

AOTEAROA

Our Whakapapa,
Our Stories



Conflict: The Musket Wars

The Musket Wars

The aim of this introductory booklet is to demonstrate the effect that the adoption of muskets had on Māori during the early 1800s. By examining what made muskets an appealing weapon in contrast to traditional Māori warfare, the motives and military campaigns of major figures in the Musket Wars, and the lasting impacts upon Māori, this booklet will demonstrate why the Musket Wars were a pivotal event in New Zealand's military and social history.

This booklet will discuss the following topics:

- A brief history of muskets and why they became the dominant weapon of the 1600-1800s
- An overview of how other cultures had reacted to musket warfare being used against them
- An overview of Māori warfare before the adoption of musket
- The early days of Māori musket warfare
- Ngā Puhī's campaigns
- Te Rauparaha's campaigns
- Te Wherowhero's campaigns
- The destruction of the Moriori as a consequence of upheaval on the mainland
- Developments in Māori *pā* fortification
- The guns used by the Māori
- Musket Wars: the best name or an inadequate description?
- Māori wounds and European opportunities



The British 28th Regiment of Foot repel a French cavalry charge at the Battle of Quatre Bras, 1815. The front rank of infantry use their bayonets to fend off the French horses while the soldiers behind them fire a volley. It was around this time that Māori were beginning to acquire and use muskets in large numbers.

Foundation: The Musket in European warfare

Muskets were a type of firearm that dominated global warfare from the mid-1500s through to the mid-1800s. A long-barrelled weapon, muskets used gunpowder to fire lead bullets at high speed, piercing armour and shattering bone. Early muskets used a slowly-burning rope 'match' on a spring-loaded 'lock' to ignite their gunpowder, and were known as **matchlocks**. By the early 1700s most muskets had changed to a more reliable pattern, which swapped the match for a piece of flint that produced sparks when the lock struck it against steel. These **flintlock** muskets were the pattern that were originally introduced to New Zealand.

Arquebuses (an early firearm that developed into the musket) and muskets had several advantages over traditional ranged weapons like the bow and arrow. Firstly, they required very little training to use, whereas an archer might need years of exercise to develop the muscles needed to draw a bow effectively. Secondly, they were powerful – even a knight's armour could be punctured at close range by a lowly musketeer. Thirdly, the noise and flame of a musket volley could strike terror into even the bravest of men.

Musketeers initially relied on the power of their bullets to stop enemy attacks. This made them vulnerable to cavalry charges, so early musket armies had equally sized armies of pikemen defending them in what became known as "pike and shot" formations. Around the middle of the 1600s European armies began to adopt bayonets: long knives that slotted onto the ends of their muskets to effectively turn them into short pikes, doing away with the need for dedicated pikemen.

Despite their power, muskets were inaccurate weapons. Their smooth barrels caused bullets to tumble in midair and swerve away from their target. A lone musketeer would struggle to hit anything beyond 50-100 metres, so European musket armies were built around the concept of **line infantry** and massed **volleys**.

Hundreds of musketeers would stand shoulder to shoulder and unleash a wave of bullets together, so that even if some bullets missed, many would still find their mark.

