

The NZ Wars – The Waikato Campaign

Museum Education Programme

Teacher Notes

Causes of the Waikato Wars

In the early 1860s the centre of attention became the Waikato district, where bitterness against the Colonial government was waxing. By trading flax and foodstuffs, those tribes who were hostile to the Europeans were amassing a stock of weapons and ammunition. Large parties of Waikato Maori had gone to help Wiremu Kingi in Taranaki, and with some suffering heavy casualties.

The government had done little to prepare the Maori for British institutions. It appeared to Maori that there was one law for the Pakeha and one for the Maori. A certain class of European treated the Maori as an inferior being, and insulted all he held sacred. The land was being bought at an alarming rate by the government, then sold to settlers at a profit. Maori became convinced that the settlers intended to take their land by force, and more Maori joined the King's party. Governor Gore Browne condemned the King Movement, and demanded the return of plunder taken in Taranaki. In mid 1861 Governor Browne decided to invade the Waikato and depose the King. However before Governor Browne could set his war machine in motion the Duke of Newcastle replaced Governor Browne with Sir George Grey. This was Sir George's second term of office as Governor.

Governor Grey was faced with an immediate problem: he must try to prevent war in the Waikato, but he must also be prepared for it. A military road ran south from Auckland. This road was constructed to protect the outlying settlements. Soon after Grey's arrival, this road was thrust forward to the banks of the Waikato river, which was proof to the Kingites that war was imminent and they regarded all Governor Grey's actions as suspicious.

Wiremu Tamihana had done his utmost to restrain the extremists in the King's camp, but by 1863 he realised that war between the two races was inevitable. To sort out those loyal to Queen Victoria, all Maori in the Waikato were required to take an oath of allegiance to her Majesty, or else move back to the King Country. Many refused, hiding in the thick bush between Drury and the Waikato. Grey issued a note to the all Waikato Chiefs complaining about the behaviour of some members of their tribes, and warning them that he intended to establish military posts along the Waikato River. The Kingites announced that they would fight if the road crossed the Mangatawhiri Stream.

On 1 July 1863, General Cameron crossed the King Country boundary at the junction of the Mangatawhiri Stream and the Waikato River. The war had begun. Grey claimed that he was making a punitive expedition against Rewi Maniapoto because he had ordered the ambush in

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Taranaki, but this is not the main reason. He alleged that the Maori were marching to attack Auckland. The truth of this has never been proved.

The main weakness for Maori during the decisive battles in the Waikato was lack of water in the Maori entrenchments. No matter how gallant the defenders, the fighting could not be prolonged when the water ran out.

A river fleet to protect vessels carried the war into the Kingites' territory. The paddle-steamer 'Avon', armoured for the campaign, was the first steam vessel to float on the Waikato. The fleet enabled Cameron to turn the Maori flank and give him command of the river.

From their strong fortifications at Meremere, the Kingites retreated by canoe up the Whangamarino and across the flooded swamps to Rangiriri, where the heaviest fighting of the Lower Waikato Campaign occurred. Here they surrendered under confused circumstances.

Although the British had suffered severe casualties, so greatly did they admire the fighting qualities of the defenders, that they hastened to cheer them and shake them by the hand. Old flintlock muskets, double barrelled shotguns, native clubs and spears, were in the long run no match for gunboats, howitzers, Enfield rifles and handguns.

Cameron captured Ngaurawahia without opposition, hoisted the British flag, and advanced steadily up the river. Realising that he planned to cut them off from cultivations at Rangiaowhia, their main source of food, Maori constructed a formidable system of entrenchments and redoubts at Paterangi. Early in 1864, nearly 3000 were in garrison there, the largest Kingite force ever assembled. At the end of January, Cameron moved his army headquarters to Te Rore, three miles from Paterangi.

No assault was made on this pa, but a month later a surprise expedition attacked Rangiaowhia, bringing the main body of the Waikato tribes pouring in to defend their supplies. It was not long before the whole of the mid-Waikato was under British occupation. Redoubts were garrisoned and gunboats steamed upriver as far as Kirikiriroa and Pukerimu.

