

Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa

THE NEW ZEALAND WARS

by Ross Calman



In the nineteenth century, a handful of Māori tribes fought a series of wars against the might of the British Empire – the world's largest superpower at the time. Although Māori were eventually defeated, the British didn't always have it their own way.

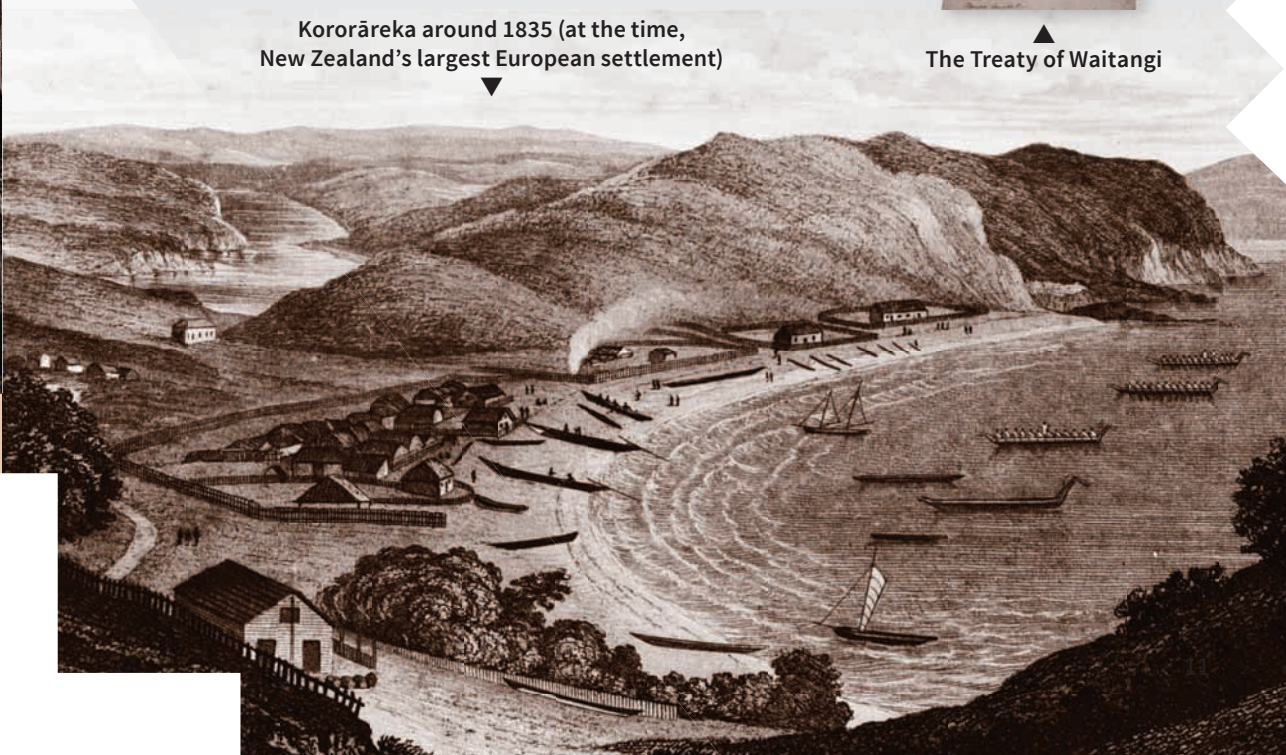
Beginnings

The New Zealand Wars were fought between 1845 and 1872. They were about who controlled the country and who owned the land. When Europeans arrived, Māori had already been in Aotearoa for more than five hundred years. New Zealand may have looked wild and uninhabited to the first Europeans, but this was misleading. Every part of the country was divided among iwi, hapū, and whānau. In each place, someone had the right to grow kūmara, gather fern-root, take birds or timber, or catch fish.

Organised groups of settlers started arriving in New Zealand shortly after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Most of these people came from the British Isles in search of a better life. At first, they lived in a handful of small coastal towns: Auckland, Wellington, Whanganui, Nelson, and New Plymouth. Māori outnumbered Pākehā, and British power and influence over the country was limited. Then, less than five years after the treaty was signed, a Māori leader decided to put British power to the test.

