CHAPTER 5

Capturing Liberation

American Imag(in)ings of the Battle of Kwajalein

> The camera is a weapon against the tragedy of things, against their disappearing.
>
> —*Wim Wenders*[1]

> All war photography can potentially suggest parallels between gun and camera. It can also make visible atrocities that would otherwise be hidden.
>
> —*Lutz and Collins*[2]

In the immediate days and months after the US bombardment of Kwajalein Atoll in late January and early February 1944, when the war against Imperial Japan's military forces was beginning to turn in America's favor, photographic depictions of victory boosted morale at home and throughout the Pacific "theater." Combat photographers shot thousands of images, rivaling the many bullets shot by their compatriots. They were ordered to do so partly to chronicle the battlefield and partly to disseminate to the media, where they could provide evidence of American triumph to the public and the world at large. These photographs related a crystal-clear, black-and-white narrative of the American mission of liberation in the Pacific during the war.[3]

World War II was the first major conflict in which both still and moving photographic images figured so heavily as a means of intelligence, testimony, propaganda, and dissemination.[4] The Battle of Kwajalein, like all battlefields of the Pacific War, was photographed deliberately to provide proof of American victory and tell a story to the larger population.[5] Its amphibious tactics became the stuff of military textbooks and the visuals from the attack fed the American pro-

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paganda machine at home to encourage the public to invest in war bonds while boasting of American strength and Japanese weakness to the world at large. The still images taken during the war were distributed widely through the media and printed in magazines, books, and newspapers throughout the United States and the world, and are still used to perpetuate a particular American reality today. Film footage of Operation Flintlock was also edited into newsreels and propaganda films. Here I explore this imaged and imagined American atollscape of Kwajalein in order to understand its many dimensions.

Re-Imaging/Re-Imagining the Battle of Kwajalein

Photographs, as many theorists have asserted and I have begun to illustrate in the previous chapters about Japanese colonial image making in Micronesia, are a constructed and mediated form of representation. Yet Young elaborates, "as a seeming trace or fragment of its referent that appeals to the eye for its proof, the photograph is able to invoke the authority of its empirical link to events, which in turn seems to reinforce the sense of its own unmediated factuality" (Young 1988, 58).[6] Culled from various armed forces public relations branches, the thousands of photographs of the war in the Marshall Islands housed today in the US National Archives in College Park, Maryland, are a rich resource that bespeaks a particular factuality of battle as seen from an American optic.[7] Some of them have been used again and again as evidence of the particular truth that interested the American military in 1944, and as such they dwell on the extent to which Japanese casualties were inflicted, on the treatment of prisoners, and on the friendships forged by soldiers with the "exotic" Marshallese "natives." They also meditate on the clear transformation of "Japanese fortress" into "free American territory." These images were captioned with text that described the spectacle of the battle in terms of an inevitable American victory. The images and the text that accompanies them depict an impossibly clear but reassuring story of winners versus losers, finders and keepers, a story in which only the American male heroes have names and histories, and nearly all Others are either just dehumanized and written off as Japanese, "natives," or women.[8] Most of the captions and archival texts quoted in this chapter included the offensive and racist term "Jap," which was used commonly in the 1940s by American officials as a way of justifying violence and dehumanizing Japanese people. Where possible, I have chosen to either

omit this term or replace it with "Jap[anese]," in order to indicate the original racism without reproducing the violence.

The caption, explained Barthes, works to "anchor" an image; it "serves to 'rationalize' a multidimensional image; it 'loads' the image, 'burdening' it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (Lutz and Collins 1993, 76). By consciously taking this into consideration, it is possible to decode the "mythologies" of the Kwajalein war images by analyzing the captions alongside the photographs they describe. I would argue that much can be learned from studying the story these captions tell in the bigger context of what we know about the invasion from the stories told by Americans, Marshallese, Japanese, Koreans, and Okinawans.

Many of the Kwajalein liberation photographs and their captions were released to the press and then used (often with caption intact) in media representations in the United States. These image commentaries actually primed American soldiers and helped to create their impressions of Japanese people (and later, "Natives"). Veteran Bruce Muench, who arrived on Kwajalein in 1945 in the aftermath of the battle, describes in his memoir *Spam Cans, Rice Balls, and Pearls* how pervasive these sorts of media texts were in preparing him for his time in the Marshall Islands:

> Other than what I had read in the newspapers and seen in the movies, I had no conception of what the Japanese were like. . . . The stereotype image we got from the movies and cartoons typically showed the Japanese soldier as some sort of single-minded fiend, bent on murdering whoever got in his way. The Japanese culture was as foreign to me as if I had been parachuted into a tribal community in Nepal. (Muench 2002, 78)

Muench's self-reflexivity is rare among war accounts of the invasion and ensuing occupation of Kwajalein, perhaps because of his late arrival on the atoll. His narrative about the relations he developed with a Marshallese man and with Japanese after the war critically reminisces about many racial stereotypes American Marines held, not only toward Japanese but toward Islanders, whom most soldiers referred to as "gooks" (2002, 56).[9] Muench explains that such terms left his and others' vocabulary the more he became familiar with Marshallese people.

What, however, do these photographs tell us when we consider

the larger global and local contexts that unfolded around the moments they were taken? What can these images say about the actual individuals, living and dead, portrayed in them? What can they tell us about the war and Japanese/American militarism in the Pacific? What stories—whose stories—do they not tell? I now explore through captioned war photographs and edited/narrated film footage how the liberation story framed the Battle of Kwajalein by smoothing over—and continuing to obscure—the tragedies of war on all sides, not only for Marshallese, Japanese, and Korean civilians and defenders,[10] but also for American soldiers themselves.

For the purposes of this book, in "re-membering" and deconstructing the liberation of Kwajalein, my intention is to reflect upon the intersections between individual lives and the larger historical and political contexts in which they participated. I have thus selected images from the archives as a way of exploring, like Barthes, the "mythologies" and power relations involved in America's production of history in the Pacific War. I am aware of my own participation in the production and reproduction of this history, not only as an American consumer of these images and narratives, but also as a photographer and (hi)storyteller. I therefore aim to be as self-reflexive as possible and to contextualize my own contradictory and sometimes ambivalent relationship to these mythologies as I confront them. Here I take Gillian Rose's invitation to use multiple methods to interrogate the power of images, conscious that "the visualities articulated by producers, images, and audiences may not coincide, and this may in itself be an important issue to address" (Rose 2001, 202).

In analyzing the making of these images, it is important of course to differentiate between the actual photographers, military public relations officials, and the different forms of media that then disseminated the images (both still and moving).[11] All the photographers who took images of the northern and southern bombardments of Kwajalein Atoll were soldiers themselves, following orders. It is likely that few had traveled outside the United States prior to the war. The photographs they took were processed and studied far away from the battlefield, removed from context, and then recontextualized when certain photographs were chosen for publication on the merit of their impact. The ways those images were then used (or not used) by the media is another crucial consideration, and one I only touch on in a preliminary way here. But it is clear that these images found their way into numerous publications, from *Time* magazine to metropolitan and local

newspapers worldwide, where they were subject to further editorial authorship. Nevertheless, there was a deliberate authorial and editorial process going on at all stages of the documentation and dissemination of the battle, in varying degrees. The military ordered these images for their own intelligence and documentation, and also partly for public consumption; yet for exactly the same reason, any images that may have reflected poorly on American soldiers or officers, and any depictions that complicated the simple and dehumanized story of a resounding American win and Japanese loss, were censored or not disseminated.

The photographer was shooting on the fly alongside his comrades during the action of the battle, but even then, moving with his battalion, he would only have been able to take pictures from an American vantage point. Once the battle was over he was freer to compose shots of battlefield casualties or of prisoners of war that told the story most effectively. Thus there are piles of photos of dead, wounded, or captured "Japanese" as if to provide reassuring evidence of the massive losses for the Japanese side.[12] American losses, while in the hundreds, were never depicted in the same manner. One sees, for instance, a postbattle shot of a dead white American Marine, lying alone, his head turned to the side, his right arm outstretched, his left hand propped on his chest, displaying a wedding ring (NA-70414). This photo, shot by combat photographer Marine Sergeant Andrew Zurick of the Fourth Marine Division, shows a soldier whose face is clean, eyes gently closed, his mouth open, as if peacefully asleep. Such a compassionate portrait amidst so many contradictory images of mangled, bloated, faceless "Japanese" bodies piled on the battlefield or unclothed prisoners of war suggests countless questions.[13]

The combat photographer was instructed in what to take or what not to take, and he no doubt practiced a significant amount of self-censorship based on what he knew might even get him into trouble when the film was developed later. Like American military censorship, earlier Japanese photographers' censorship of their own war images was just as deliberate and careful. As Morris-Suzuki explains of Japanese military censorship of the Nanjing Massacre, rules governing which images are likely to be "banned" are quickly internalized by war photographers and their superiors: "Their sense of survival taught them when they should and should not take pictures, and which images were not even worth submitting to the censor" (2001, 175).

"Doesn't the photographer," asked Walter Benjamin, "have the

obligation to expose the guilty with his photos?" (Sontheimer 2005). And whether the blame rested entirely on Japanese imperial militarism itself or the furious bombardment by American military might upon a relatively defenseless atoll, the devastation surely impacted the cameramen who witnessed the drama unfold. Perhaps it was this "obligation of exposure" that led many photographers to document the sheer horror of *gyokusai* in the Battle of Kwajalein as extensively as they did, taking "messy" images that did not suit America's clean-cut discourse of "liberation." As evidence of this, many of the images in the archives were boldly stamped "RESTRICTED" by military authorities or scribbled with the words "NOT RECOMMENDED FOR RELEASE." One might speculate, however, that there were other forbidden images that were never archived in the first place.

