

Chapter 12

“They Drank Their Own Tears”: Archaeology of Conflict Sites

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Introduction

The subject of this chapter is not about how many troops were on the ground, how many and what types of vehicles were used, the positions and movements at sea or over the terrain, or the type of ammunition used. It is about the human element and legacy left after the battle, it is about the way in which we as archaeologists and managers understand how world wars shape culture and communities and how it affects us as individuals, it is about the value the community places on heritage related to the battle, and it is about how that heritage is represented and discussed in a public forum. This chapter takes a step back from the individual sites, artifacts, and landscapes and focuses on the people and places and what we as archaeologists experience when we engage in archaeology at conflict sites.

There are several concerns archaeologists have when it comes to sites of conflict. One concern is that by preserving and interpreting conflict sites, we are prolonging the time it takes for healing and promoting often unresolved political and historical tensions. An alternative view is that addressing conflict sites openly helps to heal the wounds and can provide significant cultural and educational resources and lessons, “as well as economic potential if marketed effectively” (Schofield 2009:51). What the work in Saipan has demonstrated is that the process of addressing conflict sites swings on a pendulum between these two extremes and in no particular pattern or timing. During the Battle of Saipan project, both ends of the spectrum and the gray zone in between became

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apparent. What follows is a discussion about the unresolved tensions as well as the healing capabilities of reflecting upon war and a little bit of the in-between.

Monuments and Memorialization

The process of memorialization both from the perspective of sites being actual monuments and the process of memorialization through ceremony, remembrance, visitation commemorations, interpretive monuments, storytelling, and individual acts that transpire at significant places is a subject both historians and archaeologists have expended great amounts of time trying to understand (Schofield and Johnson 2006). The motivations behind and behaviors of individuals and groups who partake in memorialization whether on a private personal level or as an outward group activity have yet to be fully explored at WWII sites in Saipan. This is one area of investigation that has the potential to address the spectrum and range of responses and feelings a community might have to conflict sites and their study and interpretation. As an example, in Saipan, memorialization can be characterized as both definitions: sites as monuments as well as acts of memorialization, and not just by one ethnic group but by many both on land *and* in the water. Sites such as Banzai Cliff and Suicide Cliff where hundreds of civilians (mostly Japanese) committed suicide near the end of the battle are both monuments and areas where memorialization takes place. The cliffs are crowded with individual, group, and government-sponsored monuments dedicated to the lives of those who committed suicide as well as the US and Japanese soldiers and Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Indigenous civilians who endured the battle. The monuments themselves range from small offerings of food, paper cranes, candy, and incense, to monumental slabs of inscribed granite, to initials carved into cacti pads.

Other sites on land are off the beaten track and knowledge of their location comes through first-hand account or through family members who know the location, such as caves used as shelter during the war. These sites have small individual or family offerings in the form of food, small memorials (i.e., paper cranes, stupas, tablets, statues), or personal objects. The sites are on both public lands and private lands, and if on private, the permission of landowners may or may not be sought.

The process of memorialization does not stop at the water's edge but continues into the waters surrounding the island. Two monuments are located on the Kawanishi H8K "Emily" site—one is Japanese and the other Korean. The Korean monument is a large block of granite set upon a granite platform. It was placed on the site by *Challenge! Earth Exploration*, a television adventure series that previously aired on the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). On one side in both Korean and English is written "Spirits sacrificed in the Pacific War, rest in peace, KBS Challenge! Earth Exploration, Innolt Engineering Co. Ltd." A second side lists the director, producer, and others involved in the program's placement of the monument. The other two sides have a series of memorial poems and statements including "to spirits who hired to the compulsory military service and died during the Pacific War" and another that reads "anger, tears and grunge." These inscriptions clearly indicate a Korean involvement in the battle and emphasize the hostility and sadness of Korean conscripts who were

forced into service. It is uncertain why a Japanese aircraft was selected for the placement of this Korean monument and the answer can only be found by contacting the *Challenge! Earth Exploration* crew. It may be related to the “Emily” being a popular dive site which is accessed by a number of dive tour operators and thus, the impact of the monument would be greater on divers. The question remains unanswered but the message is clear—the Korean community is keenly aware of their role in the battle as conscripted labor. The ability for memorials to express anger and blame represents a political element in the process of memorialization that is directive and non-dismissive of the events and actions. Reactions to the monument by two Japanese divers on separate occasions were unsympathetic and borderline anger that a Korean monument was on a Japanese plane in which only Japanese would have perished. One cannot help but wonder if these reactions are residual of the historical relationship between Japan and Korea. As Little and Shackel (2014:40) have pointed out, “Heritage conflicts are not abstract, but are intensely meaningful to the communities and individuals involved in them, heightening the importance of ethical engagement.”

