

INTRODUCTION

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of Norman Bartlett's book, *Australia at Arms*,¹ followed twenty-five years later by his more definitive paper² outlining Australian participation in the New Zealand Wars, little new history on this matter has been published. During the thirty years that I have been involved in the research of Australians and the New Zealand Wars, academic interest has not generally focused on improving the research opportunity or finding publishers for the story. Until very recent times, the subject has been either neglected, or rejected as a serious Australian military event, with the dismissive comment that Australians who enlisted to fight in New Zealand were 'mercenaries'. Another criticism suggests the volunteers were not really 'Australians' but British colonials living in the various colonies that constituted Australasia at that time. Bartlett, who pioneered the research, considered both criticisms to be spurious, and the present evidence supports the rejection of both comments.

While a serving member of the RAAF in 1976, I was the recipient of one of the first research awards granted by the Australian War Memorial (AWM) to investigate the involvement of Colonial Australia's contribution to the New Zealand Wars. The research was published in 1983 as a monograph primarily for archive and research use.³ Throughout the past decade, I have been privileged to attend several military history conferences in Canberra, Armadale and Wellington, where I have presented papers on the Australian participation in the New Zealand Wars. Almost always the paper has generated after dinner discussion with most lively argument and debate, and outcomes not always fruitful or constructive. In recent years, a new interest in the subject has been sparked by social and military historians who, by acknowledging the origins of Australian military history, have made brief (and not always accurate) reference to Australians in the New Zealand nineteenth-century land wars. The recent publication by Jeff Hopkins-Weise⁴ is an enlightened exception and hopefully is the beginning of a renewed historiographical understanding of the event.

The nineteenth-century land wars in New Zealand were without doubt the first occasion that significant numbers of Australian volunteers participated in an overseas war of Empire.

During the period Australians were involved in the New Zealand Wars, an estimated 10,000⁵ Maori, Imperial soldiers, New Zealand Militia, Australian Military Settlers and civilian settlers, including women and children of both races, were killed, wounded or maimed for life. Hundreds of settlers in the North Island lost their homes, livelihoods, property, livestock and crops, while their villages were reduced to ashes and their social infrastructure destroyed. The effects of the war impacted severely on Maori de-population, tribal commercial enterprises, village life, and Maori culture as their land and property was laid waste by the Imperial and Colonial army, not to mention their systematic killing, maiming and burning. The final degrading of Maori life was driven home with the enactment by the Government of the confiscation of Maori lands.

There are many memorials to Australia's war dead; among them are two permanent reminders to the Australian participation in the New Zealand Wars. The entrance to the Anglesey Barracks in Hobart is dominated by a tall memorial column to the members of the 99th Regiment which sailed from Hobart to take part in the First New Zealand War (1845-1847). On their discharge after the war, the Tasmania veterans of the 99th Regiment who finally settled in Hobart regularly met at the Anglesey Barracks memorial for their annual commemorative service and reunion. The second memorial is more directly significant to this study and it is frequently the cause of curious questions raised by visitors. It stands in a foremost site, dominating its pleasant garden surroundings, designed as a memorial triumphal arch in the centre of Sydney's Burwood public park. The stone arch has chiselled on its exterior the countries where Australians have fought – for Empire to Peace Keeping. At the top of the list is the inscription 'The New Zealand Wars'. The reference no doubt is a recollection within the Burwood historical memory of those young men who, in the mid-nineteenth century, sailed from the district and died or returned from their service for the Empire and the New Zealand Wars.