Not surprisingly, the most frequently restricted images appear to have been those that complicated the tidy legend of "good Americans," "bad Japanese," and "grateful Natives." For instance, there is a series of images that depict Marshall Islanders in compromising situations, emerging terrified, naked, and emaciated from Japanese bunkers (such as image NA-74284, of a young, partially clad Marshallese man obviously in shock, surrounded by American soldiers), and many that show young-looking Korean or Japanese prisoners of war in pitifully humiliating conditions, unclothed, wounded, and dazed while being interrogated at gunpoint by big Americans. See for instance image number NA-70420, of a naked soldier caked in sand, sitting dazed on the ground with outstretched legs as he is accosted by a group of four US interrogators.[14]

As Lisa Yoneyama writes of the "traces" of Hiroshima, there is a tendency to "tame the memory" of the war (1999, 44–45), something I wish to avoid. My aim here is not to place blame on any individual, but rather to show how the "big history" of war and nation betrayed and "concreted over" the "little histories" of the people whose lives were caught up in these events. It is not my interest to be complicit in this narrative of liberation by reinscribing the valorization of massive death and destruction, or the dehumanization and loss of dignity depicted in the close-up images of Japanese, Korean, and possibly Marshallese bodies. A careful appraisal of such powerful images, however, can in fact restore dignity and humanity to the dehumanized. Anne Perez-Hattori has, for example, chosen to reproduce the disturbing medical photographs taken by US Navy officials of the bodies of Hansen's-disease-inflicted Chamorros interned in "colonies" in early

twentieth-century Guam. Her decision is a deeply respectful way of restoring the dignity and memories of these Chamorros as "members of our island community" (Perez-Hattori 2007).

My own effort, likewise, is to humanize and remember all the lives lost during this "liberation" process. These images, taken entirely by Americans for whom the Pacific, Islanders, Japanese, and Koreans were all mostly unfamiliar, show a tendency to dehumanize, exoticize, or eroticize the Other, all the while redeeming and celebrating American individuals throughout the campaign. I therefore have chosen a number of captioned images from the archives (and some from print and film media, for the sake of comparison) that I felt were most representative of this uneven power relationship. They represent each of the framings of the stages of "liberation" that I found to be most prevalent.[15]

I present these framings under five rough categories: (1) Capture, where the changeover between Japanese and American power was documented through the looting of national symbols like flags and other artifacts, or by images of mass death and carnage[16] that indicated the island had fallen; (2) Dehumanization, in which Japanese and Korean prisoners are shown disrobing or fully stripped of their clothing and possessions; (3) Cleanup, whereby the battleground is sanitized and American soldiers are vindicated through tropes of washing or domesticity; (4) Gratitude, in which Marshallese are portrayed in the aftermath of battle as thankful, happy, and free as they celebrate freedom, work alongside Americans, receive aid, and accept American gestures of kindness; and (5) Romance/Ridicule, wherein the Marshallese people (mainly women) and their islands are either romanticized as exotic/erotic people and places in the imagined Pacific paradise, or ridiculed for their failure to live up to those expectations. There is often some crossover between these themes within each photograph, but in the following sections I will attempt to unpack the liberation narrative by following the battle mostly in the order in which it was photographed.

Capture

> As I thought of the landing that I would be making on the morrow, I was both excited and anxious. Yes, I thought of death, but I wasn't afraid. Somehow I couldn't see myself as dead. "Why wasn't there fear," I wondered. Even though I was nervous, it was with excitement, not fear.

> Instead there was a thrill. I was headed for great adventure, where I had wanted to be. This was just an adventure. It was "grown up" Cops and Robbers. . . . Thoughts of glory were in my mind that night. Now it was my turn to "carry the flag" into battle. It was my turn to be a part of history.
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> —*Private First Class Robert F. Graf, U.S. Marine Corps, upon invading Kwajalein Atoll (in Chapin 1994, 4)*

In this fading image, three American Marines, probably in their late teens or early twenties, stand in the bright sunshine of Namur islet in the aftermath of invasion. The military photographer's caption explains that they are holding up the bounty of their exploits: a "small Jap[anese] flag" and some paper currency. Their faces beam with boyish delight and enthusiasm. Two of them have removed their shirts, probably sweaty from the intense tropical heat. The one in the foreground flaunts his silver watch and what looks like a wedding ring. Together, they are a wholesome vision of 1940s boy-next-door white masculinity. Despite their military fatigues, they look more like three cheerful friends who won a rigorous game of basketball than three soldiers who waged a bloody battle through the jungles of Kwajalein Atoll that left thousands of Japanese men dead. The message is clear: The hard work is over, it was a job well done, and the liberation of the atoll has been achieved. The Japanese enemy, absent from the photograph, is represented by the loot he has left behind for lucky American servicemen to take home: his small (and therefore trivial) flag, his

"SOUVENIRS—Marines hold a small Jap[anese] flag and money they found after capturing Namur, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands," 2 February 1944

worthless cash (perhaps pulled from the pockets of a uniform), and—as many other images attest—swords, helmets, and a wide range of other exotic treasures.

It is the historical narrative told by the captioning of these photographs that is the most interesting, because the ideas that accompany these pictures create a third language of juxtaposition between text and image. Indeed, in Young's terms: "One of the reasons that narrative and photographs are so convincing together is that they seem to represent a combination of pure object and commentary on the object, each seeming to complete the other by reinforcing a sense of contrasting functions" (1988, 57–58).

An otherwise violent image of dead bodies, ruined landscapes, and expended artillery thus becomes a celebratory declaration of victory when coupled with a clever headline or catchphrase. The Public Affairs Office of the Department of Defense was no doubt conscious of this, for their wording of the captions typed on manila index cards on the back of each photograph and later released to the media sometimes reads like advertising copy. Even an "innocent" photo like the one above assumes ironic significance when comically entitled "Souvenirs" and labeled with the explanation that these men have just completed the invasion of the northern part of the atoll and taken some mementos from the Japanese soldiers they killed.

Changing of the Guards

As in this image of captured Japanese artifacts, many of the war photographs taken at Kwajalein Atoll and subsequent battle sites throughout the Marshalls deploy the sign of national flags to downplay or belittle Japanese power and herald the installation of an American regime. Repeatedly, as the Hinomaru[17] was triumphantly supplanted by Old Glory, the persistent comparison between "small" Japanese flags like the one above and the hearty, fresh, new American flags like those raised on Iōtō (Iwo Jima) could be seen in still photos and film all throughout the Pacific War campaigns. Similar to the image above, there are many images of Marines at Kwajalein covetously holding tarnished, damaged Japanese flags. Given the rituals and performances surrounding the American flag and its installation from island to island as the United States advanced victoriously through the Pacific, it cannot be underestimated how meaningful it would have been to military officials that the "captured" Japanese flag also appeared cheap,

"THE FLAG RISES ABOVE THE SMOKE—the Stars and Stripes waves over a Marine position and the smoke of battle on Namur Island, Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshalls."

ruined, defunct, and pitiful. These photos declared that the empire had been defeated and, like the Pledge of Allegiance American children are made to recite toward the American flag, the glorious mission of "liberty and justice for all" had been served.

Hoisted on a lone trunk of a palm tree on Namur islet, the image of the Star-Spangled Banner rising "above the smoke of battle" is an emblem of victory amidst complete destruction and devastation. It is, like the flags that announced freedom from British rule in the American Revolution, the ceremonial heraldry by which America's own liberation was displayed. On Kwajalein islet, the destruction was even more thorough, with observers describing that only one palm tree was left standing, as symbolized in the sort of image below.

Japanese history (likely owing in part to such "lone palm" photographs) also incorporated these semiotics of defeat. For bereaved family members of the Japanese soldiers who were killed during the bombardment, the strong contrast between the utter beauty (*utsukushisa*) of the present landscape and the complete and unimaginable obliteration of war is central. Even though there were close to three hundred Japanese and Korean survivors of the battle, Kwajalein, in Japanese histories, is described as nothing less than a complete *gyokusai* in which all were lost. Suzuki Yukiko reflected upon her second visit to Kwajalein:

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> It's unimaginable to think that here, so far away from Japan, there was a *gyokusai* so severe that only one tree was left standing . . . and the blue of the outer ocean and the bright blue of the inner lagoon . . . the blue of the sky . . . such a beauty we can't find back in Japan. It's just so beautiful.[18]

Crushed Jewels

What was *gyokusai* for Japan was a "textbook battle" for the United States, but even so, the sheer scale of the death and destruction created complications in depicting the American victory, depictions that might otherwise have been sanitized. Kwajalein was one of the first full-scale "crushed jewel" American soldiers would encounter in the war, and the "messiness" of the confrontation there was hard to downplay. The photographs taken in the immediate wake of the fighting in the north and south of the atoll seem to meditate almost exclusively on the overwhelming loss of life.