A second Japanese monument is located on the site and is an epitaph for an individual (Fig. 12.1). As the first few letters are in a special writing style, they are undecipherable; however, the last four characters translate to “Underwater (seabed) War Memorial.” The monument is made of granite and is similar in shape to that of a wooden stupa used for modern Japanese Buddhist-style graves. This monument appears to have been erected by an individual or family. At the base of the monuments, many small movable objects have been placed on the seabed including several gas cylinders.

On this same site, there appears another arguable form of memorialization which may represent an individual’s visitation—etched graffiti in the wing of the plane (Fig. 12.2). While in a traditional definition graffiti is a form of vandalism and can protest or represent a person’s identity, graffiti also can be viewed as an act of memorialization. Archaeologists view it as destructive to the very fabric of historical and cultural sites and while this is true, we still need to consider the meaning behind this destructive behavior and what it represents of the person(s) who created it and their relationship with the sites (Frederick and Clark 2014; Fernandes 2010).

A second equally destructive behavior that also can be considered a form of memorialization is the collection and arrangement of moveable artifacts on a site or the addition of materials to a site (i.e., sake bottles or tea kettles). This behavior occurred in conjunction with or after the placement of the Japanese monument on the “Emily” site, but it is seen in other places as well including the Japanese freighter (aka *Shoan Maru*) where 50 caliber rounds have been placed in patterns on a Korean monument. The Martin PBM Mariner site has been the subject of recent collection and piling of artifacts which has been documented in photography from early 2010 to the present (Fig. 12.3). Photographs from the 1980s show that objects are also brought down on sites, as evidenced by the wooden stupa and sake bottle placed on the propeller of the Aichi E31A “Jake” site. A tea kettle was also found on the “Emily” site in proximity to the Japanese monument. When discussing this behavior of collecting and aggregating artifacts or adding offerings on site with the dive community, they all suggest it is the Asian and more particularly the Japanese diving community who are responsible. This raises an interesting juxtaposition between



Fig. 12.1 Japanese monument with collected air cylinders stacked around base (Photo: Brett Seymour)

Japanese and Korean divers who like to “make” things (i.e., creating small memorials out of items) and US divers who have a tendency to “take” things (i.e., souveniring mementos).

The large granite monuments will stand the test of time, but the spontaneous, portable, and/or organic memorials of small groups, families, or individuals are less likely to survive as they may disintegrate, be altered, or even removed. While their accretion speaks to the time in which they were placed on the ground or in the sea, our understanding of them as memorials represent the plurality and diversity of the

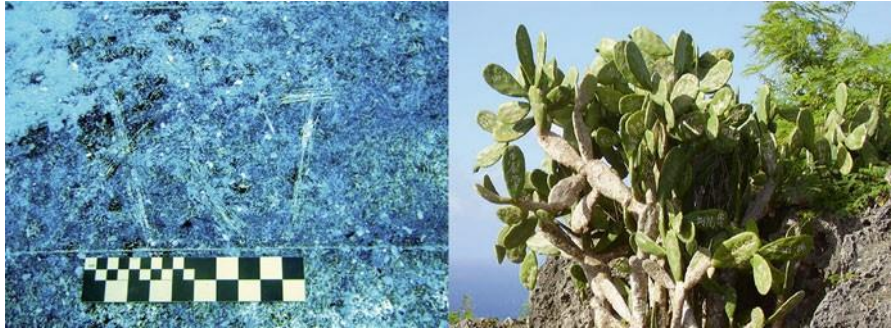


Fig. 12.2 Graffiti etched into the aircraft wing and graffiti etched into cacti atop Suicide Cliff

