

Arboreal Resistance and Military Memory of Arrow Air 1285

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Abstract:

This paper adopts a material rhetoric lens to examine the agency of trees to disrupt imperialist narratives of memory at the former Task Force 3-502nd Memorial Tree Park at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Two hundred and fifty-six trees were planted on post in 1986 in memory of the 248 soldiers and eight crew members who lost their lives on December 12, 1985, when Arrow Air 1285 crashed after a refueling stop in Gander, Newfoundland. In the 37 years since the crash, there has been no public critique of how the disaster is remembered at any of its memorial sites around the globe. One unsettling event, however, occurred with the dying of the sugar maples at Fort Campbell, which necessitated the relocation of the memorial park in 2019. The death of the trees, which were recruited to “stand for” pious ideals, can be read as resisting imperialist discourses of bi-national friendship between Canada and the United States, settler-colonial incursions on Indigenous lands, and an exploitative view of nature as existing to serve human interests. Their dying represents an urgent call to regard living beings with care and compassion—and to live in reciprocal relations, not ones of dominance and usurpation.

Keywords: Public memory, material rhetoric, trees, resistance, binational friendship, air disaster
