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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

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2012

Abstract

This thesis analyses the nature of military intelligence in the New Zealand Wars and assesses the role that it played in the outcome of the various battles and campaigns. Military intelligence has seldom been identified as a factor in the wars and this is the first major study of it. The thesis examines the way that military intelligence was used in nineteenth century colonial warfare in general, and then applies those concepts to the New Zealand situation by studying four major wars that occurred between 1845 and 1864.

The thesis shows that Maori enjoyed the advantage of fighting in their own environment which meant that they were familiar with all of the features of physical geography such as: routes and tracks, the location of communities, pa and food supplies, and barriers to travel such as rivers and swamps. They were equally aware of the socio-political aspects of the area such as the tribal groupings and political allegiances. The government made little secret of its intentions and through a number of avenues including newspapers and contact with government officers. Maori resisting the government generally had a good understanding of its strategic intentions. They were also able to monitor the activities of the troops by infiltrating military camps, by observation and reconnaissance, and by the transmission of information between Maori supportive of the government and those opposing it. In consequence, Maori generally had a good military intelligence picture throughout the wars.

The thesis demonstrates that the government forces, which comprised the British Army, the Royal Navy, and various militia and volunteer units, usually had a less clear military intelligence picture. The early battles of the Northern War 1845-6 indicated that the British Army had a complete lack of understanding about the physical environment of the Bay of Islands and the enemy that they were fighting. Over the course of the period studied in this thesis, a rudimentary military intelligence system developed until, by the end of the Waikato War and Tauranga Campaign of 1864, it was moderately effective. The government collected information from its own political officers in the regions, and from missionaries, settlers and pro-government Maori to establish a relatively clear idea of the terrain and the socio-political mood within Maori communities. The British Army undertook reconnaissance in a number of ways including cavalry and by river boat. The acquisition of that information allowed the military to plan its campaigns effectively.

The thesis concludes that military intelligence was an important factor in the outcome of the wars that were fought in New Zealand between 1845 and 1864. It shows that the effective use of military intelligence, or indeed the absence of it, were often significant reasons for success or failure of military operations. This new appreciation of the role and effect of military intelligence provides new insights into the battles and enhances an understanding of the whole New Zealand Wars period.

Dedicated to the memory of the early New Zealanders, men and women, Maori and Pakeha on all sides, who suffered and struggled in the building of our nation.

And in memory of my parents

Roy and Peggy Simons

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following institutions and their staff for the assistance that I received during my research: Auckland Public Library, Auckland Institute and Museum Library, University of Waikato Library, Tauranga Public Library, Te Awamutu District Museum, Whakatane District Museum, Hawkes Bay Museum, National Army Museum Waiouru, Puke Ariki New Plymouth, Massey University Library, Defence Library Wellington, Victoria University Library, Archives New Zealand, National Library of New Zealand and the Alexander Turnbull Library, Christchurch Public Library, Hocken Library Dunedin.

My interest in the New Zealand Wars was stimulated by Dr Laurie Barber and Lieutenant Colonel Garry Clayton, DPhil. I thank them for igniting an interest that has become an enduring passion. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Taylor, PhD, has been a friend and colleague for many years and we have shared many field trips and discussions about the wars. He has been my secondary supervisor and I thank him for the advice, information and support that he has given to me over a long period of time. Dr John Tonkin-Covell has been my primary supervisor. I have greatly enjoyed our joint interest in the New Zealand Wars and I appreciate the tremendous advice and support that he has given to me over the duration of this project. His guidance, encouragement and support have been major factors in bringing this thesis to fruition. I also wish to acknowledge that my employer, the New Zealand Army, has supported me by funding my tuition fees. The New Zealand Army has a long tradition of encouraging and supporting the academic development of its personnel, and I am grateful to have been part of that process.

I have had willing support from a number of people who have helped with the production of this thesis. I am extremely grateful to my daughter Julia Simons, who proof-read all of the chapters and repaired my grammar, and my son Ben Simons, who adapted the maps and helped me with the photographs. I hope that the experience of helping me with this thesis will serve them well in their own academic careers. My friend and colleague Lieutenant Commander Kevin Sanderson, PhD, gave the thesis a very thorough final proof-reading. I am very appreciative the expertise and enthusiasm that he brought to that task. Lastly I want to acknowledge the assistance that I have received from my wife Paula. She has been a great help in solving various IT and formatting issues, but most importantly, her constant love and support have allowed me to spend the time required to bring this thesis to a conclusion.

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Glossary of terms used

Maori

Atua	Gods, spirits
Hapu	Sub-tribe
Hau Hau	Adjustment cult prominent in the late 1860s
Hui	Meeting
Iwi	Tribe
Kingitanga	The Maori King Movement
Mana	Prestige, moral power
Marae	Formal meeting place
Mere	Short fighting club
Pa	Fortified village or purpose-built fortification
Pai Marire	Religion of the Hau Hau Movement
Pekarangi	Light fence in front of a fortification
Rohe	Tribal territory or domain
Rua	Pit
Tangata-Pakeha	A hard man
Tapu	Sacred
Taua	War party
Taua Muru	War party intent on customary plunder
Tikanga	Appropriate customs and traditions
Utu	Make response, revenge
Whare	House

Military

Campaign	A series of operations in a theatre with one overall aim
Commissariat	Supply department
Cordon	A line of troops sealing off or blocking a position
Doctrine	The fundamental principles of a military force
Enfilade	From the flank, particularly sweeping fire along a frontage
Entrenchment	Fortification dug into the ground, including trenches and often covered pits
Killing ground	Area, often in front of a fortification where the defenders have channeled the enemy and plan to destroy them
Sap	An offensive trenching system designed to compromise the opponent's defensive position.
Sharp-end	Combat troops, the front
Turn	By-pass, out-flank