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# **The First Taranaki War – A Divergent History**

**A Thesis presented in Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts in History  
at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand.**

**Murray Robert Hill**

**2013**

This work is dedicated to my father  
**Robin Bernard Hill M.B.E.**  
For laughing at my 5<sup>th</sup> Form History teacher  
who had said I had no future as an historian.

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## Preface

“We believe certain things about the past, not because they are true, but because it suits us to believe them at the moment.”<sup>1</sup>

On a crisp May morning in 1978, the day before my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, I stood with my brother on the bank of the sport fields at Westlake Boys High School, and watched something we both recognised. We were navy brats recently returned from a two year stay with the Armed Forces in Singapore, so we recognised a military convoy when we saw one. This convoy consisted of Army buses and trucks. The passengers may have been police officers, but the motorcycle outriders were military police and the organisation, bringing those police officers to Auckland via RNZAF aircraft through the base at Whenuapai, was nothing but a military operation.

It was a military operation directed at a group Maori who were in their 507<sup>th</sup> day of occupation at Bastion Point. This was the first occasion that we had seen such a thing in this country, and even at that young age my brother and I both found it unsettling. In my brother’s words, “the use of the Army by the government in a civil matter - I really felt that was a horrible mistake”.<sup>2</sup> My brother, a month short of turning 17, raised a bus fare with donations from the staff at our school, and took several buses to Bastion Point, where he employed his age and status as a school-boy to pass through the military cordon and observe the events first hand.

Later that day he talked to several Social Studies classes, including mine, at the request of a number of teachers. Many were not aware of the larger significance of this event, but clearly some of the teachers were. Other staff members were less than supportive and my brothers remaining time at Westlake was coloured more by the headmaster’s politics than any educational efforts. What links this incident to the First Taranaki War, on the face of it, is little or nothing. But when viewed as part of the larger picture, it is inextricably intertwined with a flow of events that has driven the historiography of that war, and all the other wars of the New Zealand’s colonial period. The Bastion Point occupation served to highlight awareness of Maori grievances, it was part of an attitude altering progression of events that would create an environment in which a radical and unique interpretation of the First Taranaki War could find fertile ground and take root. This is so much so that even until quite recently, substantial efforts to revise this new interpretation have meet with near universal failure to gain traction in the public environment.

In the same way that the teachers at my school were divided in their attitudes towards Bastion Point, which coloured their treatment of my brother, attitudes towards the First Taranaki War have coloured treatments of the sources. These differences existed from even before the first shot was fired, yet it is the changing views of those who have presented their respective

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Hill interview 4/6/2012

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

interpretations of the events at a later time that has shaped and fixed those divisions. It is obvious to any observer that the wars of this period are of importance to modern New Zealanders. As has been recently observed by Danny Keenan,

New Zealand did not come of age on the beaches of Gallipoli; it came of age on our own battlefields, like Rangiriri. The war that mattered - that forged the nation we are today - was fought on our own soil.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in spite of this obvious importance, we now have a situation where one radical account has become widely accepted, and even perceived as an “official” interpretation, despite the fact that this account has been repeatedly questioned and demonstrated to be inaccurate on some key issues. This simply hardens the divide that exists between the two narrative lines in what is quite possibly the single most important issue to our nation. Examining how and why this came to be may help us to gain a more thorough, realistic and less divisive, understanding of those events that continue to shape our country today.

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<sup>3</sup> Keenan, Danny NZ Herald guest column, *We came of age on battlefields of New Zealand*  
[http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10378631](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10378631) Accessed 14/08/2012

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## I - Introduction

There exist a substantial, yet finite, number of sources for the First Taranaki War. Personal letters, official documents, reports, parade states, newspapers and first-hand accounts all add to a store of written sources. Within these resides much of the information historians need to draw upon to reconstruct the events of 1860-1861, and within them exist sufficient contradictions with alternate and conflicting perspectives that enable historians to arrive at a variety of interpretations. From the very earliest the accounts contained divisions that are now reflected in the present marked divisions in the existing narratives. The military history event based narratives, and the social histories have sought to define why and how the war began, what the impact was and who was responsible. At present these interpretations have arrived at, and maintained, diametrically opposed conclusions. The sources are there to be considered and understood, but it is not the sources that have driven these interpretations, as much as the perspectives of those working with them, the context of their own time and most noticeably, the audience for whom the history is intended.

In the unique environment of New Zealand's social and political landscape, the historiography of the First Taranaki War, and in a wider perspective, the entire New Zealand Wars have to some degree always been divided, but in more recent times this has grown to the point that two distinct versions exist in parallel. Of these two versions, one has become well established and widely sanctioned interpretation, while the other is set to one side as the province of irrelevant specialists. The first mentioned here, is actually a later, post-colonial revisionist interpretation that focuses strongly on value judgements and assertions of victory or loss with assignments of blame. The second is the earlier and strongly military history-flavoured interpretation, the more event-driven and traditional one. While the seeds of these divisions existed within the primary source material, it how these sources were selectively employed later led to an existing, and on-going, divided narratives. Through perception, prejudice, social policy, government agencies, popular culture and the mass media, New Zealand's history has become a tool focused on modern issues, rather than a mechanism for understanding the past. The reality is that neither version is "right" or "wrong". Both interpretations have important points to make, yet neither is complete.

Given the importance of the events of the First Taranaki War to New Zealand and citizens of New Zealand today, it is reasonable to argue that it is simply too important to allow events to be misunderstood for simple convenience or expedience in achieving settlements with the aggrieved. Even so, regardless of the topics subjective "importance", the historian has responsibility to challenge and critically evaluate in their work. Yet the emotional significance to the descendants of the participants of both sides is not acknowledged by this procedure. If we are to accept the descendants of one side can be emotionally attached today by the events of 1860-1861 in Taranaki, is it not reasonable to expect that the descendants of the other side – the so called "winning" side - are entitled to feel similarly aggrieved by having their own past rewritten for current political convenience? The New Plymouth phone book contains the names cited in the histories, as do the head stones the town cemeteries. But

no mechanism or body exists for those who might seek redress for injustices against them or their ancestors by modern historians. And what of the descendants of the Maori who fought and fell in that war? Are they not entitled to know the truth of what their ancestors did? Now even the places where those men are buried are being neglected, as there is existing denial that they even fell at all. Consequently, we are faced with the challenge of deciding if it is possible to produce a work that does not alienate through either insensitive language or a flawed narrative.

Keenan has examined the language of discussion surrounding the issues of the New Zealand Wars and of Waitangi Tribunal claims, and he points out how quickly debate or discussion devolves into an essentially racist name-calling session.<sup>4</sup> Many of the assertions made in such situations are at best wildly inaccurate. At worst, people are arguing fiction as fact, and Maori who possess genuine grievances are faced with critics who will Maori claimants in the Waitangi Tribunal as being “obviously, motivated by the most blatant self-interest”.<sup>5</sup> It is entirely possible to alter people’s perceptions, but not when they are provided with information that suits their predispositions and feeds their prejudices. The predispositions of one side is well catered for in the existing narratives, and a number of authors have experienced substantial frustration in attempting to “correct” what they view as errors in many official works.

In fact a substantial part of the problem is that since James Cowan produced his works, the New Zealand Wars were not given any significant degree of attention by military historians. The landmark work of James Belich in the 1980s essentially secured pole by presenting a comprehensive military history-flavoured narrative, and since that time military historians have been almost entirely reactive. These reactive military histories are frequently only received within specialist circles, and therefore lack a wider audience. Those that were not reactive were repetitive by employing Belich’s arguments to create revisionist military histories that lent authority to the revisionist position. This takes place in an environment in which the most interested parties are those seeking to identify Maori grievances, and the military histories remains a largely specialist area of study that is not as well-regarded. The existing audience has sought a revisionist narrative, and the traditional narrative has become less relevant to the discussion.

Tracing the historiography of the First Taranaki War makes it very clear how the division developed and why it has become so marked, but doing this simply restates the problem with clarity. The two narratives have demonstrated that in recent times they are able to at least to coexist, but as yet the gap remains quite marked. The reality is that some arguments are going to be popular at particular times, irrespective of the quality involved and a constant review of existing narratives always has the potential to offer new perspectives. This has not happened as effectively because of the confrontational manner in which it has been

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<sup>4</sup> Keenan, Danny, Comment New Zealand Herald Truth reached only by rational debate [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=3521144](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=3521144) accessed 24/04/2012

<sup>5</sup> Round, Donald, Time to Say "No" to Treaty Claims, New Zealand Centre for Political Research, <http://www.nzcp.com/guest240.htm> <http://www.nzcp.com/guest240.htm> Accessed 03/03/2013

attempted. It is also apparent from a detailed examination that the two narrative lines - both the traditional military history-styled narratives and the post-colonial revisionist narratives - have significant weaknesses. Both benefit from re-examination, and do offer up some of the answers to the question of how to bridge the gap between these works. It is possible to bring the two narratives – albeit unwillingly – closer to each other.

One of the features of that is relevant to both narratives is the issue of hostility and animosity between the two races. The traditional narrative sought to downplay this feature while the revisionist narrative makes a feature of it. Belich describes the assertions of the traditional narrative, that the races lacked hostility for each other as a “myth” and presents a race based conflict as a theme of the revision.<sup>6</sup> It is the existing hostility as an aspect of the discussion of the New Zealand Wars today that is a major obstruction to mutual understanding. Setting aside the question of whether or not a history should be constructed to have a specific impact, this work will demonstrate that much of the historiography contains language that is confrontational and interpretations that are divisive. Much of the reaction to the revision has been sufficiently confrontational as to alienate much of the potential audience and to some degree even marginalise the history itself in favour of revisionist narrative. It will be demonstrate that it is possible to produce a robust narrative that does not contain these elements, and is more intended to foster a mutual respect and greater understanding.

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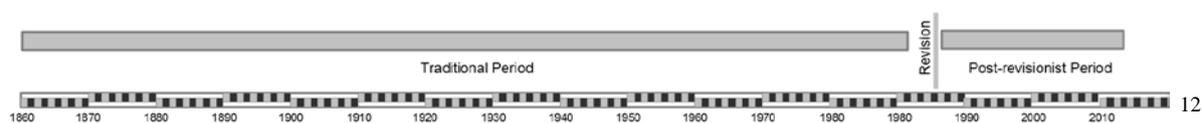
<sup>6</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *The New Zealand Wars, Episode 2, Kings and Empires*, written and presented James Belich, Auckland, N.Z., Distributed on behalf of Television New Zealand by Roadshow Entertainment, 1998

## II - The Historiography of the First Taranaki War

*"The further backward you look, the further forward you can see."*

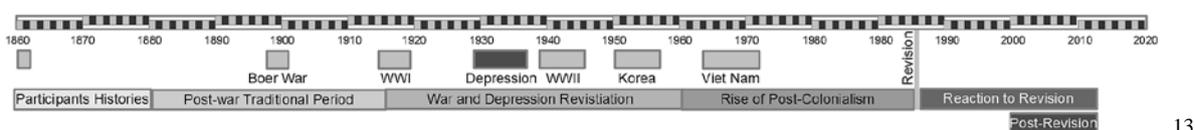
Winston Churchill

In his PhD thesis, *British logistics of the New Zealand Wars 1845 – 1866* (2004), Richard Taylor examined historiography for the New Zealand Wars and subsequently presents three periods when teaching the campaigns of the wars.<sup>7</sup> These periods are defined as the “traditional” period of general histories, the “revision”, and the “post revision” periods.<sup>8</sup> The traditional period was established with the participants accounts then fixed by Cowan with his detailed *New Zealand Wars* works which were both thorough and extensively researched.<sup>9, 10</sup> Taylor’s “revision” is clearly and specifically identified as the work of James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*.<sup>11</sup> The period since that publication Taylor calls “the post-revision period” which is, he suggests, the period we are experiencing now.



The treatment periods of the historiography of the New Zealand Wars according to Richard Taylor

Taylor’s terms are broadly applicable to the First Taranaki War, but can only be regarded as too generalised. When examining the historiography of the First Taranaki War in detail there are actually seven observable periods, or more accurately, six periods and an “event”.



The treatment periods of the historiography of the First Taranaki War according to the author

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Richard *British logistics in the New Zealand wars, 1845-66: a thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*, Richard J. Taylor, 2004 p.2-10

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, Richard *New Zealand Wars lecture, Massey University, 2009*

<sup>9</sup> Cowan, James. *The New Zealand Wars A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period Vol 1 & 2*, Wellington, W.A.G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1922

<sup>10</sup> Cowan, James, *Hero Stories of New Zealand*, Wellington, N.Z., Harry H. Tombs, 1935

<sup>11</sup> Belich, James, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, N.Z., Penguin, 1998

<sup>12</sup> Full size graphic attached in Appendix A

<sup>13</sup> Full size graphic attached in Appendix A

These periods are:

- Participants' Histories
- Post-war Traditional Period
- War and Depression Re-visitation Period
- The rise of Post-colonialism
- The Revision Event
- Reaction to the Revision
- Post-Revision Period

The first of these is the period of “participants histories”, the diaries, letters and particularly the brief, yet detailed accounts of those taking part, and published within one or two years of the events up until around 1880. These can be regarded as primary sources, particularly when employed in conjunction with such things as official records, newspaper accounts and physical evidence like the ground.<sup>14</sup> These are not notable for their unity of message and contain a multitude of conflicting opinions and assertions. Militia accounts such as those of William Grayling argue the incompetence of the regular army, while Lt Colonel Robert Carey was exceedingly critical of the settlers and their lack of ability to gather intelligence.<sup>15</sup> Carey also argues convincingly and with great authority, although incorrectly with the reasons he states, that Pratt’s sapping operation was the single most effective activity for “having, in all probability, brought the war to an end”.<sup>16</sup>

What is severely lacking at this time is any significant Maori account, particularly written by Maori. There exist many minor sources and second hand accounts such as McDonnell’s work on New Zealand history, but little by way of substantial works and the Eurocentric view substantially has a free hand.<sup>17</sup> Even so, enough division of interpretation exists within those Eurocentric accounts. Octavius Hadfield, for example, greatly exemplifies the position of a liberal humanitarian movement with the publication of three letters of pamphlet length, *One of England's little wars* (1860), *The New Zealand war: the second year of one of England's little wars* (1861) and *A sequel to 'One of England's little wars'* (1861), all highly critical of the government actions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Ground” is frequently the first question dealt with military history as it is regarded as being one of the elements that impacts on the direction and outcome of a battle.

<sup>15</sup> Grayling, William Irwin, *The war in Taranaki, during the years 1860–61*, New Plymouth, N.Z., C.W. Woon, Herald Office, 1862

<sup>16</sup> Carey, Robert, Lt Col., *Narrative of the late war in New Zealand*, London, Spotsworth and Co., 1863 p.48

<sup>17</sup> McDonnell, Thomas, Lieutenant Colonel, *Maori History: A Native account of the Pakeha-Maori Wars in New Zealand*, Christchurch, Kiwi Publishers, 1997 (Originally published by H. Brett Publishers, Shortland Street.)

<sup>18</sup> Hadfield, Octavius, *A sequel to one of England's little wars*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1861, Hadfield, Octavius, *One of England's little wars*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1860



*The conflicting positions of the Europeans demonstrated in Taranaki Punch 21 November 1860.<sup>19</sup>*

What is worth observing from this period, is that although very clear disagreements existed they were not polarising to a wider audience. It was evidently accepted that differing opinions existed within particular groups and these differences seemed to confine themselves to politely penned letters to the editor. The actual combatants generally left the hostility behind and got on with their lives freely mixing with each other within a few years.

What is important in understanding this material is an awareness of who is producing a source, who is it being produced for and why. With an understanding of the context of the source, we are then able to employ it appropriately in relation to the other works. Collectively they will build up a picture of events and what people thought about those events. The Reverend Thomas Gilbert's account, *New Zealand Settlers and Soldiers or The War in Taranaki, being Incidents in the Life of a Settler* (1861), is an excellent example of this. Gilbert wrote a highly personal account of his own experiences as being one of those, who the militia and a company of the 65<sup>th</sup> regiment were sent to collect resulting in the clash at Waireka. Although technically present he actually saw almost nothing of the fight itself. But his observations, viewed in relation to the official accounts commonly used, gives us a good degree of corroboration. At the same time Gilbert freely indulges in repeating rumour and speculation which, while not actually evidence of what was happening, was evidence for the degree of misinformation at the time. Gilbert himself makes this point.<sup>20</sup> At this point it was also too soon after the events to be able to observe any outcomes which at least presents with an account uncoloured by elapsed time.

The accounts of soldiers exist in two distinct types, those of senior officers who address issues at a strategic level and the accounts of ordinary soldiers who provide accounts of their own experiences. Both are exceedingly useful in providing broad strategic level information

<sup>19</sup> New Zealand History Online, *Missionary Protection of Maori Cartoon*  
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/missionary-protection-maori-cartoon>

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, Thomas, Rev., *New Zealand settlers and soldiers, or, The war in Taranaki: being incidents in the life of a settler*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi Publishers, 1999

and the finer details respectively. Senior officers like Robert Cary and James Alexander can provide us insights into how the war was being run and what the commanders were thinking. Carey for example expresses more contempt for the settlers than he does the Maori. Sergeant Majoram's diary, published after his death by his comrade, William White, gives us first-hand accounts of the actions and details of conditions in New Plymouth. These are of course perspective based accounts, and must be treated as such.

William Grayling was a militiaman and also wrote for *the Taranaki Herald* and as such, gave us the first published account of the Battle at Waireka. His work is sufficiently detailed enough to greatly aid in reconstructing events with specifics like orders of march and specific timings.<sup>21</sup> But at the same time Grayling presents us with an insight into the attitudes of the settlers at this time in the war.

It strikes me that to-day's work will not be without its effect upon the natives, as it must have convinced them that the British settler is both capable and willing to protect his rights and property, and will tend to show them that it has not been from fear but mercy alone that has presented us from chastising them before.<sup>22</sup>

Grayling's assertion was at best wildly optimistic, but also a commonly held paternalistic view amongst the settlers, which was that they had some degree of natural superiority over the Maori.

Sir William Fox produced an account of the wars that is exceedingly useful in understanding the mind-set of those who were in power. The most notable feature of Fox's work is its Eurocentric based assumptions of superiority. It employs the Anglicised names for the Maori participants where the Maori and others would use the Maori version of those names. While many, such as Wirimu Kingi, had taken on these names, they had maintained the Maori pronunciation. Fox went as far as to arbitrarily apply the Anglicising to others such as Teira whom he names "Taylor".<sup>23</sup> This sort of source would eventually date itself and they tend to be overlooked for anything beyond the basic information.

One type of work that is not immediately apparent is exemplified by B. Wells' *The History of Taranaki*.<sup>24</sup> This work has the appearance of being a well-researched and detailed with extensive quoting. However, in keeping with the style of the day it does not fully quote sources except for the purposes of borrowing authority from those sources. Entire passages from the work are taken from other sources such as the *Taranaki Herald*. Consequently this work adds very little to the sources other than being a concentration of selected sources. It

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<sup>21</sup> Grayling, William, *Taranaki Herald*, 31 March, 1860, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=TH18600331&e=-----10--1----0> Accessed 15/07/2011

<sup>22</sup> Grayling, *Taranaki Herald*, 31 March, 1860

<sup>23</sup> Fox, Sir William, *The War in New Zealand*, London, Smith, Elder, 1866, Christchurch, Capper Press, 1973 p.34,36

<sup>24</sup> Wells, B., *The history of Taranaki: A standard work on the history of the province*, Christchurch, Kiwi Publishers, 1998

also removes these sources from their context and produces them selectively which can weaken those sources. Where possible it is better to locate the source within its context. The Taranaki Herald for example will contain a substantial degree of contextual information when viewed as a complete edition than a selected extract.

As can be seen there exist a wide range of written sources produced either during, or immediately after the war. They are coloured by their own perspectives but remain useful in providing us with first hand perspectives. They are not coloured by the passage of time or subsequent events. They hold the power of having been produced by those who were there, and were dominant for several decades before the war was reviewed with new eyes. Even then, the existing perspectives would be substantially preserved and repeated, but with a new focus. Prior to that time though, very little attention at all was written about the First Taranaki War.

The initial period of participants' accounts was followed by protracted period of post war acceptance of those existing accounts, during which there was little, if any, significant pressure to revisit the existing interpretations. Indeed there existed very little drive for any writer or historian to attempt an evaluation of the works of people still living. The work that was carried out sought to revise, or as the writers saw it, correct, the errors of the first accounts and interpretations. There already existed a perspective based division in interpretations at this time. The event based accounts gave little attention to causes and impacts beyond the immediate end of the war, while the social, political and humanitarian accounts gave little attention to the events. These accounts existed as unrelated viewpoints of the war that were not widely read outside their immediate disciplines or other interested parties. Most significantly, any existing inequities resulting from the war still had the potential of redress. The causation accounts of the humanitarians sought, most strongly, to point out the failings of government and highlight the injustice suffered by Maori. There was no immediate audience for a reinterpretation, only to "correct" the errors of others.

One notable departure from the accepted event based accounts was produced in this period being Morgan Grace's *Sketch of the New Zealand Wars* (1899).<sup>25</sup> Graces' work was weak, factually challenged and is illustrative of little more than his prejudice. As Grace notes he regarded the British as "bumbling asses" while the Maori were "fine fellows".<sup>26</sup> However, Grace's work was the first challenge to the accepted version of events of the Battle of Waireka and the actions of William Odgers. It was Grace who first asserted in written form that Kaipopo Pa had been empty when Cracroft's party had stormed the position. Graces' work was produced some thirty years after the events and employed no sources other than his memory of conversations with unnamed members of the 65<sup>th</sup> regiment. These conversations took place some months after the event in an environment in which the 65<sup>th</sup> had been

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<sup>25</sup> Grace, Morgan S., *A sketch of the New Zealand War*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi, 1899

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, Preface

substantially criticised in the Taranaki media for its early withdrawal from the fight at Waireka.<sup>27</sup>

His work was intended, as noted above, to show “what blundering asses we were, and what fine fellows the Maori.”<sup>28</sup> His account spared no effort in seeking to rehabilitate the reputation of the 65<sup>th</sup>. The account stands alone and apart from the previous accounts and is highly questionable. Beyond being an example of attitudes, it is almost useless as a “source”. During this period it was virtually the only attention the war was given. It is also worth observing that Grace’s work was produced at the concurrently with raising tensions between Britain and the Boer which would lead to a second war in South Africa.<sup>29</sup> The New Zealand public was once again turning its attention of the issue of being involved in war, and at the same time becoming aware as the end of the century approaches that it had a brief, but dramatic history. At the very least Grace would have had an audience for his work, although much of it would be hostile to his message.

The only other works of this period were brief, audience specific works, such as W.J. Penn’s *The Taranaki Rifle Volunteers: A Corps with a History*. The work is certainly useful as a collection of documents, but these can all be located elsewhere. The book is aimed at members and family of the unit itself and assumes a more detailed knowledge of the actions it undertook. Notably the units’ colours have two honours, Waireka and South Africa. The battle of Waireka is made much of, and substantially detailed as a large portion at the beginning of the book. Likewise, Mahoetahi is given substantial attention also having a map of the action included. Reference to the defeat at Puketakauere takes three short sentences and is followed with: “The volunteer rifles not being engaged in the affair, no further reference is here necessary”.<sup>30</sup> It is nothing if not a text book example of the traditional narrative.

The period of World Wars Re-visitation begins in 1914 and lasts until some years after 1945, when the impact of two world wars and a depression called on the attention of New Zealanders in an uncompromising and inflexible manner. The First World War saw an appalling loss of life and it was said that in New Zealand, everyone lost somebody.<sup>31</sup> Hard on the heels of the war an influenza epidemic killed even more people. A few short years later the world was plunged into a depression which presented people with the problems of simply staying alive that issues of the long past wars were not considered to be of any great

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<sup>27</sup> Grace, p.31

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, Preface

<sup>29</sup> The 2nd South African War 1899-1902 involved several New Zealand contingents

<sup>30</sup> Penn, W.J., *The Taranaki Rifle Volunteers: a corps with a history, being a chronicle of the formation and achievements of the first British volunteer corps to become engaged with an enemy in the field, from 1859 to 1909 / compiled from the Taranaki Herald, official records, and other sources*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi Publishers, 2005 (Originally published New Plymouth, N.Z., Thomas Avery, 1909) p.27

<sup>31</sup> New Zealand forces suffered over 58,002 casualties from 103,000 men deployed during the war. New Zealand History Online, *First World War casualties by month*, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/first-world-war-casualties-month> Accessed 28/04/2013

significance or importance. The Second World War brought many social changes in New Zealand. With over 70,000 men serving overseas New Zealand experienced an influx of up to 45,000 US servicemen who brought with them new issues to focus on.<sup>32</sup> These huge events impacted on the historiography by creating an audience that would be open to a retelling of the old war, but in a specific way while being closed to some aspects.

The immediacy and personal impact of two world wars and a depression supplanted considerations of the past and replaced them with those current events. This resulted in there being an absence of a “sense of history” which Cowan would seek to address with his work between the wars.<sup>33</sup> But at the same time as creating the opportunity for Cowan, the bloody First World War would define what that audience would want to read. The great tragedy of the First World War for New Zealand history was that it almost took over the historical consciousness of New Zealand and shunted aside the now dated events of over half a century before, but at the same time it presented an opportunity in a hunger for heroes.

While that audience was open to the tragedy and heroism of the early New Zealand conflict it was to a substantial degree closed, possibly even hostile, to the injustices that the colonial wars had been born from and then led to. The rhetoric of the day was one of racial unity with Maori fighting in both mixed and essentially Maori units in both wars.<sup>34</sup> During the entire period, if hero stories were sought, then Cowan was prepared to employ the demand and at the same time, fill the void in the nation’s sense of history. He did this with his two volumes covering the wars, being *The New Zealand Wars and the Pioneering Period* (1922) and his *Hero Stories of New Zealand* (1935). It is worth noting that Cowan produced his works at times of significant national trial with *The New Zealand Wars* being soon after the end of for the First World War and *Hero Stories* being published towards then end of the great depression of the 1930’s. He noted in the latter work that New Zealand had a great lack of knowledge of its own history and detailed and introduction to one book that said New Zealand possessed no frontier or frontier heroes.<sup>35</sup>

A.J. Harrop’s *England and the Maori Wars* (1937) which followed Cowan’s work, was certainly a traditional work that was both exceedingly academic and Eurocentric in its presentation. Harrop’s work is strongly based on Colonial and War Office documents augmented by Cowan.<sup>36</sup> Harrop, like Cowan, was seeking to fill a gap in historical knowledge, but his work was, he claims, “absolved” from undertaking research outside of documents available in Britain by Cowan’s work.<sup>37</sup> The work was intended to provide a better understanding of tensions between the two races, and is dedicated to The Minister of Native Affairs (Michael Joseph Savage) and the “future of the Maori Race”. Beyond adding

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<sup>32</sup> New Zealand History Online, US forces in New Zealand, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/us-forces-in-new-zealand>, Accessed 29/04/2013

<sup>33</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*

<sup>34</sup> Pugsley, Christopher, *Te Hokowhiti A Tu : The Maori Pioneer Battalion in the First World War*, Auckland, Reed Books, 1995

<sup>35</sup> Cowan, *Hero Stories*, p.viii

<sup>36</sup> Harrop, A. J., *England and the Maori Wars*, London, England, New Zealand News, 1937 p.7

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p.19

to the perspective of the war from the point of view of the Colonial and War offices, the work is representation of Cowan. The account of Waireka repeats elements of Craycroft's report as being the entire engagement quoting four wounded sailors and sixteen dead Maori. Its greatest weakness is its readability. Outside an academic environment it is dry and not particularly engaging.

Other works produced early in this period were very much the product of a people who frequently held, and expressed views that are cringingly uncomfortable to the modern reader. Shrimpton and Mulgan's work, *Maori and pakeha: a history of New Zealand* (1926), displays a self-assured Eurocentric attitudes which colour so many of the accounts.

It was twenty years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, in which a savage race acknowledged the "sovereignty" of one highly civilised, and in the interval, relations between the races had in important respects deteriorated.<sup>38</sup>

These accounts are a reworking of a traditional narrative in which the writers assume the wars were an unfortunate by-product of the arrival of the settlers. These settlers possessed a superior ability to produce food and it was both obvious and inevitable that they would control the land.

Issues such the obvious illegality of the sale of the Waitara were seldom the subject of such works. Notably however, Cowan was certainly not oblivious to these aspects and it could even be argued that as a bilingual journalist who grew up in a home built on confiscated land and amongst dispossessed Maori he was more aware than most others.<sup>39</sup> Towards the end of his life Cowan would attempt to produce a work more in keeping with the more negative aspects of the war, but illness and simple unwillingness by others to listen would prevent it happening. *Settlers and pioneers* (1940) was written to be published as a series by the National Centennial Historical Committee for the celebrations in 1940, and it had a chapter about the New Zealand Wars "vetoed because it was too 'outspoken' and 'inappropriate to an official Government publication'".<sup>40</sup> At the time Cowan wrote on the New Zealand Wars his audience expected, and were given, a positive treatment of that history. The narrative free of guilt and blame and it would take an entirely different audience in which to present the wars in a new light.

W. Dowdie Stewart vigorously, and even persuasively, challenged the existing perceptions of the Waitara purchases legality in *Mr. Justice Richmond and the Taranaki War of 1860: A great judge vindicated*, (1945).<sup>41</sup> This was a significant departure from the histories produced

<sup>38</sup> Shrimpton, A.W. and Mulgan, Alan E., *Maori and pakeha; a history of New Zealand*, Christchurch, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1930 p.200

<sup>39</sup> Te Ara biography, *James Cowan*, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c36/cowan-james> Accessed 23/07/2012  
<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c36/cowan-james>

<sup>40</sup> Te Ara biography, *James Cowan*

<sup>41</sup> Stewart, W. Downie, *Mr. Justice Richmond and the Taranaki War of 1860: A great judge vindicated*, Wellington, N.Z., A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1947

at the time, which almost universally placed blame and culpability on Governor Thomas Gore Brown for the First Taranaki War. Most notable was his addressing the question of land sales requiring the approval of the “paramount chief” which is Stewart considers to be key to the question of culpability for the beginning of the war and Stewart raised doubts over the universality of the requirement for a senior chief’s approval<sup>42</sup>.

Towards the later end of this period there was a distinct move towards highlighting and examining the issues of the wars with a more inclusive treatment. Aspects such as the causes and on-going social impacts became the focus of significant works while the actual events were little more than a frame work for the narrative. Keith Sinclair produced his work *The Origins of the Maori Wars* (1957) and a *History of New Zealand* (1959). These works speak directly to the issues of cause and impact of the wars. Like Cowan, Sinclair wrote with the deliberate intention of filling a hole in collective consciousness of the New Zealand public and without fear or favour.

Many newspapers became violent towards the Maoris. Sensational journalism, as exemplified in a "Blood for Blood" article in the *Examiner*, was not yet 'popular', in the sense of being bestselling, because so many could not read. But, though 'thinking men' regarded that paper with disgust, it adequately represented the views of the majority of Europeans.<sup>43</sup>

His first work was widely hailed, in many ways reflecting the readiness of the existing audience for a new perspective. Although Sinclair’s work was by no means a radical revelation of a new narrative, it was certainly a significantly less one sided than previous works and produced with a high level of academic quality. However, it was focused more on the causes of the war than with the events of the war.

Edgar Holts work, *The Strangest War* (1962) is almost a fitting end to the period, as in spite of being a readable and compact outline of the history of the period, it does little more than rework existing narratives and represent them. Holt has made an attempt to cram a great deal of information into a reasonably short work of 263 pages by covering from Hobson to the campaign against Te Kooti.<sup>44</sup> The most notable aspect of Holt’s work is that it is not an academic work, but rather a readable presentation of the traditional narrative. Evidently there is always an audience for the simply presented narrative that is focused on an academic contribution as its primary goal.

