

Dr Bruce Moon's full account of events at Rangiaowhia on 21st February 1864.

On the night of 20th February at 11 o'clock, the mixed force of colonial cavalry, regular infantry, artillery and Forest Rangers paraded. Horses feet were muffled and their gear wrapped in cloth. Passing successfully close by the rebel defences in the darkness, the cavalry reached the village soon after dawn. With many Maori civilians, men and women, running away, Captain Wilson commanding the advance guard called to the women in Maori to sit down to avoid the risk of being shot. "They obeyed, and we passed them; then they got up and ran on."^{xiv}

Soon the troops were everywhere in the village. There was some skirmishing as Maoris began firing from their huts at the cavalymen. "One or two of [the] snipers were women."^{xv} "The Forest Rangers found the Roman Catholic church ... crammed with armed Maoris, who showed a white flag and were not pressed further."^{xvi} "The English church, too, was filled with Maoris, and some shots came from the windows."^{xvii}

"It did not take long for the cavalry to clear the enemy out of Rangiaohia [*sic*], our infantry being far in the rear. Having accomplished our work, we had turned about and were taking prisoners as we came along, when Captain Wilson's attention was drawn to a whare, near which a struggle was going on between Corporal Little, of ours, and a huge Maori. ... I heard some days afterwards that the big Maori, whom I mentioned before as having been taken prisoner, had said that his life was saved by a man who wore a silver band round his cap, meaning Captain Wilson."^{xviii}

Meantime, the boy, Potatau, leaving the house where he had spent the night, saw some troopers passing nearby. He takes up the story: "I at once ran to my father's house. I had not been long there when my grandfather [chief Hoani]^{xix} came to the same house. ... so that he might die with us - [Chief] Ihaia, Rawiri and his son. At this time myself and my mother went outside the house, and sat at the door of the house. I heard my father say to my grandfather: 'Let us lay down our guns and give ourselves up as prisoners.' ... My grandfather would not agree. At this time the soldiers came to us, and asked my mother in Maori: 'Are there any Maoris in the house?' She replied: 'No, there are no Maoris in the house.' My father at once said: 'Yes, there are Maoris here.' The European who spoke Maori came to the door of the house, and caught hold of my father, and handed him over to the soldiers."^{xx}

It is pretty evident that the "big Maori" who was captured was Potatau's father, Captain Wilson who had taken him turning him over to the corporal.

At this point, Captain Wilson ordered Sergeant McHale, the sole Australian volunteer in the cavalry, to enter the hut and take the occupants prisoner.^{xxi}

Potatau again: "The European went inside of the house. My grandfather shot him and killed him. Some of the others dragged the body in the house. At this time my mother and self arose and went through the soldiers and between the troopers. They did not interfere with us, but allowed us to pass. We went to the house of Thomas Power, who had a Maori woman to wife. After we left we heard the soldiers firing. ... [After] the firing had ceased[, w]e at once left the place and ran off to the bush, and made for Rangitoto."^{xxii}

"Captain Wilson called out 'What are you shooting the Maoris for?' and jumping from his horse was into the hut in a moment. The door was so low he had to stoop to get inside. The place was full of smoke, and as Captain Wilson entered he found under him McHale's body, his feet towards the door, and face down. The captain could not see anyone else for the darkness and smoke,

consequently he soon backed out, calling out that McHale had been shot, which the men no sooner heard than with their carbines they commenced to riddle the house, which was built of slabs. The firing soon brought together the whole of the cavalry, and after a while some of the 65th and Forest Rangers, also the general and staff, came up. It was after General Cameron's arrival that Colonel Nixon was shot from the door of the whare. Then, as the Maoris did not surrender when challenged for the second time, the infantry fired the house. I saw one Maori walk out of the blazing hut, his blanket singed on his back. Poor fellow! he fell within ten paces of the door whence he and his compatriots had so wantonly shot our colonel and many other good men. There was nothing now to prevent us from recovering McHale's body, but its condition was such that we could hardly distinguish it from the Maoris around him.^{xxiii}

Of the one who walked out of the blazing hut, Cowan says: "A tall old man, clothed in a white blanket [twisted to a white flag in some modern tales] ... emerged from the doorway of the burning house. His upstretched arms showed that he had no weapon. 'Spare him, spare him!' shouted the nearest officers. But next moment there was a thunder of shots. ... the old hero ... swayed slowly and fell dead to the ground. The episode enraged the chivalrous officers who had entreated quarter for him."

The irony of all this is that the "old hero" must have been Potatau's grandfather who had fired the shot which killed McHale and started the whole fracas. Almost the last survivor, he had realized that the game was up and walked out to meet his fate. Had he heeded his son's advice at the start to give themselves up, none of it would have happened. As it was, nearly all the casualties at Rangiaowhia occurred there. Two more men came forth from the whare and were shot dead while firing at the troops then the burning building collapsed. Besides the charred body of McHale, seven bodies were found in the ruins. One source says that two of them were daughters of Kereopa Te Rau who barbarously swallowed the eyes of murdered missionary Volkner.