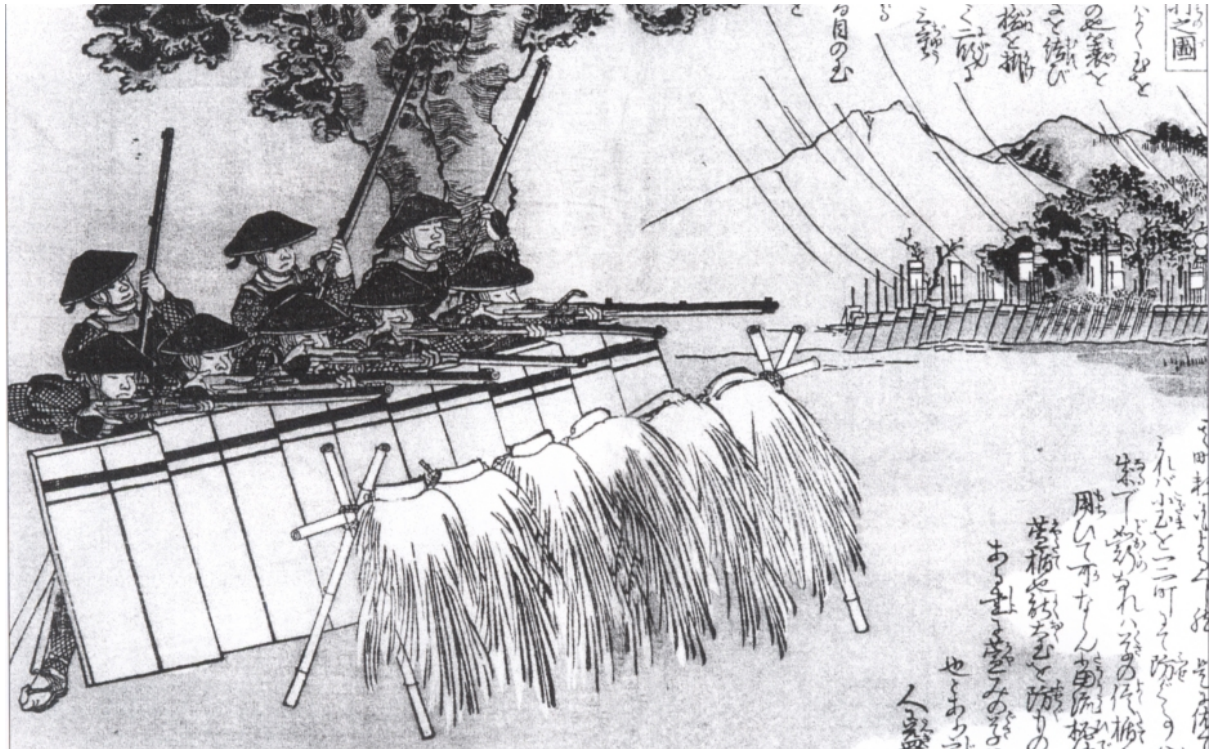
Muskets also took time to reload – a musketeer would have to pour gunpowder down the end of the barrel, drop a lead ball in with some wadding (stuffing) to make it fit tight, ram it down to the back of the barrel with a long metal stick, put the stick away, pour more gunpowder in the ‘pan’ (a small plate with a vent leading into the barrel), and then ready the firing mechanism (a slowly-burning rope ‘**match**’ in old muskets, a **flint** striker in newer versions) – all of this while potentially under attack! This might take over a minute for untrained soldiers, and even Europe’s best professionals couldn’t reload quicker than 15-20 seconds.

To keep up a constant rate of fire, European armies developed the concept of **fire by rank**. Musketeers would form several lines. The first line would fire a volley, then kneel or march to the back of the formation. As they reloaded, the next line would fire and so on. By the time the last line fired, the first line would have reloaded and be ready to fire again.

To make sure that everything went like clockwork, European armies were **drilled** (trained with a series of precise routines). Familiar military features such as matching uniforms and marching in step were invented to help musketeers fight effectively and think as a unit.

Supporting Image

Detail from *The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras*, Elizabeth Thompson, 1875, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



Japanese musketeers protected by wooden shields

Muskets vs the World

Before we look at the impact of muskets in New Zealand it's worth looking at what happened when muskets were introduced to other areas of the world, so that we can compare their responses to the Māori adoption of the musket over traditional warfare.

Portugal brought gunpowder weaponry to Japan, and the Japanese *daimyō* (clan lord) Oda Nobunaga equipped his clan with an early form of musket. At the battle of Nagashino in 1575, his musketeers smashed an attack by the Takeda clan, who were still armed with traditional swords, bows and spears. Takeda Katsuyori lost two thirds of his men, and Oda Nobunaga became the ruler of Japan in all but name.

Japan began to mass-produce muskets, and in 1592 they invaded their neighbour Korea, which was still arming its soldiers with bows and arrows. Initially devastated by Japanese musket attacks, the Koreans quickly made muskets the core weapon of their army, and soon made a name for themselves as capable musketeers.