This study recognizes only briefly Australians, some of whom participated in the earlier Northland conflicts of 1845-47, and again in the following war of 1860-67. For the purposes of this history, it is confined mainly to the period of 1860-67 beginning with Australia's first Naval campaign and what was later



Burwood (Sydney, NSW) War Memorial noting the NZ Wars at the top of the conflicts. A community memory to those who enlisted and went to the New Zealand Wars. (GC.ARCDC)



99th Regiment Memorial, Hobart, Tasmania, in 1913 with the Heath Inspector of Devonport, Tasmania, Mr J. Cole, a former bugler during the 1845-47 war. (*Weekly Graphic* 26 February 1913)

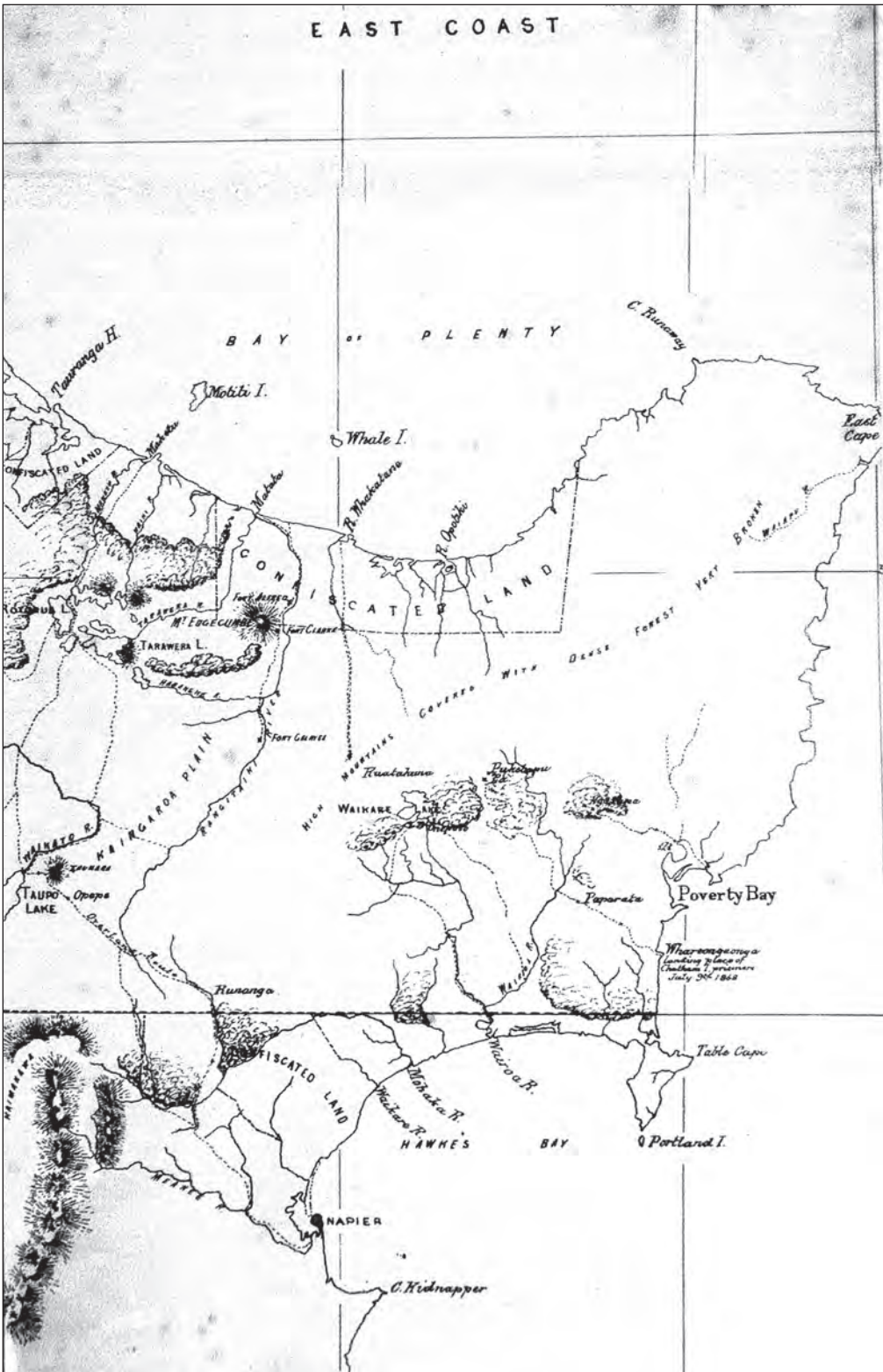
termed by the Australian colonial press the *corpus Australis* period – a clearly defined epoch of specific Colonial Australian military identity and involvement in the New Zealand Wars.

