and documentaries.<sup>78</sup> Although some dismissed these as enemy propaganda, one prisoner credited *The Fall of Berlin*, a Russian documentary, with showing the extent of the destruction throughout Germany, leaving them without any illusions of the war, "but also of any war in the future."<sup>79</sup>

In late July 1945, intelligence officers began classifying POWs at Neys with the new PHERUDA system, a process that evaluated prisoners' (P)olitical outlook, attitude towards (H)itler, (E)ducation, (R)eligious beliefs, (U)sefulness, (D)ependability, and attitude toward the (A)llies. Prisoners were assigned a numerical

score from one to five, indicating whether they were White (1-2), Grey (3), or Black (4-5). Over the next two weeks, intelligence staff—referred to by the POWs as "Seelenforscher" or "investigators of souls"—interviewed each POW and compared the results with existing records and anti-Nazi informants. The program identified twenty-four Whites, 138 Greys, and 401 Blacks.<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, much work remained to reduce Nazi influence. The Supreme Command and their translators continued to suppress news and eliminated mentions of concentration camps. This suppression provided POWs with a distorted view of Germany and prevented them from understanding that the strong, united Germany they had once known was no more.<sup>81</sup> The Canadians responded by providing every POW with a copy of the *Montreal Standard*, and though this undercut news suppression, it prompted suspicion. Many prisoners remained doubtful of concentration camps as they had not witnessed such atrocities.<sup>82</sup> But re-education attempts were taking hold. The camp appeared to be turning "Grey" as of September 1945, with fanatical Na-

<sup>78</sup> LAC, RG24, Lt.-Col. S.C. Sweeny, "Intelligence Report, Month of May 1945," 4 June 1945, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>79</sup> Wilhelm Kahlich, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Kanada schreiben, dichten, zeichnen: eine Auswertung der Lagerzeitung "Der Auftakt" des Jahrganges 1946* (Uelzen: Jomsburg, 1997), 135.

<sup>80</sup> An additional twenty-one on work projects, two in hospital, two in detention, and three with mental health concerns were not categorized. LAC, RG24, Capt. J. Jezewski to MI7, 15 August 1945, HQS 9139-100-P/W. Classification—Neys, C-5366.

<sup>81</sup> LAC, RG24, Detlef Bieseke and Heinz Pfeifer, "Forming of Political Opinions in Internment Camps," n.d., HQS 7236-94-6-100—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Intelligence Reports & Correspondence—Neys, C-5416.

<sup>82</sup> LAC, RG24, HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

zis now in the minority.<sup>83</sup> In an attempt to further disrupt Nazi control, camp spokesmen were now required to be democratically elected. Wilhelm Wendt, the incumbent Spokesman, won the subsequent election, but runner-up Joachim van Möhring, who had called for cutting ties with National Socialism, became Deputy Spokesman.<sup>84</sup>

The end of the war in September 1945 and dwindling Nazi power finally allowed anti-Nazis the freedom to identify themselves as such. Thirty-four POWs declared themselves democratic anti-Nazis willing to cooperate with Canadian authorities and committed themselves to helping repair the damages of war and ensure a peaceful post-war Germany.<sup>85</sup> A newly established Camp Cultural Department worked with Canadian authorities to limit Nazi influence through lectures and a new camp newspaper, the latter translating articles from Canadian, English, and American sources. Although forced underground, the Supreme Command exhibited enough influence that some anti-Nazis still feared repercussions and remained reluctant to testify in the Medicine Hat murder trials.<sup>86</sup>

In late 1945, Wendt resigned, and von Möhring replaced him as Spokesman, a further blow to Nazi control. Fifty POWs applied for immigration, with most arguing that their time in Canada had exposed them to and given them appreciation for the democratic, Canadian way of life.<sup>87</sup> These applications were ultimately denied, but the prisoners would not have long to wait at Neys for, in January 1946, Canada began preparations to transfer its POWs to the United Kingdom.

The British government, hoping to employ POWs to help rebuild the country, requested anti-Nazi POWs be transferred first and pro-Nazis last. Canada agreed—initially—and internment authorities elected to exchange Whites and Greys from Neys with Blacks from Camp 33 (Petawawa). Protesting, Commandant Lt.-Col. Pinkham argued this would destroy his staff's progress in de-Nazification and re-education and instead suggested transfers be made on the recommendation of camp staff. Despite Pinkham's efforts, the transfer went forward, and 147 Whites and Greys were exchanged with 78 Blacks from Peta-

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<sup>83</sup> S/L. Fred W. Poland to Major Wygard, n.d., HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>84</sup> LAC, RG24, Camp 100 Intelligence Officer, "Intelligence Report, Part I & II, September 1945, Internment Camp 100," n.d., HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>85</sup> LAC, RG24, "Petition," 21 September 1945, HQS 9139-100-P/W. Classification—Neys, C-5366.

