In Okinawa, luncheon meat, or what locals call “pork” (pōku), has an ubiquitous presence. At a local restaurant, a bowl of Okinawan soba would include at least one, and more often two, thick slices of “pork.” At grocery stores, various brands of luncheon meat – Hormel, Tulip, Midland, etc. – fill the shelves, competing with each other in taste and price. “LOVE! SPAM,” a cookbook published by the Okinawan Hormel, lists one hundred recipes involving luncheon meat, including “SPAM Curry,” “SPAM Taco Rice,” and “SPAM Oden.”

This presentation explores how luncheon meat has created a vibrant narrative space in which Okinawans tell their tales of war, American occupation, and “reversion” to Japan. Examining a wide range of narratives involving luncheon meat, including war memories, cultural commentaries, food essays, and company advertisements, the presentation analyzes how luncheon meat functions as a narrative node around which Okinawans articulate their post-war memories and identities vis-à-vis the US and Japan, as well as their longing for “grandma’s home cooking” (which of course involves luncheon meat) where a gendered sense of nostalgia is invoked.