The story of the 2400 Australian volunteers recruited in 1863 from a population base of 1.5 million settlers was a contribution with unique military, societal, political and commercial outcomes, both for the individual colonies and their later military development. This account is specifically confined to the period of Australia’s greatest contribution of men and munitions, beginning in 1860 and continuing until the disbanding of the majority Australian-recruited Military Settler Regiments in October 1867.

THE EAST COAST AND TARANAKI ENGAGEMENTS

THE ROYAL NAVY instituted a blockade of the eastern coast of the North Island in January 1864. The flagship, HMS *Miranda* of the newly constituted Royal Navy's Australian Squadron, had transported part of the successful Thames Expedition some weeks after successfully patrolling the North Island's eastern Bay of Plenty coastline. There had been talk among the settlers, as well as a lively Government Customs' suspicion, that war supplies and provisions were put ashore on the East Coast and were reaching the Maori King's armoury by way of the Waikato forests.¹ The delivery of weapons and supplies presented little physical difficulty, for the Maori tracks from the East Coast into the Waikato interior had been well established over hundreds of years and were frequently used. Supplies of powder and accoutrements, including the necessities to maintain the few cannon Maori possessed, had to be denied the undefeated King Movement. The single important European settlement on the East Coast was the trading and missionary district of Tauranga, which was established by the Church Missionary Society in 1839. The district was well populated by many thousands of Maori who had been established in this area of plenty and prosperity for many centuries.² The historic Mission House 'The Elms' and the work of its pioneer missionary, Archdeacon A.N. Brown³ survives today and includes a mission building that was used as a military hospital. The Archdeacon's vicarage became the centre of warm hospitality extended by Archdeacon and Mrs Brown to the officers and men of the British and Colonial regiments during their deployment in Tauranga.⁴

General Cameron sent two British regiments and elements of the 1st Waikato to Tauranga. He was hopeful that their presence as representative of the 'fleet



in being' would avoid potential hostilities, engender a spirit of submission from the Maoris, and restore their allegiance to the Crown. On 21 January 1864, 700 troops of the 43rd and 68th Regiments and 100 Australian Volunteers of company strength came ashore at Tauranga to be welcomed by the missionaries and some of their Maori allies, all of whom were anxious to avoid hostilities.⁵ The British immediately set about constructing two redoubts and building a stores depot necessary to sustain their presence for the long term. As a show of force, almost every day the fully-equipped British and Volunteers marched in columns into Maori tribal land, well beyond the boundaries of the Tauranga Township. This behaviour was a blunt, undisguised statement to Maori that any form of military opposition on their part would be pointless. After six weeks of marching and flag waving, the Tauranga Maoris responded by writing a terse letter to Sir George Grey reminding him that he had earlier instructed them to remain on their lands on his assurance the military would also remain on the land of the settlers. In some locations, the incursion of the soldiers onto Maori land had frightened many from their whares fearing they could be arrested or even shot. The writers likened the British to 'A god of theft and mischief that goes about like a loudly roaring lion seeking some persons whom he may devour. No more the end'.⁶ They were correct in their assumption that the Imperials were being deceitful and had adopted double standards.

Maori indignation did not conceal from Cameron for one moment the fact that, should he order instructions to occupy their land, they would strongly oppose any incursions or military actions that challenged their independence. Those Maori who had fought in the Waikato were not fooled for one moment by the suggestion that the arrival of the British and Colonial Forces was an exercise in diplomacy. As the weeks passed into April, the prospects of open warfare were delayed only because local Maori were clearly divided on the issue of tribal support for the King Movement. It was a strange armistice because the soldiers and warriors of both parties intermingled in the Tauranga settlement, while the missionaries moved freely between both sides, conducted

Left: The East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand circa 1870. Clearly shown is the area of operations around Opotiki, and Tauranga (close to Gate Pa) where the Melbourne Contingent fought in 1866-67.