Kororāreka around 1835 (at the time, New Zealand's largest European settlement)

The Treaty of Waitangi



Hōne Heke Pōkai and the Flagpole: THE NORTHERN WAR (1845–46)

Hōne Heke Pōkai, a Ngāpuhi chief, was a proud leader. He had been the first chief to sign the treaty, hoping it would benefit his people. However, many Ngāpuhi faced hard times after 1840, especially when the capital was moved from the Bay of Islands to Auckland in 1841. This meant there was less trading in the north.

In protest, Heke Pōkai chopped down the British flagpole at Kororāreka (which the British called Russell) not once but three times between July 1844 and January 1845. So Governor FitzRoy brought troops from Sydney and stationed them in the town. The Northern War began on 11 March 1845 when Heke Pōkai and his ally, Kawiti, attacked and routed the British garrison at Kororāreka. Most of the town was destroyed during the fighting.

Heke Pōkai's seemingly easy victory shocked Pākehā. They had expected the British soldiers, with their superior weapons, to be more than a match for the Māori warriors and their antique muskets.

Could Auckland be next? Was the young colony about to descend into chaos? Under strong pressure, Governor FitzRoy requested more soldiers from Sydney and mounted a military campaign against the Ngāpuhi chief. However, things didn't go according to plan.

The first battle, at Puketutu on 8 May 1845, was inconclusive. The next month, the pro-British faction of Ngāpuhi had more success when they captured Heke Pōkai's pā at Te Ahuahu. Because no British troops had been involved in the encounter, FitzRoy was unable to claim it as a victory. In the next battle involving British troops, at Ōhaeawai, soldiers attempted to storm Kawiti's pā but came under intense fire from Māori, who shot from hidden positions. The soldiers were forced to retreat, and a hundred men were killed or wounded. FitzRoy didn't get the chance to make amends after the setbacks at Kororāreka and Ōhaeawai. He lost his post shortly afterwards.



Timeline

- ▶ **6 FEBRUARY 1840:** The Treaty of Waitangi is signed. (At the time, the Māori population is around 80,000, the Pākehā population around 2,000.)
- ▶ **8 JULY 1844:** Heke Pōkai orders the flagpole at Kororāreka to be cut down.
- ▶ **JANUARY 1845:** Heke Pōkai cuts down the flagpole at Kororāreka for a second and third time.
- ▶ **11 MARCH 1845:** Heke Pōkai and Kawiti attack the British soldiers at Kororāreka.
- ▶ **8 MAY 1845:** The Battle of Puketutu is fought (inconclusive).
- ▶ **12 JUNE 1845:** Pro-British Ngāpuhi defeat Heke Pōkai at Te Ahuahu pā.
- ▶ **1 JULY 1845:** Māori win the Battle of Ōhaeawai.



Kūpapa troops pose outside a stockade

MĀORI VERSUS MĀORI

During the Northern War, and in the later campaigns against Titokowaru and Te Kooti, Māori also fought on the side of British and colonial troops. Known as kūpapa, these Māori had various reasons for fighting against other Māori, some of whom were their own relatives. Some kūpapa were traditional enemies of those Māori who were resisting the government. Others felt that they needed to stay onside with the government in a bid to preserve their own lands. Others did it for the money. Kūpapa always retained a degree of independence and sometimes even refused to fight.

FitzRoy's replacement was the brilliant but arrogant George Grey. Although he studied Māori language and customs during his time as governor, Grey still believed that British civilisation was superior to Māori culture, and he sought to bring the war to a swift conclusion. Grey increased the size of his army to over a thousand men, who were joined by 450 pro-British Ngāpuhi. Together, they attacked Heke Pōkai and Kawiti at Ruapekapeka on 11 January 1846.