Print media capitalized on these images, using them to narrate a story of Japanese vulnerability and American invincibility. A layout from *Yank* magazine was particularly blunt in its use of dehumanizing and racist images of mass death, in which two combat images (which also appear in the archives) were contrasted with each other, one on top of mainly Japanese carnage, and one on bottom featuring American bodies. The image above, boldly captioned, "We Killed A Lot of Japs" [*sic*], depicts at least four Japanese bodies, one with his outstretched foot still clad in a *tabi* boot, another one face down, unclothed and covered in blood. An exploded fuel barrel and a wrecked tank join other shrapnel and junk on the battlefield. Five American soldiers stand around in what appears to be casual banter. One smokes a cigarette. A sixth soldier seems preoccupied with the damaged tank. The relaxed pose of American soldiers in the background seems to imply that somehow the job was effortless and instantaneous, and the corpses in the foreground seem ordinary and commonplace, naturalized into the landscape of the liberation mythology. In comparison, the image on the bottom of the page, captioned "But Some of Us Died Too," is more somber and respectful of death, as white American bodies are laid out one by one on stretchers, covered in blankets. More than twenty servicemen stand around the bodies, mourning their loss.

Despite the actual events that unfolded at the time these images were taken, the contrast of these two images—one violent and imper-

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sonal, one reverent and humane—is no doubt deliberate and strategic. The top photo depicts slain foes, the bottom depicts fallen heroes, creating a visual text for the reader that says Japanese troops were ruthless inhuman barbarians not worthy of respect while "a few good men" of our white military died in honor for their country. The text in the article that accompanies these images also illustrates this message and the overall American military context of early 1944:

> Although there is still some occasional rifle fire and the smoke still curls from the ruined concrete pillboxes, the veterans of the Army's 7th Division are now sitting under the trees or lying on the ground with V-mail blanks, writing their first letters home. . . . The men cannot say that they are on Kwajalein, cannot give details of the action they fought here, cannot name friends who were injured, cannot give the date and cannot say where they came from and where they are going. They can't say much of anything except "I'm still alive and well." But that is enough. . . . There are heated arguments about whether the 1st Platoon of Company A killed more Japanese than the 3rd Platoon of Company L. Hardly anyone knows for sure just how many Japanese he did kill. "When it gets past 10, you lose count and lose interest," says Pfc. James Carrigan of San Aba, Texas, . . . who accounted for 12. (Miller 1944, 3)

Newsreel film footage also dwelled on this postapocalyptic battlescape. Like captioned photos, this footage was edited, narrated, scored in compelling ways, and then recycled in a number of propaganda films produced during the war. The most significant of these films was a short produced by the US Army Pictorial Service in 1944 titled *What Makes a Battle,* which was clearly directed at the American public to promote the war effort, sell war bonds, and rationalize the production of weapons. The film's impassioned male narrator proclaims:

> Without [weapons], no battle is possible. You the millions of workers, men and women, young and old, high school kids and grandmothers, Democrats and Republicans, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. White and colored. You who make them know their purpose. Give them to our fighting men and you give them the overwhelming power of the world's greatest industrial democracy, the power we are now using to rid the world of the Nazis, the power that will break the empire that produced the Jap[anese] executioners and murderers.

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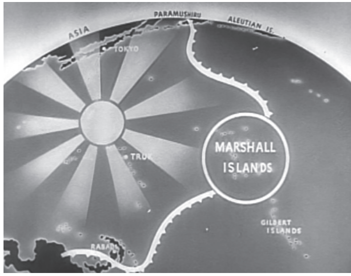
MARINES STAND BY A WRECKED TANK AND TALK ABOUT THE BATTLE FOR KWAJALEIN ATOLL WHILE IN THE FOREGROUND REST A FEW OF THE 8,122 JAPANESE KILLED.

THESE MARINES DIED ON ROI IN THE KWAJALEIN CAMPAIGN. OUR LOSSES WERE COMPARATIVELY LIGHT: FOR BOTH ARMY AND MARINES, 286 DEAD, 1,175 WOUNDED.

Superimposing the Japanese naval ensign over a map of the Nanyō Guntō Micronesia and the territories held by Imperial Japan, the narrator describes Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands as "Centergate in Jap[anese] Fortress Pacific," as depicted in an animated map from the film. In this still frame of the map, the rays of the Japanese



flag reach out like deadly and threatening tentacles, filling an imaginary bounded expanse of Oceania. Previously unknown by most Americans and even by most Japanese (for whom the islands were the farthest away and least colonized), the Marshall Islands are visualized as the dead center of the ocean, the ultimate prize in the empire.

Depicting Americans as nothing but heroic and humane and Japanese as nothing but suicidal and fanatical, extremely graphic long shots of severe casualties and deaths are shown in succession, with equally violent narration and a sinister musical soundtrack that sounds as if it belongs in a Hitchcock film. The narrative then focuses on the plight of prisoners of war and how they were treated (as I will discuss in the next section). It closes on yet another flag image: an American Marine with his back to the camera, with the vengeful narration, "Yes there will be more battles, harder and fiercer battles, until all of these honored dead are avenged with a terrible justice."

But the vindictive pursuit of "terrible justice" made it easy to ignore the nuances and contradictions of battle, as well as the simple fact that, at Kwajalein, the Japanese military forces—not anticipating the American strategy of bypassing some of the more heavily fortified atolls like Jaluit—were outnumbered by the Americans nearly five to one. That the defenders of the atoll were able to resist and hold out as long as they did was quite a remarkable feat.

Meanwhile, writing off suicides and sacrificial "banzai charges" as ridiculous and "pointless," as is done in *What Makes a Battle,* also devalued what would have been acts of heroism[19] seen from the Japanese military perspective of 1944. Such characterizations of Japanese masked the complicated cultural context in which *gyokusai* had become not only the honorable way to die for one's country when resistance became futile, but a way of avoiding the severe torture anticipated at the hands of the enemy (Kawano 2001, 175–177).[20] For American

soldiers encountering these mass suicides, however, the experience was deeply unnerving and traumatic, as former soldier and Japanese literature expert Donald Keene notes of his experiences:

> After putting up strong resistance, the Japanese decided to use all their remaining strength to stage a final attack. Perhaps they hoped that a sudden onslaught would sweep the Americans into the sea, but in fact American casualties remained light. Half the Japanese garrison died not from enemy action but from an act of mass suicide.
>
> Most of the Japanese soldiers who were not killed in the final assault killed themselves, often by pressing a hand grenade to their chest. I was baffled by their determination to die, to use their last grenade against themselves rather than the enemy. Of course, the end of Japanese resistance on the island was welcome to the Americans, but the sight of the exploded corpses was sickening, and I found it impossible to reconcile what I interpreted as mindless fanaticism with what I knew of the Japanese from their works of literature. (Keene, in Oda 2003, viii–ix)

One Small Flag

Another photograph taken on Kwajalein islet seems to suggest the darker realities of *gyokusai,* alongside the overt symbolism of captured flag. It is an image simply titled "Members of the Burial Detail on Kwajalein" and features thirteen (possibly fourteen) soldiers squinting toward an unseen photographer, their grim faces covered in sweat, soot, and stubble. In the immediate background is the burnt grass and shrubbery of Kwajalein's jungle stripped away and piled up with the dugout rocks and boulders of a bomb crater, its coral mud exposed and whitewashed in the equatorial sunshine. The decapitated charred trunks of three coconut palms stand in the distance. Three men in the foreground solemnly hold a ripped Japanese flag upside-down, its bright red Hinomaru surrounded by brush-painted Japanese writing that can be seen if one looks closely enough. An initial look at the captioned photo (the looted flag together with the "burial detail" caption) would suggest that these men who have gloriously defeated the Japanese and liberated Kwajalein Atoll are now burying their enemy by the thousands.

Yet in this photo, the men's expressions speak of fatigue and heat

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“MEMBERS OF THE BURIAL DETAIL on Kwajalein, Marshall Islands, 8 February 1944”

exhaustion, and perhaps even revulsion, for the air is likely filled with the stench of death. The thrill and gaiety of winning is not present whatsoever here; it is replaced by the burden and trauma of the battle’s aftermath. Some of the men do not even face the camera; others look almost disgruntled and disheartened. The eighth of February, when this photograph was taken, was already several days after the US invasion of Kwajalein islet was complete, and the cleanup of the islet was underway. Even by the middle of the battle, wrote military historian Samuel Marshall, American troops had already tired of killing: “The slaughter seemed to them to be senseless though it was unavoidable. The taking of one Jap[anese] prisoner cheered a company more than the killing of fifty” (Marshall and Dawson 2001, 84). Having lost many of their friends in the battle but also having to deal with the bodies of so many dead Japanese and Korean bodies undoubtedly made a powerful impression on these men.

Muench relates the experience of one of the soldiers who came before him and participated in the invasion:

> Following the battle, this man was assigned to picking up the enemy bodies for burial at the north end of the island. A trench was excavated by bulldozer, the bodies dragged into it and lined up in rows. They were bloated and decomposing by this time. . . . Later in 1945, in an effort to conceal the stench, or perhaps to provide a more fitting burial grounds, the island administrators decided to re-bury the Japanese bodies, which had been simply lined up and bulldozed under the coral rubble along the north end of the island . . . It had been a year since these bodies were initially buried, so there was not much left but the bones, however there was apparently enough organic material to make a pungent odor once the bodies were exposed to the air. We were surrounded by that odor for at least a week afterwards. It was like no odor I ever experienced, both sweet and sickening. Once you smell it, you never forget it, because it penetrates your brain. (Muench 2002, 65–67)

Muench's vivid and disturbing description expresses a sense of the horror and "messiness" of war, as well as evoking the humanization of the American soldiers involved. As I describe later in this chapter, American propaganda was interested in communicating a clear-cut story that dehumanized the Japanese while it propagated an earnest and wholesome vision of US soldiers.

