

“Far-Reaching Effects:” The United States Military and the National Parks during World War II

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WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENTERED WORLD WAR II, the national park system included 164 units with a combined area of more than 21 million acres. The National Park Service (NPS) found itself with two major responsibilities: to protect and preserve that system for present and future generations and to support the war effort to the greatest extent possible. These two missions and responsibilities at times came into conflict, but, NPS officials claimed, a “fine spirit of cooperation” developed between NPS and the Navy and Army departments, which enabled them to avoid serious damage to irreplaceable park features.¹ Throughout the war, the Park Service struggled to balance its commitment to preserving park natural and cultural resources with requirements to support the war effort. Recognizing the need to compromise, it issued permits to the Army, Navy, and other war agencies to use park lands and facilities and provided soldiers and sailors with sites for rest and relaxation as well as training and maneuvers.

The relationship between the parks and the military went back to the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, well before NPS was created, but had grown closer since the 1930s when the historic military sites were transferred from the War Department to NPS. Indeed, some of the sites that the military would use during the war had been part of that original transfer. While the Park Service emphasized its patriotic contributions to the war effort, its response to military requests and requirements proved to be both patriotic and pragmatic. Officials had three primary reasons for cooperating with the military in its use of the national parks and accommodating the requirements of the military as much as possible: military use of park units would help NPS ensure that the parks remained, help park

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concessionaires survive the wartime economic impact, and demonstrate that it was actively supporting the war effort and thus minimize threats to the national park system. The military effectively used the parks for rest and recreation, training and maneuvers, and occasionally as locations for warning stations and observation posts. Opening the parks to military uses had both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, a number of the soldiers who experienced the parks would return after the war, often with their families, and interest in the national park system would grow. Yet military use also left some parks in poor condition and ill-prepared to handle the post-war surge in civilian visitation.

NPS was quick to highlight its support to the military. It issued nearly 2,000 permits and authorizations for use of NPS areas, facilities, and resources for war-related purposes. More than half were for minor short-term uses, such as field exercises or overnight bivouacking. Most of the military uses that NPS authorized were for facilities and areas formerly open to the public and simply involved changing the type of use, such as opening roads in Yellowstone National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, and George Washington Memorial Parkway to trucking on a temporary basis.²

The military used nearly all of the national parks and monuments located along the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf coasts for defense installations, aircraft warning service posts, or training. They also used some historic and military sites for the study of military maneuvers. In addition, NPS turned over much of its heavy equipment to the Army for clearing airfields. NPS Director Newton Drury, who had come to his position in 1940 with impressive conservationist credentials, proudly reported, "There is hardly an area of the National Park System that has not made some direct contribution to aid in winning the war."³ He understood that his agency had to come up with alternatives to proposals that would be made for certain uses of park units for defense purposes.⁴

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, also a strong conservationist, shared Drury's concerns. In a letter to President Roosevelt just before the attack on Pearl Harbor he warned that the department's jurisdiction over public lands, including national parks and monuments and wildlife refuges, was "rapidly being restricted to a futile ex post facto protest as far as the Army is concerned." The Army had invaded public lands without considering the use to which they were devoted and without consulting the department. While his department had tried to accommodate the Army's wishes and agreed to the use of lands where the military clearly demonstrated the need, he insisted, some areas taken for bombing ranges and other purposes did not serve the purpose of the Army any better than adjacent lands. "It is utterly discouraging," Ickes concluded, "to have a body of men who don't care about the sort of thing that this Department is charged with fostering and protecting march in and take possession just as Hitler marched in and took possession of the small democracies of Europe."⁵

Meanwhile, concern about the impact of military use on park resources continued to grow. In 1941 NPS Supervisor of Interpretation Carl P. Russell requested information on proposed military projects that might negatively affect wildlife in the national parks and monuments. The manager of the national park wildlife section responded that the Army was developing a list of potential areas for training and artillery ranges, to include roughly 30,000 acres at Henry's Lake within Yellowstone, where military use would have a detrimental effect

on the migration route of trumpeter swans. The War Department also had proposed the establishment of an airport near West Yellowstone, which would have harmed elk, moose, and other wildlife.⁶

Military use and park operations/concessions

As Park Service leaders took steps to cooperate with and support the military, they were motivated in part by a desire to help park hotel operators and concessionaires stay in business. Faced with a severe decline in civilian visitors during the war, park hotel operators and concessionaires increasingly relied on business from military and defense workers. NPS worked closely with park operators to accommodate the varied and rapidly expanding needs of the military. On December 1, 1942, representatives of the Western Park Operators' Conference met in Chicago with Navy Commander John L. Reynolds, Director of the Bureau of Naval Personnel's Welfare Division, and Army Major William G. Hyde from the Welfare Section in the Army's Special Services Division. The park operators represented the Glacier Park Hotel Company, Rocky Mountain Motor Company, and Mesa Verde Company, as well as Sequoia and Kings Canyon, Lassen Volcanic, Yellowstone, and Yosemite national parks. Perhaps an indicator of the meeting's importance, Drury represented NPS, along with his senior staff, two regional directors, and several park superintendents.