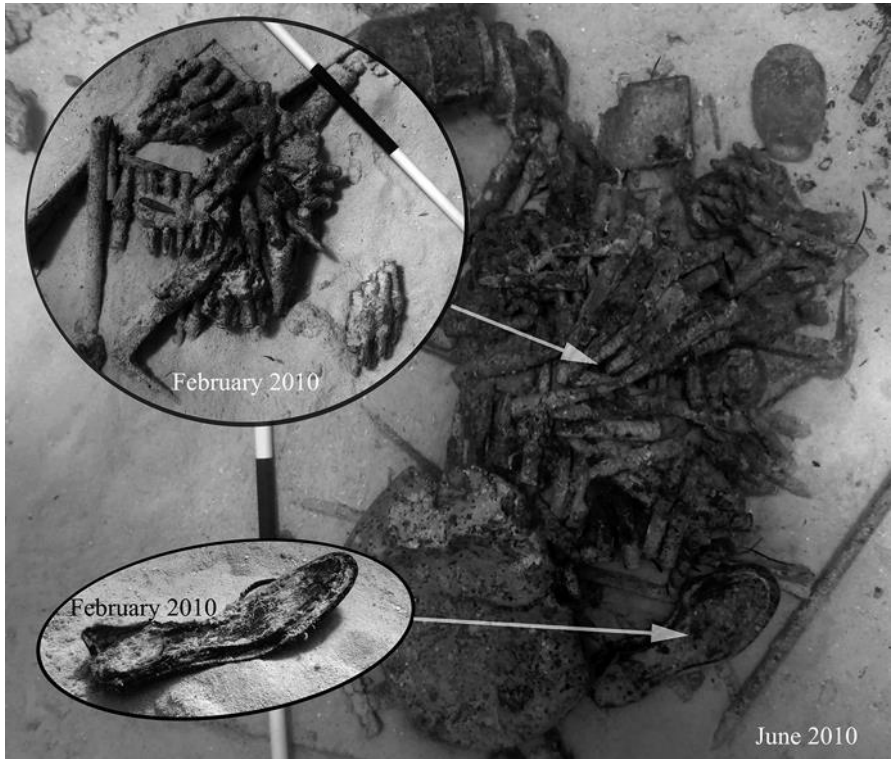


Fig. 12.3 Comparison of moveable objects on Mariner site (Photo: Sam Bell)

community and individuals who were touched by the battle over time. From paper cranes, to incense, to American flags, to Virgin Mary statues, the memorials represent and express both the collective loss and constitution of the battlefield community. An in-depth, cross-cultural study of monuments on Saipan is much needed.

Monuments of War: Heritage or Off-Limits

An interesting phenomena but one that should not be surprising is the fact that some WWII sites/battles within the Pacific are considered more acceptable or are more attractive to visit than others, particularly for Japanese tourists. This comes as a lesson in generalizing about heritage tourism for specific cultural markets, as what may work for one battle or site may not work for the next. As an example, within Saipan, there are sites that Japanese tourists will not dive. According to a local well-respected Japanese dive tour operator, many Japanese divers are reluctant and refuse to dive in the vicinity of Banzai Cliff because of the “souls” that are left behind. He went as far to say that some that had dived the site reported seeing spirits in the water. What is interesting is that Japanese tourists appear to have no or fewer reservations about visiting the terrestrial counterpart of these sites which see tourists by the busload on a daily basis. The difference between the terrestrial and underwater context of these sites warrants more investigation.

Broadly speaking, Saipan is probably the most heavily visited battlefield of WWII by Japanese peoples within the Pacific. This is not just because it is closer to the Japanese homeland, but likely because it was once part of the Japanese holdings and many families still consider it home. Japan held the Mariana Islands from 1914 until the battle in 1944, but even before they received the islands as a mandate territory under the League of Nations, the Japanese controlled all commerce and shipping within the Marianas. As a result, there exists a connection with Saipan that is not just militaristic. Pearl Harbor is another site that is visited with great frequency by Japanese tourists, and it could be posited that this is related to the Japanese Empire’s success at the site during WWII. Places like Chuuk Lagoon, where US forces launched Operation Hailstone sinking 52 ships within the lagoon and destroying over 400 aircraft (Jeffery 2004:109), was a complete disaster and loss for the Japanese Empire and, as such, may be innately less appealing. More study is needed as to the motivations of Japanese tourists and WWII sites and battles within the Pacific.

Japanese tourists are not the only cultural group with limits on sites that are considered undesirable to visit. On the island of Saipan, there are individuals of Chamorro and Carolinian descent who find certain sites taboo or undesirable to visit. Cave sites are, for some, off-limits because of the spirits that reside inside or within their vicinity. During a recent project that involved recording WWII-related caves, this was a theme that came up regularly when speaking with locals—from their youth, many were scared to enter the caves for fear of spirits or leftover traps or dangers from the war.

