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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEW

Maurice Lennard, The Road to War. Whakatane and District Historical Society Monograph 16, 1986. 248 pp., appendices, references, index. \$26.50.

In this long-awaited book Maurice Lennard records the results of many years historical, archaeological and topographic exploration of events which led from the militarisation of Auckland's Great South Road in the early 1860s to the invasion of the Waikato and the battle at Rangiriri in November 1863. Many of the archaeological observations have a special value in that the sites referred to and known to the author have since been destroyed.

The book begins with a history of the origins of the Great South Road, especially that part of it which lay over the Bombay Hills. There follows an account of the July 1863 crossing of the Mangatawhiri by troops which led to war with the people of the Waikato. Succeeding chapters cover the Papakura-Wairoa (Clevedon) frontier and campaigning in the Hunua Ranges, the advance along the Koheroa ridges to Whangamarino and Meremere, the Thames expedition and establishment of a frontier line from Pokeno to Miranda and the battle at Rangiriri.

A range of subjects is covered in some useful appendices. There is a brief account of the design and construction of blockhouses and redoubts, together with a list of such works in the Auckland region. Great South Road mileposts, the Presbyterian church at Pukekohe East, the township of Havelock, and the Royal Artillery in New Zealand also have detailed attention, and there are plans of thirteen redoubts of the south Auckland-north Waikato region by archaeologist, Wynne Spring-Rice.

But it is a pity that such excellent research has not been given a more coherent context. As the story jumps about in time and place, it is clear that the various sections were written separately and not as a continuous narrative. Without a good background knowledge of the opening of the Waikato war readers will have much trouble trying to fit together the various disjointed episodes.

Nor is the author entirely confident in the wider historical background. On page 2 he begs all questions regarding a supposed "anti(land)-selling league". Cameron and Grey are said to have been on bad terms as early May 1862 (pp.19-20) - whereas it was some time later that this actually came about. The war in Taranaki had not recommenced at the opening of 1863 (p.204). There was no "Governor General" in New Zealand during

the war (there was a Governor instead). For a "50 square feet" redoubt (p.205), read 50 feet square (or 2500 sq.ft). The conclusion that Rangiriri was the end of the Waikato war (p.186) has the authority only of doubtful hindsight.

A yet more distracting note is struck by the 19th century language and attitudes which the author takes directly from his 19th century sources. A few examples should suffice. On p.40 there appear, "most implacable and most barbarous enemies". The same people presumably as those who on p.43 have a "fiendish thirst for a safe massacre", and who are later described as "... a brave, fanatical savage race, in the fastnesses of the bush, who took every opportunity to waylay and murder all opposed to them" (p.182). There are no prizes for guessing who is being referred to. When the author suggests (p.184) that, "Had the Governor [Grey] possessed absolute command it is probable that six months would have seen the end of the war", I wish I could be sure that this results from pessimism and not from wishful thinking. Perhaps "... that inimitable weapon in the hands of a British soldier, the bayonet", (p.44) should have been put to more effect.

Regrettably, then, it must be reported that this book is confused, not always accurate and of no value in encouraging any wider understanding of the events described. Nonetheless, it is valuable for its record of places and remains relating to the events described. One such I found quite fascinating was mention of practice pa built from Taranaki experience on an artillery range possibly in the Point Chevalier district. The author's documentation of the destruction of too many of the archaeological sites of the Great South Road is the result from a rare interest and unique knowledge. We can only share his concern that nothing more is lost.

Nigel Prickett

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