Drury opened by reminding attendees that NPS policy was to aid the military in any way possible. Reynolds then provided background on the Navy's efforts to provide rest centers for its personnel. Soon after the war broke out, he explained, it became clear that naval personnel on strenuous sea duty needed periods of rest. Congress had enacted Public Law 528 on April 28, 1942, which directed that funds appropriated under the heading "Welfare and Recreation" be available for the rental and use of buildings, grounds, services, facilities, and for subsistence for rehabilitation and recuperation of naval personnel returning from duty beyond the continental United States, including Alaska, the Canal Zone, and insular possessions. This gave Navy officials authority to order their personnel to take a rest. The Navy then surveyed the available facilities in the US, looking primarily for isolated areas to discourage the families of the naval personnel from joining them. Its program was centralized in Washington, DC; however, contract negotiations required the approval of the commandant of the naval district concerned. Reynolds invited the operators interested in renting their facilities to submit proposals through NPS to the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks in Washington and encouraged them to negotiate with the local commandant.

While civilians faced severe transportation shortages and restrictions on rubber and gas that often prevented them from visiting the parks, Reynolds pointed out that Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) regulations permitted the Navy and Army to use "automotive equipment" to take organized groups on special tours. This broad authorization would allow the military to bring groups to national parks (Figure 1), though it was up to senior officials to decide if they would actively encourage the use of these parks. Reynolds had no clear answer for park operators who wanted to know when the Navy might be calling on them for their facilities. The Army planned to handle its still evolving rehabilitation program largely through the various Army commands.



Figure 1. 273rd Field Artillery Battalion at the Wawona Tunnel Tree, with park ranger and deer, Yosemite National Park, 1943. National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection/photographer Ansel Adams.

Regarding military access and use, the attendees tentatively agreed that regional directors and park superintendents would be authorized to approach the local Army and Navy representatives in the company of park operators to discuss the possibilities of bringing organized groups to parks on a regular schedule, and encouraging others to visit parks independently. Park operators reiterated their concern that without enough visits by servicemen and civilian war workers, they would go out of business. Drury closed by saying, “So far as possible the Service will keep the parks open to the public and it is hoped that there will be sufficient business to keep at least the minimum facilities of the park operators in operation.”⁷

Later, in his report on this meeting, Drury re-emphasized that above all the national parks and monuments should be held intact and that NPS should continue to administer and interpret these areas. The Army and Navy, he said, should use these sites for rehabilitation rather than as cantonments, thus making a clear distinction between short-term use of parks for rest and relaxation, much like civilian visitors, and the establishment of military camps. The department was making an inventory of properties the military had taken over, he added, but some of those areas might never be returned to NPS.⁸

Rest and recreation

Nearly all of the parks with significant concentrations of servicemen and -women nearby

served as rest areas for them. Two million of the seven million park visitors during 1943 were military, and many of these came for recreation, relaxation, and recuperation. This had benefits for both the military and NPS. As noted, with civilian visitation in sharp decline, military use of the parks helped the concessionaires stay in business. Through NPS's relationship with the War Department and at the request of the Army Adjutant General, it supplied the US Army's morale and recreation division with a portfolio of maps of every state with the location of federal and state parks and other recreation areas. Along with the maps it provided the names of NPS officials at the parks, regional, and headquarters level. The plan was for the heads of the morale and recreation divisions to establish relationships with the agencies in charge of these areas and develop a plan for the military to visit nearby parks.⁹

Early on the Army requested information from NPS about available recreational facilities. At a July 1941 meeting of morale officers for the Army 4th Corps Area (Southeast), NPS Assistant Regional Director H.K. Roberts emphasized that Congress had established NPS to protect those federal areas considered outstanding and only authorized development that would make those areas available for public use while preserving their outstanding value. He then briefly traced the history of NPS involvement in recreation. In the 1930s NPS had been directed to co-operate with the various states in developing state parks and state recreational areas through the use of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and developing as recreational demonstration projects some of the submarginal land acquired by the Resettlement Administration, in part to demonstrate how this land could benefit the states and communities for outdoor recreation. NPS also had responsibility for making a nationwide recreation study and identifying where additional recreational facilities were needed. Later, the agency set up what was known as the Branch of Recreation and State Cooperation to handle this work. It was therefore natural that when the Army had to arrange to concentrate large numbers of troops, Roberts explained, especially in the 4th Corps Area, military officials would seek information about available recreational facilities. At the Army Adjutant General's request, NPS had designated a representative for each Army corps area to consult with the morale officer on recreation problems.

Meanwhile, the Army Chief of Staff designated Assistant Adjutant General James A. Ulio (later Adjutant General of the Army) to survey the Gulf Coast of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Recognizing the value of the coastal area as a recreation center for soldiers and the limited overnight accommodations currently available, the War Department authorized the establishment of the Gulf Coast Recreation Areas. Since an NPS representative had assisted Ulio with the original survey and because of NPS experience in constructing group camps, it was designated to construct the necessary facilities in cooperation with the CCC. The group camps consisted of floored, framed, and screened tents and other facilities. Camps were authorized and under construction in nearly all Army corps areas. Roberts described the "cheerful cooperation" of all the agencies involved and noted that the CCC enrollees had "accomplished excellent results in short periods." He expressed hope that NPS representatives could continue to cooperate with corps area morale officers in order to take full advantage of the facilities that could be used to provide recreation and improve soldier morale.

