

R. Scott Sheffield and Noah Riseman. *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War: The Politics, Experiences and Legacies of War in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 364.

This impressive transnational work compares the Second World War experiences of Indigenous civilians and soldiers and their increased interaction with four settler societies. Common war experiences offer a framework to examine Native Americans of the United States, First Nations of Canada, Maori of New Zealand and Indigenous peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. More often than not, when war broke out, Indigenous populations declared their support, offering “voluntary, monetary and symbolic aid to national war efforts” (p. 1). Indigenous recruits were usually integrated into settler units experiencing respect and acceptance. On the homefront, new jobs were available as barriers of racist exclusion were removed. While these dynamic contributions suggest Indigenous empowerment and an opportunity for Indigenous policy reform by settler governments, the desires of settlers steered limited restructuring after 1945. Indigenous war contributions seemed to fade into obscurity until the 1970s, when in all four countries recognition corresponded to increased political influence. The authors write, “These striking parallels in historical experiences cry out for transnational and comparative examination” (p. 2). Despite these similarities, this work acknowledges complexities and diversity, hoping to “comprehend Indigenous interactions and relationships with the war and state as contested processes, constantly negotiated over ever-shifting terrain” (p. 2). The result is a book that examines the transnational features of settler-colonialism yet provides a constant reminder against essentialising Indigenous peoples, instead respecting the diversity of responses to global conflict.

The book begins with two valuable contextual chapters on settler-colonialism and Indigenous military service. While the authors acknowledge that these “cannot be comprehensive national histories given their brevity and are thus massive exercises in what to leave out,” they are useful for those who are familiar with, for instance, the relationship of the Canadian state with First Nations, but who could use a primer in the colonial histories of Australia, New Zealand or the United States, or a summary of Indigenous interaction with their militaries (p. 15).

The authors suggest that during the Second World War a significant number of Indigenous people volunteered, but if official

numbers can be trusted, a substantial variance is seen in the various populations showing enlistment rates from only 3 per cent of First Nations in Canada to some 14 per cent of Maori in New Zealand (p. 63). Perhaps the difference could be explained by the argument that New Zealand was “the most inclusive with the least overt racism and prejudice” (p. 67). Rejection for lower education levels or poor health may have also varied in each nation state. The authors conclude that “systemic barriers blocked many Indigenous men and women from successfully enlisting” (p. 71). Curiously enough, while opportunities to serve expanded in three settler states (the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Navy eliminated racial exclusion in 1942 and 1943 respectively), in New Zealand the reverse occurred: when Maori men were not welcomed in Britain and were found problematic due to racism in Britain’s colonies around the world, they were encouraged to transfer to the segregated 28th (Maori) Battalion. Even in the New Zealand armed forces, the battalion was an anomaly. Most Indigenous peoples served in integrated units, and because of this, their service is characterised as “individual, rather than collective” (p. 96). Most also served in armies, due to larger demands for personnel there and lower entry standards of health and education. They signed up for the money, adventure and travel, warrior status, “ideological affinity with the larger cause, loyalty, and/or patriotism” or, no doubt, for myriad other “idiosyncratic individual rationales” which cannot be easily categorised (pp. 85, 90). For many, enlisting was a political act which was “situational, varied and fluid,” and often misunderstood by settler commentators (p. 87). Rhetoric surrounding enlistment could variously invoke treaty obligations, sovereignty or civil rights.

Transition to military service was generally smooth, more so for those with higher levels of education. Canadian recruiters were told that graduates of Indian Residential Schools made good recruits, which, no doubt, had as much to do with a comparably draconian disciplinary environment as book learning (p. 113). A cautious correction to the notion of the exceptional Indigenous warrior is offered here which suggests that there must have been both good and poor Indigenous soldiers and that they may have experienced combat through “some syncretic combination of Indigenous and military codes” (p. 130). The authors see great opportunity in “a more culturally attuned approach to understanding Indigenous experiences of combat” (p. 131).

