

Institution: University of Aberdeen
Unit of Assessment: 17 (Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology)
Title of case study: The Peleliu battlefield archaeological survey
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Staff members of the School of Geosciences are involved in research into Conflict Archaeology, especially based in the Pacific region and the WW2 Pacific island theatres. One exemplar project involves fieldwork undertaken on the island of Peleliu, in the Republic of Palau (Micronesia). The fieldwork and associated research has demonstrated that Peleliu is most likely the best preserved battlefield in the Pacific, and potentially the best preserved WW2 battlefield site anywhere.</p> <p>Supported by the findings of the research, proposals are now in place to incorporate Peleliu into the U.S. Government's National Park system, uniquely as a site on foreign soil. This aims to document and preserve the sites, provide education and outreach facilities to the general public, to monitor and maintain the battlefield through sustainable eco-tourism (with vital income generation for a fragile local economy in this developing country), and to protect the site from looting. The research has played a large and crucial part in providing supporting evidence and documentation for this process.</p> <p>The research has delivered impact on creativity, culture and society, and especially towards the enhancement to heritage preservation, conservation and presentation, including museum and gallery exhibitions and public education. Public and political debate has also been shaped and informed, and the findings of the research have enhanced a broad cross-cultural understanding of the issues.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research to this case study is relatively recent, and its impact fast-developing. The research in its most substantive form was sub-contracted by the Peleliu War Historical Society through funding provided by the American Battlefield Protection Programme (ABPP) within the U.S. National Park Service. Funding is also being used for de-mining operations to clear unexploded ordnance, and other cultural and outreach programmes. Researchers in Aberdeen (Knecht, SL since 2009, and Price, Chair since 2008) were specifically invited to undertake archaeological survey work in 2009 due to prior links with the Palauan government's Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC). The research leading to this case study is founded on fieldwork undertaken on Peleliu in late 2010 and into January 2011. This involved the documentation of 326 different sites, creating a significant archive of digital photography, main survey reports to the BAC and ABPP issued in early 2012, and the means to properly record sites of significance for future museum, education, outreach and tourist-related activities.</p> <p>Within the discipline of Archaeology, conflict research is of course a well-established field, with studies of events dating back thousands of years. In this specific case, however, the research is only the second study of Peleliu as a WWII theatre (the first being in 1984, and necessarily limited in scope for cultural and safety reasons), and Peleliu is itself considered to be the best preserved site of its type in the world. The research is also unique in considering not just the details of the battle itself, but issues of heritage management through a multi-vocal focus on all sides in the conflict. Most importantly, the project addresses the continuing impact of the battle and its</p>

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aftermath on the local population, a previously neglected arena: the conflict archaeology of Peleliu from the perspective of those whose home this was, and is. The project also seeks to ensure the survival both of the battlefield itself and the memory of those who fought there, and to maximise the educational, commemorative and reflective potential of a conflict landscape. It is believed the research will provide a reference work for future studies of a similar nature in this and other locations.

3. References to the research

1. **Price, N. & Knecht, R.;** “*Peleliu 1944: The Archaeology of a South Pacific D-Day*”. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 7 (1), Jan. 2012, 5-48.
2. **Price, N & Knecht, R.;** “*After the Typhoon: Multicultural Archaeologies of World War II on Peleliu, Palau, Micronesia*”. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 2013 (DOI: 10.1179/1574077313Z.00000000026).
3. Sponsors report commissioned by the Bureau of Arts and Culture, Government of Palau and the American Battlefield Protection Programme (<http://www.peleliuhistorical.org>).

4. Details of the impact

Various parties from the Republic of Palau and the United States have been attempting to protect the integrity and status of the Peleliu battlefields for some years. Following the survey in 2010, a series of meetings took place in Washington, Guam and Palau in 2011 towards achieving this objective. The contribution of the research principally lies in its thorough documentation and description of the battlefield site that supports and underpins the application for inclusion into the U.S. National Park system, and in that way has assisted with the goal of achieving protected area status as an NPS site for the battlefields. The survey report to the BAC has been used as evidence to the Palauan Government, U.S. National Park Service and to the U.S. Congress to support a Special Resource Study authorized by Congress and approved by the President of the Republic of Palau in 2013. These developments have also generated a five-year Sister Park agreement between the Peleliu Battlefield National Historic Landmark and the War in the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam [1].

The report has also been well received by the officials of National Park Service of the USA (based in Guam) who not only cite the work in evidence of their own ongoing commitments to support Palau in its efforts to preserve and promote the site, but also in their own reflections on future management of similar sites elsewhere in the Pacific arena. Steve Cypra of the Peleliu Historical Society, sponsor of the research, has advised the research team that the research report was read by Barbara Alberti, Superintendent of the War in the Pacific National Historic Park (NHP) in Guam and of the American Memorial Park, Saipan, and that it influenced the discussion and her reports on the matter immensely. [2]. Our work has established a useful methodological model in terms of incorporating local knowledge, integrating archival sources, standards of site recording, and in dealing with unexploded ordinance.