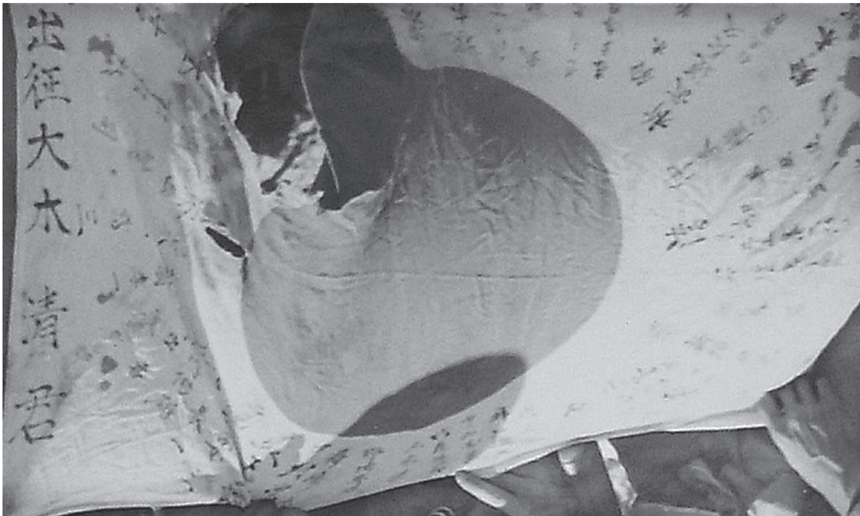
Like Muench's narrative, however, the portrait of the burial unit undercuts this message as it evokes a sense of the ambivalence and hardship of war for all parties. This is one of several images in the archives where the subjects of the photograph subvert the prevailing narrative or intention and instead allude to some of the more unsettling realities of the battle experience. While at first glance it would appear to depict a crushing victory over Japan, through the expressions of the men it becomes a moment of what Christian Metz would call "instant self-contradiction" (1985), in that there is some "slippage" in the signs: We wonder if this "liberation" is happy after all.

Yet undoubtedly the most significant slippage here comes not from the hapless countenances of the soldiers, but from the Japanese flag they hold. Flaunting the spoils of their military exploits, the image is composed not unlike a portrait of hunters returning with game or fishermen proudly holding up their catch. The Hinomaru would have meant little to these soldiers (and to most non-Japanese) other than a symbol for Japan itself, at the very least, a token captured from the enemy. Like *any* slain deer or giant tuna, the flag would seem at first

glance to be a symbol for the generic bounty of the American campaign: it is a surrogate for *any* Japanese person.

But this is a special flag. Upon closer inspection, it is clear that this *nisshōki* Japanese flag is covered with brush-written characters. And while the American soldiers are probably oblivious or unaware of this layer of meaning, since they hold the text upside down, the Japanese writing is quite legible. Zooming in on the flag and turning it right-side-up, one can easily tell the flag is covered with *yosegaki,* or messages from a number of people, radiating out neatly from the red rising sun in the middle. The bold, proud, polite characters painted on the left edge of the flag translate roughly to "Dear Oki Kiyoshi-kun, we all wish you good luck on your departure for the front."[21] The suffix *–kun,* after the first name Kiyoshi, is an intimate, diminutive form used for boys and male colleagues. It tells us that Private Oki was probably fairly young. It also suggests that the people who have signed this flag for Oki are within his inner circle of workmates, family members, or community.

A well-known Japanese proverb, "*ji ga hito o arawasu*" (literally, "calligraphy [i.e. handwriting] reveals the person") is helpful in reading this flag. The quality of this image is too poor for us to read the actual inscriptions with much accuracy, but it is abundantly obvious to the viewer familiar with Japanese calligraphy that Oki's flag reveals the personalities of a whole regiment, school, community, or family. There are some names and messages that are brushed thinly and delicately



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onto the flag, the mark of an elegant and humble person or perhaps a gesture of femininity. Others sign the flag bluntly but passionately with deliberate calligraphic blots of ink in an expression of bold and almost rebellious individuality. Others write with more "manly" pointy and straight-edged *katakana*-like characters, similar to the way many of the soldiers penned their self-censored letters to families back home.

Whereas typically American flags are draped over the caskets of soldiers killed in action, then folded and presented to family members on behalf of the nation, in wartime Japan, a soldier would carry with him a *nisshōki* like this as a talisman and memento to bring him protection and security in his mission and good luck to ensure his safe return home. Such flags were emblematic of the intersection between the national and the personal, hinting toward a more familiar, more human, and more emotional side of the war, such a warm and intimate reminder of family that they were often worn against the body of their owners for security and reassurance. Upon the national "text" of the flag, these inscriptions were like human faces behind the depersonalized national rhetoric, subtle messages that slipped through the cracks. The spirits of those supporters no doubt cheered for Oki up to his final moments just as much as the letters from family back in the United States encouraged the American soldiers as they fought.

Ironically, *yosegaki* writing on the Japanese flag was actually in contravention of the Japanese Imperial Public Code, as it was considered a desecration of the national symbol.[22] One could make the same criticism about the "abuse" of the US flag by, for example, advertisers or by patriotic Americans who wear flag-patterned clothing.[23] But the American Flag Code is a voluntary set of guidelines, whereas prewar Japanese flag violations were punishable by the Kenpeitai special police. That the practice of making good-luck charm gestures by writing on the flag became so widespread throughout Japan in defiance of national prohibitions was indicative less of resistance to Japanese nationalism as it was of personalization of the national war effort, so authorities probably overlooked such infringements.

So here is thus a Japanese flag, ostensibly a national symbol to the Americans who hold it, but entirely different from the American flags raised on makeshift coconut palm flagpoles, for it is signed, well-worn, personalized, possibly even loved. The gaping hole in the upper left-hand corner indicates where a bullet may have pierced or a grenade may have detonated. It is creased and ragged from being folded and rolled up again and again, and it is stained by blots of what likely

is the blood of its owner, the bodily signature of the flag's owner himself, which merges into the blood-red Hinomaru at its center.

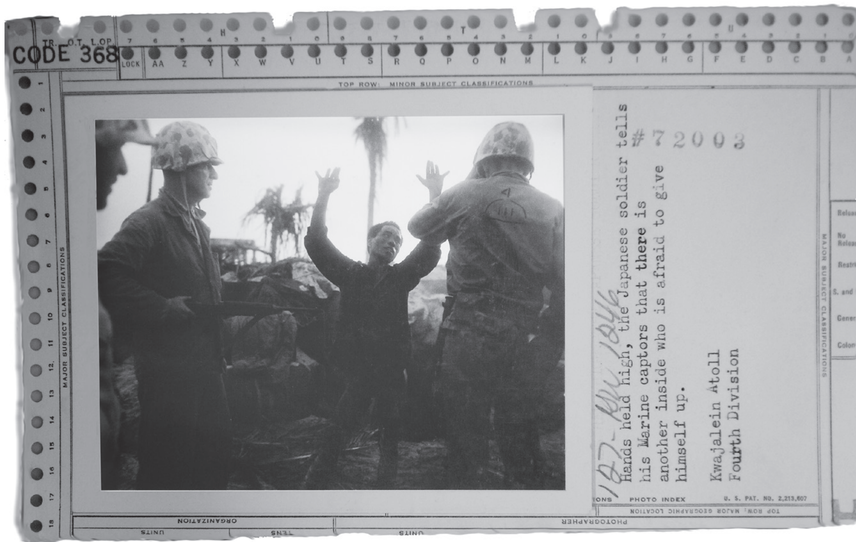
We can only wonder where this flag is now. Perhaps it went back to the States with one of the soldiers in the burial unit where it was coveted as a prize, framed or folded away in a box, forgotten in someone's attic as worthless war paraphernalia. Perhaps collectors have auctioned it over the Internet: A typical web search on a given day of the American online auction site eBay reveals at least twenty such so-called "battle flags" (or "Kamikaze flags") for sale, some fetching hundreds of dollars. A compassionate few Americans have tried to repatriate the flags to Japan. One woman in California, via the Japanese government, managed to locate the family of the soldier whose flag her father had kept in his collection of souvenirs from his time as a pilot in the war. She discovered that through returning the flag she had provided a man with "the only tangible link" to his father, who had died sixty-two years earlier in the Philippines (Seitz 2007).

Each of these flags represented an individual human being. Captured in February 1944 in the Marshall Islands and photographed for us to witness is Oki Kiyoshi's flag. We can only imagine what Oki was doing on his final day on Kwajalein, or what route brought him there. Had he been drafted into the Imperial Army, deployed to the unfamiliar Pacific front? What was his life like in the wooden barracks on Kwajalein built by Marshallese construction workers or Korean laborers? Did he look across the lagoon on quiet nights like I once did as a child? Oki's flag calls out from the archives like a story within a story, reminding those who can read its messages that this was a real human being with a past, a family, a hometown back in Japan where loved ones were waiting. This flag still speaks to us across the decades to all those who will listen.

Dehumanization

Although most Japanese histories of the invasion of Kwajalein tend to write it as if there were no survivors, nearly three hundred people, over half of whom were Koreans, were taken prisoner throughout the atoll. For those who survived the bombardment but who had been told they would be tortured if they became prisoners of war, surrendering to Americans was probably more terrifying than it was relieving.

Image no. 72003 appears to have been taken near the Air Operations building on Roi islet, judging by the remains of the building



"Hands held high, the Japanese soldier tells his Marine captors that there is another inside who is afraid to give himself up."

in the background. Three helmeted US Marines seem to tower over the slender Japanese soldier, his hands raised in the air, his fingers splayed as widely as possible. The Marines could easily be twice his age, likely no more than twenty-one or twenty-two. The man on the left holds his rifle firmly in place, pointed at the soldier, a paternal but stern expression on his face. The Marine in the foreground with his back to the camera seems to be holding something up to his own face, possibly even a camera of his own. The soldier's eyes are wide and anxious as he looks at him, completely exposed and vulnerable. His fellow soldier, the caption tells us, is too "afraid to give himself up."

