

Study destroys picture of peace and harmony before the treaty

□ *The Musket Wars: A History of Inter-iwi Conflict 1806-45*, by R D Crosby (Reed Books, \$65)

□ Reviewed by Graeme Hunt

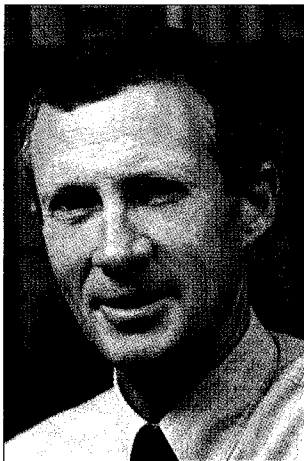
New Zealand history writing in recent years has been obsessed with the Treaty of Waitangi and the Maori grievances that followed. It has been dominated by Europeans offloading their guilt about the real or alleged wrongs of colonialism.

The tenor of the writings has been: (1) Maori society was peaceful and unified until the arrival of British sovereignty; (2) Maori were hoodwinked into signing the treaty; and (3) everything that happened after the treaty was to the detriment of Maoridom.

The pre-treaty period has barely rated a mention, especially the period from 1806 when muskets first fell into Maori hands and became the currency of tribal power. James Belich's wide-ranging book, *Making Peoples*, mentions the musket wars in passing in an otherwise revisionist look at New Zealand history. Most historians haven't bothered.

It has been up to Ron Crosby, an Auckland-born lawyer practising in Marlborough, to put this great historiographic oversight right and he has done so in splendid style. *The Musket Wars* is not simply an account of the bloodiest period of New Zealand inter-tribal warfare but an historical indulgence well written and superbly illustrated – a book on par with *The New Zealand Wars: A History of Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period*, James Cowan's two-volume classic published in the 1920s (dealing with the European-Maori wars).

The introduction of the musket changed Maori society forever. Warfare, a traditional feature of Maori life, was transformed literally at the barrel of the musket. Those tribes fortunate enough to trade with Europeans and acquire guns achieved a military advantage well beyond anything traditional weapons could offer. Not only did the musket allow certain tribes to achieve their expansionist aims far more



RON CROSBY: Questions for treaty litigants

quickly than in the past but the cost was many times higher.

No one knows exactly how many Maori were victims of the Musket Wars but as many as 60,000 are thought to have been killed, enslaved or forced to migrate.

The Maori population of New Zealand in 1810 has been estimated at between 100,000 and 150,000 so the impact of the wars in terms of straight casualties, depopulation and iwi cleansing was far worse than the fate suffered by Kosovar Albanians at the hands of Serbia.

Torture, brutality, slavery and cannibalism were features of Maori warfare before the arrival of the musket; the white men's guns simply lifted the scale and ferocity several notches.

It is legitimate to talk about genocide and the Musket Wars in the same breath because the new weapons created a military imbalance that had never before been a part of Polynesian warfare.

The North Taranaki invasion of the Chatham Islands in 1835 and the destruction of the peaceful Moriori inhabitants is but one of numerous examples of musket-led genocide.

Historian Michael King, an expert on the Chathams, notes in *The Musket Wars*' introduction: "The disproportionately lethal effect [of muskets] on opponents who lacked them upset the balances of pre-European tribal life and took a terrible toll.

"In contrast to the pre-[European] contact days, when

casualties might be measured in dozens and there were always survivors among the vanquished, now those same casualties might number hundreds, or, in a few dramatic instances, thousands."

The significance of the Musket Wars goes well beyond the destruction they caused.

By the time the treaty was signed in 1840, Maori society had been turned on its head; many tribes had lost their lands, been enslaved or disappeared altogether.

But the basis of the alleged partnership under the treaty is that all Maori authority emanates from 1840.

The tribal divisions, landholdings and interests existing on February 6 that year are those today that are the source of Maori Land Court litigation, treaty claims before the Waitangi Tribunal and multimillion-dollar grievance settlements funded by the taxpayer.

Put simply by King: "To apply the '1840 rule' to this distribution of people and power has as much logic, and as much fairness, as the application of a hypothetical '1940 rule' would have on the borders of Europe."

This is the real significance of Crosby's book. For the first time there is, in intricate detail, a comprehensive guide to the Musket Wars that takes the conflict beyond its military perspective.

Crosby, whose wife Margy is of Te Rarawa and Te Aupouri descent, has taken a huge risk entering the domain of the professional (and revisionist) historian.