In the final incident "at the Catholic church some of Hoani Papita's men made a short stand. Twenty or thirty of them rushed into the church and fired through the windows, and it was thought at first that they intended standing a siege there, but they discovered that the weatherboards were not bullet-proof. The rangers and some Regulars attacked, and the church-walls were soon perforated with bullets. At last the defenders dashed out through the door on the northern side, and fled into the swamps."^{xxiv} "The churches remained intact, "two officers of the 50th Regiment live in the Catholic Church. The beautifully stained glass windows of the English church are entire."^{xxv} **Even prominent rebel leader Wiremu Tamihana admitted this, saying: "There was only one house burnt; that was the house where the Maoris died. I went there and saw it."** ^{xxvi}

Five of Cameron's men, one being Colonel Nixon, were killed at the ill-fated whare or died later of wounds. Ten Maoris died there including the chiefs Ihaia and Hoani who made the fateful decision not to surrender at the start as his son had advised him. Just two Maoris were killed in the entire remainder of the action. "About thirty prisoners, some wounded, were taken."^{xxvii} Cameron's own account says "About twelve natives were killed and twelve taken prisoner. I have detained 21 women and children who were found in the village"^{xxviii} A little arithmetic verifies that these figures are consistent.

Searching the whares afterwards, the troops found substantial quantities of arms. So much for O'Malley's "place of refuge for women, children and the elderly". A white flag was raised at the property of Thomas Power and his wife, Rahapa, née Te Hauata, where many of the women and children were sheltering unharmed and it was left strictly alone.

"After the skirmish at Rangiaohia, the troops returned and camped at Otawhao, the Rev. John Morgan's missionary station (now known as Te Awamutu), The slain were buried; the Maori wounded and prisoners kindly cared for, having tents pitched for their use."^{xxix}

So there it is, pretty much the whole story, now unrecognizable in the false accounts of women and children being burned alive in the church, too readily believed by our part-Maori revisionists and their white fellow-travellers. It was not long before such stories began to circulate.

"At the great Maori meeting at Kopua, twelve months last May, Captain Wilson met two gentlemen – Wesleyan ministers – who informed him that there was but one thing the natives were sore about; namely, the kohuru [murder]^{xxx} at Rangiaohia. The captain replied, 'I can explain all about that affair, for I was present. It was I who sent the man whom the Maoris shot into the hut to make prisoners. Our man was dead inside the hut before the attack commenced.'^{xxxi}

What really enraged the rebels was that they were completely out-witted by General Cameron whose name has been falsely blackened. The church-burning lie gave them a ready excuse for their failure and spread like wildfire amongst them, interpreted by O'Malley as "Maori oral histories from the time of the raid consistently refer to women and children being killed." A lie repeated a hundred times does not become true, even if the hundredth teller is Dame Susan Devoy, too ready to believe it without checking genuine sources.^{xxxii} One of her minions, Pele Walker, has chimed in with "History is often contentious and debatable. There are many historical sources, including accounts from Waikato-Tainui and the NZ History website, which give different accounts from your sources as to what happened in Rangiaowhia in 1864."^{xxxiii} So there you are - more hypocrisy from her office from one who does not want to know the truth.

Rusden, for example makes the outrageously false statement that the official account of the fight at Ihaia's house "was the official method of telling, or concealing, that women or children were burned to death. ... Their rage at being outwitted by the flank movement which left them idle, and destroyed their food and plantations, was exaggerated by the burning of their wives and children."^{xxxiv}

The review of Rusden's book in the "New Zealand Herald" for 4th August 1883 is scathing about the flagrant bias in what he writes. This is readily available online by entering "G W Rusden History" and selecting the entry: "Rusden's History of New Zealand – Papers Past."

It may be the first of a long line of so-called histories which give grossly falsified accounts of the story of early New Zealand. It was when Potatau found this out that he came forth to say what he knew. A key witness, he was clearly a man of integrity.

In fact, Cameron's brilliant and humane action at Rangiaowhia was the beginning of the end of the rebellion in the Waikato. As historian Chris Pugsley has observed, it was the decisive action of the entire conflict, a severe economic setback for the Kingitanga and a major blow to its morale. From then on the end of resistance in the Waikato basin was only a matter of time.

So compare the real account with O'Malley's lurid claim that "the assault on Rangiaowhia was an almost incomprehensible act of savagery".

Put plainly, the outwitted rebels in their rage concocted the dastardly lie about the burning of a church full of women and children – which was all too readily repeated – as their descendants

continue to do today. The Tainui tribes are one such source, a 2014 example under the heading "The Latest Tainui news from Eraka's Blog" being the following.

"150 years ago during the New Zealand wars at Rangiaowhia, near Te Awamutu, ... a ... **massacre of innocents** took place. Local Maori folk took refuge from the fighting in St Paul's church. The church was surrounded by British soldiers. Some Maori who attempted to flee were either shot or bayoneted. The soldiers set the church ablaze, a **horrific war crime** took place, the non-combatants consisting of mostly women and children were burned alive." [Her emphasis]

It would be difficult to imagine a more foul lie than this.