(Author's Collection)

Christian services for both parties and gained equal access for discussions on the state of affairs with British and Maori leaders. Neither side took any precautions to hide the fact they were constructing redoubts, fortifying their Pa and generally making preparations for war.⁷ Anecdotally, the Australian Volunteers suffered a not uncommon treatment from Imperial officers of the period who considered them to be second-class soldiers and, accordingly, they were relegated to less active duty and labouring roles. Notwithstanding this doubt about their effectiveness, they were engaged before the end of April in the first skirmish with Maori.

Twenty-five kilometres south along the coast from Tauranga was a small redoubt known as Fort Maketu, commanded by Major J.M. Colville of the 43rd Regiment. Included in the garrison was a detachment of the 1st Waikato that included Australians commanded by Ensign H.F. Way.⁸ On 21 April 1864, Major Colville, Ensign Way and a soldier of the 43rd Regiment were fired at from a riverbank as they waded across to reconnoitre the ground opposite their camp. The three men fled. Colville believed they had been fortunate to avoid injury or death as he believed they had faced at least fifty armed men. On the other hand, the Maoris suffered from a consistent failing throughout the entire war – they fired too high; and this incident was a likely example.

Colville mustered 50 men from the garrison and, returning to the scene of the engagement, forded the river. A heated exchange of fire then took place, during which Maori dead and wounded were observed to be removed by the attackers. After six hours of firing, the Maoris silently withdrew and the skirmish ended. No British or Australian volunteers were killed or wounded and Colville reported 'our escape most providential and wonderful.'⁹ The Australians suffered no loss and surprised their British counterparts by their behaviour under fire as they lacked none of the soldierly field skills necessary to survive in battle. During their period of garrison duty at Fort Maketu, the volunteers had proved they could perform as well as the British Imperials. Both in field-craft and when crossing rivers, the Australians showed more awareness for individual safety than the British regulars. This was probably an adaption to the circumstances from their experience of the outback and bush know-how for, anecdotally, we are told more volunteers could swim than British soldiers.

The bitter engagement fought at Gate Pa by the Tauranga Field Force on 28-29 April 1864 included two line infantry regiments – 43rd Royal Artillery and

the 68th Naval Brigade, supported by the 1st Waikato. Gate Pa remains one of the best documented battles of the war,¹⁰ however, it is necessary to refocus on the part played in the battle by Australian volunteers, which is not well-recorded. Past histories have ignored their presence at Gate Pa and, were it not for a vaguely recognizable brass numeral **1** (1st Waikato Regiment) cap badge worn by two soldiers clearly visible in a photograph allegedly taken early in the morning prior to the attack, their participation may well have gone permanently unnoticed. Gate Pa was one of the most tenacious battles of the war and witnessed an eight-and-a-half-hour artillery barrage, the longest and heaviest fired during the war. Despite this barrage, which was supposed to create fear and panic among the Maoris and strengthen the confidence of the attacking forces, the end result was a panic-driven, wild retreat by British soldiers and sailors. The British Army and Navy lost numbers of senior officers out of all proportion to the participating junior rank and file. The psychological victory the Maori defenders achieved through their subterfuge, as they successfully routed the British assault from the confines of their pa, was more serious. The British deserted their wounded on the field and, despite the panic, two Victoria Crosses were awarded for bravery, a rare spirit on that day. The British eventually achieved victory on 29 April only because the Maoris abandoned their earthworks during the hours of darkness and thus lost their advantage of potential victory. The role of the Australians at Gate Pa was not spectacular. It was confined to logistic support as riflemen positioned at the rear of the British line, together with the Imperial Commissariat Transport Corps.