A stand for independence was made at Orakau, a few miles from Cameron's post at Kihikihi, where Rewi Maniapoto and his small band of Kingites withstood the assault of nearly 2000 soldiers armed with modern equipment. Their ammunition reduced to wooden bullets and their food to raw kumara. They refused the opportunity to surrender. Many escaped to the swamps and across the Punui, but this engagement was the end of the war in Waikato. Peace was not concluded until May 1865, when Wiremu Tamihana met general Carey at Tamahere, placed his taiaha at the General's feet and said, "I and my tribes will fight no more. The laws of the Queen shall be the laws of the King."

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Wiremu Kingi did not submit until 1872; Tawhiao not until 1881, but they were living in exile on lands belonging to Maniapoto. The war might have ended conclusively in 1865 if it had not been for the rise of a new religion, Pai Marire, which was an attempt by Maori to turn their backs on Christianity and re-establish a Maori religion. The Hauhau believed they were a chosen people, and would by divine help, have their confiscated lands returned to them.

The seizure of lands, intended as a punishment for tribes who would not submit to the government, proved to be both unjust and a disastrous mistake. The best land was taken, regardless of whether the owners had or had not fought against the Queen. A vast area of the Waikato was confiscated including the land on the east side of the Waikato-Waipā basin, from the Mangatawhiri Stream south to the summit of Mount Pirongia.

From there the line followed the Puniu river to Waikeria, to Pukekura on the foothills of Maungatautari, then northward to the Thames gulf. Portions of this area were returned later to hapu who had not fought, but most of it was handed out to settlers. Thus the Ngāti Maniapoto, whose territory lay in the King Country, and whose chief Rewi had urged war, lost no land. Those who had to bear the most drastic punishment were the Ngāti Hauā, whose chief Tamihana had tried to prevent war, and some Waikato tribes who had supported them.

NGARUAWAHIA

Ngaruawahia is important for its association with the Kingitanga. Here in 1858 the Waikato chief Te Wherowhero was proclaimed the first Maori King, known as King Potatau I. Because of this, the British were delighted to occupy Ngaruawahia in 1863 following the battle at Rangiriri. In doing so, they believed they had overcome their rival sovereignty. Nothing survives at Ngaruawahia from this era although there is a memorial to King Potatau I at the confluence of the Waipa and Waikato Rivers.

HAMILTON

There had long been Maori settlements in this area but land confiscations forced their retreat south. Pakeha settlement began in August 1864 with the arrival of 118 settler soldiers. Members of the Waikato Militia, which were part of the Colonial forces, had been promised land as part of payment for their service in the Waikato Wars. They arrived aboard the gunboat *Rangiriri*, the wreck of which lies as a monument on the river bank at Hamilton East.

PATERANGI

Paterangi was the third defensive line built by the Kingitanga, which begun shortly after the battle of Rangiriri, and was designed to protect Rangiaowhia. Pakeha described this area as 'the choicest part of the Waikato' because of its agricultural bounty.

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On 28 January 1864 the invading army reached the Paterangi line. For three weeks they camped nearby, observing and occasionally shelling the largest pa, but making no attempt to assault the position. This enabled them to rest and replenish their supplies while ensuring strain on those Maori communities whose warriors had gathered at Paterangi during the harvest season. Late at night on 20 February Cameron moved his 1200 men past Paterangi without alerting the watch.

RANGIAOWHIA

Early in the morning of Sunday 21 February, Cameron's force suddenly appeared before Rangiaowhia. This Maori settlement had no defences and many men of fighting age were absent at Paterangi. About twenty turned out to fire at the British, some of them from the shelter of the wharepuni. The building was then set on fire. The following account appeared in the Daily Southern Cross four days after the event:

...As the smoke and flames forced the rebels from their retreat, they were at once shot down and fell amidst the flames, suffering a most horrid death...

Cameron's victorious army plundered Rangiaowhia.

TE AWAMUTU

Te Awamutu's Pakeha history precedes the Waikato War. The Anglican Mission at Otawhao was established there in 1839. John Morgan, the pioneer missionary, introduced wheat to the district. The region around Otawhao, Kihikihi, Orakau and Rangiaowhia rapidly became the granary of the Waikato. By the 1850s it supplied a substantial part of the agricultural produce sold on the Auckland market. The income helped Maori finance the defence of their sovereignty through the purchase of military materials. With the Waikato War, sales were reduced partly because more Maori relied on the produce for their own needs.

Another of Morgan's initiatives, St John's church, was completed in 1854. During the Waikato War it was fortified as a garrison church.

RIVAL PRINTING PRESSES

Before Maori and Pakeha went to war in the Waikato, both of these rivals for sovereignty had put their cases to Maori in printing.

