

*Exploring the Meaning of Indigenous Military Service during the
Second World War in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the
United States*

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What was the meaning of military service for Indigenous men who volunteered during the Second World War? On the surface it seems a relatively simple question, though invested with a certain gravitas because of the nature of the service and sacrifice being discussed. At its core, this question can help elucidate what is often the “big why?” invariably asked by people encountering this subject for the first time: why did Indigenous people, marginalised socially, economically, and politically by settler society, engage in the national war effort during the Second World War? Or phrased another way, why did young Indigenous men fight for a freedom, democracy and equality that they had never experienced? Perhaps surprisingly, Indigenous oral testimonies and written accounts often never provide clear reasons behind their choice to enlist. The idea was somehow so self-evident to veterans in the context of the totalising nature of the Second World War that it did not require elaboration. Yet as historians we remain fascinated with the question of ‘why,’ a retrospective emphasis which derives from desires to make sense of war service in the context of colonialism. Thus reconstructing the meaning of Indigenous military service moves us much closer to understanding the broader Indigenous involvement in the War.

This article explores these questions through a transnational lens, drawing on research for a major study of Indigenous contributions and experiences during the Second World War in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. That process revealed the striking parallels and interesting anomalies in the meanings ascribed to military service among Māori, Canadian Aboriginal, Native American, and Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Most Indigenous service personnel served integrated into settler armies and faced similar challenges and patterns of experience. Additionally, lifting each national experience out of its national box enables historiographical cross fertilisation and opens up a wider array of the often scattered and fragmentary Indigenous voices (Riseman, 2014). The focus will be on male service in settler armies, as gender differences and the demands of air and naval service are beyond the scope of this article.

Employing its transnational lens, the article seeks to do interrelated things. First, it examines the meaning of military service for Indigenous men in each of three distinct phases: prior to their enlistment, while serving in the army and in combat, and after demobilisation and transitioning to veterans. At each transitional point individuals crossed a Rubicon beyond which their understandings would be transformed by a profoundly different lived experience in a substantially different environment. Meaning is, by its very nature, situational, fluid and defined by specific context. Second, this study considers Indigenous perspectives and experiences in relation to, and the broader context of, the non-Indigenous comrades-in-arms with whom they enlisted, served, and sacrificed. I do this to counteract the tendency in all four national historiographies to treat Indigenous military service in isolation, which amplifies distinctly Indigenous meanings and downplays or ignores meanings that these men shared with non-Indigenous soldiers. As I have argued elsewhere, we are missing the full picture if we fail to see both the distinctly Indigenous and the shared understandings of military service (Sheffield, 2017a). This does not mean subsuming Indigenous experiences and perceptions within a homogenous soldier's experience of combat, but being sensitive to the understandings shaped by common experience as well as to the sometimes nuanced, sometimes profound, distinct meanings shaped by the indigeneity of an individual soldier. In the end, this quest reveals much about diverse interpretations prevalent amongst Indigenous soldiers and veterans in specific times and places, but

cannot be definitive in the face of such complexity and the ultimately idiosyncratic and personal nature of veterans' lived experiences.

Across the American, Canadian Australian, and New Zealand armies, Indigenous men served in the thousands with the vast majority incorporated as individuals within largely non-Indigenous units. There were a couple exceptions, principally the 28th (Maori) Battalion and the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion, where Indigenous service personnel served in segregated units. Total enlistments were approximately 25,000 Native Americans in the United States, approximately 16,000 Māori in New Zealand, approximately 4,300 Status Indians in Canada (with unknown numbers of Métis and Inuit), and 4,850 in Australia, with only miniscule minorities in each country serving with naval or air forces. While all four states developed some form of conscription, only the United States and Canada considered Indigenous people eligible for the draft. Nevertheless, the majority in both countries volunteered for service rather than be forcibly enrolled, and thus voluntarism forms the predominant narrative of Indigenous entry into settler armies.

Even before donning a uniform, military service was rich in diverse meanings for many young Indigenous men during the Second World War. If this were not the case, they would never have been moved to offer themselves for military service. Rationales for such decisions would have varied from one individual to the next and from one cultural community to the next, with each young man that volunteered likely motivated by multiple meanings.