The pā was quickly captured as many of the defenders, running low on supplies, had left overnight. The battle continued in the nearby countryside. Governor Grey claimed victory and brought the Northern War to a close. But Heke Pōkai retained his lands and remained independent of British authority, and the flagpole at Kororāreka wasn't rebuilt during his lifetime.



Governor George Grey



Above: The Battle of Ruapekapeka, with the pā on the hill
Right: New Plymouth around 1857, with its stockade on the hill

Wiremu Kīngi's Defiance: THE TARANAKI WAR (1860-61)

In the years after the Northern War, boatloads of fresh settlers arrived in New Zealand. By the late 1850s, Pākehā outnumbered Māori. The new arrivals had been promised cheap land, and many eyed up the prime sites occupied by Māori. Some Māori were happy to sell, but many were not. They were worried about Pākehā taking over the country, so it was decided to establish a Māori king. He would lead opposition to the British and help to prevent further land sales. In 1858, the Waikato chief Pōtatau Te Wherowhero became the first Māori king and leader of the Kīngitanga (King Movement).

Towards the end of the 1850s, New Plymouth settlers put pressure on Governor Browne to make more land available. The governor bought the Waitara block from the young Te Āti Awa chief Te Teira, even though Browne knew the other owners of the block opposed the sale. Expecting trouble, Browne sent troops to the area to build a fort.

Wiremu Kīngi Te Rangitāke, a senior leader of Te Āti Awa, was outraged that the governor claimed to have bought his ancestral land and was intending it for Pākehā farms. In February 1860, he drove the surveyors away and built a pā at Te Kohia. This became the scene of the first battle of the Taranaki War on 17 March 1860, which was inconclusive. A British victory followed at the Battle of Waireka, but in June, Māori won a major victory at Puketakauere. Fighting continued for a further nine months, with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. A truce was declared on 18 March 1861, and the Taranaki War ended.

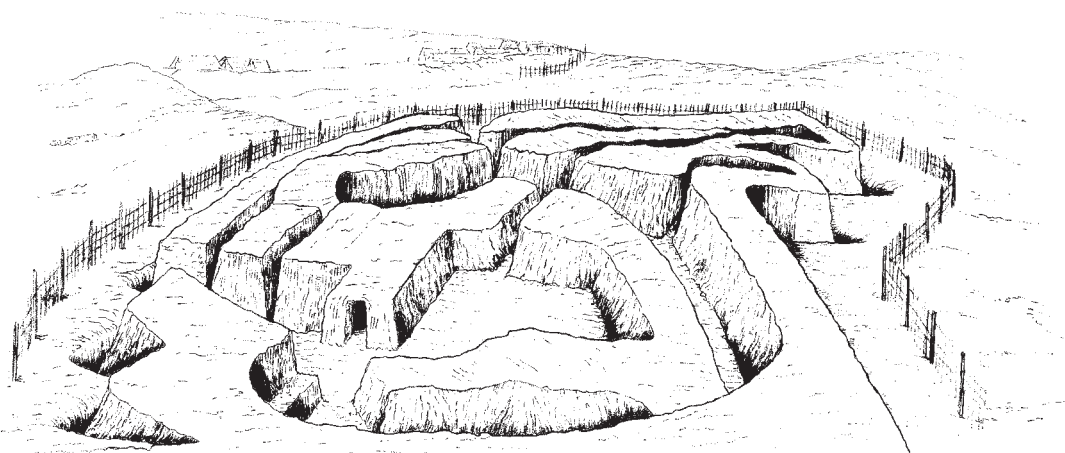


- ▶ **11 JANUARY 1846:** The British win the Battle of Ruapekapeka, and the Northern War ends.
- ▶ **1853:** The first election for a New Zealand parliament is held.
- ▶ **1856:** The Māori population is around 56,000, the Pākehā population around 59,000.
- ▶ **MARCH 1859:** Te Teira sells the Waitara block to the government.
- ▶ **20 FEBRUARY 1860:** Wiremu Kīngi prevents a survey of the Waitara block.
- ▶ **17 MARCH 1860:** The Battle of Te Kohia is fought (inconclusive).
- ▶ **28 MARCH 1860:** The British win the Battle of Waireka.
- ▶ **27 JUNE 1860:** Māori win the Battle of Puketakauere.
- ▶ **18 MARCH 1861:** A truce is declared, and the Taranaki War ends.

