

## MILITARY HISTORY

# BATTLE HILL

## FARM FOREST PARK



In 1846 fighting broke out in the Hutt Valley, north of the New Zealand Company settlement of Wellington. Disputed land claims led to smouldering discontent between Maori and Pakeha, and this now burst into flame.

Its causes were a tangled web on both sides. The two fighting chiefs of the Ngati Toa, Te Rauparaha and his nephew, Te Rangihaeata, subjugated the Wellington area in the 1820s. They were joined during the 1830s by contingents of Te Ati Awa, Ngati Tama and Ngati Rangatahi whose tribal areas had been invaded by Waikato tribes. Te Ati Awa, the largest group, settled at Petone, Waikanae and other places. In 1839 they sold the Hutt Valley and Wellington to the New Zealand Company without reference to Ngati Toa.

The Company's settlers came progressively into conflict with Ngati Tama and Ngati Rangatahi who had settled in the Hutt Valley as the guests and "under the cloak" of Te Rangihaeata. The latter, who fiercely opposed European encroachment, supported them. His uncle, Te Rauparaha, outwardly steered a middle course and placated both sides.

### Trouble at Wairau

Trouble started in the Wairau in 1843 where a confrontation between settlers under Captain Arthur Wakefield and Te Rangihaeata, with Te Rauparaha present, led to shooting in which one of Te Rangihaeata's wives was killed. In the fighting that followed 22 settlers and Maori were killed. Nine settlers surrendered and were each killed by Te Rangihaeata in utu or revenge. After Wairau, Te Rangihaeata established himself, among other places, at Pauatahanui. From here he controlled the land routes out of Wellington and could range by sea along the coast.

Panicky Wellington settlers prepared to repel Maori attack and defences were built. In the next few years, stockaded posts were built in every small settlement from Karori north and at intervals down to Porirua Harbour.

### Hutt Land Claims Disputed

The Hutt Valley was thickly wooded and settlers farming the disputed ground had to clear the bush before sowing grass among the stumps. Plank roads consolidated muddy tracks from forest-clearing to forest-clearing where settlers' houses were built out of earth-sod walls and timber. Where the Connolly Street substation borders the golf course, were the palisades of Maraenuku Pa which marked the boundary of the disputed land.

The Ngati Rangatahi refused to move without compensation, and after several clashes between Maori and settler, Governor Grey ordered the Maori to abandon the pa.

On 27 February 1846 Grey illegally sent in British troops who looted and burned the now abandoned Maraenuku Pa, including the chapel and graves, and destroyed surrounding cultivations. This incensed the Maori and, with Te Rangihaeata's blessing, they retaliated and raided Hutt settlers' houses. The taua looted everything that they could carry and destroyed the rest, but left the houses standing. The settlers fled into Wellington and to the security of the stockades.

On 3 March 1846 Grey proclaimed martial law, called out the Hutt militia and armed the Porirua settlers. British soldiers reinforced Fort Richmond and occupied Boulcott's Farm three kilometres north on what is now the Hutt Golf Course.

### Fighting at Boulcott Farm

On 2 April 1846 Andrew Gillespie and his son, the first family to occupy the disputed land after troops had fired Maraenuku Pa, were axed to death by a Ngati Rangatahi raiding party while sawing timber on their farm across the river from Boulcott's.

Before daylight on 16 May 1846 Boulcott Farm was shrouded in river mist. While the sentry marched out its beat, a 200-strong taua or war party under Topine Te Mamaku of the Upper Wanganui, reinforced by Ngati Rangatahi and Ngati Toa, crossed the river from the area of the Belmont Hills and moved in on the farm.

Something in the mist alerted the sentry. He fired, turned to warn the picket in the tent behind him and was axed to the ground as he ran. The picket had no time to respond. Musket fire raked the tent and warriors hacked its occupants to death with their patiti.



*Te Rangihaeata*. Detail of a painting by Charles Heaphy. Alexander Turnbull Library.