Roberts explained how each morale officer could in turn assist NPS. Drury, he noted, had clearly outlined the participation in the defense program expected of NPS field representatives and had waived park admission charges for the military. Park officials had cordially welcomed convoys of soldiers, provided them with information, and allowed them to use the facilities. Yet Roberts also recognized that use of these areas for tactical maneuvers, or as overnight campgrounds for large forces and heavy motor vehicles, was harmful, and the type of road construction required could cause severe damage. Morale officers could help explain to their commanding officers the different types of uses and encourage the use of less scenic and valuable areas for tactical maneuvers.¹⁰

NPS officials worked closely with the War Department to select appropriate sites for rest camps for soldiers on leave, and the Army enlisted NPS field technicians to help plan and direct CCC workers in construction of those camps. Often NPS personnel were the only sources of reliable information, and government-owned lands, buildings, facilities, and equipment were the only ones readily available. In 1941 NPS reported that CCC workers had established 16 camps. A year later, the number of Army rest camps constructed in 23 states and the District of Columbia jumped to 33 with a capacity to house 20,000 men.¹¹

NPS emphasized the opportunities to find inspiration and “healthful” exercise in the parks. “For soldiers and civilians who need respite from grueling war service,” noted one article, “the National Park Service can offer spiritual and physical rehabilitation.”¹² Between October 1, 1941, and September 30, 1942, approximately 900,000 of the ten million visitors to NPS units (nearly 10 percent) were members of the armed forces. Officers at Army camps and naval stations near parks encouraged their men to visit these areas. In some instances, they organized visits to parks as part of the military’s morale-building program. Hobbs Air Field, located 100 miles from Carlsbad Caverns National Park, for example, sent 1,000 soldiers each month to the caverns. Whether servicemen came in small groups or as organized units, one official explained, NPS welcomed them to the parks without collecting fees and did everything possible to help them better understand and appreciate the natural and historic treasures contained in the areas. Civilian war workers benefited as well. Defense plants in California organized vacation tours to the national parks in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The Lockheed Plant and Consolidated Aircraft sent groups of employees to Yosemite for two-week rests. “This use of national parks and monuments by the armed forces and war workers may seem incompatible with the nation’s ban on pleasure travel,” one NPS official concluded, “but, certainly, it is in harmony with the recreational needs of the military and the war production program.” Gettysburg National Military Park, Castillo de San Marcos and Santa Rosa Island national monuments in Florida, Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, and Joshua Tree National Monument in California reported roughly 200,000 soldiers and sailors visiting in May 1943.¹³

In June 1943, the US Navy took over administration of the picturesque and luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite and until December 1945 operated it as a convalescent center for recuperating sailors, particularly those returning from operations in the South Pacific (Figure 2). The military treated nearly 7,000 patients there. The lodge’s grand lounge, solarium, and mezzanine reportedly held bunk beds for naval personnel, with the antique rugs,



Figure 2. Sailors from the U.S. Naval Convalescent Hospital (Ahwahnee Hotel) in Yosemite National Park, 1944. National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection/photographer Ralph H. Anderson.

deluxe furniture, and equipment safely stored away. The Navy believed that in the beautiful Yosemite Valley, servicemen would gradually regain their strength. Army detachments also used the park for military purposes and recreation. Drury portrayed the military takeover of Ahwahnee in the best possible light, reporting that the hotel was “serving its highest purpose in wartime by furnishing an ideal environment in which members of our naval forces may regain their health.”¹⁴

The Navy wanted to establish a similar rehabilitation unit inside Grand Canyon National Park, but Drury resisted turning over any more park hotels. “While, of course, we will do whatever is required of us to help in the war, or post war rehabilitation,” he explained, “I hope we can avoid taking on any more enterprises of this sort.” While acknowledging that operations at Ahwahnee Hotel had been “satisfactory” for the most part, he noted that the burdens on an already diminished park staff had increased because of new administrative problems caused by “the character of the patients and of some of the employees of the Navy” not under NPS control. A senior naval official had told him that the training center inside Grand Canyon would likely be used instead for rehabilitation. There were nearly 50,000 men there and excellent facilities “for that type of work,” including assembly halls, social centers, and swimming pools. While the director had serious reservations about housing soldiers and sailors in park facilities, he did not hesitate to emphasize this activity when it was beneficial. He cited the efforts to accommodate armed forces at Grand Canyon and other NPS areas “to good effect” before the US Bureau of the Budget and to members of Congress.¹⁵

Grand Canyon hosted thousands of troops each month as they broke up their convoy training trips for a few days of rest and relaxation. Roughly a third of the park's visitors were military. Several Army units used the recently abandoned CCC complex in the park as a recreational camp. Later, troops rotated from the Kingman Army Air Group for periods of recreation. One Army colonel who commanded an anti-aircraft artillery battalion no doubt spoke for many when he wrote, "The trip to the Grand Canyon proved to be beneficial far beyond our expectations in recreational and educational values."¹⁶

The military used parks in Alaska for rest and recreation as well. The Japanese assault on Alaska came in June 1942 with air attacks on Dutch Harbor at the east end of the Aleutian Islands and the occupation of the far western islands. Resulting restrictions on civilian travel to Alaska meant almost no tourism, and Mount McKinley National Park cut its operations to a bare minimum. Meanwhile, military reinforcements and civil construction crews poured into Alaska by the thousands. Emergency airfields and coastal defense installations sprang up across Alaska. Army engineers began constructing the Alaska-Canadian Highway (AL-CAN). Soldiers on leave or recuperating from the Aleutian campaign needed the retreat. After negotiations involving Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening, Commanding General of the Alaska Defense Command Major General Simon B. Buckner, and Department of the Interior and NPS officials, an agreement was reached to turn Mount McKinley into an Army recreation camp. Although Buckner called for the construction of camp facilities, road extensions, and other improvements that would have significantly altered the park, Drury successfully squashed these plans. NPS units would support the war effort in every way consistent with their status as national parks, but he opposed any alterations that would jeopardize that status.¹⁷

