War at the Margins
Poyer, Lin

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Strangers in the Homeland

The vortex of combat zones caught up an immense variety of people, pulling troops and labor from globe-spanning empires into Indigenous homelands. The China-Burma-India (CBI) theater was famously multicultural. British Chindit columns, for example, included Englishmen, Scots, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Kachins, Karens, West Africans, and East Africans, among others. In the Bougainville campaign, where Aboriginal Taiwanese were among the forty thousand Japanese and auxiliaries killed, Allied personnel included African American and white US troops and New Zealand, Australian, Fijian, and Papuan and New Guinean units—and the Japanese also held Indian POWs on the island. Such a mix was found wherever war concentrated manpower.

Civilian populations were exposed to all this variety during the years of war in their homelands as they were drawn into labor, trade, friendship, or sexual relationships. Such associations had long-lasting effects on formerly isolated peoples. This chapter takes a closer look at two consequential fields of interaction—Germans in Sápmi and Australians and Americans in the Southwest Pacific. A final section considers civilian-military sexual interaction.

German Troops in Sápmi

The large German Army presence in Sápmi rapidly altered everyday life. The situation was most oppressive in occupied Norway, where Germans were seen as invaders and relations with civilians were tense. Sámi reindeer herders benefited from mobility and the fact that the military valued their deer, but those living as fishermen and in settled villages lacked such protection. Occupation troops used Norwegians and Norwegian Sámi as forced labor; brutality and rape harmed Norwegian and Sámi women. Nazi racial ideas judged Sámi as non-“Aryan” and rejected support for children of mixed unions. Sámi responses varied from fleeing into the mountains or across the border to Sweden, to quiet evasion of
German demands, to active service with the Norwegian resistance, or to cooperation with the occupiers.²

Relations were better in Finnish Sápmi, where Germans viewed Sámi rather like tourists, seeing them as exotic and “people of nature,” and valuing their reindeer-herding and survival skills. The two hundred thousand soldiers, plus some thirty thousand German prisoners, outnumbered the combined Finnish and Sámi population of fewer than 150,000. High wages expanded the cash economy, and German investment and prisoner labor improved roads and infrastructure. Troops settled even in small villages, bringing roads, telephones, and sea transport to previously isolated areas. Near the front, German bases invited air raids, but also meant protection from attacks by Soviet partisans. Northern Finland was under military command, but civilian life was still administered by Finnish authorities. Still, the three-to-four-year long presence of large numbers of soldiers, prisoners, and forced laborers had an overwhelming impact on the rural region as people traded with and worked for Germans and had friendships with them. The economic stimulus of the large German presence, plus existing local resources, ensured adequate sustenance in the war years. But like Sámi in Norway, people observed German harshness to their
own soldiers and were aware of the prison camps. Soldiers’ takeover of schools and assembly halls upset everyday life and hampered education. And after the war, households that had been too friendly with the occupiers were tainted with that reputation.³

Sámi in Finland and Norway were most profoundly affected by the forced evacuations in autumn 1944, ahead of the German Army’s retreat, which sent most of the population south to live among the majority population (chapter 8). In Finland, civilian evacuation went smoothly, in part because of German help. In Norway, in contrast, many Sámi and Norwegians sought to evade evacuation, fleeing into the countryside in the hope of waiting out the war. In either case, the German presence had changed the trajectory of Sámi life.

Strangers in the Southwest Pacific Islands

Though German occupation changed Sápmi’s infrastructure and economy, the greater change came from Sámi interaction with fellow citizens during the evacuation period. In the Southwest Pacific, though, it was association with foreigners that was transformative. Many wartime newcomers to British and Australian island territories were not entrenched in colonists’ racial views and had little interest in propping up their sense of superiority. War unsettled old certainties: after being so quickly routed by Japan, “white masters” were no longer seen as invincible, and Islanders glimpsed new political options on their horizon.

