

Archaeology of the Second World War in Cambodia and French Indochina

—カンボジアとフランス領インドシナにおける第二次世界大戦の考古学—

1. Introduction The Second World War (1939-1945) in French Indochina has been studied from numerous research perspectives except the archaeological. Since the 1980s, Conflict Archaeology has developed from Battlefield Archaeology to examine warfare across the full spectrum of conflict and war.¹⁾ Many archaeological studies for the Second World War in the Asia-Pacific theatre of operations exist which provide material traces that complement, add to, and challenge the written records. However, mainland Southeast Asia and, in particular, former French Indochina have been neglected. This project asks: *What are the archaeological traces for the Second World War in French Indochina?*

This study is a preliminary attempt to answer that question. Its initial focus is the use of various historical and archival sources to identify and classify sites.

2. Historical Background French Indochina was the colonial entity comprising modern Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Figure 35). Following the defeat of France in May 1940, both Thailand and Japan viewed Indochina through their respective strategic lenses. In September 1940, Japanese military forces occupied northern French Indochina. The Franco-Thai War, fought from October 1940 to January 1941, resulted in the cession of parts of Laos and Cambodia to Thailand. The Darlan-Kato Agreement, of July 1941, permitted the Japanese military occupation of southern French Indochina.²⁾ The territory then became a military base for Japan to prepare and launch its attacks against Thailand and British Malaya on 7/8 December 1941, and later to Burma. This occupation continued until 1945.

3. Case-Studies Three case-studies are presented as a brief introduction to some of the different site types expected in this research. The Longvek case-study is the result of fieldwork done in 2016. The other two examples, Siem Reap and Phú Quốc, were identified from historic records.

i) Longvek Located approximately 50 km north of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia.

Site Type: Army garrison structures.



Figure 35 Map of French Indochina, showing the aerial infrastructure of airfields and air-routes in 1939 (Source: Gallica).

Date: post-June 1941-circa August 1945

Notes: Structural features located in the area referred to as the North-West Fort include ten platforms with brick and concrete walls and floors (Figure 36), as well as two larger buildings. The platforms were extensively damaged by later conflicts in the 1970s-1990s. Oral history states that these were built for the Japanese army during its occupation of French Indochina.³⁾

ii) Siem Reap Located in Cambodia on the northern edge of the Tonle Sap Lake, and the town closest to the archaeological monuments of Angkor (9th-15th CE).



Figure 36 Remains of the Japanese Garrison, Longvek, Cambodia. North-West Fort (Site No.020) (Source: Martin Polkinghorne).



Figure 37 A Japanese-made Ki-30 light-bomber supplied to the Thai Air Force, shot down and crashed north of Angkor Wat, 10 January 1941 (Source: EFEO Photo Archive).

Site Type: Aviation-related sites.

Date: a. airfield - constructed 1931⁴⁾ and modified 1940⁵⁾

b. crash site of a Thai Air Force aircraft shot down by the French *Armée de l'Air* in January 1941 (Figure 37).

Notes: During the final phase of the Franco-Thai War in January 1941, sites in Cambodia and Laos were bombed by aircraft of the Thai Air Force. Siem Reap was a major military target in this air-campaign. Siem Reap airfield was also one of the eight treaty-airfields in the Darlan-Kato Agreement (June 1941) and was used by Japanese air units in December 1941 in their invasion of northern Thailand.

iii) **Phú Quốc** An island off the south coast of Vietnam.

Site Type: Airfields.