The Army ultimately leased McKinley Park Hotel, converting it into a recreation center for soldiers fighting in the Aleutians and using it until March 1945. At one point the hotel housed 150 to 200 soldiers at a time on seven-day furloughs for rest and relaxation. NPS also leased camps that the Army staffed and operated. During the peak year of 1943, 6,000–8,000 soldiers a month arrived at the park, where they enjoyed fishing, hiking, and horseback riding in summer and skiing and skating in winter. Many soldiers thus received their first opportunity to experience the scenic beauty of the national parks. Elsewhere in Alaska, the US Air Corps established two recreation camps in Katmai National Monument for personnel from Naknek Air Base. In Washington state, soldiers from Fort Lewis and other camps in the area who had completed their training and were awaiting transfer to war zones received free trips to Mount Rainier and Olympic national parks.¹⁸

In addition to the large scenic parks, a number of historical parks welcomed soldiers and sailors seeking rest and relaxation. Civil War battlefield parks in the East, such as Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in Georgia and Tennessee, became popular sites for rest and recreation, and as temporary encampments for military convoys traveling across the country. Parks near main highways sometimes became popular bivouac sites for transient troops.¹⁹

Maneuvers and training

In addition to providing servicemen and -women with a favorable environment and facilities for relaxation and recreation, parks became sites for military training and maneuvers. Soldiers from Fort Lewis used Mount Rainier National Park for training in alpine warfare. The vertical zones that made Mount Rainier flora and fauna so diverse and beautiful also made the area a good place to find terrain and weather conditions which could simulate winter fighting conditions in the European Alps (Figure 3). At higher elevations the military could test clothing and equipment under the most severe conditions. Soldiers tested sleeping bags and snow suits on the summit of the mountain.

Use of the park for mountain infantry exercises developed fairly suddenly. In November 1940 a platoon of the 41st Infantry Division, calling itself the Military Ski Patrol, arrived for an exercise. Twenty-four soldiers of the 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, from Fort Lewis arrived later for a full winter of ski training and maneuvers. The two military ski units were somewhat experimental, the Army combining for the first time soldiering and skiing. At the time, there was a growing possibility that US troops would be fighting in central Europe and facing similar conditions. The Army constituted the 87th Infantry Regiment at Fort Lewis on November 15, 1941. This elite regiment was made up of expert skiers from other units, volunteers from New England ski clubs and Ivy League ski teams,

Figure 3. Military ski unit training at Mount Rainier National Park. Courtesy of the NPS Historic Photos Collection.



a large contingent of qualified European immigrants and exiles, and more than a score of NPS and Forest Service rangers. The 1,000-man regiment wintered at Fort Lewis during the winter of 1941–1942. Under a cooperative agreement with NPS, the Army used Paradise Inn for training ski troops and testing motorized snow equipment. In a compromise with NPS, the ski troops used tow ropes above Paradise Inn on weekdays and park visitors used it on weekends. In spring 1942, the regiment was reorganized as the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment and transferred to the Army's new Camp Hale in Colorado where it formed part of the 10th Mountain Infantry Division and would later participate in campaigns in the Aleutians and Italy. Military leaders had asked NPS to give groups there for ski training an eight-week course in certain aspects of mountaineering, which included classes on the park, meteorology, glaciers, snow slides, avalanches, glacial travel, and rescue, topography, and geology of mountain areas, mountain climbing, rescue, and forest fires. They occupied all the facilities for the winter.²⁰

At Mount McKinley, the Army tested various types of equipment for Arctic warfare because this was the only reasonably accessible place in North America that offered Arctic conditions in summer. The Army held small-scale maneuvers at the park and conducted cold-weather tests of food, clothes, and equipment. In February and March 1944 more than 500 troops used the eastern portion of the park to hold winter maneuvers, operating with dog teams and ski and snowshoes. An Army cold-weather test party from Wright Field used the park from October to December 1944, spending 87 days in the wilderness of the Alaska Range testing food and clothing for the Air Force. A similar party visited the range again in mid-May 1945.²¹

While Mount Rainier and Mount McKinley provided a suitable environment for training in alpine and Arctic warfare, other parks provided a climate and training environment closer to what soldiers would experience in North Africa. Desert warfare training camps in Arizona and southern California, for example, organized maneuver-recreation trips to Grand Canyon.²²

At Shenandoah National Park, the 711th Chemical Maintenance Company, Air Corps, Langley Field camped for a week near Panorama in 1943, Army groups conducted mapping during summer 1943, and the same month a contingent of 1,000 soldiers from Fort Belvoir entered the park with another 1,000 coming every two weeks. Over 3,000 soldiers entered the park for training during April 1944. The Army tested several types of military clothing in the park and various military techniques. The Army Corps of Engineers assembled water lines, built bridges on fire roads, and performed trail work.²³

Meanwhile, national historical parks, military parks, and historic sites became what Drury called “laboratories for the study of military activities.”²⁴ Park Service officials emphasized that the Civil War battlefields were well suited for tactical maneuvers. Military groups, mostly from Camp Lee, Virginia, visited Petersburg National Military Park (later redesignated a national battlefield) throughout the war. The quartermaster school at Camp Lee sent its classes to the park for lectures during its standard thirteen-week training period. Park staff participated in the instruction program. The military found the problem of supply in the

wilderness areas of Africa and in the South Pacific Islands to be much like that encountered during the Civil War. Constructing wharves and building railways, bridges, and roads were still integral parts of bringing supplies to the front. The park historical technician complained that with regimental commanders sending their classes of officer candidates to the park regularly for lectures, park staff could only perform 50 percent of their required work.²⁵