The Japanese offered one such option, especially where troops stayed for several years. Japanese stationed in the Wewak area of New Guinea took pride in friendships with Islanders. They saw themselves as different from racist Europeans, though they too thought of local people as “primitive” and wished to enlighten them. Soldiers shared meals with their workers and showed less prejudice than white colonials. Some Island men were appointed to positions supervising Japanese soldiers and Asian laborers, a rare occurrence under Australian rule. One young lieutenant, Yukio Shibata, set up a school in Wewak that changed the life of Michael Somare—then a child—who later became the first prime minister of independent Papua New Guinea. Japanese brought other strangers to the islands as well, including thousands of POWs from British Indian forces, as well as Chinese, Malaysians, Indonesians, and other laborers.⁴

On the Allied side, too, there were new options. In New Guinea, J. K. McCarthy wrote, “War was not only a great destroyer but a great teacher.”⁵ For people who had known only a few Europeans, foreign soldiers offered numerous learning opportunities. Australian and American troops, casual and friendly,
tended to ignore colonial rules of racial hierarchy, and meeting African Americans who were as wealthy and skilled as whites was an eye-opener. The most important lesson was that the old patterns of racial interaction were not universal—despite colonial efforts to maintain them. Even the vocabulary was different: the newcomers called Island men “Sport” (Australians) and “Joe” (Americans) instead of or at least in addition to pejorative terms. Reciprocal use of friendly terms like these marked a dramatic change from the “Sir” and “Master” addressed to Europeans before the war, though those did not disappear.6

Discussing race relations in New Guinea in wartime, Australian anthropologist (and Lieutenant Colonel) Ian Hogbin describes how colonial whites tried to enforce the color bar despite the changed circumstances. Some ANGAU officers insisted on such absurd rules as segregating drinking water tanks or forbidding New Guineans to ride in jeeps beside Europeans, except on army business. Hogbin himself was criticized for letting a servant ride with him in a staff car to catch a plane—he should have ordered a separate truck, despite the waste of gas.7 Military personnel were to be guided by the Australian Army’s booklet, “You and the Native,” which advised servicemen to respect the “native” and not underrate his intelligence, but also to preserve the social gap crucial to white prestige. Troops were warned not to fraternize (no “Promiscuous bathing, including frolicking together in the water”!); 8 But soldiers went their own way. Australians tended to champion the underdog, admired the work of carriers and stretcher bearers, shared food and cigarettes, and even learned to speak Tok Pisin.9 Villagers in the Markham Valley vividly contrasted prewar Europeans (whom they called “English” regardless of nationality), with Australians. Australian soldiers welcomed men into a slit trench during the fighting at Wau (the prewar “English” would have turned a local man out) and posted night sentries to protect carriers (“The English would not have cared”). Sergeant Major (later Sir) Pita Simogun commented, “Before the war I knew only two or three white men as friends. With the war I have got to meet the real Australian, who has treated me as a man and a friend.”10

Media coverage also changed views of Australians at home. More than five hundred thousand Australians were sent to the New Guinea region, out of a total population of seven million, which meant that most Australians knew someone who had served there. The public became familiar with the islands’ geography through battles at Kokoda, Buna, Salamaua, Bougainville—names that entered Australia’s collective national memory.11 News reports offered a new, positive view of Papua and New Guinea people, starting with appreciation for the carriers who supported the fighting on the Kokoda Trail and cared
for wounded men. A poem and a famous photograph cemented this image. “The Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels” was a sentimental and patronizing but popular rhyme praising stretcher-bearers; the photo was of Raphael Oimbari leading the bandaged, blinded Australian Private George Whittington (figure 5.2). Regis Stella, Papua New Guinea novelist and scholar, cautions that the “fuzzy wuzzy angel” feel-good image “is nevertheless belittling” as it denigrates the
men’s appearance and judges them in white terms. But the publicity forced the Australian public to recognize the strength and capacity of these men and to acknowledge their service.