A substantial degree of the neglect being experienced in the event based histories is a result of New Zealand “military history” largely not addressing the wars. Of course, there is naturally a question as to what actually is “military history” and where does it fit into this examination. Military history obviously deals with war and related matters frequently it is the

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<sup>42</sup> Stewart, p.19

<sup>43</sup> Sinclair, Keith, *The Origins of the Maori Wars*, Wellington, N.Z., New Zealand University Press, 1957 p.207

<sup>44</sup> Holt, Edgar, *The Strangest War*, London, Putnam, 1962

province of former army officers, and in reality a quite recent participant in the discussion. Military history can be viewed as a specialty discipline with its own language and particular way of doing things. It is also a comparatively small number of historians who have a substantial amount of work to address. It is actually the non-participation of the military history in the discussion about the First Taranaki War that has contributed the greatest impact to the existing situation. While Cowan contributed a work that will concur with many military historians' interpretation, it was still weak in its interpretations of the military aspects it was examining. The reasons for military historians not giving any substantial attention to the early wars are virtually the same as those of the general readership.

The impact of the First World War on the New Zealand public interest was sufficient to both distract interest from the "old wars", and to create a new and immediately accessible crop of hero stories. It could be argued that New Zealand's awareness of its own military history began on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1914. Every ANZAC Day<sup>45</sup> New Zealanders parade to remember the fallen and sacrifice demanded by war, but it will occur to few, if any, to include those who fought and fell within the country.<sup>46</sup> As noted Cowan sought to address this lack of a sense of history and to do so well, but he lacked the credibility of being a "modern historian". With his two works Cowan employed journalist skill with great effect, interviewing the participants and even walking the battlefields with them. He sought out detail and explanations where he could, such as the death of a British officer at Puketakauere.<sup>47</sup> In this he displayed a great deal of investigative skill. More importantly he told the events as a story, a good yarn might be a good description. He presented the history in a form palatable to the existing audience. However his language would date his work and to the modern audience seems is sometimes viewed as a naive and biased colonialist approach which can weaken his contribution.

Effectively, Cowan existed as the military history of the New Zealand Wars and no attempt was made to replace his work until military history drove the creation of modern military historians, at the same time creating immediate and extensive work for those historians. Beginning with the First World War, which has yet to be fully addressed, a massive volume of work existed that demanded attention.<sup>48</sup> Since that time the simple number of military operations has seen the current workload explode. For a small nation New Zealand has played a part in many conflicts as well as non-combat roles.

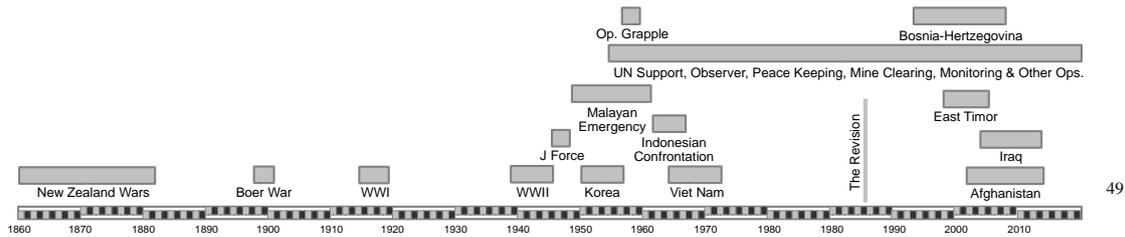
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<sup>45</sup> ANZAC is an acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps which was formed for operations in the Gallipoli campaign..

<sup>46</sup> ANZAC Day (25<sup>th</sup> April) is New Zealand and Australia's national day of commemoration for those who have died in war and the date is from the first ANZAC Day, being the landings at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1914.

<sup>47</sup> Cowan, *Hero Stories*, p.58-61

<sup>48</sup> The *Centennial Project* is currently seeking to produce a multi-volume definitive work on New Zealand's Part in the First World War.



A sample of New Zealand Military History topics

It is immediately apparent that military history is a substantial topic to be tackled by a comparatively small number of historians. Within this group many will specialise in a particular area, or single war, as their primary interest. Given the high number of former army officers who have moved into the field it is also natural that many do so from an interest in applying what can be learned from past conflicts in order to apply the lessons to future conflicts. This can lead to a stronger focus on more recent conflicts that have direct parallels with current and anticipated situations. While there remained a degree of interest it was fairly minimal, and in the absence of any drive to address questions that had already been answered, the First Taranaki War remained little more the nostalgic curiosity. This state of lethargic indifference would continue until a significant event in the historiography of the First Taranaki War which will be detailed below.

Post-colonialism, on the other hand, is a school that reviews past narratives with an assumption that an “outsider” can’t accurately describe the actions, thoughts or context of a “native peoples”. Consequently the existing narratives of colonial nations were demonstrably incorrect. A substantial degree of this school was born out of the growing number of nations that regained their independence from a colonial power. India and creation of Pakistan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Singapore, Burma, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, Cyprus, Zimbabwe and others, all experienced radical changes in who would be in control of those nations. Many of them also experienced serious conflict and even wars as part of their birth process. New Zealand had already experienced it’s bloody birth, but had yet to revisit that experience with these new eyes and actually understand it. Obviously the entire British Empire was ripe for post-colonial revision

The post-colonial phase for the First Taranaki War is difficult to definitively date beyond some time during the 1960’s, but can be seen as part of a global phenomenon and one during which the separation of the approaches to treatment of the First Taranaki War were developed. The most powerful and significant being Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).<sup>50</sup> Seen in this light, the growing focus on the causes and social impacts of the First Taranaki War in works such as Holts *The Strangest War* (1962), have the context of being part of a wider awareness that the traditional narrative was incomplete.<sup>51</sup> There was clearly awareness of the social and political issues not having been adequately addressed and in 1964 the New

<sup>49</sup> Full size graphic is attached in Appendix A

<sup>50</sup> Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2003

<sup>51</sup> Holt, Edgar, *The Strangest War*, London, Putnam, 1962

Zealand born, Cambridge educated, J.E. Gorst published *The Maori King; or, The Story of Our Quarrel with the Natives of New Zealand* (1908).<sup>52</sup> The work was entirely focused on the cause and effects of the war and asserts that to get a complete picture it is essential to consult Maori describing this point as being one of his chief objectives.<sup>53</sup> Though his view is notably still somewhat colonial with his description of Wirimu Kingi being that Kingi was “simply a grey haired savage, of a course and blood thirsty disposition”.<sup>54</sup>

During the progression of the period, there was a discernible movement in the tone of works. Alan Ward’s *A Show of Justice* (1973) was Ward’s PhD thesis and the result of controversy over *The Hunn Report*, which had examined the social situation of Maori regarding the question of integration.<sup>55</sup> Ward’s work examined the question encompassing the values and attitudes of both Maori and pakeha in what could be viewed as an entirely new direction in race relations. Ward became an expert on the Waitangi Tribunal and wrote *An Unsettled History: Treaty Claims in New Zealand*, publishing it in 1999. These works are characterised by the attribution of responsibility for the war rather than with the events of the war. It is at this time that a separation of interpretation of the First Taranaki War begins. What would come to characterise this period was the direct challenging of accepted “colonial views”. Where authors such as Sinclair and Ward had already been producing works of this type, it was during this period that a more socially aware audience began reading these works in significant numbers. The very first issue *The New Zealand Journal of History* in 1967 carried Alan Ward’s article *The Origins of the Anglo-Maori Wars: A Re-consideration*.<sup>56,57</sup>

In the same year Dalton publish his *War and Politics in New Zealand* (1967), which focused, obviously, on the politics rather than the events, the events war becoming almost irrelevant in the discussion at this stage.<sup>58</sup> During this period a considerable degree of effort went into viewing the wars from a perspective which had been neglected, that perspective being a Maori perspective. This perspective had a focus on the impact of the wars and subsequent land confiscations on Maori. Where narratives had already covered these questions, they were significantly Eurocentric in their perspectives. *War and Politics* was produced with an evident understanding of a new audience and Dalton’s detailed work is significantly more even handed than previous works. Dalton describes events, but does not offer value judgements or assign motivations without evidence.<sup>59</sup> Yet he maintains the traditional narrative in describing Mahoetahi as “the first real success in over seven months”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gorst, John Eldon, Sir, *The Maori King; or, The Story of Our Quarrel with the Natives of New Zealand*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi, 1999

<sup>53</sup> *ibid* p.408

<sup>54</sup> *ibid* p.137

<sup>55</sup> Ward, Alan, *A show of justice: racial 'amalgamation' in nineteenth century New Zealand*, Auckland, N.Z., Auckland University Press, 1995 p.vii

<sup>56</sup> *The New Zealand Journal of History* was founded by Keith Sinclair and was noted for its sympathetic treatment of Maori issues.

<sup>57</sup> *New Zealand Journal of History, Issue 1 Vol. 1*, Auckland, Department of History, University of Auckland, 1967

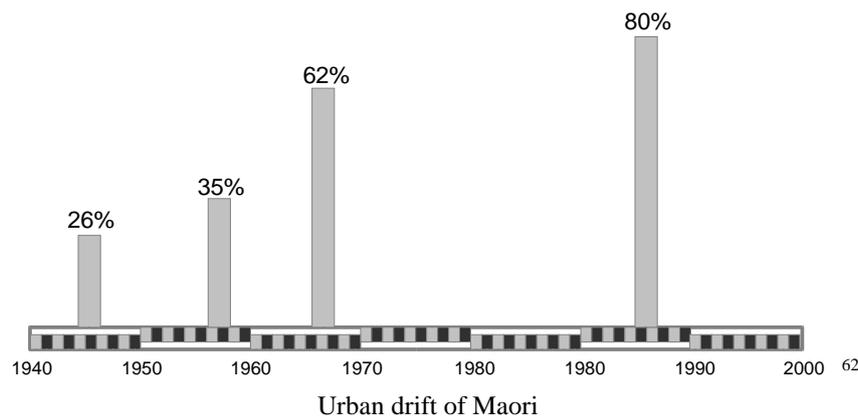
<sup>58</sup> Dalton Brian James, *War and politics in New Zealand*, Sydney, N.S.W., Sydney University Press, 1967

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.123

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p.122

The historiography of the First Taranaki Wars had not developed as an insulated phenomenon and was subject to a number of influences. In conjunction with the global move towards a revising of existing histories, the war historiography was subjected to substantial need for review and reinterpretation by social pressures and even government policy. This was compounded by an ever changing public perception of historical events. In particular, what has been described as a “Maori Renaissance”. As the driving force behind changing attitudes the Maori Renaissance is an on-going phenomenon which encompasses deliberate and coincidental elements. By the end of the New Zealand Wars period many people had believed that the Maori race was dying out as a distinct and separate people. In 1903 MP William Herries had said in Parliament that he looked forward to 100 years in the future when “we shall have no Maoris at all but a white race with a dash of the finest coloured race in the world”.<sup>61</sup> This is typically backhanded compliment which would have patronisingly been viewed as a form of respect, but to the current perspective is pure arrogance. In reality Maori would be prove to be exceedingly resilient as a people.

In reality the Maori were largely out sight and out of mind with around 85% living in rural areas, after the Second World War this changed with an urban drift of Maori seeking paid employment in the cities.



The growing proximity of Maori led to issues of race inequality and race relations were forced into the public arena. In 1960 the question of Maori being excluded from a rugby tour in South Africa, with its apartheid laws, had become a public debate. The recent Maori contribution in the Second World made it difficult to justify acquiescing to South African apartheid laws for many people, and former Brigadier Howard Kippenberger spoke in favour of Maori inclusion in any representative side. For Kippenberger if Maori were good enough to fight for New Zealand, they’ were good enough to play rugby for New Zealand.<sup>63</sup> But for many others rugby was more important than equality and the tensions remained. In fact the tensions would be greatly increased.

<sup>61</sup> King, Michael, *The Penguin history of New Zealand*. Auckland: Penguin, 2004, p. 441

<sup>62</sup> Te Ara, *Maori and Pakeha Relations*. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/maori-pakeha-relations/page-5> Accessed 14/08/2012

<sup>63</sup> Harper, Glyn, *Kippenberger: an inspired New Zealand commander*, Auckland, N.Z., HarperCollins, 2005 p.274

The Maori Affairs Amendment Act of 1967 was assumed by some to be the beginning of another land grab by whites, and the act was seen as the catalyst for a “Maori protest movement”.<sup>64</sup> In reality there was simply very little protest at all until this time. This new spur to protest also contained aspects of a more global civil rights movement and much of its support in New Zealand came from those more interested in the issues of racial equality in other countries than land and sovereignty issues in New Zealand. HART (Halt All Racist Tours) for example, was a driving force in protest that encompassed Maori issues, but it was white dominated and employed Maori issues for its own objectives as much as Maori protesters used HART as its own protest vehicle. The times were changing and not in a regulated, controlled or predictable manner.

There are times in every society's history that come to be recognized as great turning points. Often these periods are not recognized as such at the time, but only later with the advantage of hindsight. Looking back from the late 1980s over the major changes that have occurred in the 1980s in New Zealand's race relations, the late 1970's was probably such a time.<sup>65</sup>

The establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal by the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 can be seen as an acknowledgement of the importance of the outstanding grievances which had been a long time coming.<sup>66</sup> The issues of the wars had not been entirely settled as most (non-Maori) New Zealanders assumed. But the Waitangi Tribunal only began to provide the mechanisms for resolutions, and the resolutions themselves were still slow in coming. The status quo was altering too slowly for some factions within Maori and it could be argued that radicalism was needed to give impetus to Maori issues. Two events illustrate this well, the Bastion Point “eviction” and the “haka party incident”. In 1978 the Bastion Point occupation ended by force as noted in the preface. This was the result of a change in approach by Maori where one faction or largely younger people had chosen direct action over waiting for the on-going negotiations to be resolved. In retrospect they were entirely vindicated as the evidence strongly suggests more negotiation would have led to more of the remaining land being subdivided before any resolution was achieved.<sup>67</sup> The occupation certainly prevented the land being illegally taken and raised the issue in the minds of all New Zealanders.

Ward's *A Show of Justice* (1973), provides substantial detail in relation to political machinations going on amongst both Maori and the government, and while this adds substantially to a good understanding, it actually gives almost no attention to events of the war. In fact Ward's work is sufficiently significant and authoritative to have been reprinted

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<sup>64</sup> Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, *Maori Land Rights*, <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/SliceofHeaven/Exhibition/Maori/Pages/Landrights.aspx>, Accessed 21/05/2012

<sup>65</sup> Paul D'Aacy *University of Hawaii at Manoa* Book review

<sup>66</sup> Sinclair noted that two consecutive governments, Labour in 1975 and National in 1985, had acknowledged that the crown had violated the principles of the treaty and he regarded this as a landmark change.

<sup>67</sup> Muldoon government intentions towards Bastion Point was to proceed with the subdivision of the area.

several times.<sup>68</sup> Obviously this work had, and still has a substantial audience arguing there is a desire for such social history relating to the wars. One of Ward's few references to events of the war does attribute the negotiated end of the war to the intervention of Wirimu Tamihana.<sup>69</sup> Although Ward does note that the end of the war effectively freed up troops for the invasion of the Waikato which would follow the First Taranaki War. The focus of Ward's work was the issues that led to the clashes and its results. For Taranaki, it was Ward's judgement that the war was the result of a play by Browne to alter the terms of land sales. It was, according to Ward, Browne's intention to bypass the requirement of approval from any senior chief and Browne was surprised to have failed.<sup>70</sup> Ward's work is certainly a helpful contribution to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the war.

Tom Gibson's *The Maori Wars* (1974), expresses a great deal of admiration for the European soldiers and his narrative is almost a story book repetition of Cowan. In the battle of Waireka he refers to William Odgers as "Bill Odgers", suggesting a familiarity that did not exist and borrowing authority he did not possess.<sup>71</sup> For Gibson there is no reason to question the existing narrative and he describes the capture of Kaipopo Pa as a "brisk little victory".<sup>72</sup> Gibson's account is only sparsely footnoted and is somewhat scant in its academic quality as although highly detailed, it is dotted with a number of questionable assertions not supported with evidence. His claim that Maori had invented fire trenches before the American civil war, for example, is exceedingly questionable and also inserted in a narrative taking place concurrent with the civil war at a time where no one outside of New Zealand or London paid very much attention to the war in New Zealand.<sup>73</sup>

The revision that followed the post-colonial phase is not a "period", but rather a singular stand-alone event in 1986 that would both highlight the existing divisions of the event driven military narrative and the judgment based social history. The revision spurred a renewed interest in the wars. More importantly the revision has become quite strongly established as the dominant interpretation of the First Taranaki War with an appearance to some of unassailability. James Belich published his book, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial conflict* (1986), into an already divided and polarised environment. Belich's work was neither a military nor a social history; it could easily be argued that it was a military history masquerading as a social history or vice versa with equal validity. The work was perfectly timed to fill the obvious hole as, at that time, there was no existing modern military history treatment. Rather than simply revise the information an update it, Belich took the opportunity to revise the interpretations and seek new ones.<sup>74</sup> The narrative would present entirely new perspectives while frequently challenging the existing perspectives. There

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<sup>68</sup> Ward, *A Show of Justice* reprinted 1978, 1983, 1995

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p.123

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p.114

<sup>71</sup> Gibson, Tom, *The Maori wars: the British army in New Zealand, 1840-1872*, Wellington, Reed, 1974 p.79

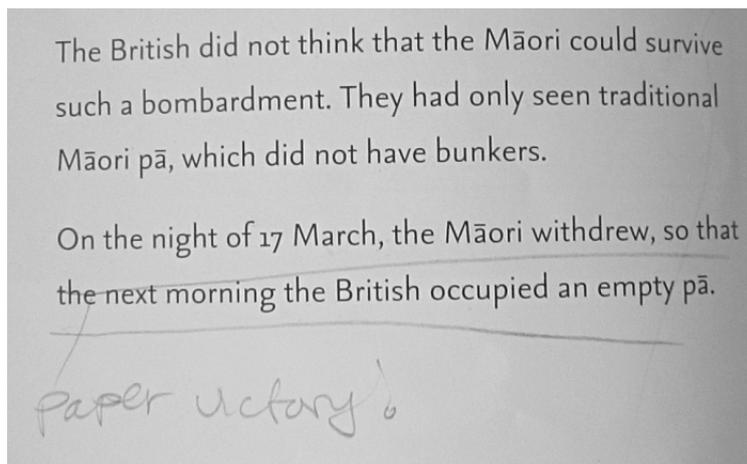
<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, p.80

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p.80

<sup>74</sup> Belich, p.15-25

existed an audience ready for a modern military history because an absence of one and a post-colonial audience because of current social norms.

While adopting the language of a military historian and in spite of the title of his work, Belich avoided the jargon of the post-colonialist historians, which makes their works frequently elitist and impossible for the uninitiated to understand.<sup>75</sup> However, regardless of the language he employed to make his work accessible, Belich's intention was openly to "find a new version of events" and he was exceedingly successful gaining long lasting recognition.<sup>76</sup> The work is clearly a watershed in the historiography of the First Taranaki War and the New Zealand Wars as a whole. Widely acclaimed, widely read and widely accepted as will be demonstrated below. The work stands apart from previous efforts and would become regarded by many as "definitive".<sup>77</sup> Thematically Belich presents that Maori were exceedingly able at warfare, even inventing a new kind of warfare, and that the "full force" of British military might was brought to bear on the Maori and failed to defeat them through consistent ineptitude and a failure to learn. The British then claimed victory where none existed by rewriting history. A technique which has virtually become a feature phrase of modern scholastic perception's, "a paper victory".<sup>78</sup>



In Ross Calman's *The New Zealand Wars*, someone, presumably a student has extensively marked the book excitedly noting here "paper victory" and may well find its way into an essay as such.. The work should be noted as highly illustrated 44 page retelling of the entire New Zealand Wars. It is a children's book.<sup>79</sup>

Belich's revision gained a firm position as the dominant interpretation of events during the First Taranaki War and it is not entirely uncommon to quote Belich as a source.<sup>80</sup> Other

<sup>75</sup> The jargon of the post-colonialist historian can be convoluted and difficult to understand to the point that specific primers and dictionaries exist to aid the novice such as: Sim, Stuart, *The Routledge companion to postmodernism*, London, New York, Routledge, 2005

<sup>76</sup> Recipient of the international Trevor Reese Memorial Prize for historical scholarship, Officer of New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2006, 2011 Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement, 2011 he was appointed Beit Professor of Commonwealth and Imperial History at Oxford University

<sup>77</sup> *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* has sold over 20,000 copies

<sup>78</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>79</sup> Calman, Ross, *The New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, N.Z., Reed Publishing., 2004 p.24

historians had found Belich to be exceedingly persuasive as well. Bohan has clearly employed Belich as the source for his own account of the Battle of Waireka, which contains not one single footnote, but conforms to Belich's account in detail, with the notable, erroneous, assertion that both Odgers and Cracroft were awarded the V.C.<sup>81</sup> To make such an elementary factual error undermines the veracity of an historians work. Yet this sole miss-sourced interpretation has been employed as part of a Waitangi Tribunal Report, without reference to any of the dissenting interpretations or primary sources, Belich is quoted as the source.<sup>82</sup> Schools have books produced by the Ministry of Education as aids for the New Zealand Wars documentary with discussion of criticism of Belich so muted and biased as to be little more than dismissive acknowledgement to reinforce the validity of Belich.<sup>83</sup> Military historians do not take Belich seriously, but must address him because of existing public perceptions, while other historians are able to employ Belich as their source without being questioned. Colin Richardson who co-authored *In the Face of the Enemy* with Glyn Harper said he only addressed the questioning of the William Odgers VC because most readers would be familiar with Belich's revision of the event and would question why it was not mentioned.

There was a great deal of positive reaction to Belich and significant and respected historians have embraced Belich and the revision. These historians have undertaken works which conform to the new perspective. Consequently it is arguable that Belich has withstood peer scrutiny well. In fact since the publication of *The New Zealand Wars* there has been a veritable explosion of interest in the colonial period.<sup>84</sup> Numerous works on as many differing aspects of the war from Ray Fargher's detailed examination of Donald McLean<sup>85</sup> to the numerous works of Vincent O'Malley dealing with the issues of autonomy and land confiscations, any interested person is now able to learn in substantial detail of the existing issues.<sup>86</sup> It is worth observing that many of these works are collaborative and Richard Hill who co-authored with O'Malley also co-authored on the subject of land confiscations with Richard Boast.<sup>87</sup> Mathew Wright has added, not only to academic examination, but has

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<sup>80</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, Te Rōpu Whakamana I Te Tiriti O Waitangi, *The Taranaki Report: Kaupapa Tuatahi*, <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/reports/downloadpdf.asp?reportid={3FECC540-D049-4DE6-A7F0-C26BCCDAB345}.pdf> Accessed 15/07/2011

<sup>81</sup> Bohan, Edmund, *Climates of war: New Zealand in conflict, 1859-69*, Christchurch, N.Z., Hazard Press, 2005

<sup>82</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *The Taranaki Report*

<sup>83</sup> Hill, Sylvia, (ed), *The New Zealand wars: changing perceptions of a shared past*, Wellington, N.Z., Learning Media for the Ministry of Education, 2000

Hill, Sylvia, (ed), *The New Zealand wars: making sense of a shared past*, Wellington, N.Z., Learning Media for the Ministry of Education, 2000

<sup>84</sup> Appendix A: The Historiography of the First Taranaki War

<sup>85</sup> Fargher, Ray, *The best man who ever served the Crown?: a life of Donald McLean*, Wellington, N.Z., Victoria University Press, 2007

<sup>86</sup> O'Malley, Vincent *Agents of autonomy : Maori committees in the nineteenth century*, Wellington, N.Z., Huia, 1998 Hill, Richard S., and O'Malley, Vincent, *The Māori quest for rangatiratanga/autonomy, 1840-2000* Wellington, N.Z., Treaty of Waitangi Research Unit, Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, 2000

<sup>87</sup> Boast, Richard (ed), and Hill, Richard S. (ed), *Raupatu: the confiscation of Māori land*, Wellington, N.Z., Victoria University Press, 2009

published a young person's version of his work *Two Peoples, One Land*,<sup>88</sup> with a well-illustrated and colourful work.<sup>89</sup> Wright is a prolific military historian and his work for young people is notable for not avoiding the complexities of the issues, significantly adding value to his work. His work conforms closely with Belich's to the point where he employs the same sources in the same way to support the claim that Kaipopo Pa was empty, describing it a victory of "propaganda".<sup>90</sup>

Countering this was an immediate reaction to perceived weaknesses in Belich, particularly areas of factual accuracy and the interpretation of the sources employed to reconstruct events with a different perspective and that reaction was characterised by strong and persisting criticism. This criticism has come from those who adhere to a traditional narrative and substantially event focused. Within the discipline of military history there is a palpable anger at what is frequently seen as Belich transgressing into "their territory". The reviews of Belich's work on Amazon frequently contain the observation that Belich is not a military historian.<sup>91</sup> The argument being that if the topic is "war" then the historian must be an acknowledged "military historian", preferably a former army officer. This territorialism is without justification, given the failure of any other historian, military or other, to produce a work prior to Belich. Additionally while Belich is attacked for not being a military historian, Cowan is not vilified for the same offence, as Cowan is the father of the traditional narrative. Notably Tim Ryan and Bill Parham had published *The Colonial New Zealand Wars* (1986) at virtually the same time as Belich had published *The New Zealand Wars*.<sup>92</sup> Although an excellent work in its own right, it was revised and rereleased in 2002. The revised work repeatedly addresses *The New Zealand Wars* interpretations directly with references to "modern historians".<sup>93</sup> Belich was not being questioned, he was being attacked.

Taylor, for example, employs Belich's arguments in his lectures on the campaigns of the Land Wars to demonstrate failures in understanding of military activity. The fall of Rangiriri during the invasion of the Waikato is ascribed by Belich as a "misunderstanding" of the meaning of a white flag being flown.<sup>94</sup> Belich claims the defenders still had plenty of "ammunition". As Taylor points out this was actually gunpowder, not shot and in reality the defenders were indeed out of "ammunition".<sup>95</sup> Belich, as noted by Taylor, employs the words "strategy" and tactics" indiscriminately and interchangeably, frequently incorrectly. One of

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<sup>88</sup> Wright, Mathew, *Two peoples, one land: the New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, N.Z., Reed, 2006

<sup>89</sup> Wright, Mathew, *Fighting past each other: the New Zealand Wars 1845-1875*, Auckland N.Z., Reed, 2006

<sup>90</sup> Wright, *Two peoples, one land*, p.95

<sup>91</sup> Amazon customer review *The New Zealand Wars and The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, [http://www.amazon.com/Zealand-Victorian-Interpretation-Racial-Conflict/product-reviews/0196480558/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_see\\_all\\_summary?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1](http://www.amazon.com/Zealand-Victorian-Interpretation-Racial-Conflict/product-reviews/0196480558/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1) Accessed 02/03/2012

<sup>92</sup> Ryan, Tim, Parham, Bill, *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, Wellington, N.Z., Grantham House, 2002

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, p.42

<sup>94</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *The New Zealand Wars, Episode 3, Invasion of the Waikato*, written and presented James Belich, Auckland, N.Z., Distributed on behalf of Television New Zealand by Roadshow Entertainment, 1998

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, Richard, *New Zealand Wars lecture* Massey University, 2009

Belich's major theme is the "invention of trench warfare", which has been universally dismissed by all military historians. The eminent New Zealand military historian Christopher Pugsley has dismantled Belich's claim in detail, notably in the *New Zealand Defence Quarterly*.<sup>96</sup> It is impossible to read Pugsley's work and not be aware of Belich's failure in this aspect alone, however, the magazine published by the New Zealand Defence force is of an exceedingly limited distribution of mainly serving and retired defence personnel. Professional archaeologist Hans-Dieter Bader complained that he believes he may be the only archaeologist in the country who reads the *Defence Quarterly*, notably Bader is a former German army officer.<sup>97</sup>

Pugsley, in addition to questioning general aspects of Belich, reviewed and condemned Belich's interpretation of the First and Second Taranaki Wars in a series of articles, *Walking the Taranaki Wars*, also published in the *Defence Quarterly*.<sup>98</sup> Pugsley is possibly one of New Zealand's foremost military historians and is currently Senior Lecturer in War Studies at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting that Belich did not undertake a common practice of walking the battlefields he described, and evidently did not see them until the filming of the documentary series based on his book. The issue for many military historians can be argued as questions of interpretation. What facts "mean" is more susceptible to interpretation than the facts themselves and Belich has offered up interpretations that were very much at odds with those military historians. But more significantly the issue goes beyond simple interpretation, and questions have been raised about the integrity of the work with Taylor noting the fabrication of several sources in his review<sup>100</sup> and Maxwell goes even further, suggesting in *Frontier* that Belich deliberately misleads his readers.<sup>101</sup> It is this sort of flagrant disregard for the accepted methods and interpretations that has seen Belich virtually under siege by an entire subset of New Zealand historians. Albeit entirely ineffectively as Belich is evidently unaware of it.

Consequently the question must be addressed why have they had almost no impact whatsoever? Magazine editor and military historian Ian MacFarlane is a well-documented example of this phenomenon. In 2006 MacFarlane read *The New Zealand Wars* and was unhappy with the account of the Battle of Waireka.

As a result of my humble endeavours, I wrote to Penguin Books in Auckland in 2004 complaining about the handling of Kaipopo in *The New Zealand Wars*. In my lengthy letter, I went through all the references presented for which, it was claimed in the

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<sup>96</sup> Pugsley, Christopher, *New Zealand Defence Quarterly*, Spring, *Maori Did not invent trench warfare*, Wellington, Ministry of Defence, 1998 p.33-37

<sup>97</sup> Bader, Hans-Dieter, interview, 08/01/2013

<sup>98</sup> *New Zealand Defence Quarterly*, Issues 25 to 29, 1998 to 2000

<sup>99</sup> The University of Buckingham, *Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Pugsley*

<http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/research/humanities-research-institute/humanities-research-institute-fellows/lieutenant-colonel-christopher-pugsley/> Accessed 14/07/2012

<sup>100</sup> Amazon customer review

<sup>101</sup> Maxwell, Peter, *Frontier: the battle for the North Island of New Zealand 1860-1872*, Auckland, N.Z., Celebrity Books for Waitekauri Publishing, 2000

book, there is substantial (p. 87), decisive (p.87) and conclusive (p.333) evidence, 'but the evidence produced is in fact far from conclusive' I told Penguin. 'Most of it is, in fact, hearsay evidence. Hearsay evidence is not real 'evidence' at all, and has no legal value'.<sup>102</sup>

I found it strange that only people who had not been present at the battle were quoted in the book. I wrote, 'It is simply not good enough to rely on what somebody (who was not there) told somebody else (who also was not there). That is just gossip'. The publisher at Penguin replied, saying he would pass on my letter to Professor Belich who might respond to me. He didn't.<sup>103</sup>

MacFarlane later read the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography online and was unhappy with the biography of William Odgers enough to write to the editors and detail what he believed to be the errors it contained. The reply was;

'We take suggested changes to DNZB biographies seriously and, as I am sure you will understand, we conduct our own very thorough research before any changes are made. Now that we have your comments, this research process can begin but changes, if made, will not be in the immediate future due to the small number of staff we have currently working on the DNZB project'.<sup>104</sup>

The most recent Te Ara biography for William Odgers has been taken verbatim from the original entry but includes the final sentences;

However, it seems now that the importance of the Waireka engagement was grossly exaggerated. The pa was not heavily fortified and there were few occupants."<sup>105</sup>

MacFarlane says he was annoyed by the experience, but not obsessive about it. He also expressed the opinion that it was impossible to criticise Belich within New Zealand.<sup>106</sup> As has been demonstrated above it is not only possible to criticise Belich, it is virtually seems to be a requirement for at least one discipline. McFarlane's other observation of Belich's work was that; "There was a strange anti-British and pro-Maori undertow, which seemed out of place in a scholarly volume."<sup>107</sup> In fact the anti-British aspect was a feature of many works from the time of war as noted above. But this aspect of Belich's work plays to the element of anti-military sentiment that existed in the 1980's New Zealand and servicemen even avoided

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<sup>102</sup> McFarlane's point overlooks that frequently an historian is required to work with little more than hearsay and must provide interpretations from a small amount of conflicting information.

<sup>103</sup> *Defending Victoria, An Undeserved VC?* <http://users.netconnect.com.au/~ianmac/news.html> Accessed 26/05/2012

<sup>104</sup> *ibid*

<sup>105</sup> *Te Ara, Biography, William Odgers* [www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/103/odgers-william](http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/103/odgers-william) Accessed 23/07/2012

<sup>106</sup> Ian MacFarlane email 15/03/2012

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, 12/04/2012

traveling in uniform.<sup>108</sup> It is a minor influence, but one that frequently gets a reaction from military historians.