The impact on Petersburg increased in November 1940 when the quartermaster requested permits to widen certain roads, erect temporary power lines, and construct water works, reservoirs, and facilities within the park boundaries. In December 1940, Ickes granted the War Department a permit to use 100 acres of park property for a hospital. Despite the objections of the superintendent who preferred a different site, a June 1941 permit provided 500 acres to establish a quartermaster training school. The heavy concentration of activity on the section of the park adjacent to Camp Lee took a toll on the roads. The Army agreed to assume responsibility for maintaining the roads in that section. In October 1943, the superintendent reported that, with the Army's help, the park was in the best shape it had ever been.²⁶

The situation at nearby Manassas National Battlefield was similar. As part of their training, student engineer officers from Fort Belvoir as well as marines from Quantico routinely visited the battlefield where the acting superintendent lectured them on the events of the first and second battles of Manassas and they toured the museum. More than 1,000 marines visited the area each month.²⁷ Meanwhile, not far away, Major General William R. Schmidt, commander of the 76th Infantry Division, wrote to Edward A. Hummell at Fredericksburg battlefield to express appreciation for the service that the park provided to his officers during the previous two months. Through illustrated lectures and guided battlefield tours, he wrote, "you have enabled us to gain a clearer and more concise picture of the War Between the States." Hummell had given the officers "an invaluable lesson" in logistics and the tactics of the Civil War.²⁸

In 1940 NPS launched a special interpretive program at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park to instruct draftees from Fort Oglethorpe about Civil War battles while instilling in them patriotic values. During 1940 and 1941, 30,000 troops, mostly national guardsmen, bivouacked in the park, while the 6th Cavalry conducted extensive training operations using horses, motorcycles, trucks, and trailers. In August 1942, the 3rd Cavalry transferred from Fort Oglethorpe and was replaced by the 16th Cavalry (a mechanized armor unit). The regiment continued using the park for drill and maneuvers and various tactical exercises. The Army began constructing a group of buildings in one park area for use as a provost marshal general's school center and later erected more school buildings, warehouses, and a motor pool. In early 1943, the Army began using park facilities for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) Training Center. The center, which could house more than 9,000, attracted much local and national attention. Looking toward the future, Superintendent Charles S. Dunn noted, "No doubt after the war is over many of the veteran WAACs will want to come back to the park and bring their relatives and friends." In June 1945 the War Department announced its plans to close the WAAC training center, and military activity in the park ended the following year.²⁹

Washington, DC area

The impact of the military was also felt in the nation's capital as temporary war buildings sprang up in areas administered by NPS: the National Mall, West Potomac Park, President's Park, the grounds of the Washington Monument, and along the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a scenic parkway in Virginia running along the Potomac River (Figure 4). Officials withdrew 30% of the major recreational facilities of National Capital Parks for war use. National Capital Parks, including East Potomac Park Golf Course, provided sites for defense installations and buildings to house thousands of war workers. NPS officials were quick to point out that the land involved was valued at \$24.3 million, and it would cost the government much more if it had to purchase alternate sites. While NPS saved the government money, withdrawal of these lands curtailed the open spaces in downtown Washington, and Drury looked forward to the removal of these structures at the end of the war.³⁰

In 1942, Superintendent of National Capital Parks Irving C. Root reported that NPS had issued 33 permits to the War and Navy departments and the Public Buildings Administration for use of park properties in Washington. The Adjutant General's Training School received a permit to use Fort Washington, Maryland, just outside the city overlooking the Potomac, with the understanding that the historic fort would not be damaged or used in any

Figure 4. The National Mall as it appeared during World War II with Memorial Bridge, Lincoln Memorial, Reflecting Pool, Navy Annex and Barracks, 1943. National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection/photographer George A. Grant.



way that might impair its historical interest. The War Department also took over a section of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, closing it to visitors to protect Washington's water supply.³¹

On May 15, 1942, the secretary of the interior granted the War Department permission to use all facilities at Fort Hunt (south of Washington off the George Washington Memorial Parkway), except those used by the National Archives (remote latrines and powder magazines used for storing nitrate films). In 1942, the military transformed Fort Hunt from an inviting picnic area to a major military installation with more than 100 buildings, guard towers, and electric fences. The military housed and interrogated Third Reich scientists, submariners, and soldiers there. Initially, most of the prisoners housed at Fort Hunt were German U-boat crew members who had survived the sinking of their submarines. As the war progressed, the focus shifted to some of the most prominent German scientists who had surrendered. Prisoners stayed at the installation from two weeks to nine months, and were held incommunicado. After their interrogation was complete, they were transferred to regular prisoner-of-war camps. The Army remained at Fort Hunt until November 1946.³²