The Portuguese also introduced muskets to India. Indian craftsmen quickly began to produce their own ornately decorated versions, known as *toradar*, that were used for several centuries. Crucially, however, the introduction of muskets greatly benefitted the Mughal Empire. The Islamic Mughals had swept into northwest India in the 1500s and subsequently conquered much of it. Adopting toradars and field artillery allowed the Mughals to maintain their dominance in the years after their introduction. The Mughal emperors quickly exchanged their cavalry garrisons for musketeers as they were far cheaper to feed and pay, and fewer were needed to destroy poorly-armed local uprisings. Furthermore, only the Emperor could field musketeers – local nobles were forbidden to provide muskets to their personal armies.



An ornately decorated late-1700s toradar musket

In the long term the Mughal reliance on muskets contributed to the collapse of their empire. The simplicity of musket use meant that although there were plenty of musketeers, they typically had less training than the traditional armies that had come before them. Secondly, as muskets became cheaper and easier to acquire, more and more of the Emperor's rivals and enemies had access to them. Finally, the Mughals' complacent approach to musket technology meant that they were still using matchlock toradars while their emerging enemies fielded newer, better weapons. Persia, the Mughals' neighbour, had overhauled its army to use the more reliable flintlock musket, and had even developed a heavier flintlock called the *jazāyer* that fired bigger bullets over longer distances. Persia also gave its musketeers intense training and constant target practice drills. The result was that the Persian army of Nader Shah obliterated the larger Mughal army within three hours and created a power vacuum in India that led to the arrival and rule of the British East India Company.

From these cases, we can see that adopting muskets gave Nobunaga and the Mughals an advantage over their traditionally armed allies. It was not enough to simply *have* muskets, though adapting to advancing musket technology and tactics shifted the advantage to the Persians when the time came to face down the Mughals.

Supporting Images and Links

Ashigaru using shields, unknown artist, c.1800s, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

A Rajasthani Toradar with paintings of flowers, Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

May, Timothy (2006), *May on Khan*, 'Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India', Humanities and Social Sciences Online. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/reviews/13288/may-khan-gunpowder-and-firearms-warfare-medieval-india>

Foundation: Māori Warfare before muskets

Unlike most societies worldwide, pre-colonial Māori typically avoided using missile weapons in combat. Javelins, slings and bows had dominated warfare in Europe, Africa, Asia and America, but were uniquely alien to Māori. Instead, battles were typically fought hand-to-hand, with *patu* (club) and *taiaha* (spear) being the most notable close-combat weapons in use. Europeans noted that these weapons were lighter than those used elsewhere in Polynesia, and that Māori were trained to be quick and agile warriors, shunning shields and armour in favour of mobility and superior parrying skills.

Pre-battle traditions were another feature of Māori warfare. *Taua* (armies) would perform war *haka* (challenges) at each other to demonstrate their strength and resolve. Individual *toa* (warriors) might also challenge their enemies to single combat, both warriors fighting as their armies watched on. On occasion, this might have been enough to settle a dispute without bloodshed.

Another important cultural influence in Māori life and warfare was *utu*. Far from a simple concept of 'revenge', *utu* was the idea that significant actions deserved an equal reaction to balance it out. If a person received a generous gift, for example, then *utu* would be to send a similarly generous gift in return. However, *utu* was a prominent factor in perpetuating inter-iwi warfare among Māori. Insults, raids and killings all demanded *utu*, which in turn generated more reasons for *utu* to be returned.

Supporting Links

Del Mar, Frances (1924), *A Year Among the Maoris: Study of their Arts and Customs*, Ernest Benn Ltd. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-MarYear-t1-body1-d12.html>

Question

Consider traditional Māori warfare. What changes do you think muskets would make to the usual fighting styles? What advantages would iwi gain from owning muskets?

False Starts and Fresh Weapons

The first muskets found their way into Māori hands through trade. European whalers and merchants alike exchanged flintlock firearms for goods and materials that could be used by the settler community, or else sold for a good price back in Europe. These **trade muskets** were usually lower quality than army muskets and were acquired piecemeal over the course of many years.

