Session - Sessión

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Archéologie Militaire
Military archaeology
Arqueología militaria
Tanki Maraka Site, Bonaire, Netherlands Caribbean: Archaeology of a World War II U.S. Military Camp

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Abstract
This paper presents a review of the 2007 archaeological investigations at the Tanki Maraka World War II U.S. Military Base camp on Bonaire, Netherlands Caribbean. Discussion is presented as to the types of artifacts and sites features recorded, as an initial artifact assemblage classification database to be associated with World War II U.S. Military sites across the Caribbean.

Resumen
Este papel representa el reportaje del año 2007 la investigación arqueológica en Tanki Maraka base militares Americana de la Guerra Mundial II en la isla de Bonaire, Caribe Neerlandesa. La discusion presenta los tipos de artefactos y lugares utilitario documentá, como un inicio para asamblear una clasificacion de informacion asociado con sitios de base militares Americanas en todo el Caribe.

Résumé
Cette recherche présente les investigations archéologiques de 2007 sur le site de Tanki Maraka, une base militaire Américaine de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, à Bonaire, une île Caraïbe des Pays-Bas. La discussion porte sur le matériel récolté des fouilles archéologiques et les constituants importants du site. Les matériels formant une collection préliminaire représentant des sites militaires de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, dans les îles Caraïbes.

Figure 1.
Location of the Tanki Maraka U.S. Military base camp site in association with the old Subi Blanku airfield, on a 1949 map of Bonaire [van de Poll 1950]
INTRODUCTION
From March to November 2007, the Bonaire Archaeological Institute (BONAI) conducted a multi-disciplinary investigation of a World War II Military Camp on the island of Bonaire, Netherlands Caribbean. This research project was conducted by this author, as the president of BONAI, and primarily funded by the Plataforma Ekonomiko Bonaire, and the Government of Bonaire. The basis of this investigation relates directly to the legal fact that sites over 50 years old can now qualify as having archaeological significance, and that a basic inventory of potential artifact assemblages for World War II sites is currently lacking.

METHODS AND APPROACHES
This research was conducted with three key aspects; Archival documents search, Oral History interviews, and Archaeological fieldwork. Over 3000 relevant documents were digitalized by this author at the US National Archives in Washington DC, from recently declassified 1940s records of the Department of State and Department of Defense. As well, historical documents from the Netherlands Antilles National Archives, CORVO government files, and files at the Mongui Maduro Library on Curacao, were referenced. This was followed by Oral History interviews with local Bonaire persons who had either visited the Tanki Maraka Camp during its operations, or had memories of the soldier's presence on the island. These key interviewees were Ms. Cicilia ‘Chichi’ Everts born in 1922, Mr. Edward ‘Papa’ de Jong born in 1926, Mr. Raymundo Saleh born in 1937, Mr. Jan Felida born in 1934, and Mr. Inesa ‘Pauli’ de Palm born in 1927 (Figure 2). As well, local historians, such as Franklin ‘Boi’ Antoin and Junnes Sint Jago, were consulted for additional background information.

The third phase of the research is the most relevant for this IACA publication, that being the archaeological fieldwork, which consisted of surface survey and mapping, as well as limited test excavations (Figure 3). A complete site inventory of physical structures at Tanki Maraka was mapped (Figure 8). By far, the largest collection of artifacts for this research was recovered through surface collections, segregated into the various site feature areas. Due to the shallow nature of the soils at this hilltop site (max. 25cm depth), the test excavations were limited to two 1x2m. test units and two 1x1m. test units. The basic soils at the site were fine sandy-loams of a 10yr 6/3-7/3 to sandy-clay 10yr 5/1-5/3 Munsell colors. A total of over 500 artifacts were collected from both the surface collections and test excavations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE TANKI MARAKA SITE
On May 10th 1940, the Netherlands were invaded by the Third Reich and quickly overtaken. On that same day/night, all German Nationals or National Socialist sympathizers in the Netherlands Antilles was arrested and sent to an internment camp on Bonaire (Figure 4). As Queen Wilhelmina escaped to London, she called for first British, then American troops to assist to protect the oil refineries on Curacao and Aruba. At that time the Curacao and Aruba oil refineries were providing about 80% of the Allied forces oil needs, according to previous historical reconstructions Bonaire was considered less strategic, and was simply chosen for the internment camp. In February 1942, the Queen invited a U.S. Military presence on the islands, and within days German U-Boats attacked both refineries at Curacao and Aruba. In September 1942, after a visit by special envoy of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, a small U.S. military base was commissioned to be built on Bonaire by the Walsh-Driscoll Company, who built all the U.S.'s Army-Navy military bases in the Caribbean, and thus have a consistently similar design for each. One unique aspect of the Bonaire Tanki Maraka base camp, was beyond its function to operate the airfield at Subi Blanku, it was also set up as an experimental radar system to detect aircraft headed for Curacao. The interment camp on Bonaire, which housed up to 461 persons, ironically both Nazi and German Jews together, was operated by the local Dutch Police and not the U.S. Military, little remains of it today.