On the homefront, broad similarities emerge “including a decline of overt prejudice, expanding economic opportunities, mobility and urbanisation and the intrusion of settler state and militaries into heretofore remote sheltered regions” (p. 56). Despite these similarities, “the home front experiences of Indigenous people were as diverse as the Indigenous communities themselves” (p. 199). Voluntarism and collaboration was a common response, but sometimes this was contrasted by resistance to specific war measures. Many of the voluntary contributions were offered “on their own terms and in their own self-determined capacities, with a particular interest in supporting their own kin who were overseas” (p. 180). While some joined settler campaigns, many developed their own ways to back the war effort. Women played a large role in fundraising, performing ceremonies of protection for overseas kin or preparing care packages. There was increased anxiety over gender and sexuality which accompanied the incursion of non-Indigenous men both in the cities and more remote areas. Women were not only given the opportunity to learn new skills at work but to “challenge masculine warrior traditions within their own cultures” (p. 302). The war represented a brief period of financial security for many.

When Indigenous peoples contested engagement with the war effort, it was often long-standing problems that were protested and addressed. Sometimes the war made relations worse, while other times it seemed to foster resolution. Wartime issues like employment, taxation, identity and citizenship and state use of Indigenous lands were war-related sources of friction. At times, protests such as sit-down strikes were targeted at specific grievances like poor working conditions, rather than the war effort generally. Conscription produced the largest and most intense protests. In New Zealand, Maori were exempted from military service due to prospects of widespread resistance. In Canada, conscription produced the most strident resistance manifesting in “civil disobedience, service evasion and disengagement” which, combined with military ambivalence, resulted in an informal system of deferred service and exemptions for men from some treaty areas (p. 228). In all four settler states, volunteering for the war effort was acceptable, but government compulsion was a different matter.

When the war ended, relative prosperity waned and marginalisation returned. Veteran status was difficult for many to achieve due to the jurisdictional conflicts between bureaucracies that served veterans and Indigenous peoples. Not all received veteran status or the standard

veterans' benefits. Those that did were often those that participated in assimilative agendas. As the authors observe, "Veterans who had survived the war and undergone profound personal transformation as a result of their war service grew disillusioned with heavy-handed, paternalistic and stifling administration of the benefits" (p. 268). In the bureaucratic gaze of the settler state, Indigeneity was easier to see than veteran status.

Self-determination was the major theme found in calls for change by post-war Indigenous activists across all four settler states. Indigenous activism paralleled forms of diverse protest and participation during the war, "ranging from wishing to be left alone, to gaining acceptance, citizenship rights and even autonomy or sovereignty" (p. 272). In the immediate aftermath of the war, veterans were generally not the prime movers of debates on Indigenous issues, serving more as symbols wielded by more experienced Indigenous leaders. It took until the later 1950s for Indigenous veterans to emerge as a political force in their own right. Widespread publicity and propaganda in settler mass media depicting Indigenous contributions to the war efforts were contrasted by "prewar neglect, oppression, maladministration, injustice and lack of rights" (p. 299). This prompted review of Indigenous policies, but change was slow and still tended towards the goal of assimilation. One of the transnational threads exposed by this book was that while the war represented a coming together of settlers and Indigenous peoples and even prompted consideration of reform of Indigenous policy, "it fundamentally did not break down enough of the underlying structures of colonialism shared across all four countries" (p. 304). "Even where Indigenous peoples managed to win a hearing, they were not genuinely heard by settler society" (p. 304).

This comprehensive scholarly work represents an impressive achievement in the synthesis of international literature and archival research. It offers a nuanced transnational and comparative framework which will be particularly helpful to scholars searching for context on more specific topics in Indigenous military history. It soundly answers calls for a more transnational approach in Canadian or military history. Combined with Timothy C. Winegard's *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (2014), the book would be ideal for analysis in graduate seminars in military, Indigenous or social history.