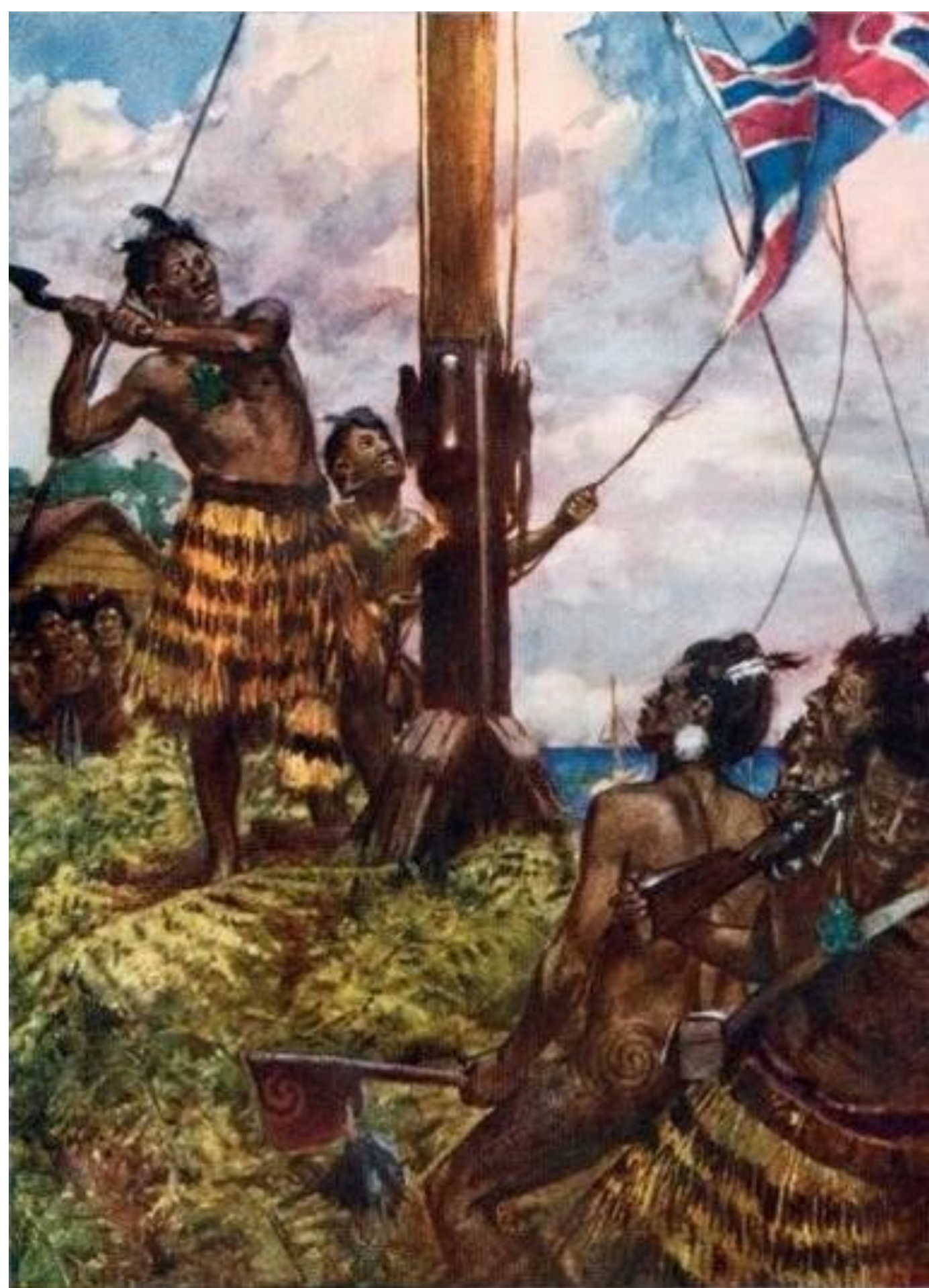


Origins of the Northern Wars

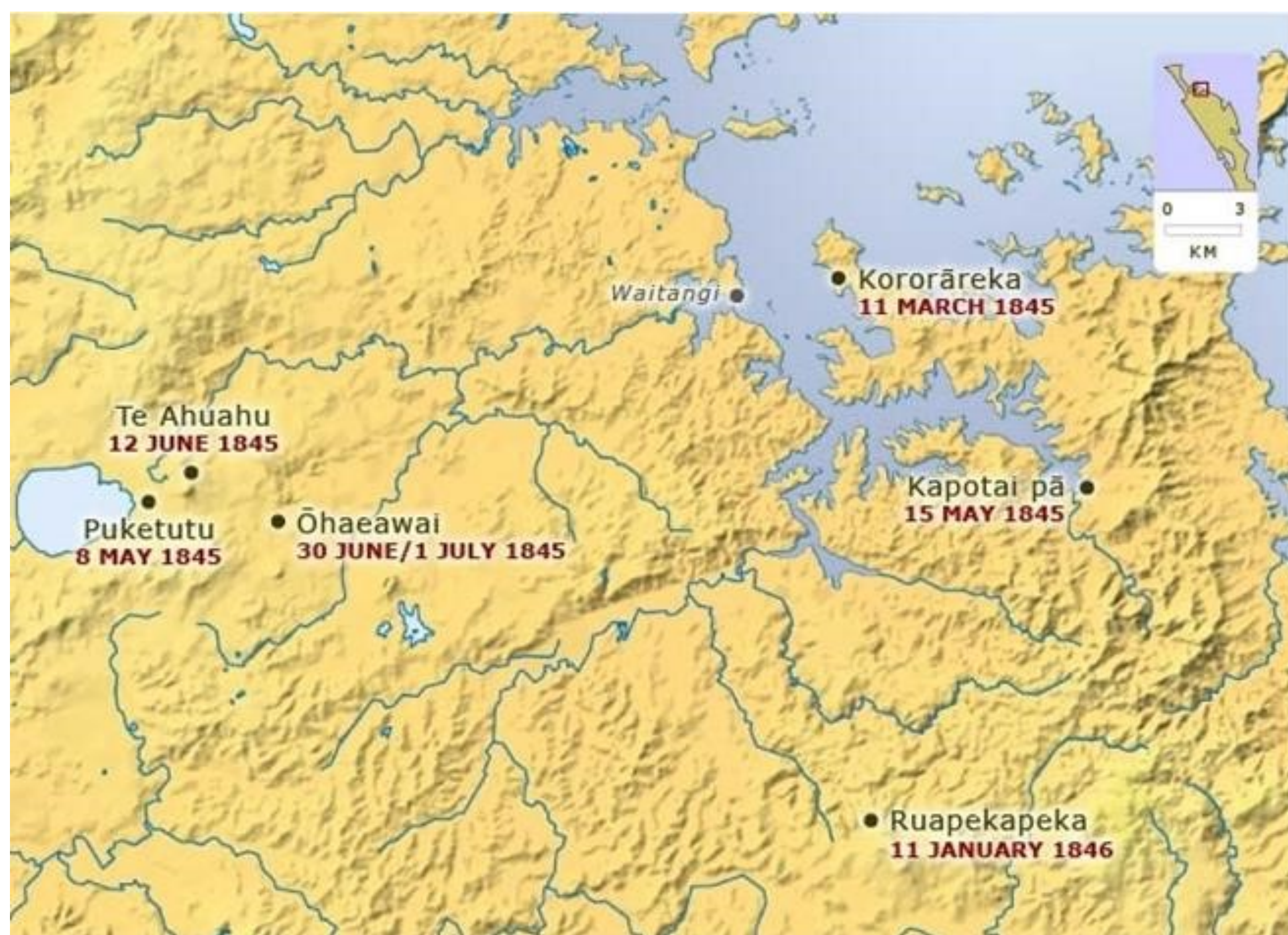


Arthur McCormick ATL 29238

Above: a 20th Century illustration of Hone Heke felling the flagstaff flying the Union Jack at Kororāreka.

The New Zealand Wars began with an attack by some Ngāpuhi hapū on Kororāreka (later Russell) in the Bay of Islands. The major cause was the concern of some Ngāpuhi that the moving of the capital from Russell to Auckland would hurt them economically, and Hōne Heke Pōkai's objection to Crown authority in his area. His supporters cut down the flagstaff at Kororāreka — which Heke himself had erected, and which was technically his — four times to make his point.

Other Ngāpuhi hapū led by Tāmāti Wāka Nene supported the British. On 11 March 1845 Heke, Te Ruki Kawiti and Pūmuka led an attack which left Kororāreka destroyed, despite the desperate defence mounted by the English settlers and British naval forces led by Acting Commander David Robertson of HMS *Hazard*.