Due to the 1941 to 1942 rapidly increasing attacks by German U-Boats in the area, the U.S. Military presence in the Caribbean established a main headquarters on Puerto Rico, with Army, Navy and Air Forces present. The Southern Caribbean arena fell under the authority of the U.S. headquarters at Trinidad, again with the same structures built by the Walsh-Driscoll Co. (Figure 5). Other U.S. bases in the region include St. Lucia, Antigua, St. Thomas, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, Guantanomo, British and French Guiana and Suriname, and thus this paper can serve as a reference for future research at these sites. In Figure 6, is the U.S. airbase at Hato, Curacao, again having the same basic structures, with the Navy being the primary presence on the Aruba-Curacao-Bonaire (ABC) islands. On Curacao alone, the U.S. Air Force had about 25 planes, with a total of about 2600 U.S. troops spread across the three ABC islands. Of important note is that in 1945, most of the U.S. ‘continental’ (re white) troops, were replaced by U.S. Puerto Rican soldiers who were then considered black.

On Bonaire, there were never more than about 150 U.S. soldiers stationed, first with a tent camp near Kralendijk (the capital city) and then after construction in October 1942, at the Tanki Maraka Base Camp. The Tanki Maraka Base Camp was situated in close proximity to the Subi Blanku airfield (Figure 7), which had opened in 1939, the same year that the Navy was conducting their first experimental XAF radar system trials in the Caribbean. Later in 1941, the Army was using SCR radar systems, which required larger power stations, like the one noted at Tanki Maraka site, thus it is probable that the Army SCR radar systems were used at this site. Planes were both flown into Bonaire, and also brought to the island by ship (Figure 7). Daily life of the soldiers at the camp was routine, with maintenance of the facility technical aspects, air survey for enemy aircraft, and handling of the airfield. Recreational facilities of basketball and baseball were available at the camp, as well as a mess hall, and a large wooden water tank near the showers and latrines area. The barracks area of the camp was situated as a visual block of the camp grounds from the main road some 200 meters away, while the technical/scientific area of the camp was hidden to the very back of the camp and protected by numerous concrete barriers and barbwire fencing. It was due to the Oral History accounts, that we were able to identify the function of many of the site features at the Tanki Maraka site. The end of the war was in 1945, however the U.S. troops departure from Curacao and Bonaire was not until February of 1947. At the time of departure, the Tanki Maraka base camp above-ground physical features were completely dismantled, with any technical or strategic supplies exported back to the U.S. and all building materials sold off to local merchants, what remained were the structural foundations.
TANKI MARAKA SITE FEATURES
In Figure 8, we can see an overall map of the Tanki Maraka Site, with concrete foundations, coral roadbeds/footpaths, and miscellaneous other structural features. The Benchmark control for this specific site location is 435 meters north of kadastral survey marker KAD-F 124. In Figures 9-16, are the specific activity area maps with feature photographs at the camp, consisting of: the Barracks Area having only two sets of concrete entrance steps [1.2 X 3.2 X 3.0 meters, aligned E-W] (as the buildings were wooden on posts), coral footpaths, loud speaker poles, and abundant personal items in the surface collections and test excavation; the Personnel Area consisted of the Mess Hall [5.9 X 7.3 meters, aligned N-S], the Latrines [1.3 X 1.3 meters] and Showers [4.6 X 6 meters, aligned E-W] and the raised Water Tank [floor 3 X 4.5 meters aligned E-W, six 20cm dia. support poles 4.5 X 4.5 meters]; the Entrance Area has two large entrance poles [concrete footings 20 X 20cm, aligned N-S] and loud speaker poles [30cm diameter], a well [3 X 4.5 meters], and with abundant car parts and oil drums present; the Recreational Area has a basketball court [15.5 X 34.5 meters, aligned N-S] with small bleachers and surrounding fence, and numerous soft-drink bottles; and the Technical Area with both a main structure [6 X 16 meters, aligned N-S] and a power station [4.5 X 10 meters, aligned N-S], various radio/radar tower footings [generally 40 X 40 X 40cm], extensive security fencing and concrete security blockades. Concrete foundations are the predominate structural features, with no wooden upper structures present, and only the latrines had wooden posts still evident.