<sup>86</sup> LAC, RG24, Camp 100 Intelligence Officer, "Intelligence Report, Part I & II, October 1945, Internment Camp 100," n.d., HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>87</sup> LAC, RG24, Camp 100 Intelligence Officer, "Intelligence Report, Part I & II, November 1945, Internment Camp 100," n.d., HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.



wawa.<sup>88</sup> Although Pinkham feared the transfer would adversely affect de-Nazification, it proved to have the opposite effect; most pro-Nazis or indifferent POWs at Neys had believed their political opinions made little difference as they were all going to be repatriated, but with Whites and Greys now being repatriated first, some pro-Nazis began to rethink their position, and many indifferent ones started to take an interest in politics. Added to this, many prisoners from Petawawa had been captured in 1944, and their first-hand experiences of the destruction and devastation in Germany proved far more successful than films, literature, and lectures in convincing the older POWs that German propaganda had lied to them and the Germany they once knew was no more.<sup>89</sup>

As Canada began transferring Whites and Greys to the United Kingdom, the Canadian government realized it was losing a valuable source of potential farm labour and quickly reached out to the British government for a compromise. Authorities eventually agreed that Canada would transfer Black to the UK and keep 4,000 POWs, mostly Whites

and Greys, to work on farms in the summer of 1946. The occupants of Camp 100 were informed to prepare for their departure to the United Kingdom, but before their transfer, Spokesman von Möhring thanked the commandant for the “correct and fair” treatment he and his men had received at Neys: “going back to Europe,” Möhring continued, “we will remember you and your people with sympathy and hope that the example of Canadian humanity will be followed also in other countries.”<sup>90</sup> While a few POWs were transferred to Camp 23 (Monteith), 407 POWs left Neys for the UK on 20 March 1946, with the last thirty-seven departing on 28 March.<sup>91</sup>

With Canada winding down internment operations, the Department of National Defence no longer required Camp 100. Its fate remained uncertain until the Department of Labour expressed interest in acquiring the camp to use as a hostel for Japanese-Canadians relocating from British Columbia to Northern Ontario.<sup>92</sup> The Department of Labour soon assumed responsibility for the camp, and the first Japanese-Canadi-

<sup>88</sup> LAC, RG24, Intelligence Ten to DDMI, 14 January 1946, HQS 9139-100-P/W. Classification—Neys, C-5366, RG24, LAC; Defensor to DOC MD10, 15 January 1946, HQS 9139-100-P/W. Classification—Neys, C-5366.

<sup>89</sup> LAC, RG24, Camp 100 Intelligence Officer, “Intelligence Report, Part I & II, January 1946, Internment Camp 100,” n.d., HQS 9139-4-100-P/W. Classification—Camp Intelligence—Camp 100—Neys, C-5365.

<sup>90</sup> LAC, RG24, H.J. Moehring to Capt. R.W. Durnin, 22 March 1946, HQS 7236-35-Policy—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Camp W, Neys, Ont., C-5387.

<sup>91</sup> LAC, RG24, “Weekly State, Internment Camp 100,” 23 and 30 March 1946, HQS 7236-53—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—I.O. 8A & 8B—Correspondence Re- Returns—Strengths—Neys, C-5374.

<sup>92</sup> LAC, RG24, Deputy Minister to A. Ross, 26 April 1946, HQS 7236-35-Policy—Treatment of Enemy Aliens—Camp W, Neys, Ont., C-5387.

ans families arrived that summer. Forced from their homes on the West Coast and subsequently interned during the war, these families were among those who chose to settle in Eastern Canada, with Neys serving as one in a series of relocation hostels.

Although they were not prisoners, families lived in the barracks, with sections partitioned for individual families, and ate in the former prisoners' mess hall. The limited privacy and shared facilities historian, Ann Sunahara, argues "stimulated rapid searches for jobs and housing on the part of the resettled."<sup>93</sup> Some gained employment with the Pigeon Timber Co., but most moved to other areas across Ontario. By 1947, most of the families had left the Neys hostel, and, as it remained surplus to the Department of Labour's needs, the Ontario Department of Reform Institutions purchased the camp.

Following its establishment in 1946, the Ontario Department of Reform Institutions launched "The Ontario Plan," a programme designed to provide better custody, care, education, and rehabilitation, part of which entailed replacing "Common Gaols" with "modern Industrial Farms."<sup>94</sup> To reduce overcrowding at the Port Arthur District Gaol, the

Department purchased the remnants of Camp 100 and the "Industrial Farm, Neys," which opened on 23 October 1947. There was no farming at Neys; instead, prisoners were employed in dismantling Camp 100, woodcutting, and road work.<sup>95</sup> Over the next four years, the number of prisoners in the camp ranged from 100 to 490, and all were short-term prisoners. Most were repeat offenders, having more than three previous charges, and the majority had been charged with crimes against public order and peace, with "Drunk and Disorderly" the most common charge.<sup>96</sup> The Neys Industrial Farm proved short-lived, closing in July 1951, as it has served its purpose in freeing up space at the Port Arthur Gaol. The remaining prisoners were transferred to other facilities, ending the internment chapter of Neys' history.<sup>97</sup>

The completion of the section of the Trans-Canada Highway near Highways in 1957 finally provided road access to Neys and opened the area to tourist traffic. The Department of Lands and Forests, hoping to preserve some of the area's natural heritage, reserved most of the Coldwell Peninsula for a park and began development in 1962. First welcoming campers in 1963, Neys Provin-

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<sup>93</sup> Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, 2020), <<http://japanesecanadianhistory.ca/>>.