The first known use of muskets by Māori was at the Battle of Moremonui in 1807 or 1808, when a Ngāti Whātua taua ambushed around 500 Ngā Puhi warriors. The Ngā Puhi had a number of muskets, but this first gunpowder battle was a disaster: caught on a beach and under close attack, the *toa* struggled to reload their muskets and were overwhelmed.

One of the warriors who escaped the disaster at Moremonui was Hongi Hika. He saw beyond the defeat and realised that muskets could provide a decisive advantage against rival iwi if used effectively. He also realised that leveraging European trade and missionary activity would consolidate his power in Northland. He encouraged limited missionary settlement, as he could trade with them for tools and they in turn would attract European ships and merchants to settled areas.

In 1820 he travelled to England. This was a diplomatic and trade mission, aimed at building connections with England and creating the first Māori-English dictionary. Alongside this purpose, Hongi Hika intended to enhance his hapū's relationships with the English in the hope that this would allow them to freely purchase muskets. He met King George IV and received several gifts, including a set of European armour that would later save his life in battle, but didn't acquire the weapons he desired. Undeterred, on the return journey he stopped in Sydney and picked up 300 muskets. The age of gunpowder warfare in New Zealand was about to begin in earnest.

Supporting Links

The Aotearoa History Show, Episode 3: Early Encounters, <https://youtu.be/XDwH2fMsJa8>

The Ngā Puhi Campaigns

In 1806 the convict crew of a small ship, the *Venus*, mutinied against its captain. They sailed from Australia to New Zealand and travelled down to the Bay of Islands, kidnapping several Māori women from the Urikapana hapū of Ngā Puhi.

These women were sold as slaves to Ngaiterangi and Ngāti Porou. In particular, the sister and the niece of Urikapana *ariki* Te Morenga were sold and later killed, and news of their deaths reached Te Morenga through a network of spies. In 1818 and 1820 he launched raids against Ngaiterangi and Ngati Porou to avenge these wrongs. Despite some personal differences, Te Morenga often supported Hongi Hika in the latter's campaigns.

Hongi Hika's campaigns were wide-ranging. From 1821 to 1824 their taua descended on the eastern and western coasts of the upper North Island, pushing into Waikato, the Bay of Plenty and Gisborne. Their attacks forced many iwi to evacuate their traditional *rohe* (territories), and some of these iwi would in turn launch their own campaigns to seize new rohe and ensure their survival.

Through these raids, Hongi Hika developed a self-sustaining system for keeping Ngā Puhi ahead of their rivals in armaments. Slaves captured in the raids would be set to work farming for cash crops such as flax, which would then be exchanged with the settlers for more muskets, which could then be used to capture more slaves. Thus, the more successful they were, the more Ngā Puhi's power snowballed toward being unstoppable. However, as their power grew other Māori recognised that they too could benefit from adopting muskets, and an arms race began as Māori across the islands sought out weapons for their own use. Ironically, Hongi Hika would be

wounded by a musket ball in 1827. He never properly healed and succumbed to his injuries a year later.

Ngā Puhi were never a single unified group. Each hapū had its own interests, and sometimes these clashed and erupted into armed conflict. In 1830, northern and southern Ngā Puhi fought the 'Girls' War', where an exchange of insults between groups of young women led to fighting and peace had to be made with the help of Christian missionaries.

Te Rauparaha

Te Rauparaha was a Ngāti Toa ariki during and after the Musket Wars. Ngāti Toa had long been in conflict with Waikato iwi over fertile farmland and utu for previous raids. Te Rauparaha made a name for himself through these skirmishes as an aggressive and effective leader.

Ngāti Toa obtained muskets somewhere between 1810 and 1815, but did not immediately make use of them. By the 1820s, Ngāti Toa were under pressure from Waikato iwi, who were aggressively expanding south and on the verge of ejecting Ngāti Toa from their traditional *rohe*. Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Mahuta and a number of other Waikato groups laid siege to one of Te Rauparaha's strongholds, Te Arawī pā, but a number of the besiegers had relatives in Ngāti Toa and secretly supplied them with food.