Further south, soldiers from Fort Belvoir and marines from Quantico had been conducting military maneuvers in Prince William Forest Park since 1938. In May 1942 the War Department secured a special use permit for exclusive use of the park's five cabin camps. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) occupied the park from 1942 to 1945. Park Superintendent Ira B. Lykes, who entered the military as a first lieutenant in the US Marine Corps stationed at Quantico, directed the base forestry program, leaving him only weekends to focus on his duties as park superintendent. Lykes observed the changes the OSS made in the park as he drove to work at Quantico. The military erected barbed wire fences, and armed soldiers patrolled with guard dogs. The OSS was training spies in the park and training officers to penetrate enemy lines and gather intelligence. They booby-trapped and destroyed old buildings, and built a "little Tokyo" in the woods, where they regularly staged assaults. Lykes persuaded the military tenants to help cover some of the costs. By November 1941, the park had acquired 14,446 acres. Lykes initially hoped the military would build a system of internal roads connecting the five cabin camps, but that never happened. Yet, by 1945, the Army maintained some roads, built barrier gates on roads into the park, and winterized the cabin camps.³³

Transfer of park equipment, land, and facilities

NPS not only allowed the military to use its parks for training and for rest and recreation, it also contributed other resources. Early in 1942, federal officials called for a survey to determine the amount of surplus equipment and supplies that could be released for use by war agencies and other federal departments. In 1943, NPS reported that it had turned over thousands of dollars' worth of equipment to the military, including the loan of heavy snow removal equipment valued at \$150,000.³⁴ In addition to the Ahwahnee and Mount McKinley hotels, NPS transferred a number of other park facilities to various branches of the military and to war work. The War Department purchased the Eastman Hotel and Bathhouse at Hot Springs National Park for use as a hospital. Military officials leased Frijoles Canyon Lodge

in Bandelier National Monument for housing soldiers stationed nearby and their families, and took over Summit Tavern (Acadia National Park) for defense purposes. The Army used Frozen Niagara Hotel at Mammoth Cave National Park for training.³⁵

During the war, NPS permanently transferred six parcels of land (9,580 acres) to the War and Navy departments. The transfers included 16 acres of Colonial National Historical Park to the Navy for a housing project, 3,052 acres in Hawaii National Park to the War Department for a bombing range, 1,072 acres at Otter Creek Recreational Demonstration Area to the War Department for training, 739 acres at Petersburg to the War Department for a training school, and 4,000 acres at Santa Rosa Island National Monument to the War Department. The Navy took over Fort Jefferson National Monument for radar operations, and the monument joined Cabrillo and Fort Pulaski national monuments in being devoted exclusively to war work.³⁶

Cabrillo had always been located on land surrounded by Fort Rosecrans. Having the Army control access to the park's main road provided greater security and aided in traffic control. Still, balancing the requirements of a military base gearing up for war and a heavily visited tourist attraction proved difficult. The park superintendent expressed concern that War Department work would seriously restrict the public's access and enjoyment of the monument. Once again, however, national defense took precedence over NPS concerns, and in February 1941, the Army and Navy Joint Defense Board requested the transfer of the monument to the War Department for administration by the Army as part of Fort Rosecrans. Drury told Colonel John White, now director of the Army's Western Region, that although national defense was paramount, the Park Service had to make every effort to keep Cabrillo as it was. An uneasy cooperation between the two agencies continued for several more months. Visiting hours were curtailed, and an FBI representative and two guards were posted at the entrance gate.

On May 12, 1941, the Secretary of War formally requested Ickes's permission to occupy and use Cabrillo for the duration of the war. Ickes issued a special use permit to the War Department on May 17, making it possible for NPS to reclaim its property after the war. His action was not surprising since there was a great need for a new coastal defense system centered in San Diego. Some of the nation's largest aircraft carriers were based there, and San Diego Naval Air Station was in the process of being enlarged to provide a base for the air arm of the Pacific fleet. Also, a Navy supply depot, the Naval Training Station, a Marine base, the Naval Fuel Depot, and many small installations were all located in San Diego. Defenses for these activities were woefully inadequate, with virtually no protection from air attack. Fear of enemy attacks on the Pacific Coast increased after the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, and implementation of the Harbor Defense Plan intensified. Still, NPS was not willing to abandon the property permanently. When White visited in 1943, the damage alarmed him. He found the Old Spanish Lighthouse occupied by a US Naval Signaling Station. Part of the main highway to the monument had been torn up. Batteries and observation posts had been constructed near the monument, and the grounds had been altered beyond recognition.³⁷

Fort Pulaski near Savannah, Georgia, faced a similar situation. The military had been interested in the strategic location of the park's Cockspur Island since the eighteenth cen-

tury. In 1940 Army and Navy officers came to evaluate the possible use of docking facilities at Cockspur Island. When the War Department later requested use of the wharf there to unload guns and supplies for transport to Fort Screven, the park superintendent expressed concern about the handling of ammunition and hazardous materials. Despite those concerns, in December 1940 Interior officials gave the War Department permission to use the wharf provided that it handled no hazardous materials. By August 1941, the Navy had selected Cockspur Island as a location for a naval station. Its deep-water access and docking facilities, its old CCC buildings, available utilities, and proximity to a nearby highway made the site desirable. A few months later, Navy and NPS representatives met to negotiate the Navy's use of the park's administration buildings, living quarters, entrance, road, and a portion of the historic landscape. Navy officials planned to use land west of the entrance road and leave the utility buildings and four living quarters to the park. The superintendent put the best face on this, emphasizing the potential benefits of Navy occupancy such as improved security. In November 1941, Interior officials issued a special use permit to the secretary of the navy to construct and maintain a section base at Cockspur Island for inshore patrol.

