

THE NEW ZEALAND WARS

Nga Pakanga Whenua O Mua

A Brief Overview

The New Zealand Wars were generally fought in New Zealand between 1843 and 1872, though opinion on this time frame does vary.

Some historians have suggested that the wars did not finish until after the **Parihaka** invasion of 1881, by the Armed Constabulary, when the New Zealand frontier might be said to have been 'closed'. This was the time when, as historian **Alan Ward** puts it, 'the rifle was replaced by the rubber truncheon.' Other historians have suggested the wars finished after the '**Dog Tax War**' of 1898. Most historians however who think the wars extended beyond 1872 point to closure after the Police invasion of **Maungapohatu**, in 1916. It was here, some have suggested, that the 'last shots fired of the New Zealand Wars' were fired.

The Engagements / Campaigns

The Wairau confrontation

In 1843, forty-nine armed settlers from Nelson travelled east across to **Wairau** and attempted to enforce a disputed sale against local Maori. The local Maori were from the **Ngati Toa** tribe. They were led by **Te Rauparaha**, and his fighting chief and nephew **Te Rangihaeta**. These days, given what we know about the earlier tribal wars fought by Te Rauparaha, it is amazing that settlers would want to tangle with him, and his people.

An Issue of Land

The land at issue was under investigation by a Land Claims Commissioner, **William Spain**. The land had earlier been 'purchased' by a whaling ship Captain, but, as other whalers had pointed out, the sale was a highly suspect one. However, the deed of sale was later transferred to the New Zealand Company. It was then cited by the Company as a basis for a claim lodged for possession of the Wairau Plains. This claim was resisted by Ngati Toa, who themselves laid claim, under Maori custom law, as 'take raupatu', land taken by conquest.

The settlers might have been better advised to await **Spain's** investigations and judicial decision, as Maori wanted to do, rather than charge in and attempt to take on Te Rauparaha, a veteran warrior of no mean ability. But pressure was on to expand the Nelson holdings. In March 1843, surveyors appeared on the Plains. Maori resisted the surveyors, and a hut was burned to the ground. This act, more than any, precipitated the attempt made from Nelson to enforce the surveys and take possession of the Plains.

Confrontation

The party that travelled out from Nelson was led by Police Magistrate HA Thompson and Captain Arthur Wakefield. Arthur was one of the four Wakefield brothers (Edward Gibbon, William and Daniel were the others. Another Wakefield, Edward Jerningham was Edward Gibbon's son). Arthur was the youngest and by some accounts the best regarded.

On June 17, 1843, Te Rauparaha and his people were confronted near the site of a small encampment and cultivations beside the Tuamarina Stream. A demand was made that he surrender. Te Rauparaha refused - one cannot imagine that he would do anything else. An attempt to arrest him turned into a nasty skirmish with many shots fired.

Fifteen Maori and settlers were killed in the initial engagement. Amongst those killed were Te Rangihaeta's wife, Te Rongo. Those Europeans who survived the initial skirmish - about thirty - fled the scene. Eleven were apprehended in flight - it is said they surrendered - and they were executed, as a customary act of revenge (utu) for those Maori earlier killed. Amongst those executed were Thompson and Wakefield.

Aftermath

Settlers in Nelson and Wellington were outraged. The issues that had precipitated the confrontation were soon lost sight of. The new Governor, Robert FitzRoy, contemplated a military response against Ngati Toa. This was strongly urged upon him by the outraged settlers. However, on reflection, FitzRoy concluded that the settlers had been wrong in attempting to enforce a claim on the Wairau, a claim for which no legal basis existed.

This confrontation at Wairau is regarded by some historians as the first engagement of the New Zealand Wars. Effectively, it was a confrontation between a group of Nelson settlers and local Maori. According to James Belich, at this time, Maori always 'backed themselves against any armed posse of settlers.' However, the British Army was another matter, presenting Maori with a complex raft of new

challenges; and this came soon enough, in the far north, in 1845, with the outbreak of the Northern War.

Further reading: Graham Hucker, *Glimpses of New Zealand in the nineteenth century*, Heinemann Education / Reed Books, Auckland, 1992, pp. 26-32; Edgar Holt, 'First Blood' in *The Strangest War. The Story of the Maori Wars 1860-1872*, London, 1962, pp.67-76.

The Northern War - 1845-46

The British Army pursuit of **Hone Heke** and **Kawati** of **Nga Puhi**, following their sacking of **Kororareka** in March, 1845. **James Belich** says the burning of the town by Maori was probably accidental. An exploding armoury and British shelling from offshore certainly added fuel to the burning of Kororareka.

The Northern War was a complex 'three-way war.' Two factions of Nga Puhi fought against each other. One faction was led by Hone Heke who opposed the Crown, and who was prepared to take that opposition onto the battlefield. The other faction was headed by **Tamati Waka Nene** who generally supported the Crown, against Heke, though it is probably more accurate to suggest that he found a useful ally in the Crown in his dispute with Heke.

Three major engagements involving British Army and Maori were fought at **Puketutu**, **Ohaeawai** and **Ruapekapeka**.

Further reading: Tim Ryan and Bill Parham, 'Hone Heke's Challenge' in *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, Wellington 1986, pp.15-28.

The Wellington – Hutt War 1846

Continuing confrontations over disputed lands in the **Hutt Valley** led to conflict and war between **Ngati Toa**, settlers and the **British Army**. Ngati Toa fell back to the Pauatahanui inlet, then further east to Horokiwi, pursued by the British, before escaping north into refuge.

Further reading: Ryan and Parham, 'Trouble Moves South' in *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, pp. 33-37.