Realising that his people might be overwhelmed and destroyed, Te Rauparaha negotiated a withdrawal from Te Arawī and decided to push south. Ngāti Maniapoto let them leave the pā, but soon gave chase. To keep his people alive, Te Rauparaha dressed his Ngāti Toa followers in red and spread a rumour that Ngā Puhi warriors wearing red had launched an expedition into the area. This clever leveraging of Ngā Puhi's dreaded reputation worked, and was enough to keep their Ngāti Maniapoto pursuers at bay.

Te Rauparaha secured Kapiti Island as Ngāti Toa's new base of power. Kapiti was well-positioned to command the surrounding area, and Ngāti Toa struck along the coast and into what is now the Wellington region. He took control of territory on both sides of the Cook Strait, and aimed to expand further into the South Island. By the 1830s Ngāi Tahu had obtained muskets from European whalers and were able to resist Ngāti Toa's expansion.

In 1840, Te Rauparaha signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the belief that this would cement his right to the land he had conquered during the Musket Wars. Unfortunately, some of this land was targeted for settlement and development, spurring the first deadly clashes of the New Zealand Wars.

Te Wherowhero

A third giant of the Musket Wars was Te Wherowhero (later known as Pōtatau), of Ngāti Mahuta. Ngāti Mahuta had an impressive legacy in traditional warfare. At Hingakaka, the largest battle ever fought on New Zealand soil, a coalition of Waikato iwi including Ngāti Mahuta had defeated a much larger invasion force from the lower North Island, with as many as 16,000 toa fighting in intense hand-to-hand combat.

Ngāti Mahuta enjoyed a period of peace following Hingakaka, but this would inevitably come to an end so Te Wherowhero was trained from childhood as a warrior.

Te Wherowhero's early campaigns were directed against Ngāti Toa, who had killed his relative Te Uira. Ngāti Mahuta's repeated attacks forced Ngāti Toa and Te Rauparaha on the defensive, and they eventually abandoned their traditional rohe around Kaipara to conquer new lands to the south. Te Wherowhero maintained a somewhat friendly relationship with Te Rauparaha, and both assisted each other despite being at war.

Throughout the Musket Wars, Te Wherowhero had to defend against neighbours' raids and launch counter-raids to maintain Ngāti Mahuta's position in the Waikato. Ngā Puhi was the most pressing threat: their early attacks with muskets had overrun Mātakitaki pā, where Te Wherowhero narrowly escaped death, and they continued to press across the frontier throughout the 1830s. The introduction of muskets to Waikato helped to level the playing field, and Ngā Puhi were never able to dislodge Ngāti Mahuta in the same way that the latter had dislodged Ngāti Toa.

Te Wherowhero earned substantial renown throughout the Musket Wars, and he refused to sign Te Tiriti o Waitangi. When the Kīngitanga movement decided to establish the first Māori King, Te Wherowhero was chosen from among the suggested candidates. In an age where traditional warfare had already been transformed, Te Wherowhero recognised that a pragmatic, adaptive approach was needed to the traditional system of hapū-centric politics and rivalries. Despite the struggles of the Musket Wars he emphasised that unity was now needed to strengthen the Māori position in negotiating with the Crown.

The Moriori

The Moriori were a group of people who lived on *Rēhoku*, the Chatham Islands. Descended from mainland Māori, they had developed their own unique culture and traditions over the course of 300 years – so much so that many Europeans originally believed that they were an entirely separate people that had lived in New Zealand before the Māori.

Life on the Chatham Islands was difficult and the small Moriori population meant that fighting would have a devastating effect on the entire island. As a result, a Moriori chief called Nunuku-Whenua decreed that the Moriori were forbidden to kill. Disagreements could be settled by ritual combat but war, bloodshed and cannibalism were banned. Nunuku-Whenua's pacifism kept the Moriori in harmony, but would have unintended, deadly consequences during the Musket Wars.

