

Kupapa – saints or sinners?

– Danny Keenan

Kupapa occupy a delicate position in New Zealand history.

They are the Maori who, for a variety of reasons, in the mid-1800s sided with the Colonial Government in battles against other Maori.

They were rewarded for that “loyalty”, for standing up against those whom the Crown sometimes branded as “savages and barbarians”.

Some kupapa received awards – and pensions.

But, perhaps more pertinently, their pro-Government efforts helped to safeguard *their* land against confiscation.

The label of kupapa, however, still has a taint about it. For some Maori kupapa has meant no more than desisting from the debate or fray. In other words, it meant being neutral.

But for other Maori it has meant crawling on all fours, and implies treachery.

The whole business had its origins in the 1840s when British Army soldiers were carrying the weight of the war against Maori. The British had ample men to send in against warriors who were holed up in various defensive pa.

But in some cases, they also used Maori forces. For example, Tamati Waaka Nene of Nga Puhī played an important support role for the British in the Northern War of 1845-46.

But this chief was an exception. The British generally didn't use Maori to fight their battles.

Once the British had gone home, however, with the Crown, in effect, having won the fight for sovereignty, the New Zealand Armed Constabulary was set up to mop up any continuing Maori resistance.

And the Constabulary was prepared to use huge numbers of Maori fighting men to bolster their ranks.

Many individual Maori enlisted with the Constabulary and fought against “rebellious” Maori. Other Maori tribes

formed their own militia units to provide support, such as Te Arawa's Flying Column, or the Whanganui Native Contingent.

As a result, many tribes fought other tribes. In fact, that was such a feature of the late 1860s that it has been seen as a Maori civil war like the Musket Wars 1818-1832.

During the wars, many kupapa Maori became famous and their exploits and ferocity were widely admired, especially by the settlers.

Perhaps the most famous of them was Rapata Wahawaha of Ngati Porou.

He'd been born into Te Aowera, a Ngati Porou hapu, in the early 1800s.

As a young boy, he was captured during inter-tribal warfare and enslaved.

But he emerged as a leader in the 1860s. He'd been to meetings in support of setting up a Maori king.

And, when war broke out in 1863, some Ngati Porou sought to join up in support of the King's forces.

There was a problem with that scheme, though. An Arawa war party stopped them crossing through the Waiariki region.

Then Ngati Porou interests took a different turn in 1865 when the Pai Marire movement started catching on in the East Coast.

A number of Ngati Porou became Hau Hau converts. Many others resisted – and resented the Hau Hau incursion.

Rapata was one of those who was hoha with the Hau Hau.

He fought against them at Mangaone and at Tikitiki. And he helped, as did some government forces, bring about their defeat near the mouth of the Waipū River.

Rapata then led a strong Ngati Porou counter-attack against the Hau Hau at Pakairomirani and Te Horo.

He shot his prisoners, as he later did at Pukemaire Hill and Hungahunga-toroa.

And, in time, he was insisting that all Hau Hau from Ngati Porou swear allegiance to Queen Victoria, or face the same fate.

By late 1865, the Hau Hau still had a hold on the Poverty Bay area, that was until Rapata dealt to their final bastion at Waerenga-a-Hika.

Prisoners (Te Kooti among them) were shipped off to the Chatham Islands.

Attention now turned to the Hawke's Bay, with Rapata moving his Ngati Porou party south to support Ngati Kahungunu near Lake Waikaremoana.

Once again all the prisoners were executed. After these engagements, that was pretty much the end of the Hau Hau influence in the east – though it was a different story in the Urewera, which still lay beyond Crown control.

The East Coast remained quiet until Te Kooti landed after escaping from the Chatham Islands. Rapata was brought down from Ngati Porou with a sizable force of local men. Te Kooti had eluded the Government forces at Puketapu and retired to Makaretu. But Rapata attacked this pa and forced him to retreat to Ngatapa.

A siege was laid there, but Te Kooti escaped by scaling sheer cliffs behind the pa. Prisoners, however, were again executed in large numbers.

Soon afterwards there was the Urewera invasion and most of Te Kooti's support was driven out or destroyed.

So Te Kooti moved his operations to Taupo and sought, unsuccessfully, to build a grand Maori alliance with the Maori King against the Government and the Government's Maori supporters.