The Pearl Harbor attack a month later intensified the focus on defense. On March 18, 1942, Secretary Ickes notified NPS that the entire Cockspur Island would be turned over to the Navy Department. The next day the park closed its doors to the public and transferred occupancy to the Navy. By July 1942, the naval section base was in full operation with 200 men stationed at Cockspur Island. The completed section base consisted of barracks accommodating 400 men, an administrative office, movie auditorium, club room, cooking facilities, officer's club, gym, athletic field, tennis courts, and several ammunition magazines. The Navy used only one-fifth of the island, the western part, and an inspection by NPS in 1942 did not reveal any impact on historic resources. Fort Pulaski officially reopened to visitors on August 1, 1947, after the Navy halted operations at Cockspur Island.³⁸

In another instance, NPS withdrew more than 3,000 acres from Hawaii National Park to provide an Army bombing range. In late 1938 the Army Air Corps decided it needed a bombing range in Hawaii and selected a location on the park's Ka'u coast as the only one that met all its needs. NPS officials resisted, arguing that this would establish a dangerous precedent for the entire park system. Undeterred, the Army applied for nine square miles of Ka'u seacoast the following April. On May 29, 1939, Ickes informed the secretary of war that if the secretary insisted that it was the only suitable site, he would not object. But under the 1916 act establishing the park, which specified that the park be preserved with its natural features unimpaired for public use, this use of the area would require congressional action to remove it from NPS jurisdiction. A bill was introduced transferring nine square miles (approximately 6,450 acres)—later amended to 3,052 acres. The withdrawal was made effective on July 16, 1940. Except for a brief period in 1943 when the Navy did some practice bombing, the military never used the withdrawn area. In spring 1946 the acting superintendent tried to reopen the Ka'u issue. He argued that if the War Department was not using it, it should revert to NPS, but the order of withdrawal would not be revoked until 1950.³⁹

NPS faced a unique situation with Bandelier where the Manhattan Project and growth of Los Alamos would have a profound, permanent impact. The US Army Corps of Engineers

planned to develop a road through the detached Otowi section of the monument. The custodian became outraged when the military began dynamiting cliffs to widen the road. He later spotted Army engineers clearing a power line right of way through the northern tip of the Otowi section without NPS approval. Development at the old Los Alamos Ranch proved a serious threat to Bandelier, but NPS managers faced a secret wartime effort about which they knew nothing. The military pressed ahead, ignoring NPS protests. NPS Region II Director M.R. Tillotson refused to back down. Experimental detonation near Otowi, he wrote Drury, might irreparably damage the ruins, but he also acknowledged that because of the project's importance, NPS opposition might carry little weight. Between October 1944 and mid-July 1945, NPS issued permits to house personnel working on the Los Alamos atomic bomb project and their families at Bandelier. It issued other permits for patrolling restricted areas within the monument and erecting guardhouses and guard shelters.⁴⁰

NPS also received defense-related requests involving its coastal areas, for installing protection apparatus, searchlight batteries, and gun batteries. Often these requests were temporary—for the duration of the war plus six months. The military operated numerous aircraft warning stations in NPS areas along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The War Department paid the operating costs except where NPS personnel voluntarily cooperated in conjunction with their regular duties. For example, some NPS employees took over aircraft observation duties at aircraft warning stations during their regular shifts. On the Atlantic Coast, Acadia and the Statue of Liberty National Monument participated in the program. Along the Pacific Coast, Mount McKinley, Olympic, Mount Rainier, Lassen, Yosemite, and Joshua Tree were involved. At Kill Devil Hill in Wright Brothers National Memorial, the military installed an “ultra-high frequency monitoring system” at the top of the monument, presumably to monitor and locate enemy submarines patrolling the shipping lanes off shore.⁴¹

Impact of military use

It is important to recognize that military use was not uniform throughout the national park system, and the impact of that use varied. In some instances, military use of national parks, monuments, and related areas caused significant damage and even changed the character of these lands. Drury remained concerned about the negative impact of military use of park facilities and resources but tried to present the effects in the most favorable light. In 1943, he reported that military authorities had demonstrated “a spirit of cooperation.” Even though most of the coastal parks and monuments were being used for defense installations, he further stated that “no important park values are being destroyed, and in many cases military needs are being served in conjunction with park protection activities.”⁴² Similarly, John E. Doerr, chief of the Naturalist Division, reported to the NPS Advisory Board that no park values had been permanently impaired by the military's recreational use of the parks. Yet he worried that this could happen if rest and recreation camps were opened in the parks. Once established, he warned, the military departments might want to retain them. Rest and recreation camps, temporary or permanent, he said, seemed to necessitate formal landscape treatment, styles of architecture not in keeping with park landscapes, entertainment facilities, and other things foreign to parks. These camps required the extension of existing road system, water lines,

sewage disposal plants, garbage disposal, and power lines. "In brief," Doerr concluded, "the viewpoint of the armed forces is perhaps not the viewpoint of the National Park Service."⁴³

Military use had a particularly significant impact on a number of parks. For example, Army use of Hawaii National Park for motorized and infantry maneuvers and firing practice caused extensive damage to the forests and desert terrain, but with martial law in effect, NPS could not prohibit this use. The best park officials could do was work out a tentative agreement that confined Army use to a specified area on certain days each week. But the agreement was not upheld. Finally, in November 1944, Secretary Ickes complained to the War Department that the Army had been using the Ka'u area for two years without a permit, causing heavy damage. He pointed out that there was no longer a need to train men in a national park. In January 1945, the Army discontinued its unauthorized use of the Ka'u desert for training and maneuvers, and the following year cleared unexploded shells from Kilauea and most of the Ka'u section. Yet in 1955 the superintendent reported that duds were still being found in the Ka'u desert, and several areas would continue to show damage.⁴⁴