WORLD WAR II ARTIFACT ASSEMBLAGES
During the archival work, it was noted that each deceased U.S. soldier had an inventory reported of his/her personal possessions, with dozens noted, from these we can suggest an individual personal artifact assemblage for a U.S. soldier. Furthermore, based on various historic references, we can compile a general U.S. military artifact assemblage, ranging from uniforms, to weapons and technical equipment. Many of these items will never be left at the base camp sites, such as weapons or technical equipment (Figure 17), and many others will be scavenged by artifact collectors soon after abandonment of these camp sites (Figure 18). As well, many items such as cloth, paper and wood are perishable, and thus will not survive well in the contexts of open camp sites, including some K-Ration food supplies. However, the tin-cans of the K-Ratons do survive relatively well, and are common discarded artifacts (Figure 19).

Artifacts recovered directly from the Tanki Maraka Site include most frequently food items, such as tin-can remains, often with knife-opening marks (Figure 20), and glass bottles particularly beer and pop bottles (Figure 23). Other metal artifacts recovered, included barb-wire, oil lamp parts, car parts, eating utensils, bed-springs and oil drums as the most common (Figure 21). Glass bottles were the best artifacts for specific diagnostics, including marks to identify location and dates of manufacture, with the interesting case that an abundance of Puerto Rican bottles were recovered (Figure 24). Consistent with the personal items documentation, at the Barracks Area were recovered toothpaste tubes, pocketknives, plastic combs, clothes hangers, cologne bottles, foot-powder cans, and shoe soles (Figures 25-26). Building materials were limited to the remains after removal of the camp structures, and included mostly iron nails/hinges, window screen, asphalt roof shingles and tar, and various wooden fragments of door handles or boards (Figure 27). Other artifact types recovered at Tanki Maraka, included; ironware ceramics and glass bottles at the Mess Hall Area (Figure 28), car parts at the Entrance area with a 1939 truck hood and a 1941 Buick emblem identified (Figure 22), as well as a Ford tire, and miscellaneous lead sheeting fragments were recovered in the Technical Area (Figure 28-29).

As can be seen in Table 1, glass (primarily beer/pop bottles) and metal (primarily tin-can fragments) were the dominate artifacts types collected at Tanki Maraka, which included total surface area and limited test excavation collections. It is further interesting to point out that no bullet cartridges were noted at the site, and that artifacts dating from after the occupation of the site were noted only in the Entrance Area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Material</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Glass</th>
<th>Ceramics</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>221</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SOCIAL-CULTURAL IMPACT ON THE LOCAL POPULATION
It is essential that when researching the presence of foreign military troops on the islands of the Caribbean, that we always also look to the social-cultural impact on the local populations. It is good to note here, at least some of the key aspects of impact on the local population of Bonaire resulting from the Tanki Maraka base camp U.S. military presence. One of the most significant impacts was the introduction of new technologies, such as refrigerators, cameras, etc. which then also had a direct impact on the introduction of new words in the local Papiamentu language (a refrigerator is called a ‘Frigidaire’ and a camera called a ‘Kodak’ resultant from the introduction of these brand names at the time), and also new dietary habits such as shifting the hot meal of the day to the evening rather than the midday. Even though the U.S. military officially forbid marriage to local women (Figure 30), children were born from these soldiers and several Bonaire women left to the U.S. (Puerto Rico) when the soldiers left. There were also Bonaire men who tried to join the U.S. military (Figure 30), as well there were significant trade and currency regulations on the islands, including supplies shortages. Of great significance to the local population, there were frequent discipline problems with the soldiers (Figure 30), and indeed many young Bonaire girls were afraid of them, as based on our Oral History interviews.