Date: Constructed September-November 1941

Notes: The airfields were constructed for Japanese military units in preparation for the commencement of the Pacific War on 7/8 December 1941. These airfields provided aerial support to troop landings in Southern Thailand and Malaya.⁶⁾

4. Discussion Each site-type reflects historic themes indicative of the changing historic and archaeological phases of the war: Longvek represents the Japanese military occupation of French Indochina; Siem Reap is both infrastructure (airfield) (Figure 35) and a battlefield in the Franco-Thai conflict; and, Phú Quốc is aerial infrastructure within the context of strategic planning. This latter, strategic, element should be considered alongside the map in Figure 38 which shows the phases of Japanese military map-making in French Indochina, which pre-empt the events of occupation and invasion.⁷⁾

The use of maps can be co-ordinated with the archive of aerial photographs compiled for French Indochina by the Royal Air Force and its allies between 1944-1947.⁸⁾ The scale of the conflict and the diversity of sites across Indochina and its neighbours makes a landscape archaeological approach “the

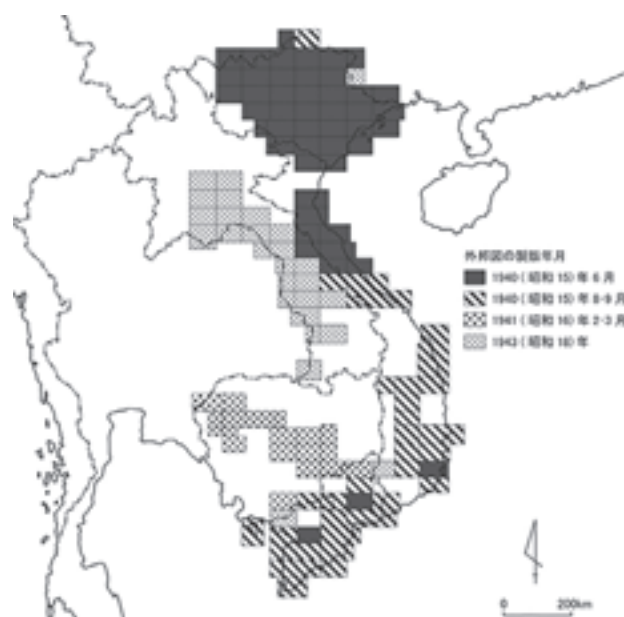


Figure 38 Military Maps, Gaihōzu (外邦図), showing the four phases of map production by the Japanese military in the Second World War (Source: 大塚直樹・丸山宗志 (2017), Fig. 4, p. 104).

appropriate scale at which to examine the cultural effects of warfare.”⁹⁾

5. Conclusion The preliminary results indicate the presence and potential of the material traces of war. The neglected archaeological record of these events can now be identified and used to question, assess, and add to the historical narratives. We can examine the militarised landscapes of French Indochina and, by using methodologies of Conflict and Aviation Archaeology, compare it to other archaeological studies across the Pacific as well as other campaigns, theatres, and regions of the Second World War generally. (MACKEY, Shaun Ian)

Endnotes

- 1) Pollard, T. and Banks, I. (2005) ‘Why a Journal of Conflict Archaeology and Why Now?’, *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 1:1: iii-vii.
- 2) Michelin, F. (2019) *La guerre du Pacifique a commence en Indochine 1940-1941*, Passés/Composés, Paris.
- 3) Polkinghorne, M., Sato, Y., Mackey, S., Teav, S., Bell, C., Duke, B. (2017) *Middle Period and Related Sites Project. Preliminary Report. Excavation November /December 2016*, unpublished report prepared for The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Kingdom of Cambodia.
- 4) Bâty, P. (2005) *Extension de l'Aéroport de Siem Reap. Rapport de fouille archéologique*. Unpublished report prepared for APSARA, Kingdom of Cambodia.
- 5) Glaize, M. (1940-1941) *Journal de Fouilles Tome XV*, unpublished daily log for the École française d'Extrême-Orient.
- 6) Tsuji Masanobu (1960) *Singapore: The Japanese Version*, translated by Margaret E. Lake, Ure Smith, Sydney.
- 7) 大塚直樹・丸山宗志「フランス領インドシナの外邦図と「南進論」」『亜細亜大学国際関係紀要』26 (1・2) 2017.
- 8) Williams-Hunt, P. D. R. (1950) ‘Irregular Earthworks in Eastern Siam: an air survey’, *Antiquity*, Volume XXIV, No. 93: 30-36.
- 9) Schofield, J. (2005) *Combat Archaeology: Material Culture and Modern Conflict*, Duckworth, London.