Two Waikato Maori, training at the state printing press in Vienna, Austria, had been presented with a printing press by Archduke Maximilian in 1860. It was shipped to Ngaruawahia and used to print *Te Hokioi e Rere Atu Na*, the Kingitanga's Maori language newspaper. Edited by Wiremu Parata Te Tuhi, the newspaper used the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi to argue for Maori sovereignty and publicised and criticised the government's preparations for war.

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The government's response was to establish a rival newspaper, *Te Pihoihoi Mokemoke i Runga i te Taunui*, edited by John Gorst and published in Te Awamutu. This newspaper criticised the King and argued that two governments could not operate in one country.

Outraged, some armed Kingitanga supporters seized the government printing press in March 1863 and ordered Gorst to leave Te Awamutu. When war began several months later *Te Hokioi* too ceased publication and the printing press was abandoned. It is now in the Te Awamutu Museum.

ORAKAU

Some of the Kingitanga forces assembled at Orakau. Working 24 hours a day in shifts because there were not enough spades, Maori built an incomplete pa on fairly flat land. The site was surrounded by peach trees. It lacked an adequate water supply and an escape route. Despite his misgivings, Rewi Maniapoto led the 300 defenders of the pa. They met 1200 troops led by Brigadier General Carey. Three attacks were repelled before the British changed tactics and encircled the pa. Cameron and more British troops then arrived. So too did Maori reinforcements but they were unable to get into the pa and sat instead '...on the hill and wept farewell, for they thought that...none [would] escape...'

By the night of 1 April some Maori were firing peach stones instead of bullets yet they rejected Cameron's suggestions that the women be sent to safety and that they surrender. 'E hoa, ka whawhai tonu ahau kia keo, ake, ake, ake!' (Friend, I shall fight against you forever, forever!) was their response. Two more unsuccessful assaults were launched against the pa but it was clear that resistance could not be sustained. At 3.30pm the Kingitanga made their move. A compact body of Maori, with women and children in the centre, advanced on the troops in silence. They got about 200 yards and charged, firing at the British as they broke through their cordon. They then separated into small groups and were pursued by soldiers on horseback. Most Maori deaths occurred during this pursuit.

Belich argues that while Maori saw Orakau as a defeat, it was the 'cruellest disappointment of the entire war' for the British. The Kingitanga still existed, now behind the aukati, hosted by Ngati Maniapoto. Within this sphere Maori exercised their sovereignty and they were still willing and able to resist if attacked. Shortly after Orakau, Cameron withdrew most troops to Auckland and Pakeha sought a fresh arena in the battle for sovereignty.

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KIHIKIHI

During the 1870s relations between King Tawhiao and his Ngati Maniapoto host became strained.

The government had made several offers to Tawhiao, seeking a permanent peace. The terms included land (sometimes part of Ngati Maniapoto territory), and an annual pension. Tawhiao refused because acceptance would mean giving up his mana or sovereignty and becoming the Queens 'pensioner'.

Rewi Maniapoto, conscious that the sovereignty and territory of Ngati Maniapoto risked compromise, made his own arrangements with the government, eventually accepting the house pictured above. The memorial to him was erected when he died in 1894.

ALEXANDRA REDOUBT, PIRONGIA

After the battle of Orakau, King Tawhiao and his Kingitanga followers retreated behind the aukati. The government then proceeded to enact its policy of confiscation and military settlement which would at once defray the costs of war and achieve a built-in system of defence.

Alexandra (Pirongia) on the Waipa River was chosen as the base for a military settlement. The township would be the hub from which settlers would move out onto confiscated land. However the scheme failed, mainly because the military settlers lacked farming experience and investment capital. Many drifted away.

After imperial troops were withdrawn from the Waikato in 1865, the remaining settlers at Alexandra grew increasingly fearful of being attacked across the aukati and pleaded with the government for a fortification. In 1872 the Armed Constabulary completed the building of the Alexandra Redoubt.

However, by the late 1870's there was a growing recognition that Tawhiao was not a threat and the government offered him peace terms. Eventually in July 1881 Tawhiao and 600 of his followers crossed the aukati and met Resident Magistrate William Gilbert Mair at Alexandra where Tawhiao laid down his gun in peace.

In May 1886 the Armed Constabulary left Alexandra and the redoubt was abandoned.

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