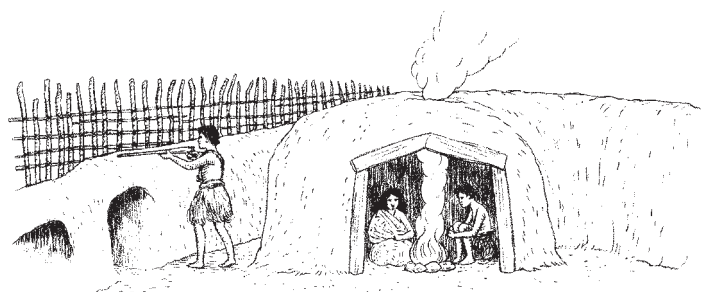
MĀORI PĀ

A pā is a defensive structure consisting of trenches, earth walls, and wooden palisades. During the New Zealand Wars, some pā were made in a few days while others, like the one at Pāterangi, included a maze of tunnels that took weeks to construct. Pā like Pāterangi often had anti-artillery bunkers, hidden rifle pits, and escape routes.

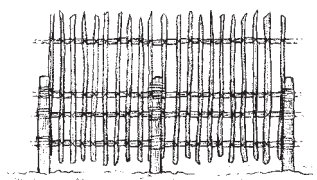
Māori pā weren't designed to be defended for long periods, and supplies such as food, water, and ammunition often ran out. This is why many pā were abandoned during battles under the cover of darkness. Most defenders thought it better to escape and regroup – to build another pā and fight another day.



Pāterangi pā



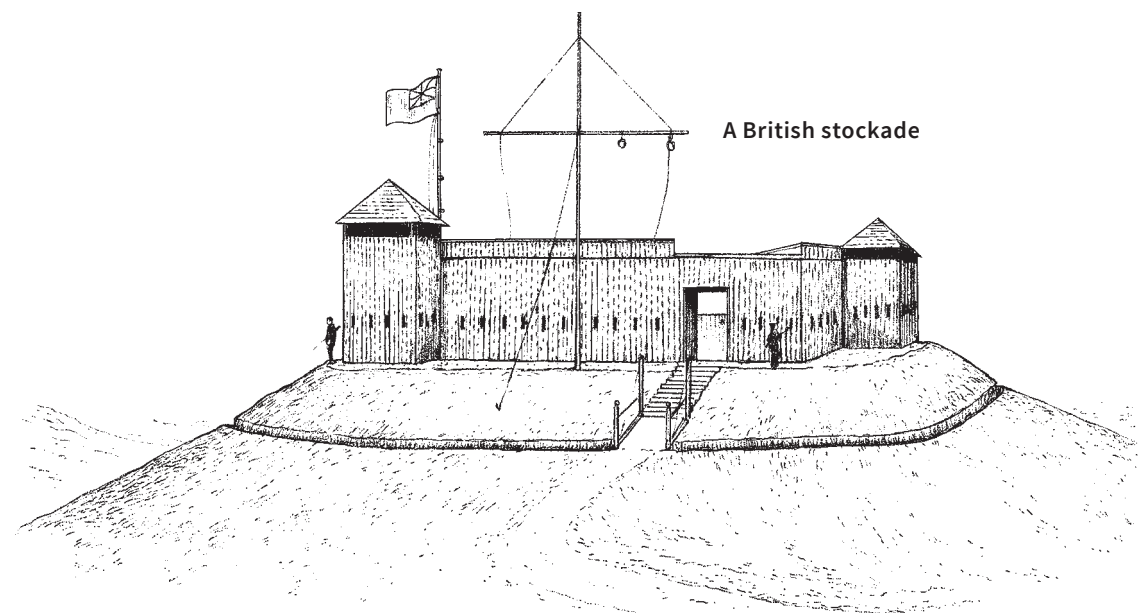
Tunnels providing safety for those not fighting