The friendly attitudes of ordinary soldiers contrasted with those held by colonial officials and settlers, many of whom took positions in the wartime military administration. Most wanted to preserve the racial hierarchy, seeing any egalitarian tendency as a threat to the supremacy they expected to continue after the war. They saw danger in the way some servicemen treated Islanders as equals, undermining obedience to white authority. The worst danger, they thought, came from those who did not know the region—especially Americans.

By war’s end, 5.3 million Americans had served overseas, making an impact in all parts of the world at war, but especially on islands and in other Indigenous regions, where small populations and a limited economy made even a “friendly occupation” disruptive. Americans abroad were noted for their generosity, friendliness, and work ethic—but also for profiteering, willingness to disregard local laws and customs, pursuit of women, and the racism of white Americans. In the Southwest Pacific, though, Islanders’ association with Americans was largely positive, even inspirational.

Fraternization and Politics in the Southwest Pacific

Like colonial authorities, military brass was wary of problems that could arise from fraternization with civilians, but the scale of deployments made it hard to control. In the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), which held a peak of sixty-five thousand troops, Islanders met Americans through work in the labor corps or at informal chores like laundry, in the busy souvenir trade, at dances, cinemas (Espiritu Santo held forty-three screens at one time), church services, and even pig hunts that took officers into mountain villages. Such frequent and casual contact differed greatly from the limited and formalized prewar interactions Islanders had had with white officials, plantation managers, or missionaries.

British and Australian authorities tended to fear such informal contact and blamed Americans for inciting resistance to colonial rule—which seems to have been true, at least in some places. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) had certainly seen discontent with British rule before the war, but interaction with Americans focused it; the war, Anna Annie Kwai writes, “laid a foundation for political education.”

The colonial order in the BSIP, as elsewhere, had reified racial hierarchy by segregation and by distinctions in clothing, food, and housing. In wartime, British officers in charge of the Solomon Islands Labour Corps (SILC) policed these
“sumptuary codes,” insisting for example that workers wear lavalavas instead of trousers and shirts. US servicemen rejected such petty rules, along with those against fraternization. They invited Islanders to visit in their tents and share meals. Some went further, championing workers in disputes, offering new models of resistance. As SILC sergeant Jonathan Fifi’i recalls, “Our [British] officers tried to forbid us from visiting Americans, but when we told the Americans of this they told us not to worry about it, so we kept on going. When an American had finished eating he would wash his plate and give it to me and tell me to go stand in the line for food. One time a Labour Corps officer saw this and told me I couldn’t eat that food. A man named Kirsh told him ‘Go fuck yourself!’”

Officers in charge of the SILC saw “a dire threat to white authority” in such interactions and tried to forestall it by urging the American authorities to limit pay and control casual interaction, and even by confiscating goods given as gifts or payment. In the end, such efforts were futile. It seems that the more the workers interacted with US troops, the more critical they became of colonial treatment.

Not everyone drew the same lesson from working on US bases. While Malaitan men in the SILC gained confidence in their ability to govern themselves, spurring postwar anticolonial movements, Santa Cruz Islanders drew the opposite conclusion. Overwhelmed by the scale of personnel and matériel at the Guadalcanal base, they realized that the world was much greater than they had realized, with the result that they accepted the return of British rule and rejected antigovernment activity.