This leads us to the issue of the isolated nature New Zealand history which operates almost as a standalone and insular institution in relation to the New Zealand Wars. As Bader put it, New Zealanders do not seek or welcome outside input on the subject of the New Zealand Wars.<sup>109</sup> There is limited interest in the New Zealand Wars from non-New Zealand military historians, beyond being New Zealand being one of Britain's and is treated as an aspect of those wars such as being a single item in *Soldiers of the Queen*.<sup>110</sup> The actual understanding of the New Zealand Wars is exceedingly poor as demonstrated by a well-respected military historian, Donald Featherstone's war-gaming scenario with a version of events so fanciful that it should be cringe worthy for any New Zealander.<sup>111</sup> There is little international context applied to the New Zealand Wars by authors outside New Zealand. Those authors could immediately observe the marked disconnect between the effectiveness of the British soldier in numerous colonial wars, in all types of terrain, against a variety of enemies and the perceived ineffectiveness of that same force in New Zealand.<sup>112</sup> What criticism exists comes from within and is stifled by the small size of New Zealand's market and the low public profile of New Zealand's Military historians. What does attract international interest is the post-colonial discussion related to the New Zealand Wars. Raj Vasil's works *What do the Maori Want?, Biculturalism: Reconciling Aotearoa with New Zealand* (1988) and similar works exemplify this. Vasil was educated in India and his works are focused on political science and has little interest in event based history, but seizes enthusiastically on the post-colonial themes of revisionist New Zealand Wars history.

The process of the Waitangi Tribunal operates in a near judicial environment which requires an evaluation of history that answers questions, rather than ask them.<sup>113</sup> Through this process the Waitangi Tribunal almost formalises and institutionalises these divisions and creates a market for revisionist interpretation.

In the modern treaty claims process currently underway in New Zealand, judicial procedure has become the principle means of revising and revisiting the past. More particularly it has acquired the dominant status as the main method of determining the authenticity of the past (as well as the present) injustices suffered by Maori through crown breeches of the Treaty partnership.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is a matter of personal experience

<sup>109</sup> Bader, Interview, 08/01/2013

<sup>110</sup> Knight, Ian, *Marching to the Drums: from the Kabul Massacre to the Siege of Mafeking*, London, Greenhill Books, 1999

<sup>111</sup> Featherstone, Donald, *Featherstone's Complete Wargamer*, England, David & Charles, 1988

<sup>112</sup> Knight, p.13

<sup>113</sup> Byrnes, Giselle, *The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand history*, Auckland, N.Z., Oxford University Press, 2003

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, P.63

From this position of dominance and authenticity the Tribunal has employed the best available history and information to arrive at its conclusions. In the case of the First Taranaki War this was Belich. The Taranaki Report features many of Belich's interpretations, such as his conclusion that at the Battle of Waireka, not only was Kaipopo Pa empty, but Maori in fact won the battle.<sup>115</sup> Although rejected by academic evaluations such as Nigel Prickett's, the report is fixed and permanent. Interestingly New Zealand History Online deals with this discrepancy by detailing Belich's "claims" and Pickett's interpretation by describing both historians as "reputable sources" which "thus cover the full gamut of contradictory outcomes". Even so this appearance of judicial support plays a significant part in leading authority to a single interpretation. This can certainly impact on public perception and is significant in maintaining the division.

The split in narratives is additionally maintained by a division in perceptions over the ongoing issue of Maori grievances, with Keenan having noted that the language of exchange is divisive and therefore maintains the divide.<sup>116</sup> Extremist rhetoric is not constructive and accusations of racism are frequent and entirely unhelpful according to Keenan. In this environment more excessive interpretations which conform to perceptions are more likely to be embraced. Frequently this perception comes from the first occasion an individual is presented with an interpretation. Many adult New Zealanders were taught Belich's interpretation history in school if they learned anything of the wars at all. If for no other reason than Belich was a comprehensive work which had the benefit of being followed with a documentary in 1998.<sup>117</sup> In fact the Ministry of Education produced two workbooks as study material to aid students and these workbooks contain only slight attention the existence of any debate.<sup>118</sup> As detailed above, departmental websites carry a strongly Belich flavoured version of events and are somewhat bureaucratic about making alterations. Consequently mass media and small screen presentations and established perceptions well before a contradicting version is presented to most people. Many people will prefer a version of events that they are comfortable with than one that challenges their perceptions. In this environment the events of the First Taranaki War were simply of less significance than addressing the questions of culpability. The history was effectively marginalised as the secondary consideration.

It is possible to simply go on listing authors and noting their works for some time, but the point is obvious enough. There is a substantial amount of work being carried out examining the New Zealand Wars as a result of Belich's work. These works are generally divided between the social histories which examine the inequities of the wars and the military histories, presently divided between a traditional narrative which overtly rejects Belich and event histories which embrace Belich. Presumably sufficient war narratives exist that embrace

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<sup>115</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Taranaki Report, Chapter 4 The Taranaki War* p.3

<sup>116</sup> New Zealand Herald, Danny Keenan, *Truth reached only by rational debate*, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=3521144](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=3521144) Accessed 24/04/2012

<sup>117</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>118</sup> Hill, Sylvia, (ed), *The New Zealand wars: changing perceptions of a shared past*, Introduction

Belich that they cannot all be written off as having been produced by non-“military historians”. Yet there remains the interesting assumption by many that the present readership exists in a “post-colonial world” and will interpret things in such a way that will lead them to arrive at a post-colonial interpretation.

The republishing of Robert Carey’s work exemplifies this apparent assumption. First published in 1863 as “*A Narrative of the late war in New Zealand by Lieutenant-Colonel Carey*”, the work was republished in 1999 as “*The 2nd Maori war, 1860-1861 by Robert Carey*”. The back jacket advises the reader that they will be able to learn how the Maori defeated the British and how inept they the British were during this war.<sup>119</sup> This is at the very least deceptive; at worst the copy writer did not actually read the book but wrote from assumption. The application of the title “*2<sup>nd</sup> Maori War*”, and the removal of Carey’s rank is also somewhat questionable. Essentially a traditional participant’s narrative is being presented as a post-colonial revisionist work. The actual text remains identical. It is assumptions of this nature that are now under threat from a true post-revisionist period. A period in which the relevance of Belich’s work, while still present, is in decline.

The final period begins around the year 2000 with the publication of *Contested Ground*, edited by Kelvin Day it represents a discernible shift in existing situation.<sup>120</sup> More significantly it begins with a drawing together the two narrative lines in a collective work that contains elements of both. The books editor, Kelvin Day, has been described as a revisionist and in his introduction he states, as fact, that Kaipopo Pa was virtually empty when stormed. But at the same time he acknowledges the courage displayed by William Odgers and the rest of the party in storming what they believed to be a defended position. While it may be argued that Day is in error from a traditional point of view, he has at least acknowledged the bravery of the party, not sought to accuse it of dishonesty while attempting to assert it was a fabricated victory. If Day is a revisionist he is at least a non-confrontational one, and that alone is significant.

The work is not a single narrative, but rather a collection of perspectives by experts in particular fields. Keenan presents the origins of the war in Taranaki while Nigel Prickett deals with fortifications. Ryan applies his expert knowledge to the British Army. In total eleven authors deliver thematically based chapters relating to the wars in Taranaki and each author is rightfully regarded as an expert on the topics they are presenting. The book also contains profiles of those authors which allow the reader a degree of context for each. It is worth noting that collectively these authors do not agree with each other and they represent a wide range of views that come from both narrative lines. While not bridging the gap, the work at least lays the foundations on each side of that gap.

One book, produced for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the First Taranaki War does not indicate a new period, but this work does represent a natural, and possibly inevitable,

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<sup>119</sup> Carey, Robert, *The 2nd Maori war, 1860-1861*, New Zealand, Leonaur, 2007

<sup>120</sup> Day, Kelvin (ed), *Contested ground: the Taranaki Wars, 1860-1881 - Te whenua i tohea*, Wellington, N.Z., Puke Ariki, New Plymouth District Council, TSB Community Trust, Huia, 2010

move toward bridging of the existing gap between the two narratives. Parties who are not in agreement are able to co-produce a single work. The social implications remain strongly post-colonial, while the event narratives have a distinct military history/traditional flavour.<sup>121</sup> But clearly they can at the very least co-exist. Belich made no contribution to the work and his works are mentioned only twice in passing.<sup>122</sup> This alone offers a refreshing change from the frequently embittered responses to Belich by military historians. That feature of reaction to Belich was, and is, entirely counterproductive as it alienates a significant portion of readers with its negativity. *Contested Ground* does not stand alone though and it is followed by Richard Taylor (one of the contributors to *Contested Ground*) with a PhD thesis examining British logistics during the wars.<sup>123</sup>

This is an entirely new departure in how the wars have been treated and adds a new perspective to understanding the wars. Added to this is Clifford Simons' PhD thesis, examining the use of intelligence during the wars by both sides.<sup>124</sup> Simons' work is embargoed until January 2014 as he is publishing the work in a different format, but it also gives an entirely new treatment to the wars and adds to a full understanding. Between them these three works represent a high degree of academic interest in the wars, in particular the wars in Taranaki and move substantially beyond the post-colonial revisionist narrative. That revisionist line still continues, but it is not engaged as being seen as a challenge to other treatments.

Murray Moorhead adds an entirely different aspect to the narrative with richly detailed and exceedingly well researched works such as *First in Arms* (2004) and *Military tales of old Taranaki* (2005).<sup>125</sup> What is significant about these works is that they are written for ordinary people and actually reject academic convention entirely. There are no footnotes, there are no references, there is just the narrative. While this might be seen as being entirely pointless from an academic point of view, Moorhead has actually produced a work for a specific audience, the people of New Plymouth and Taranaki for whom the existing works are essentially too academic or simply unpalatable in their direction. It is also the same method applied to the American Civil War by noted historian Shelby Foote who publish a three volume set, *The Civil War A Narrative*, which is widely regarded as definitive.<sup>126</sup> Foote, who had begun writing as a novelist would say of his work:

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<sup>121</sup>     ibid

<sup>122</sup>     ibid p.65, p.263

<sup>123</sup>     Taylor, Richard *British logistics in the New Zealand wars, 1845-66: a thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*, Richard J. Taylor, 2004

<sup>124</sup>     Simons, Clifford, Interview, 16/03/2013

<sup>125</sup>     Moorhead, Murray, *Military tales of old Taranaki*, New Plymouth, N.Z., Zenith, 2005

<sup>126</sup>     Foote, Shelby, *The Civil War, a Narrative*, Vols 1-3, Vintage Books; 1st Vintage Books ed edition, 1988

No good novelist would be false to his facts, and certainly no historian is allowed to be false to his facts under any circumstances. I've never known, at least a modern historical instance, where the truth wasn't superior to distortion in every way.<sup>127</sup>

Arguably Moorhead has taken the position of Foote in the providing the most accessible narrative of the First Taranaki War. Although few in number these treatments represent a new direction in both academic and publicly accessible formats that are not dependant of either accepting, or rejecting, the work of a PhD student from the mid 1980's. They stand on their own merits as both individual and collaborative works that add to the discussion rather than repeat the polarised positions of the debate. It is always hazardous to claim to be able to predict the direction of events when dealing with an existing, and highly fluid situation, but these recent works seem to indicate that a post-colonial revisionist viewpoint, like all schools of thought, has a limited shelf life and that it is possible that it is reaching the later stages of that shelf life.

Since 1880 historians have employed the same sources as a basis for their interpretations, yet have produced a range of interpretations from these sources. These interpretations have always had an element of division in them, although sometimes it is difficult to observe. There have been factors that have shaped the audience, wars, urban drift of Maori, social change, a global shift in attitude towards colonialism. Through time though, it has always been the audience that has been substantially driving the interpretation of events and their significance by various historians. The historians themselves have not separated themselves from their own context and perceptions. The social changes in New Zealand from mid the 1970's until present have involved seeking to redress the injustices of an earlier time and have established a condition in which history is put into a tension with law. The outcomes have not always been entirely good for history. The resulting condition has assisted in creating a divided audience for an already divided historiography and the division has become entrenched to a degree where it is difficult, often perceived as impossible, to revise an accepted and established version of events.

The reaction, or more accurately, over-reaction, to Belich contributed little more to the debate than to define the separation of the narratives. Arguably military historians were obsessed with Belich and this coloured far too much of their works on the First Taranaki War. There is no doubting Pugsley's abilities as a military historian or he would not currently be a senior staff member at Sandhurst, but his responses to Belich were excessively confrontational and delivered to a small and already sympathetic audience. This situation has begun to alter first with historians beginning to narrate the war without reference to Belich, and then with the publication of *Contested Ground* in 2000. Thanks to the revision, interest in the wars has been renewed, although far too many historians will not acknowledge this and the traditional narrative has responded in a reactive manner to the revision. However there are indications that the traditional approach is beginning to move on and leave that alternate narrative to one side while it produces well researched stand-alone works that add to the a greater

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<sup>127</sup> Foote, Shelby, Seminar excerpt, New York State Writers Institute, March 20, 1997

understanding of the wars. The fact remains that the interpretations of the First Taranaki War and the other wars of this period have a significant and on-going relevance to all New Zealanders and the gap remains. So the question must be asked, can that gap be bridged?

### III - Bridging the Gap

*Extending the range of history must involve taking risks and tackling subjects that are uncomfortable to deal with, as well as those that are likely to have wide appeal, or else we distort the past.*<sup>128</sup>

It has been shown that a gap exists between two narratives of the First Taranaki War, which has become entrenched. The issue is an obstruction for the progression of a good understanding of the war and a resolution of its outstanding problems. As seen, there has already been some degree of movement in bringing the narrative lines together, but this is almost coincidental and lacks the deliberate approach that may be required for real progress. The production of *Contested Ground* was part of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary activities relating to the First Taranaki War. While coincidental, is a timely demonstration that the discussion has moved forward and that progress may well be inevitable.<sup>129</sup> In order to actually make genuine advances in producing a useful narrative, a more deliberate approach is required. What is observable is that the more honest an historian's work, the more robust and lasting their work is. Cowan and Sinclair's work exemplifies this.

In spite of time past, their accounts remain substantially robust, even when deliberately attacked. There are many possibilities for making progress, however, they largely boil down to employing as wide a range as possible of source information including physical evidence, oral traditions, written evidence and official record. This has of course already been done, but generally they have been interpreted by an individual and this has led to a lack of specialist knowledge shedding light on the interpretations. Consequently, a historian must be prepared to accept his own lack of specialist knowledge and employ assistance when this can help. The key element currently absent in all weak versions is to take the information gathered and present it in context. When this is done an event will have a consistency across a range of perspectives and be self-sustaining.

Context requires a wider scope of examination which includes more than a single historian working within a single discipline. The multi-disciplinary approach does have much to recommend it, although many historians prefer to work alone, there is no reason that other disciplines should not be consulted. An archaeologist such as Hans-Dieter Bader for example, will offer the perspectives a historian may not have considered by finding a supply area that has not been considered in the ending of the war, as will be shown in the following chapter.<sup>130</sup> Obviously there already exist these good interpretations and there is no reason not to employ them. This should not be confined to works that directly address the topic either and can be expanded to include elements of an international perspective which provide another layer of context to the questions being examined, such as the nature of colonial war for the British soldier as examined by Ian Knight.<sup>131</sup> What is vital is an awareness of the

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<sup>128</sup> Caunce, Stephen, *Oral History and the Local Historian*, London, New York, Longman, 1994 p.66

<sup>129</sup> Day 9ed), *Contested Ground*, p.xi

<sup>130</sup> Bader, Interview

<sup>131</sup> Knight

importance of the work and the nature of audience. A confrontational work will be rejected by a substantial portion of any potential audience before anything useful can be communicated. It must therefore, be acknowledged that there is an existing hostility in the discussion and feeding this hostility is counterproductive. Hence it is difficult, yet crucial to present an interpretation in as palatable form as possible. Cowan has already done this, but has erred on the side of being positive to the detriment of the narrative.

“Honest intent” is an exceedingly relative concept which is entirely subjective. A historian may be entirely honest, yet produce a flawed work for many reasons. Many historians write from a passion for their subject and with a deliberate intent which will be reflected in their interpretations. Belich has been guilty of this in some areas and others have followed his path without an evidence of re-evaluation. The risk is that approach will feed the hostility that already exists in the discussion leading to otherwise good works devaluing themselves through responding to a single interpretation as with Maxwell.<sup>132</sup> Consequently the information must be presented in as non-confrontational a way as possible, and a willingness to treat conflicting sources on their merits, rather than by their value to a predetermined narrative is essential. One of the greatest challenges is in dealing with questions of race. Here it is essential to understand the nature of race and race relations as they were at the time, along with a good understanding how the races interrelated. Not a retelling of how things are now, or were, in the intervening time.

A detailed examination of the time in which the events are being interpreted, the geography, prevailing attitudes, evaluations of both key personalities and ordinary people are a part of the wider contextualisation. Cowan makes the observation that at Puketakauere, the British suffered nearly 18% casualties.<sup>133</sup> Within the context of the time this was substantially less significant than the issue of a lack of bodies to bury as an impact on the morale of the Europeans.<sup>134</sup> Cowan was writing with the context of a New Zealander who had lived through the period of the First World War and acquired the horror that many felt for the extreme casualties experienced by New Zealand soldiers.<sup>135</sup> What is focused on as being “racism” is likewise given an excessive degree of attention based on modern perceptions, to the point of being a distraction to more significant issues of how the races interrelated. Even the contemporary viewpoints employed are coloured by a lack of context that has permeated through to the current narratives such as the assumptions that Maori gained some logistical benefit by the nature of their race. When the Maori supply system is examined we see that assertions of Maori being “supplied” by planting potatoes on the side of the road as claimed by Carey does is not a functional argument.<sup>136</sup> Taylor’s extensive evaluation of British

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<sup>132</sup> Maxwell, Peter, *Frontier: the battle for the North Island of New Zealand 1860-1872*, Auckland, N.Z., Celebrity Books for Waitekauri Publishing, 2000

<sup>133</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.184

<sup>134</sup> Taranaki Herald, 1 September 1860

<sup>135</sup> New Zealand troops suffered a cumulative casualties of over 60% during the war. At the time of the First Taranaki War American regiments would frequently suffer in excess of 50% in single engagement.

<sup>136</sup> Carey, Robert, Lt Col., *Narrative of the late war in New Zealand*, London, Spotsworth and Co., 1863 p.70

logistical systems touches on this area and Bader's physical field work confirms that a Maori of 1860 required as much to eat as a soldier of 2013 regardless of race and food shortages were a serious logistical matter.<sup>137</sup>

Given the limits of this thesis it is impossible to apply the described treatment to all components of the narrative, however, a number of selected cases are included to demonstrate how the treatment functions. When examined in detail it becomes very apparent that "Maori" did not operate as a single cohesive force.<sup>138</sup> They were divided by tribal allegiance and, at this time, by a degree of political polarity, and all operated for their own reasons. The Ngati Manipoto and Waikatos were by no means natural allies to Te Atiawa. In fact they were quite recent bitter enemies. Kingi needed their numbers to wage his war, but he needed to provide them an enticement to fight beyond the idea of self-rule. This explains possible misinformation in relation to causalities employed by Kingi's runners, which was taken as gospel by Belich.<sup>139</sup> Hapurona, as Kingi's commander, never had a "single cohesive force" that would obey instructions.<sup>140</sup>

This helps account for the possibility of Te Atiawa observing the defender's being over-run at Mahoetahi consequently have context.<sup>141</sup> Hapurona could not "order" the Waikato not to fight at Mahoetahi, yet by the same token, Te Atiawa was not obliged to support them. From this we can gain a better appreciation for Kingi's persuasive skills and Hapurona's command genius in being able to maintain any degree of control at all during the war. We also gain an insight into why non-Taranaki tribes fought, often more for personal gain in material wealth and mana than for any love of the Taranaki.<sup>142</sup> At the same time, this context completely undermines Belich's claims that Maori fielded a single cohesive force that was able to deal with its supply issues with a "rotational system", with which some warriors would go home, will new ones arrived.<sup>143</sup> This simply did not happen.

When examining an individual we also gain valuable contextual insights. In this instance Major General Thomas Simson Pratt has been almost universally hailed as "slow moving and cautious" as exemplified by his sapping.<sup>144</sup> This will alternately be characterised as either being careful and thorough, or simply slow and stupid. The bulk of the sources from the period would certainly give weight to the later interpretation. However, when we examine more of the life of Pratt we have a man with a substantial history of professional soldering coloured by consistent success. Pratt first saw action in 1814, in Holland being present at the attack on Merxem February 2nd and the subsequent bombardment of Antwerp.<sup>145</sup> During the First Anglo-Chinese War of 1841 Pratt twice commanded an inferior force that assaulted, and

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<sup>137</sup> Taylor, p.114

<sup>138</sup> Simons, Interview

<sup>139</sup> Belich, p.102

<sup>140</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>141</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.193

<sup>142</sup> Simons, Interview

<sup>143</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>144</sup> The Argus 12 April 1860 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/203500> Accessed 12/02/2013

<sup>145</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography, *Pratt, Sir Thomas Simson (1797–1879)*, by Ronald McNicoll <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pratt-sir-thomas-simson-4414> Accessed 26/11/2012

took, substantial defensive works. At the *Second Battle of Chuenpee*, January 7<sup>th</sup> Pratt commanded an ad hoc force consisting of 504 Royal Marines, 33 Royal Artillery, 104 26<sup>th</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup> Regiments, 607 37<sup>th</sup> Madras Native Infantry, 76 Bengal Volunteers and 137 Sailors and officers of H.M.S. Wellesley, H.M.S. Blenheim and H.M.S. Melville.<sup>146</sup> This force of 1,500 attacked and captured a defensive position known as the Upper Fort with naval gunfire support followed by a second, “lower fort” being stormed by Royal Marines. The defenders had over 2,000 men of whom 700-900 became casualties and 118 guns were captured for a total of 38 wounded.<sup>147</sup>

Pratt’s second command was during the Battle of the Bogue, February 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>, where he commanded 1037 men against approximately 2,000 Chinese defenders. Over two engagements, in three days, Pratt’s force took five wounded inflicting over 500 casualties and taking 419 guns.<sup>148</sup> This fight also featured fixed positions and naval gunfire support. This exceedingly brief, review of just a portion of Pratt’s career gives us details of the man which conform with, and give context to his actions in New Zealand. The context and the nature of colonial warfare are also presented with consistency and New Zealand seen be seen as being just a part of a much larger series of wars for Britain, firstly, that the British colonial wars featured attacking and taking positions as noted by Simons.<sup>149</sup> Secondly that Pratt had been an exceedingly bold and skilful commander of multi-unit forces; finally that Pratt’s forces in New Zealand displayed significantly more respect for Maori fighting ability than they did for other forces such as the Chinese.

The habit of arriving at hard and fast conclusions with only limited information, or by simply accepting an existing treatment is a feature of many histories, yet one that a study of historiography would strongly indicates is an unwise approach. History remains fluid rather than definitive, and even ancient history receives new treatments from new perspectives, particularly when new evidence is found. In too many aspects of the First Taranaki War answers have been given, claiming to have “settled” something with no allowance made for the possibility of error. The frequently repeated finding of Belich that Kaipopo Pa was empty when assaulted has subsequently been demonstrated to be entirely erroneous, as will be shown in the next chapter. The drive to provide answers can lead to providing conclusions for which there is insufficient evidence. Where questions remain unresolved, this must be acknowledged, rather than filled in with a conclusion that suits the narrative. In the case of the First Taranaki War this is a three way tension between the requirements of the Waitangi Tribunal for firm answers, the requirements to reach conclusions from multiple conflicting sources and the ever present issue of there simply not being enough information. This is a question of judgement that only time and further investigation will resolve but it is apparent that many historians and participants have arrived at conclusions that have proven to be erroneous.

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<sup>146</sup> Haythornthwaite, Philip J., *The Colonial Wars Source Book*, London, BCA, 1995 p.238

<sup>147</sup> Featherstone, Donald, *Colonial small wars, 1837 – 1901*, Newton Abbot, England David & Charles, 1973 p.39

<sup>148</sup> Ibid p.40

<sup>149</sup> Simons, Interview

While all narratives can be demonstrated to display some weaknesses, almost all of them contain elements that are of value and their interpretations should be reviewed. Where a good interpretation exists it could, and even should, be employed. The total inclusion, or exclusion, of one historians work due to a perceived weakness is actually counterproductive. This certainly applies to Belich who has made exceedingly valuable observations. These observations are frequently overlooked by other historians who are hostile to his perceived weaknesses. It is also true that Belich has also been guilty of doing the same thing and has sought to negate the preceding traditional narrative as dated and irrelevant.<sup>150</sup> In particular the least helpful approach in producing a good narrative is the rejection of social histories by military historians and the rejection of those military histories by social historians. Within the aim of producing a more useful history this confrontational method must be discarded and the contributions acknowledged and employed where appropriate.

Very few historians have either the will, or the cross discipline ability to be able to self-contextualise the available information. As demonstrated by *Contested Ground*, it is possible for a range of skilled historians to produce work that can be co-published.<sup>151</sup> The question is, can they actually work together to produce a single narrative. In addition beyond the idea of different “historical disciplines” is the wider idea of multiple disciplines and their ability provide useful information. Belich was originally inspired by labouring on a filming project which involved the substantial earthwork at Rangiriri, an element of the wars that Belich had been entirely unaware of until that time.<sup>152</sup> Yet when he came to work on his history he worked entirely with written sources as he was working in Oxford. The physical evidence of the ground, the defences, the weapons are all relevant to producing a functional interpretation as demonstrated by Nigel Prickett.<sup>153</sup> As Maxwell complained, in one instance Belich’s inattention to ground resulted in an error of two locations being two days “march onto the bush” distance when in fact they were separated by a 20 minute stroll.<sup>154</sup>

One often overlooked issue with existing narratives is that they are substantially the result of the insular nature of New Zealand history. To a degree this approach, which examines New Zealand history as a standalone subject, rejects an existing context. On occasion this context is actually overtly employed to negate an argument; whenever the American Civil War is included such references are rejected as irrelevant as New Zealand’s Wars were not a “civil war”.<sup>155</sup> This ignores the exceedingly useful operational observations of a war that took place at the same time with similar weapons, but an entirely different result. The effect of artillery alone includes numerous studies of the impact of modern artillery in warfare of the Armstrong Whitworth gun that fired explosive shells and had more in common with modern

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<sup>150</sup> Belich, p.320

<sup>151</sup> Day, (ed), p.xii– xxvii

<sup>152</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>153</sup> Prickett, Nigel, *Historic Taranaki: An archaeological guide*, Wellington, N.Z., GP Books, 1990

<sup>154</sup> Maxwell, Peter, *Frontier: the battle for the North Island of New Zealand 1860-1872*, Auckland, N.Z., Celebrity Books for Waitekauri Publishing, 2000 p.19

<sup>155</sup> McFarlane, email, 21/04/2012

artillery than the guns of the Napoleonic era it resembled.<sup>156</sup> Such inclusions as the operational nature of Britain's military provides us context in relation to the strategy applied to the First Taranaki War. Invariably "natives" in other theatres would construct and then defend a position.<sup>157</sup> When these positions were captured, the war ended as shown with Pratt as detailed above. We gain a greater understanding of how and why the British army operated the way it did, not through a failure to understand Maori, but rather with an understanding of how colonial wars were usually brought to a successful conclusion.

The British army of this period is simply not that portrayed in the revisionist narrative. Of the British army Ian Knight has observed;

While the army was usually understrength, ill-informed and badly supplied in the field – circumstances which inevitably produced a fair share of disasters – only one campaign over that period resulted in consistent political and military defeat, the Transvaal revolt of 1881.<sup>158</sup>

Knight's work covers the time of the entire New Zealand Wars period specifically addressing the Invasion of the Waikato. He observes none of the consistent failures in New Zealand which are a feature of the revisionist narrative. This international context is not confined to simply military observations and there are also social aspects. The relationships between the Colonial Office and other colonial nations helps to provide the context that what the British believed to be an "enlightened approach" was at least attempted in New Zealand.

It is obviously hazardous to draw extensive conclusions from single, non-contextualised, observations such as single account of an event. Yet this is more a feature of existing histories of the First Taranaki War than the exception, where a single source is often employed to create an entirely different narrative from the accepted one. An inclusion of all possible sources makes for an exceedingly long, detailed, and frequently, dull, work. However, as shown here, such an inclusion can considerably alter an interpretation. Context should at least be applied to the research before an interpretation is arrived at. This context must include pushing the historian beyond his own context as well. If the historian is comfortable with his work he has not extended, either himself, or the history. Even as early as Cowan, perceptions had altered and historians have written from their own context, rather than that of the time they are observing. The following chapter is narrative of the First Taranaki War which has been produced employing the methods described here. As may be expected, it does not conform with the either of the existing traditional or revisionist narratives.

## **IV - The First Taranaki War**

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<sup>156</sup> Ryan, p.69-74  
<sup>157</sup> Simons, interview  
<sup>158</sup> Knight, p.13

## A Narrative with Case Studies

*'He wahine, he whenua I mate ait e tangata,'* said the Maoris  
'Women and land are the reasons why men die.'<sup>159</sup>

This narrative of the First Taranaki War is a demonstration of the results of applying some of the methods discussed in the previous chapter. While within the confines of this work there is both insufficient time and space to carry this out extensively, it is possible to demonstrate the potential of these methods. In addition to the narrative, specific events will be examined in greater detail, in relation to their respective treatments by Cowan and Belich. So that it can be understood how and why the interpretations were made and what strengths and weaknesses these interpretations may represent. The intention is not to demonstrate who is right or wrong, but rather to show the existing strengths and weaknesses of each narrative. The present division of the First Taranaki War narratives exists to a substantial degree as a result of the postcolonial revision. The division already existed when Belich produced his work but it was fixed in place by Belich's widespread acceptance. Virtually all works after this fall either into the revisionist camp that accepts Belich as convincing, or with the traditional narrative as established by Cowan. The post-colonial revision has even impacted on the field usually defined as military history with the division two narratives being marked.

Historians such as Bohan and Wright employing the same sources in the same way as Belich, in relation to the storming of Kaipopo Pa as the litmus test. Grace will be the point of divergence followed by the "contemporary" account of Wells. As will be shown below these sources are deeply flawed. As an example Ryan argues Odgers V.C. worthy assault as fact,<sup>160</sup> while Wright describes the attack as a "victory for propaganda".<sup>161</sup> These versions are not compatible and both can be traced back to Cowan and Belich respectively with Wright employing Grace as his point of argument.<sup>162</sup> Consequently it comes down to an issue of the use of sources and questions of interpretation between these two narrative lines, the traditional narrative of Cowan, and the post-colonial revision of Belich. To cast a wider net would only lead to a pointless review of several layers of reinterpretation which will ultimately resolve back to these two positions in some manner.

The existing social and military histories have been examined in comparison with each other in order to find the most reliable elements. The multi-disciplinary aspect includes contributions from specialists of differing areas of speciality and, where possible, other disciplines are included. This is not as extensive as it might be, however it does include archaeology, battlefield walks, first hand field examinations and interviewing of experts in order to gain differing perspectives. The physical evidence is not limited to archaeology and includes observations and first-hand operation the firearms employed during the war. It is immediately apparent that each discipline or perspectives impacts on the others, and in turn,

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<sup>159</sup> Sinclair, Keith, *A History of New Zealand*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961 p.112

<sup>160</sup> Ryan, p.42

<sup>161</sup> Wright, p.95

<sup>162</sup> Wright, p.96

is impacted on by all the others. This makes the process complex and lengthy, however the result is frequently one in which a good level of confidence can be placed. Frequently it is often not the result that may have originally been expected. All of these elements have been included in previous work, however, usually only in part. Cowan had the advantage of having the participants and the ground available, while Belich was impeded by distance but had the perspective of being remote from the events by time as well, yet possessed access to documents that were denied to Cowan.

