

Sandra Semchuk. *The Stories Were Not Told: Canada's First World War Internment Camps*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2019. Pp. 247.

Sandra Semchuk's *The Stories Were Not Told* is a unique and welcome addition to the growing body of work on Canada's 1914-1920 internment operations, 100 years after they came to an end.

The author, one of this country's foremost photographers, is the recipient of a 2018 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, with her work featured in collections throughout North America. Inspired by the author's precept that "The Land Remembers" (p. xxxi), *The Stories Were Not Told* features Semchuk's stunning recent photographs of all twenty-four internment and holding camp sites across Canada (pp. 24-92).

The book was supported by the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, a federal government endowment established in 2008 following a long campaign by the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Descendants of Ukrainian Canadian Internee Victims Association and the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko.¹

The work is a cautionary tale of the abuse of state power, its lasting consequences and the collective ability to overcome. In the author's words: "I dialogue with the internees and their descendants across cultures to model memory work for readers who have the desire to empathetically locate themselves in these stories" (p. xxix). This "memory work" is actively designed to foster reconciliation. Essentially, the work probes the intergenerational trauma of internment through tales told to the author by the internees' descendants, an approach that prioritises unvarnished oral accounts and giving the experience a very personal face.

But what is the relevance of this work for Canadian military historians? An early statement declares that "it is not the purpose of this book to give the complex history of the internment" (p. lvi). Considering the fact that numerous records were destroyed, lost or marred by transliteration errors, and that few who endured internment kept written accounts, there is much that is welcome

¹ Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, accessed 5 June 2020, [<https://www.internmentcanada.ca/>].

about this particular approach, even as it simultaneously obscures the wider context.

First and foremost, the stories of Canada's first internment operations are not widely known, a major point stressed throughout the work. From 1914 to 1920, 8,579 "enemy aliens" were interned behind barbed wire under armed guard. Fully 5,954 of the internees were nominal subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, mainly recent Ukrainian immigrants from Bukovyna and Galicia, including eighty-one women and 156 children.² At least 109 internees died of illness or injuries in the camps and six men, including eighteen-year-old Andrew Grapko, were fatally shot while trying to escape. More than 80,000 others were compelled to register with the authorities. Those who were wounded in less visible ways cannot be so easily counted and, as *The Stories Were Not Told* emphasises, the trauma of internment resonates.

Even while only outlining the historical bones of this story, the work makes abundantly clear that nativism was the real motivation behind internment. Nikola Sakaliuk, interned at Fort Henry and Kapuskasing, declares that "they found it useful to look upon us all as enemies" (p. 106). They certainly did; even in the midst of a war with German militarism, the authorities drew a sharp distinction between Austro-Hungarian subjects of German ethnicity and those of Ukrainian extraction, with the latter much more likely to be interned.

Of course, Ukrainians opposed the Austro-Hungarian occupation of their homeland and many had come to Canada to escape compulsory military service in the Dual Monarchy's ranks, only underscoring the prejudice that motivated the state's actions.

As the book further reveals, life in the camps, which were thrown up quickly, often being built by the internees' own hands, was harsh. Castle Mountain internees constructed the Banff to Lake Louise motorway, while Kapuskasing, Ontario and Spirit Lake, near Amos, Quebec, were essentially experimental settlements, tests to see whether non-Indigenous people could live year-round in the north. The latter camp, which housed Ukrainian internee families, was a

² Lubomyr Luciuk, Natalka Yurieva and Roman Zakaluzny, *Roll Call: Lest We Forget* (Kingston: Kashtan Press, 1999); and "Canada's First National Internment Operations of 1914 - 1920," Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, accessed 5 June 2020, [<https://www.ucccla.ca/ukrainian-canadian-internment>].

largely unrecognised part of the government of Quebec's agricultural colonisation zone endeavours.

As recruiting took an ever greater toll on economic life in 1916-17, the authorities paroled the vast majority of the internees to be exploited as forced labour in essential- and dangerous-occupations like mining and railway maintenance.

Whatever benefits the state may have accrued from this, internment hindered the overall war effort, a core point that deserves far more attention. Consider the case of Filip Konowal. An ethnic Ukrainian, he came to Canada in search of a better life in 1913 and initially found only irregular employment. He enlisted in 1915 and won the Victoria Cross at Hill 70. The only difference between Konowal and an internee was that fate had decreed he be born in the Russian Empire. How many other Konowals were lost to the Canadian Expeditionary Force because of internment?

Fear of Bolshevism, especially alongside the Canadian intervention in the Russian Civil War, kept internment in place for fully eighteen months after the Armistice. Those imprisoned after 11 November 1918 were "reds," who, like Vasyl Doskoch, a renowned organiser for the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees after his belated release, had the audacity to demand better conditions within the camps.

The signing of the Treaty of Trianon, the peace agreement that formally ended the war with Hungary, on 4 June 1920, removed the last fig leaf supposedly justifying incarceration. The final internees were released and the last camps closed, sixteen days later.

Overall, readers will not find much that is new here, at least from a "traditional" historical viewpoint. In one fresh interpretation, the work argues that the *War Measures Act*, which authorised the internment, grew directly out of the *Indian Act*. However, while parallels are likewise drawn with the internment and forced evacuation of Canadian Japanese during the Second World War, no other internment operations are analysed. The stories of those non-Ukrainians who were interned during the First World War, including 2,009 Germans and 205 subjects of the Ottoman Empire, are not told here either. And what about the perpetrators? Aside from limited detail on Major General Sir William Otter, there is strikingly little insight into those who created and oversaw the incarceration of thousands of their neighbours.

The Stories Were Not Told nevertheless supersedes the existing general literature, much of which is now dated, though it should

certainly be consulted in tandem with the recent pioneering work of Lubomyr Luciuk, Bohdan Kordan and Mary Chaktsiris.³

Florence McKie, the granddaughter of Castle Mountain internee Mikhail Danyluk, considers that Canada's First World War internment operation, "gives examples for the youngsters to analyze, to see and to understand why the internment occurred. Not just that it occurred and that it was wrong, but that there is something to be understood about the process of making decisions" (p. 141). One can only agree, and *The Stories Were Not Told* is especially recommended for supplementary use in educational curricula.

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³ For earlier examples, see James R. Carruthers, "The Great War and Canada's Enemy Alien Policy," *Queen's Law Journal* 4, 1 (1978): 43-110; David J. Carter, *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire: Alien, Refugee and Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1914-1946* (Calgary: Tumbleweed Press, 1980); and Frances Swyripa and John Herd Thompson, eds., *Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada During the Great War* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1983). For the latest work, see especially Lubomyr Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence: Canada's First National Internment Operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920* (Kingston: Kashtan Press, 2001); Bohdan S. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Bohdan S. Kordan, *No Free Men: Canada, the Great War, and the Enemy Alien Experience* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016); and Mary Chaktsiris, "Identifying the Enemy in First World War Canada: The Historiography and Bureaucracy of Enemy Alien Internment and Registration," *Canadian Military History* 28, 2 (2019): 1-31.