Wanganui War - 1847-48

Disputed land sales around Wanganui led to conflict, murder and open warfare. Wanganui itself was attacked, by **Topine Te Mamaku**, with skirmishes in outlying areas, most notably **St Johns Wood**. **Governor George Grey** sued for peace in 1848.

Further reading: Ryan and Parham, 'Trouble Moves South' in *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, pp. 33-37.

North Taranaki War 1860-61

War broke out in North Taranaki in March 1860. The issue over which the war commenced was a block of land, called the Pekapeka Block, now for the most part covered by the township of Waitara in North Taranaki.

An Issue of Land

In 1859, a local Te Atiawa chief, **Te Teira** offered to sell the Pekapeka Block to the Crown, an offer he had made on a number of earlier occasions. Many other Maori objected to the sale. Those objecting were led by Wiremu Kingi, regarded by Te Atiawa as their paramount chief. **Wiremu Kingi** therefore spoke for all Te Atiawa, especially for those who were actually living on the block itself (about 2000). His customary right to oppose the sale far outweighed the right of Te Teira to force a sale through.

The Crown was caught in a bind; but not for long. The Governor, Thomas Gore Browne, had just announced a new Government policy - that the Government would accept any offer of land from any individual Maori who wished to sell. No Maori of supposed rank or customary status would be permitted to obstruct this policy. As Gore Browne saw it, it was a matter of the Governor General against paramount Maori - which one was to have the ultimate authority? Maori must not be permitted to usurp the authority of the Crown, he said. Therefore, the sale would go through, provided Te Teira's title to the land could be confirmed.

Te Ngapara (Mt. Pleasant), Waitara. British Army placed their artillery here, firing at Te Kohia Pa, 1860. The First Taranaki War commenced here, in 1860.

An Issue of Authority

This decision angered Te Atiawa, who were not about to allow the Crown to occupy the disputed Block. Wiremu Kingi warned the Governor that 'he did not desire war against the Pakeha' - but he would not allow the sale to proceed. When an attempt was later made to survey the Block, Te Atiawa obstructed the surveyors and removed them from the area. The Governor saw this action of obstruction as tantamount to treason. Maori were instructed to apologise, and to remove themselves from the

Block. Te Atiawa refused. Instead, they hastily built a defensive Pa at Te Kohia, symbolically sited just inside the south eastern corner of the Block. On March 17, 1860, the British Army marched out from New Plymouth and opened fire on the Pa, thus commencing what is generally called the 'First Taranaki War'.

Battle at Te Kohia

The opening battle then was fought at **Te Kohia**, said by James Belich to be place where New Zealand's 'great civil wars of the 1860s' began.

Further important engagements were fought at **Puketekauere, Mahoetahi, No 3 Redoubt and Te Arei**.

In the course of this war, the British Army suffered some setbacks but ultimately prevailed over Maori. A truce was signed at **Te Arei Pa** in 1861.

Further reading: James Belich, 'The Taranaki War' in *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, 1986, pp. 73-116; Neil Finlay, 'The First Taranaki War' in *Sacred Soil. Images and Stories of the New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, 1998, pp. 29-44; Tim Ryan and Bill Parham, 'The Taranaki Saga Begins' in *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, 1986, pp. 37-46.

Invasion of the Waikato 1863-64

The defining war of the New Zealand Wars. Massive **British Army** invasion in July 1863 of the Maori King's avowed home area, the **Waikato**. Skirmishing at **Koheroa** and **Meremere** followed by a major engagement at **Rangiriri**. With Rangiriri taken, the British Army pushed south, ultimately defeating Waikato and allies at **Orakau** in 1864. Maori King **Tawhiao** fled west, and took refuge amongst **Ngati Maniapoto** in dense bush country later known as the '**King Country**'.

Further reading: James Belich, 'The Waikato War' in *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, 1986, pp. 73-176.

Tauranga 1864

Sometimes seen as a part of the Waikato war, which strictly speaking it is not. A war that turned on Ngai Te Rangi defence of land, against British Army and settlers. Major battles fought at Gate Pa and Te Ranga.

Further reading: James Belich, 'The Tauranga Campaign' in *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, 1986, pp. 177-202.

Central – South Taranaki 1863-69

This area, South Taranaki especially, remained on an uneasy war-footing after 1860 when elements of Ngati Ruanui travelled north to support their related tribes of North Taranaki in 1860. Ngati Ruanui returned south after the war and later attacked Tataraimaka in 1863. British Army sent into the area in 'repress the Maori' which it did with some ruthlessness, especially under the command of Major General Trevor Chute. Increasingly, New Zealand Armed Constabulary was taking over the war, with the British Army returning home to England. War made more complex by the rise of Hau hau in 1864. Major wars were fought between Maori as Hau Hau spread, beyond Taranaki. A short period of peace was sharply broken by Titokowaru's war 1868-69.

Further reading: James Cowan, Chapters 2-6, 15, 20-23, and 29 in *Volume II, The New Zealand Wars*, Wellington, 1922.

East Coast War 1868-1872

Te Kooti of Rongowhakaata escaped from imprisonment on the Chatham Islands and with adherents was pursued across the breadth of the North Island. A very long and complex war involving multiple alliances of Crown, settlers and Maori pitted against Te Kooti's people in flight. Te Kooti finally accepted an offer of refuge from Tawhiao and retired into the King Country, in 1872. He was later pardoned.

Further reading: Ryan and Parham, Chapters 16, 22 and 23, in *The Colonial New Zealand Wars*, Wellington, 1986.

Danny Keenan - danny.keenan@newzealandwars.co.nz