Right: A map showing the places and dates where key battles of the Northern Wars took place.

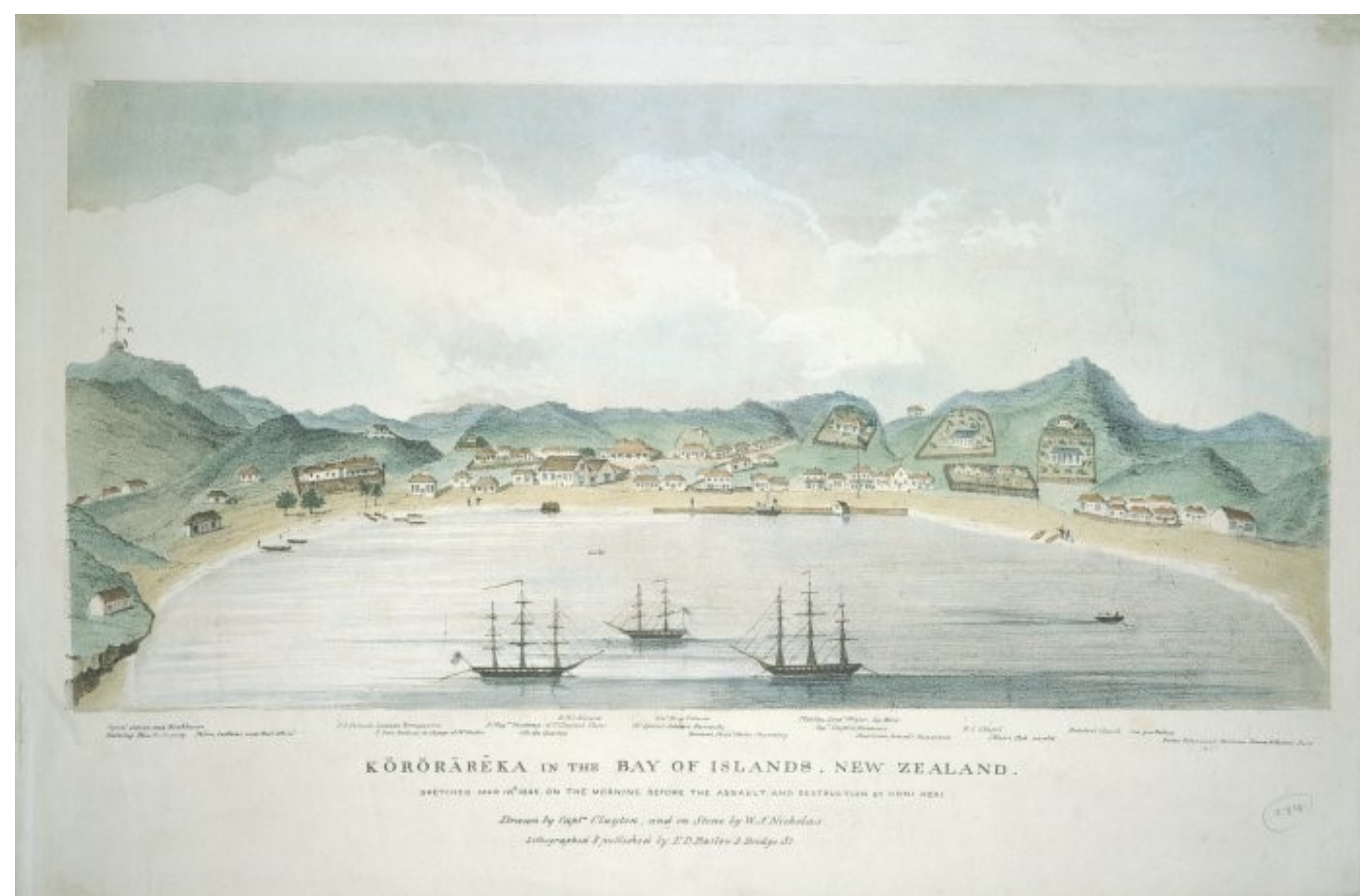
Fighting at Kororāreka 11 March, 1845

On top of a hill above Kororāreka, later to become known as Russell, Hone Heke had cut down the flagpole there previously, having identified it as the most prominent symbol of the authority of the British Crown. After the events of that day, it stayed down for a long time.