Te Mamaku's warriors closed in on the buildings, but the sentry's shot alerted the garrison whose response stopped the Maori from doing more than firing at close range. Volleys from the barn and daybreak led the Maori to withdraw across the clearing. From there they continued to harass the garrison before crossing the river and withdrawing victorious into the hills. It seems that, while some were wounded, no Maori were killed.

The trouble in the Hutt convinced Grey that the only way to suppress Te Rangihaeata was to gain control over Porirua Harbour. Grey established a military post at the Paremata ferry next to Thom's Whaling Station. It commanded the track to Wellington and gave him access to both arms of Porirua Harbour. Te Rauparaha remained at Taupo Pa where Plimmerton now stands and Te Rangihaeata withdrew to Pauatahanui in the inner harbour where, out of ship's cannon range, he built Matai-taua Pa on a spur overlooking the harbour.

From the warships in Porirua Harbour a ship's long boat, manned by a crew of 14 and armed with a 12 pound carronade and a brass gun, sailed the Pauatahanui Inlet. This was commanded by Lieutenant H F McKillop, the *Admiral in Chief of the Porirua Navy*, who in published reminiscences gave himself full credit for seeking out and besting Te Rangihaeata and his warriors in a series of incidents.

### Dawn Raid

On 23 July 1846 Grey ordered a dawn raid on Taupo Pa and seized Te Rauparaha whose facing both ways attitude had made the Governor tired. Te Rauparaha was imprisoned on HMS Calliope but skirmishes in the Hutt continued. A settler, Rush, was murdered and a party of the 99th Regiment attacked. At the end of July a twin pronged attack was planned against Te Rangihaeata at Matai-taua Pa. British soldiers would land from the warships at Paremata and attack it from the front. A second force would move across the bush trails over the Belmont Hill and attack it from the rear. This second party was led by Captain McDonough of the Hutt Militia with a 150 Te Ati Awa, accompanied by Mr David Scott and 13 armed Wellington police.

Rough weather in Cook Strait delayed the landing of British soldiers, but on 31 July 1846 the militia and Te Ati Awa moved over the hills towards Pauatahanui. On 1 August 1846 they were advancing through the bush towards the spur on which the pastood. A scout, Tamati Hapimana of Pipitea Pa, surprised Whareaitu, a Wanganui Chief, outside the pa and attempted to fire upon him but his gun being wet did not go off. Whareaitu wounded Hapimana with a long handled tomahawk but was run down and captured with the help of another scout. Maori women from the pa saw this and wailed a warning.

Militia and Maori quickly dropped their packs and hurried towards the pa. There was no resistance. Rangihaeata's Matai-taua Pa was deserted. The approach from the Hutt took Te Rangihaeata by surprise and later that day he challenged across the harbour: *What people are in my pa?* To be told: *The Governor's*

*people and the Maoris of Port Nicholson.* Angry, Te Rangihaeata threatened attack. His Ngati Toa fired a volley across the water and then withdrew.

Matai-taua became a British redoubt until deserted in 1851. Today St Albans Church stands on the site, and watches over pasture and swamp where, before the 1855 earthquake, water lapped at its base. Te Rangihaeata's fighting terraces now carry settlers' graves. Only slight depressions on the cemetery's edge mark the last signs of Te Rangihaeata's musket trenches.

On 1 August Matai-taua Pa became the base camp in the pursuit of Te Rangihaeata. Grey arrived that afternoon and the next day British soldiers landed from HMS Calliope and Driver. Two hundred Ngati Toa from Taupo Pa led by their chief Rawiri Puaha joined the party, officially to support Governor Grey, but privately to cover the fighting retreat of their kinsmen. The Maori were supplied with muskets and *blue serge frocks with VR in large white letters on breasts and backs, to prevent our men from mistaking them for the enemy.*