In fact, one challenge facing Islanders as they grasped the scope of the war was to make sense of what they were learning. People rethought their worldview to integrate foreigners and explain their technology and wealth. Santa Cruz Islanders reworked myths, adding in a local deity’s travel to the United States. Men from Vanatinai (Louisiade Archipelago) employed at the Milne Bay base had such good experiences with white and African American soldiers there that they believed they must be kinmen, leading to the idea that the spirits of their own dead turn white and go to the United States. After the war, colonial authorities and missions were kept busy suppressing energetic social/religious/political movements inspired by wartime experiences but drawing on prewar ideas about the source of wealth (“cargo cults”). Some were fantasies, like the claim that Americans secretly built an underground town on Guadalcanal where they buried equipment and weapons, but others such as the John Frum movement in the New Hebrides and Maasina Rule in the Solomons became important precursors to independence (chapter 11).
guides or carriers, in contrast to civilians in Europe, who were a vivid presence in war reporting and histories—“For the GI, the Pacific had ‘natives,’ while Europe had ‘civilians.’” That white Americans were oriented toward Europe makes sense in terms of history and culture, but it was also a matter of race. The Pacific was more of a “race war” than was the war in Europe—not only in the contest between European and Japanese, but in terms of the Allies themselves. British colonial racism, “white Australia” racism, and American racism institutionalized in the military, all deployed into the Pacific Islands along with the troops.

_African Americans in Indigenous Homelands_

Even more than other US soldiers and sailors, the presence of African Americans made an impact on Indigenous communities, especially in the Southwest Pacific. The United States at the time was a segregated society, as much in the military as in civilian life. Black units were restricted to support and construction activities until late in the war, which meant they spent long deployments as neighbors of Islanders and often employed local labor. For example, five hundred of the Americans sent to build an airfield and base on Aitutaki (Cook Islands) were African American; up to four thousand Islanders were hired to work there. On Efate (New Hebrides)—with a prewar population of about three thousand—the majority of the fifteen thousand US servicemen were African American.

Though discrimination, segregation, and straight-out racism was endemic in the US military, it was not so obvious to Island onlookers, who knew little about Americans at all. In their eyes, African Americans seemed equal to whites in their military kit and their abilities. They were literate, they drove and repaired complex machinery, they were skilled at carpentry and other demanding tasks. Because sumptuary rules symbolized and cemented racial hierarchy, it was important that Black and white Americans owned the same clothing and equipment, lived in the same conditions, and that, despite official segregation, the servicemen, and sometimes Islanders, would eat together. Furthermore, those who worked for them also in many cases ate the same food as the troops, lived in the same kind of barracks, and wore US-issued clothing. The contrast with treatment by white settlers or ANGAU personnel was stark. Thomas Nouar recalled working for African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment on Efate; “when they called out, they didn’t say—they called us ‘brother.’ Brother, their brothers. They didn’t say that we were no good. They liked us, and because of this our hearts were happy with them. Eh, the Americans!” Islanders saw African American soldiers ignore antifraternization rules and stand up to white ANGAU officers in support of workers. Islanders themselves
became more assertive in knowing their rights and expressing their grievances— exactly what those who hoped to maintain the old order did not want to see. ANGAU administrators “feared the effect that well-dressed, well-paid and educated Black Americans might have on native populations.” Indeed, Jonathan Fifi’i confirms that his experiences in the SILC shaped his political activities as a founder of Maasina Rule (chapters 9, 11).

Elsewhere in the Pacific, wherever African Americans were stationed, white military officials tried to restrict contact with local populations, sometimes with a fanatical zeal that mystified civilians. US Army command argued about where to station African Americans, and policed their sexuality with particular fervor, often to the surprise and dismay of their hosts and Allies. Where both Black and white US troops were in place, as in Tonga, Americans’ “paradoxical racial outlook” was on display: Americans were annoyed that British and New Zealanders excluded Tongans from gentlemen’s clubs, yet the US units had separate bases, recreational facilities, and duties. (The nearly two thousand African
Americans of the 77th Coast Artillery from California got along well with the nonsegregationist Tongans.)