Maori tactics at Kororāreka reveal to an observer looking back something that was not very evident to the British at the time. What were seen as independent skirmishes were in fact cleverly orchestrated actions, designed to complement one another. Heke's colleague Kawiti led a party into the sleeping town from Matauwhi Bay, in an action that was designed, successfully, to draw attention away from the flagstaff and Heke's aims there.

Kawiti was slightly hindered by a small party of marines from HMS *Hazard*, anchored off Kororāreka, who happened to have gone ashore to strengthen a gun position on the approach from Matauwhi. The ensuing gunfire set off the alarm earlier than Kawiti had planned, but the effect was still the same — the picket of soldiers from the 96th Regiment on Flagstaff Hill was distracted, and allowed Heke's men to enter the guard-house, with results that were fatal for several of them, and allowed the flagstaff to be cut down.

The Northern Wars had begun.



Captain Clayton, ATL 31377

Above Right: an illustration of the port at Kororāreka in the Bay of Islands.

Below Right: The British fired on Pomare's pa following the attack on Kororāreka — even though Pomare had declared himself neutral.



John Williams, ATL 3538



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

Puketutu 8 May, 1845



The first major engagement of the northern campaign occurred at Heke's new pā, Te Kahika at Puketutu, near Lake Ōmāpere, (close to the old pā of Te Mawhe). On 3 May 1845, 400 soldiers, seamen and marines landed at Onewhero (close to the entrance of the Kerikeri Inlet) and marched for four days to Lake Ōmāpere. On arrival, they used Congreve war rockets. It was thought that these would soon demolish any Māori stockades. However, the rockets had little effect so 200 men attacked Puketutu. After four hours of fighting,

Left: Fighting at Puketutu.

Kapotai Pā

On 15 May Major Cyprian Bridge and three companies of troops, together with the warriors of Tamati Waka Nene, attempted a surprise attack on Kapotai's Pā on the Waikare Inlet which they could easily reach by sea. The defenders of the pā became aware of the attack and chose not to defend the pā although the warriors of Kapotai – allies of Kawiti – fought with Waka Nene and his men in the forests around the pā. The pā was soon burnt and destroyed.

Te Ahuahu 12 June, 1845 Hone Heke and Tamati Waka Nene



Heke (pictured centre with wife Hariata, left, and Te Ruki Kawiti) withdrew to nearby Te Ahuahu — Heke's own pā — where he was attacked by Ngāpuhi forces loyal to the British led by Tāmami Wāka Nene (above right) and Makoare Te Taonui.



Heke retreated, and later returned with 450 warriors, but he could not dislodge Wāka Nene from Te Ahuahu. During this battle Heke was wounded in the thigh.

Tamati Waka Nene was a rangatira from the Hokianga who led taua (group of warriors) who fought with the British forces in the Northern War. He acted independently choosing his own tactics as he did not have confidence in Colonel Henry Despard who he called 'a

Bombs away...