The lonely Tauranga cemetery gravestone of Private Henry Matthews,¹¹ who enlisted in Melbourne and served with the 1st Waikato, created something of a mystery for many years as his death is dated 6 September 1865, fourteen months following the Gate Pa battle. Some historians have assumed that he died as a result of wounds. Recent enquiry has revealed that he was killed while attempting to extract powder from an unexploded 110 lb artillery shell found near Gate Pa. For decades following the heavy artillery bombardment of the Pa, settlers taking up land, and the later home builders, had to be especially mindful of unexploded ordnance.¹² These few acres in Tauranga are New Zealand's only equivalent to the First World War sites in Belgium and France where unexploded ordnance remains undisturbed after almost 100 years.

Sir George Grey had plans for the 3rd Waikato when he ordered that they remain and settle in the area of the Bay of Plenty. He was anxious that con-

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Mt Maunganui in the distance and the fledgling settlement of Tauranga centre foreground, as the Australians would have seen the town on their arrival in 1864.

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General Duncan Cameron, hands in tunic pockets, is surrounded by his staff. Reputed to be at Gate Pa on the morning of 29 April 1864, the photograph shows two men wearing the numeral 1 on their caps. These are 1st Waikato members; one stands to the right of General Cameron and the other is likely Sergeant Major Jackson who sits behind the 5.5 inch mortar, one of the several manufactured in Sydney.

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discarded land be quickly allocated to all of the military settlers. He instructed General Cameron early in May 1864 that the military settlers in Tauranga be held 'with a view to their ultimate location in that place'¹³ a task that included providing a garrison for at least one of the permanent redoubts in Tauranga. Cameron required the volunteers be given the same duties as regular British troops, but with one significant difference. He ordered that the officer in command of the military settlers was to have a free hand in deciding what activities the volunteers were to be engaged in when not involved in military duties or directly co-operating with their British counter-parts. In June 1864, Lieutenant Colonel Philip Harington,¹⁴ who had replaced Colonel Pitt as commander of the 1st Waikato, landed in Tauranga with a reinforcement contingent of 280 men and instructions that the volunteers undertake garrison duties and eventual settlement on the East Coast.¹⁵

Although the British had won a victory at Gate Pa, significant numbers of East Coast Maori and their Waikato allies remained who were far from defeated, and not in any mood to submissively yield to the wishes of Governor Grey. They tenaciously held to their seigneurial authority over their land. Their understanding in a military and cultural sense was to defend it from what they perceived to be theft by a military force in the name of Queen Victoria, regardless of any expressions of fealty they may have earlier made to the Crown. Whatever the cost, Tauranga Maori were determined to defend their cause against the Imperial and Colonial Forces, and both parties knew that these consequences would take both races many decades from which to recover.

On 21 June 1864, in the cold chill of winter rain, Colonel H.H. Greer¹⁶ was commanding a reconnaissance column some miles inland from Tauranga. His scouts reported that an estimated 600 Maoris were busily entrenching themselves on the top of a nearby ridge. Greer quickly organized his force of 600 British and the 1st Waikato to attack the ill-prepared Maoris. The trenches were built on a location bounded by the eastern side of Pye's Road and Joyses Road, known today as Te Ranga. The location is a grazing paddock with no discernible features to indicate it was once the scene of a desperate battle between Maori, the British army and Australian volunteers.

Greer ordered an immediate attack and successfully drove the Maoris into the confines of their uncompleted earthworks, which gave them a distinct

advantage on the high ground with a wide field of fire into any attacking force. Greer then positioned some of his men on the flanks of the earthworks to cut off Maori retreat, and dispatched a messenger to Tauranga with orders to Colonel Harington to send another artillery piece and the remaining military settlers. Meanwhile the desultory firing between the Maoris and the British continued. With the arrival of the troops and gun, Greer deployed his forces so as to have a clear and unobstructed advance across the ground towards where the Maori were entrenched. Just after midday, and following accurate artillery fire, Greer placed the 43rd Regiment on the right flank, the 68th in the centre and the Australian Volunteers, commanded by Captain R.R. Moore,¹⁷ on the extreme right of the start line. The front was about 200 metres wide, over which an estimated 800 men were to charge with bayonets fixed. There is no doubt that Greer was anxious to redeem the morale and reputation of his troops after the disorganized rout two months previously of the 43rd and 68th regiments at Gate Pa. When the bugle sounded the 'charge', the regulars and volunteers swept across the open ground towards the Maoris who fired from their ill-prepared entrenchments. As usual they fired high and despite the favourable conditions of the wide front, close attacking formation and an open killing ground, few of the attackers died in the rush to the trenches.