Most frequently discussed amongst these is the notion of young men seeking the cultural recognition and status of warrior within their own Indigenous communities through fighting in settler armies. Amongst Māori and some Indigenous peoples in North America, a warrior ethos had deep roots and remained vibrant in the mid-twentieth century. One Māori volunteer explained that "all their history had been steeped in the religion of war, and the training of the Maori child from his infancy to manhood was aimed at the perfection of the warrior-class, while to die in the pursuit of the War God Tumatauenga was a sacred duty and a manly death" (Soutar, 2008, p.35) Similarly, amongst Canadian Plains First Nations, such as "some of the young Bloods who had joined the army and been overseas with the Expeditionary Force made sure, when they came back, that they could join the Old Warriors Society" (Niven, 1941).

Thus for young men raised in a culture venerating a warrior's masculine code this rationale could prove a potent motivator. It is important, however, to guard against essentialising this rationale across Indigenous societies, as not all Native American and First Nations admired warriors and their deeds, nor indeed was this prevalent amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Australians.

Many Indigenous men framed their rationale for volunteering as a means to protect their own homelands and people. Saulo Waia joined the Torres Strait Light Infantry because "War in New Guinea already. Japanese in there already. So, we only last chance.... Not very far from New Guinea. Thursday Island group of Torres Strait ... we joined in for the sake of our families" (Hall, 1995, p.142-43). Navajo man Cozy Stanley Brown succinctly proclaimed that his "main reason for going to war was to protect my land and my people," (Iverson, 2002, p.182) while fellow Navajo Albert Smith framed his rationale more broadly: "this conflict involved Mother Earth being dominated by foreign countries. It was our responsibility to defend her" (Townsend, 2000, p.77). For this and other reasons, Indigenous enlistment should not be read as somehow validating or indicating support for the colonial system that subjugated their people.

Indeed, Indigenous enlistment could be a political act intended to unsettle or challenge colonial structures and Indigenous marginalisation. This emerges in the often fervent statements and demonstrations of loyalty from political leaders regarding Indigenous service, such as a letter from the Australian Aborigines League to the Australian Prime Minister in 1940 which stated: "the Aboriginal population is intensely loyal to the Empire and the volunteering of the native men is for this reason. They are capable, they have good initiative, and I am informed by those training them that they will make excellent soldiers" (Burdeau, 1940). In New Zealand, amongst those Māori with strong traditions of alliance with Pākehā [non- Māori New Zealanders], service in the 28th (Maori) Battalion became a demonstration of loyalty. According to Rangi Logan, an NCO in the Battalion, "They really went at it so enthusiastically that where a whaunau [family] didn't have a young man of appropriate age, well it's a matter of family honour that the whanau must be represented, so we had men as young as fifteen in the Battalion" (Soutar, 2008, p.38). The political implications of Indigenous service

were spelled out by leading Māori politician, Sir Apirana Ngata, in his booklet, *The Price of Citizenship*, in 1943:

Has he [the Māori soldier] proved a claim to be an asset to his country? If so, he asks to be dealt with as such. An asset discovered in the crucible of war should have a value in the coming peace. The men of the New Zealand Division have seen it below the brown skins of their Maori comrades. Have the civilians of New Zealand, men and women, fully realised the implications of the joint participation of Pakeha and Maori in the last and greatest demonstration of citizenship (Ngata, 1943)?

This is not to suggest that each Indigenous youth that volunteered did so with a clear notion of its potential political implications. Nevertheless, some articulated individualised notions of such sentiment. One such soldier, who went on to become the most highly decorated Indigenous soldier in the Canadian Army, Thomas George Prince, explained that, all his life, he “had wanted to do something to help my people recover their good name. I wanted to show they were as good as any white man” (Porter, 1952). Such conceptualisations of service arose from an Indigenous perspective and were distinct to young Indigenous recruits.

There were other meanings for enlisting though, which transcended ethnic boundaries. Perhaps the most commonly discussed was the understanding of military service as economic opportunity. Just emerging from the Great Depression, “everybody was poor, and everybody was scratching out a living, like chickens scratching for food,” recalled Dakota soldier Shirley Quentin Red Boy (Boxer, 2004, p.18). Particularly in North America, where the economic catastrophe had bitten deeper than in Australia or New Zealand, military service offered economic stability and the chance to help their families to young Indigenous recruits. Many would have agreed with Métis soldier Wilfrid John Henry:

Well I joined [the army] to make money; \$1.10 a day, which was better than the 50 cents I'd been getting hauling wood into town. On top of that, there were free clothes, and free board and room. So I joined up because it would help my folks out. Their conditions weren't very good and I could give them half my pay, and they wouldn't have to feed me or buy me clothes. I told my dad that the money I sent home was to go to his machinery. I

enlisted because I couldn't stand him not having any money. He was still hauling wood into town for 50 cents a cord (Henry, 1997, p.55).