Military activities also had a negative impact on the parks in Alaska. In August 1942, a logging crew began sawing down trees on the shore of Excursion Inlet to provide piling for construction of a huge Army shipping base. The project would require 20,000 to 30,000 pilings at an estimated cost of \$15 million. Superintendent Frank T. Been visited the site two weeks after the cutting had begun and reported that the logging crew was felling trees at the north end of the inlet well within the boundary of Glacier Bay National Monument. While Been condemned the removal of the virgin stand, he reluctantly acquiesced. Regional Director Owen Tomlinson explained to Drury that the military necessity was so urgent that all they could do was try to prevent unnecessary damage.

Lieutenant General John Dewitt, head of the Western Defense Command, had ordered the construction of the shipping base in July 1942 as part of the Army's logistical preparation for air and land operations in the Aleutian Islands. The Army contracted with a San Francisco company to construct the facility at a cost of over \$17 million. The Aleutian campaign ended before the base was in operation. The only use made of the base was non-military. In March 1945, after two and a half years of secrecy, the Army revealed this project to reporters; only then did NPS officials learn of the plan. Tomlinson and Drury agreed that the land should be withdrawn from the monument and transferred to the War Department to protect the monument's integrity. As a result, in 1943 Interior officials negotiated a formal land transfer with the War Department, an agreement that allowed the secretary to terminate the public land order at any time subject to the approval of the president. The agreement also stated that upon termination of the public land order all buildings and facilities erected by the War Department would be transferred to Interior or removed and the sites restored as much as possible to their condition before the war. NPS efforts to contain the damage were only partly successful. The Army left NPS with a landing field inside the park that Interior officials later turned over to the Civilian Aeronautics Administration for commercial use.⁴⁵

While the negative effects of having large numbers of troops in the park were clear, there were benefits as well. Opening up parks to the military allowed NPS to demonstrate its support for the war effort and its contributions at a time when the very existence of the national

park system was being threatened. The 1943 NPS director's annual report rationalized the national defense imperative, stating that, "There is significant justification of the national park concept in the fact that increasing thousands of members of the armed forces are being given opportunities they never had before, and may never have again, to see the inspiring beauty and historical significance of this land of ours."⁴⁶ Troop visits brought desperately needed business to park concessions that were struggling because of the drop in civilian tourism. Perhaps most important, it blunted accusations by grazing, lumbering, and mining interests that national parks were not making their share of sacrifices for the war effort. Faced with either opening the parks for use by military personnel or for use by war profiteers, NPS officials chose the former.⁴⁷

One of the greatest benefits for NPS was in exposing millions of soldiers and sailors to the parks for the first time. Even more beneficial than the overnight bivouacs and field maneuvers, Drury explained, was "the far-reaching effects upon the mental attitude of these members of the armed forces [which] resulted from their seeing some of the greatest aspects of the America that they are fighting to preserve." By August 1943, two million servicemen had visited national parks, often in parts of the country they had never seen before. Many would return after the war, contributing to the tremendous growth of park visits in the 1950s.⁴⁸

Toward the end of the war, Drury claimed that use of park land for military purposes saved the military an estimated \$30 million, with "little destruction of park properties." While the military benefited from the access to the parks for recreation and training, some concessionaires also benefited from the revenue that military and civilian war workers brought into the parks. The military also benefited from the expertise of park staff. In 1942, Drury reported that the knowledge NPS employees had of the areas they administered was "constantly sought by military authorities." The Army used NPS landscape architects, engineers, and "field men" to help locate gun emplacements and effectively camouflage them and to report weather data, road and trail conditions, and the accessibility of mountain and densely forested areas.⁴⁹

In 1944 Drury told Congress that NPS faced two basic questions: What relationship did its activities bear on the war program? and, What minimum activity was it required by law to perform as guardian of part of the federal estate? It had granted 463 permits to the Army, Navy, and other war agencies to use park land for training, rest and rehabilitation, and other purposes. There had been four transfers of jurisdiction for the duration of the war (including Cabrillo to the War Department and Fort Pulaski to the Navy); six temporary transfers; 31 cases of utilization of mineral, timber, forage, and water; and 71 permits involving occupancy and some constriction or modification of landscape. There were five cases of exclusive occupancy of facilities; 162 permits involved field exercises, maneuvers, and overnight bivouac; 27 cases permitted the loan or transmittal of equipment. In most cases the understanding or expectation was that the properties would be restored to their original condition after the war but, Drury conceded, this was not always the case.⁵⁰

In 1946 NPS reported that most outstanding permits and authorizations for the use of its areas and facilities for war purposes had been terminated, and it was returning the areas to their former condition as quickly as possible. Drury testified that during the war, the parks,

monuments and historic sites, “have justified their existence if for no other reason than that since Pearl Harbor they have been a source of inspiration and pleasure” to some 5.5 million members of the armed forces. NPS had issued, he said, approximately 1,700 authorizations for various types of military use of national park areas and resources.⁵¹ Despite severe budget and staffing cuts and a drop in visitation from roughly 21 million before the war to roughly six million a few years later, NPS had with very few exceptions succeeded in preserving the national park system and keeping the parks open. Moreover, its experience with military use during the war and the related threats to park resources had left it with a greater appreciation for the need for resource protection.

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