The single issue of context is an exceedingly powerful element, when seeking understanding the behaviour and events of the past. Even so, it is often not well understood, or it certainly does not appear to be, from the frequent failures of misapplication. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, General Pratt has only been viewed within the narrow context of his few months of presence in New Zealand. When research examines an individual or event beyond a single action, or narrow time frame, we can see them with an entirely new perspective. Pratt ceases to be a lethargic, even foolish officer and becomes a dynamic leader of men whose win against superior numbers was both thorough and professional. From this we can go back to his time in New Zealand better equipped to reconcile the conflicting descriptions we have. His subordinates evidently had substantial faith in his command and he displayed considerable ability in Carey's eyes.<sup>163</sup> The contempt expressed by the Taranaki Herald and numerous individuals of the settler community remains in keeping with their extreme dissatisfaction with the progress of the war. There are simply too many personalities and situational aspects to be able to present these examinations extensively, other than as an entire work in its own right, however where appropriate this more detailed examination will be presented.

One of the central themes of this work is that the existing histories are presented for a specific existing audience and are consequently shaped by that audience. It has also been proposed that in order to progress the discussion that the presentation must be at least non-confrontational and seek to avoid alienating a potential audience. It is intended to produce a narrative that has sufficient broad appeal to be acceptable to more than a single part of the audience. In keeping with the concept that to make a contribution a narrative should be non-confrontation and constructive, the narrative has been presented in as neutral and non-judgmental a way as possible. There is praise and acknowledgement where this is warranted, but this does not mean that treatments and interpretations of the events by historians will be handled with any degree of favour, they will be analysed and critiqued appropriately. This is an ambitious goal and one that is asserted by virtually all historians, yet all have their failings. This is more an aspiration than a statement of fact. This may well be seen as an attempt to "sugar coat" a brutal and at times exceedingly nasty war. It is not, those elements remain, but this work is not intended to provide meat for a victim mill for any party. The negative aspects are included and contextualised in order to explain them where possible. The argument remains that until such time as a majority of the audience is able to look at the events without disregarding it, we will not be moving forward.

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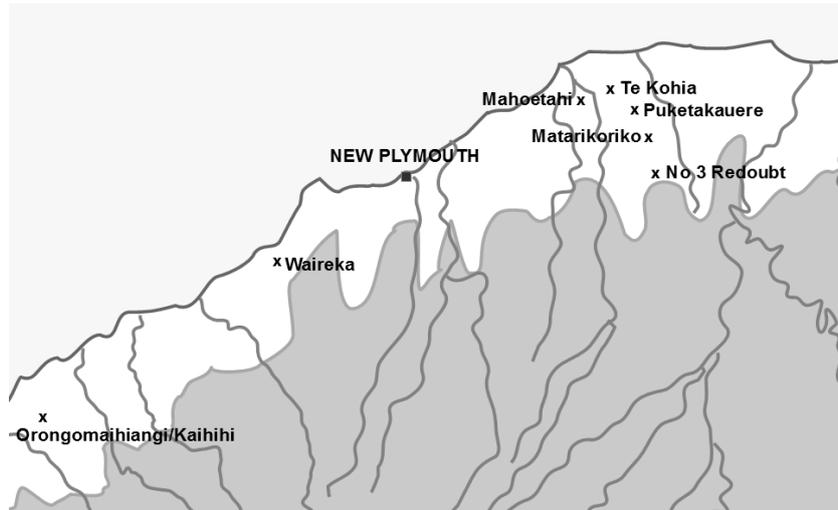
<sup>163</sup> Carey, p.134

One aspect difficult to deal with is that of the Maori perspective as noted. There is a shortage of written sources which makes a conventional research difficult. It is possible though, to extrapolate through the understanding the context of the individuals and groups involved in relation to their actions. This is, of course, an inadequate method and a substantial degree of information will be missing making conclusions difficult. However, in these circumstances it will usually be possible to hypothesise the probable and possible answers. But without good evidence the answers cannot be conclusive. As a result many unanswered questions remain and this is in fact as it should be. When a question is unanswered there is room for progress and further examination. When a convenient answer is provided it can become “fact” within a short period to time and impede further discussion.

There also exist problems with each interpretation; however, there is a particular problem in evaluating Cowan’s sources due to his non-academic methodology. It is impossible, when examining Cowan, to test the validity of his interpretation though a conventional evaluation of his sources for the simple reason that Cowan frequently does not detail them. In contrast Belich provides a more conventional footnoting approach and it his interpretation and use of these sources. This puts Belich at a disadvantage with his sources being exceedingly well detailed and checkable. The only way that the two can be contrasted with any degree of even handedness is to contextualise their positions as much as possible and to not simply assume that if Cowan cannot be demonstrated to have erred that he is correct. What does become obvious is that both interpretations contain identifiable problems that raise questions about how accurate they actually are.

The specific events being examined in detail as case studies are;

1. The Capture of Te Kohia Pa.
2. William Odgers and the Victoria Cross at Waireka.
3. The attack on Puketakauere
4. The capture of Mahoetahi.
5. The attack on Number 3 Redoubt
6. Pratt’s sapping and the End of the War



The First Taranaki War – Overview Map

## The Beginning of the War

The sale of the Waitara block to the Crown by Teira is a topic worthy of substantial attention but is not actually relevant to the issues being examined here. Other than to acknowledge the sale as being the point at which war became a more immediate possibility it will not be addressed in this work. Tensions existed between Governor Gore Browne and Wirimu Kingi and Kingi was adamant that the Waitara would not be sold. Whatever Kingi's intentions were he clearly planned to not be responsible for beginning a war, and the British forces were more than obliging in allowing themselves to be drawn in by Kingi's provocative actions at Waitara with a series of escalated tension that would bring the Crown and Kingi into open war. When a survey was attempted the pegs were pulled up by old women. Then a new pa was constructed just inside the southern edge of the disputed area.<sup>164</sup> Although this pa – usually referred to as The L-Shaped Pa – is often viewed as a disposable pa intended only to draw the British in, it was well stocked and seemingly intended to stand for as long as required.<sup>165</sup> Browne could not let this challenge to his authority remain unanswered and the soldiers moved against the pa. An order to leave was ignored and the troops opened fire on the pa. This was precisely what Kingi was seeking.

## Te Kohia Pa

Te Kohia Pa was a small pa that would not withstand a major attack. But at this very early point in the conflict there were very few British soldiers or Maori warriors. The purpose of the pa was to defy the British and provoke them. Now with the shooting begun its practical function was to inflict casualties on the British before letting them have the pa. This would become a feature of Maori tactics.

<sup>164</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.159  
<sup>165</sup> *ibid*

The strategy was evidently to erode the British will to fight; the modern “fighting pa” was one of the tactical tools for accomplishing that plan.<sup>166</sup> The question in this case is how effective was Te Kohia at doing that? The pa was well provisioned and defended and on the evening of March 17<sup>th</sup> 1860. In command was Te Atiawa’s fighting chief Hapurona. Invariably described as “small and fiery”, Hapurona was a commander of considerable intelligence, military ability, on both the tactical and strategic levels while being possessed of great personal courage and considerable mana.<sup>167</sup> Hapurona declined to abandon the pa and infantry of the 65<sup>th</sup> Regiment engaged the pa with Enfield rifled muskets while supported by two guns of the Royal Artillery. The infantry worked their way forward under cover of the artillery bombardment and when the pa was under close fire the guns were displaced forward from 700 to 400 yards.<sup>168</sup> This was an exceedingly close range for field artillery.

There is reason to believe that the British were successful in driving some of the defenders from the pa with their fire, but accounts are mixed. Lieutenant M<sup>ac</sup>Naghten, R.A. advised that a practical breech had been made late afternoon/early evening, but the Commanding Officer, Lt Col. Gold, was reluctant to carry out an assault in failing light.<sup>169</sup> It may have been the apparent effect of the bombardment or frustration at the delayed assault that would lead to some of the British get the impression that victory was nigh and action should be taken. Three members of the Volunteer Mounted Rifles rode up to the pa firing their revolvers and attempted to take the flag hanging over the palisade after the masthead had been knocked over by the artillery fire. But this piece of bravado would prove fatal.

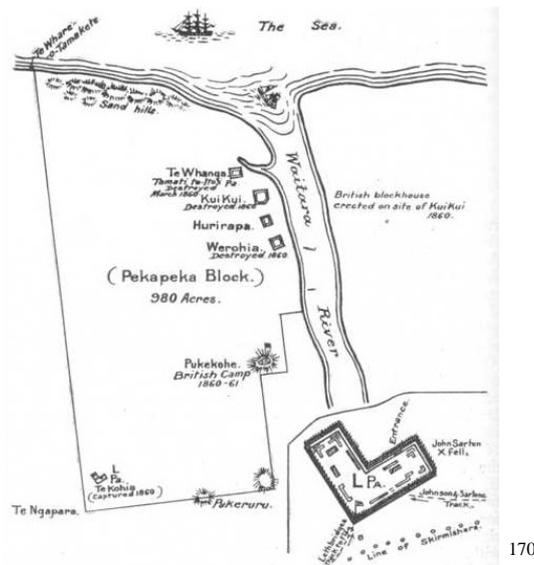
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<sup>166</sup> “Modern fighting pa” is a comparative term that refers to the style of defences developed by Maori during the inter-tribal Musket Wars of the 1830’s. The layout of such pa exploited the firepower of muskets to best effect.

<sup>167</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.159

<sup>168</sup> White, William, (ed), *Memorials of Sergeant William Marjouram, Royal Artillery: including six years’ service in New Zealand, during the late Māori war*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi Publishers, 1995 (Originally published: London, James Nisbet, 1862)

<sup>169</sup> This possibility was presented by Cowan and the fact that it was MacNaughten who led the assault in the morning confirms it. It had long been the practice in the British army that a breech would be deemed “practicable” by either an engineer officer or artillery officer who would then lead the assault on a defensive work. This helped the officer making the decision focus on the task.



The Waitara (Pekapeka) Block and Te Kohia Pa

The pa was still defended and a volley crashed out mortally wounding Trooper John Sartén, giving him the distinction of being the recorded as the first death of the war. A soldier of the 65<sup>th</sup>, with a sailor from HMS Niger, courageously recovered the fallen Sartén and the exchange of fire continued hotly until darkness when the shooting gradually dropped away.<sup>171</sup> The 65<sup>th</sup> remained in place though the night and after a brief bombardment a rush on the pa led by Lt. MacNaghten with a mixed force of artillerymen and the 65th in the morning found the pa to be empty. It is invariably argued that this was the intention of Hapūrona, to inflict casualties then leave the pa. However, this does not mesh with the fact that the pa was well stocked for a much longer occupation. If a “bump and run” was the essence of Hapūrona’s tactic then its execution at Te Kohia was not going to win a war. He had inflicted a total of 4 casualties (2 dead, 2 wounded) on the British.<sup>172</sup> The Maori casualties are unknown, and this invariably translates into “no casualties” for modern historians, but it is usually asserted in contemporary accounts that Maori suffered similar casualties’.<sup>173</sup>

The point of Hapūrona’s stand at Te Kohia was to provoke the British into initiate the fighting. The conditions any King Movement involvement required that a member be the victim of aggression, not the initiator, in order to gain military support from the movement in keeping with the three principles of the Movement Te Whakapono, Te Aroha and Te Ture, (Christianity, Love and Law).<sup>174</sup> While the evidence for this remains substantially circumstantial, it would become apparent that recruitment from outside the Taranaki was a feature of Kingi’s plan and this required that he be the victim of aggression. Kingi could have

<sup>170</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.181

<sup>171</sup> Sartén was the first of three members of his family to fall during the First Taranaki War. There are currently 14 Sartén listings in the New Plymouth phone book.

<sup>172</sup> Bump and run, also sometimes called “shoot and scoot” is a classic guerrilla tactic of inflicting casualties on an enemy and escaping quickly.

<sup>173</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.160

<sup>174</sup> Buddle, Rev. Thomas, *The Maori King Movement in New Zealand – with a full report of the Native Meetings held at Waikato, April and May 1860*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi, 1860 p.24

had no illusions that a single small pa would cause the British will to dissolve, his plan was always to wage a war against the resolve of the British. Having the British attack at Te Kohia was Kingi's intention, and Hapurona's mission at Te Kohia. The war was begun; the British had fired the first shots. Kingi could now appeal for aid from the King Movement as the victim of aggression. Most importantly Kingi could now recruit warriors for Hapurona to fight his war.

### Case Study –The Significance of the fall of Te Kohia Pa

The case study of Te Kohia focuses mainly on two aspects, the significance of the event and level of detailed provided. Cowan provides good technical detail including an excellent plan of the pa including its dimensions along with other details.

This pa Te Kohia, more generally known as the L pa from its shape, was 110 feet in length and 33 feet in width on each of its two arms, and within the double row of palisading was a series of rifle trenches and pits, most of which were roofed over with timbers, fern, and earth. The place was well provisioned with potatoes, maize, fish, and fruit. The garrison consisted of about a hundred men of Te Atiawa.<sup>175</sup>

This immediately gives a reader some perspective, in that the pa was a small work for only around 100 men and not intended as a permanent feature of the area. His narrative of the fight includes the comment “recognizing that they could not hope to hold the position much longer, they prudently evacuated it before daylight on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>”. Cowan views it as a purely military decision without a wider aspect. Cowan also details the death of Sarten with “some of the Volunteer cavalry rode up very close to the pa and fired their revolvers off, and two of them seized and carried away the war-flag (a red colour, bearing the name “Waitaha”).

The Sarten incident has been reinterpreted by Ryan and Parham as being a “cavalry charge” in conjunction with the claim that they were attacking fleeing Maori driven out by the bombardment.<sup>176</sup> There exists no other similar interpretation of this event, and no identifiable source for it. The fact that the cavalry were firing into the pa and took the flag rather indicates that no such “cavalry charge” took place in the manner described. Cowan's account is brief but detailed, and he ends it by detailing the losses of the attackers as being two dead and two wounded. Cowan names their units (one man killed and one wounded from the 65<sup>th</sup> and the cavalry including Sarten), followed with the somewhat less detailed, “the Maori losses were about the same as those of the attackers.”<sup>177</sup> The engagement was also of no great significance, as Cowan launches immediately into a more detailed account of the following engagement at Waireka, describing it as a “much sharper affair”.<sup>178</sup> The traditional account is a fairly scant retelling of events, and lacking in the context that Belich would focus on.

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<sup>175</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.165

<sup>176</sup> Ryan, p.40

<sup>177</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.167

<sup>178</sup> *ibid*

Belich's interpretation is coloured by an assigning of motivations to define victory/loss, which is coloured by perceptions of the events when viewed through the filter of later events. In contrast to Cowan, Belich does not present any account of the fight at all, beyond two brief sentences. "On 17 March, Kingi and seventy or eighty of his warriors threw up a pa, Te Kohia or the L-pa, at Waitara, and refused to evacuate it. Shots were exchanged, and the Taranaki War begun."<sup>179</sup> This is more than an understatement, it is almost dismissive. Belich uses the fight as an opportunity to introduce his theory of the "disposable pa", which completely confounded the British. Belich takes the idea that Maori abandoning, or "being driven out of the pa" as Cowan suggests, to automatically mean that Maori had won the battle.<sup>180</sup>

In the revisionist narrative, the Maori either not losing, or preventing the British winning, equates to a "win" for the Maori. Intuitively this could be viewed as simply ridiculous, and has been treated this way by several later histories such as Ryan and Pugsley.<sup>181</sup> However, in reality it has a degree of truth. It is certainly not a method that will win a war, but it will contribute to maintaining a fighting ability, and it is exceedingly unlikely that Kingi believed he would win a pure military victory. It is simply a question of the degree of "victory" that is open to debate. For Belich, the real issue was the significance of the event, and the nature of the pa, rather than the event itself. Belich contributes more to a good understanding of the war and how it was fought in a wider perspective.

Belich goes into some detail of how the pa was a tool of war that was quick to construct, being "thrown up" in one night.<sup>182</sup> Belich also asserts that the defenders were "entirely protected" by the bomb proof bunkers and covered trenches.<sup>183</sup> This is counter to the existing evidence with Cowan asserting "similar casualties", and Belich does not offer a source for his own claim.<sup>184</sup> It is also in defiance of the realities of field works, as the defenders had to expose themselves to shoot. Even a small loophole to shoot through is enough for the possibility of a return shot hitting a defender.<sup>185</sup> It is simply impossible in this form of warfare to completely protect oneself. A military interpretation that is weak becomes a lever on which Belich's work is attacked as a whole. This will unfortunately mean that the more important point, which Belich grasped, is overlooked.

Belich notes that immediately after Te Kohia was taken, that recruits flocked to Kingi.<sup>186</sup> However, he tempers this with identifying them as being "small groups", but at least notes they were from more than one tribe.<sup>187</sup> Even so, in the midst of correctly detailing the impact

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<sup>179</sup> Belich, p.82

<sup>180</sup> ibid

<sup>181</sup> Pugsley, *Maori did not invent trench warfare*, p.33-37

<sup>182</sup> Belich, p.83

<sup>183</sup> ibid

<sup>184</sup> Cowan p.167

<sup>185</sup> Piers Reed, Interview, 08/12/2011

<sup>186</sup> Belich p.82

<sup>187</sup> ibid p.83

of the fight at Te Kohia, he asserts that Gold was “unable to take the pa”.<sup>188</sup> This is true to the point that Gold did not take the pa while it was defended, but he certainly held the pa after it had been assaulted, and there is no evidence that he would have failed to take the pa if it had been defended. This is a matter of circumstance, not capability, and Belich’s presentation, though technically correct can lead to an inaccurate understanding by the reader. Based on events the European forces were entirely capable of taking a defended field work, doing so repeatedly during the wars both in New Zealand and in other parts of the world during Britain’s colonial wars.<sup>189</sup>

The Maori did not demonstrate this ability during this war, for all their military ability. Belich also ties later events, in which defenders abandoned pas, to Te Kohia, ignoring that pas could, and would, be held and defended when it suited the defenders.<sup>190</sup> Belich also makes a general assumption that the Europeans failed to grasp the importance of the pas systems by quoting Gold as observing that the pa was “curiously hollowed out”.<sup>191</sup> This was a generalisation made about all Europeans based on the observation of one European and many other European accounts make a great deal of observing and demonstrating a detailed understanding of its features such as Lt Col. Alexander.<sup>192</sup>

The real lack of understanding demonstrated here is not that of the British military, but that of Belich failing to understand that the British forces were exceedingly cautious about placing cut off parties or attempting to “surround” a pa. The derogatory name for this activity in the military is an “Irish Firing Squad”, which will frequently lead to friendly fire incidents and friendly casualties.<sup>193</sup> It would be the main cause of British casualties at Gate Pa in 1864 according to Taylor.<sup>194</sup> They were also seeking avoid cornering the Maori and seeking more to capture the ground than win a strategic victory though a “show of force”, particularly at this initial point of the war. It is more likely that the British sought to reduce the fortifications and replace them with their own redoubts in order to deny the Maori the disputed ground in keeping with the generally accepted practice of the British army at this time. This is evidenced by the numerous Redoubts built on, or near existing captured Maori pa.<sup>195</sup> At this point of the conflict the most likely answer is that they believed that all they needed to do was drive off the Maori and the conflict would be resolved. Most importantly at the British forces were seeking to minimise their own casualties. In spite of Belich’s assertions to the opposite,

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<sup>188</sup> Belich p.84

<sup>189</sup> Knight, p.160

<sup>190</sup> Belich p.84

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p.83

<sup>192</sup> Alexander, Sir James Edward, *Incidents of the Maori war, New Zealand in 1860-61*, Christchurch, N.Z., Capper Press, 1976

<sup>193</sup> Irish firing squad is a derogatory slang term used by British soldiers for many year where a fire groups have either been set up poorly or the movement of enemy has led to fire arcs including friendly forces.

<sup>194</sup> Taylor, lecture Massey University New Zealand Wars Campaigns, 2009

<sup>195</sup> Prickett, Nigel, *Landscapes of conflict: a field guide to the New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, N.Z., Random House New Zealand, 2002

they did not have “overwhelming numbers”, particularly when the need to protect the town minimises the available fighting manpower that can be brought to bear.<sup>196</sup>

Te Kohia was a model for Belich and the fight itself “nothing more than a minor skirmish”.<sup>197</sup> The essence of its value for Belich is in what it demonstrated and the impact that it had for the Kingi. Belich was entirely correct in these points, but presented them with a slightly excessive degree of faith in the pas capacity to confound the European style of warfare. The traditional interpretation is essentially oblivious to the points Belich makes. The impact of Belich’s work can be viewed in the first paragraph of NZ History’s section on the First Taranaki War:

The opening shots of the Taranaki war were fired at Kingi's new pa, Te Kohia – also known as the ‘L’ pa because of its shape – on 17 March 1860. After a day of fruitless artillery fire Maori evacuated the pa during the night with no loss of life. Te Kohia set the pattern for the next 12 months of fighting. Te Atiawa aimed to confront the British in a way that prevented them from being able to use their superior manpower and resources.

This history is a line by line repetition of Belich’s interpretation retold as fact without a hint of investigation. This unquestioning acceptance of Belich as an authoritative source incenses many military historians.

## The Battle of Waireka

After Te Kohia, there was an assumption amongst many of the settlers that the issue may well have been dealt with if the newspapers are to be believed. A British camp was established at Waitara and the Maori had been driven from the land. There was a certain amount of horror from Browne, that he had managed to get himself into a shooting war, and he was quick to lay the blame on Colonel Gold whom Gore Brown accused of exceeding his orders.<sup>198</sup> On the Maori part, recruits flocked to join the fighting, and it was for Hapurona to plan the time and location of the next fight. The war parties mustered to the south of New Plymouth, not far from the militia stockade at Omata, where they set about building a pa and provoking the British to fight. The Maori declared their fight to be against the British settlers and military. Churches, churchmen and foreigners were not to be attacked. Even so, Reverend Thomas Gilbert recorded the tension and fears he, and his family, experienced at the time, particularly with so many unfamiliar Maori arriving near his home.<sup>199</sup> It was Gilbert whose cart was used to recover the bodies of three men and two boys, who were ambushed and killed in an effort

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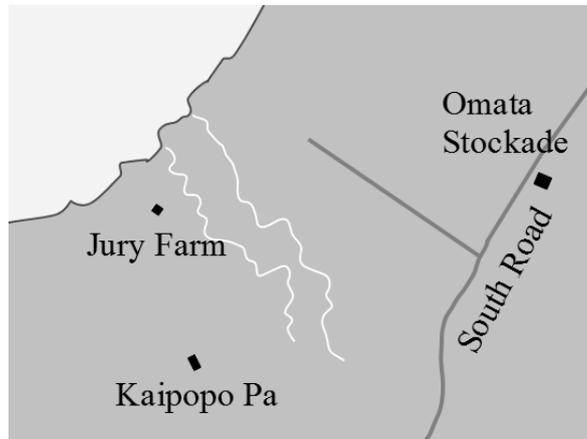
<sup>196</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>197</sup> Belich, p.83

<sup>198</sup> Gore Browne, Harriet Louisa, *Narrative of the Waitara purchase and the Taranaki War* edited by W.P. Morrell, Dunedin, N.Z., University of Otago Press, 1965

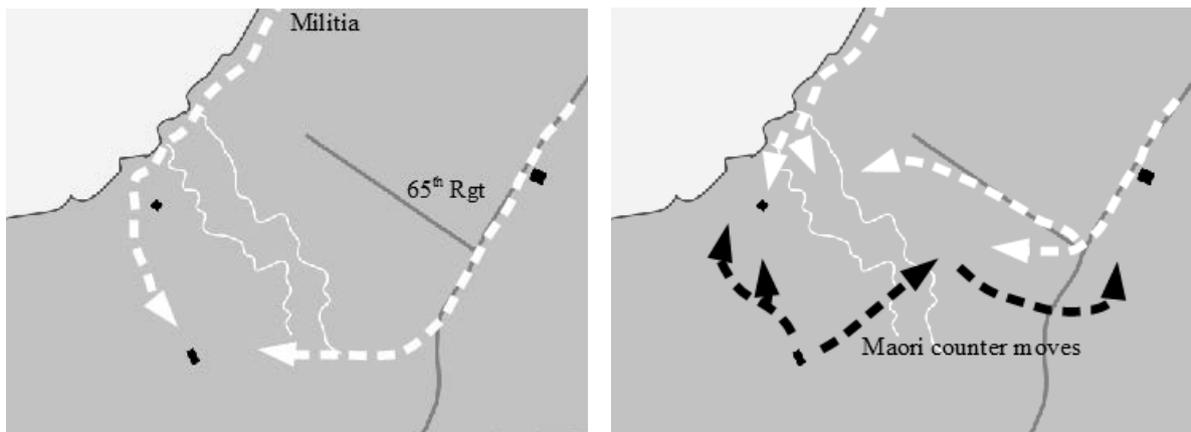
<sup>199</sup> Gilbert, Thomas, Rev., *New Zealand settlers and soldiers, or, The war in Taranaki: being incidents in the life of a settler*, Christchurch, N.Z., Kiwi Publishers, 1999 p.84

to provoke the next confrontation.<sup>200</sup> The Maori followed this up with a demonstration in front of Omata Stockade, but did not press an attack.



The area of the engagement at Waireka.  
The area along the river lines is cut by deep gullies.

It was only eleven days after the taking of Te Kohia that Maori efforts to entice the British into a fight were rewarded. Gold sent out two columns from New Plymouth, one of regulars and the other being the first engagement for the militia force. The plan was to encircle and destroy the Maori if possible and to gather up the settlers who had remained outside the defences of New Plymouth. Gold was being exceedingly cautious, and gave orders for the force to be back before dark. As is often the case, the plan lacked the flexibility to include an enemy response, and neither column even completed the intended march. The militia became engaged while making their way up the gullies from the beach, while the 65<sup>th</sup> were attacked from the gully between Kaipopo Pa and Omata stockade.



The plan and the actuality of Waireka

The Maori responded aggressively, engaging both columns in the open with the militia observing large numbers of Maori running down the slope from the pa to almost envelope their position.<sup>201</sup> The 65<sup>th</sup> were brought up short, and deployed down a side track above the

<sup>200</sup> Gilbert, p.79-84  
<sup>201</sup> Wells, p.199

gully, from where the Maori maintained a constant fire.<sup>202</sup> At 1pm two signal guns were fired from Marsland Hill in New Plymouth, which was the signal for a Maori attack on the town. Guns had Captain Cracroft of the H.M.S. Niger reduce the ship to an anchor watch, and get every able bodied man ashore to assist. Finding that the town was under direct attack, Cracroft climbed Marsland Hill with his telescope to observe what was visible of the fight in company with Col. Gold, and was present when Lt. King of the volunteer cavalry arrived with a situation report.<sup>203</sup> Murray had requested reinforcements and ammunition, and Gold asked Cracroft to assist. Cracroft's party set off towards Omata in the late afternoon with 53 men, and 7 officers.

During this time the militia were certainly feeling the pressure, but managed to take up a defensive position at Jury Farm, and an overlooking position on the high portion of the ground between the two gullies.<sup>204</sup> The militia remained defensive, expecting support from the 65<sup>th</sup>. The regulars meanwhile, had their own problems, and Col. Murray seems to have felt himself on the back foot, with small parties of Maori beginning to flank his line to the east. He sent some support under Lt. Urquhart to the militia, but otherwise stayed where he was. Cracroft's party arrived at Omata stockade, and halted to await the cart with their rocket tube, and it was here they found Niger's First Lieutenant, Blake, wounded by a ball in his right breast. During this time, Cracroft assessed the situation and observed the pa on Jury Hill to his front, as being the key to the Maori position, with puffs of smoke being observed from the hillside in front of the pa.

Cracroft talked to his men, telling them of his decision to take the pa, offering £10 to the first man inside, and they voiced their support. Cracroft sent a messenger to find Lt. Col. Murray, and advise him of the intended attack. Three of the militia at Omata, Francis Mace and two of the Messenger family, Edward and Charles, offered to act as guides for the naval party. Once the cart arrived with the rocket tube and gear, Cracroft advanced and fired a number of shots at the pa, but finding the tube too slow to reload and dark falling he elected assault the pa which was still some 800 yards distant, although clearly visible being sky-lined in the failing light. Cracroft left the rocket party and advanced along the road in near complete darkness, in the gully between Omata and Jury Hill.

From where the road breaks clear of the bush, Cracroft's party charged up the hill, surprising the Maori on the hillside who had taken the rockets for more artillery, which had been firing all afternoon. Even so, the defenders managed to wound a number of Cracroft's men as the naval party charged, but the Maori quickly fled back to the pa. The sailors were already amongst them, and followed them into the pa, where the in the confusion the defence was quickly overwhelmed, with only four of the attackers suffering leg wounds from tomahawks, while the officers put their pistols to good use, firing down the length of the trenches.<sup>205</sup> It

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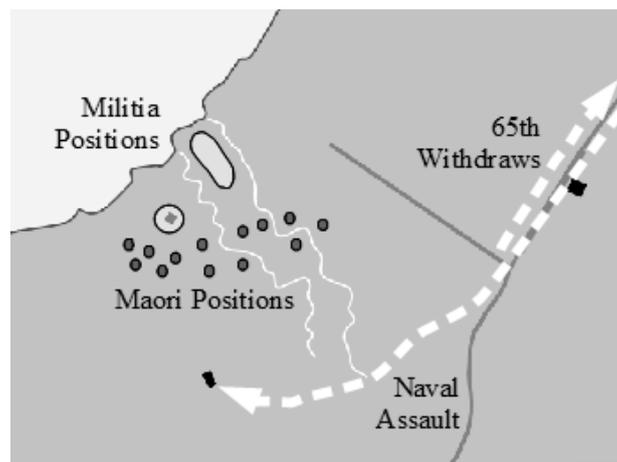
<sup>202</sup> Taranaki Herald, 31 March 1860

<sup>203</sup> The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1862, Vol 31, *Journal of Captain Cracroft, of H.M.S. "Niger" – New Zealand*, London, Simpkkin, Marshall and Co., 1862 p.576

<sup>204</sup> Wells, p.200

<sup>205</sup> Nautical Magazine, p.626

was during the brief fighting inside the pa, that Royal Marine William Clarke killed the deserter from the 58<sup>th</sup> Regt whose presence had been noted by Reverend Gilbert.<sup>206</sup> The Maori who were able to do so, fled. Those inside were killed and the flags were hauled down. Cracroft's own Coxswain, William Odgers, was conspicuous in the fight and the capture of the Maori flags, an action for which he would eventually receive the Victoria Cross.<sup>207</sup> Cracroft was taking stock of the situation and preparing to establish a defensive stance, when a messenger arrived from Murray advising that he was withdrawing. Cracroft made the unhappy decision to abandon the position and withdraw as well.<sup>208</sup>



The sudden change in fortunes occasioned by Cracroft's timely arrival

Murray had made the decision to withdraw his force shortly before dusk, and the bugle sounded the recall several times before it was obeyed, less a corporal and eight men who were left with the militia by Lt. Urquhart.<sup>209</sup> He evidently made the decision before becoming aware of the naval parties presence, and he may well have been under the impression that he had not received the requested support from New Plymouth. However, the message from Cracroft had alerted him to the presence of the naval force. Murray was able to advise Cracroft of his withdrawal, and so avoided having the naval party left isolated in the pa.

Murray's force was not closely pressed around the time of Cracroft's assault on the pa, and the 65th were able to withdraw without molestation.<sup>210</sup> Cracroft's force moved back to Omata stockade, gathering up their rocket party along the way. At Omata, they waited for a few hours before making their way back to New Plymouth, arriving about 9pm. Of the militia, nothing was known and a party was preparing to leave, when Captain Brown arrived about 11pm, carrying their wounded. The militia had not received the final attack they had been expecting, and attributed it to the pa being taken, as they could see the flags being hauled

<sup>206</sup>

ibid

<sup>207</sup>

New Zealand History Online, Biography, *William Odgers VC* <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/william-odgers-vc> Accessed 23/04/2012

<sup>208</sup>

Nautical Magazine p.627

<sup>209</sup>

Alexander, p.118

<sup>210</sup>

Wells, p.198

down, followed by a cessation in the shooting.<sup>211</sup> However, with much of the battlefield in darkness they were entirely unaware of what Maori were still on the field, and had delayed their withdrawal for several hours. There was considerable rejoicing in the town, much of it directed at Cracroft and his men, but there was also the question of Lt.Col. Murray's untimely withdrawal to be answered. Although it would be investigated, no action was taken, if for no other reason than the difficulty the precedent of court martialing an officer for obeying orders would create.