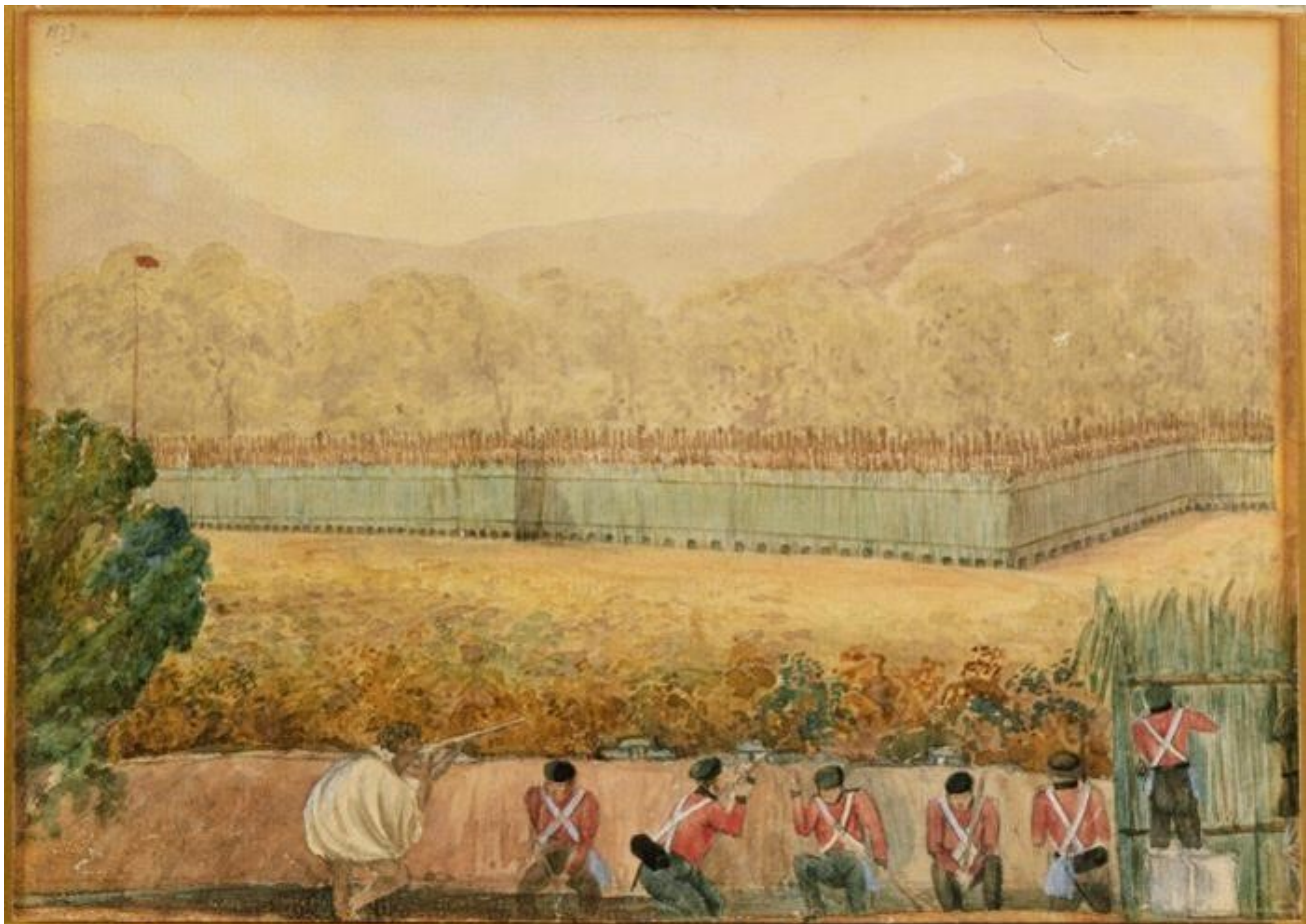
Apart from small arms, Hulme had not brought any guns—simply a dozen naval rockets; great gunpowder filled shells with a 4m-long wooden stick as a 'tail'.

One of the defenders later described their fear at what these might do, until the first one swooshed towards the pa and then suddenly shot up vertically in



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

The Battle of Ohaeawai 30 June—1 July, 1845



Above: British troops fire on Ohaeawai.

A pā was built near Ōhaeawai designed by Pene Tauī and Kawiti. Goaded by seeing a British ensign, captured earlier by Māori forces, flying below a “native garment” Colonel Henry Despard ordered an attack on the pā. On 1 July 1845 a 220-strong party of soldiers, seamen and militia attacked. Despard ordered a frontal assault even though he was warned by Waka Nene that this would be foolish. He did not listen and 41 men died and over 70 were wounded. After the battle the men retreated to Te Waimate.

Ōhaeawai, the prototype of the ‘modern pā’, was a major advance in the Māori response to new weaponry. Firing and communication trenches gave the occupants maximum protection while allowing rapid movement within the pā. Anti-artillery bunkers (rua) were dug into the ground and covered with logs, stones and matted flax. Each could house 15–20 warriors in relative safety.

Three views of the Battle of Ohaeawai

“...We were safe below in our ruas when the big guns poured shot and shell into us, therefore why should we fear the cannon of the white troops?”

- Rihara Kou, quoted in *The New Zealand Wars* by James Belich

“I can only describe it [the attack] as the opening of the doors of a monster furnace.”

- Mitchell diary, quoted in *The New Zealand Wars* by James Belich

“But the Pah was strong our men were few and we could hardly stand And in 7 minutes and a half we lost one hundred men...”

