



## *Bombs Away: Militarization, Conservation, and Ecological Restoration*

by David G. Havlick.

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“Bombs and Beasties” is the name of an event held at the Orford Ness National Nature Reserve<sup>1</sup> in England, where a wildlife refuge has replaced a Cold War weapons testing facility. Such sites are the subject of this compact and accessible work of military environmental history by David Havlick (Univ. of Colorado–Colorado Springs).<sup>2</sup> Its seven chapters analyze converted military sites from social, political, and environmental perspectives, using evidence from interviews, government documents, and site visits.<sup>3</sup> The author’s lucid style of writing and personal experience—he grew up near the highly toxic Rocky Mountain National Arsenal, now a National Wildlife Reserve (NWR)—will engage readers, both general and specialist.

The first two chapters, “Military Natures” and “Bunkers, Bats, and Base Closures,” lay out the study’s theoretical framework and discuss such concepts as “militarized landscapes” and “military-to-wildlife.” In explaining the transfer of jurisdiction of military sites from the Department of Defense (DOD) to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Havlick reveals contradictions between the agencies’ missions. Both are tasked with protection, but for different reasons and using different methods. The Defense Department most often destroys or prepares to destroy, while the FWS seeks to halt destruction, often by limiting or preventing human intervention. Unsurprisingly, restoration of DOD sites has been driven chiefly by budgets and efficiency rather than environmental concerns. Not all the actions are human, however. Havlick considers the role of nature as well in transforming sites from military to civilian uses.

In chapter 3—“Real Restoration?”—the author turns to specific case studies, including the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, seen by many as a model of successful restoration. He clarifies the meaning of the virtually interchangeable terms “ecological restoration” and “restoration ecology.” Both seek to return an area to a previous ecosystem, but which one? Havlick traces the evolution of thought on this issue from restoring to a pristine state to the “new ecology” view that such a state never existed. There is a danger that military activities once conducted at these sites will fade from memory. Visitors want to enjoy nature and forget about history. If they do know the history, they tend to see the site as a “victory” for nature. Forgetting the reasons for the sites is problematic and historians can help ensure that the visiting public learns the entire history of a site.

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1. See website.

2. Havlick has also written a book on land use for recreation, *No Place Distant: Roads and Motorized Recreation on America’s Public Lands* (Washington, DC: Island Pr, 2002), and co-edited the collection *Restoring Layered Landscapes: History, Ecology and Culture* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2015).

3. E.g., of the Green Belt in Central Europe, he writes, “I wondered: How is it that this heavily militarized, fortified death strip now offers an extensive series of wildlife sanctuaries and an extended route for recreational excursions” (86).

First, however, sites must be made safe for visitors. In chapter 4, “Sanctuaries Inviolable,” Havlick wonders whether a given military site can ever be completely converted to preservation and whether so doing would justify the huge costs involved. Currently, many sites are underdeveloped and most contain dangerous materials. Local residents, who have a wildlife refuge but cannot access it, might ask why it was converted in the first place. A key idea emerges in this chapter: Havlick argues that sites are “hybrid spaces,” both natural and created, and their management must reflect this. He applies Ulrich Beck’s “risk society” idea<sup>4</sup> to reveal the hybrid nature of these sites and notes that political considerations are critical.

Chapter 5, “Not Nature Alone,” covers international sites. Havlick finds good examples of how to preserve military sites but also points out the many differences between American and international sites. He praises the Iron Curtain Trail, part of the European Green Belt Initiative, which presents a more complete picture of the history of the old Cold War border. Other examples include Bikini Atoll, the promotional materials for which overlook radiation hazards and tout “pristine” nature, and the Korean Demilitarized Zone,<sup>5</sup> which is both a tourist attraction and example of success for nature. All of these landscapes were created or altered by humans and fit the “hybrid” nature of military sites.

The last two chapters, “Army Green” and “Remembering and Restoring Militarized Landscapes,” concern US military sustainability programs and ways to ensure such sites are remembered in a manner typified by the Iron Curtain Trail. These programs include waste reduction, renewable energy sources, and saving energy. While these projects attract attention, Havlick repeatedly reminds us that military matters always take priority: budget numbers show that most funding (78 percent) goes to cleaning up unexploded ordinance and hazardous waste, not preservation or public education.

Havlick stresses that we are surrounded by militarized landscapes, whether we realize it or not, and suggests how to maintain memories, using case studies such as Hiroshima and the Berlin Wall.

The lessons and legacies these places provide remain shaped not just by the dynamic processes of ecosystems and physical change, but also by politics, agency budgets, and social priorities. How we allow ourselves to experience and interpret these sites will shape their meaning as we encounter the past. How this translates to policy and action will, in turn, affect the way we live today and in the future. (162)

*Bombs Away* has few weaknesses, being built on a solid theoretical background illustrated by well chosen case studies. My biggest complaint is that the book is too short. Only one chapter is devoted to international sites, including many closed US bases in Europe. Moreover, not all closed bases become wildlife refuges. The Naval Training Center in San Diego was repurposed as commercial, residential, artistic, and educational spaces. And military-to-wildlife sites could usefully be compared with repurposed industrial sites or railways (“rails to trails”). In short, scholars should welcome David Havlick’s fine study as a model for adding missing pieces.

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4. See *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Pubs., 1992).

5. Havlick draws here on Lisa Brady’s “Life in the DMZ: Turning a Diplomatic Failure into an Environmental Success,” *Diplomatic History* 32.4 (2008) 585–611.