<sup>94</sup> Ontario. Department of Reform Institutions, *Annual Report 1948, Part 1: Reformatories, Industrial Farms, Common Jails* (Toronto: Babbist Johnston, 1949), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ontario. Department of Reform Institutions, *Annual Report 1949, Part 1: Reformatories, Industrial Farms, Common Jails* (Toronto: Babbist Johnston, 1950), 11.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>97</sup> Ontario. Department of Reform Institutions, *Annual Report 1952, Part 1: Reformatories, Industrial Farms, Common Jails* (Toronto: Babbist Johnston, 1953), 9.

cial Park was officially established on 28 December 1965.<sup>98</sup> Today, some signs of the camp remain, but rows of red pines largely replaced the clearing that occupied most of the shoreline.

Over the last fifty years, Ontario Parks has built much of Neys Provincial Park's identity on POWs and Camp 100. Although Mountain's original research from 1974 has been updated and revised over the years, Ontario Parks has yet to undertake a study focusing on primary source research. This is no fault of the staff at Neys, who have made continued efforts to improve the park's interpretative programming. Nevertheless, they remain limited by the lack of a designated cultural resource team and the park's seasonal designation. The lack of a comprehensive narrative of Canadian internment operations during the Second World War further hampers this work.

For the more than 2,000 combatant POWs, EMS, and Civilian Internees interned at Camp 100 during the Second World War, their experiences of Neys varied significantly depending on when they were in camp. Camp 100 evolved as the war progressed and the Department of National Defence adapted its internment operations. The camp was established to hold POWs until the end of

the war, but over the years, it continued to improve its facilities. Thanks to the dedication of EMS and civilian internees, POWs had an array of recreational and educational opportunities to keep themselves occupied and help prepare themselves for post-war life. Camp 100's final wartime stage as a "Black" camp reveals how Canada attempted to solve the problem of what to do with its thousands of pro-Nazi POWs. Although re-education measures were met with varied success, they were the beginnings of converting former enemies into future allies.

The emphasis on the humane treatment of POWs can be applied to Neys, as is noted in the federal heritage designation, which reads: "Canada's humane treatment of military prisoners was favourably noted internationally and prompted hundreds of former prisoners to immigrate after the war."<sup>99</sup> Combatant POWs were treated in accordance with the 1929 Geneva Convention, and even though the EMS and Civilian Internees did not qualify, they were treated in a similar manner. Yet, little emphasis has been made on the pro-Nazi part of Camp 100's history, apart from references to it being a "Black" camp. Although Ontario Parks recognizes Camp 100 as a "Black" camp, it has not yet explored what this

<sup>98</sup> Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, *Annual Report of the Minister of Lands and Forests of the Province of Ontario, For the Year Ending March 31st, 1966* (Toronto: Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, n.d.), 203.

<sup>99</sup> Parks Canada, "Detention of Second World War Military Prisoners of War and of Enemy Aliens Sent to Canada from Great Britain National Historic Event," *Parks Canada Directory of Federal Heritage Designations*, <[https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page\\_nhs\\_eng.aspx?id=13015](https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=13015)> (accessed 14 May 2021).

means. The claim that former POWs returned after the war is, therefore, more complicated considering that in the last year-and-a-half of its operation, nearly all those in Camp 100 were the category of POWs that Canada specifically did not want as immigrants.

In emphasizing Neys' POW past, it has relegated its Japanese-Canadian and civilian detention chapters to the sidelines. Ontario Parks' *Parks Blog* does note that the camp was used as a relocation camp for Japanese-Canadians, but the description of Neys providing "a free place to stay, eat, and find separated family and friends" underscores and diminishes the struggles of Japanese-Canadians in the Second World War.<sup>100</sup> Historians Raynald Harvey Lemelin, Michel S. Beaulieu, and David Ratz likewise argue the federal heritage designation's omission of Japanese-Canadians "[com-

memorates] one part of our history while disregarding other, perhaps more uncomfortable narratives."<sup>101</sup>

There remains much more to Canada's internment history than the humane treatment of POWs. Neys being among the few internment camps to hold combatant POWs, EMS, civilian internees, and Japanese-Canadian internees, provides an excellent example of how we can move forward. Although archival closures prevented more than a cursory examination of Neys' post-war use here, more critical evaluations of internment are needed. Like James Mountain's account, this article is not a complete account of Neys' wartime and post-war history but remains an example of how more can be done to explore both the history of internment in Canada as well as the culturally significant sites protected within our parks.

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<sup>100</sup> Laura Myers, "From Prisoner of War Camp to Provincial Park: Neys' World War II History," *Ontario Parks-Parks Blog* (blog), 25 June 2018, <<https://www.ontarioparks.com/parksblog/prisoner-war-camp-provincial-park/>>.

<sup>101</sup> Raynald Harvey Lemelin, Michel S. Beaulieu, and David Ratz, "'Everything Changed!'—The Ramification of the Second World War on the Canadian North," *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 6:1 (2020), 87.