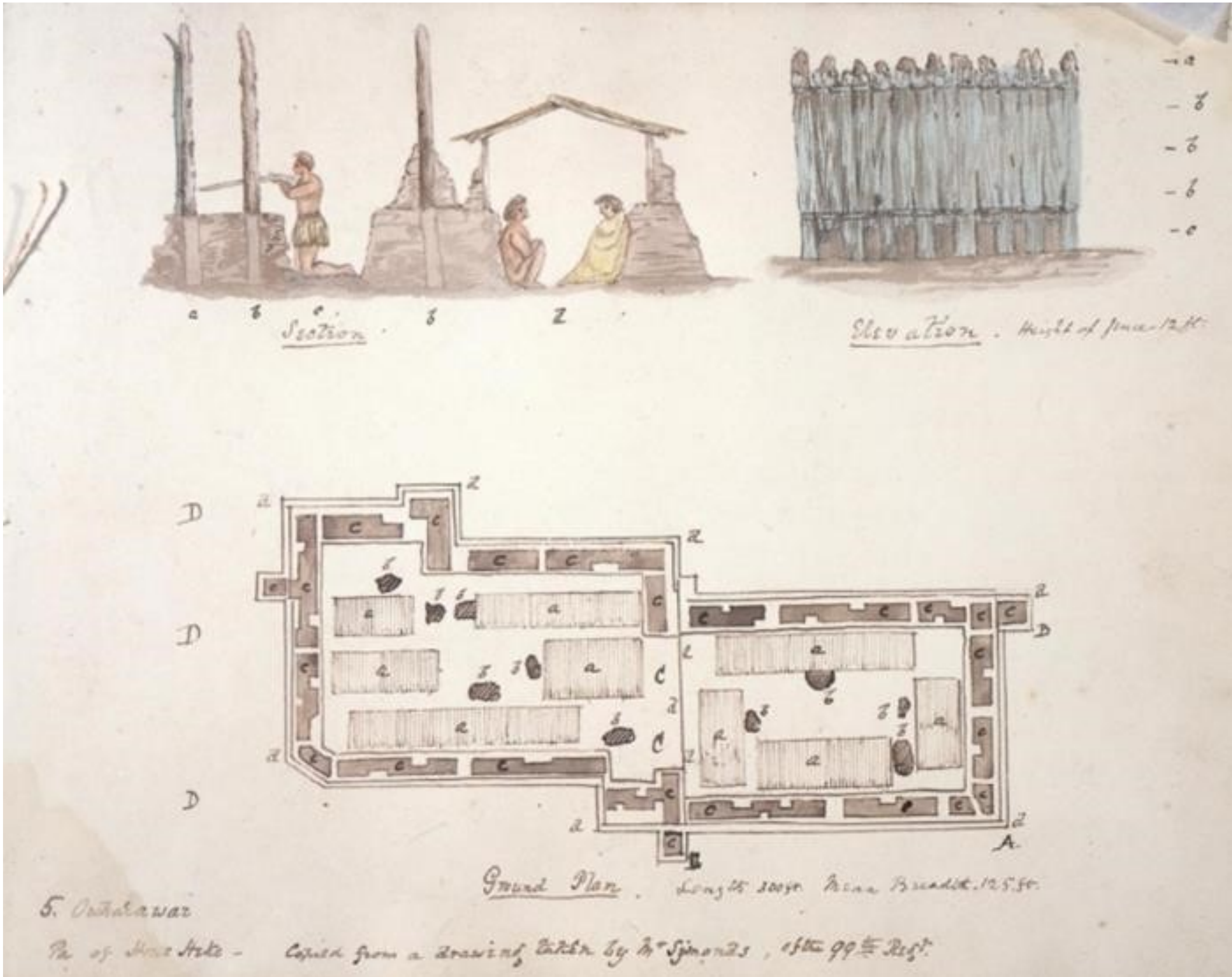


Above: Part of the British encampment at Ohaeawai.



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

Ohaeawai Pa 30 June—1 July, 1845



The pā at Ohaeawai was heavily built of stout timber, with three rows of palisades, and clad in flax leaves as a screen. This screen prevented the British from seeing the interior of the pā. What lay hidden were the interior defences – the deep shelters underground, to protect the defenders from a bombardment, and the strong bastions at the corners that enabled the defenders to direct strong fire on an attacker trying to scale the walls. Loopholes at the base of the flax screen allowed the defenders to fire without exposing themselves – many of the attackers recorded their frustration at

Inventive warfare

What [Despard and Bridge] were unable to see, and what they could hardly be expected to guess, was that Kawiti had independently invented the anti-artillery bunker. These pits, or rua as they were called by the Maoris, were underground compartments roofed with beams of timber. Earth, fern, and, at Ohaeawai, possibly stones were piled on top of the excavations to render them shell-proof.

