admitted that writing general histories is never easy and that packaging a region as diverse culturally and historically as the Pacific Islands is a bit of a conundrum. But this effort, sadly, is not what it could have been. Like the single-author pan-Pacific narratives that preceded it, it should inspire us to learn to do better.

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These two books have a lot in common, in their focus on the military in Papua New Guinea, but they are also very different in their approach and style of presentation. Ron May's book is a brief but comprehensive analysis of an increasingly important issue in Papua New Guinea, the role of the military in the state. He sets out to show that there has been a fundamental change in the role of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and to explain why. The central theme is how the defense force, inherited at independence after a searching debate on whether it should be disbanded, and given an essentially external defense role, came to replace that external role with an internal one. An escalating law and order problem within the country, an increasing realization that it simply did not have a viable external role, and, finally, the Bougainville crisis, explain the shift.

The book has all the usual academic evidentiary appurtenances: copious footnotes, references, appendixes, glossary of acronyms and abbreviations, tables, and so on. The colonial origins of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and its anatomy, structure, organization, regional representation, and funding are covered. On all these, as on military–civil relations, the mission of the force, its civic action work, border operations, and maritime surveillance activities, May is informative, balanced, and crisp. Although he overlooks nothing of significance, he does not dwell very much on the many internal problems of the force, which, as Liria shows, have clearly contributed to the poor performance on Bougainville.

Yauka Liria's book complements Ron May's. It is a hilariously funny and entertaining book, despite dealing with such an appalling tragedy. An eleven-page appendix, giving a chronology of important events in the evolving Bougainville crisis from January 1990 to the end of June 1993, is the closest he comes to presenting his materials in the familiar academic manner. The book is simultaneously a reflective and racy personal account of the insurgency and counterinsurgency on the island of Bougainville, where Liria served as an intelligence officer.
and, on a second tour of duty, as a company commander. The thriller quality would be conveyed by pointing out that a part of the book, submitted for the Papua New Guinea National Literature Competition, won the first prize in the novel category! We must all be thankful for the format he chose, a series of “novelettes” that are humorous and serious at the same time, thrilling and yet yielding serious answers to those who ask the right questions about the role of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force in the Bougainville crisis and why the crisis has gone on for so much longer than most people would have predicted in 1989.

Liria is very scathing and unsparing in his criticism of trends in the force. He gives trenchant accounts of indiscipline and paralyzing rivalries in the officer corps; of lack of professionalism and horrendous tales of incompetence; of cowardice and widespread belief in the supernatural powers of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army opponents; of lack of commitment to soldiering as a vocation rather than just a source of income; and so on. He does not mince his words, and that is one reason this is such a valuable book for Papua New Guinea watchers. Apart from the counterinsurgency campaigns, hardly any sustained disquisitions exist on anything to do with the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. Yet there are answers, scattered on many pages, to most questions one cares to ask about that organization.

For instance, there is no detailed presentation of the structure and organization of the force in Liria’s book, unlike May’s book. But from Liria’s autobiographical sketch in chapter 2, the attentive reader learns a great deal about the training of recruits and officers and about the structure of the two infantry battalions. This information is supplemented later on by a discussion of how companies on Bougainville operated at half strength because a battalion there was only half its normal, regulation size. Similarly, although there is no sustained discussion of why the defense force’s performance has been so dismal on Bougainville, there is a complete answer, but it is scattered over several pages. The answers have to be retrieved and put together by the reader.

There is so much new evidence (to this reviewer, at any rate), including the hushed mutiny by B Company on 29 June 1989, barely three months into troop deployment on Bougainville, and so much insight, that any discussion of the defense force or of the Bougainville campaign will now proceed on a much higher level of knowledge and understanding, thanks to Yauka Liria’s book. It is truly a pity that he could not write such a book and remain in the army because, unless the force does not reward its thinking officers, I am convinced that he would have headed for the very top one day.

May also gives the continuing insurgency on Bougainville the prominence it deserves, as the severest test so far of Papua New Guinea statehood and the capability and competence of its defense force. However, for him, the Bougainville crisis provides the final evidence and rationale for the shift in the defense force’s primary preoccupation from external to internal threats.
Perhaps the best way to summarize the differences between the two books, and to emphasize their respective qualities, is to say that May’s book is what you recommend to an earnest undergraduate, or to an academic who is coming to the subject of the military in Papua New Guinea for the first time. Liria’s book, on the other hand, is what you recommend to the discerning postgraduate student who is already familiar with May’s book, or to the academic who is an old hand at Papua New Guinea affairs. The incredibly large amount of startling and fresh evidence in Liria’s book, on virtually every aspect of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and its counterinsurgency activities, particularly the negative aspects concerning incompetence, indiscipline, lack of professionalism, crippling rivalries and absence of an esprit de corps, lack of commitment to soldiering, and so on, have to be noticed and carefully garnered because they are usually offered in passing. Not only does Liria write as an insider, with a direct knowledge and understanding of what he is writing about, but as a Papua New Guinea national he is far less inhibited in his criticisms and exposure of national failings. He can afford to be far more forthright in his assessments than can foreigners who want to be able to continue to work in Papua New Guinea or want to be able to come and go.

YAW SAFFU
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In Voices of Conflict, Andrew Strathern takes a broad view of conflict among the Melpa of the Mount Hagen area of Highlands Papua New Guinea, drawing primarily on material collected on several visits to the area between 1981 and 1986. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present detailed accounts, complete with transcripts of mediation sessions, of three disputes between kin and neighbors. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 explore regional patterns of conflict such as rivalry between Christian sects, resurgence of tribal warfare, and violence associated with elections. Throughout, Strathern has two concerns. First, he contributes to an understanding of conflict resolution in small societies by exploring the logic of dispute settlement among the Melpa, including the goals and characteristics of talk at various phases of the proceedings, and the factors influencing decisions. Second, Strathern examines the impact of recent economic and political changes, particularly those affecting the Highlanders following Papua New Guinean independence in 1975.

Through the detailed examination of cases in the early chapters, Strathern contributes to a larger literature on conflict resolution in the Pacific and in small communities elsewhere. Overall, he argues that the most important factor influencing the way Hageners deal