Waireka was a significant engagement and one which has seldom been fully appreciated. The Maori suffered reasonably substantial casualties; at least equal to any they would suffer in any other battle in this war. But more importantly, they lost an unusually high number of their leaders, which also helps to account for the general withdrawal that took place the following day.<sup>212</sup> For the British, the battle would help to establish a division between settlers and the regular army.<sup>213</sup> The perceived failure of the 65<sup>th</sup> to support the settler militia was the beginning of deteriorating moral in New Plymouth, which would not be improved by the overcrowding in the town. Particularly as those who had remained in outer areas now flocked into the town, including the Reverend Gilbert who had little confidence in the power of the tapu to protect him.<sup>214</sup> The militia acquired a sense of great achievement from their first fight, quickly forgetting that they had been expecting to be overrun, right up until the moment that Kaipopo Pa was stormed. The Taranaki Herald declared that the Maori had been taught a lesson about the nature of the British settler "defending his rights".<sup>215</sup> Most significantly, the British were simply far too slow to follow up their victory, and any possibility of delivering a strategic victory melted as the apparent losers were allowed time to gather up their plunder, bury their dead and withdraw south.

### Case Study - William Odgers VC

Minor figures in an historical narrative often lose their individuality, when their actions in a single incident are employed by a historian for the purposes of arguing a particular point. Once reduced to a two dimensional caricature, they are perceived as nothing more than an aspect of the incident itself, within the interpretation of the historian. Of the First Taranaki War, no other individual has suffered from this treatment more than Captain's Coxswain, William Odgers VC. In fact, it can be argued that if one single event can be used to measure a narrative, it would be Odgers winning the VC. The traditional narrative being, that the naval party stormed a defended pa and captured the position, while the revisionist narrative employed Kaipopo as a model of a "paper victory", saying the British attacked an empty pa, then lied to make it into a victory. When examined in detail, there is no reasonable doubt about what actually took place. Consequently, this one question is given a substantial deal of attention. In the two existing narratives, Odgers is either a fearless hero or a drunken liar, and

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<sup>211</sup> Taranaki Herald 31 March, 1861

<sup>212</sup> Gilbert, p.103

<sup>213</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.175

<sup>214</sup> Gilbert, p.106

<sup>215</sup> Taranaki Herald, 31 March 1860

in reality he was neither. Odgers has been distilled down to a black and white caricature, employed to illustrate a point. No apparent effort was taken to contextualise the man, and when this is done; neither narrative entirely works, as the reality does not fit either interpretation. Both accounts have their sources from which to draw their picture, and while both are technically, a faithful reporting of their sources, both are highly selective.

Cowan's narrative of the assault on Kaipopo pa, follows on from detailing the situation of the embattled settlers.<sup>216</sup> This is almost a story-telling device, which heightens the tension of the situation for the reader. The actual assault is simply told in a few lines, singling out Odgers as the first man in and who assisted in hauling down the Maori flags flying over the pa. Cowan then quotes a veteran of the assault party, one Mr R.B. Craven of Parakai, Helensville, to give the number of casualties as "about one hundred".<sup>217</sup> This is an unfortunate choice, as it is an extreme estimate which is seized on by revisionists, and used against the traditional narrative.<sup>218</sup> Cracroft's report details "sixteen bodies in the pa with a number on the road outside".<sup>219</sup> The defaulting to the larger number, displays Cowan's tendency toward dramatization in his narrative, through which a hero, in the form of William Odgers, is delivered. However, as it is quickly apparent that the casualty figure is an exaggeration, his narrative becomes undermined and can be portrayed as more of a "good yarn" than a history.

This weak portrayal is severely aggravated by his general lack of details. While Cowan had access to many participants, and did interview many people, he quotes very few sources and offers little, if any explanation as to how he arrives at his interpretations. In the Odgers case, Cowan almost exclusively employs Cracroft's report as the structure of his narrative. However, he chooses the less reliable casualty figure, apparently for the sake of dramatic effect. We are actually left with very little material with which to evaluate the validity of his version. It is a good story, but is a weak one. Cowan's account more than invites the treatment it receives from Belich.

For Belich, the Battle of Waireka and its subsequent reporting was clearly just another attempt by Europeans, to hide yet another defeat, and Morgan Grace provided him the evidence to prove it. According to Grace, the pa had been empty, and only one old man had been killed.<sup>220</sup> Expanding on this, Belich tells us the assault, and the battle itself, had not even been necessary as the militia had never been surrounded, and the settlers in the area were never in any danger, as the Maori had declared the local minister and his property tapu.<sup>221</sup> In Belich's reinterpretation, Odgers was the first man into the pa; the pa was actually only a "land claim pa" and not a fighting pa anyway.<sup>222</sup> But on finding the pa empty, (except for the one old man cooking potatoes), Cracroft and his sixty men, including a number of militia, concocted a story that it had been defended, and Cracroft recommended Odgers for the

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<sup>216</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p. 173

<sup>217</sup> *ibid*, p. 174

<sup>218</sup> *ibid*

<sup>219</sup> Wells, p.199

<sup>220</sup> Grace, p.30

<sup>221</sup> Belich, p.87

<sup>222</sup> *ibid*

prestigious Victoria Cross, in order to give the story credibility.<sup>223</sup> This is, Belich tells us, “a classic paper victory” of the sort common throughout the entire New Zealand Wars, where a British force had been defeated, yet the British simply denied it later on paper with a fictitious account.<sup>224</sup> Odger’s character is further demonstrated as flawed by Belich telling us that Odgers spent his £10 reward on “a drunken spree in Auckland”, although he mentions Odgers saved enough money to have his photo taken with his VC.<sup>225</sup> Odgers was nothing more than a lucky drunkard, who “must have thought all his Christmases had come at once”.<sup>226</sup>

Both narratives have significant weaknesses, and it is important to evaluate the sources and how those sources were used. Cowan’s account became accepted, but actually lacked the notoriety that Belich would attribute to it. As late as 1929 there remained some degree of ignorance about Odgers, and an exchange of letters to the editor of the *Evening Post* pointed out that a story of the first V.C. being won at Gate Pa was actually incorrect.<sup>227</sup> There did exist a single questioning of this version, though Morgan Grace rejected it entirely, and it is with Grace’s account that Belich begins his narrative, to turn the interpretation of events on its head. In fact, Belich’s account has become a central theme in revisionist narratives, going as far as being included in the Waitangi Tribunals Report on Taranaki, to the extent that it claims a Maori victory.

“Belich considers the Maori casualties were grossly exaggerated and amounted to 'about one'. In his view, it was 'a classic example . . . of a paper victory'. In reality, the victory lay with the Taranaki war party and its allies, who plundered the settler farms and endangered New Plymouth.”<sup>228</sup>

For the purposes of this report Belich is the source. The tribunal employed the best available information from a well-known historian, which was entirely reasonable. Belich’s version has become so widely accepted and unquestioned that revisionist authors will make no attempt to evaluate its validity to the point of even embellishing it. Edmund Bohan even claims both Cracroft and Odgers were awarded the Victoria Cross.<sup>229</sup> Wright employs the same sources in the same way, inaccurately describing Grace as a “contemporary” source.<sup>230</sup> On the other side of the division, numerous individuals have sought to “correct” what they view as an obvious and demonstrable inaccuracy. Ian McFarlane, an experienced editor, spent several years in a fruitless effort to have the NZ Government History web entry “corrected”, as noted in the previous chapter. McFarlane was frustrated to be told that the sites controllers had their

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<sup>223</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>224</sup> Belich, p.88

<sup>225</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>226</sup> *ibid*

<sup>227</sup> *Evening Post*, 3 July 1926 *William Odgers VC*

<sup>228</sup> Waitangi Tribunal *Taranaki Report, Chapter 4.2 The First War*

<sup>229</sup> Bohan, Edmund, *Climates of war: New Zealand in conflict, 1859-69*, Christchurch, N.Z., Hazard Press, 2005 p.62

<sup>230</sup> Wright, p.96,

own historians for fact checking, and declined to make any changes.<sup>231</sup> Yet an evaluation of the sources and how they were employed by Belich leads to one conclusion only, Cowan's account, while exaggerated for effect, is more accurate.

Belich's claims contain the following points;

- Morgan Grace's account stating the pa was empty.
- The pa was a "land claim pa" as asserted by Reverend Ward.
- Cracroft lied in his official report and the Victoria Cross was awarded for political reasons to support Cracroft's claim of victory.
- The account of Edward Messenger saying he could find no Maori in the pa.
- The subsequent Maori claims of having taken no casualties in the fight.
- The additional aspects of Odgers character as drunken man who had thought "all his Christmases had come at once".

The first source employed by Belich in his new narrative line, is Morgan Grace's account as told to him by a participant, who was "in Charley Urquhart's company".<sup>232</sup> The chapter is entitled, "A Soldiers Account of the War" and the entire chapter is written in quotation marks for each paragraph, but it is delivered in the first person, giving the impression that Grace is actually the source. In fact, at the time of Odgers actions at Waireka in March, Grace was at sea in transit only arriving in New Zealand in June 1860.<sup>233</sup> The most problematic issue with this account is that Grace wrote it 30 years after the events it describes and it can hardly be viewed as a primary source. Grace departed from the usual methods of an historian; he "consulted no authorities, read no dispatches".<sup>234</sup> He does however, claim a "photographic plate in my brain" of everything that he saw, "from which I can strike a picture off at will".<sup>235</sup> He also claimed to be able to "act as a phonograph of everything I heard." Grace's attitude towards events is also hardly that of an objective observer. "You will thus learn what blundering asses we were, and what fine fellows the Maori."<sup>236</sup>

Graces account is also second hand, with the added disadvantage of it not actually identifying the source at any time. Grace's source was clearly a member of the 65<sup>th</sup>, and the narrative seeks to rehabilitate the reputation of the regular soldiers, who had been the target of much criticism by the settler community, and newspapers, particularly taking issue with the newspapers "making a racket" about the 65<sup>th</sup> running away.<sup>237</sup> It is the aspect of settler military relations that is actually the most useful part of this account. The criticism of the British policy of attacking pa while not protecting settler property was a theme of reporting throughout the Taranaki War, much to the irritation of the regulars. The Reverend Robert Ward would later record that the tensions between the settler community and the British was

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<sup>231</sup> Ian McFarlane Email 15/03/2012

<sup>232</sup> Grace, p.30

<sup>233</sup> *ibid*, Introduction

<sup>234</sup> *ibid*, preface

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*,, Introduction

<sup>236</sup> *ibid*, preface

<sup>237</sup> *ibid*, p.31

repeated, as hostility, and blame for the conflict was directed at the settlers by the British press. “The secular press, from the Times downward, was stout in its accusations against the settlers.”<sup>238</sup>

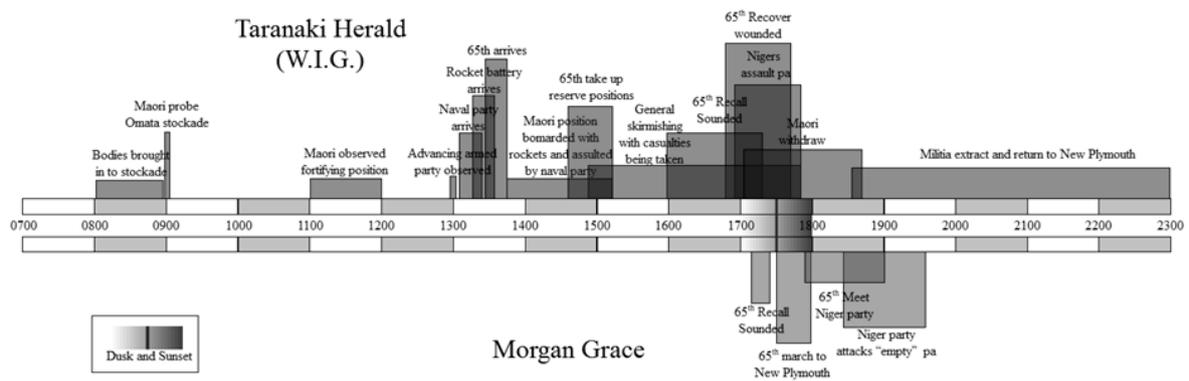
The most telling feature of Graces account is that it includes very few details other than those that support the drive of the teller to negate the efforts of the naval party. When graphically compared to William Grayling’s newspaper report that scant detail is obvious.<sup>239</sup> This alone should have raised questions of being an “interested party” with an obvious bias. The other parts of the account are entirely unsupportable, such as Graces claim that a number of elderly Maori re-entered the pa on observing his source’s own party retirement.<sup>240</sup> Even if we were to disregard the failing light, it is impossible for Grace’s source to be aware of what was taking place inside the pa, or to observe the assault while his party was moving off and already some distance away.

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<sup>238</sup> Ward, Robert, *Life among the Maories of New Zealand : being a description of missionary, colonial And military achievements*, edited by Rev. Thomas Lowe and Rev. William Whitby, Christchurch, Kiwi Publishers, 1997 p.345

<sup>239</sup> Attached as Appendix A. Graphic comparison of details of the battle of Waireka, Grayling and Grace accounts.

<sup>240</sup> Grace, p.30



*A graphic representation of the events described by Morgan Grace and William Grayling demonstrating the detail of Graylings account* <sup>241</sup>

Belich continues his line of interpretation with Ward, describing him as “a contemporary source” and noting that Ward described the pa as a “land claim pa” and not a fighting pa.<sup>242</sup> However, Belich’s “contemporary” source is the Revered Robert Ward who wrote his account over ten years after the event, without the benefit of military experience and in the environment of British having been routinely attacked, with the idea of the pa being tactically insignificant. Wards view should have been tempered by Colonel Alexander’s survey of the site, citing its weapons pits and covered escape routes.<sup>243</sup> More importantly, while Ward describes the pa as temporary, he did actually support the official accounts of the pa being assaulted while defended by “a number of natives”.<sup>244</sup> And so Belich’s use of Ward

<sup>241</sup> Full sized version attached in Appendix A

<sup>242</sup> Belich, p.87

<sup>243</sup> Alexander, p.121

<sup>244</sup> Ward, Robert, p.361

arrives at the opposite conclusion to the information that Ward provided. However, the use of Ward as a source at all is questionable, as the bulk of Ward's work was actually transcribed without attribution. Although, this only becomes clear when cross checking sources during which Ward's verbatim employment of newspaper items becomes obvious.<sup>245</sup>

The element Belich employed from Ward was that Kaipopo was a "land claim pa". In this case the physical evidence of the pa itself can be employed. For Belich this was not possible, as the pa had not been excavated, however, recent work on the site, which was included in Contested Ground, has seen Kaipopo brought to light once more.<sup>246</sup> Hans-Dieter Bader who worked on the site, states that it was "without question a well-designed fighting pa", and that the layout includes the escape trenches described by Colonel Alexander.<sup>247</sup>



*Kaipopo Pa. Digital 3D model by Raysan Al-Kubaisi, for the Puke Ariki exhibition, War, based on Hans-Dieter Bader's geomagnetic archaeological survey. The "escape ditches" described by Alexander clearly visible behind the pa.*

Belich's assertion requires an acceptance that Captain Cracroft lied, and that the Victoria Cross was awarded to William Odgers in order to support this lie. Additionally, around sixty other men in total, sailors, marines and militiamen, were co-conspirators with Cracroft with not a single one of them subsequently ever giving the slightest hint of the lie. This assertion is breathtakingly offensive to many military readers, it also does not account for the time delay in the decision to actually make the award. Cracroft's journal up until April 10<sup>th</sup>, mentions Odgers only once as being the representative of the crew at a reception for the Niger in Auckland, with only a mention of his conspicuous gallantry at Kaipopo in passing.<sup>248</sup> There is no mention of Odger even being recommended for the V.C., and it seems likely that the decision was made at a higher level than Cracroft to make the award.

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<sup>245</sup> Ward, Robert – Transcribed from Taranaki Herald

<sup>246</sup> Day, (ed), p.89

<sup>247</sup> Bader interview

<sup>248</sup> Nautical Magazine p.629

Within the context of military service, the suggestion that a senior officer would falsify a report to the degree that Cracroft has supposed to, and then to have audacity to have followed it up with the prestigious V.C., simply lacks credibility. However, to the civilian reader of the late 1980's it is entirely possible. The issue can only be treated with contextualisation. In this instance Cracroft was a veteran officer who had displayed both skill and integrity in the past, and would do so in the future. The V.C. did not hold the exalted position in 1860 that it did in 1986 and now, as Lt Col. Colin Richardson details:

It (the V.C.) had only been around for three years really. Many of the units in the Crimea treated it quite lightly when told they had to ballot for who won it – some didn't even bother. It was still customary to wear it after the campaign medal in which it was won until the 1880s.<sup>249</sup>

The assertion that “the most prestigious award” had been granted in order to bolster the false claim of victory does not function within this context.<sup>250</sup>

Edward Messenger wrote that on entering the pa, he “couldn't see anyone to stick or shoot”.<sup>251</sup> Belich does not explain how he arrived at the point where Messenger meant the pa was empty. Particularly when the more obvious interpretation is that all the defenders were dead or had fled by the time Messenger, a militiaman, had gotten into the pa after the sailors of the storming party.<sup>252</sup> This interpretation is coupled with Belich's quoting accounts of two Maori who were not present. One factor of intelligence gathering for the military in New Plymouth after the engagement was a notable lack of any kind of consistency in Maori claims.<sup>253</sup> Clifford Simons notes that misinformation, through overstatement or understatement, was a part of the employment of Maori intelligence which would involve runners to distribute information to other parts of the country in an effort to raise more recruits.<sup>254</sup> The information they delivered was seldom “bad” news and invariably not entirely accurate. Deliberate misinformation may well have been a feature of Maori intelligence during this, and other wars.<sup>255</sup>

The obvious missing perspective is that of the Maori and this presents a difficulty of its own. At present the only written source we have “Maori account” as published by Thomas McDonnell which says;

“I must tell the truth in our history. Well, these men beat us; but still we might have had better fortune had it not been for the unexpected arrival of some man-of-war

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<sup>249</sup> Richardson, Colin, Lt. Col. Email, 04/04/09

<sup>250</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Epside 2

<sup>251</sup> Belich, p. 87

<sup>252</sup> *ibid*

<sup>253</sup> Browne, p.20 Harriet Gore Browne records the the story amongst Maori that Archdeacon Octavius Hadfield was marching to support Kingi at the head of 800 Maori as an example of the absurdity of the rumours that circulated.

<sup>254</sup> Simons Interview

<sup>255</sup> *ibid*

sailors, who attacked us from another quarter. They rushed at our pa and climbed over the palisading, regardless of the storm of bullets we sent at them. We lost heavily in this remarkable fight, but we killed many of the enemy.”<sup>256</sup>

But this work may well be more a product of McDonnell’s imagination than a transcription from any Maori. It is an entirely unhelpful trap that can well end up adding to the claim of a conspiracy to create the phenomenon of Belich’s “paper victory”. The reality is that local Maori still believe that the pa was empty when stormed, as noted by Richardson.<sup>257</sup> This viewpoint must be acknowledged even though it is not supported by the weight of evidence.

The single most important element in this episode is William Odgers, and his personal story was not available to either Cowan or Belich. Odgers great-great-grandson, Stan Fisher, acquired an interest in his family history at an early age, not for the sake of William Odgers, but rather the connection many of his family had with the sea. His research was obviously more based on individuals rather than events. He found reconstructing the facts of Odgers career to be reasonably elementary.<sup>258</sup> But the real value in Fishers work is in having the oral tradition of his family members giving flesh to the bones of his narrative in the form a book, *An Ordinary Seaman (and Bluejacket) by William Odgers VC*.<sup>259</sup> Although Fisher describes the work as a fictional account, this is because some parts of Odger’s life cannot be fully known. But the elements that can be checked have proven accurate.<sup>260</sup> The details included in this interpretation have been confirmed by Fisher as being from the accounts given to him by Harry Craven, William Odger’s great-grandson.<sup>261</sup> While this source is obviously somewhat tenuous in the same way that the Maori oral traditions can be questionable, its inclusion, as with the Maori accounts, is important to provide the context lacking in the existing histories.

From the information gathered by Fisher, we gain an excellent snapshot of William Odgers. Odgers was an unusually well-educated young man who had progressed well in the Royal Navy, having become Captains Coxswain at the young age of 26. This appointment carried with a degree of responsibility and trust that is not common to the rank of Ordinary Seaman. By the time he arrived in New Zealand as part of the Crew of H.M.S. Niger, he had participated in two wars fighting in a number of engagements. Expanding our view from the individual, the rest of the crew and the Niger were also experienced veterans of those same battles. Additionally Cracroft had undertaken specialist training with the assistance of two friendly Maori in Auckland prior to deployment to Taranaki. Clearly these were no rank armatures or strangers to a fight.

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<sup>256</sup> Kowhai Ngutu Kaka, *Maori history: being a native account of the Pakeha-Maori wars in New Zealand*, edited by Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McDonnell, Christchurch, Kiwi Publishers, 1997 p.513

<sup>257</sup> Richardson, Email 04/04/09

<sup>258</sup> Fisher, Email 01/01/2013

<sup>259</sup> Fisher, Stan, *An Ordinary Seaman and Bluejacket*, by William Odgers VC, Unpublished manuscript available on Skydrive <https://skydrive.live.com/?cid=87bff6a8f1e1fe91&id=87BFF6A8F1E1FE91!247> Accessed 02/11/2010

<sup>260</sup> Fisher, Email 01/01/2013

<sup>261</sup> Fisher, *An Ordinary Seaman*, p.3

Of the fight at Waireka one key item of information is that the Niger party were armed with Enfield rifled muskets, and the 1859 pattern Colts .36 calibre six shot revolver and cutlass.<sup>262</sup> Additionally important, is the detail that not only did Cracroft give his party a motivational brief, but this took place after the party had moved on from Omata where they had seen their own First Lieutenant Blake wounded and apparently dying as noted above. They had arrived from New Plymouth, assumed the fight to be desperate, from the message that King had brought in to New Plymouth, and from the observable situation. With one of their popular officers dying, they were about to attack the enemy. In short, their blood was up, and when they delivered their assault they did so from an unexpected part of the field against a second line force, with second rate weapons, as noted by Richardson.<sup>263</sup>

The defenders may well have numbered as few as twenty, which Cracroft's report seems to indicate. Cracroft's report also indicates they received four casualties inside the pa, while from his journal, several more received during the attack up the hill. One of the arguments against the pa being defended is that Cracroft had no notable casualties, yet this is demonstrably inaccurate. The attackers were roughly 40 men armed with very accurate rifles shooting from close range while the attack went in and their officers were armed with 6 shot revolvers. The effectiveness of this fire was multiplied once inside the pa by shooting down the length of the trenches. The defenders were fighting without being able to reload, with the close proximity of the attackers. The one sided nature of this fight becomes more apparent when these details are taken into account. Cracroft and his men then withdrew from the field in the dark, after receiving Murray's message that he was withdrawing. But the impact of losing the pa was significant, and the Maori withdrew from the field on the assumption that their flank had been turned.

When a wider range of sources is evaluated it becomes apparent that William Odgers did participate in a successful assault on a defended fighting pa that evening of 20<sup>th</sup> March 1860. His actions were, by objective standards, heroic. But he did not think himself to be a hero. In fact he had nightmares for the rest of life, the first being that night. Dreaming of the two men he "shot in the eye".<sup>264</sup> His sense of guilt was such that he never wore his medals with the single exception being the day they were presented to him.<sup>265</sup> Noteworthy is that his Victoria Cross was presented to him in England, not New Zealand. He did not save money for his photo to be taken, as claimed by Belich for the simple reason that no such photo was taken.<sup>266</sup> The existing photo is a fake with the medals being painted on later.<sup>267</sup> Odger's family sold his medals to an Indian museum, after the death of his second wife, and they reside there today.

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<sup>262</sup> Fisher, Email 31/01/2013

<sup>263</sup> Richardson, Email 04/04/09

<sup>264</sup> Fisher, Email 01/01/2013

<sup>265</sup> *ibid* Email 30/01/2013

<sup>266</sup> TVNZ Documentary, Episode 2

<sup>267</sup> Fisher, Email 15/06/2012



*William Odgers V.C. (bottom centre) on display in the Sheesh Mahal Museum, Patiali.  
Note above Odgers medals is the exceedingly rare New Zealand Cross and New Zealand 1860 – 1866  
medal of Assistant S Surgeon Samuel Walker, Armed Constabulary & New Zealand Militia<sup>268</sup>*

When the sources are examined thoroughly, with context, and William Odgers is examined as a person, not the feature of an event, we gain an entirely different picture to either of those that reside in the traditional or revisionist narratives. He is neither the flawless hero, nor the drunken braggart. William Odgers was a man with flaws of character, as all men have. As a person he was both trivialised and lionised by historians in an effort to colour their own narratives. It is fitting that a better understanding of the man helps to remove some of the misunderstandings of the events, and, in this case at least, provide a clearer understanding of that event. The simple facts of Odger's life make the revisionist narrative, at best, inaccurate. The traditional narrative has separated the man from his humanity.

When reviewing what sources were used, and how they were employed, we learn more of the author's reasons for writing, than of the event itself. Additionally by including the sources that were not used for various reasons, we are left with a version of events that does have a self-supporting integrity and consistency. The new interpretation, presented above, is not a moderate version that lies between two extreme accounts, but rather something that is outside both narratives. Odgers was certainly a flawed individual, but on this day his actions were nothing less than heroic, and deeply traumatising. More importantly an understanding of Odgers actually helps us contextualise the events of the evening of 20 March 1860.

## The Raid South

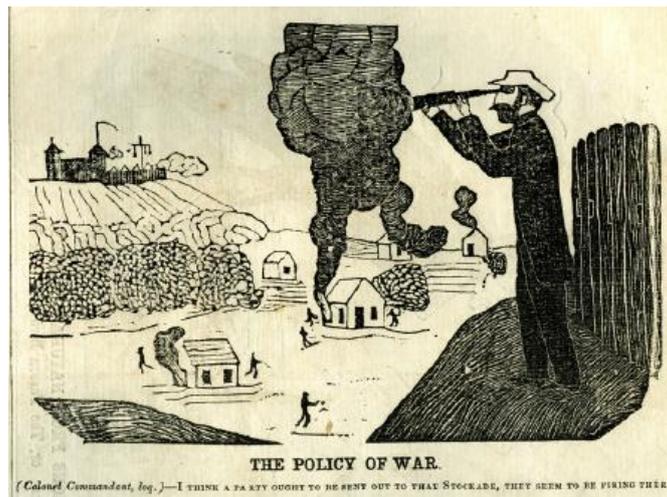
After Waireka it was clear that the Europeans had achieved a significant degree of domination, and "The Battle of Waireka" resulted in significant loss of both leadership and manpower to the Maori. The settler newspaper, The Taranaki Herald, was euphoric with the victory and confidence in the ability of the settler militia soared.<sup>269</sup> A military expedition was mounted virtually immediately to destroy the Maori military presence to the south of New Plymouth via what could be seen as an old style punitive expedition. For four days a mixed column of British troops and settler militia travelled south raiding and destroying Maori villages. In spite of the generally positive rhetoric it was at this point that the Maori strategy

<sup>268</sup> The Sheesh Mahal Medal Collection is located in the Sheesh Mahal Museum in the city of Patiali in the Punjab <http://www.victoriacross.org.uk/bbsheesh.htm>

<sup>269</sup> Taranaki Herald, 31 March 1860 p.3

should have become apparent. The Maori did not fight unless they liked the ground and the tactical situation. Numerous pa were “captured” then dismantled, or “destroyed” as the reports termed it.<sup>270</sup> All of them abandoned by the defenders after the Europeans had deployed to attack. Dissatisfaction soon began to creep in, particularly when the Maori response was to retaliate with almost surgical precision by destroying the property of their enemy. The farms and property of the British settlers became the system by which Maori applied pressure to in their war. When a pa or village was taken an appropriate balance in British property was destroyed.

Unlike the European raid, which was almost a wild random flailing, the Maori reaction displayed a discipline that should have been obvious, yet was overlooked. No church and no non-British farms were targeted.<sup>271</sup> Nor were the Maori simply operating a free for all. With thousands of pounds in property available to them and the ability to roam almost at will with the British forces remaining largely fixed to roads it was entirely within the power of the Maori to destroy the region. Yet they did not do so. The settlers quickly became disillusioned with the British plan to destroy the Maori military capability while the farms were left defenceless.<sup>272</sup>



*I think a party should be sent to that stockade, there seems to be firing there.*<sup>273</sup>

In fact the regular command was seeking a decisive engagement that Hapuroa declined to offer. Combined with the lack of troops to effectively “guard” an entire Province, it is apparent that the British were not well placed to win. Yet there was no obvious answer this dilemma. Hapuroa’s force though was able to operate in small groups and range over the area as well as enter the town to gather intelligence under the guise of being “friendly Maori”.<sup>274</sup> The situation was exceedingly detrimental on morale of the settlers who were virtually bottled up in the town and only able to visit their farms during the day in an effort to

<sup>270</sup> Taranaki Herald, 13 October, 1860

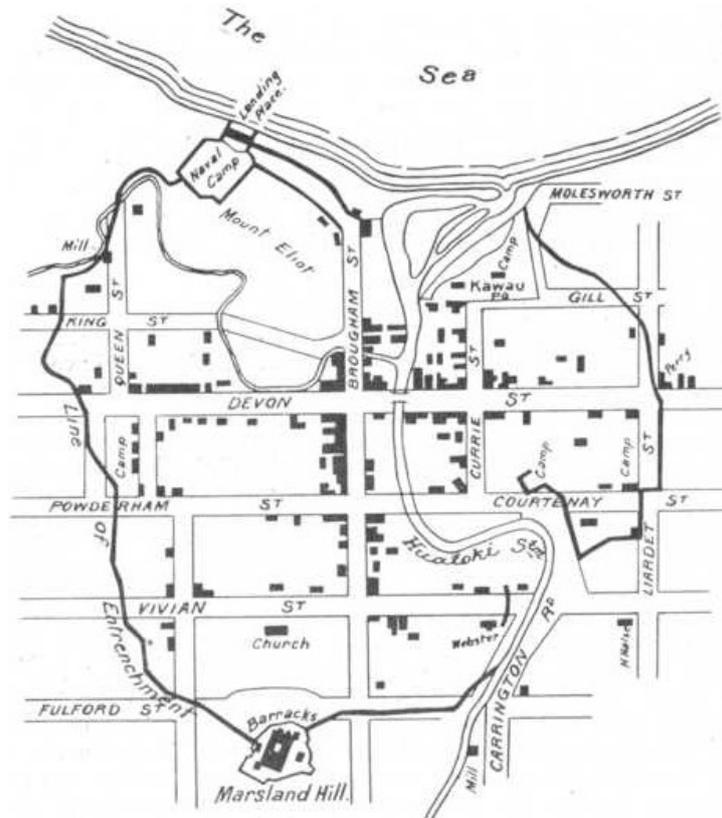
<sup>271</sup> Gilbert, p.37

<sup>272</sup> Cowan, New Zealand Wars, p.187

<sup>273</sup> New Zealand History Online, The Policy of War Cartoon, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/taranaki-war-cartoon> Accessed 04/12/2012

<sup>274</sup> Simons Interview

maintain their properties which was threaten as much by the British army as the Maori.<sup>275</sup> The four day raid south had achieved little other than to present the government forces with the reality that they were simply not in control of the war.



New Plymouth and its defences in 1860.<sup>276</sup>

Following the raid the Europeans essentially withdrew into New Plymouth and the stockades where they were secure against Maori attack, and attempted to operate the farms during the day. When fighting pa sprung up the military would attack and then destroy them. Then another pa would appear and the process would be repeated. It was obvious to all in New Plymouth that the Europeans were not winning the war. Furthermore, the farms and property of the colonials were being methodically destroyed turning it into a “desolate and plundered state”.<sup>277</sup> The tensions between the colonials and the Regulars increased with newly arriving regiments being virtually alien to the country and containing more than few of the opinion – common in the London press – that the war was a direct product of colonial greed for land which Octavius Hadfield called the “real object of the war”.<sup>278</sup> The settlers believed that the British regular forces were not protecting their property and that the church was protecting the Maori. The churches themselves were visibly not being attacked and many churchmen were vocally opposed to the war. The situation was eroding the will to fight for the Europeans while the Maori seemed free to roam, murder, steal and burn at will.