The research has also provided the existing National Historic Landmark (and associated cultural organs including the museum) with the means to better preserve, monitor and maintain the site, especially to protect the site more rigorously from souvenir hunters and looters. Site location and condition assessments provided by our survey report are now in the hands of local authorities as an essential tool for monitoring and enforcement. The Speaker of the Peleliu State Legislature, Des Matsutaro, advised in a communication to the US National Park Service in March 2012:

“The Peleliu Battlefield National Historic Landmark was designated in 1985. We the people of Peleliu were honored to be given the opportunity to express our gratitude to the U.S. and profound respect for the battlefield which took place on our land. As people unaccustomed to the responsibilities this recognition was to entail, we trusted in the United States to assist us in protecting this obligation. As seen in the ensuing years, significant efforts were undertaken by the U.S. to further recognize the importance of Peleliu, however we the people of Peleliu found ourselves having to rely on own resources to address the day to day challenges presented by this recognition, [...]. Seen in this light the people of Peleliu take enormous pride in what today is being recognized in the work of the University of Aberdeen’s Peleliu survey of military sites to preserve this Landmark” [3].

The Impact of the research in the immediate term has been to provide this evidence, but also to bring back to prominence in the consciousness of the United States, Palau, and to a lesser extent Japan and the wider world, the nature of WW2 in the South Pacific, and in particular in the conflict on Peleliu itself. Literally exorcising the ghosts of the past (see JCA paper 2013), the research has been well received by the people of Peleliu and the Government of Palau, in particular with respect to the traditional belief systems of the local populace, and their relationship with the site as a place of imagination, evocation, spirituality and death. In the words of the Peleliu State Cultural & Historical Preservation Commission: *“The Commission is deeply gratified and indebted by the efforts of the University of Aberdeen to document Peleliu’s historical artifacts and willingness to assist the State of Peleliu in future preservation efforts. Your efforts, particularly the 2012 WWII Battlefield Survey of Peleliu Island completed for the U.S. National Park Service, is now recognized as a milestone in its enormous contribution to our understanding of this U.S. National Historic Landmark” [4].*

Ultimately the main objective of the sponsors of the research is to achieve National Park status as a means of providing a lasting, protected memorial to the Peleliu battlefield, and the heritage of the Republic of Palau. Substantial achievements along these lines have been obtained as the results of the research have passed into the hands of the relevant authorities both in Palau and the United States. Along with the newly authorized Special Resource Study, a five-year sister Park agreement between the Peleliu Battlefield National Historic Landmark and the War in the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam was signed in 2012. The research also provides comprehensive documentation of the events of the battle for Peleliu, its causes and its aftermath, which in itself provides closure for those affected: the local population, the veterans and families of those who fought, died and survived [5]. The importance and impact of the results of the research is summarised in a communication from Steve Cypra to US Senator James Bingaman [6]:

“[...] the Republic of Palau and State of Peleliu have complied with requirements for a determination of feasibility as outlined in the Special Resource Study of the Peleliu National Historic Landmark of 2003. Further underscoring this affirmation, a 2012 summary of the Battlefield Survey of Peleliu Island funded by the National Park Service and conducted by the University of Aberdeen states, “In the 2010 survey we were able to confirm what other scholars have long suspected; that Peleliu is by far the best preserved battlefield in the Pacific. As the nature of the resources (of Peleliu) has begun to reach academic audiences further afield, the emerging consensus is that Peleliu may in fact be one of the best preserved battlefields left to us in any WWII theatre. The historic significance of the Peleliu battlefield is hard to overstate. The sheer quantity of artifacts and their evocative preservation on Peleliu are unique in their capacity to convey the nature of the Pacific War.”

Whilst it is acknowledged that academic impact is not a consideration of the Research Excellence Framework, it would be remiss not to reflect on the potential impact of this research on the wider

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field of Conflict Archaeology, particularly in a contemporary context. The journal in which the papers are published has, in each case, provided the outputs from the research with lead and extended article status and in discussing our work the editors say “its scope and scale may set a benchmark for future studies”. It is anticipated the research will form a reference body of work for future related study in the field, increasing Reach and Significance. It is anticipated the success of the project will allow further substantive funding to be secured for further detailed research in Peleliu from 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Draft Sister Park Arrangement between Peleliu Battlefield National Historic Landmark (State of Peleliu, Republic of Palau) & War in the Pacific National Historic Park (National Park Service, USA).
2. President of the Peleliu War Historical Society (sponsor of research) can corroborate the impact of the Report.
3. Correspondence to various officials of the National Park Service and of Peleliu from Des Matsutaro, Speaker of the Peleliu State legislature, 16th March 2012, along with newspaper articles from 22 and 23 March 2012, relating to the meeting between memorial park officials and Peleliu leaders.
4. Letter from the Peleliu Historical and Cultural Preservation Commission, Office of the Governor, dated February 18, 2013 corroborates the permission to publish results and support for ongoing Aberdeen research.
5. Letters from Bureau of Arts & Culture, Govt. of Palau can corroborate the appreciation of present research and desire for future collaboration.
6. Letter from the President of the Peleliu War Historical Society to Senator Jeff Bingaman, US Senate Energy & Resource Committee, dated 15 March 2012 (which directly cites the research).