When Te Kooti returned to the Urewera he was once again hunted by Rapata. At least one operation was a joint effort, with Rapata linking up with another notable kupapa, Te Keepa Te Rangihiwini or Major Kemp.

Back on the East Coast, Rapata is still highly regarded among his Ngati Porou people, especially for protecting tribal interests by waging war against Maori insurgents. In fact, he's revered for saving Ngati Porou from the Hau Hau and confiscations.

And he's also fondly remembered for his later role as a mentor and protector of the young Apirana Ngata.

Another prominent kupapa chief from further south was Te Keepa Te Rangihwinui of Wanganui.

He'd been born at Tuwhakatupua on the Manawatu River. His father, Mahurea Paki Tanguru o Te Rangi, was a warrior chief of Muapoko.

Te Keepa became well known locally as Major Kemp. He fought against the Hau Hau (when they attempted

prominent local chief, Hoanui Hipango, was killed.

Meanwhile Te Keepa had enlisted in a Wanganui Native Contingent which chased the Hau Hau to Weraroa and Waitotara. They were then recalled to Pipiriki, which was under siege.

And elements of Te Keepa's force were sent as far north as Opotiki, following the hanging of the missionary, Volkner, in 1865.

As the Hau Hau wars simmered down, new Maori "belligerents" arose, especially Titokowaru in South Taranaki and Te Kooti in the Poverty Bay.

The threat of Te Kooti led to Te Keepa's involvement (with Rapata) in the Urewera.

Te Keepa went back to Wanganui, but soon pitched in against Titokowaru.

(Moutoa Gardens), complete with detailed battle descriptions, attests to the enduring memory of this kupapa.

A third kupapa leader, from the same era, hasn't enjoyed anything like that acclaim.

He's Wiremu Te Wheoro, who was born in the Waikato and became paramount chief of Ngati Naho just before the invasion of the Waikato in 1863.

Earlier (at a meeting in Rangiriri in 1857), Te Wheoro had spoken against a proposal to install a new Maori king.

He supported the Governor and spoke favourably of government policies towards Maori.

Then, six years later, when the British invaded, Te Wheoro was commissioned as a captain in the Colonial militia – and offered his services as a guide.

His men ferried supplies for the British, but he didn't take part in any of the hostilities.

After the defeat of Tainui at Rangiriri, Te Wheoro acted as an intermediary between the Government and the retreating Maori King – and he continued to operate as a link.

He often met with the King in refuge, and tried to persuade him to meet with Crown officials.

He hoped that Tawhiao might accept his losses and negotiate directly with the Crown for redress. Tawhiao refused.

Eventually, Te Wheoro was elected Member of Parliament for Western Maori and served for two terms.

He promoted the cause of the Maori King in Parliament and pushed for reconciliation between Tainui and the Crown.

But, ultimately, his support from the King movement dwindled and he was replaced by Henare Kaihau, a nominee of Tawhiao. And Te Wheoro slipped away into obscurity.

He was never forgiven for his relationship with the British Army.

The Army's invasion of the Waikato had led to the raupatu, the land confiscations, which is a legacy too keenly felt among Waikato Maori to be ignored.

Raupatu was the issue over which Tawhiao would not compromise. Te Wheoro suffered accordingly and his families suffer still.

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The Arawa Flying Column – at Kaiteriria, Rotorua.

incursions into Wanganui), joined the pursuit of Titokowaru in South Taranaki, and later linked up with Rapata to pursue Te Kooti throughout the National Park region.

Te Keepa's initial brush with the Hau Hau came in 1864 when the upper Whanganui River tribes adopted the Hau Hau faith.

They then threatened to sweep into Wanganui, laying a challenge on the Maori of Putiki pa.

The two sides met in May that year at the battle of Moutoa Island where the Hau Hau were repulsed.

Te Keepa then took off in pursuit of them to Ohoutahi pa, where a

His Native Contingent moved north to support the Armed Constabulary in its campaigns against Nga Ruahine and allies after 1867.

Te Keepa was present when Titokowaru delivered a major defeat to the Constabulary at Te Ngutu o Te Manu. His contingent also fought at Moturoa in 1868.

However, after his bruising encounters with Titokowaru, Te Keepa pulled his contingent back to Wanganui and put an end to his direct battles against Maori.

Today Te Keepa is still revered by Wanganui Maori as a great warrior chief. An impressive statue at Pakaitore