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The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior

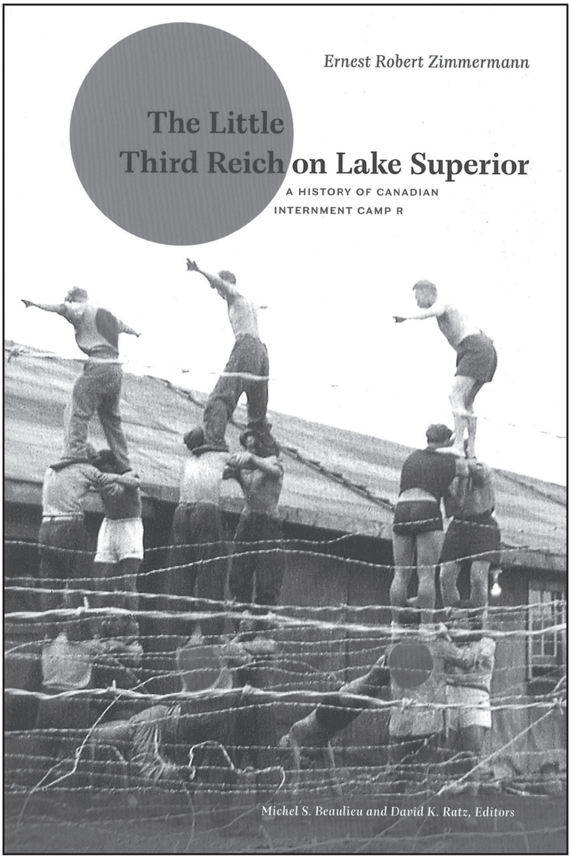
A History of Canadian Internment Camp R

by Ernest Robert Zimmermann. Edited by Michel S. Beaulieu and David K. Ratz

Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2015. 346 pages. $29.95
paperback. ISBN 978-0-88864-673-6 (uap.ulaberta.ca).

In a lesser-known contribution to the Second World War, from 1939 to 1947, Canada held over 35,000 prisoners of war (POWs) and internees in twenty-six internment camps and hundreds of labour projects scattered across the country. Ernest Zimmermann's *The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior* examines one of Canada's earliest internment camps, Camp R, in Red Rock, Northern Ontario. Unfortunately, Ernest Zimmermann was unable to see his project through to its completion but, after his untimely passing in 2008, his colleagues Michel Beaulieu and David Ratz picked up where he left off to complete the book.

Despite the significant number of internees and POWs sent from the United Kingdom to Canada, the historiography of internment in Canada during the Second World War has focused primarily on the internment of Canadian civilians. Placing his focus on those who arrived in the initial shipments of internees from the United Kingdom, Zimmermann attempts to bring their story to light. However, the limited historiography presents a challenge in that, as Zimmermann explains, there has yet to be a "satisfactory, systematic, overarching study of prisoner of war camp and internment operations in Canada" (xxviii). As this is in part due to the unique character of each of Canada's twenty-six internment camps, he argues that each internment camp should be studied in its individual context to better understand Canadian internment operations as a whole.


Ernest Robert Zimmermann
The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior
A HISTORY OF CANADIAN INTERNMENT CAMP R
Michel S. Beaulieu and David K. Ratz, Editors

Before looking at Camp R, Zimmermann dedicates a significant portion of his account to understanding why the British government elected to intern thousands of men and women and how the "most dangerous" ended up in Canada. Having suffered significant military defeats on the continent, facing a German invasion, and an emphasis on the perceived threat of a "Fifth Column" movement in the British Press, a volatile situation resulted, and the British public was willing to accept mass internment in the name of national security.

When the first internees arrived at Camp R, a re-purposed mill, on 2 July 1940, camp staff and guards expected 1,150 dangerous combatant POWs and treacherous enemy aliens, but the men who walked into camp were far from it – 700 Enemy Merchant Seamen (EMS) and 375 civilian internees, many of them old men and school boys. While there was a strong pro-Nazi element among many of the internees, Zimmermann notes it did not take long before the camp staff and guard realized the majority presented little danger to British or Canadian national security. In fact, half of the civilian internees were Jewish or anti-Nazi refugees; only 100 were pro-Nazis or Nazi sympathizers. Zimmermann argues the arrival of these low-risk individuals presented a number of challenges to officials. Canada was more willing to accept German POWs than civilian internees as their internment was governed by the 1929 Geneva Convention, which stipulated they had to be returned to the detaining power. There was no such equivalent for civilian internees, prompting the Canadian government to wonder whether civilian internees from Great Britain would remain in Canada as "unwanted immigrants" (56). While many were later reclassified as refugees and released in Canada or back to Great Britain, Zimmermann argues that former refugees have historically placed the blame on Canada for the "refugee misery" rather than Great Britain, "...the mother country of the original evil" (201). The British had instituted the tribunal system that categorized them as dangerous threats, decreed internment, and had sent them to Canada. Furthermore, the British government had failed to properly inform Canada of the "dangerous enemy aliens" it sent and never acknowledged they had interned and dispatched refugees as well.

By mid-1941, it was clear that Camp R was ill-suited as an internment camp. Internees were transferred to other camps and, on 23 October 1941, Camp R closed its gates. It did, as Zimmermann explains, serve its purpose, providing a location for internees while more suitable arrangements could be made, and provided valuable lessons for future internment camps.

While Zimmermann discusses aspects of camp life, food, recreation, security, and life behind barbed wire, I found his analysis of British-Canadian negotiations and relations to be the most compelling part of his account. For a supposed history of a single internment camp, Zimmermann's account focuses heavily on the context of the internment process rather than the specific conditions at Camp R. It therefore becomes less a history of Camp R but more so a history of the first shipments of civilian internees sent to Canada from the UK. This being said, I found his critical analysis of British policy regarding enemy aliens to be particularly engaging, for few authors have critically examined the question of why so many of these enemy aliens, many of whom were actually refugees, were sent to Canada in the first place. Zimmermann's account, criticizing British policy and revealing the living conditions of Camp R, provides an engaging introduction for future studies on Canadian internment operations during the Second World War.

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