At the time two iwi, (Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama), had been displaced from their former rohe by invaders from the Waikato. They allied with each other for survival and invaded the Wellington region to establish new territory. In 1835, a party of 500 from this alliance took the brig *Lord Rodney* and ventured to the Chatham Islands. They were armed and carried plenty of supplies and potatoes for planting, suggesting that they intended to colonise the islands. They encountered the Moriori and began to take over their territory. The concerned Moriori held a meeting to determine whether they would offer any resistance but decided that Nunuku-Whenua's pacifist principles were vital to preserve even if it meant the destruction of the Moriori people.

Around 300 Moriori were killed in the initial invasion or in ritual executions, and many of the remainder were enslaved and severely treated. Within 30 years, there were only 101 Moriori left, and the Chatham Islands fell under Māori and then European rule.

Developments in Māori Pā fortifications

The Musket Wars also led to innovations in Māori fortification. Māori had always been skilled field engineers - early European visitors were often surprised by the skill and strength of traditional Māori pā (fortified settlements). These traditional pā were typically built as rings of ditches and palisades (wooden walls) around villages or on prominent hilltops. Behind the palisades stood tall fighting-towers from which toa armed with *huata* (long spears, measuring at least six metres) could safely fend off any attackers. This was sufficient to thwart most attacks, since stones and the occasional spears were all that any attacker could throw at the defenders. This design was highly successful for its time, and over 5000 pā were established across New Zealand.

Later, the features that had given traditional pā their strength suddenly became weaknesses with the introduction of muskets. Toa on the fighting-towers found themselves exposed, and in the words of one Māori warrior, were "shot down like pigeons." Gaps left in the palisade for spears now became holes through which attackers could rake the pā's defenders with musket-fire, and the round shape of the

defences made it difficult for defending musketeers to concentrate fire on an attacking force.

The traditional pā was obsolete, and Māori engineers needed to adapt their designs quickly or perish. The result was a rapid and innovative shift toward a new style of Māori fighting fortification: the 'gunfighter' pā.

Gunfighter pā were designed to shift the advantage back to their defenders. Gone were the tall palisades and elevated fighting platforms. Instead, the main fortifications were deep trenches behind shorter, denser palisades that would block attackers and make them an easy target for musketeers. Traditional materials still had their place – later studies demonstrated that the *pūriri* logs often used in pā were effectively bulletproof. The shape of pā also made them easier to defend: they became rectangular to allow volley fire along a long front, with the occasional protruding outwork to cover possible blind spots. Small trenches called **rifle pits** were sometimes built along the approaches to a pā – these allowed defenders to harass an attacker and then pull back to the safety of the main defences. If the outer trenches of a pā were taken the attackers would suddenly find themselves confronted by a second line of defences. Trapped between the inner and outer palisades, they became easy targets for muskets.

Together, these changes transformed pā from an obsolete, vulnerable target into a well-prepared, deadly killing ground. A well-prepared taua could build a complete gunfighter pā in a matter of days, and pā became a means of dictating the focus of a battle rather than just a tool for defending settlements.

Supporting Materials

Knight, I. (2014), *Māori Fortifications*, Osprey Publishing

The Guns

While many muskets were used as-is, some Māori chose to carve their muskets with *whakairo* patterns similar to those found on traditional weapons. These carvings made the muskets more than mere tools, and unlike the decorated toradars of India they were more than just ornamentation. Instead, the carvings linked the muskets spiritually with their owners.

Some Māori also made mechanical modifications to their firearms. Muskets sometimes had their bores widened (much like the Persian jazāyers had done), allowing them to fire a bigger or heavier shot. The vent for igniting the gunpowder could also be widened; this increased a musket's firing speed but robbed it of some of its power (since more gas could escape from the vent).

The unique challenges posed by pā warfare and the New Zealand bush also led to different trends in firearm adoption than had been seen in other countries. Japan, India, and Persia were all urbanised and agricultural societies, which lent themselves to forming large armies of line infantry using standardised formations and weapons across developed land. Māori taua, on the other hand, were essentially irregular forces equipped with a variety of muskets and fighting either in the bush or against small settlements. As such, weapons like shotguns, which had no place on the

European or Asian battlefield, were popular among Māori. In particular, the two-barrelled shotgun (*tupara*) was well-liked, since a warrior could fire twice before they needed to reload. Ngāi/Kāi Tahu ariki Tūhawaiki even used a rare revolving rifle, an innovation that never caught on in other militaries of the day.