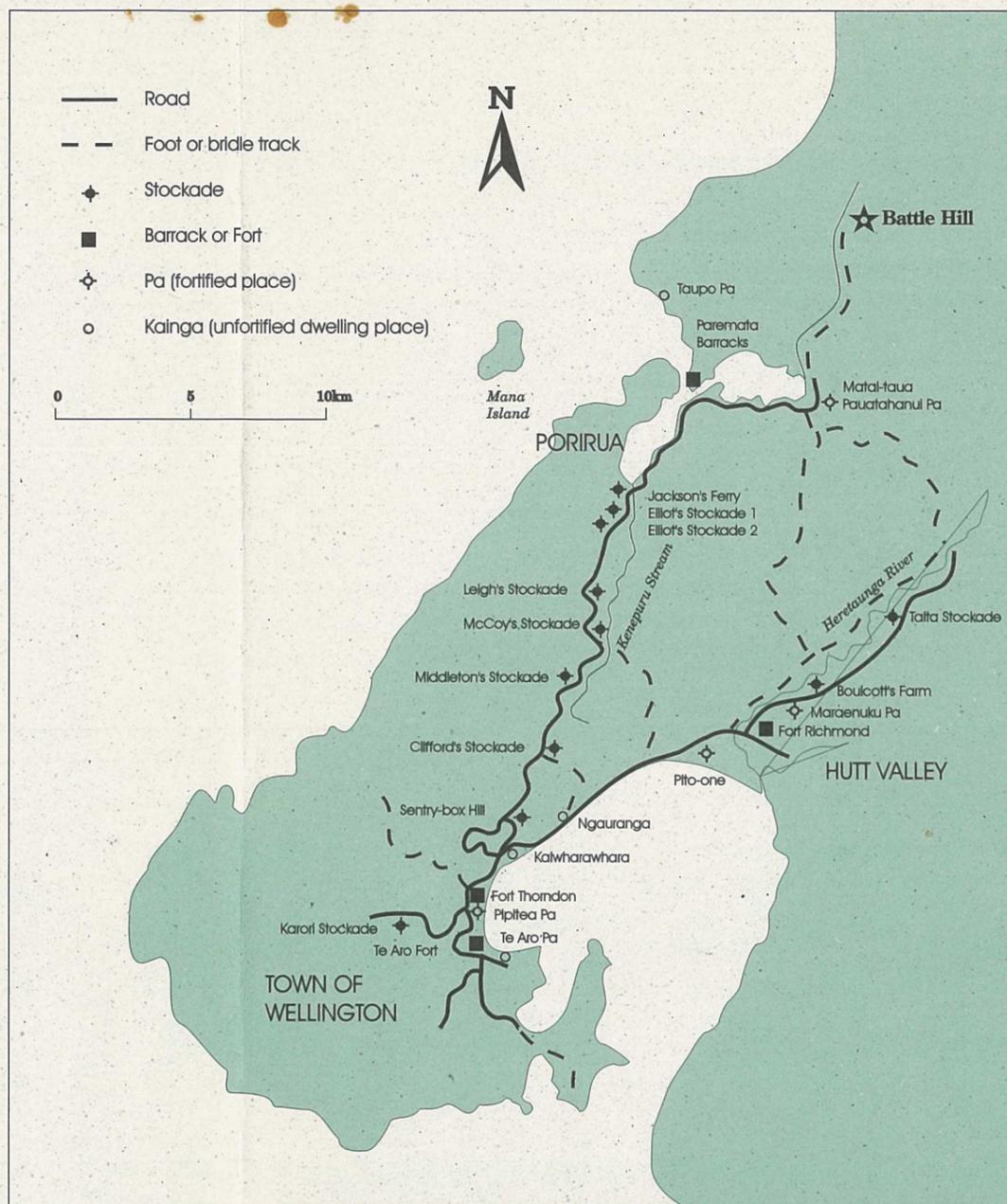
Grey's force set out on 3 August up the Horokiwi Valley. Its winding track was a foot route north over the hills where the road now runs. Ngati Toa under Puaha being acquainted with the country led the advance. Te Ati Awa followed but were highly distrustful of their allies. The wet bush clad Horokiwi Valley was a nightmare for British soldiers and sailors. It was the *depth of winter, miserably cold and pouring with rain.* Te Rangihaeata's abandoned camps were passed in turn during the two day trudge up the valley. Puaha and his Ngati Toa refused to move with any Europeans other than Ensign Servantes the interpreter. The force's logistics were a shambles. Food came late and there were no cooking utensils.