<sup>275</sup> Wright, p.96  
<sup>276</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.150  
<sup>277</sup> Gilbert, p.152  
<sup>278</sup> Hadfield, *A sequel to one of England's little wars*, p.9

Browne became fearful that the Waikato based King Movement would become involved and pose a threat to the undefended Auckland. The Governor made a somewhat optimistic attempt to pull back from the violent confrontation, and issued instructions on May 28th that hostilities against Kingi should cease and that the war should become defensive for the British.<sup>279</sup> The British military however, sought a decisive engagement as being the essential component to ending the war; the fight would take place nearly three months after Waireka on June 27<sup>th</sup> at Puketakauere. It was not the victory that the British had anticipated, although it was very close to being decisive.

## Puketakauere

The move against the Maori position at Puketakauere was ostensibly the result of a reconnaissance party being fired on from defenders at Puketakauere on April 24<sup>th</sup>. In reality the reconnaissance was a response to Hapurona's employing the presence of a Nagti Maniapoto force to establish a presence at the twin pa of Puketakauere/Onukukaitara. The British intention was to drive the Maori out of a fortified position in close proximity to the camp at Waitara and to destroy that Maori force. The British military believed that the Maori had provided them the excuse to attack and Maori believed the British had fallen for their provocation again. Not only was it a failure for the British, it was a serious defeat that crippled the morale of the British and deepened the divisions within the European community. It also demonstrated to the British that the Hapurona was a commander of considerable skill, well able to fight against them when he chose. On this occasion the result was the product of good preparations by Hapurona augmented by poor intelligence, preparation and execution by the British.

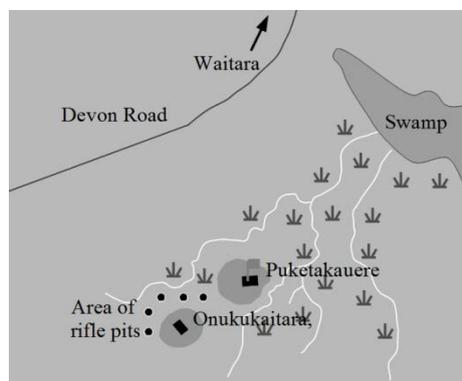
As is often the case with a failure, numerous peripheral reasons were identified in later analysis. While they were certainly aggravating elements, in reality they were of little significance to the outcome. While the losers will make much of individual failures in the quest to assign blame, Puketakauere was decided before the first shot was fired, it was simply a question of to what degree it the operation would fail. Quite simply a disorganised and dispersed force was soundly beaten by a well prepared force, fighting on ground that suited it. At Puketakauere the conditions were most eminently suitable to a fluid and mobile defence and the Maori operation was a model of this type of action. The British focused a swollen river as the point of blame, where in fact, poor communications and a failure to learn the ground were the key issues. Major Nelson, who planned the operation, was the primary architect of failure.

Nelson had to operate in full view of the Maori at Puketakauere and its other feature, the Onukukaitara Pa located about 200 meters west-south west of Puketakauere. Although the British no longer wore red, but rather campaign blue, they still used white webbing which made them very easy to see, particularly since the regular army tended to remain on the roads

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<sup>279</sup> Browne, p.24

to move.<sup>280</sup> Nelson's plan involved dividing his force in an effort to prevent the Maori escaping. There is evidence that Nelson carried out a partial reconnaissance of the area and his cut off party will be operating with some knowledge of what ground they would be traversing. But events indicate their knowledge was incomplete particularly as to where the enemy would be. Until now the Maori had usually fled when approached and British forces had been frequently criticised for making little, if any effort to prevent this flight. While previously British troops has sought to avoid such a dangerous activity as cornering Maori, no such concern existed for Major Nelson and he sought to destroy this pa with its garrison in detail. To this end Nelson had his artillery travel by road to establish a firing position targeting Puketakauere as it was from this pa that a flag was flying. Given that enthusiastic embracing of military flags by Maori it could well be argued that this was part of a deception plan to induce the British to misdirect their attack.

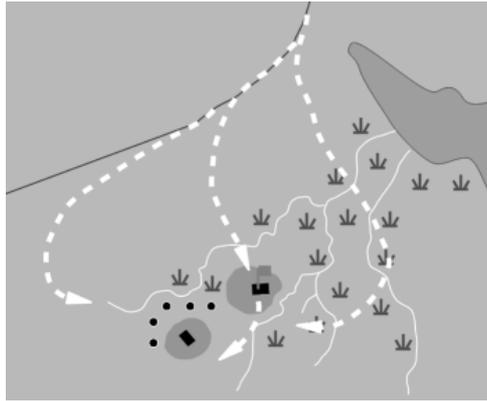


The ground of Puketakauere

The fight took place in a swampy area cut with deep gullies and with rivers swollen by recent winter rains. From Hapurona's point of view the enemy's guns would be confined to the roads and would arrive at an entirely predictable location. Any attacking party would be constricted the swamps and could easily be ambushed with any support being impeded through a lack of visual contact and the slow going of the swamps. This would all take place in full sight of the high ground held by the Maori. Given the high growing scrub and flax that dominated the area around the pas the area was simply made for defence, particularly a mobile one. Hapurona made full use of the conditions and set his force in concealed fire pits and ambush locations. Hapurona prepared a trap, and then taunted the British with his presence. Nelson walked into this trap with a poorly planned and excessively aggressive plan.

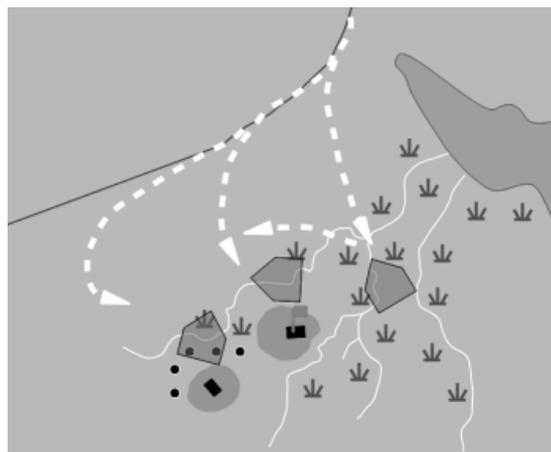
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<sup>280</sup> Ryan, p.50



Nelson's complex plan of attack on the double position at Puketakauere

The militia cut-off party never got into position, they were slowed by the swamp they were attempting pass through and blundered into a sizeable Maori ambush group. The militia were routed in a protracted running fight, and the wounded were left behind. On the other side of the field, the attack on the pa was first struck by flanking fire from the rifle pits and then assaulted by Maori from the Onukukaitara Pa. Finally the Maori who had already driven off the militia added their weight to the counter attack. These repeated blows drove the regulars from the field ignominiously. If Major Nelson was the primary architect of the British failure, then Hapurona was the architect of Maori success. Hapurona had near full tactical intelligence with the entire field visible from the pa and the movement of Maori from one side of the field to the other indicates he made full use of his interior lines to apply maximum advantage. In contrast there the British parties were unable to communicate with, or support each other. The British wounded were left on the field to be killed and the quest for a culprit was begun. Blame was quickly directed at Major Nelson for delivering a poorly timed attack.<sup>281</sup> This was followed by unfavourable attention being directed at Col. Gold who arrived at the Waiongana Stream and decided that the river was too swollen and that his force was not needed so retraced his steps to New Plymouth.<sup>282</sup>



The action at Puketakauere with the British show in white and the Maori in grey.

<sup>281</sup> Ryan, p.43

<sup>282</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.182

In fact Gold's force could have made little difference to the outcome, defeat was virtually inevitable. The moral of the Europeans plunged to an all-time low and an anti-war feeling began to grow amongst the population. Extremist rumours were common and some belief existed that the bodies of the fallen had been simply stripped and thrown into the swamp. In reality they had been accorded a degree of respect, in that they were buried after having their equipment removed for further use by the Maori. The common grave is located under a new off ramp from SH3.<sup>283</sup> For the Maori there was jubilation and another great recruitment drive was undertaken with the prizes taken from the fallen British to aid their efforts.<sup>284</sup> However, this victory was sufficiently significant to gain the attention of the senior military officer in Australasia, General Thomas Pratt. Pratt was a highly experienced and able officer who was well supported with an able staff. Puketakauere would see Pratt relocate his command to New Plymouth to take direct control of the war with the intention of bringing that war to successful conclusion. His presence would lead to the British forces operating in an entirely new way that would bring the war to a cease fire. Pratt was one problem for which Hapurona lacked an immediate answer.

### Case Study – Puketakauere

One of the great weaknesses of Cowan's narrative is that it avoids the less savoury aspects of events, electing instead to focus on the more positive images of the conflict. His two narratives of the events are his initial work on the subject, *The New Zealand Wars* and the follow up, *Hero Stories of the New Zealand Wars*. In *Hero Stories*, Cowan goes to great lengths to seek out, and retell, the story of Lt. Brooke who was killed during the rout in the swamp in order to demonstrate the honourable nature of the defenders in such a way that it has context for his readers.<sup>285</sup> His account is well sourced, more than likely accurate, but glosses over the fact that the wounded were summarily executed and the bodies were stripped before burial as mentioned, if only obliquely, in *The New Zealand Wars*. In this mention Cowan excuses the action as being a necessity of combat where the Maori were "unable" to take prisoners.<sup>286</sup>

Even so Cowan provides us with an otherwise detailed account of the events of both before and after the fight, as well as the battle itself. He identifies that the absence of a reconnaissance led to the British fighting blind.<sup>287</sup> He also details the ground, but noticeably does not provide a map as was his usually practice. Without justification, Puketakauere is described as "impregnable", which is simply unrealistic.<sup>288</sup> From Cowan's narrative we can reconstruct the battle, but with some limitations. Without the usually provided map we only have only what Cowan tells us and in some points he is not entirely clear. Such as the left hand column of Nelson's force being instructed to "march to the left" in its effort to flank the

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<sup>283</sup> Bader, Interview

<sup>284</sup> Simons, Interview

<sup>285</sup> Cowan, *Hero Stories*, p.59

<sup>286</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.183

<sup>287</sup> *ibid*, p.179

<sup>288</sup> *ibid*, p.178

Maori defences.<sup>289</sup> This leaves us with some questions, particularly how did this detachment manage to flee the Maori in the swamp and end up bumping into Nelsons force only to be sent back to collect their own stragglers.<sup>290</sup> The narrative seems almost contrived to explain the defeat while absolving as many as possible of responsibility for it.

More helpfully, Cowan details the discussion amongst the Kingites that led to the increase in manpower for Hapurona to make this stand.<sup>291</sup> This provides us a better understanding of the issues Hapurona had to contend with in waging this war. We learn that Hapurona is dependent on the Maori King who was opposed to the war actually releasing warriors to fight, although notably those Cowan says were released were under Rewi Maniapoto and Rewi was generally considered to be unlikely to be swayed by the King anyway.<sup>292</sup> It is details like this that provide us context for the battle and are frequently absent, or at least glossed over, in the traditional narrative. Additionally Cowan gives us a good understanding of the impact of Puketakauere on the morale of both the British and the Maori.<sup>293</sup> The spirit of the people of New Plymouth plunged, as reflected in the newspaper; particularly galling was the inability to deal with their own dead who had been left in the swamp.

Although Cowan includes a proclamation from Robert Carey dated September 3<sup>rd</sup> to help illustrate his narrative, which does not help maintain confidence in his work.<sup>294</sup> For Maori, Cowan notes, such a significant victory, backed up with the display of British uniforms and equipment resulted in a major recruiting drive by Hapurona for his Taranaki war.<sup>295</sup> The one element that Cowan missed was the double edged sword of success for the Maori. In this case it was Puketakauere that led to Pratt taking direct command. The growing confidence and aggression of Maori detailed by Cowan would ultimately lead to the invasion of the Waikato, having provided the next Governor, Grey, with the excuse he needed to seek the destruction of the King Movement. The Maori victory gave Cowan a motivation to examine the event in a wider context than usual, but it also reduced the detail of the event.

Belich's interpretation of Puketakauere greatly assists in a thorough understanding of the battle when added to Cowan's. There are elements of Belich's narrative that are not entirely accurate though, particularly those that touch on the military operations. Belich does, however, correctly and accurately identify the significance of the battle, both long and short term. Belich describes Puketakauere as the most important battle of the First Taranaki War "with profound strategic and political consequences".<sup>296</sup> The value of Belich's narrative is somewhat undermined by a conspiracy theory however, and also underplays the issues faced by the British, as well as an attack on historians who do not concur with his own conclusions. In this narrative the reconnaissance was a deliberate provocation to entice the Maori into

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<sup>289</sup> Cowan New Zealand Wars, p.180

<sup>290</sup> *ibid*, p.183

<sup>291</sup> *ibid*, p.180

<sup>292</sup> *ibid*

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, p.178

<sup>294</sup> Cowan NZ Wars, p.184

<sup>295</sup> Simons, Interview

<sup>296</sup> Belich p.92

firing, which it may well have been. But Belich extrapolates the circumstantial evidence to suggest that Gore Bowne was a party to this effort.<sup>297</sup>

His primary evidence is to quote, but not identify or appropriately source, “one local settler” who Belich tells us, said that the reconnaissance force was sent out “really as bait”.<sup>298</sup> Numerous historians have been critical of Nelson for failing to complete the reconnaissance which hampered Captain Messenger’s eastern column, but Belich claims that the area that had been subject to a close reconnaissance” and those historians were all wrong. In fact the reconnaissance was not “close”. “Close reconnaissance” is a specific term relating to closing on an enemy position and gaining detailed knowledge of it. Belich specifically states that the British actually lacked this knowledge, it is a feature of his narrative in fact, stating “but the crucial fact was that the advancing British did not know it was fortified”.<sup>299</sup> The previous works being critical of Nelson for failing to complete are correct. They were being critical of the reconnaissance not being completed, not in failing to attempt the reconnaissance as Belich asserts.

These elements of Belich’s narrative are essentially the colour of the revisionist narrative and it is further displayed by an overstatement that Major Nelson was a “capable and vigorous” officer.<sup>300</sup> The weakness of Nelson’s plan and his choosing to divide of his force in the face of an unknown enemy make his leadership questionable. It is almost a blueprint for the much more substantial disaster of Isandlwana during the Anglo- Zulu War 19 years later, and it is only the smaller forces involved that make it less significant in the global context.<sup>301</sup> Belich’s approach is augmented by a manipulation of the numbers with a view to maximising the British force and describing them as “elite”, while minimising the Maori numbers to heighten to one sided nature of the victory.<sup>302</sup> In fact neither the Naval Brigade, nor the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment were “elite”. The only significance is that the grenadier company of the 40<sup>th</sup> was employed, which indicates the tallest and biggest men of the regiment, nothing more. Without these dressings the narrative of the fight is actually reasonably accurate based on the evidence. It also does not gloss over the more unpleasant aspects of the wounded being “slain without mercy.”<sup>303</sup> But it is tempered by the colouring of the situation with even the exceedingly difficult situation of Messenger being reduced to Messenger’s force being in “less favourable terrain than Nelsons.”<sup>304</sup> The “less favourable” was in reality some of the single worst terrain in a country known for it difficult terrain and on no accounts should be underestimated as a factor.

Even when accurately identifying that Gold had no responsibility for the defeat at Puketakauere, Belich incorrectly claims that Gold was replaced by Pratt because of his failure

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<sup>297</sup> Belich p.92

<sup>298</sup> ibid

<sup>299</sup> ibid, p.93

<sup>300</sup> ibid, p.92

<sup>301</sup> Farwell, Byron, *Queen Victoria’s Little Wars*, London, Allen Lane 1973 p.225-227

<sup>302</sup> Belich, p.92

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p.94

<sup>304</sup> ibid

to support Nelson.<sup>305</sup> At best this is a “technically accurate” comment. However, Pratt, (a Major General where Gold was a Colonel), taking command was a substantial change in the situation that was accompanied by the significant increase in the number of troops. Gold remained in his existing position in command of the 65<sup>th</sup> and continued to serve in his existing rank until he retired from the 65<sup>th</sup> in October, and was promoted to Major General, which has more the look of a reward than a punishment.<sup>306</sup> The evidence in regards to Colonel Gold is actually polarised and contradictory, with the sources making it possible to describe Gold with range of abilities as a soldier. Letters to the editor debating the responsibility for the failure at Puketakauere were exchanged well after Gold’s death expressing support and condemnation for his actions.<sup>307</sup> At the very least we can see that Puketakauere remained very much a bitter incident for the settlers, but Gold was not “punished” for it as Belich suggests. Almost every aspect of the British military is subjected to a negative treatment unless it is a positive employed to build up the Maori, such as Nelson’s ability.

Belich focuses on the leadership and fluid defence by Hapurona as the primary, indeed single, cause for defeat of the British. After presenting the defenders with the problem of overwhelming numbers against their own few and a British commander of superior skill, Belich also claims that Nelson managed to secure “tactical surprise”.<sup>308</sup> Yet in spite of these barriers Hapurona completely trounced the British, taking insignificant casualties in the process.<sup>309</sup> Belich identifies Maori tactics, engineering techniques and an employment of the “modern pa” as with the L-Pa, as the cause of the British defeat.<sup>310</sup> As Belich observed the existing narrative failed to provide an adequate explanation of the Maori ability to defend the position and he had corrected this error.

However Belich has simply performed the same mistake, only in reverse. The engineering played no part in the action whatsoever beyond being the focus for the British and intended to lure them into the killing zone. When providing his explanation of how the modern pa works Belich states that the works entice the British to attack and once the defenders have inflicted loss on the attackers they withdraw.<sup>311</sup> This is not what took place at Puketakauere where Hapurona displayed great skill in mounting a flexible, reactive defence, in which his works were never actually threatened and the Maori remained on the field. Belich’s enthusiasm for Maori ability is unquestionable, but it does not demonstrate a good understanding of the ability of Hapurona as a general and questions remain to be investigated. What is most useful about examining Puketakauere is its treatment by the two narrative. It remains underplayed and excused by the traditional narrative, while somewhat overplayed and inaccurately

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<sup>305</sup>       ibid p.97

<sup>306</sup>       Te Ara Biography, Gold Charles, Emilius, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1g13/gold-charles-emilius> Accessed 23/06/2012

<sup>307</sup>       Hawke’s Bay Herald, *The Late Colonel Gold*, 12 August 1882

<sup>308</sup>       Belich, p.93

<sup>309</sup>       ibid, p.97

<sup>310</sup>       ibid, p.98

<sup>311</sup>       ibid, p.83

interpreted by the revisionist line. In neither narrative is the defence of Puketakauere by one on New Zealand's most skilful generals analysed thoroughly.

## The Stalemate

After the Maori victory at Puketakauere New Plymouth became a virtual town under siege. The plunge in European moral was matched by a rise in both warrior numbers and confidence for Maori. The perceived dominance had shifted to Hapurona and it was clear that in spite of the rhetoric of the Taranaki Herald, the Europeans were not fighting an undisciplined "mob of savages". This underestimation of their foe remained a feature of the settler newspaper throughout the war. Even the defeat at Puketakauere was reported as being "confused" and an attempt was made to claim a huge number of casualties inflicted on the Maori. This degree of denial did nothing to maintain moral in the face of reality when the Maori began attacking the outlying fortifications and even the perimeter of New Plymouths defences. Even at this height of Maori dominance two issues would ensure Hapurona would not ultimately be victorious. First Hapurona's allies began to decline as warriors went home for the planting season, secondly British frustration at lack of progress would see Major General Thomas Pratt arrive in the country to take direct command of the war and with him a substantial number of additional regular soldiers. But until the Pratt's presence came to be felt Hapurona would exploit his superiority with stepped up pressure on the British.

In spite of the multi-tribal make up of Hapurona's force, there is evidence of a high degree of discipline in the prosecution of the war with Hapurona able to targeted a specific enemy. Churches and foreigners remained unharmed. Even when the entire village of Henui, only 1 mile from New Plymouth, was put to the torch the church remained unscathed.<sup>312</sup> The same situation was repeated in Bell Block and Waitara where the churches remained safe. Maori pressure on New Plymouth was stepped up with comparatively large scale attacks and the adversaries began clashing closer to the defences of the town. Several of the stockades fired on including Fort Carrington and the naval stockade of Fort Niger.<sup>313</sup> There were numerous skirmishes, and the settler militia under Captain Atkinson began to demonstrate their willingness and ability to operate in close country. But there was no noticeable improvement in the situation, and with winter came sickness in the overcrowded town that was made worse by the limited supplies and lack of fresh food.<sup>314</sup> Civilian deaths from illness would outstrip military casualties from war. The most notable military actions though were the reinforcing of New Plymouth with 150 men from the 40th in Auckland and the emplacement of two naval 32-pounders "on the end of the spur in the rear of Marsland Hill fort, in order to sweep the ground to the south of the town."<sup>315</sup>

These efforts were clearly defensive and did little to help moral. When Pratt arrived he found New Plymouth to be a town under siege with questionable defensives spread over an

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<sup>312</sup> Cowan, New Zealand Wars, p.185

<sup>313</sup> *ibid*

<sup>314</sup> Taylor p.114

<sup>315</sup> Cowan, New Zealand Wars, p.185

excessively long perimeter leaving an inadequate number of soldiers available to carry out offensive operations. Pratt was unimpressed with the haphazard approach that had been taken up until his arrival, and immediately set about putting the situation into his military vision of order. This saw a reduction of civilians in New Plymouth itself with women and children being sent at government expense to Nelson, or further at their own cost. The perimeter of the town was reduced and rationalised to make it if more readily defensible. He also undertook a review of the actions taken so far, although there is no evidence of a witch-hunt or any form of house cleaning. Pratt evidently did not feel the need to tinker with officer appointments. Although New Plymouth was already under martial law proclamations become more common and daily life inside the town more regulated. Outside the town Pratt sought out both a method and location that would result in the defeat the Maori and end the war.

Pratt's first efforts, however, were to secure his base of operations. Many of the women and children were shipped off to Nelson at government expense or their own cost if they wished to go further. The perimeter was reduced and some outlying parts of the town abandoned. Although theoretically already under martial law, New Plymouth now became a military town in practice, that existed to support Pratt's operations against the Maori. Once his base was secured in a satisfactory manner, Pratt began operations against the Maori, and while he had no noticeably dramatic successes, he did manage to avoid the defeats experienced by Gold. Pratt began his offensive operations with another expedition south where, on October 9<sup>th</sup>, he attacked Orongomai Pa and two other mutually supporting pa, employing sapping methods. During the night these pa were abandoned and Pratt took all three pa without loss.

In itself this was simply more of the same sort of action that had been a feature of the war until this time. Yet Pratt had certainly studied the actions to this time and he clearly felt that he would be able to apply his methods in a more effective, less costly manner. Followed by this exercise in attacking Pratt was engaged in the open several times but prevented his own force following up when the Maori "retreated" into the bush. Although this was derided as timidity by the Taranaki Herald, it certainly seems that Pratt was able to avoid a substantial ambush on more than one occasion.<sup>316</sup> The shift in balance was slow and certainly not noticed by the civilians, but the coming of summer would be Pratt's opportunity to employ his additional troops and seek an ending to the war. In spite of his poor reputation for lethargy and timidity in the press, Pratt's reaction to a Waikato tua moving into the area was swift and decisive. At Mahoetahi, Pratt took and kept the initiative in the war and even if the press were unaware of it, Hapurona certainly was as his operations became more reactive than proactive.

### The Assault on Mahoetahi

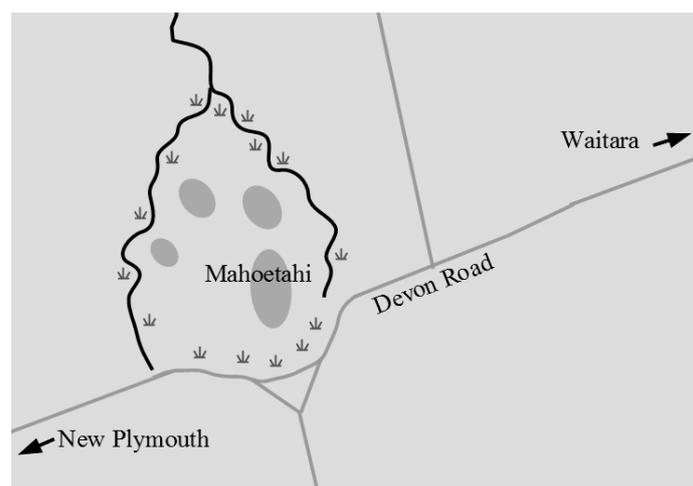
The November 6<sup>th</sup> engagement at Mahoetahi could well be regarded as a mirror of Puketakauere. Although the situations were similar, the result was entirely reversed. The British victory was so one sided that even at the victorious British and militia soldiers were

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<sup>316</sup> Taranaki Herald 15 September 1860, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=TH18600915&e=-----10--1----0--> Accessed 11/03/2013

less than jubilant at the result. At Mahoetahi a large force of British and colonial troops attacked and quickly overran a pa site defended by the newly arrived Maniapoto and Raukawa under Waitini Taiporutu. Yet the impact on the moral of the British and the Maniapoto and Raukawa was marked. For the settlers it was the beginning of the end of a debilitating and seemingly never ending war. From the perspective of the Maori, it was an unmitigated disaster, yet one that served to harden their resolve and would provide Hapurona yet more warriors with which to maintain his fight to the very end. Ultimately it was a battle that should probably not have been fought had Hapurona been listened to.<sup>317</sup> It was simply a mistake by Wetine Taiporutu to make a stand on such a weak position against a numerically superior force.

Mahoetahi is a collection low mounds located on the Devon Road approximately 1 kilometre west of the Waiongona Stream. As such it is situated directly between New Plymouth and the Waitara military base. The low ground was marked with swampy areas around the stream lines with a broader swamp to the south, which dry in summer. The Devon Road looped around the south end of the hill, and swamp. Now it cuts directly through the hill and the swamp is virtually gone. The main position on the southern mound was an old pa and in very poor repair when Wetine Taiporutu's tua made their stand. At the time of the battle, early summer, the swamps were substantially reduced in their effect. As a defensible position Mahoetahi was exceedingly poor and the location multiplied the positions shortcomings. It was well in advance of the Maori dominated area, and on the primary supply road between New Plymouth. Possibly the most significant aspect of the position is its lack of escape route. This is particularly problematic with substantial enemy forces being based either side of Mahoetahi. The pa on the hill was both old and had not been maintained. What firing pits existed, were overgrown, while the palisade was in a very poor state.



The ground at Mahoetahi

On the night of November 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>, Wetine Taiporutu force moved south and occupied Mahoetahi. Skirmishers were sent out to scout the area and the remainder of the force got to

<sup>317</sup> Cowan, New Zealand Wars, p.184

work re-instituting the defences.<sup>318</sup> There is some conflicting evidence about whether or not they were supported by Hapurona with Morgan Grace writing 30 years later with details of around 140 Taranaki Maori taking up a hidden position in the swamp.<sup>319</sup> Grace, as previously noted, is a highly questionable source and his account – which he writes as being first hand – is demonstrably inaccurate in other points. However Cowan agrees that there was Maori force located in the swamp at the time of the assault.<sup>320</sup> There is also the possibility that Hapurona argued against making a stand at this site at all. This has its source in a waiata detailed by Cowan. *Haere ra, e Tima, i te riri kaihoru a Ngati-Haua; Kaore i whakaaro ko te kupu pai a Haapurona.*<sup>321</sup> Regardless of which force occupied the swamp, it was evident that the defenders were planning repeat the events of Puketaukere.

At the same time that the Waikatos were moving on Mahoetahi, Pratt received word of their presence in the area. In spite of his reputation for being slow, Pratt issued orders for an immediate response with the troops at Waitara received their orders near midnight for a 4am start to the operation.<sup>322</sup> This alone presents us with a picture of Pratt that is inconsistent with the common perceptions of him. Since taking command in Taranaki, Pratt had frequently not followed up minor successes and appeared timid to the settlers. Yet it would appear that on at least one occasion he had managed to avoid a major ambush as a consequence of habitually avoiding moving too deeply into the forest.<sup>323</sup> Pratt produced a simple and effective plan in a very short time and had his forces moving in order to converge on Mahoetahi from two directions before sunrise. While it is often perceived since the revision that there was an element of “good fortune” in Pratt having been prepared to move on Mahoetahi, it is apparent from the urgent signalling which initiated the following days efforts of two forces moving from opposite directions, that Pratt was reacting to a situation, not carrying out a pre-planned operation with Carey detailing the increase in size of the force to be deployed.<sup>324</sup>

The attack itself was not a set piece engagement, but rather a running fight with Pratt’s force moving on the road with flank security, driving the Waikato skirmishers back as they advanced. Consequently, the British force arrived at Mahoetahi already deployed, but somewhat disordered.<sup>325</sup> In fact they had crossed the stream and prepared to assault before the guns were brought up. In these circumstances it would have been clear to the defenders that their situation was exceedingly serious. They were substantially outnumbered and if they had intended to foul an attack with men secreted in the swamp, those men were poorly placed to do this. The decision of the Waikato’s to remain was certainly brave, but it was not militarily sound. The British had virtually no defensive palisade to deal and combined with the problem of shells skipping low mounds and endangering the Waitara force, the artillery

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<sup>318</sup> ibid, p.191

<sup>319</sup> Grace, p.87

<sup>320</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p194

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, Translation: “Farewell O Tima, overwhelmed in the flood of battle.

’Twas the fatal deed of Ngati-Haua, they who heeded not the wise counsel of Hapurona.”

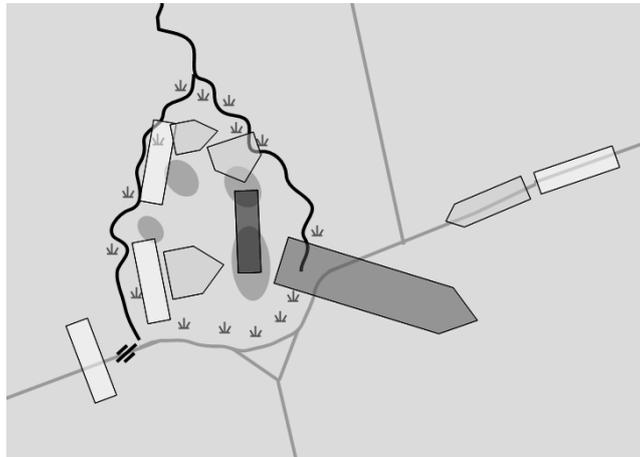
<sup>322</sup> Carey, p.126-127

<sup>323</sup> ibid, p.104

<sup>324</sup> ibid, p.126

<sup>325</sup> Wright, p.103

fired only briefly. The rifle fire was exchanged, and the 65<sup>th</sup> assaulted the position with the settler militia enveloping the northern end of the position and then adding to the charge.



The hammer and anvil operation at Mahoetahi

The defenders quickly broke and fled, and it was at this was the point that the Waitara force arrived, and were deploying to engage the fleeing Maori in the flank. Hand to hand fighting became widespread in the swamp to the east as the Maniapoto and Raukawa retreated. The pursuit continued until within close sight of Puketaukere Pa, which was still occupied by Maori at this time.<sup>326</sup> Were Hapurona present with a force exceeding 100, this would have been the time for him to strike. But there is no evidence for this happening. The reports indicate that around 30 Maori were killed with an unknown number wounded while the British got off with much lighter casualties. The casualty list presented by Cowan is quite specific, and supports the traditionally accepted numbers.<sup>327</sup> The dead and wounded were collected with the aid of allied Maori who had marched with Pratt from New Plymouth. The friendly Maori helped to identify the dead, while General Pratt shook the hand of each of the wounded - many of whom would soon die of their wounds – in acknowledgement of their great courage. It was hardly the bitter race war as presented in revisionist interpretations. Four Waikato chiefs among the dead, including the commander Wetine Taiporutu, were removed to New Plymouth for burial in a display of respect that was not uncommon with the regulars, yet apparently exceedingly offensive to the settlers, whose empathy had been eroded by their own situation. The difference in attitude was marked. The memorial stone on the grave reads;

*Maori War*  
*In honoured memory*  
*of*  
*Wetine Taiporutu, Whararangi, Hakopa*  
*Hemi Taiporutu and two others.*  
*Chiefs of the Waikato and*  
*Allied Tribes, who fell fearlessly*

<sup>326</sup>

Wright, p.104

<sup>327</sup>

Cowan, New Zealand Wars, Appendix B Mahoetahi Casualty report

*leading their tribesmen at  
Mahoetahi, 6th Nov. 1860.  
'Haeri ra o Taiporutu  
i te riri kaihoru.'*

Taranaki Punch delivered an entirely different perspective by publishing the following cartoon February 13<sup>th</sup> as a reaction to burial of the chiefs.