Others joined because all their buddies were going, Aboriginal man Harold Stewart recalls: "I didn't join because I was patriotic. I joined because my mates had gone" (Stewart, 1991). Of course enlistment and service abroad offered more than just comradeship. A Māori woman from Rangitukia recalled the young men in her community were encouraged to enlist, "not to fight, but rather for the adventure and the opportunity to travel" (Soutar, 2008, p.39). Gilbert Horn, Sr., from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, stated simply: "I wanted to know what was beyond the reservation boundary" (Horn, 2004).

Some meanings overlapped with non-Indigenous enlistees, albeit with nuances that slightly distinguished Indigenous meanings. Notions of patriotism and duty, for instance, were in the foreground for many would-be soldiers, including one anonymous Navajo Code Talker who explains, "during World War II, we were fighting for *our country*. Then, we were being attacked – as close as Pearl Harbor! The enemy was headed this way and we had to stop them. If someone is trying to take something away from us, we fight back. If this is what you call *patriotism*, then we are very patriotic!" (Paul, 1973, p.115). Peter Gladue, a First Nations man from Alberta, despite being rejected for military service, expressed his genuine anxieties in this time of crisis:

Today and on is our chance to save our children their lives is beyond to help of winning this big flame of fire coming toward us in a world war. Today every stitch of everything is needed. And beyond, all Indian of Canada of all points should now look in future if they love their children and their lands, to help winning this terrible war. A man is fit for war should now go and stop this big flame of fire coming to burn our children their lives. And any one not fit to go should help on every penny to help those people are fighting for us all (Indian Says All Should Help).

Such statements were declarations of belonging and the right to take part in the national crusade that the Second World War became. Other Indigenous volunteers found inspiration closer to home, following in the footsteps of relatives who had served in the Great War and sometimes longer standing family traditions of military service. Gunditjmara man Reg Saunders from western Victoria noted that he had "merely

followed in the footsteps of hundreds of other Aboriginals in World War I. The men that I grew up with – you know, my school mates’ fathers and that – they were nearly all soldiers or involved in the military. So I thought it was just a normal thing” (Hall, 1995, p.64). Sometimes fathers or uncles who served in the Great War encouraged the younger generation to enlist, such as Plains Cree Chief Joe Dreaver. A veteran of the First World War, he drove seventeen men from his reserve community, including three sons, into Saskatoon to enlist a month after Canada’s declaration of war (Summerby, 1993, p.21-22). The decision to enlist then arose from an array of rich meanings, often working in concert to persuade young Māori, Native American, First Nations, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to step forward.

As Indigenous soldiers put on their uniforms, they crossed an invisible but irreversible boundary beyond which their understanding of what their service meant would be transformed. Subsequent experiences of basic training and especially of combat would forge, according to Sebastien Junger, “strong emotional bonds within the company or the platoon” (2016, p.85). Euclide Boyer, a Métis soldier in the Canadian Army, remembered that there “were a few Indians and Métis, but in those days every fellow soldier was like a brother to you, so it didn’t make much difference” (Boyer, 1997, p.18). The intense interpersonal connections between soldiers in small units cut through peacetime identifiers distinguishing Indigene from settler and formed the core of meaning in military service. Indigenous and non-indigenous understandings of military service converged, and did so in more than just the camaraderie of soldiers. In spite of tendencies among scholars to treat Indigenous soldiers as separate and exceptional, human physiological and psychological responses to the fear, acute stress, brutality and intensity of modern warfare crossed ethnic boundaries. Tini Glover recalls simply of the Maori Battalion: “we were all frightened” (Glover, 2003). In a similar vein, Reg Saunders’ trauma at his first experience killing an enemy soldier could come from any soldier:

I deliberately shot him, you know. I lined him up and I knew I could kill him because I was a very good rifle shot. He was the first one that I’d ever seen in a position where I could kill him, and I killed him. When I got [to where he had fallen] I was terribly sorry about it ... blood was still running out of him ... because I shot him through the ... he was down and I shot him

through the ...[the bullet] went through his back ... awful experience (Hall, 1995, p.72-73).

Men in combat all struggled to manage its powerful mental and physical demands on them, and depended on their mates to help get them through.