On 5 August Te Ati Awa and militia met Puaha's Ngati Toa at the base of what is today Battle Hill. The campsite is today's farm flat where sheep graze around settler and military graves. Fern huts were built in a clearing among the trees and double sentries posted. Puaha reported that Te Rangihaeata was entrenched on the ridge above them. He had climbed up and met Te Rangihaeata and having cried with him returned to the bottom of the hill.

On 6 August the whole force moved on Te Rangihaeata's Pa. McKillop recorded that Puaha's Ngati Toa did a haka before leading off, despite Last's plea to keep movements as quiet as possible ... *Several of us joined in this exhibition, much to the delight of our Maori friends, who immediately advanced up the hill, dividing themselves into two parties, each under the command of their own chief ... Our native allies, however, proceeded very cautiously after we reached the summit of the hill, crawling on their stomachs and peering into every bush in the most searching manner, evidently expecting an ambushade.*

### Bush Cleared

Then came a party of engineers chopping away the bush from the narrow ridge track that climbed through the trees with steep gullies on every side. Behind came the First Division commanded by Major Arney, 58th Regiment. This was a mixed party of seamen, soldiers, armed police and militia numbering seven officers and 127 men. Following



Last stand of Rangihaeata at Battle Hill. Watercolour by G H Page, Alexander Turnbull Library.

them came the Second Division under Captain Armstrong of 99th Regiment, numbering five officers and 117 men.

McKillop reported: *We advanced in this tedious mode for several hundred yards; until they discovered a breastwork thrown across the very top of the hill at the narrowest part, composed of several large trees which had been felled and thrown across; with a small clearing in front, which prevented our approach unseen.*

If you walk the track you cannot see any sign of Rangihaeata's trenches from five metres away. But climb off the track onto the small knoll between the third and fourth telephone posts on the hill and there, by a single round orange banded post, is distinct evidence of his trenches. Their zigzag cuts across the narrow crest for some 24 paces. Forward in the centre is a fighting trench covering the dead ground. Te Rangihaeata's trenches still dominate the ridge track and any movement left or right. In 1846 the clearing extended 20 or so metres below the barricade.

Look down the track and picture the scene in 1846 with fleeting Maori figures advancing through the trees and a dense mass of red-coated soldiery with white crossbelts coming briefly into view between the trees before seeking cover.

### Force Splits

The scouting Maori recognised the strength of the position and split, with Puaha's taua moving to the edge of the clearing on the left, both about 80 metres below Te Rangihaeata's position. Behind them, Major Arney's First Division closed up astride the track.

*Puaha's natives now commenced fortifying themselves, barely within musket shot; and nothing would induce them or the Port Nicholson natives to join in a proposed assault. Here we remained for about an hour - our Maoris crawling about in the thick underwood, trying to get a shot at any straggler who might show himself... The Maoris on our side kept perpetually firing on the path, from which a brisk return was made; our people getting excited, commenced shooting right away and left among the trees, not half of them having seen a moving creature to fire at. At this time we had two or three men wounded in front, belonging to a road party employed as pioneers, under the command of Lieutenant Elliot of the 99th, who were cutting down trees and clearing away the bush, to enable us to get a better sight of the rebels, as well as to allow of the men moving two or three abreast, instead of crawling along in single file.*

McKillop reported: *We saw a number of the enemy jumping over some felled trees and running to the right; on our giving notice of which, several volleys were fired in that direction - rather prematurely; as I do not think any of them had time to get round when the firing commenced. It was proposed to make a rush at the place as the Maori were seen leaping over the fence, which clearly proved it was not a very formidable fortification. The bugles sounded the advance, and a demonstration was made, which ended in a retreat. Our position was a bad one, the enemy having*

*the advantage of the rising ground, and the open space in front giving them a clear view of our movements.*

The attempt to advance led to casualties among the tightly packed British ranks on the last steep climb towards Te Rangihaeata's barricade.