Taranaki Punch February 13<sup>th</sup> 1861

The cartoon was followed two weeks later with an item that included the comment;

“we have heard that several people have positively tasted, perhaps it might be called an essence of Maori, existing in their wells, and it is not at all an uncommon thing to see people making wry faces after drinking, no doubt resulting from the peculiar sensation imparted to the roof of the mouth. Ugh! Horrible idea! Drinking infusion of Maori! ugh! decoction of nigger! If grubs turn the colour of what they eat, why should not children turn the colour of what they drink?”<sup>329</sup>

Aside from displaying a degree of overt racism which simply alienates any modern reader, the cartoon and comment provide us with an indicator of the level of simple anger that existed for the settlers. Their homes have been destroyed, their future crippled, their families have died of illness while the government and regular army have taken over their town, ruling by proclamation. None of this excuses the content, but the context is essential to

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<sup>328</sup> New Zealand History Online, *Reaction to Maori burials in New Plymouth*  
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/burying-maori-new-plymouth-cartoon> Accessed 13/01/2013

<sup>329</sup> *ibid*

understanding it. If we were to view the long term Maori reaction to their experiences we can observe similar responses in terms of anger.

### Case Study – Mahoetahi

Cowan’s account is more of a story than a battle narrative, being lively and descriptive. It does contain a lot of very useful detail along with the narrative however. Cowan repeatedly invokes a direct visualisation of the battle employing the commands used such as, “fix bayonets and prepare to charge”, followed shortly by the “charge” sprinkle the account.<sup>330</sup> At the same all the significant officers, their ranks and place in the command structure are detailed.<sup>331</sup> Cowan is able to employ the disparity in numbers to show the “splendid heroism” of the Maori, indeed it is significantly easier to present them in a positive light when they are so quickly and thoroughly overwhelmed. Cowan describes the “gallant Ngati-Haua”, being forced back, “yard by yard”.<sup>332</sup> In spite of Cowan’s vivid descriptions of 600 rifles and howitzer shells bursting around them, at the stage of the battle Cowan is describing, the howitzers had actually ceased firing and were masked, while the fight Maori were actually in full flight.<sup>333</sup> In reality Cowan has over dramatized the fight.

Indeed Cowan indulges in repeating a number of personal stories of the hand to hand fighting in the swamp where the European combatants are named, but the Maori are referred to by a physical description.<sup>334</sup> While these stories certainly add colour they do not add significantly to the account, but rather serve to highlight the Eurocentric nature of it. What is more notable is Cowan’s description of the Atiawa electing not to fight.<sup>335</sup> Although this part of the narrative supports Grace’s version of events, it lacks details. Cowan does not place them on field at all, but tells us that they could have halted the British attack, but “remained aloof” and were simply content to be “distant spectators”. Cowan also mentions Kingi by name, yet there is no evidence to suggest Kingi’s presence. It is these small acts of assumption employed to fill in the blanks that undermine Cowan’s narrative.

Cowan completes his narrative with extensive notes, including a detailing of the lament waiata to the Maori fallen, from which can be drawn the possibility of Hapurona advising the Waikato’s not to make their stand at this place. This fits with the realities of Maori operations in that Hapurona did not have authority to issue direct orders to other chieftains. It is supported by the possibility of Te Atiawa observing, but not participating in, the fight. We simply lack the confirming details that would have aided a better understanding of the complex relations between the tribes and how they impacted on military activity. The notes are completed by another personal account, notably from General Alexander, relating to one of the Maori staying with a dying friend only to be killed himself. This was followed with a

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<sup>330</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.191

<sup>331</sup> *ibid* p.192

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>333</sup> White, p.286

<sup>334</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.193

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*, p.103

detailing of the ground as it was when Cowan was researching his work. His narrative is essentially focused on engaging sympathy for Maori, using the one sided nature of the fight to reach his audience. For Belich the battle is actually of little relevance and is easily explained.

Perhaps Belich's great impediment was that he was not in New Zealand when he produced his work and did not have access to the ground which is reflected in his interpretation of Mahoetahi. An understanding of the ground is an absolute essential to understanding military activity, and it is not a coincidence that when formal orders are issued they begin with a description of the ground. Belich made a number of errors in relation ground throughout his work as noted by Peter Maxwell.<sup>336</sup> In regards to Mahoetahi the ground is one of the pivotal factors in the outcome. It was quite simply an exceedingly poor choice of ground to defend on several counts. This is one of the difficulties experienced by Belich that is exploited by critics in the same way that Cowan is exploited for his style and aspects that are not as robust as they might be.

At Mahoetahi the newly arrived Waikato chief placed himself on a low hill in the open, literally on the supply road between Waitera and New Plymouth. There was no escape route, there was no possibility of mobile response to an approaching enemy in the open country. There was no realistic expectation of support from the nearest friendly position with Puketakauere being on the other side of the Waiongana Stream. Belich struggles to maintain his narrative with Mahoetahi applying "bad luck" as the reason the defenders were beaten, with Pratt coincidentally moving to occupy the same position within a day of the defenders arrival.<sup>337</sup> But when the probability of Haperona warning the Waikatos not to fight in such a position is considered, mere "luck" is not a sufficient explanation.<sup>338</sup>

Belich goes on to suggest fewer Waikato present than is generally accepted, numbering them between 50 and 150.<sup>339</sup> Belich quotes both Marjoram and A.S. Atkinson to support this re-evaluation. But the actual quote employed is from Wells, in which the assertion of fewer than 50 Maori being present is presented, in fact Wells only records the force as being "a powerful reinforcement".<sup>340</sup> Wells' account was taken verbatim from Graylings published in the Taranaki Herald, and a more expansive quotation from the newspaper includes "They say there were only fifty Maories in the fight at Mahoetahi. I did not believe them."<sup>341</sup> This quote, rather than supporting the lower number actually rejects it. Belich's narration is exceedingly brief and claims that over "1,000 beat less than 50".<sup>342</sup> This is stretching the facts beyond accuracy with the British force being well detailed in its number at less than 750 and never combining in the fight at all while a substantial portion were employed as flank

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<sup>336</sup> Maxwell, p.19

<sup>337</sup> Belich, p.101

<sup>338</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.194

<sup>339</sup> Belich p. 101

<sup>340</sup> Wells, p.212

<sup>341</sup> Wellington Independent, 14 December 1860 <https://www.google.co.nz/search?q=Hakihea+&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a> Accessed 23/04/2013

<sup>342</sup> Belich, p.101

guards for the artillery.<sup>343</sup> He makes no mention that a substantial portion of the force of “1,000” actually coming from Waitara.

Mahoetahi presented Belich with the problem of Maori being beaten and taking significant casualties. This fell outside his revisionist narrative, but is reasonably straightforward to deal with by demonstrating that a huge numerical disparity existed. However, Belich has become dependent on Maori sources which contain a spread of iwi-centric stories that are frequently perspective based. Where one tribe may claim that only a few men survived, they may well be referring to their own tribe, not the entire force.<sup>344</sup> Without making a thorough evaluation of all the sources, Belich has made arbitrary numerical alterations to the engagement in order to dismiss it. In doing so he does a disservice to the participants and demonstrates an unwillingness to acknowledge any ability on the part of Pratt. Belich also fails to address the issue of ground, which plays a significant role in the result of battles. This would actually lead to a greater appreciation of Hapurona’s ability in picking his ground.

It is also worth noting that when Belich came to make his documentary, no mention is made of Maohetahi at all in spite of easy access and good state of preservation. There are simply too many elements of this fight that are not accounted for. The scale of the action including the running fight prior to the assault does not suggest the small number of Waikato’s. The presence, and death, of four significant chiefs does not support the suggested numbers. The protracted running fight does not support the suggested numbers. The numerous contrary accounts strongly suggest a number much closer to 150 defenders. In this instance the presentation of information is nothing short of selective. In fact both versions demonstrate the pitfalls of selective inclusion and exclusion of information to maintain a cohesive narrative line that can lead to a technically accurate account, but one that is not completely informative. What needs to be explained is why Maori were so comprehensively defeated on this occasion, and that relates to Pratt’s decisive reaction and poor choice of ground by Wetini Taiporutu.

### Pratt on the offensive

From Mahoetahi on, the British held the initiative, which was virtually negated by Pratt’s troops being bled off to Auckland, because of unfounded fears of a widespread King Movement uprising. But before the end of December, Pratt was able to carry operation to the Maori. His intention was to drive his forces up to the heart of the Taranaki Maori and take the pa of Pukerangiora. It was this major site that Pratt had identified as being the key to Maori resistance. This objective was not numerous small disposable pa that would have cost Pratt time, resources and men to capture and dismantle before abandoning the ground. Rather this was venerable site so significant to the Te Atiawa. This is entirely in keeping with the British experience of colonial warfare and Pratt’s own experiences in the Anglo-Chinese war he served in. Carey was obviously convinced of the effectiveness of Pratt’s sapping and sums up

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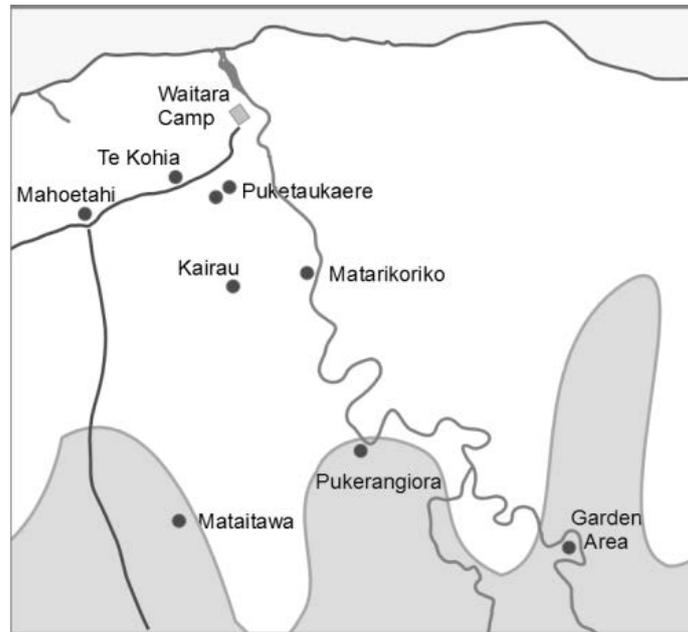
<sup>343</sup> Carey, p.128

<sup>344</sup> Simons, Interview

the reasons why it worked in convincing detail.<sup>345</sup> The settlers, however, remained exceedingly hostile to Pratt's "tardy progress" while their homes were still being torched.<sup>346</sup> The settlers were convinced Pratt was simply a slow moving fool, and both Pratt and Gold were commemorated in one of New Zealand's first recorded nursery rhymes.

*General Gold was not very old  
General Pratt as not very fat:  
But all the motions of General Gold  
Were as slow as if he'd been fat and old  
And all the motions of General Pratt  
Were as slow as if he'd been old and fat*

This is not evidence of the obvious incompetence of the British military, but it does demonstrate the attitude of the settlers to them. In fact Pratt's plan was sound, but not entirely for the reasons he thought.



The area of Pratt's final operations in New Zealand

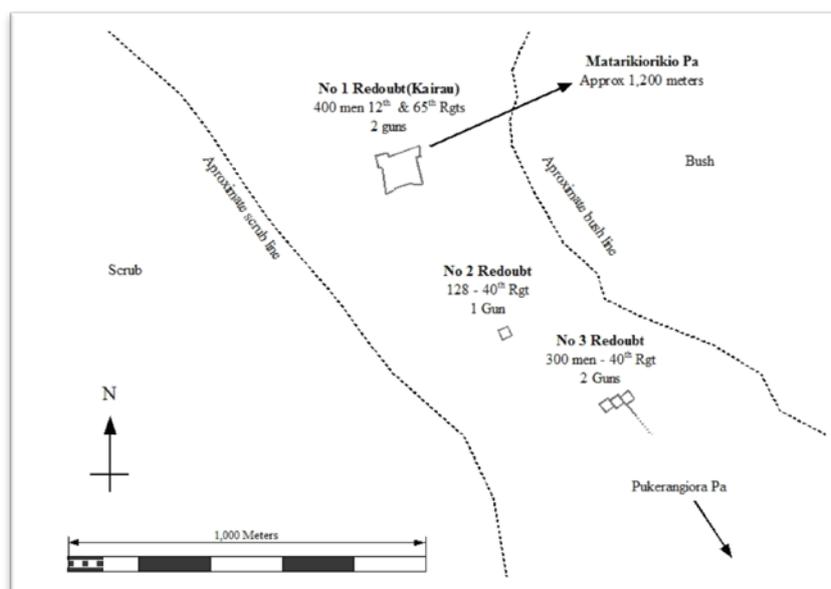
Pratt's intention was to take and hold ground, while driving the defenders back on their main position, Pukerangiora. As it eventuated Pratt was applying pressure at one of the few points at which he could leverage Hapuroa and Kingi. Although Pratt may well have identified a position that had an emotional significance for Kingi and Atiawa, it was coincidentally an important location in the conduct of the current war. Located on the edge of the bush where the British general avoided going, it was also located between two of the supply bases for Atiawa. The reasonably well known Matakaitawa, and a second garden area upriver from Pukerangiora. This second area was unknown to Europeans until identified by archaeologist

<sup>345</sup> Carey, p.136

<sup>346</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.206

Hans-Dieter Bader.<sup>347</sup> The drive on Pukerangiora would threaten the continued supply for Hapurona. Consequently from the Pratt's first move, the capture of Kairau, Hapurona was paying very close attention.

When Pratt began the operation against Pukerangiora on December 29<sup>th</sup> with an attack on Kairau Pa, he did not attack an isolated irrelevant disposable position. He had hit the outer edge of Hapurona's defences which included mutually supporting pa and numerous rifle pits providing a defence in depth which followed the ridge from Kairau to Pukerangiora.<sup>348</sup> Kairau, was taken and turned into a substantial operational and supply base, garrisoned by 400 men and equipped with two guns.<sup>349</sup> Redoubt Number 1, as Kairau was renamed, was built on the night of the December 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> under fire from the Maori rifle pits that dotted the area. It was a large redoubt able to hold 400 men and was intended to be the forward operations base for the effort against Pukerangiora Pa. The following day a protracted fire-fight took place with the British forces expending some 70,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 120 rounds from the two 8" guns that had been directed against Matorikoriko pa to the east.<sup>350</sup> On the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> the pa was found to be abandoned, and two companies of the 65<sup>th</sup> under Colonel Wyatt occupied the site.<sup>351</sup>



Redoubt No's 1 to 3.<sup>352</sup>

Two weeks later, on 14 February, Pratt moved forward with elements of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> Regiments and naval personal. The force came under fire from Maori in fire pits who were, in return, engaged by the guns and small arms of the Kairau garrison. During the firing Royal Engineers established Number 2 Redoubt approximately 400 meters in advance of Kairau. No 2 Redoubt was garrisoned with 128 men of the 40<sup>th</sup> regiment under Captain

<sup>347</sup> Bader, Interview

<sup>348</sup> Wright, p.105

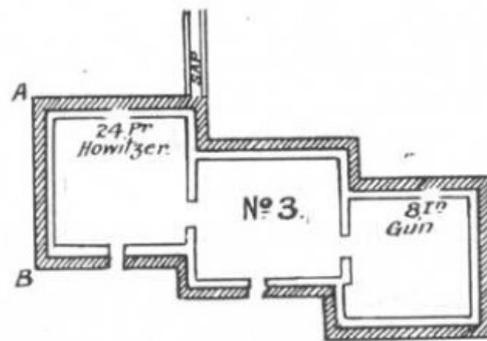
<sup>349</sup> Survey Report: Kairau Redoubt, Nigel Prickett

<sup>350</sup> Cowan p. 197

<sup>351</sup> ibid

<sup>352</sup> Based on surveys by Nigel Prickett

Bowdler.<sup>353</sup> The strategy was becoming obvious to Hapurona, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> Prat moved forward again. This time the British established the multi-celled Number 3 Redoubt over the top of an existing, but unused, old Maori gun pa.<sup>354</sup> Number 3 Redoubt was ringed by Maori fire pits, and located in an exposed position. It was manned by 300 men of the 40<sup>th</sup> with its regimental headquarters and the Commanding Officer, Colonel Leslie.<sup>355</sup> The position was improved with two large guns making the redoubt capable of withstanding a very determined attack while supporting the advance. Hapurona delivered that attack only five days later.



No. 3 Redoubt, Huirangi

The flank A—B was the one first attacked by the Maoris. 356

### The Attack on Number 3 Redoubt

The attack on Number 3 Redoubt was an unmitigated military disaster for the Maori, significantly greater than Puketakauere was for the British forces. It was also one of the rare occasions in which Maori delivered a deliberate assault on a British defensive work. Like all Maori attacks on British defensives, it failed, but only by a narrow margin. It did come close to successfully breaching a defensive work and over running a sizable body of British troops. Had it succeeded it could well have been the single greatest military disaster for British efforts in the entire New Zealand Wars. It is, consequently, an event that demands thorough examination and evaluation, yet this has not taken place. There is certainly a wealth of written sources to work from and although the physical evidence has been almost entirely destroyed or altered with the passage of time, the ground still exists. The locations of the redoubts are known having been well recorded in the 1970<sup>s</sup> with surveys.<sup>357</sup> With this information it is still possible to recreate the events of the fight with a good degree of confidence. What needs to be investigated is how the opportunity was missed by Hapurona in its execution.

What is not straightforward is understanding exactly why events played out in the manner they did. At 0345 a single shot was fired from the scrub to the west of Kairau Redoubt. This

<sup>353</sup> Survey Report: No 2 Redoubt

<sup>354</sup> Bader Email 25/02/2013

<sup>355</sup> Survey Report: No 3 Redoubt

<sup>356</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.201 Note the plan is oriented to the axis of advance, not North as is the modern convention for maps.

<sup>357</sup> Prickett, Nigel, *Historic Taranaki: An archaeological guide*, Wellington, N.Z., GP Books, 1990

shot roused the defenders and while all Maori opened fire on Kairau and Number 2 Redoubts, a sentry at Number 3 fired at a Maori just outside his own ditch on the east side of the redoubt.<sup>358</sup> The sentry was killed a return shot almost immediately. The Maori were inside Number 3's ditches and engaged in cutting steps into the walls in an effort to scale them.<sup>359</sup> In spite of assumptions that things were going well, the question of whether or not the Maori attack was developing in the manner that Hapurona had intended may well never be known. Hapurona was with Ephraim and Rewi Maniapoto in the ditches at Number 3 Redoubt attempting to gain entry, indicating the seriousness of their intent.<sup>360</sup> It is clear that taking Number 3 Redoubt was the objective, but why would Maori reveal the attack with a diversionary attack when the assault parties had already managed to gain the ditches by stealth and remained undiscovered? Had the Maori chosen to, they could have waited until the assault party had gained entry or were discovered, and then conducted pinning attacks on Kairau and Number 2 Redoubts to support the assault. Alternately they could have remained concealed and caught the relief column in the open and delivered a serious blow to the British troops.

What actually took place was that the Maori fired on Numbers 1 & 2 Redoubts and then withdrew, while the assault party was left to continue without support. As the light grew, three companies were dispatched from Number 1 Redoubt and doubled up to Number 3, cheered on by the garrison of Number 2 Redoubt. This force then split in two and counter attacked the Maori, who by this time were sheltering in the ditches, reduced to shooting back when a head showed due to a lack of ladders. The counterattack, delivered on the Maori flanks, broke the surviving Maori who fled. The attack was the sort of action for which British Regulars were trained, and these soldiers carried it out the counter attack in text book fashion.

The Maori in the ditches of Number 3 Redoubt had been subjected to an improvised grenade attack with artillery shells being dropped on them which resulted in horrific wounds. Their resistance had ended when those who could, fled, and with that sudden cessation of hostilities the British soldiers tended to the wounded Maori. Bates estimates the dead and wounded to number 40 to 50, and while this is most likely excessive, it was certainly a serious blow to the Maori.<sup>361</sup> Their attack had clearly been carefully planned, but it seems that something had gone wrong in the execution. Although the assault parties had gained the ditches of Number 3 Redoubt by stealth and were nearly over the walls, for some reason the surprise was lost by an apparently premature shot.

Even so there remained a good chance of success given the difficulty for the defenders of shooting over their thick walls, into the ditches on the blind sides of their redoubt. While it is possible to be critical of Maori for not bringing ladders, it seems more likely that they intended to carry the attack by stealth and elected to avoid carrying the extra gear to aid their

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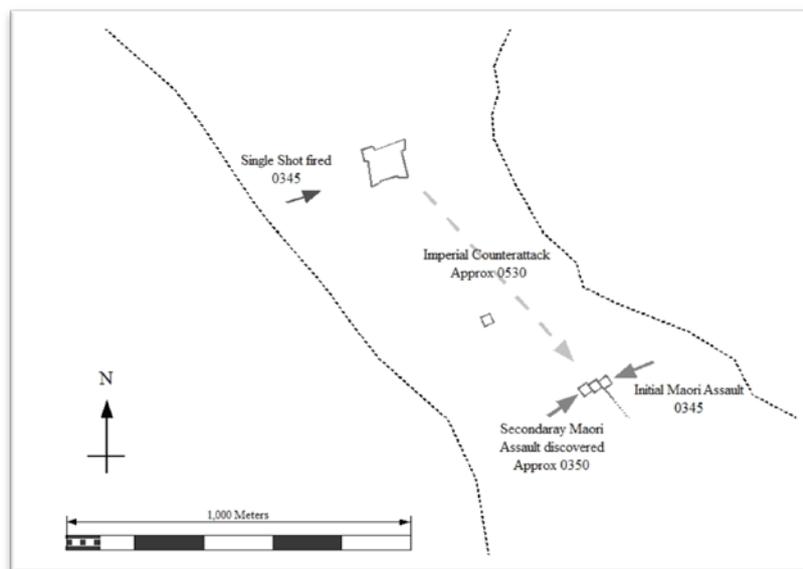
<sup>358</sup> Cowan, p.200

<sup>359</sup> Carey, p.165

<sup>360</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p. 205

<sup>361</sup> *ibid*, p. 197

stealth. In shooting they actually had the advantage over the defenders given that the latter had to expose themselves to shoot at the Maori.<sup>362</sup> While artillery shells did inflict serious wounds, but these would tend to be only to those the shells were immediately next when they went off and so their impact was minimised.<sup>363</sup> The collective firepower of the redoubt was evidently not enough to drive away their attackers. But the integrated placement of the redoubts had more than ample resources to respond to the attack with their close proximity facilitating the effective response to the Maori attack. In spite of being an apparently well planned and complex attack, the Maori were defeated by their lack of numbers, an inexplicable execution and a professional response by the British troops.



The attack on Redoubt Number 3

The attack on Number 3 Redoubt was the result of Hapurona understanding the significance of Pratt's intention and seeking to bring the British operation to a halt. It was a large scale, coordinated operation and a substantial degree of inter-tribal cooperation. Simply put it was a desperate attempt to prevent Pratt from driving further into Hapurona's defences. It failed, but it was a near run thing. As Pugsley noted it was simply one of five large attacks on the sapping works.<sup>364</sup> The evidence is overwhelming that Pratt had found a point at which he could apply pressure to the Maori war effort. For Hapurona it was obvious that he would not be able to stop the sap from reaching Te Ari and negating its defensive value. Without Te Ari Pukerangiora would fall. Pratt had the answer to his problem and Hapurona was faced with a problem he was unable to counter. The end of the war was now in sight.

### Case Study – Number 3 Redoubt

<sup>362</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.201

<sup>363</sup> Fused shells are intended to detonate in the air to deliver an all round explosion and when they go off on the ground they tend to blow upwards more than outwards.

<sup>364</sup> *New Zealand Defence Quarterly*, Autumn 1996, Wellington, Ministry of Defence, 1996 p.31

In interpreting this attack Cowan uses the opportunity to present both sides positively in a heroic light with the authority of a first-hand account. The actions of the participants are presented to highlight the lack of animosity by Cowan's source and consequently the post-battle events receive a significant amount of attention. Cowan's traditional narrative gives us the tragic story of defeat in a distinctly human account. Cowan begins with a description of the early morning with the troops standing to and a Maori signal gun being fired to initiate the assault.<sup>365</sup> This is immediately a questionable presentation of the information as the soldiers would not have been stood to at this hour without an alarm prompting them. Normally the soldiers will be stood to (dressed, armed and ready to fight at their fighting positions) around 30 minutes before sunrise in New Zealand with dawn taking a full hour to complete on a clear day.<sup>366</sup> Sunrise on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1861 was approximately 0615 and the assault began a considerable time prior to this at 0345. Maori demonstrated a repeated ability to deliver co-ordinated volley fire, even in conditions of poor light. It seems more likely on this occasion that the firing of a single weapon was an accidental discharge, particularly in the context of the assault parties attempting their action by stealth and already being inside the redoubts ditches.

Cowan very quickly abdicates his narrative to Colonel H. Stretton Bates, who had served as an Ensign during the war and whose unpublished work comprises 80% of Cowan's coverage of the fight. Bates' work does coincide very closely with Cowan's own style in its tone and gives a highly detailed version of the events for Cowan. Much of Bates' account deals with his interactions with the Maori wounded, speaking of their dignity and courage.<sup>367</sup> He focuses in particular on one young man whom Bates held while he died and then of learning the youth's name, and later being able to tell his family of his death. This is very good evidence of the lack of animosity between the participants, but not of the events themselves.<sup>368</sup> In fact none of the important questions are addressed by Cowan, and we learn nothing of why the attack played out the way it did. Cowan's surrogate narrative has no answers for these questions and our understanding of the event from Cowan's account is incomplete.

For Belich's revisionist narrative there is difficulty reconciling this event necessitating an explanation to maintain the consistency of the narrative line. . Belich presents the attack as being the result of "boredom" and describes it as the "greatest mistake made by Maori during the war" and his treatment of the event is constructed to prove this.<sup>369</sup> We are actually offered no real narrative of the event to work with, but rather Belich focuses on applying what criticisms to the operation he has sources for and asserts that the British could have achieved the same effect by remaining in New Plymouth.<sup>370</sup> He suggests that the Maori actions were

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<sup>365</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars* p. 200

<sup>366</sup> The purpose of "Stand To" at dawn and dusk is to be prepared for attacks employing the changing light to deliver either an attack with the intention of escaping after delivery a blow employing the failing light at dusk or using the darkness of pre-dawn to prepare for an attack at first light. This is often combined with sweeping patrols that clear the area of any concealed enemies.

<sup>367</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p. 206

<sup>368</sup> *ibid* p. 204

<sup>369</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *Episode 2*

<sup>370</sup> Belich p. 111

the result of a speech made in December 1860, before the sapping had begun exhorting the Maori to abandon their pits and throw themselves headlong at the military.<sup>371</sup> This takes evidence out of context, particularly when Belich's reinterpretation is obviously not what took place in this engagement.

Belich does begin with an acknowledgement that the attack was evidence of an impact on Maori, calling it the "best evidence for a baneful psychological impact".<sup>372</sup> But this is followed with undermining that very point with his claim that "the unsuccessful attack on number 3 redoubt did very little to vindicate Pratt's approach."<sup>373</sup> Indeed Belich had already reinterpreted Colonel Mould's description of the attrition impact on the moral of the Maori has an effort which would have "bored them" into submission.<sup>374</sup> Belich then employs this own reinterpretation as evidence of Maori of being "bored to frustration" leading them to attack.<sup>375</sup>

In fact Belich reacted to the attack with almost visible disappointment, calling it the greatest mistake of the war for the Maori being "unnecessary and desperate"<sup>376</sup> Belich ignores that the Maori were badly defeated by an effective and aggressive mobile response suggesting he has not given this sufficient attention. Belich successfully negates the more reasonable and obvious interpretation that the attack was the result of pressure being placed on the defenders by the sapping and a very clear indication that it was succeeding. This interpretation is essential to support the assertion that the entire sapping operation was pointless and no real threat to the defenders. At the same time the perceived pointlessness of the Maori attack has led to an absence of evaluation and the same questions not addressed by Cowan are similarly ignored by Belich and the narrative is incomplete.

The attack was very obviously a complex, coordinated attack involving multiple Maori units, operating at night, with the assault directly led by the senior commanders. The attack on Number 3 Redoubt had serious intentions, which resulted from the threat the sapping operation posed. But the attack failed to achieve its objectives for reasons that remain somewhat unclear on the part of the Maori. The British response was professional and effective in driving off all remaining Maori, who were still able to withdraw. Although Cowan's account gives some light to the events, it is only half the story. Belich's contribution does not add to our understanding of the event in any useful manner.

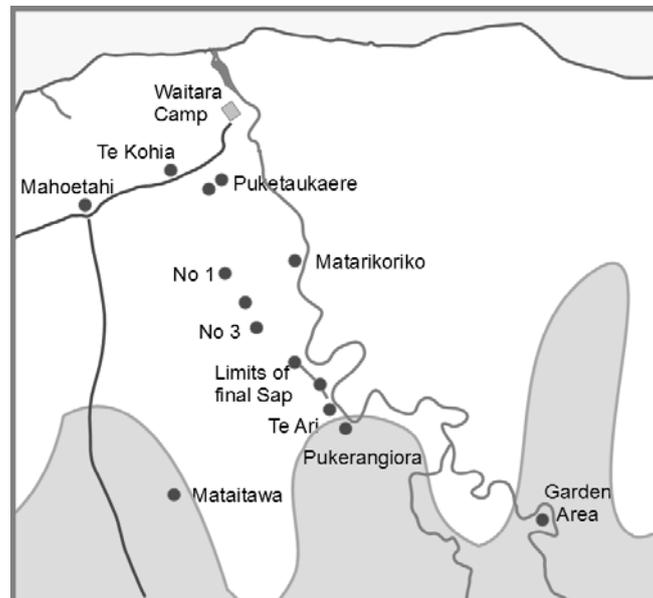
## The End of the War

After the failure of the Maori attack on Number 3 Redoubt, Pratt's sapping continued to drive forward into the Maori defences. The work was gruelling, monotonous and time consuming.

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<sup>371</sup>     ibid  
<sup>372</sup>     ibid  
<sup>373</sup>     ibid p.109  
<sup>374</sup>     Belich p. 111  
<sup>375</sup>     ibid  
<sup>376</sup>     ibid

But like an inexorable steamroller it continued to close with Te Ari. Maori continued to snipe at the sap and occasionally a man would be hit. Raids were made in an effort to fill the sap in at night. Hapurona attempted to entice Pratt away with numerous minor attacks to the south of New Plymouth. But Pratt has sufficient resources to leave the task of dealing with fighting south of New Plymouth to the militia and 400 regulars he had left in New Plymouth.<sup>377</sup> South of New Plymouth was a side-show and Pratt knew it.



Pratt's Sapping Campaign

From Number 3 Redoubt a double sap was driven forward towards Huirangi Pa with the aid of a massive sap roller or “fascine” made of branches and packed with material to protect the sappers. Hapurona admiringly regarded the technique as a “master work”.<sup>378</sup> Redoubt Numbers 4 and 5 were established with Number 5 being only 200 yards from Huirangi. At this point Hapurona elected not to attempt to defend the pa, and Huirangi was abandoned without defending a direct attack. The British established Redoubt Number 6 on top of Huirangi, completing it on February 2nd. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Pratt advanced to within 750 yards of Te Ari and established Redoubt Number 7, and began to bring up his guns. The fire from the defenders was vigorous enough persuade Alexander that they faced “at least fifteen hundred” defenders, when less than half that number is much more likely.<sup>379</sup> The artillery began its work of making life unbearable in Te Ari and Hapurona began to exhaust his options.