While it is important to include Indigenous soldiers alongside their comrades in shared meanings and understandings of battle, this does not mean subsuming Indigenous soldiers in a blanket of sameness. Christopher Hamner (2011, p.13-14), for instance, challenges the:

assumption that some universal elements of combat (danger, chaos, the risk of death, and the necessity of killing) are so profound that they somehow transcend the influences of technology, tactics, and culture ... [arguing a] variety of factors, from training to leadership to the soldier's relationship with his arms and with his comrades, all affected the ways that infantrymen prepared themselves for battle and were motivated from without and from within to endure its rigors.

Despite military training designed to reconstruct individuals as members of a unit with shared masculine codes of behaviour and the cohesion forged in combat, soldiers retained much of themselves in the army. While somewhat nebulous and impossible to measure, the cultural conditioning experienced while growing up in their communities before the war would have left many Indigenous soldiers with unique lens through which to understand their experiences. It could provide distinct coping mechanisms, such as the tobacco kept by Potowatomi soldier, Leroy "Mickey" Mzhickteno. "It's good medicine even though you can't pinpoint what it does for you. It's not like medicine you take to get well or something like that. It's just something...[I kept it in] a pill bottle. I don't remember when I ran out. I guess I had too many close calls!" (Mzhickteno, 2005). While there might well have been overlap between military and Indigenous masculine codes of behaviour, understandings of death, hate, revenge, courage, cowardice, or sacrifice all had culturally specific connotations. For example, Māori officer Arapeta Awatere reacted to the death of his brother in North Africa, subsequently sought revenge, and eventually healed spiritually through culturally specific meanings:

So with my pistol I shot the fellow who fired the gun. I then ordered my lot to shoot. Those [prisoners] were mowed down like ninepins ... I went over, saw my brother's body and swore that until the end of the war I will kill every man of the enemy that opposed me anywhere at anytime as 'utu' or 'ngaki mate' for my brother mainly and then the rest ... I turned cold and ruthless till the end of the war, till the old 'pure' was performed at Rotorua (Soutar, 2008, p.185).

The meanings for Indigenous soldiers while in the military were thus shared, but also potentially shaped by their own cultural upbringing and world view in certain circumstances.

There was one additional meaning for Indigenous service personnel, as well as for some other ethnic minorities, and this was the egalitarian nature of military service where they felt accepted and respected for their abilities and character. Almost all Indigenous veterans speak of this aspect of their war experience in some way. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, a wireless operator in the Australian Women's Army Service, claimed that there:

was a difference between the way we were being treated in the Army and before the war. Oh yes! A complete difference, because in the Army they didn't give a stuff what colour you were. There was a job to be done, just to get it done, and all of a sudden the colour line disappeared, it just completely disappeared... (Hall, 1995, p.118-19).

Métis woman Dorothy Asquith recalled a cousin who had served in the front lines saying, "Who the hell ever stopped to look at colour? We were so gall darn glad that you could get a place to duck into: who gave a damn who's with you? We were there together, two lives" (Asquith, 1997, p.6). It is not that recognition of their Indigeneity disappeared – Native American soldiers often were nicknamed 'chief' for instance – but the overt and hateful sentiments of peacetime receded and what was left appears to have been offset in the minds of most Indigenous soldiers by the warmth and acceptance of their comrades-in-arms (Bernstein, 1991, p.56).

War's end brought another profound transition for Indigenous servicemen – demobilisation and a return to 'civvy street,' Subsequently, the meaning of their war experiences would be defined and shaped by hindsight and the shifting contexts and

experiences of their post-war lives. The dominant narratives in each settler society have constructed the Second World War as the 'good war,' where the 'greatest generation' (Brokaw, 2004) did its thing and antipodean Digger legends were renewed and reinvigorated (Seal, 2004). That warm collective memory now rests on the broadly positive eras that followed in each country, which experienced almost uninterrupted growth and prosperity for decades. The majority of returned service personnel participated in those economic good times, boosted in the immediate post-war years by the generous and flexible veterans benefits provided in each settler state. Indigenous servicemen's place in this heartening narrative is less clear.

Certainly the meaning of their post-war emotions and experiences paralleled many of those of all demobilising soon-to-be-veterans. First and foremost was their joy and relief at their reunion with loved ones. "I didn't believe that I was home until I got to see my folks," one Canadian First Nations' veteran recalled. "I said to myself, 'I'm on home ground now. I'm safe'" (Innes, 2004, p.695). That joy was blended with a sense of accomplishment. Métis veteran Charlie Umpherville remembered that, "When the war was over, I was happy to get back; that's for sure. Happy to come through it. Not really happy about the war, but I was happy that I had done a little part, and that we got rid of that old Heil Hitler" (Umpherville, 1997, p.130).