Thomas Hulston

Above: A plan of Ohaeawai Pa.

Retreat to Te Waimate Mission July-October, 1845

By far the greatest threat and damage to Te Waimate Mission occurred when 600 British troops arrived at the mission after the battle of Ohaeawai. The troops wintered at the mission, resulting in considerable damage. Ramparts were built around the mission (some still visible), fences and shingles used as firewood, and young officers stationed in one of the houses nearly destroyed it.

Large amounts of grog bottles can still be found in archaeological context. When the troops left in October cottages and sheds were burnt down, the schoolroom and two houses were severely damaged and all the fences had disappeared. But at least the guests had left. The effect of the



Above: Te Waimate Mission — the Church Mission Society's inland mission at Waimate North — as it was in its hey day.



Above: Te Waimate Mission is today cared for by Heritage New Zealand and is open to the public.



Left: A wooden headboard marking the graves of Privates Stewart and Hodgkins who died from their wounds received in the attack on Ohaeawai. The headboards are in the cemetery of St John the Baptist Church adjacent to Te Waimate Mission.



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

Ruapekapeka 7 December, 1845 — 11 January, 1846

A force of around 1300 British troops and 400 Māori began their advance on Ruapekapeka in early December 1845. After three weeks hauling 30 tonnes of artillery and supplies over nearly 30 km of rugged country, the British force assembled before Ruapekapeka – ‘the bat’s nest’.



Above: The assault on Ruapekapeka.

Ruapekapeka was a highly intricate pā with tunnels, rifle pits and trenches surrounded by a strong palisade, but its garrison was outnumbered four to one. The British had three naval 32-pounders, an 18-pounder, two 12-pounder howitzers and a number of mortar and rocket tubes. Te Ruki Kawiti had an ancient 12-pounder (which was destroyed shortly after the British commenced shelling the pā) and a 4-pounder. Hōne Heke, who had recovered from his wounds, joined Kawiti inside. A full-scale bombardment on 10 January created three small breaches in the palisade. Despard was keen to attack before Kawiti’s men could escape but was talked out of this course of action by Tāmati Wāka Nene and Grey.

The end of the battle is shrouded in controversy. The following day on

A military masterpiece



Above: The scale model of Ruapekapeka. (Source: www.ruapekapeka.co.nz)

Ruapekapeka was a masterpiece of military engineering with its heavy multiple palisades, flax screens, loopholes at the base, and most importantly an elaborate system of underground bunkers, rifle pits, food stores and interconnecting passages, to provide excellent shelter to the defenders. Models of it were used in training British engineers for



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA



Above: Part of the British encampment at Ruapekapeka.

11 January, scouts discovered that only Kawiti and around a dozen warriors were still inside the pā. They fled into nearby bush after firing a volley. When the British followed they were fired on from hidden positions. Fighting intensified briefly when Kawiti’s men seemed to be trying to retake the pā. The conflict fizzled out when the British refused to be lured into the bush. Māori casualties numbered 30 and British 45.

Heke and Kawiti had escaped with their forces largely intact, and the terms of the subsequent peace settlement suggest that they had en-

A question of tactics

“You are foolish to remain in this pā to be pounded by cannon balls. Let us leave it. Let the soldiers have it and we will retire into the forest and draw them after us, where they cannot bring the big guns. The soldiers cannot fight amongst the kareao [supplejack]; they will be as easily killed among the canes as if they were wood pigeons.”

- Hone Heke, quoted in *The New Zealand Wars* by James Belich

“1100 men were occupied a full month in advancing 15 miles and in getting possession of a pa from which the enemy escaped at the last moment, and escaped with the satisfaction to him of a drawn battle. The question is was it worthwhile to go through all that laborious march to

End of the Northern Wars

Not long after Ruapekapeka, Heke and Kawiti met with Tamati Waka Nene and his companions. All agreed that the time to fight had ended. As Kawiti said: “Peace shall be made with the Governor, and peace shall be made with Nene.” Heke and Kawiti reached out to Governor Grey with Nene acting as an intermediary. On January 23 Grey issued a formal proclamation granting a “full pardon” to all those involved in the

For More Information

Web Sources:

Te Ara - The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand – www.teara.govt.nz

Ruapekapeka – www.ruapekapeka.co.nz

Dictionary of New Zealand Biography – www.teara.govt.nz

New Zealand History – www.nzhistory.govt.nz

Recommended Reading:

The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict

By James Belich, Penguin 1988