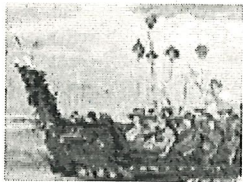


# Overview - Musket Wars



Hongi Hika returns from a raid

Between 1818 and the early 1830s an estimated 20,000 Māori were killed in what have been called the Musket Wars. On a per capita basis this is equivalent to around 200,000 deaths in the First World War instead of the 18,000 New Zealand lives actually lost. Thousands more were enslaved or became refugees.

Unlike the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s, the Musket Wars were New Zealand-wide. They began because of rivalry between the northern iwi Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Whātua, but all the tribes were soon trading to obtain muskets. Some of the heaviest fighting took place in the South Island between Ngāti Toa and Ngāi Tahu. Sometimes, as in the kai huanga (eat relations) dispute on Banks Peninsula in 1826–27, the fighting was even closer to home. Only the threat from Te Rauparaha and Ngāti Toa attacks on the region ended this bitter internal feud. In 1835 Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama took the fighting offshore when they devastated pacifist Moriori during their invasion of Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands.

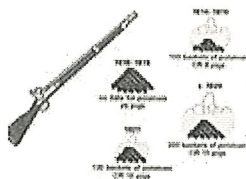
These wars have been described as a prime example of fatal impact theory in practice. In the wake of contact with Europeans, Māori are said to have grabbed as many guns as they could and killed as many of each other as they could. The assumption was that the introduction of European technology alone was responsible for these wars.

## Naming the wars

In her book *Taua*, Angela Ballara questions the validity of the term 'musket wars'. The musket could be seen as having contributed to Māori history rather than determining it. These wars were about tikanga (custom) and often involved the settling of old scores. Ballara argues that they would have occurred regardless – the musket was merely a new tool. The new technology made conflict more destructive but did not cause it.

Ballara and fellow historian James Belich point out that muskets contributed less to the bloodbaths of the early 19th century than the 'humble spud, which created the food surpluses war parties (taua) needed to supplement captured supplies and human bodies.' As Gavin McLean points out,

Māori had always fought rival kin groups. McLean observes that men fought for 'land, for resources, for women and for the sheer hell of it.' Warfare was both 'an integral part of the Maori political system' and a 'legitimate cultural response to offences or crimes of any kind'. Conflict increased as the population grew. Resources were depleted and insults demanding a response multiplied. Wars were fought in autumn – after food for winter had been stored – using hand-to-hand weapons such as mere and patu. They were often ritualised affairs that caused relatively few deaths. The victors gained land and booty and increased their mana (status). The losers sometimes had to migrate to a less desirable, unpopulated area.



The cost of muskets

The first muskets peddled by European traders were unreliable and slow to reload. Trained warriors armed with taiaha and patu (long and short clubs) were more effective than those armed with muskets. When Ngāpuhi used muskets in battle for the

first time, around 1807, they were overwhelmed by conventionally armed Ngāti Whātua. Tom Brooking suggests that the musket was of greater value as a mechanism for utu when executing prisoners.

Ngāpuhi sought to buy as many of these costly weapons as they could. From 1815 Ngāpuhi taua armed with muskets wreaked havoc across the North Island. Their victims faced death, slavery or exile. Fighting escalated in 1821 when the

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neither 'Potato Wars' nor 'Tāua' stuck, so Musket Wars they became.

Ngāpuhi leader Hongi Hika acquired 300 muskets. Over the next few years he led huge musket armies against iwi from Tāmaki (Auckland) to Rotorua. Ngāpuhi suffered heavy casualties, but their opponents were crushed despite retreating into fortress pā.

Once all tribes had muskets there were no more easy victories. Pā that had been adapted to withstand musket fire were harder to capture. By the 1830s the strain of maintaining campaigns and the impact of European diseases were taking their toll. Warfare gave way to economic rivalry.

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# Beginnings - Musket Wars

## Hongi Hika: Warrior chief



Meeting with Hongi Hika

The start of the Musket Wars is attributed to the Ngāpuhi chief Hongi Hika. An important influence on Hongi's leadership was the defeat of Ngāpuhi by Ngāti Whātua in the battle of Moremonui, at Maunganui Bluff, Northland in 1807 or 1808. Though some Ngāpuhi were armed with muskets, they were successfully ambushed by Ngāti Whātua using traditional hand-held weapons, who took advantage of the time it took Ngāpuhi to reload their muskets. Hongi survived by hiding in a swamp, but his uncle and two brothers were killed. Hongi felt obliged to avenge this defeat. By

1815 he was the undisputed leader of his people and convinced of the shock value of muskets – if they were used in sufficient numbers.

Hongi made contact with European visitors to the Bay of Islands and in 1814 ventured to Sydney. Here he met Samuel Marsden of the Church Missionary Society, whom he encouraged to go ahead with his plan to establish a mission at the Bay of Islands. The mission was set up later that year under Hongi's protection. European ships now came to the Bay of Islands in greater numbers. Hongi guaranteed their safety, greatly increasing his opportunities to trade food and supplies for European technology, including tools and weapons. Other mission stations were established under his protection at Kerikeri and Waimate.

Other leaders complained to Marsden about Hongi's monopoly of the relationship with the missionaries. For his part, Hongi was angry that the missionaries refused to trade in muskets and powder. But he made the most of the iron tools and agricultural implements they were willing to trade.

Hongi put the many slaves captured on southern campaigns from 1818 to work increasing the yield from his land. While he experimented with wheat and corn, his main concern was to ensure that sufficient quantities of potatoes and flax were grown to exchange for muskets and powder with the crews of visiting ships. Initially muskets didn't come cheap. Some locals starved as pork and potatoes were sold to visiting Europeans.

As he acquired guns Hongi set about seeking utu (revenge) from Ngāti Whātua for the Moremonui disaster. In 1818 he headed further south, leading a taua that destroyed 50 villages as far south as Tolaga Bay on the East Coast. Approximately 2000 slaves were taken so that they could be put to work dressing flax to exchange for muskets. In 1821 Hongi attacked rivals in the Auckland–Coromandel region, capturing another 2000 slaves.



Hongi Hika and Thomas Kendall

In 1820 Hongi and the young chief Waikato accompanied the missionary Thomas Kendall to Cambridge, England to assist with the compilation of a Māori dictionary. Hongi was more interested in getting his hands on some of the 'thousand thousand guns' he had heard were stored in the Tower of London.

Hongi met King George IV and was presented with gifts, including a suit of armour that was described as a 'coat of mail'. Hongi traded most of his gifts in Sydney on the way home for 300 muskets. He kept the suit of armour, which saved his life during a battle with Ngāti Pāoa at Mauinaina, beside the Tāmaki River, when he was hit twice by musket shots. His survival gained him a reputation for invulnerability.

This boost to his arsenal not only altered the balance of power in the north but also prompted an arms race, the consequences of which would be felt throughout New Zealand for two



decades.

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