After the flurry of welcome at their return, Indigenous veterans then turned their attention to the challenging task of civilian re-establishment. Most managed the transition, but it was not straight forward and many would have agreed with Omaha soldier Hollis Stabler who said, "coming home to a post-war world was a confusing experience at best" (Stabler, 2005, p.118). Simply adjusting to the often mundane nature of peacetime life and work was hard enough: "how do you regain the kind of excitement that you get when you're in a war? You can't. Your life is pretty much downhill after that" (Innes, 2004, p.695). Some found settling into a successful civilian career hard. Métis veteran Joseph Fayant recalled, "I was discharged in August and came home. I tried to salvage a civilian life for myself, but that didn't work" (Fayant, 1997, p.39). He subsequently re-enlisted for a tour in Korea in 1950. These reminiscences suggest that at least part of the post-war meaning of their military service was a sense of purpose and belonging that proved elusive in later civilian life.

Of course some veterans did not return alone, but accompanied by demons and ghosts. Native American veteran Draven Delkittie spoke of a fellow Indigenous veteran who could not make his peace with having killed people and drank himself to death (Carroll, 2008, p.119). Alcohol proved an important, if corrosive, salve for those veterans for whom the meaning of military service was psychological pain and suffering. Monty Soutar's important work on C Company of the 28th (Maori) Battalion speaks of suicides, alcoholism, and family violence amongst Māori in the Tairāwhiti region of the North Island (Soutar, 2008, p.373). In North America, this experience is embodied in the tragic post-war lives of Ira Hayes and Tommy Prince, who both struggled and turned to alcohol to cope. Hayes' death of exposure in a ditch in 1955 was immortalised in song (Hemingway, 1988), while Prince served an additional two tours of duty in Korea before eventually living out his life in anonymous poverty on the streets of Winnipeg until he died in 1977 (Lackenbauer, 2007). While such stories are not generally audible amidst the cacophony of the 'good war' trope, they were part of all veterans' lingering connection to the war.

While some shared meanings persisted after the war, the convergence in meaning between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous servicemen during the war reversed course after veterans returned home. The wartime convergence had been predicated on a combination of identical training and combat with the intense inter-personnel bonds between soldiers that had minimised the distinctions of Indigeneity. Demobilising and returning to civilian life meant re-entering a civilian world that was little altered from pre-war realities where Indigenous identity powerfully distinguished, separated, and defined day-to-day realities between Indigenous and settler veterans.

These differences became apparent for many Indigenous returned service personnel from their initial welcome home and initial reintegration back into their communities because these processes were often culturally proscribed and distinct. For example, during the public ceremonies held when the 28th (Maori) Battalion landed in Wellington, 24 January 1946:

Elders recited a chant to satisfy the ritual of 'tango tapu' (removing tapu) ... To the elders, a soldier's discharge from the army was not sufficient to convert him to a peaceful citizen. The ritual had to be performed before the

distinction between the warrior and the ordinary citizen was dissolved (Soutar, 2008, p.361-62).

At his welcome, Joseph Medicine Crow sang his war song, describing his military accomplishments during the war to Crow Elders to prove that he had performed the courageous deeds to be accepted as a warrior and war chief amongst his people (Medicine Crow, 2013). For veterans from some Indigenous communities, such as Coast Salish (Carlson, 1996) or Zuni (Adair and Vogt, 1949), war service was not positively embraced but instead marked them as tainted and culturally threatening or problematic. In some cases, culturally-defined understandings of war and warriors extended to unique ceremonies and medicines that offered Indigenous veterans, struggling with what would today be identified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, different ways to heal. Navajo Agnes Begay recalls:

our elder folks planned a special ceremony to receive a person who had been gone for so long and who had been captured by the Japanese... Then, later, the same summer we planned a Squaw Dance for him because he was very nervous and sort of upset and sleepless. After the dance was performed, he became normal again like he was before he had gone to war and had been captured (Begay, 1977).

Such cultural healing and renewal provided different models for some veterans to understand war experiences – and themselves (Holms, 1986, Holms, 1996). Culturally-defined meanings thus infused military service with increasingly different nuances than those available to their non-Indigenous friends.