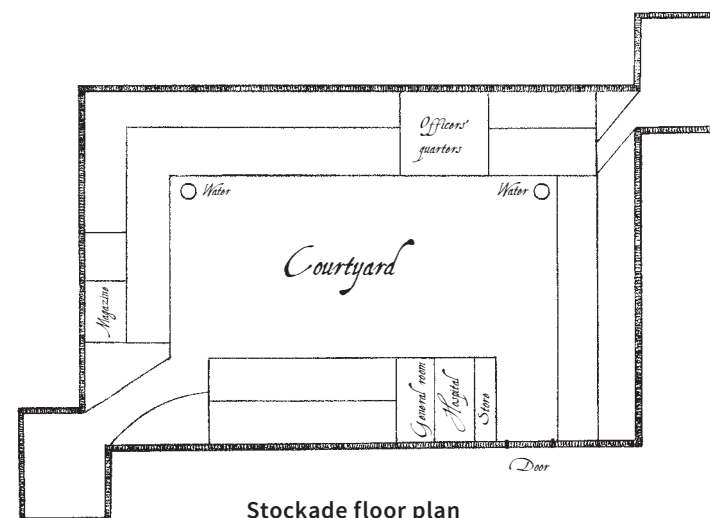
Palisades

BRITISH FORTS AND STOCKADES

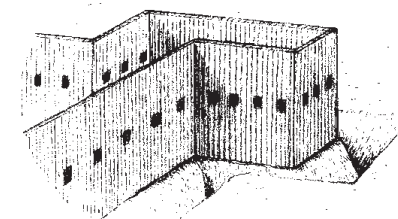
The British and colonial soldiers built forts in areas where they feared attack by Māori. Forts were usually made from wood thick enough to withstand rifle fire, and they had loopholes through which the defenders could shoot while keeping safe from harm. Some forts had earthworks, like pā. These were called redoubts. The main towns also had stockades, where troops lived and where weapons and ammunition were stored. Local townsfolk could also shelter in these stockades during an attack.



A British stockade



Stockade floor plan



Detail showing loopholes

“Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou”: THE WAIKATO WAR (1863–64)

George Grey, who was now a governor in South Africa, heard about events in Taranaki. He asked the British government to send him back to New Zealand, claiming he could put a stop to the troubles. Grey returned in September 1861 and within months was preparing for the largest military operation of the New Zealand Wars.

Grey was determined to break the resistance of the Māori king. To do this, he would invade the king's territory and defeat him. Then the lush Waikato land could be opened up to Pākehā settlement. Grey persuaded the British to send more regiments to New Zealand and raised an army that swelled to fourteen thousand men.

This army was commanded by General Duncan Cameron. Māori were heavily outnumbered. They could muster at most four thousand warriors – but not all at once as the men had to provide food for their families as well as fight.

General Cameron's army spent eighteen months building a road south from Auckland towards Waikato to make it easier to move troops and supplies. Then finally, on 12 July 1863, his soldiers crossed the Mangatāwhiri River. The invasion had begun. For some weeks, the men were held back by the Māori defences at Meremere. But then the British transported troops by riverboat at night, landing beyond the pā.



General Cameron with soldiers

The first major battle was at Rangiriri on 20 November 1863. After a day of intense fighting, most of the Māori defenders left the pā overnight, and the British claimed victory. After Rangiriri, the British occupied the king's home village of Ngāruawāhia before attacking and burning the village of Rangiaowhia, which supplied the Kīngitanga army with food.

The last battle that took place in Waikato was at Ōrākau. After three days, the Māori defenders ran out of supplies and decided to make a break for the surrounding swamps. Many were killed. During a pause in the battle, Ngāti Maniapoto leader Rewi Maniapoto is said to have made his speech of defiance: “Ka whawhai tonu mātou, ake, ake, ake!” (“We will fight on, for ever and ever!”)

