

The Musket Wars, By Ron Crosby

Publisher: Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd

Price: \$65.00

Reviewed by Sarah Putt

The history of Maori warfare and settlement both before and after the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 is slowly capturing the interest of the general public. Now a year after the television documentary "The New Zealand Wars", a South Island lawyer Ron Crosby, has written a comprehensive survey of the so-called Musket wars that raged up and down the country between 1806 and 1845.

Crosby has been actively working in land and marine claims with Iwi of the northern South Island. Through both his legal contacts and his wife Margy, who is of Te Rarawa and Te Aupouri descent, he has assembled a range of written sources on which to base his account.

Crosby asserts that prior to the introduction of the musket, Maori lived in relative harmony. There were skirmishes between Hapu and Iwi but the death toll was not significant. It was the arrival of the musket, with its ability to overwhelm unarmed opponents that sent Maori ranging over the countryside attacking and avenging.

Many of the conflicts between Iwi arose from either minor insults or skirmishes but soon grew into long campaigns where each Iwi sought revenge (utu) for previous defeats and humiliations.

In documenting the Musket Wars Crosby writes that he wants to make New Zealanders as familiar with the heroes of their own past as they are with those in American and European history. Leaders such as Hongi Hiki of Ngapuhi, Te Ruaparaha of Ngati Toa, and Te Heuheu of Ngati Tuwharetoa emerge through his narrative as great chiefs.

A central theme running through Crosby's account is that conquering taua changed the traditional boundaries (rohe) of each Iwi prior to 1840. This has serious consequences today as it is the altered boundaries on which Treaty of Waitangi settlements are now based.

The devastation wrecked by the musket wielding taua sometimes drove whole tribes of Maori from their settlements (Pa), thus depopulating their traditional homeland. This made it easier for Europeans to settle and buy land, sometimes from the conquering tribe that had no traditional right to the land. It also set the scene for the land wars between Maori and Pakeha that were to dominate the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Crosby cites the example of the Waikato taua who, after 13 years of warfare with the Taranaki Iwi, had pushed the later into the Horowhenua district. When Taranaki returned at the end of the Musket wars they discovered much of their land occupied by Europeans, who had "purchased" it from the few Maori living there. The resulting disputes flared into the Taranaki land wars of the 1860s.

Aside from supplying Maori with muskets Europeans play a peripheral role in this account. That is until the end of the Wars when a combination of land purchases, Pakeha settlement, Christianity and the Treaty of Waitangi effectively ended the Musket War era.

Crosby has peppered his survey with accounts of individual bravery sacrifice and torture. For example: "It is recounted that a Ngati Kahungunu rangatira... was captured and hanged upside down by his ankles. A vein in his neck was pierced and his captors drank his blood as it flowed from the site of the incision, each man placing his hand over the cut until the next took his place. This method of ritualised torture and slow death carried with it the symbolism of devouring and demeaning their victim."

At the conclusion of The Musket Wars the reader is left with a mixture of sheer admiration for the Maori warrior who was so fierce and tactical, tempered with a feeling of pure horror at the tales of indiscriminate killing and rampant cannibalism.

Crosby's scholarship will no doubt be picked over by Pakeha and Maori historians alike but there is much to interest the general reader. Those Maori whose whakapapa can be traced to the Iwi involved will find this account of

their ancestors engrossing. In his introduction, noted historian Michael King welcomes *The Musket Wars* as it brings together many of the written accounts of the period for the first time.

A chronology of important events and battles as well as a list of protagonists at the beginning of the book is a helpful reference point. But a map of the Iwi boundaries, both in 1806 and in 1845, would also have been helpful. The chapters are arranged in chronological order of events, thus in one chapter the reader can be taken all over the countryside, sometimes losing the thread of each campaign.

In his prologue Crosby expresses his desire that this crucial era in New Zealand's history to be uncovered, discussed and taught in schools. He has shown through his attention to detail and willingness to include "human interest" stories that the history of this country is every bit as intense, passionate and absorbing as anywhere overseas.

For more information on *The Musket Wars*, visit Reed Publishing's website: www.reed.co.nz

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The Musket Wars

A History of Inter-Iwi Conflict 1806-45
Ron Crosby - Author's Profile*

The Musket Wars is a landmark book, the first single volume recounting this crucial yet neglected period of New Zealand history. The product of years of research, lavishly illustrated with more than 40 maps and 80 reproductions of paintings and photographs from the nineteenth century, it is a book that will enlarge New Zealanders' sense of our past as well as our present.

In pre-Contact Maori society, the intensity of military exchanges had been moderated by the use of traditional weaponry, limited food resources and the equalising effect of utu. The arrival of the musket and new food sources changed all that. Between 1806 and 1845, tens of thousands of Maori were killed, wounded or displaced in the sporadic waves of fighting that engulfed most parts of the country. Entire districts were depopulated and tribal boundaries were redrawn. Yet to the victors went the spoils: the Treaty of Waitangi acknowledged tribal boundaries as they existed in 1840. The wars thus have ongoing relevance to the entire Waitangi Tribunal process, a fact that has not been sufficiently addressed by most claims.

Ron Crosby has written a gripping narrative that, while giving an accurate and complete historical account, also brings to life the human drama of these brutal and unremitting wars. A superb introduction has been provided by leading historian Michael King.

Format : Jacketed hardback, 240 x 160, 392pp
ISBN : 0790006774
Publication date: early August 1999

*Ron Crosby

Ron Crosby was born and brought up in Auckland, gained an honours degree in law from the University of Auckland, and has practised law in Blenheim for most of his professional life. He is currently a partner in the Marlborough legal firm Gascoigne Wicks. His interest in the Musket Wars was sparked by his wife, who is of Te Rarawa and Te Aupouri descent, and through his work in recent years on land and marine claims involving iwi of the northern South Island.
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The Musket Wars

Crosbie was interviewed by Wayne Moat on National Radio 10/8/99 pm

From my (BM) brief notes-

Prior to advent of musket, warfare was hapu based. There was only limited warfare because balance of power had been reached.

Muskets plus European foods (potato was mentioned) gave freedom of movement through others' territories and the means to settle old scores.

There were "massive" displacements of population, with 500 (significant) battles.

Muskets led to slavery, prostitution, and trading in dried heads until banned by the NSW Government. He described cannibalism as "a necessary part of utu".