He has done so sensibly and without the hang-dog apologies that nearly every European writer on Maoridom feels obliged to offer. In the prologue, for instance, he writes of Maori custom or tikanga Maori in the Musket Wars period measured in chivalry, hospitality and mana, largely based on rangatira aristocracy. He also writes of the "darker side" – slaughter, slavery and cannibalism (the last two are related because slaves taken on campaigns were literally meat on foot).

"Kai-tangata (cannibalism)

became a fixed way of life for the victors, although the European potato was the most important food source for taua (war parties)."

Like King, Crosby is critical of the "cloak of juristic legality" given to the Maori status quo of 1840.

"A question Maori may have to address is whether boundaries and entitlements that are based on conquests that were only achieved through the use of European weapons should continue to be adhered to or whether there should be some putting aside of those entitlements.

"This will involve consideration of whether modern concepts of equity suggest there should be a division of compensation on the basis of the present [Maori] population."

There is little doubt the availability of advanced military technology (muskets) made inter-tribal warfare far more dangerous than in the past.

But Crosby has been careful not to blame the Europeans or the musket for the wars.

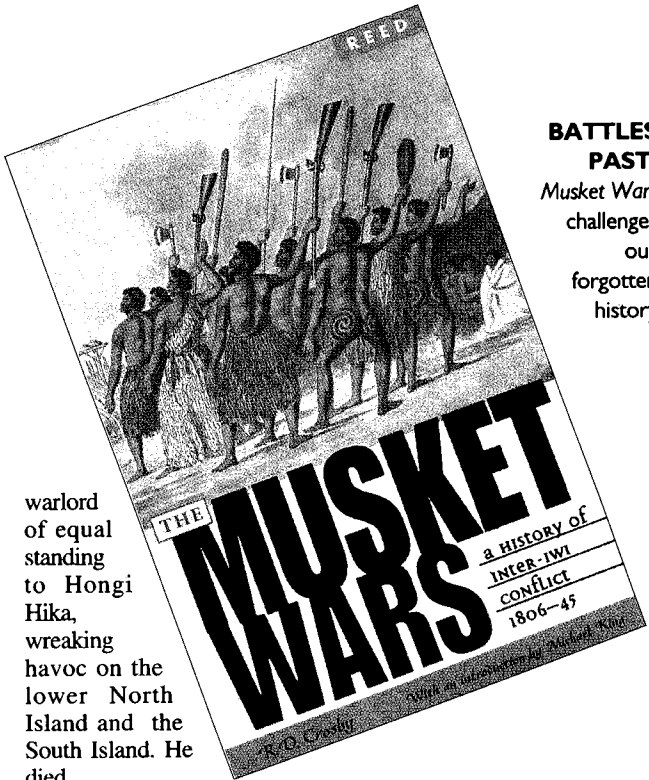
In most cases the causes (or alleged causes) were as old as Maoridom itself – kidnappings, insults, alienation of tribal property or rights by members of another tribe and, that great excuse for ritualistic slaughter, utu (revenge).

To be sure, Maori who embraced muskets first were those who lived or traded with the Europeans. The worst offenders of the early period were from the north, Ngapuhi chiefs Hongi Hika and Te Morenga.

Their raids on the Bay of Plenty in 1818 were a little like Hitler's invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938 – a test of military superiority and a prelude to a larger war.

Hongi became the consummate warmonger – he exchanged gifts from King William IV for muskets – and was the central figure in Ngapuhi raids from 1818-25. He died of a musket wound in 1828. Had he lived longer, the slaughter would have been even greater.

The great Ngati Toa chief, Te Rauparaha, was a musket



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warlord of equal standing to Hongi Hika, wreaking havoc on the lower North Island and the South Island. He died peacefully in 1849.

The Musket Wars were not an all-Maori affair.

European traders supplied the weapons, much to the concern of the missionaries, and Europeans who had "gone bush" – so-called Pakeha-Maori – were sometimes involved directly in the fighting.

Trader-shipper Richard Barrett and his captain, John Agar Love, were drawn into a protracted tribal war when Waikato Maori besieged their trading colleagues, Te Atiawa, at Otaka pa, Ngamotu, in 1832.

Barrett, using cannon sal-

vaged from the ship, Tohora, helped raise the siege.

Prosperous flaxmiller Philip Tapsell (real name Hans Homman Jensen Falk) – founder of the Tapsell dynasty – was not so fortunate. He lost everything when Maketu pa was sacked in a revenge attack in 1836.

The Musket Wars were an ugly blot on New Zealand history. The fact they have been largely ignored by historians is an even larger blot on historiography.

Crosby should be honoured for redressing this historical imbalance.