After two more battles near Tauranga, the Waikato War ended in victory for the British, and they confiscated huge tracts of land from Waikato Māori. King Tāwhiao and his followers retreated to the region that became known as the King Country. This part of New Zealand remained under Māori control for the next twenty years and was off-limits to Pākehā developments such as roads, railways, and telegraph lines.

- ▶ **1 January 1862:** Work starts on the road into Waikato.
- ▶ **1 November 1863:** Māori are forced to withdraw from the pā at Meremere.
- ▶ **20–21 November 1863:** The British win the Battle of Rangiriri.
- ▶ **8 December 1863:** The British occupy the Māori king's village of Ngāruawāhia.
- ▶ **20 February 1864:** The British attack and burn the village of Rangiaowhia.
- ▶ **31 March–2 April 1864:** The British win the Battle of Ōrākau (near Te Awamutu).
- ▶ **29 April 1864:** Māori win the Battle of Gate Pā (near Tauranga).
- ▶ **21 June 1864:** The British win the Battle of Te Ranga (near Tauranga), and the Waikato War ends.



On the Pōkeno hill, building the military road to Waikato



Rewi Maniapoto

“Hopes Are Ebbing Fast”: TĪTOKOWARU AND TE KOOTI

After the Waikato War ended, the British army withdrew, and the New Zealand government became responsible for running its own army. It relied heavily on kūpapa – Māori allied to the government. Troops moved through Māori settlements, tearing out crops and burning houses. Sporadic fighting continued, but it seemed that Māori resistance was waning.

Then, during 1868, two Māori leaders emerged to challenge the government and spread fear among settlers. For six months, they managed to outwit the army. In South Taranaki, Ngā Ruahine leader Tītokowaru won two decisive victories against government soldiers in the area. Meanwhile, Rongowhakaata leader Te Kooti escaped from the Chatham Islands, where he had been kept prisoner. He then launched a series of raids in Poverty Bay, including a raid at Matawhero on 10 November 1868, where more than fifty Māori and Pākehā were killed. This included both soldiers and civilians.

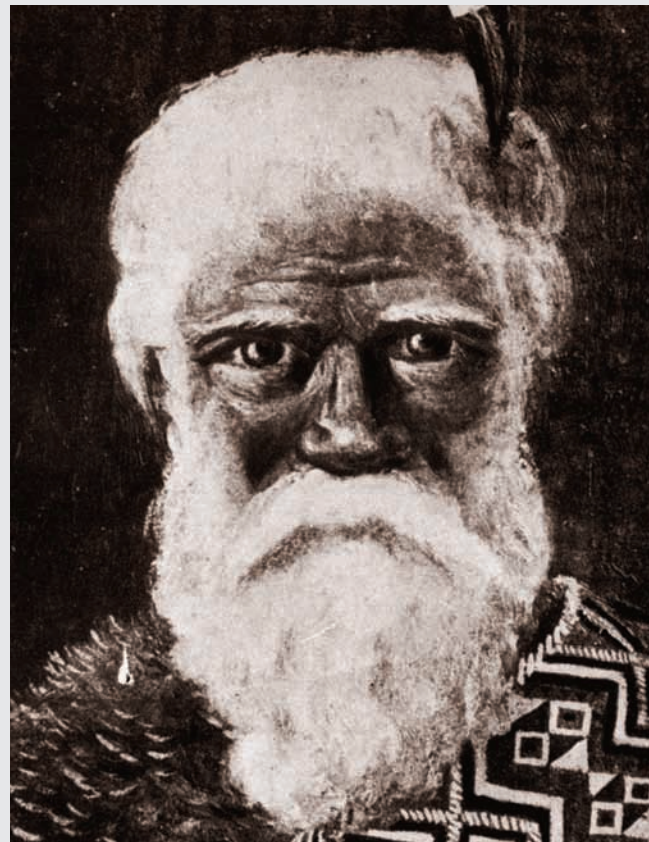
The Pākehā population became deeply concerned after these attacks. People worried that there would be a Māori uprising and their towns would be attacked. On 1 January 1869, Whanganui’s *Evening Herald* reflected the general feeling of doom: “The New Year brings no joy or gladness to Wanganui. Suspense is everywhere and hopes are ebbing fast.”

