

B. Malinowski. War and Weapons among the Natives
of the Trobriand Islands.
Man, No. 5, 1920, V.20, pp.10-12
p.10.

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The natives of the Trobriands were neither cannibals nor head-hunters, and therefore lacked the two inducements to warfare typical of Papuaia and Melanesia. Nevertheless they were keen on fighting, and conducted systematic and relentless wars. Warfare was, however, carried out with a considerable amount of fairness and loyalty, there being strict rules of conduct which were scrupulously observed. They never practised nocturnal raids on another village - taking it by surprise and ruthlessly murdering all inhabitants in their sleep - a form of warfare very popular among the majority of Papuanian tribes. Nor would they invite a party from another place and murder them treacherously. They never fought without warning, nor would they fight at night, and though complete victory - death

of the enemies and the destruction of their village - was the ultimate aim of a war, the mere fact of fighting as a sport, and the glory derived from a display of daring and skill, were an important incitement to warfare.

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The Trobriand Archipelago, and in particular the main island, Bwoiowa, was divided into a number of districts, which were at war with each other. The most important pair of such districts potentially at war were Kiriwina, with the capital village of Omarakana, and Tilataula, with its capital Kabuaku. Between these two districts relations were always strained. A row over gardens, pigs, women, a breach of etiquette, or suspected sorcery would result in a preliminary fight on the spot with light weapons, such as sword clubs, throwing sticks, light spears, or walking-sticks, which the natives always used to carry about with them. This might be smoothed over or it might lead to a formal outbreak of war. In the latter case both parties would muster their forces, the chiefs of Omarakana and Kabuaku sending word to all their adherents to appear at a certain

date in their respective capitals. Each assembly would be addressed by its chief, after which coconuts would be distributed ceremonially and scraped, all the men anointing themselves with coconut grease. The warriors of the belligerent districts would now remain in the capital till the end of the war. Midway between the two capital villages a place was selected and a circular arena cleared, which would be the theatre of fighting. The opponents ranged themselves opposite each other, the warriors standing at a distance of some thirty to fifty meters apart and throwing their spears. Behind the warriors stood or sat the women, helping the men with water, coconuts, sugar-cane, as well as with verbal encouragement.

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Fighting lasted as long as both parties could resist the onrush of their opponents. When one party had to flee, the road to its villages was open, and the enemy would rush on killing men, women, and children indiscriminately, burning the village and destroying the trees. The only remedy for the defeated party was to abandon their villages and to fly for life into another district. As a rule, practically everybody, especially the defenceless ones, would succeed in escaping. Thus, in 1899 about a dozen villages were destroyed, and the vanquished had to remain homeless for a time. The main village, Omarakana, was not rebuilt before a formal atonement ceremony had been held between the victors and the vanquished, the latter having been living in a provisional village some six miles to the south of their own village." (Comp.Seligman, op. cit. p663-668)

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In order to understand this lenient and conventional character of warfare one must remember that all inhabitants of the Trobriand Archipelago belong to the same tribe, all speaking the same language, having exactly the same customs, intermarrying, participating mutually in all festivities, etc. It was in consequence rather a form of social "duel", in which one side earned glory and humiliated the other, than warfare conducted to obtain any decisive advantage, economic or other.