This "soldier," on closer inspection, does not even seem to be wearing a typical Japanese military uniform; he appears, rather, to be clad in a workman's shirt. In fact, not only is he not in uniform but he is completely unclothed from the waist down. Of the several thousand war images of Kwajalein, there are countless pictures of dead or captive "soldiers" in nothing but loincloths. Perhaps, hiding in their sweltering concrete fortifications, it was too hot to wear full uniforms. But another possibility is that these images are of the "*ninpu*" (mostly Korean or Okinawan) laborers, for whom this was normal attire while working outdoors or on the reef.

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More importantly, it is also likely that at the time this photo was taken "Marine captors" had asked this "soldier" to strip. There was apparently no formal American military policy of making potential "Japanese" POWs strip, but by January 1944 this had become standard operating procedure because of a deeply ingrained belief that the enemy would hide grenades in his clothing and then feign surrender. Although this was based on isolated reports of such incidents in Guadalcanal and Tarawa, American soldiers felt intense fear and distrust that Japanese would turn themselves into human bombs. Thus, all prisoners, including at least some Marshall Islanders,[24] were typically ordered to remove all their clothing.

The US military was quite invested in advertising its benevolence toward soldiers through the medium of propaganda films, probably as a tactic to encourage Japanese in later battles to honor the Geneva Conventions. Despite the cruel conditions under which Japanese forces held many Allied prisoners (or even executed them on occasion), making prisoners strip and holding them unclothed for long stretches of time would seem inhumane. Article 2 of the Third Geneva Convention of 1929 (which pertained to the treatment of prisoners and was applied during World War II) states that POWs must "at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults, and from public curiosity"; Article 12 requires that clothing and footwear must be provided to all POWs.[25]

Yet there are many photographs in the archives of naked "Japanese" in compromising poses being interrogated on beaches, surrounded by Marines pointing guns in their faces. Predictably, most of these were restricted. Although the Japanese, Koreans, and Okinawans would indeed eventually be clothed and fed, given cigarettes and medical treatment, they were first made to march unclothed across the battlefield where they were held naked in confined holding pens before being taken aboard ships. This is when many of the photographs that ended up in the archives were taken.

It could be argued that in the complex context of radically different battle tactics, ignorance, cultural and linguistic misunderstandings, and the need for up-to-date intelligence, American soldiers were simply "following orders," and the war photographers, as military personnel, were also just documenting "reality," strictly for their own files. Yet if this were the case, why would the most explicit of those scenes then be used in the propaganda film *What Makes a Battle,* which

“Battle of the Marshalls,” 2 February 1944

was fully meant for public consumption and watched by audiences all across the United States?

In one scene from the film, a skinny young man in a loincloth emerges from a pillbox emplacement, pulling back his long hair and bowing deeply. The next shot is a scene of naked prisoners crouching on the ground, while another ten men, who from their attire and hairstyles look distinctively like laborers, are forced to strip at gunpoint. One American Marine even forcefully yanks off the trousers of one of the men. The narrator boasts, “[T]hese sullen human beings were in terror that they would receive the same fate that *they* had given *our* boys at Bataan. Instead, we gave them cigarettes, food, and water. Soft, eh? Well, the record *shows* who’s soft.[26] We just happened to be *civilized.* That’s the difference.”

As the narrator speaks, footage of a wounded Japanese soldier being given cigarettes is shown, but this is immediately contradicted by a scene of at least twenty naked “Japanese” marching down a road and then later being made to sit unclothed on the ground in large groups in fenced-in pens while American troops smile off to the side.

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Given the context of 1940s America, where exposing almost any part of the body was strictly forbidden in motion pictures, the idea of filming naked Japanese being herded around Kwajalein and making the film available to the general public is exceptional, especially given the emphasis on Americans being "civilized." But this only draws more attention to the ways in which racial stereotypes played such a large part in American encounters with the enemy. Asian men were depicted as barbaric, nearsighted, short, immature, and uneducated—the complete opposite of what Americans and Europeans imagined to be a noble enemy. We do not see, for instance, in images taken from Europe at the same time, footage or still photography of white German troops being stripped and subjected to the same humiliation by Allied soldiers, although of course scenes of stripping, nakedness, and violence were commonplace in Nazi photographs of Jewish people, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and others in concentration camps. It was only possible for Americans to make public these graphic images of "the Japanese" because they were considered to be completely Other: nonwhite, incomprehensible, exotic, inferior, and ultimately inhuman.

Cleanup

MOPPING UP THE MARSHALLS

On Namur, the thick jungle has been burned down to a cratered moonscape, and the bombed-out holes in the earth have been filling up with seawater from below. Far in the distance on the horizon is the roofline of the damaged Japanese air operations building. Also faintly visible are the skeletal remains of the hangar at the Roi airbase. In the foreground, one Marine walks from crater to crater, spraying down the contorted remains of Japanese, Okinawans, and Koreans with sodium arsenate.[27] Countless bodies already seem to be floating in the swampy crater. Two Marshallese men unload another body off of a canvas stretcher.[28] One Marshallese man, his back to the camera, leans on a shovel or a stick in his right hand as he rests, watching this macabre scene unfold. "Natives help US Marines move dead Jap[anese] bodies on island," the photograph is bluntly titled.

On Kwajalein islet, the army used burial squads of eleven or more men, all of them Americans, who were assisted by a burial detail of fifty-five Marshallese (Poyer, Falgout, and Carucci 2001, 239), and

“NAMUR ISLAND—Natives help U.S. Marines move dead Jap[anese] bodies on island,” 5 February 1944

burials followed most of the proper procedures. In the north of the atoll, however, at Roi-Namur, the picture (literally) seems to have been quite different. Archaeologist Leslie Mead indicates that although some images and records suggest that some of the “Japanese” bodies were treated in the proper manner, as at Kwajalein (lining the bodies up, carefully interring them in canvas, and burying them after spraying them with an embalming fluid), “the situation apparently deteriorated very rapidly,” and “quite literally everyone on the island was drafted into working to remove the bodies, both Marines and Marshallese.”[29]

The way this burial photograph is titled, one gets the sense that these Marshallese men are just lending a helping hand to the Marines. Apparently these men were volunteers who had been gathered by the Marine Corps Civil Affairs Unit (Poyer, Falgout, and Carucci 2001, 238), but the scenario of an American soldier walking near the crater, with other American Marines marching around like supervisors, some in the foreground and some in the background, while Marshall Islanders toil in the hot sun shows that perhaps these “liberated” Islanders are not just “helping” but are actually working under the command

of the military itself. Lindstrom, in his analysis of Pacific Islanders depicted in Allied war photographs from the South Pacific taken around the same time as those taken in Kwajalein, points out how the framing of Islanders in this manner works to pose them as "Allies" fighting alongside Americans for the same "just" cause:

> The natives also volunteer to defeat the Japanese. They join labor corps and defense forces. Pictorially, they line up; they raise their right hands; they make their marks on induction papers. And their allegiance legitimates the Allied presence. The cause is just. The natives join with us rather than with the Japanese. (Needless to say, images of native allies were also common in Japanese productions.) . . . The loyal native redirects his cannibalistic zest and jungle savvy against a common Japanese foe. (Lindstrom 2001, 118)

At the same time, in the contrast of white supervisors and "colored" Islanders, this image is one of untold others that recall the racial tensions of black and white throughout American history. On one level, this framing recruits the Marshallese man as an Allied colleague while it simultaneously inscribes him as "hired help." Lindstrom points out that this is entirely consistent with the ways the US military itself was segregated and African Americans were assigned only to low-ranking support battalions: "Military photographers situated dark Islanders within the overgrown discourse of American racism, as South Seas versions of Black Americans" (2001, 114).[30] And while the exotic "natives" are "domesticated" through this predictable categorization, Japanese, Koreans, and Okinawans are only further dehumanized as they are dumped one by one into the brine of Namur Island's craters of coral, sand, and wilted vegetation. Unlike previous photographs where bodies were still recognizable, in this image they have completely become inanimate objects, the road kill of liberation.

And so began the ugly process of "mopping up," literally and figuratively. Throughout the rest of the atoll, American soldiers swept each small islet, looking for stragglers, capturing remaining Japanese ships at sea, and even diving down to the lagoon floor to seek valuable documents to translate for intelligence purposes. For more than a year after the conflict, new batches of soldiers were mobilized strictly for mop-up purposes in the Marshalls: disposing of bodies, capturing remaining Japanese, dealing with prisoners, and forcing the surrender of other atolls still under Japanese control.

LAUNDRY

In cleaning up the atoll, bulldozers and heavy equipment were used to clear the landscape, but on another level, there was arguably another kind of "cleaning" process going on, one meant to purge the atoll of the stench of death and sanitize its history into a blank slate upon which America could project itself. Thus a clear theme emerges in the postwar photographs on Kwajalein, not only of neatening the land, but of household cleaning and ultimately the cleaning of the body itself. There is, for example, a surprising preponderance of images of soldiers washing and devising different ways of doing their laundry with windmills and other gadgetry. These images served not only to report on the day-to-day austere living conditions of the soldiers, they also worked to weave Kwajalein into 1940s Americana, a time when "family values" and middle-class domesticity featured centrally in the mainstream culture.