Having no artillery there were limited options for response and first a counter sap was attempted. This was negated by the establishment of the 8th and final redoubt from which a new sap was begun. Efforts to fill in the British sap on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> /28<sup>th</sup> did little more than slow the work. Once the earth was dug it was easier enough to empty out a filled in trench. In early March Wirimu Tamihana arrived with the intention of finding a peaceful

<sup>377</sup> New Zealand Defence Quarterly, Autumn 1996, p.31

<sup>378</sup> Alexander, p.280

<sup>379</sup> *ibid*, p.286

solution. Such was the respect he was held in by all parties, that a truce was affected for three days. But Hapurona still felt he had options, and Pratt did not feel he had gotten close enough to a victory at this point. The hostilities continued while the sapping continued in the face of heavy rifle fire. Even efforts to remove the roller were only initially successful.

On two consecutive nights the roller was taken, and on night of 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> March, the Maori set off the friction fuse booby trap injuring some of the party. Efforts to take the roller ceased and the advance continued. Fighting around the head of the sap intensified and Lt McNaughton was killed on the 17<sup>th</sup> when the sap was only 75 yards from Te Ari. It was apparent that the defenders efforts would not stop it and Te Ari would also fall. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March Hapurona raised a white flag to initiate a truce.<sup>380</sup> Wirimu Kingi was not present at the negotiations removing himself to the Waikato to continue his struggle. A peace treaty was agreed on and the war came to an end of sorts. The question is why did the war end here at this time? It was a sudden and almost unexpected end to the year-long conflict and many were taken by surprise that the war would simply end with no obvious reason why. The white flag flown over Te Ari is frequently mistaken as surrender, it was not. The answer lies elsewhere.

Pukerangiora had fallen to the Ngati Maniapoto only three decades before and many Te Atiawa been enslaved or died trying to escape. The fall of Pukerangiora was a traumatic and bloody event for Te Atiawa, the stones in the river below the cliff bear the names of those who threw themselves from those cliffs to escape the invading Ngati Maniapoto.<sup>381</sup> The spiritual significance of Pukerangiora cannot be overlooked, and the Maori field commander Hapurona had barely escaped when the pa fell in 1831.<sup>382</sup> To date, this aspect has seldom been examined, although Peter Maxwell in his work *Frontier* gives an excellent evaluation of these considerations.<sup>383</sup> The other issue which neither narrative had any awareness of was the existence of a significant supply base upriver from Pukerangiora. Pratt's operation threatened access to this base and as such was a direct threat to the Maori ability to maintain its operation. Even Pratt was unaware of this factor.

Pratt's method was to take and hold ground, while advancing on what was clearly to him, the most significant position to Maori fighting in the Taranaki. It could be argued that Pratt considered Pukerangiora Pa to be Hapurona's centre of gravity, the point at which the Maori war effort could be destabilised due to his own and Kingi's, emotional connection to pa. Sapping is a slow, tedious and laborious activity which frequently attracts derision from observers. The defenders of Petersburg would claim in 1864 that the "Yankee gents can't get their men to charge our works", preferring to dig like moles.<sup>384</sup> In reality the Federals did not need to attack, but even so it requires professionalism and persistence to continue the sapping

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<sup>380</sup> Wright, p.110

<sup>381</sup> Bader, Interview

<sup>382</sup> Wellington Independent, 11 March 1874, *The Death of Hapurona*. <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=WI18740311.2.20> Accessed 08/01/2013

<sup>383</sup> Maxwell, p.58

<sup>384</sup> Burns, Ken, *The Civil War, Episode 8 War is all hell*, PBS Home Video, 1990

work when there is little indication of effect. Pratt's experience reinforced this approach. The fact that Pratt was moving towards Hapuroa's supply system was entirely coincidental. Archaeologist Hans-Dieter Bader describes the situation thusly:

I suspect that Maori had a number of areas with cultivations closer and further inland of which we have so far little archaeological records. The one I found is possibly one of many, but it has line of sight to Waitara (which is why a telecommunications antenna is built on it) and might have been one of the more important ones. To which area Mataitawa cultivations relate, we don't know yet, but it must have been important as otherwise it would not have been mentioned by Cowan.<sup>385</sup>

It is both difficult and hazardous to ascribe motivations to people many years after their passing, but with Hapuroa and Kingi the proximity of their supply base can reasonably be argued to be one of their motivations to bring the war to an end. Added to this the sapping had advanced to the point when an assault might become viable.

What is apparent is that the war was not going well for either party. Hapuroa was facing limited success, and being confined to defensive actions some distance from where he wanted to fight and apply pressure to the European population. His efforts to stop the sapping by direct assault, although carried out with great valour, were defeated. For Pratt there was the aspect that he was about to entirely run out of military options. If, as argued by Cowan, he was not inclined to fight in the close country, his next step forward in his sapping would put him at the edge of that type of country. His men were evidently becoming demoralised and discontent with their situation while the Maori displayed every sign of falling back once more. Of the two parties though, it was Pratt who needed a cessation of hostilities the most. It is nearly pointless to argue who won and who lost at this point as the treaty was little more than a ceasefire, with the terms not honoured by either party. From the European perspective the region had been set back 20 years by the widespread destruction and many people had lost their lives.<sup>386</sup> For Maori it was apparent that the Government would not play by the rules. Nothing had been resolved except that Governor Gore Brown had totally underestimated Wirimu Kingi's will to fight and the King Movements ability to mount projected military operations. It was only a breathing space for all parties with the issues of land and sovereignty remained unsettled.

### Case Study – Pratt's Sapping and the End of the War

Both narratives of Pratt's sapping, and particularly its significance in contributing the end of the fighting, display a number of weaknesses. In the case of Cowan it is an essentially European perspective, which, while it contains many accurate details, is substantially incomplete. There is also the lack of a wider evaluation which makes it an exceedingly one-sided account. There is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the sapping and we are at a loss

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<sup>385</sup> Bader Email 08/01/2013

<sup>386</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.213-214

to connect this activity to the end of the war. While Cowan's version lacks details and depth it is largely "accurate", but ultimately lacking important information. Cowan details Pratt's unwillingness to employ his settler militia or the 65<sup>th</sup> regiment in the close country around the Te Ari and Pukerangiora believing it to be a mistake.<sup>387</sup> But Cowan had the context of working years later, when the settler forces such as the Bush Rangers had proved themselves in close country. However those close country actions were still in the future at this time and the militia had yet to gain any experience beyond a few minor actions in the bush. The Maori were obviously exceedingly skilful in such fighting.

Cowan describes, but does not detail his sources, an enthusiasm amongst the combatants which is, at the very least, arguable. "When are we going to rush the pa? many a Regular asked with his eyes lifted to the entrenched position of his foe."<sup>388</sup> Any number of personal diaries, letters, or participant's works, will provide similar evidence for a substantially reduced level of enthusiasm for attacking the Maori defences given the intensity of the defence. Lt. McNaghten RA was killed and John Lucas of the 40<sup>th</sup> won the second VC of the war in the fighting.<sup>389</sup> But it is the details such as this that are interspersed with technical information, such as the naval parties assembling the gabions at Waitara, to deliver his exciting and engaging narrative.<sup>390</sup> Consequently, when Cowan slips in the psychological impact of the sapping on the Maori it is not questioned. We simply accept that the Maori were indeed "seriously disturbed" and goaded into action by the works.<sup>391</sup> This is actually nothing more than speculative fiction from Cowan for which he does not give any strong evidence. He may well have had the evidence, but he did not present it.

The narrative oscillates between these more dramatic elements and more useful such as the three day cease fire (12th, 13th, and 14th March) "at the request of Wiremu Tamehana, who was just arrived from the Waikato to negotiate for peace. His efforts were not successful at the time, but peace was near."<sup>392</sup> At this point Cowan misses an opportunity to make an important observation; Wiremu Tamehana has sufficient standing amongst the combatants to request, and receive, a cease fire. Cowan follows this a description of a coordinated attack by Maori on March 5<sup>th</sup> when a distracting attack was made to enable a quick, limited attack on the digging which wounded one man and killed another. The attack was clearly well delivered and text book operation that required planning, discipline and patience. None of these aspects were noted by Cowan and the event seems to have been the coincidently action of random chance.

The attempt by Maori on the evening of March 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> to steal the sap roller used to protect the troops digging at the face of the sap is a good opportunity for Cowan to note that the British troops were still learning from, and reacting to, the Maori defenders.<sup>393</sup> This was not

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<sup>387</sup>       ibid, p.206

<sup>388</sup>       Ibid, p. 207

<sup>389</sup>       Wright, p.110

<sup>390</sup>       Cowan, *New Zealand Wars*, p.207

<sup>391</sup>       Ibid, p. 208

<sup>392</sup>       Ibid, p. 210

<sup>393</sup>       Wright, p.109

the first occasion the Maori had made an attempt on the roller, successfully stealing it the evening prior, but Cowan does not mention this event. Moving from this action Cowan extols the virtues, skills and successes of the British regiments. While his information is evidently accurate, he does not give the same treatment to the leaders and men ranged against them. Cowan writes of the “spirit of a chivalrous tournament” between the combatants, a theme that Belich angrily rejects as a “fantasy”.<sup>394</sup> While the animosity between the participants did end virtually with the last shot, the fighting was exceedingly vicious and deadly. Later newspaper reports demonstrate well the respect that remained by many for the Maori.<sup>395</sup> Cowan diminishes this aspect with his treatment of the evidence.

Cowan’s conclusion is somewhat sudden and awkward. “The war was terminated by an agreement between Hapurona and the Government, Wiremu Kingi having gone to Kihikihi, Upper Waikato, to live with his friends the Ngati-Maniapoto.”<sup>396</sup> There is no detail of what actually took place, or the sequence of events that led to discussions. Simply that the war ended with an agreement. Cowan details the terms of the ceasefire and we are given the impression that the war has truly ended and there is little more to discuss beyond the fearful damage to the European property in the region.<sup>397</sup> Cowan concludes that the losses to the settlers and the area (£200,000) and blames the injudicious Waitara purchase.<sup>398</sup> He does not present any information relating to the Maori losses.

While Cowan is little more than a starting point for developing an interpretation of the events, he does deliver what is one of the most relevant observations relating to the end of the war though. “It was known however that there were plantations at Mataitawa and other well-sheltered retreats of the Atiawa.”<sup>399</sup> With what we know from the Invasion of the Waikato in 1863/4, the loss of a supply base can lead to a near immediate collapse of Maori resistance.<sup>400</sup> While many commentators of the time, and even more recent times, will argue that Maori can grow potatoes on the side of the road as a substitute for a logistical system, the reality is that it takes a great deal of food to maintain a fighting force in the field.<sup>401</sup> Mataitawa was quite possibly that supply base for Te Atiawa and their allies in the Taranaki. This would be what a military historian might refer to as the Maori “centre of gravity” in the Taranaki. To ignore it is to miss one of the most significant aspects of the cessation of hostilities. Close behind it is the sapping itself, which Belich concludes was an entirely useless activity.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *Episode 2*

<sup>395</sup> Wellington Independent, *The Death of Hapurona*.

<sup>396</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars* p. 213

<sup>397</sup> *ibid*

<sup>398</sup> *ibid*

<sup>399</sup> Cowan, *New Zealand Wars* p.206

<sup>400</sup> After going around the massive Paterangi Lines of defences some thirty kilometres south of Ngaruawahia during the invasion of the Waikato, Cameron took the supply base at Rangiawahia. Deprived of this supply system Maori evacuated the Paterangi lines and war came to a quick close with Rewi’s final stand the following month. Taylor

<sup>401</sup> Taylor, p.114

<sup>402</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *Episode 2*

Belich presents a strong counter to Cowan's weakness with a solid evaluation of the risks presented to Maori by the sapping and he gives us the more detailed evaluation of the sapping with his observation that the "cumulative effect of this process threatened to breach the pa cordon and to expose such Atiawa bases as Mataitawa to British seizure."<sup>403</sup> Unfortunately Belich follows this with an entirely flawed evaluation of the sapping's part in bringing about the end of the fighting. In this case it is very clearly Belich who delivers the more useful narrative towards understanding the events in spite of his weaknesses. Having effectively identified the sapping's effectiveness he presents a constructed argument to demonstrate that Pratt's activity was outside the accepted practice and therefore useless. Belich explains in his documentary – having removed the detailing of the saps ability to put pressure on the Maori and break the cordon – that sapping is a siege method and a siege requires surrounding an enemy so they can't escape. It is therefore "a siege method without a siege."<sup>404</sup> This theme is expanded on operating on the premise that the entire activity had no impact on the Maori and consequently can have played no part in the subsequent cessation of hostilities.

In fact Belich's premise is demonstrably false with numerous examples of sapping being a tool of closing with, and putting pressure on an enemy, or providing a launch point for an assault. Belich was correct in the first instance before he reworked his argument to support his conclusion. The events of the American Civil War saw sapping of this nature develop to the point where some areas resembled the Western Front of the First World War. Some of these were full investment sieges while others were not. At Petersburg a trench warfare campaign took place with both sides continually extending to the south and west of the city, but at no time ever being more than open ended trench lines. Pratt's works were intended to deliver an assault force to a forward point so close to Hapurona's defences as to negate the value of the defensive system. That Hapurona attempted to thwart this effort repeatedly and elected to negotiate rather than wait for the assault demonstrates both Hapurona's comprehension of Pratt's efforts and its effectiveness while being mindful of his own inability to negate Pratt's efforts.

It is the end of hostilities which is the most problematic for a revisionist narrative. The white flag which was flown from Te Ari pa is not mentioned, but rather Belich explains that the British sought peace because of their lack of success and the Maori ability to remain in the field indefinitely.<sup>405</sup> To support this he repeats a favourite theme of the modern pa being disposable and of no consequence to the Maori. Pukerangiora was not a modern pa. Additionally Belich's failure to note the white flag opens up an opportunity for some to argue that the Maori had surrendered and Belich ignores this. This assertion is simply not applicable to Pukerangiora Pa. Belich creates a narrative in which it appears that the Europeans sued for peace, which simply did not happen. However it did very much assist Pratt to seize on the opportunity to claim victory and walk away.

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<sup>403</sup> Belich p. 112

<sup>404</sup> TVNZ Documentary, *Episode 2*

<sup>405</sup> Belich p.113

Neither narrative notes that it was Hapurona who elected to initiate the end to the fighting and likewise miss the opportunity to seek out Hapurona's centre of gravity in spite of the evidence of its presence here.<sup>406</sup> The sapping was the single most effective element of the British campaign and led about bringing the war to a point where a cessation of hostilities could be achieved with the most flimsy of excuses. For Wirimu Kingi it was a respite allowing time to rebuild and for Pratt it was the single best opportunity to claim victory and leave New Zealand. There was no winning by default, nor was there a loss though having not been victories. There were simply better reasons to stop rather than continue the fighting. Neither narrative shows this.

## **VI – Conclusion**

It is a language that moves us further away from,

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<sup>406</sup> “Centre of gravity” is a military term for the point at which a force vulnerable such as logistical considerations.

not closer to, settling our troubled history.<sup>407</sup>

The New Zealand Wars are of significance to all New Zealanders, and the First Taranaki War has particular importance to the people of the Taranaki. The same is true for the places such as Tauranga, the Waikato and other places where fighting took place. The events of the war, why it took place and how it played out have an on-going impact on New Zealanders today. These events did not “shape us”, they are of shaping us now in a very real manner. But a good knowledge and understanding of that war has not been maintained. Although many authors have written about the war and its peripheral impacts, all have written their works within their own context and all authors have written for their own audience. The divisions that exist now were present from the events themselves and are representative of the factional accounts of the day. This is inevitable, all narratives are perspective based and being able to identify and understand the context of these perspectives is a key element in producing a valid interpretation of the events being described. The context of the participants is a one sided view, no matter who they may have sympathised with, or why they wrote, they wrote from their own viewpoint.

The settlers wrote from a sense of certainty that they were entitled to own the land and assumed they eventually would. The regular soldiers often wrote with the assumption that they had military ability superior to both Maori and settlers. The humanitarians wrote with increasing outrage at the obvious injustice to Maori, all the while maintaining the belief that Maori would naturally benefit from becoming “Europeans”. These are of course generalisations and there were always exceptions. The Maori did not write very much at all and this is perhaps the greatest weakness of the existing collective works on the topic. The absence of a contemporary Maori voice does not leave us with a hole or missing portion, it leaves us with barely half the story. It becomes apparent to anyone retracing the events of this war that the Maori, under Hapurona and allied iwi, fought a modern war against superior numbers with great skill. While they did not “win”, they most certainly did not lose this war. It is both exciting and frustrating to discover this and not to be able to find answers to the numerous questions that arise.

Since 1880 the participant’s histories were largely accepted, and existed as differing viewpoints which were seldom questioned, as many of the wars veterans were still living. Beginning in 1899 these first accounts have been subjected to reinterpretations and these interpretations have been strongly audience driven. The first major departure being the exceedingly flimsy work of Morgan Grace, which offered little more than barrack room gripe as being definitively factual. It was clearly intended to rehabilitate the reputation of the 65<sup>th</sup> in relation to the First Taranaki War, but made very little impact. It is worth noting that this work was produced concurrent with the rise of tensions leading the Boer War when an audience for such work existed.

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<sup>407</sup> Keenan, Danny, Comment New Zealand Herald, *Truth reached only by rational debate*

Interest in the “old wars” was replaced by the immediacy of the First World War, in which an audience developed that was both detached from the colonial wars and without a sense of its own history.<sup>408</sup> This audience was more ready enough for the tragic and heroic interpretation that Cowan presented shortly after the First World War. It is not a coincidence that Cowan published his *Hero Stories of New Zealand* several years into the great depression. Again the audience at this time was ready for diversions, but not a more confrontational and negative interpretation. These interpretations did not mean Cowan was unaware of the issues arising from the wars, it is simply that an interpretation of that sort did not suit Cowan’s intention to provide New Zealanders with that sense of history they were lacking.

Cowan’s work was well researched and detailed, but in the 1960’s the audience had shifted. Maori had experienced a full 100 years of frustration in their efforts to redress the issues arising from the wars. The rise of post-colonialism as an historical method gained ground in revisiting many existing narrative lines. This new audience is reflected in a growing trend to revisit the First Taranaki War with a focus on the causes and effects with a strongly judgemental flavour. Edgar Hodges *The Strangest War* and Alan Wards *The Origins of the Anglo-Maori Wars* are two works that were produced early in this period. These were followed by B.J. Daltons *War and Politics in New Zealand* and Alan Wards follow up work, *A Show of Justice*. These works are not compromising and very direct in their intention of revisiting and reinterpreting the existing Eurocentric understanding of the war.

At the same time that this post-colonial visitation was underway, the polarising and widely unpopular Viet Nam War was helping to add a significant anti-military attitude to New Zealand society. Even so every man who served in that theatre had volunteered for service. Divisions were beginning to manifest themselves in obvious ways, with increasingly physical confrontations taking place. Further impacting on this was the “Maori Renaissance” which saw Maori become less tolerant and patient when seeking acknowledgment and recognition for the on-going injustices dating from the colonial wars. The mid to late 1970’s and early 1980’s were period of virtual collision. The establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 with the intention of addressing the inequities of the wars was followed with confrontations such as the “*haka party incident*” of 1979, the Springbok Tour of 1981 and of course the occupation of Bastion Point mentioned in the preface of this work. Incidents of this nature served to draw substantial attention on questions of race and equality in New Zealand.

In this environment of a ready audience for historical works with a strong post-colonial flavour James Belich produced a work that was notably devoid of the language of a post-colonial historian and had every appearance of being a military history. That such a work would find favour with the aggrieved is obvious. But the work was also palatable to other readers who had a natural curiosity about our early wars. Maxwell records that on first reading he found Belich’s ideas “as dazzling as they were convincing”.<sup>409</sup> It is a very common reaction, but Maxwell become entirely hostile though a single inconsistency which

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<sup>408</sup> Cowan, *Hero Stories*, p.vii-xi  
<sup>409</sup> Maxwell, p.19

caused him to investigate Belich in detail. Maxwell's distaste for Belich is virtually a theme of his work *Frontier*, describing Belich as not only failing to acknowledge the debt owed to Cowan and Gudgeon, but seeking to destroy them with the intention of replacing their interpretations with a revisionist one that would "stand alone as the sole truth".

Like Maxwell, many military historians were incensed by Belich and almost everything written since has been reactive. While this may be an effort to "correct inaccuracies", it is actually entirely counter-productive. It gives the appearance of a seeking to undermine something that the authors do not agree with, and has a taint of bitterness that is not persuasive to someone who has only been exposed to Belich's work. While the military histories may well be correct in what they are saying, it is not conducive to receiving a warm welcome from many readers. Belich's documentary series is frequently the first, and often only, source of information about the war that many people have. The existing popular media contains points that are plucked directly from Belich which are self-supporting in the same way that Belich first seemed to Maxwell. They effectively create a belief that in the modern environment does "stand alone as the sole truth"<sup>410</sup>. To be told that what one has believed with absolute certainty for a decade or more is not just inaccurate, but entirely wrong, is an uphill battle. It is also the wrong battle to fight.

The recent works such as those of Richard Taylor and Clifford Simons are a move in the direction of being more constructive, in that they demonstrate the reality that all previous accounts are, at a minimum, incomplete. They provide us new perspectives that are not reacting to existing narratives. They stand alone and apart, giving us new perspectives that by their nature help in moving us toward a more thorough and complete understanding of the wars in general and the First Taranaki War in particular. Simons' work in particular gives us a much greater understanding of how Maori operated on the modern battlefield of the 1860's without depending on fanciful assertions of creating a "new kind of warfare" or some indefinable "natural genius". Through such works a greater, and more realistic, appreciation of the genuine abilities of the Maori warrior will create an environment in which the less appealing aspects of simply outright illegal activity can be presented.

By the same way producing a narrative that does not negate the social history aspects will greatly advance the cause of those seeking to present a view of history in which settlers and British soldiers were not hidebound, ignorant, stupid racists. They were real people with characteristics that exceed the boundaries of a single wars narrative. They were, in many cases, young men seeking adventure, in the same way that New Zealand's young men of both races did in two world wars. Many of them had a much greater respect and sympathy for their enemy than fits the existing narratives. We also have more in common with them now than some historians would care to acknowledge. Many were open in their admiration of the Maori as both fighters and people. Few were under any illusion about their purpose in New Zealand and wrote openly of that purpose, to take someone else's land.

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<sup>410</sup>       ibid

The lack of that Maori “military history” perspective has greatly undermined this work as it has with other works, and even though where possible, this has been noted and reasonable extrapolation made from the information has been employed, that hole is ever present. Accounts of kind that McDonnell transcribed, assuming it is truthful, can only be viewed as a partial account in that they are an account based on responses to a European, by a Maori, answering European questions with a European context. The Maori participating in such accounts did not answer questions that were not asked. The questions were not asked because it did not occur to the European to ask them. This would have been the area that Cowan could have excelled at, but did not. It is also the one area that requires the greater degree of attention.

What is most compelling about the Maori manner of conducting war is not its differences, but its advanced similarities to European warfare. Pure military questions such what was the Maori supply system, how did their intelligence system operate are only being addressed now. Clearly both systems existed and were considerations of Hapurona’s strategic planning. The logistical system was an integral part of a wider command control and communications system with the market gardens being co-located with observation and communication stations. The Maori demonstrated an excellent decision making process based on good intelligence with the notable exception of Mahoetahi. But beyond only vague observations of these aspects little is noted, and all earlier accounts are weaker for this exclusion. At present Clifford Simons has a PhD thesis on the use of military intelligence by both sides during the New Zealand Wars under embargo but presents an aspect of Maori in war that has not been addressed previously. This fact alone demonstrates that history is not fixed and it must be allowed to grow, develop and be subjected to repeated review.

Even with the weakness of only being a partial viewpoint, it has been demonstrated that it is possible to bridge the existing gap between traditional and revisionist narratives, but the question remains, is there the will to do so? If we were to assume that we have arrived at a point and the history is fixed, then the answer is no. The nature of the Waitangi Tribunal in determining the authenticity of the past is counter to the fluidity of history and has helped the revisionist narrative to dominate. Additionally the revisionist tone of government funded websites and the manner in which the war is currently taught in schools serves to give the appearance that some conscious decision has been made and the narrative is fixed. Numerous websites are essentially Belich rephrased, and the Ministry of education workbooks, intended for use with Belich’s documentary, give little attention to criticisms of Belich.<sup>411</sup> However if we view our own perspective as being part of a continuous stream of events then we can observe regular and frequent changes. Already as noted above there is a move away from simply rehashing the existing interpretations and a more dispassionate investigation of the events on their own merits.

However, history by its nature remains fluid regardless of what judicial activity may take place. While post-colonialism is, or was, exceedingly valuable in forcing a re-evaluation of

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<sup>411</sup> Hill, Sylvia, *Changing perceptions of a shared past*, Introduction

an accepted interpretation, it is by its very nature, predisposed to a bias. The obvious temptation to simply reverse the existing narratives as “wrong” can be hazardous and was Belich’s stated intent.<sup>412</sup> While his work helped to fix and define the separation of the two narrative lines, it has led him to overreaching in some areas that were clearly not his speciality. In New Zealand’s unique socio-political environment the success of such an approach has a real world impact. It has been seized upon with great enthusiasm and become a widely accepted stand point. However for a revisionist interpretation to remain dominant it requires an acceptance that will not withstand repeated questioning. And the questioning of that revision has been vocal and frequent. It has been somewhat misdirected though, operating within a specialist area and read by only a few.

In spite of its popularity in the public arena, post-colonial revision is simply one facet employed to view past events. It simply does not stand up to close examination as being an entire interpretation. Or it is reactive in the same way that military history has been reactive to revisionism; revisionism has been reactive to traditionalism. Military history is now moving beyond its reaction phase and is revisiting the wars without reference to the revision, consequently greatly undermining it. The reviews of Belich’s work on Amazon, although hardly a scientific survey, do reveal a number of key points. It is widely criticised with very few people actually sufficiently interested in defending the work. The one single defence of Belich’s work claimed it as being “the truth”, is an emotive, yet fact deficient attack on the other reviews.<sup>413</sup>

The interpretations of the events of the First Taranaki War were divided from the beginning, but it is only comparatively recently that the existing divisions have been fixed. The revisionist narrative has gained near official status, while the traditional narrative has, to some degree languished as being the special interest topic of a minority of interested people. However the fluid nature of history itself and the existing trends of how professionals are treating the war, make it inevitable that the revisionist interpretation will not remain dominant. While this may be seen as a failure on the part of post-colonial revisionism, it is actually the driving force behind an increased interest in the early period of modern New Zealand. As such the school of post-colonialism is owed as much a debt as that of the traditionalist’s, Cowan and Gudgeon. The existing situation also serves well to demonstrate the insular nature of New Zealand history and stands as a warning against such an introspective perspective.

The rise in interest in the New Zealand Wars presents an opportunity to make progress towards improving the levels of discussion about the issues.

Repeatedly through history New Zealanders have been under the impression that the wars and their consequences were a thing of the past. In 1855 the wars were spoken of as a distant

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<sup>412</sup> Belich, p.11-14  
<sup>413</sup> Amazon customer review

history.<sup>414</sup> In 1960 at the commemoration of Waireka, Reverend Cameron observed that were “one nation” and that relations had not been as good as they were in 1960.<sup>415</sup> But he pointedly warned that the situation could and would deteriorate once more if the people forgot. And as before people did forget and the situation has deteriorated in precisely the way that Cowan sought to avoid, “a lack of accurate knowledge is general”.<sup>416</sup> Too many aspects of the revisionist narrative have become too fixed to enable any discussion, while the reaction to the narrative has been an attack rather than a presentation of an alternative. The divisions that exist now are a product entirely of our own making.

The hostility that characterises discussion today is not a direct result of the war. Rather the division has been an aspect of the historiography. The division is in contrast to the time when Cowan walked the battlefields where “old antagonists were now firm friends”.<sup>417</sup> That is not to say that the revision was not needed, it certainly was. However the question needs to be asked, should the revision be the final word on the matter, or just another part in the stream of a complete history. The very nature of evolving historical thought is enough to convince an observer that the latter option is the best way to move forward. There is already a movement away from focusing on the revision, and towards presenting a more diverse range of interpretations, where authors demonstrate their own interpretations rather than present their arguments why someone else is “wrong”. We will be closer to an understanding of the events when the respective abilities of the combatants of the First Taranaki War, and the suffering experienced by both races during that war can be viewed objectively, without the need to denigrate an opposing viewpoint. Perhaps that objectivity may bring respect and compassion. As Danny Keenan noted, we came of age on our own battlefields. But as yet no one would consider wearing any medals early than 1914 on ANZAC Day, and men like Hapurona are seen as Maori chieftains rather than New Zealand generals. In time we may become one people with a common history, but that is some time away.

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Ian McFarlane, Magazine Editor, historian  
Author of *Ordinary Seaman and Bluejacket by William Odgers* VC Unpublished  
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Stan Fisher, Historian  
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### **Interviews**

Hans-Dieter Bader, Archaeologist  
Interviewed in relation to his professional work as an archaeologist in the Taranaki area on sites relating to the First Taranaki War.  
Interviewed: 08/01/2013

Bruce Hill Journalist ABC Australia  
Interviewed for personal recollections of Bastion Point  
Interviewed: 4/6/2012

Maj. Gen. Piers Reed, Historian, Senior lecturer Massey University  
Interviewed in relation to questions of military theory with practical examples from history.  
Interviewed: 08/12/2011

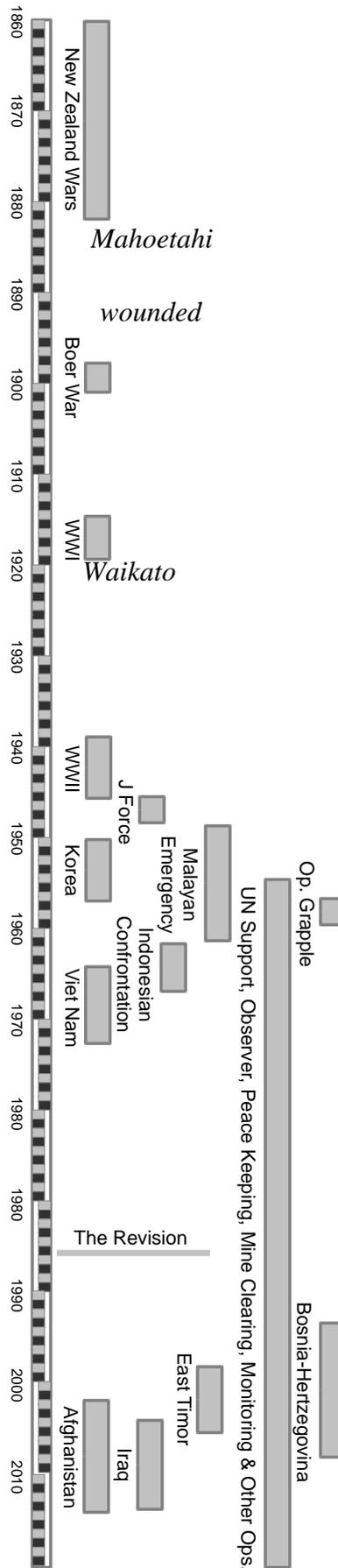
Clifford Simons, Historian  
Author of *Military intelligence in the New Zealand wars, 1845-1864: a thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Defence and Strategic Studies at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*, Clifford Roy Simons, 2012  
Interviewed regarding the contents of his embargoed PhD thesis.  
Interviewed 16/03/2013

Appendix A

Appendix B – The Casualties of

65<sup>th</sup> Rgt, 2 dead, 10 wounded, 1 officer  
 Rifle Volunteers, 2 dead, 4 wounded  
 40<sup>th</sup> Rgt, 1 wounded  
 Total  
 4 dead  
 16 wounded

Wetini Taiporutu – Chief of the  
 Wharangi - Chief of the Ngatiapakura  
 Hakopa – Chief of the Ngatikoroki  
 Te Urkopi, Heneriko  
 Ngatikoroki, Wanganui, Tamihana  
 Ngatihaua, Harawira, Hirini, Pari  
 Ngatiruru, Hemi Karena  
 Unlisted tribe, Wirihana, Hakopea  
 Others not named, 12  
 Total  
 25 dead  
 Wounded unknown  
 4 POW



## Appendix C

## Taranaki Herald (W.I.G.)