Australia’s and New Zealand’s own racial habits were unsettled by US policies and personnel. Australia had a complicated relationship with American servicemen stationed there, and even more so with African Americans. Of the nearly one million Americans who came through Australia in World War II, one hundred thousand were African Americans. Government resistance to their deployment, despite Canberra’s request for protection while its own men were serving abroad, contrasted with the often-positive attitudes of ordinary Australians. Many found a friendly reception from a public who appreciated their defensive role, but “white Australia” protected its exclusivity. In Western Australia, where African American sailors made up only a small number of the US servicemen stationed there, they attended public dances and a navy club and dated white women, but in cities such as Brisbane, interactions were more tense despite segregated facilities. African American men fraternized with white Australian women, and about fifty marriages brought white wives to the United States. They also fraternized with Aboriginal Australians—segregated clubs for African American troops included Aboriginal women as staff and dance partners—but US immigration barriers mostly blocked bringing them home as wives. Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s parents hosted African American and white US servicemen in their Stradbroke Island home, and she knew two women who married African Americans. “There was always this wonderful feeling between the black Americans and the Aboriginals . . . always,” she recalled. “They were welcomed into our homes.”

The presence of African Americans in Australia offered new ideas to Aboriginal Australians and also gave white Australians a chance to rethink racial attitudes. Like Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal Australians saw a new model of Black men, and white Australians’ racial perceptions were challenged as they encountered well-educated and well-paid African American mechanics, truck drivers, and bulldozer operators. For their part, African Americans were sympathetic toward Aboriginal Australians, but saw them as quite different from themselves, especially those living in rural areas (where most African Americans were posted)—they had more in common with those they met in the cities, like Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s family.

While New Zealand forces were largely stationed in the Middle East, tens of thousands of Americans came to New Zealand, both for defense and as a respite from Pacific battlegrounds. European and Māori New Zealanders hosted the men and Māoris gave cultural performances at camps and hospitals. Civilian
relations were largely positive, but there was hostility between New Zealand and US troops, and where Māori soldiers were present so was American racism. A 1943 riot outside the Allied Services Club in Wellington started when white soldiers from the southern US objected to Māoris and whites drinking and socializing together. Another brawl in April 1944 in Fremantle, Western Australia, involved hundreds of US Army soldiers in transit and Māoris on shore leave on route to the Middle East; many were injured, and Americans killed two Māoris. Certainly, Māori Battalion men on home leave “were not about to put up with racist remarks from white U.S. Marines and sailors.” Māori elders intervened to calm things, and social events were held to increase cultural understanding. But even good relations came with racial overtones: white New Zealand women who married servicemen could emigrate to the United States, but racial exclusion/antimiscegenation laws made that rare for Māori women.35

The global movement of millions of servicemen and women and laborers built up a stockpile of novel interactions. Mateship, shared hardship and combat, recognition of courage and loyalty, and simple everyday familiarity with different kinds of people—all affected postwar reality. For women, the presence of strangers at war had an additional dimension.

Sex and Love in Wartime

As soldiers and sailors deployed around the world, sexual activity changed wherever they went. Women’s involvement with these strangers ranged from battleground rape to sexual slavery to paid sex work to romance and marriage. Recent studies have examined official and unofficial prostitution in all theaters and sexual activities of soldiers abroad, though information about Indigenous women’s experience remains scarce.36

The drive to recognize and compensate survivors of Japanese military brothels has drawn attention to the varied forms of wartime prostitution (military and civilian, official and unofficial, willing or pressured or forced), sexual violence by troops, and consensual sex.37 Overseas Japanese brothels for expatriates and the military existed from the start of the century, but after 1937 premises for military and police use were established in occupied regions. At first these were staffed by Japanese, but over time women from Korea, Taiwan, and other colonial and occupied regions were drawn and forced into work. As is the case for military brothels in general, one intention was to reduce rape, though sexual violence still occurred.
Indigenous women were a minority of those involved in the system. In Japanese Micronesia, for example, the military brothels in Chuuk and Saipan employed women brought from Japan or elsewhere in the empire. Official brothels were less common at the edges of empire and at active fronts, and apparently were not set up in occupied areas of the Solomon Islands, eastern New Guinea, the Gilbert Islands, or the Aleutian Islands. Japanese authorities regulated interaction with civilians in occupied areas and knew the danger of raising hostility by mistreating women (this is one reason they set up the military brothel system). But certainly some Indigenous women were forced into sex work, though in small numbers, as in East Timor, around the large base at Rabaul, and on Guam.