Images like the following photo of pilots "mix[ing] the practical

"In commemoration of Mothers' Day 1944 crew members of the 7th A.F. B-24 Liberator, *Come Closer*, based on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, mix the practical aspects of the laundry problem in with a touching sentiment."

aspects of the laundry problem in with a touching sentiment" communicate the multiple meanings of "cleaning up" on a number of different levels of irony. Ten men in uniform, some shirtless, labor over their laundry in front of their airplane, scrubbing clothing in buckets and hanging it out to dry, while laughing. Two men hold up the banner that reads, "Mothers' Day: Dear Mom . . . Cleaning up in the Marshalls. Sure wish you were here. Love from 7th AAF [Army Air Force]." One wonders, given the context, whether the "laundry problem" is just a joke about not being able to keep clothing clean and dry in the frequent squalls of the tropics, or if the "problem" is a chauvinistic joke about these men not having mothers and wives to take care of them. Such a reading makes the line, "Sure wish you were here," all the more relevant.

But this image, presumably taken in May of 1944, three months after the invasion of the atoll, is obviously also playing off the double meaning of "cleaning up" on a more symbolic level: ridding the Marshall Islands of Japanese. What was only recently a catastrophic scene of death, mass burial, and anguish is thus systematically disinfected, freshened up, and bleached into white middle-class America.

BATHTIME

In line with such mythology, the theme of cleanliness can also be found in several images that portray American soldiers showering outdoors or bathing in the sea. In contrast to the humiliating images of prisoners of war stripped naked and made to wait in barbed-wire pigpens, nudity in the white American context of postwar liberation takes on completely different meanings of purity, wholesomeness, and renewal. The image below, taken immediately after the battle, has an almost baptismal quality to it, as Marines eagerly strip off their uniforms and frolic past the detritus of war and into the lagoon to "cool off" after their campaign.

"The imperial act of discovery," writes McClintock, "can be compared with the male act of baptism. In both rituals, western men publicly disavow the creative agency of others (the colonized/women) and arrogate to themselves the power of origins" (McClintock 1995, 29). Here Kwajalein lagoon itself becomes not only a restorative site of cleanliness for the atoll's liberators, but also a site through which they "rebirth" the atoll into the territory of the United States. With their bodies they mark the transition from Japan to America on this former Japanese beach. Stripping away their uniforms, they commune

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“ON JAPAN’S SANDS, Marines cool off on former Jap[anese] Beach,” 2 February 1944

with nature and return anointed by Kwajalein’s waters, “naturalizing” America’s mythology of seizing Japanese (but really Marshallese) land and sea. In doing so, they also render their Western (and Christian) imaginary of the Pacific onto their environment. As Lutz and Collins write, “beaches are the essence of the Pacific for many Westerners, as travel posters attest; the beach should be a scene of pleasure, not of work or unpleasant sights” (1993, 140).

Never mind that at the time of the invasion of Kwajalein, nearly one hundred years had passed since the first American Christian missionaries came to the Marshall Islands at Ebon and admonished the original inhabitants for not wearing enough clothing, and that (despite Japanese customs of swimming in *fundoshi* loincloths) Marshallese of 1944 no doubt would have found swimming in the nude obscene. Just as Teresia Teaiwa wrote about the cruel irony of the bikini swimsuit being named for its “explosiveness” after the nuclear testing in Bikini, one of the bitter ironies of colonialism in the Pacific is that now it is the Islanders who frown on the scantily clad tourists who help themselves to their beaches (Teaiwa 1994, 97).

In all these images of bathing, soldiers are shown celebrating the great outdoors, splashing happily in the sea or hosing themselves off outside. It is worth also considering the way American military masculinity is naturalized via the countless photographs of bare-chested soldiers that appear in the archives. Like the bare-breastedness of Mar-

shall Islander women that was fetishized so often by Japanese and American photographers, the toplessness of American soldiers is eroticized in these war photographs. In most of these images, American male bodies are portrayed as natural, pure, and masculine, celebrating the soldiers' virility.[31]

Gratitude

> From the time of the WWII liberation, and the US occupation, which inoculated the Marshalls with canned SPAM and westernized thinking, Marshallese have valued their relationship with the US and looked up to the Americans.
>
> —*Aenet Rowa, 2005*

A significant component of the American liberation story during the war, not only in the Marshall Islands but also in Japan, involved the provision of food. The US provisional military government was only to supply "enemy populations" with enough food, shelter, and other supplies to avoid health problems and social unrest, but in the former Nanyō Guntō, where Islanders were not "indigenous" Japanese, this order was "interpreted liberally" (Richard 1957, 183). This image of a young Marshallese boy relates the story of Islanders being show-

"K-RATIONS A TREAT TO HIM . . . A Marshallese boy perches comfortably on a wind-twisted coconut tree and prepares to open a box of K-rations. He found the Marines' field rations a welcome change in his usual diet of rice, fish, and coconuts. Picture was taken soon after the Fourth Marine Division's invasion of the Island," March 1944

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ered with new and desirable American food while it also exoticizes Marshallese as pristine, "traditional," unspoiled (and even childlike) people. The field rations he receives, say the caption, are "a welcome change in his usual diet of rice, fish, and coconuts." Given the posing of the boy "perching comfortably on a wind-twisted coconut tree," there is a suggestion here that this "native" child wearing a knit ski cap is in his natural habitat, suddenly confronting the modern world through the good grace of American liberation. Yet not only was rice a major influence on the Marshallese diet ever since it was introduced by Japanese colonists as a staple in the 1920s, so were many other Japanese foods, which were traded at nearby Jaluit Atoll and sold in local shops on Kwajalein. By the time of the American invasion, Marshall Islanders were already well-accustomed to Japanese canned foods, such as mackerel (*saba*), and preserved pickles like *umeboshi* salted plums and *takuan* made from *daikon* radish.[32] They were used to using *shōyu* (soy sauce) on their food as well, to the extent that in times of scarcity, people would survive by pouring it on rice and eating it with coconut. To this day, the per capita average consumption of Kikkōman brand soy sauce is actually higher in the Marshall Islands than it is in Japan.[33]

Indeed, the Americans introduced many new (and many extremely unhealthy) foods to Micronesia, and most Marshallese recollections of the invasion are preoccupied with this influx of food in abundance, "reflecting," say Poyer, Falgout, and Carucci, "both the privation of war and the important symbolism of food in Marshallese culture" (2001, 243):

> While Americans undoubtedly thought, correctly, that their gifts were signs of good will and gestures of friendship, they were less aware that Marshallese also interpreted them as the customary distributions of chiefs—very powerful chiefs with a seemingly unlimited source of goods. Joined with the invasion's overwhelming display of military might, Americans came to be seen as "the parallel of traditional conquerors writ large—that is sacred chiefs."[34] The political implications of this abundant initial generosity would emerge later in the American administration. (245)

Walsh has also considered the implications of this generosity in her study of American-Marshallese power relations, arguing that Americans may have intended to liberate the people but instead became

the new *irooj* (chiefs) within the larger political sphere, a relationship that suited American strategic imperial needs in its establishment of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and made Marshallese independence a complicated affair in the 1980s (Walsh 2003). And although the Marshall Islands is an independent republic in "free association" with the United States, at Kwajalein Atoll, where the military has occupied most key islands nonstop since the war, I would argue that these "chiefly relations" are still in place, to some extent.[35]

In the next image, we see yet another "chiefly" exchange between an American serviceman and "Magode, Chief of the natives" on Āne-Eļļap-Kan (Carlos), two islets up the west reef from Kwajalein. Framed not unlike early American portrayals of exchange between settlers and Native Americans, or European voyagers and countless Pacific Islanders, the American soldier makes a peace offering, here in the form of

"Magode, Chief of the natives on Carlos Island, Kwajalein, accepts a cigarette from Pvt. Loren V. Fager of 241 Vermyo, Raton, New Mexico. Marshall Islands, 26 April 1944"

a Camel cigarette. It is important in this image that this is person is referred to as a "chief"; in fact, "Magode" is one of the only Marshallese individuals appearing in the archives who is properly identified with a name other than "native."[36] This is telling, given that American military and later civilian administrators, like Japanese and previous colonial powers, were keen to negotiate only with traditional leaders, preferring to govern the populace through those people they identified as kings.

Of course, much to the frustration of these officials, Marshallese land tenure and traditional leadership is much more sophisticated than this: all Marshall Islanders have claims to land, with multiple affiliations crisscrossing between atolls and islands. This image would suggest, however, that somehow this American soldier is on even terms with or even superior to this traditional leader, that through his generosity he is made both welcome and powerful. Lindstrom also writes about similar images between Allied soldiers and Islanders in the Solomons:

> Images of shared effort intimate that the native is like us, or at least somewhat like us. In pictures at least, natives and servicemen work together for joint goals, muscling artillery up a mountainside, unloading PT boats. Poses of shared endeavor and everyday experience connote a common humanity. These shared experiences include having a Coke together, playing checkers, lighting up one another's cigarettes. This last pose is very common in the archives: servicemen and Islanders again and again give each other the courtesy of a light. (2001, 120)[37]

Romance and Ridicule

The above picture shows how Marshallese men, who were not usually given access to alcohol or cigarettes during Japanese times, are granted these "freedoms" through the paternalistic intervention of American men, who offer these pleasures as a gesture of shared manhood. By the same token, however, scenes of Marshallese women smoking cigarettes or engaging in other activities that did not fit the stereotypes of the eroticized "hula girl" were ridiculed in some of the images as unladylike. The following image, of a young woman doing laundry "with a cigarette dangling from her lip," is a perfect contrast to the previous image. It implies through its sarcastic captioning and gro-

"MONDAY IN THE MARSHALLS: With a cigarette dangling from her lip, a native woman on Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Is. does her family's washing. Rocks make a good scrubbing brush. Note the bucket provided by the Marine Corps. Picture was taken shortly after the Fourth Marine Div. invaded the Japanese-held islands."

tesque framing not only that smoking is unbecoming for a woman but that Marshallese women are somehow primitive and unclean enough to indulge in the habit.