Pā battles also made women and sometimes children part of the fight. Safe in the trenches of a gunfighter pā, the women and children could load and reload multiple muskets so that the defenders had a constant stream of firearms at the ready, speeding up their rate of fire.

Some groups became proficient at setting up ambushes, and the development of pā defences naturally led to local innovations in musket tactics such as covering fire, killing zones and rifle pits.

Musket Wars?

Food supplies played a part in escalating the scale of the conflict. Traditionally, Māori relied on locally sourced food or difficult-to-grow crops such as kumara. Kumara in particular had a series of ritual requirements surrounding its planting and harvesting. Women and slaves were forbidden from harvesting kumara, so men were always required to be present for the harvest instead of out fighting. A taua could not sustain extended military operations, so campaigns typically took the form of raids against neighbouring iwi to capture slaves or enforce utu for past wrongs. However, potatoes were easier to grow, provided more food, lasted longer in storage, and could be harvested by anyone without dedicated rituals. This meant that a taua furnished with potatoes could be in the field for longer, allowing extended campaigns and sieges of previously untouchable pā.

Another perspective is that the Musket Wars were just the continuation of traditional utu, but their impact was amplified by the effectiveness of muskets. Previous methods of conflict resolution like haka or ritual single-combat challenges were liabilities in the age of the muskets, where battle could be joined with little to no warning by the simple pull of a trigger. Muskets increased the effectiveness of ambushes. Since toa did not need to run into close combat, they could retain the element of surprise right up until the first shots rang out and remain in cover throughout the fight.

The unparalleled bloodshed during the Musket Wars has led New Zealand historian Michael King to suggest the term “Māori Holocaust”. Up to 40,000 Māori died in the space of three decades, from an estimated population of only 120,000.

This booklet has focussed on the fortunes of Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Toa and Ngāti Mahuta during the Wars, but Māori across New Zealand were affected and in many cases their stories are marked by misery, death and destruction. Many hapū and iwi were forcibly dislocated from their ancestral rohe, losing their essential spiritual connection to the land. The land was the wellspring of identity, prosperity, and mana, so the Musket Wars severed centuries-old bonds with place and the cultural legacy that had been built on these bonds.

Consequences: Māori wounds, European opportunities

Some iwi had worked with Europeans in trading for food and muskets, but this had in turn given European settlers a foothold in the country as trading ports and settlements were established. The wars had also provided an opening for Christian missionaries to spread among the Māori community and introduce European religious and cultural ideas. Missionaries taught Māori to read and write, and some helped to provide and repair muskets (both willingly and under threat). The Christianisation of Māori in the following decades would in some ways provide a unifying force for traditionally quarrelling iwi, but at the cost of centuries-old traditions and beliefs.

Ngā Puhī's expansion left Tāmaki Makaurau – now the Auckland area – temporarily depopulated as its historic inhabitants fled further south. This land, well-situated between two large harbours and controlling access north and south, was a desirable prospect for European settlement. When Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed, Ngāti Whātua offered the area to Governor William Hobson. At the time this seemed like a good deal. Governor Hobson gained ideal land for building his new capital, Auckland, while Ngāti Whātua now had a shield of European settlers between themselves and Ngā Puhī. In the long-term Auckland would become a base of European power and the jumping-off point for the Government's campaigns against the Kīngitanga movement during the New Zealand Wars.

The devastation of the Musket Wars taught Māori hard lessons about musket warfare, but these lessons were taken to heart. Over the course of thirty years, Māori toa were forged into capable gunpowder warriors. In particular, the innovation of the gunfighter pā gave Māori a modern, effective defensive strategy that was seen again and again during the New Zealand Wars. There, British soldiers learned first-hand that taking a well-built pā would require a slow, careful approach. British commanders who ignored the advice of their Māori allies and attempted frontal attacks on pā suffered heavy losses for no gain.