

THE MAY 1993 OCCUPATION AT CAMP IPPERWASH OF THE MILITARY RANGES AND THE JULY 1995 OCCUPATION OF THE ARMY CAMP

In May 1993, a group of Stoney Point people peacefully occupied the military ranges at Camp Ipperwash. They entered the army camp through the main gate to the built-up area, with tents and a trailer. Some members of the group took up residence indefinitely. No police were present. The purposes of the occupation were to reclaim the land and to get the negotiations moving again. The mood amongst the Aboriginal group was jubilant; people were overjoyed to be back on their land.

In summer 1993, the Stoney Point people planted a peace tree, and held a ceremony to “bury the hatchet,” which signified that no weapons would be used in reclaiming the land and that it would be peaceful. They lit a sacred fire where people gathered to share stories, knowledge, documents, and memories about the area and the occupation. Marcia Simon taught some of the young people about the traditions, language, and history of the Anishnabek people.

There was some tension between the occupiers and the military following the occupation of the ranges. Incidents that highlighted the tension between the Stoney Point people and the military were an incident involving an occupier’s dwelling and possessions in August 1993, and the shooting of a military helicopter on August 23, 1993. One occupier described their relationship with the military between May 1993 and July 1995 as “one of taunting each other. Kind of like neighbours bickering at each other all the time.”

Members of the Stoney Point group persisted in their efforts for the return of their land; they marched to Ottawa in September 1993, and remained on the lands through the difficult winters. In February 1994, the Department of National Defence announced that Camp Ipperwash would be closed and that the land would subsequently be returned to the Kettle and Stoney Point First Nation. However, the military did not relinquish the land to the Aboriginal people.

In March 1994, a tribute was held by the Stoney Point people to honour Clifford George and Dudley George as nation-builders following their difficult winter on the land at the military range.

In 1995, the frustration of the occupiers increased because of the military’s persistence in remaining on the land. In the summer, the military planned to remove all equipment and other assets from Ipperwash by July 17, 1995. But military personnel and equipment remained at the army camp on July 28, 1995.