Memories and Rebuilding

“Archaeology as a process of commemoration can be used to draw out individual memories and make memorialization a collective endeavor. The distortions of memory and the problems of memory work make this difficult, but the potential for

inclusive and interdisciplinary work cannot be ignored” (Moshenska 2006:65). Much of the focus on memory collection of WWII involves that of veterans, and more particularly male veterans, while less attention has been paid to the memory collection of women and civilians who were involved and impacted by the war. The collection of civilian memories, particularly Indigenous memories, was important to the project, as the goal was to be inclusive and multivocal in our attempt to interpret the battle and heritage. Thus, speaking to both men and women who endured the battle was critical to understanding the story and challenging the history that involves only a Japanese and American narrative.

Throughout the research project, I had a chance to meet with many civilian survivors of the battle, particularly those of Chamorro and Carolinian descent, to record their memories. More times than not, those conversations veered toward the post-battle memories rather than the actual battle, despite my efforts to return to the actual event. And in some instances, elders were not interested in discussing the battle at all. Memories of war are incredibly complex involving injury, loss, and destruction. Their study is also subject to many problems such as memory loss, distortion, and even social or political strategies. With the risk of generalizing, trivializing, and aggrandizing, the reactions to discussing memories of the battle focusing on the post-battle period seemed to be related to a cultural and historical essence of survival and rebuilding—an essence that was built upon and strengthened by a historical narrative of colonial intervention with the Spanish in the 1600s, the Germans in the late nineteenth century, the Japanese in the early twentieth century, and the USA in the mid-twentieth century to the present.

The epitome of this resilience is characterized in the phrase “they drank their own tears” which was the title of a children’s book on elder memories of WWII and was repeated time and again by elder Escolastica Cabrera in her account of the battle. This phrase comes from Esco’s family story of sheltering in the caves during which the thirsty children were told by their father to continue crying but to catch their tears so that they could quench their thirst (Escolastica B. Tudela-Cabrera, personal communication, 2013). Esco in particular focused much of her recollection on the post-battle period during which she, and later her husband, became successful entrepreneurs providing beauty shop services, catering for schoolchildren, and operating a store. Her stories centered on the opportunities that the battle brought for her family as opposed to the destructive nature of war. This general sense of resilience is not restricted to Esco but was carried throughout conversations with many elders.

However, this is not to suggest that civilians were not and still do not harbor feelings of anger, distrust, and accountability for the “twenty-five days of battle... borne upon their non-combatative shoulders” (Cabrera 2015). Subsequent generations, in particular, recognize the devastation the battle brought to their islands, which impacted not just their parents and grandparents but the “ancients” whose histories and heritage were wiped from the landscape and seascape through the destructive process of war (i.e., tunneling, burning, bombing, etc.). The loss of Indigenous cultural heritage in war compounds the loss of generations that extend well beyond those that can be accounted for.

The Chamorro and Carolinian struggle to have their history and culture adequately recognized and protected continues to this day with US government plans to use islands in the Marianas for military training, which would destroy pristine ancient sites (Franklin 2013). For many on the island, remembering and communicating the battle is as much a social and political platform on which to make present and future decisions about their involvement and protest in ongoing colonial and military activities, as it is a historical narrative. Thus, the archaeological investigation of the battle can serve as a mechanism for local communities and individuals to remind themselves of the destructive interference of war and advance their current narratives of resistance.

Conclusion

As early as 1995, a generation ago, archaeologists identified the importance of engaging with local communities and understanding and mitigating the negative impacts of our work (Pyburn and Wilk 1995), and those ideas of engagement and reflection have continued to be developed and refined today. Some have even suggested that what we do should evolve as a human rights-based practice or a form of civic engagement and social justice (Little and Shackel 2014). This call for not just a reflective, inclusive approach, but an active or even activist approach is apropos for a place like the Pacific where vestiges of colonial military practices are still part of the landscape and seascape and are actively carried out today. While the remains of the Battle of Saipan may seem like a backdrop against which the community of Saipan goes about its day, they are much more. The sites are signs of devastation and decay, reminders of rebuilding and hope, platforms for unresolved anger and distrust, mechanisms for healing, and stages for resistance. In the words of Desmond Tutu (1999:31), “the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, is embarrassingly persistent, and will return and haunt us unless it has been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we will find that it returns to hold us hostage.”

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