Another factor immediately reared its head for Indigenous veterans upon their return in the form of settler prejudice. Navajo Code Talker Wilsie Bitsie was angry that when he and other veterans came “back home and ... you find discrimination, you find hate and everything is mixed up here. You go someplace and you can’t go in this hotel here, you can’t go in this cafe here, things like that you’re up against.... So that feeds the rest of what we went through” (Riseman, 2012, p.211). A Canadian veteran similarly recalled the bitterness of his post-war return:

as long as you’re on the reserve the nearest town won’t have anything to do with you. They just regard you as nothing. And that’s how we were treated. We were just another Indian....When we were discharged they told us that

we would get first choice of any job at all. But that was impossible, I mean you go out and I've been rejected so many times (Innes, 2004, p.694).

For John Rangihau, who had served with the Maori Battalion, ongoing settler prejudice altered his feelings about the war:

We came back into a situation which had not changed in any way, where we were still treated as second-class citizens, where we were still not allowed to purchase alcohol ... Suddenly there was an annoying thing at the pit of our stomach about having gone away to free this beautiful land and yet still be treated as aliens in our own country (Rangihau, 1992, p.187).

Given their sacrifices, such experiences frequently altered the meaning of their military service during the Second World War for Indigenous veterans.

Homecoming to Indigenous communities and reserves also usually meant returning to regulatory regimes and intrusive state controls. In Canada, the constraints of the *Indian Act* and arbitrary control of Indian agent seemed for some veterans seemed harsher and more frustrating than before they went to war. Cree veteran Gordon Ahenakew recalled how, "especially at that age when I came back, I was bitter against the Indian agent, the Indian Act, the government . . . it's almost you know funny how a freedom loving people . . . we were closed in here, simply closed in." (Innes, 2004, p.697). In each country, veterans programs were crafted, administered, and sometimes distorted in ways that created unequal access to veteran's benefits for Indigenous veterans, and a lower likelihood of translating the funds and programs into economic reestablishment in civilian life (Sheffield, 2017b). One Māori veteran railed against heavy-handed supervision of his veterans' benefits in New Zealand: "you have to borrow money from Maori Affairs and they send a broken-down bloody Pakeha contract painter to administer your finances. You're not even allowed to write your own cheques to pay for your bills" (Soutar, 2008, 373). A common aspect of settler state regulatory regimes was a ban on Indigenous access to alcohol, which proved symbolically important to many Indigenous veterans who had joined their buddies for a beer during the war but could no longer do so in peacetime. This struck particularly hard at Indigenous veterans because, as Junger (2016) argues, one of the largest challenges returning from war was shifting from a collectivist military life to an individualistic civilian life. The loss of comradeship left many veterans adrift and was

an important reason for the importance of veterans' halls, where war buddies could find solace and support in a pint with people who understood their world. Because they served alcohol, Indigenous veterans in most settler jurisdictions could not enter these establishments. In Western Australia, Gloria Brennan remembered her father, under the *Western Australia's Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944*, "suffering the 'indignity of getting a citizenship rights card so as to be able to walk into a hotel to have a drink with the same men he fought side by side with. That really got his pride" (Gilbert, 1977, p.79). These colonial legislative and regulatory systems had long intruded into the daily lives of Indigenous peoples in all four countries, but after having worn a military uniform, lived as an equal in the service, and sacrificed so much on the altar of freedom, democracy and equality, such treatment embittered many veterans and reshaped the meaning of their war service.

Ultimately, military service was deeply meaningful to those Māori, Canadian Aboriginal, Native American, and Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander men who participated in the Second World War. At every stage of the process, from civilian to soldier to veteran, a multiplicity of possible factors shaped how these young men understood military service. Many of these meanings influenced Indigenous recruits/soldiers/veterans in much the same way that they shaped the experiences of other non-Indigenous men. Other factors, arising from the particular cultural, political, legal or economic context of each Indigenous serviceman, could provide different nuances to the ways in which they perceived their service that were distinct or even unique to each individual. The degree of similarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous meanings appear to have been evident prior to the war in the motivations to enlist, but the gap would have narrowed once in military uniform and participating in combat. The distinctions of Indigeneity reasserted themselves after the war, however, in forceful ways that again reduced the overlap in experiences and shared understandings of military service in the Second World War. This article has focussed only on the years immediately following the war, but the differences for Indigenous veterans carried on into their twilight years. They were widely ostracised from local and national acts of remembrance and commemoration, and sometimes found themselves campaigning for recognition, remembrance, respect, and sometimes restitution of grievances over unequal pay or benefits. The success of these campaigns, combined with the broad societal re-discovery of First and Second World War veterans in each of these countries,

has brought belated recognition, commemoration, apologies, and compensation that may have again shifted Indigenous veterans' feelings about their war service in more positive directions.

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