THE FORGOTTEN WARS

Why the Musket Wars matter today

Ron Crosby
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to bring our countryside alive.
country, there are numerous sites
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‘Mauinaina pā in Auckland; Te
Maungatapu and Te Papa pā at
aranaki; Te Whetu maatarau pā at
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and Ōnawe pā in Canterbury.
usket Wars, supplemented with
abled events to be envisaged
as of endurance and courage and
lighted.

THE PLACE OF THE MUSKET WARS IN THE TEACHING OF OUR HISTORY

The lack of awareness of the significance of the Musket Wars era in both historical and contemporary terms was demonstrated as late as 2019, when the government announced that New Zealand history would finally become part of our national education curriculum. It was a very sound and long-overdue decision.

However, when the initial list of subject matter was revealed, there was a disappointing absence of specific recognition of the Musket Wars era and its long-term effects. Areas to be covered included:

- the arrival of Māori in Aotearoa;
- initial contacts with Europeans; and
- early colonial history;

then there was a leap forward to:

- the Treaty in 1840 and its history;
- colonisation, and immigration to New Zealand; and
- the New Zealand Wars;

followed by later events.

If the term ‘initial contacts’ was supposed to cover the 30-year Musket Wars era, this can only be described as a demonstration of classic Euro-centric thinking as to the ‘real’ history of our nation, given that the Musket Wars era involved minimal ‘initial contacts’ apart from the supply of actual muskets by Pākehā to Māori.

It is to be hoped that by the time this book is in print the curriculum will have been revised to include what was the longest period of continuous, tumultuous warfare throughout the length and breadth of Aotearoa, which in large part laid the basis of contemporary inter-iwi and inter-hapū relationships. Māori, and all New Zealanders, deserve to have that crucial period of our history identified and taught in our schools.
early and late 1820s, these migratory movements tended to be to more southerly areas of refuge. Some of these migrations led to worse outcomes as the former refugee iwi, such as Ngāti Toa and their allies, gained access to large numbers of muskets from about 1826 onwards. They then proceeded to launch repeated tāua into Te Tau Ihu (The Top of the South) and right down the east and west coasts of Te Waipounamu (the South Island).

From the mid 1830s further major tāua occurred repeatedly in the Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Taupō and Whanganui areas, continuing in a few limited locations even after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. By 1835, the Musket Wars had even moved offshore to Rékohu/Wharekauri, with devastating effects for Moriori there.

**Huge Numbers Affected by Death, Permanent Migrations and Temporary Displacements**

In the absence of any reliable census data, population figures and casualty estimates will always be uncertain. However, a reasonable assessment would suggest that impacts from deaths, wounds, permanent migrations and temporary displacements could have affected over 50,000 people over the approximately 30-year course of the Musket Wars, out of a likely population of between 100,000 and 150,000.

Human impacts on such a level and rate were massively beyond those of any previous or subsequent warfare in Aotearoa over a similar time scale. In the later New Zealand Wars, while imbalances in forces and logistics existed, these were not as devastating in terms of direct human casualties as the effects of the imbalance in firepower provided by the musket. Any direct imbalance in the New Zealand Wars was principally limited to that created by artillery, and in the limited cases where it could be brought to bear, by the impact of massed bayonet use by well-drilled soldiers. Otherwise, the imbalance was far less direct, taking the form of much-higher-quality ammunition and more reliable food supply logistics.

**Major Permanent Migrations Displaced or Subjugated: The Original Occupying Iwi**

The major permanent migrations of the loose coalition led by Ngāti Toa occurred particularly from 1822 to 1832, when iwi from the areas around Kawhia down to north Taranaki, and the Matamata/Maungatua (Cambridge) areas, headed...