The BONAI is currently organizing that the Tanki Maraka Site, be developed into an historical visitation site and open-air museum relating to the World War II period of Bonaire’s history. An important goal of this Open-Air Museum project is to highlight the impact of the U.S. Military presence of Bonaire’s cultural development.
**Future World War II Research**

Now that World War II sites can qualify as significant archaeological sites (being over 50 years), it is expected that increasing research will be given to this topic in the region, beyond the current historical documents studies (see Watters paper in this volume). As well, due to the consistency of U.S. military material remains, with this paper an initial basic diagnostic artifact assemblage and site feature inventory, for comparison in future World War II sites archaeological research in the Caribbean region, is now available for other investigations.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Government of Bonaire, the Plataforma Ekonomiko Bonaire, the SKAL Bonaire, the BONAI students, Raymundo Saleh, Hubert Vis, Jackie Bernabela and Robert van Dongen, for their contributions to this research.

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**Selected References**


Achival documents U.S. National Archives : Department of State and Department of Defense


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*Figure 2*: Oral History interviews with local Bonaire persons, who knew the Tanki Maraka camp and the soldiers who occupied it (l. to r.) ‘Papa’ de Jong, ‘Chichi’ Everts, Raymundo Saleh.
Figure 3: BONAI students during archaeological excavations at Tanki Maraka, and an excavation unit in the latrines area.

Figure 4: Arresting German nationals in Curacao on 10 May 1940; the Bonaire internment camp [Sint Jago 2007].

Figure 5: U.S. Military Sub-Regional command base at Trinidad; note the building construction forms [source: U.S. National Archive files].

Figure 6: U.S. Air base at Hato, Curacao; note the barracks building construction form [source: U.S. National Archive files].
Figure 7: Subi Blancu airfield in 1942; military aircraft being unloaded from ships on Bonaire [source: U.S. National Archive files].

Figure 8: anki Maraka Base Camp overall site plan; concrete foundations (blue), coral roads/foot paths (orange), wooden post features (black dots). [no scale]

Figure 9: Barracks Area (up). Mess hall/showers/latrines Area (below).
Figure 10 : Mess Hall foundation (left) ; a latrine (right).

Figure 11 : Entrance Area (left) ; Recreational Area (right).

Figure 12 : Entrance Area oil drums (left) ; Coral roadways (right).
Figure 13: Technical/Scientific Area; note the various protective concrete barriers.

Figure 14: Power Station generator building in the Technical Area (below).

Figure 13: Technical/Scientific Area; note the various protective concrete barriers.

Figure 14: Radio/Radar Building in the Technical Area; to right associated tower footings.

Figure 15: Security Barriers (left) and tower footings (right) in the Technical Area.
Figure 17: U.S. Military personal issue objects; guns, dog tags, etc.; these items would not be left behind [Katcher 1978; Miller 2010].

Figure 18: Personal objects that may be left behind [Miller 2010], yet later would likely be scavenged from the site.

Figure 19: K-Raton artifacts that are often left behind [Miller 2010].

Figure 20: K-Raton artifacts found at the Tanki Maraka site; note the knife puncture marks.
Figure 21: Other metal artifacts found at the Tanki Maraka site; barbwire, oil lamp, bedspring.

Figure 22: Motor vehicle parts from the Entrance Area at Tanki Maraka site; 1941 Buick emblem and hood of a 1939 truck.

Figure 23: Glass bottles from the Tanki Maraka site; beer/pop bottles most common across the site, Clorox and cologne bottles in the Showers and Barracks Areas. Many beer bottles with the top of the rim intentionally broken off, using a knife-popping technique popular at the time.

Figure 24: Glass bottle marks from the Tanki Maraka site, as diagnostic artifacts for sourcing and dating; note the ‘PRG’ mark of Puerto Rican manufacture.
Figure 25: Personal items from the Barracks Area of the Tanki Maraka site; toothpaste, plastic combs, shoe soles, and a pocketknife.

Figure 26: Personal items from the Barracks Area of the Tanki Maraka site; Cologne bottle, foot-powder can, clothes hanger.

Figure 27: Mess Hall artifacts (left); iron artifacts from the Entrance Area, and lead sheeting from the Technical Area; Ironware ceramics, metal fasteners, lead sheeting.

Figure 28: Building Materials from the Barracks Area, window-mesh screening, asphalt roof sheeting, iron nails.
Figure 29: Building Materials from the Barracks Area of Tanki Maraka site; hinges and latches.

Figure 30: Social-Cultural Impacts; (l. to r.) Bonaire men requesting to join the U.S. forces; Restrictions of marriage to local women; discipline problems with the soldiers [U.S. National Archive files].
la publication de ce volume CD a été possible grâce au soutien de