At the site of its old mission, the Catholic church has erected a sign which says: "It was one of the most prosperous areas in New Zealand. But on Sunday 21st February 1864, the Imperial forces attacked the undefended settlement which was inhabited by women, children and the elderly. ... After the event, the Crown had confiscated and redistributed the land." This is a clear example of where telling a selected part of the truth is worse than lying.

One Tommy Wilson has repeated a tale that General Cameron "gave orders to wipe them out. His troops herded all the local Maori up like cattle and locked them in the church and then set it alight - killing all 144 inside ... only one three-year-old girl escaped ... The fearful tale when told by the granddaughter sent down a veil of deep sadness that settled across our wharenui."^{xxxv} This tale which he says he heard from "whakapapa" is yet another monstrous fabrication. Note his concocted tale of 144 deaths to give a spurious appearance of accuracy.

O'Malley concludes his piece with an admonitory: "Acknowledging this difficult history is not a recipe for endless division and recrimination, as some critics like to allege Owning up to our troubled past requires guts and maturity." But!! Recognizing and dealing with the multitude of lies current in New Zealand today, amongst them those related by O'Malley, is an urgent and desperately need prerequisite. *Further articles are planned to address more of them.*

As long ago as 1815, J L Nicholas observed that "amongst the moral vices to which many of the New Zealanders are prone, may be reckoned the odious practice of lying, in which they too frequently indulge ... [it is] seldom of a harmless nature ... to serve their own interested purposes".^{xxxvi} Quite evidently, this practice continues today.

So, shame on the "Listener" for being party to this dastardly story; shame on Susan Devoy and Vincent O'Malley for repeating the lies. My O'Malley forebears of Galway who survived the "Great Hunger" would turn in their graves if they knew.

Acknowledgement: I am obliged to private communications for the material from Brett's' "Early History of New Zealand" and some other material.

Bruce Moon Nelson
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Postscript: To give some credit where it is due, "The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period: Volume I,(1845-1864)", Victoria University of Wellington, gives an account substantially in agreement with what we have written though it wrongly entitles the chapter "The Invasion of Rangiaowhia", a false nomenclature we have pointed out and it fails to give the real reason for General Cameron's move, while for "Wars" one should read "Rebellions".

i Paul Moon, "This Horrid Practice", Penguin, 2008, ISBN 978 014 300671 8, quoting other authors, pp 143 & 151

ii "History and Traditions of the Maoris of the West Coast, North Island of New Zealand prior to 1840, Victoria University of Wellington

iii Assisted by Thomas Power of whom more later.

iv Michael King, "The Penguin History of New Zealand", Penguin, 2003, ISBN 9780143018674, p. 202

v Michael King, *op. cit.*, p. 203

vi Charles Heaphy, "Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives – 1861 Session", p.5

vii "Proceedings of the Kohimarama Conference, Comprising Nos. 13 to 18 of the "Maori Messenger.", available online in both English and Maori from Victoria University of Wellington.

viii[?] John Robinson, "The Kingite Rebellion", Tross Publishing, 2016, ISBN 978 1872970486. Robinson quotes other sources extensively and where they are quoted here, references to them may be found in his book.

ix Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.219

x What was once called the "Wairau Massacre" in 1843, is now described at the site as "The Wairau Affray". Since on that occasion, Te Rangihaeata slaughtered more helpless prisoners than the entire number of rebels who died at Rangiaowhia, "Affray" is a more than adequate description for it.

xi F Glen, "Australians at war in New Zealand, Christchurch, 2011, ISBN 987-1-87742-739-8, p. 146

xii "Brett's Historical Series, ed. Thomson W Leys & H Brett, Auckland 1890

xiii J Cowan, "The New Zealand Wars", Vol. 1, Chapter 37

xiv "One who was there", Brett, *op. cit.*

xv Cowan, *op. cit.*

xvi Cowan, *op. cit.*

xvii Cowan, *op. cit.*

xviii "One who was there", *op. cit.*

xix Known as "John the Baptist" or "Hoani Papita"

xx Potatau, Brett, *op. cit.*

xxi Glen, *op. cit.*, gives more details about McHale.

xxii Potatau, *op. cit.*

xxiii "One who was there", *op. cit.*

xxiv Cowan, *op. cit.*

xxv "NZ Herald", 2, 24, 6th April 1864

xxvi "Petition of William Thompson Tarapipipi", 1865.

xxvii Cowan, *op. cit.*

xxviii "NZ Herald", 1, 96, 4th March 1864.

xxix "One who was there", *op. cit.*

xxx "Kohuru" can also mean "ambush" which would be a better translation

xxxi "One who was there", *op. cit.*

xxxii Susan Devoy, "Learning Nation's Past A Way To Safeguard Future", "Bay of Plenty Times", 4th January 2017

xxxiii Email to C. Lee, 14th February 2017

xxxiv GW Rusden, "History of New Zealand", London, Chapman and Hall, 1883

xxxv T Wilson, "Kapai's Corner", "Bay of Plenty Times", 12th August 2009

xxxvi JL Nicholas, "Narrative of a Voyage to New Zealand", Vol. I., 1817, pp 384-5

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