"Rocks make a good scrubbing brush," the caption explains of the woman's method for doing "her family's laundry."[38] Cross-reading this image with the series of soldiers doing their laundry with buckets and scrub boards, another parallel is drawn in terms of the "shared everyday experience" that Lindstrom alludes to in the above quote. Yet the caption also directs the viewer to the bucket that has been provided by the Marines, emphasizing once again that American goodwill and advanced technology are making a big difference in the lives of the "natives" and that these gestures are received with immense gratitude.

It was only a short time before military authorities began to strictly regulate interactions between American soldiers and Marshall Islanders. Soldiers were prohibited from visiting Marshallese villages on other islands, likely in part out of fears that soldiers would become

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"NO GLAMOR GIRLS . . . Native women of Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands shun sarongs, favor "Mother Hubbard" dresses, as this photograph illustrates. They do not wear shoes, either," March 1944, Kwajalein Atoll

sexually active with locals. As I have already mentioned, defeated Japan was eroticized "in the eyes of the conquerors," as evidenced by the fetishization of *geisha* (Dower 1999, 137). Arguably a similar trend could be said of all military campaigns, as discussed by Enloe regarding the prostitution that inevitably springs up around American bases (1990, 81).

The eroticization, or attempted eroticization, of Kwajalein women can also be seen in the gaze of military photographers, setting the stage, perhaps, for depicting postwar Micronesians during the Trust Territory era. Lutz and Collins analyze this in depth in their study of the images in *National Geographic,* pointing out, for instance, how the magazine's images of Micronesia "emphasize the 'toplessness' of its women, the exoticism of its dancers, the romance of its navigators, and the juxtaposition of things native and things modern or Western" (1993, 136). But unlike the images of "bare-breasted beauties" that feature in military photography from parts of western Micronesia like Palau and Yap, where Islanders tended toward customary attire, mili-

tary photographers seemed disappointed by Marshallese and Kosraeans in eastern Micronesia, where the influence of nineteenth-century American missionaries had been the most pervasive.

In an image mockingly titled "No Glamor Girls," eleven Marshallese women pose for the cameraman with their backs to Kwajalein lagoon. The caption explains that these women "shun sarongs," as if to suggest that Islander women should wear sarongs and go topless, in line with the Hollywood fantasy of the premodern South Pacific. The image ridicules the women, portraying them as somehow inferior in their disappointingly modern "Mother Hubbard" dresses, cheap substitutes for the exotic Pacific "dusky maiden" archetype. "They do not wear shoes, either" is another characterization of their lack of "glamor."

On one hand, soldiers' invasion narratives expressed a sense of kindred values around the awareness that most Islanders were Christians (Poyer, Falgout, and Carucci 2001, 237). For Marshallese, too, even though Americans had never been in an official colonizing role in the past, the return to the islands of fellow Christians was cause for celebration, since missionary activities had been severely limited during Japanese times and religious ceremonies had been outlawed during the war. And judging from some of the images in the archives, on occasion soldiers were even serenaded with church hymns. Yet on the other hand, soldiers' fantasies of the tropical island Pacific framed their expectations of Islanders and fixed them in the premodern past, so the Marshallese women's Christian-influenced attire may have been disappointing.

In contrast to the prewar Japanese romanticization of the Pacific, in which Marshallese women were framed erotically by the "chieftain's daughter" discourse discussed in chapter 3, American depictions of Marshallese women were typically disparaging. For Americans, Paradise had already been found in European exploration literature and in the territory of Hawai'i (which the United States eventually made into a state after the war in 1959). It was this imaginary that set the standard for the American Pacific; anything that did not fit the eroticized fantasy of slender hula dancers with light skin was not authentic enough.[39]

It was, nonetheless, probably the "hula girl" fantasy and the American fetishization of the "grass skirt" that led to scenes like the one above, in which "grass" skirts are apparently being sold to two soldiers on Āne-Eļļap-Kan (Carlos) Island. In this image, four girls and

"Pfc. Louis A. Avial of Gilroy, Calif. (left) and Cpl. James Riddick of Everest, N.C., attempt to purchase a grass skirt from young native girls on Carlos Island, Kwajalein, Marshall Islands," 26 April 1944

a mature woman (perhaps their mother or aunt)—all of whom wear cotton dresses—display "traditional" garments for the Americans. The young woman in the center appears to be laughing, either out of amusement or embarrassment as the soldier on the right looks at her intently. Meanwhile, the older woman on the far right models one of the skirts on top of her cotton dress.

From a Marshallese perspective, because this "traditional" clothing had not been worn since the late nineteenth century, these "grass skirts" would have been quite extraordinary objects. It is important to note, first of all, that Marshallese women did not customarily wear "grass" skirts made from loose strands of fiber like these; up until the late 1800s and on some ceremonial occasions thereafter, they wore elaborate and intricately woven mats that typically covered their knees.[40] Women would never have worn the skirts shown here in this photograph. In fact, they look like *in,* the kind of skirts that were once worn by Marshallese *men* (Spennemann 1998). They also resemble the skirts worn by male dancers during the sacred and chiefly *jebwa* dance.

Taking this cultural background into consideration, it is likely that the women in this photograph were either weaving "traditional" male Marshallese attire for the soldiers themselves to wear, or perhaps they were producing order-made skirts to meet the soldiers' demand for hula paraphernalia. In either case, this exchange is a moment in which Islanders sell "traditional" culture and "dress up" to meet Americans' expectations of authenticity. The "cross-dressing" of the woman on the right is also an intriguing moment of inversion in which she dresses in premodern Marshallese menswear and simultaneously plays along with American "Hawaiiana" stereotypes of the Pacific (see Desmond 1999).

Of course here we could also say that by purchasing grass skirts, the soldiers are on the verge of "going native" and engaging in their own "ethnic cross-dressing," what Lindstrom calls the "collapse of boundaries and convergence of once disparate identities: the self as other" (2001, 120). These playful moments are not to be taken seriously; they are entirely ironic if orientalist in their composition. What is interesting to me, however, is the multiple layering of gazes (indeed, perhaps a convergence of atollscapes) that takes place in this image. While the two soldiers project their fantasies of the Pacific onto the Marshall Islanders as they literally gaze at the young women, the older woman on the right gazes straight back into the camera. She parodies the American fantasy (and caption) of the photograph by jokingly drawing attention to her own "drag" performance as a "native," the old-fashioned man's skirt layered on top of her modern dress.[41] Is this a Marshallese inside joke?

In collapsing these boundaries and finding affinities between "liberated natives" and their "liberators," the postinvasion narrative of Kwajalein also needed to eradicate all traces of "Japaneseness" from the atoll. In the midst of their fascination with atoll Pacific life, mop-up units also had to contend with the possibility of Japanese hiding away in the jungles of small islands or with Islanders who might be pro-Japanese. The following image, in which two soldiers view "with curiosity" an elderly Marshallese woman in a village, explores these encounters with "natives" on the remote small islands of Kwajalein Atoll.

The photograph is posed quite evocatively, with foliage draped over the immediate foreground. The setting is a very "traditional village" with thatched structures and a sense of a quaint and timeless era. The soldiers in full uniform, with helmets, smile as they greet the elderly woman, who is only about half their height. She wears a

"SALES TALK—Sergeant Brooks pauses for a moment in a native village to view with curiosity a tiny, elderly native woman. In native villages such as this one, members of the patrol found many traces of Japanese such as pictures and ammunition; and yet the natives were very much against the Japanese," June 1944

white gown and seems to look up to them, with a smile on her face. It is a peaceful scene that looks like an illustration from a children's fairy tale book. As such it elegantly carries the liberation narrative of heroic knights coming to save a peaceful kingdom helplessly mired in the evildoings of another empire. The woman seems to welcome the soldiers, and the soldiers seem to present themselves as perfect gentlemen just making a courteous neighborhood visit or, as the caption jokingly suggests, a "sales" call.

Yet these so-called salesmen probably were not on a business mission but rather a mop-up operation to small islets in the atoll to check for Japanese stragglers or pro-Japanese "natives." As the image's caption indicates, there were many "traces" of the Japanese, such as "pictures and ammunition." What sort of pictures might have these been? Perhaps these were images of friends and loved ones? In light of the fact that many Marshallese had worked alongside the Japanese and there had been romantic liaisons between Japanese soldiers and local women, as well as generations of children born of mixed Japanese-Marshallese heritage, it would be strange if the departure of

the Japanese were not also accompanied by ambivalence and melancholy for many people. As the caption of this photo suggests, Americans felt a need not only to justify their own presence, but also to reconcile the notion of Marshallese as subjects of the Japanese empire by reminding themselves that the "natives" were "very much against" the Japanese at the same time. Meanwhile, according to many accounts, these Japanese artifacts were confiscated by American authorities and never returned. Former first lady Emlain Kabua, whose father was Japanese, spent the war years on one of the small islands in Kwajalein Atoll. She explained that her family hid many of their possessions, since the American soldiers made these house calls and literally took away many important family heirlooms, documents, and photographs of personal significance (interview, March 14, 2010). For many Marshall Islanders, especially those with Japanese heritage, it was as if the Americans were actually trying to confiscate their memories.