*We sheltered ourselves behind the trees as we best could, and carried on an irregular fire for some hours, our people throwing away several thousand rolls of ball cartridge. The rebels were very successful and picked off several of our men. Poor Blackburn, the acting brigade major, was the first who fell; he received this death wound from a Maori who was concealed in a tree; he turned around to speak to me about the sailors being so much exposed, when he was shot; one of my own men was shot in the breast almost at the same time.*

### Attack Refused

Majors Last and Arney expected more from their Maori allies and ordered them to attack. They refused. Angered, Last called on David Scott to witness their cowardice and uselessness ... *this I exceedingly regretted as I am sure ... they acted in every way promptly and willingly, and at one time upon some of the soldiers retreating rather precipitously from the front of our advanced position amongst the natives, they cheerfully and steadily obeyed my request to remain.*

Common sense won out and Last pulled his force back behind the shelter of a large fallen tree. McKillop then saw Rangy's Maori, upon seeing two or three wounded men on our side being removed, treated us to a short war dance ... Scott reported that throughout the day the war dance was repeatedly performed by both parties of our allies and returned by the rebels with the greatest spirit of defiance.

The attackers were stuck. To move forward was to die, and there was no way round. Major Last sensibly refused repeated requests to allow the men to attempt to carry the place by assault. Last himself stayed forward and had a narrow escape, a ball passing through the upper part of his cap. The firing continued until dark and then Last left two officers and 120 men to assist our native allies to watch the enemy and withdrew and occupied the previous night's campsite.

McKillop and his blue jackets were ordered to return to Porirua for two small Coehorn mortars. On 8 August they returned, *every man carrying three shells and a fifteen-pound bag of powder ... Captain Henderson and his artillery-men immediately set to work planting the mortars, and making such other preparations as were necessary, whilst we joined in the skirmishing that was still going on. I was anxious to see the effect of the shell, and crawled on through the bush as near as the enemy's stockade as possible, and had not waited long before I heard the report of the first mortar; the shell pitched rather short, of which I immediately gave notice, after which they fell very well, most of them going into what we supposed to be the centre of the pah. Several of the natives were driven from their ambush and retreated in great haste; I got a shot at one or two of them, but after six or seven shells I did not see a soul move.*

Most of the shot sailed over the trenches. Te Rangihaeata's families had established a camp in the saddle north of the barricade. This was abandoned and a camp built further up the ridge.

### Aim Achieved

Grey joined Last at Horokiwi and no doubt applauded his caution. He wanted no more British disasters like Puketutu or Ohaeawai of 1845. Grey had achieved his aim. Te Rauparaha was captive and Te Rangihaeata prised out of Porirua. Wellington was secure and settlement possible in the Hutt and Paremata. For now, that was enough. Lack of supplies would force Te Rangihaeata and his people north. At Waikanae, Wiremu Kingi of Te Ati Awa supported the Governor and barred further incursions from Wanganui.

On 10 August Last withdrew his soldiers and militia, leaving the Maori to continue the siege. He would endure criticism over his unwillingness to attack but considered British losses severe enough with two killed and nine wounded; one later dying of wounds.

Te Rangihaeata won his battle, but lost his war. On 13 August he withdrew from Horokiwi. Harried by Grey's Maori allies, he retreated to his stronghold in the swamps north of Otaki where he lived out his life unreconciled but unmolested.

### Acknowledgements

This pamphlet was edited with the permission of Chris Pugsley from articles published in New Zealand Defence Quarterly Nos 6 and 7, 1994. Copies of the magazines, which provide greater detail, are available from Ministry of Defence, P O Box 5347, Lambton Quay, Wellington.

### How to Get There

Battle Hill Farm Forest Park is located on the Paekakariki Hill Road, 6 kilometres from State Highway 58 at Pauatahanui. The Park is open daily between 8.00 am and dusk.

### More Information

Recommended reading:

Michael Barthorp, *To Face the Daring Maori*  
James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars, Vol. 1*  
Ray Grover, *Cork of War*  
Ian Wards, *The Shadow of the Land*  
R I M Burnett, *The Paremata Barracks*  
Lieutenant H F McKillop, *Reminiscences of Twelve Months Service in New Zealand*

The Park Ranger  
Battle Hill Farm Forest Park  
Paekakariki Hill Road  
PAUATAHANUI

Telephone 0-4-237 5511