Allied militaries did not match the Japanese organized system of brothels, but the presence of huge numbers of troops transformed sex work wherever they were stationed or in transit. The “first strange place” many US servicemen in the Pacific theater visited was Hawai‘i, where sexual and personal relationships readily crossed racial lines. Before the war, Honolulu’s bar and prostitution district served the small but regular military trade. When Hawai‘i became a major base and transit point, hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors passed through Oahu. Honolulu’s wartime brothels were staffed mostly by white women from the mainland, though there were also local women, as ethnically diverse as Hawai‘i itself. Under martial law, the military, police, and civilian officials agreed on how to manage prostitution in Hawai‘i; it was illegal but regarded as necessary and acceptable until September 1944 when the police finally got military agreement to shut down the brothels.

Elsewhere in the Pacific, private establishments operating near US bases drew in local women, a situation complicated by American racism. Both African American and white US servicemen used the Māori-run brothel in Wellington, New Zealand, but in New Caledonia, US military objection to interracial sex caused trouble. African American troops were prohibited from the mostly white-staffed licensed brothels, so they used unofficial prostitutes, which put them at risk of being charged with rape. American officials wanted New Caledonia to set up a separate facility for African Americans, staffed by Kanak women—a suggestion that French colonial authorities adamantly rejected, saying that Americans should bring African American women from the US if their prudishness could not handle sex between races. In Australia, both white and Aboriginal Australian women worked in informal brothels set up by the US military, apparently with some racial segregation of service.
In a militarized environment, sexual encounters became potentially dangerous, as interaction slid from willing to coercive to violent. Rape occurred as a weapon of war, as a civil crime, and in the guise of commercial transactions. Despite Allied propaganda, there seems to have been a low incidence of rape by Japanese soldiers in New Guinea, at least as long as discipline held; the situation elsewhere varied with local commanders and conditions of war.\(^43\) Allied forces also dealt with rape accusations—sometimes entangled with racial issues, as in charges against African American soldiers in New Caledonia and New Guinea and against Pacific Islands Regiment men—or, often, failed to deal with them. Faced with the flood of American servicemen into Kiriwina (Trobriand Islands), the local ANGAU officer complained that, “It was impossible to get anyone to take rape seriously on Kiriwina in 1943. It was a war situation. Normal law and order seemed unimportant, because everybody expected to be killed soon anyway. In any case the Americans would not accept the word of a native against their own people.”\(^44\)

Although rape is a weapon of war and a consequence of racism and indifference, and prostitution accompanies all armies, intimate relationships were also a part of the picture. For the most part Japanese troops were under orders to avoid social contact with local women, but alliances certainly happened. In Micronesia, where there had been Japanese-Islander marriages before the war, consensual relationships occurred with soldiers, too. In the worst periods of bombing, starvation, and military control, sex could be pressured in exchange for protection and support. Tamotsu Ogawa spent three years on New Britain, where he claimed it was the women who were attracted to and made sexual advances to the Japanese soldiers. In some occupied areas, Japanese officers formed relationships with women and their families to enhance local ties, as on Bougainville. This could have the opposite effect: in inland Borneo, a Tagal leader’s daughter mistreated by a senior Japanese officer provided information to Allied guerrillas and her story incited anti-Japanese animosity.\(^45\)