But events soon turned against the two Māori leaders. Te Kooti narrowly escaped from a battle at Ngātapa pā, where many of his followers were captured and killed. In February 1869, Tītokowaru lost the support of his people and had to retreat to inland Taranaki. It had been a close call for the Pākehā population.

After his escape from Ngātapa, Te Kooti was pursued mostly by kūpapa through the central North Island for the next three years. On 14 February 1872, the last shots of the New Zealand Wars were fired against him. After this, Te Kooti sought refuge in the King Country.



Above: The Battle of Te Ngutu-o-te-manu



Above: Te Kooti
Below: Te Kooti’s war flag, Te Wepu



- ▶ **1865:** The Native Land Court is established.
- ▶ **1865–67:** The British army withdraws from New Zealand.
- ▶ **1867:** An armed constabulary is formed to replace the British army.
- ▶ **1867:** Māori seats are established in parliament.
- ▶ **9 June 1868:** Tītokowaru’s war begins when his men kill three military settlers at Ketemarae.
- ▶ **10 July 1868:** Te Kooti and almost three hundred followers land on the East Coast after they escape from the Chatham Islands.
- ▶ **7 September 1868:** Tītokowaru wins the Battle of Te Ngutu-o-te-manu.
- ▶ **7 November 1868:** Tītokowaru wins the Battle of Moturoa.
- ▶ **10 November 1868:** Te Kooti leads the Matawhero raid.
- ▶ **5 December 1868:** Colonial troops attack Te Kooti at Ngātapa pā.
- ▶ **5 January 1869:** Te Kooti escapes from Ngātapa. Many of his followers are killed.
- ▶ **2 February 1869:** Tītokowaru leaves Taurangaika pā and retreats to inland Taranaki. This is the end of Tītokowaru’s war.
- ▶ **1871:** The Māori population is around 50,000, the Pākehā population around 300,000.
- ▶ **14 February 1872:** The New Zealand Wars end.



The End

Although Māori fought bravely and had the upper hand in a number of battles, the superior resources of the British Empire – and later, the settler government – ultimately prevailed. The government was able to sustain long military campaigns, while Māori had to juggle the demands of war and whānau. And while Māori had a realistic chance of wresting back power at the beginning of the wars, by the end, they were heavily outnumbered by Pākehā.

After the wars, the government punished those Māori who had fought by confiscating a million hectares of Māori land in Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, and Poverty Bay. Land was even confiscated from some iwi who had fought alongside the government. The confiscations compounded the negative effects of the wars on Māori and are still regarded by many as a great injustice.



New Zealand Armed Constabulary garrison at Ōpepe, near Taupō, early 1870s

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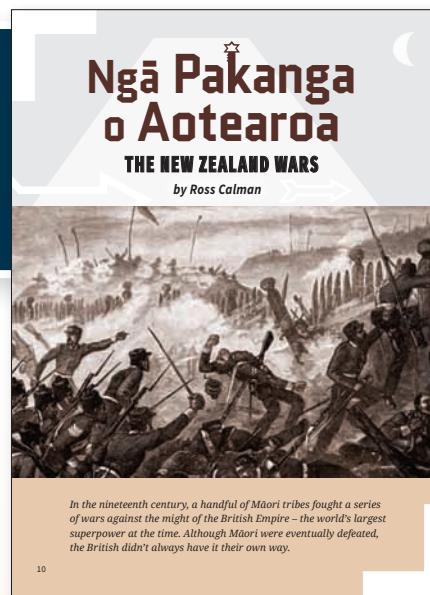
Published 2014 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6011, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz
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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 0 478 44631 9 (online)

Publishing services Lift Education E tū
Series Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Adam Pryor
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



New Zealand Government



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 4, NOVEMBER 2014

Curriculum learning area	Social Sciences
Reading year level	Year 8
Keywords	history, war, Māori, Waikato, Taranaki, war, Te Kooti, Tītokowaru, British Empire, land, settlers, pā, Kīngitanga