The noise, the shouting, the shrieks and the cursing, coupled with the clash of weapons, filled the air as men fought to kill and survive. The stench of opened bodies ripped by the long British bayonets and the smell of flesh, powder and smoke, made the struggle so much more horrifying as men stood on the dead and battled for the occupation of the trench. This was a continuation of the bitter hand-to-hand fighting that Maori, British, Colonial and Australian volunteers had experienced in close combat at Titi Hill, Rangiriri, Orakau, and Gate Pa; and it was a battle in which the British and the Colonials matched and defeated the Maoris. Despite the flashing of the tomahawk, the thrust of the taiaha¹⁸ and the firing of the tupara,¹⁹ the bugle continued to urge the British and the Colonials to finish their work. It ended as suddenly as it had begun, with unwounded Maori struggling out of the trench and fleeing into the safety of the bush behind them. One dignified Chief walked quietly away without haste and with pride. He was either not noticed or no one had the heart to shoot him. The bush behind the trenches was the only escape to safety and, as the Maoris retreated, their adversaries hotly pursued them. It

was a time of terrible slaughter and unforgiving violence when no quarter was granted. New Zealand had seldom experienced such a brutal fight and it was one which, sadly, was to be repeated with the same ferocity and violence in the future. The British awarded two Victoria Crosses for acts of bravery; although no Australian volunteers were recommended for such an honour, despite their principal part in the attack.

When the battle subsided, nine British soldiers were dead and a number wounded, but the Australians – according to the record – did not sustain any killed or seriously injured. One hundred and eight Maoris were killed in the assault; many were high-born, intelligent and well-educated leaders of their people. The majority of them had, until recent months, lived comfortably and at peace in both their own and European cultures. All Maoris who died that day believed implicitly that the land upon which they had fought was inalienably theirs and by right, it was the inheritance of their children. It was a tragic day for Tauranga Maori with so many of their leaders dead in the unfinished Te Ranga trenches. Colonel Greer ordered that they be interred in their own trenches and they remain buried in that spot today. For the 1st Waikato, the battle of Titi Hill had been avenged and, as volunteer settler soldiers, they had demonstrated they were equals of British regulars in the use of the bayonet. In his dispatch to General Cameron on the outcome of the battle, Colonel Greer described the action of the volunteers as having performed ‘in a most dashing manner’.²⁰

Greer’s desire to expunge the ignominy of the shameful British retreat at Gate Pa was likely the reason he gave scant praise to the Australian volunteers. Similarly, the Historic Places’ Trust notice where the attack took place is just as silent on detail. In 1977, the New Zealand Historic Places’ Trust located the exact position of the battle and its significant points of action, through the use of a proton magnetometer. The results obtained supported the local tradition and confirmed the accuracy of the surviving reports from the previous century.²¹

The month of April 1864 may have gone well for the Australian volunteers of the 1st Waikato, but events were to prove disturbing for the settlers on the western coastal strip of the North Island. The Victorian and New South Wales volunteers who enlisted in the TMS had been recruited a few weeks prior to Pitt’s first official Melbourne and Sydney recruiting campaign. These early volunteers were specifically enlisted prior to August 1863 for settlement in Taranaki, by way of a well-orchestrated advertising campaign throughout

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Site of the battle of Te Ranga, 21 June 1864. The date sign is in error. Across this foreground the 1st Waikato, with two Imperial Regiments, made their bayonet charge. It was here that the infamous Australian bushranger, Captain Moonlite (Andrew George Scott), may well have been wounded. (GC/ARCD)



The Pihitri Redoubt ,circa 1866, defines a well built and defended stronghold. The Military Settlers accommodation was outside of the Redoubt and built into the ground. The redoubt was on a high point with the advantage of a long field of vision.