For Americans, it may have seemed contradictory to the script of liberation from the "enemy" that Marshallese would cling to some Japanese customs and keepsakes. As I have mentioned elsewhere, however, many Marshallese in Kwajalein old enough to remember the Japanese colonial period do so with a fair degree of nostalgia and as a time of productivity, cooperation, and generally positive change. Those same elders, though, make a clear distinction between the civilian administration of the atoll up until the late 1930s and the ensuing time of military rule that followed. They also distinguish between "Japanese civilians" and "Japanese soldiers," the latter group being characterized as unreasonably hostile and harsh or "crazy." Indeed, Marshallese were against military occupiers, period. Muench reminisces about his conversations with a Marshallese worker he befriended during his time on Kwajalein, when he first came to terms with indigenous ambivalence toward the American presence as well:

> Once I asked Caleb if he was happy that we had taken the islands from the Japanese military. He said, "Yes, and we'll be happy when you go home, too!" At first I was affronted by his candor, but after awhile I could see his wisdom. These islands were theirs, not ours, nor the Japanese, nor the Germans. They knew how to survive and be happy in their environment—we didn't. (2002, 54)

But happiness in one's environment is relative. Following ostensibly the same logic, in what has been characterized as a policy of

"benign neglect" (Kiste 1993, 70), the subsequent US Navy administration of the Marshall Islands in years to come would pursue a strategy of leaving Islanders to go back to their "traditional ways" of subsistence living, supposedly because they would be "happier" this way, all the while militarily exploiting the islands for a decade of Cold War nuclear testing. After more than a century of colonialism and enculturation, during which Marshallese got used to the pleasures and pains of Spanish, German, and Japanese empires, the idea of being "liberated" back into the premodern era made little sense to anyone.

POST-LIBERATION: AN ONGOING "SPECIAL" RELATIONSHIP

"In the Pacific Islands," writes Keith Camacho, "the making of history is a vibrant process of contestation and celebration" (Camacho 2011, 177). At least in the early days after the invasion, the liberation of the Marshalls was celebrated with much fanfare. Marshallese staged various cultural performances, including the *beet* dance performed in this image taken in Majuro Atoll, featured in an "impressive 4th of July celebration." Young barefoot Marshallese maidens dance merrily in the center of the photograph, led by the enthusiastic cheering of a man

"MARSHALL NATIVES HAIL THEIR LIBERATION ON FOURTH OF JULY—Native girls of the Marshall Islands stage a colorful dance before hundreds of Marines and Sailors at an impressive 4th of July celebration. . . ." Majuro, 4 July 1944

raising his arms and clapping off to the left, and an older matriarch on the right. In the background, a large group of soldiers in uniform are visible, and more than one of them is taking a photograph of this momentous event.

Captions from other photos taken this same day explain that "hundreds of natives" did performances, including one performance in which Marshallese men "staged a colorful dance" in which "the American eagle (made from cardboard ration boxes) [conquered] the Rising Sun" (image NA-93270). Here Marshallese rehearsed the narrative of liberation through performance, playing out the story of an almighty America that was strong enough to conquer Japan's empire. In light of Carucci's argument about "sacred chiefs" (1989, 85), however, this "colorful dance" could be read less as a story about Marshallese emancipation from Japanese rule than as a story about the dueling of two chiefly powers and the ultimate hegemony of America's military brawn. This pageant bears a striking resemblance to a parade I witnessed on Ebeye to commemorate the Kwajalein invasion: one carnival float was decorated as a jungle where young Marshallese boys brandished swords and wore headbands emblazoned with the imperial rising sun insignia (the *kyokujitsu-ki*); the next float signaled American postwar superiority with a mock control room in which children dressed in lab coats and spectacles maneuvered a gigantic papier-mâché missile with "US Army" painted on its side (see Dvorak 2004, 59–60). In either case, "before and after" are not much different; military muscle is the common catalyst for rupture.[42]

It is also highly significant that the celebrations featured in these photographs take place on the Fourth of July, the date the United States celebrates its sovereignty and liberation from England. Thus the celebration could be seen as a celebration of America and American independence, a Marshallese gesture of solidarity with the United States' mission of spreading freedom in the world. Yet from an American perspective somehow in these representations of "happy natives" rejoicing the end of the war and Japanese military rule, it is as if the camera collapses thousands of years of "free" Marshallese civilization into the brief span of American history, rendering that earlier memory obsolete.[43] Thus this fanfare marks the beginning of an era of American quasi-colonialism in the Marshall Islands and throughout Micronesia, in what policymakers aptly titled "strategic trust."

It is in fact this collapse of histories that continues to resonate throughout the postwar years in the relationship between the Mar-

Dvorak - Coral and Concrete.indb 153 5/29/2018 7:08:18 PM

shall Islands and America, causing many leaders, both Marshallese and American, to euphemize this unequal alliance of interdependence as "special." After American abuse of the Marshall Islands for decades as a nuclear proving grounds and the lease of Kwajalein Atoll as a missile-testing site, the fact that many Marshallese still consider the United States to be their best friend makes this a very "special" relationship indeed, even with the millions of American dollars in aid.

It is arguably these representations, these oversimplified images of cut-and-dried liberation, that have helped to obscure the memory of other pasts that came before the invasion and set the tone for the present day. Through the veneration of this kind of erasure, Japanese human connections to Kwajalein and the Marshalls or Micronesia in general were severed, replaced by images of fanatic subhuman militants and their subsequent demise. The memory of Marshallese genealogies, lands, and sacrifices, meanwhile, got mired in the force of the American mythology, buried beneath a concrete-coated atollscape filled with "benevolent white chiefs" and their loyal "native" subjects.

Marshallese loyalty to the American cause has remained strong ever since the Pacific War, and it is renewed nowadays when thousands of Micronesian soldiers are fighting alongside Americans in Iraq and other sites (Hezel 2005, 5). On Kwajalein in 2005, when a particularly military-minded commander installed a speaker system to broadcast army bugle calls throughout the base, the largely civilian American community protested in letters to the editor of the *Kwajalein Hourglass* and in other public forums. Base residents, expected to stop their activity to turn and face the flag by the air terminal as an expression of appreciation for "our men and women of the armed forces," laughed at the prospect, some pledging to ignore the bugle calls altogether. But it was the Marshallese base workers—citizens of an independent republic and trusty best friends of the United States—who stopped whatever they were doing, placed their hands over the hearts, and patriotically stood at attention until the bugle broadcasts would come to an end (*Kwajalein Hourglass,* March 30, 2005).[44]

The American story of spreading democracy through liberation and postwar power is not unique to Kwajalein, of course. It has taken on different inflections in other places globally, as well as in other parts of Micronesia (see Diaz 2001). Yet in the Marshall Islands, where the United States has from the Cold War to the present aimed to justify its presence in the Central Pacific as benevolent and essential, liberation takes on a special meaning. As Lazarus Salii pointed out in 1972,

Micronesians have always been well aware that the United States has been both "conqueror" and "liberator" in their islands (Poyer, Falgout, and Carucci 2001, 289), and the slippery terrain between these contradictory extremes requires maintenance and reinforcement of the liberation legend.

It is this American double standard, no doubt, that brought local Marshallese leaders in Kwajalein Atoll to finally change the name of "Liberation Day" to "Memorial Day" in the early 1990s, around the fiftieth anniversary of the battle.[45] Unlike the Americans who live today on Kwajalein as temporary transplants from the States, the Marshallese of the atoll have strong and painful memories of the war and all the people they lost. Mindful of the deep sorrow and anger most Islanders also feel about nuclear weapons tests in northern atolls and the sickness and displacement they caused, paramount chief (*iroojlaplap*) and former president Imata Kabua was known to say sarcastically, "why don't they just liberate us from the radiation already?"[46]

"I always want to say to Americans, you'll never find any more true and loyal friends than the people of the Marshall Islands," says "Wesley," a Ri-Kuwajleen resident of Ebeye. He insists how pro-American and devoted Marshall Islanders are but is quick to point out that Marshallese were also very pro-Japanese in certain contexts. Along with their loyalty and fondness for Americans, there has also been anger and bitterness over the many trespasses the United States has committed:

> Once, an American official came up to me and said, "Hey, did you know the Japanese finally apologized to us for bombing Pearl Harbor?" And I said, "Wow! That's great! I really take my hat off to those Japanese to apologize like that, they are such gentlemen!" And then I said, "And what about you guys, when are you going to apologize to us about all those nuclear tests you did here?" And the American guy just turned around without saying anything and walked out of the restaurant.[47]

Whether for defense, offense, or "just testing," Kwajalein is today the uncontested epicenter of the "Martial Islands." Encoded in the American discourse of the present day, from the battle tales and iconography of commemorative historical plaques and memorials to the ways the current missile-testing range justifies its mission, are the legacies of this liberation narrative set into motion more than half a

century ago. Yet the images captured of the atoll's "liberation" hint at deeper stories that lie just beneath the military base's manicured surface.

Every so often, someone comes across dangerous unexploded ordnance from the war sitting in his or her backyard or nestled among the multicolored coral thickets of the reef. Yet we are not asked to remember the mass graves where Japanese, Korean, and Okinawan bodies were buried by the thousands, not implored to know where the houses of Marshallese chiefs once stood, and not reminded that this is Marshallese land. When the US Army digs new trenches to repair its water pipes or replace a street lamp, the public rarely learns about all the bones they find. These histories are sanitized and landscaped over by peaceful grassy lawns, idyllic beaches, and, of course, concrete. The US Army refers to this as "beautification." Indeed, Kwajalein today is strikingly picture-perfect. Amnesia is bliss.