Like some Japanese in occupied territories, Allied guerrillas who lived for long periods with Indigenous communities might form family bonds—or those with family bonds might become guerrillas. Dennis Rosner, who served with the Kachin Levies, married a Kachin woman and settled permanently in Myitkyina after the war. American Henry Clay Conner, who lived with Negritos in the Philippines for nearly three years, learning the language and organizing several hundred guerrillas, married the chief’s sister and had a son.\(^46\) In colonial Malaya, H. D. Noone’s marriage to a Temiar wife preceded the war, but he relied on her family and community as he pursued clandestine work during Japanese occupation.
Guerrillas operated far from official oversight, but where troops were concentrated military commanders worried about sexual violence, venereal disease, prostitution, and interracial relationships, whether of Germans with Sámi, African Americans in Polynesia, or white Americans in New Guinea. In the Pacific theater, US Army commanders’ preoccupations about racial mixing affected deployment planning. Servicemen’s own preconceptions shaped behavior: Americans stationed on islands that matched the 1930s Hollywood stereotypes of the “sexualized South Seas” of Polynesia—romanticized in the 1949 musical *South Pacific*—seem to have had more sexual interaction than those sent to New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. But memoirs include positive romantic images of Melanesian women, too. The diary of Captain Hyman Samuelson, a white officer of the 96th Engineers, is very complimentary about the “beautiful figures” exposed when young New Guinea women danced in the moonlight, but he always notes the imprudence of going beyond casual flirting because of the color bar controlling race relations. Residents also worried about these relationships. On Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands (and many other places), well-paid Americans upset patterns of intimacy by giving cash and generous gifts to sexual partners, making it impossible for local men to compete. The relative wealth of US soldiers and sailors, their sheer numbers, cultural differences in the significance of gifts and of sexual acts, war’s unsettled conditions—all gave rise to behavior that could not be regulated by traditional family and community patterns.

“Love,” Judith Bennett and Angela Wanhalla comment, “is something historians rarely speak of”—yet certainly some wartime relationships involved love, not just sex. After the United States took charge of defense of the Pacific region, Americans staffed bases on large islands and tiny atolls. When the “tsunami of young men” flowed across the ocean and entered their world, women had the chance to gain new experiences and income from domestic work and sales of food and handicrafts. Many local men were gone, travelling for military service or labor. Add in alcohol, gambling, cigarettes, movies, dances, a ready supply of imported food and goods, along with the fact that the foreign servicemen were young, lonely, flush with cash and eager to socialize, and you can see how young Islanders living near US bases experienced two to four years of excitement, which ended as quickly as it began.

No matter how positive or intimate the relationships were, they ended abruptly when men were transferred or bases closed. Soldiers moved on, leaving only memories—and, in the case of Americans, about four thousand fatherless
children throughout the Islands. Servicemen could not marry without permission from commanding officers, which was rarely granted for marriage to Islanders. Immigration and antimiscegenation laws prevented many women from entering the United States. Barriers against these unions contrast with assistance given to men bringing “war brides” from elsewhere, even when those brides (German, Italian, Japanese) were from a former enemy population. War separated families in other ways, too. Japanese and Okinawans who had emigrated to Pacific Islands and formed families there were separated at the start of war when Allied territories interned enemy civilians, or when, as across Micronesia, they were repatriated at its end.

It was not just with “strangers at war” that sex and love took place. The war re-ordered social relationships within communities and increased interaction among them. Young Fijians returning from the front “were welcomed home with traditional ceremonies, gifts and feasts” and in some cases the traditional offer of young wives, some unwilling. On the homefront, Indigenous people moved far from home to work in war industries, fostering racially mixed and (in North America) inter-tribal relationships (chapter 9). And, lest it seem that wartime increased sexual activity, we should note that it also broke families apart, killed husbands and wives and lovers and children, isolated men and women from one another, and depleted time and energy.

No matter how far away soldiers travelled, they brought their existing cultural ideas with them. In the next chapter, we turn to how images and realities of the “other” shaped military action. Indigenous cultures have histories of conflict; fighting itself was not new to them. What was unprecedented was the scale and nature of industrial war. As we will see, men familiar with small-scale wars had something to teach the major powers about how to fight.