

THE FLAGSTAFF WAR

BY ROLY HERMANS



Introduction

This *Sharp Practice* scenario is based on the first major engagement between Maori and British forces during the Flagstaff (or Northern) War in New Zealand.

The flagstaff is cut down the first time

One March day in the year 1845, Maori chief Hone Heke stood up in front of his war-party of men from his section of the Ngapuhi tribe, the dominant local tribe in the Bay of Islands in New Zealand. “Did I not speak in favour of the Treaty of Waitangi between the British government and our sovereign chieftains?” he declared angrily. “Did I not embrace Christianity? Did I not present the tall flagstaff on Maiki Hill above the town of Kororareka? And what is our reward? The government moves the capital from here in Kororareka down to Auckland, and imposes customs dues on visiting ships. Our trade with the *pakeha*, the white man, vanishes like water in the sand.”

The warriors murmured in agreement. Heke raised his voice dramatically. “We do not want to drive away the *pakeha* we rely on for trade, but we must make a gesture of defiance. So we will cut down the *kara*, the British colours, that fly on the flagstaff on Maiki Hill!”

The next day Heke’s war-party beached their *waka*, or canoes, on Kororareka’s waterfront. Not for nothing was Kororareka known as ‘the Hellhole of the Pacific’. The shoreline of the main town of the Bay of Islands, built on trade with visiting whaling ships, was lined with red-gabled wooden grogshops and brothels. For three days the war-party remained in the town, the young bloods swaggering into stores and private houses alike, seizing whatever they fancied, the settlers helpless to stop them. On the third day, the flagstaff on Maiki Hill was cut down. The war-party returned home, pleased with their booty and satisfied that their gesture had been successfully made.

The town’s inhabitants sent an urgent appeal to the colony’s capital in Auckland for help to prevent a reoccurrence. A few weeks later, Governor James Fitzroy and a detachment of troops sailed into Kororareka Bay.

Fitzroy met with the local chiefs to discuss their concerns and what could be done to contain the firebrand Heke. Tamati Waka Nene, leader of another section of the Ngapuhi, stood up. “If you



remove these troops and redress our grievances about customs duties,” he declared to Fitzroy, “we will keep Heke in check and protect the *pakeha* in the district.”

Fitzroy accepted Waka Nene’s offer. He ordered the troops to return to Auckland and Sydney, and declared Kororareka a free port. Heke himself even offered to erect another flagstaff.

The flagstaff is cut down the second time

On reflection, and with the prompting of interested parties, Heke began to rue his decision to replace the flagstaff. Trouble flared up again in the Bay over the next few months as restless young men began to carry out depredations on outlying settlers.

One summer day in early January, Heke visited his friend, the acting consul for the United States, a storekeeper named Henry Green Smith.

“Hone, you see that?” asked Smith, pointing at the British flag fluttering on the new flagstaff above the town. “That goddam flag shows how you Maori are now slaves of the British. We Americans didn’t put up with that. So we rebelled, and now we fly our own flag.”

“I burn to do likewise,” replied Heke solemnly.

“Well said, Hone, well said!” retorted Smith. He walked over to a drawer, pulled out a folded American flag, and presented it to Heke. “Here, and when you do make a stand, you fly this here flag to show how true people fight against tyranny.”

By first light the next morning, the British flagstaff had fallen for a second time. Heke’s *waka taua*, or war-canoe, paraded round the harbour, his *kai-hautu*, or fogleman, chanting a battle-song. Heke himself stood at the steering-paddle, while the American flag billowing from the *waka*’s carved sternpost.

The flagstaff is cut down the third time

A week later, the government brig *Victoria* sailed into Kororareka Bay and landed a small detachment of troops.

The Reverend Henry Williams watched as the soldiers hauled up a new flagstaff on Maika Hill. “I don’t know about flaunting the British flag in the face of the natives like that,” grumbled the missionary, who in former times had been Hone Heke’s mentor and teacher. “Not, at any rate, until we can guard it efficiently. Otherwise Heke will have it down again.”

Sure enough, by daylight next morning, Heke and his men had cut down the flagstaff for the third time. They fired a triumphant volley on the beach, danced a war-dance, and then departed in their canoes.

Will the flagstaff fall for a fourth time?



British briefing ¹

On the evening of 10 March 1845, Police Magistrate Thomas Beckham faced a meeting of leading townsmen, naval officers from the recently arrived HMS *Hazard*, and army officers from the 96th Regiment.

“We’ve been informed that Hone Heke is planning to fall on Kororareka tomorrow,” Beckham commenced. “We’ve got to stop him looting the town and attacking its citizens, and also from cutting down the flagstaff a fourth time.”

Acting-Commander Robertson of the *Hazard* stood up. “The attack will most likely come from Matauwhi Bay. So I’ll place one of *Hazard*’s guns at the southern end of the town, facing down the valley to the bay. Early tomorrow morning I’ll also send a work party of sailors and marines down there to dig some more trenches.”

Robertson gestured towards the officer standing beside him. “Lieutenant Philpotts will organise and drill the more steadfast of the settlers into a civic guard, and base them in the sapling stockade around Mr. Polack’s house in the north part of town. There are the stands of arms and a thousand rounds of ball cartridge kept there that they can use. If needs be, the stockade can also be a refuge for our women and children.”

“Meanwhile,” added Robertson, “*Hazard* will stay moored in the bay in case her broadside is needed to cover the town.”

Beckham nodded in agreement. He turned to the two young officers from the 96th. “Lieutenant Barclay, if you could quarter your men of the 96th in the barracks in town. And you, Ensign Campbell, take a party up Maiki Hill to guard the flagstaff. We’ve had a prefabricated blockhouse landed from *Hazard* and assembled up there, and surrounded it with a ditch and palisade. The new flagstaff is sheathed in iron hoops and chains to a height of 10 feet, so it won’t fall easily to a Maori tomahawk again.”

Beckham then addressed a sturdy-looking settler in a sombre suit. “Mr Hector, you’ll take charge of the old ship’s guns emplaced beside the lower blockhouse that we’ve built on the spur above Polack’s stockade.” Cornthwaite Hector nodded in affirmation. Although just the local solicitor, he was known as a man of much spirit and resolution.

The police magistrate straightened and eyed the whole meeting. “Gentlemen, I don’t want you to start the shooting. But if they do attack you, then do what must be done. I fear it is going to be long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

Early morning, 11 March 1845: Acting Commander Robertson RN, Status III, is with a work party of twelve sailors and marines near the single gun on the road to Matauwhi Bay. Lt Barclay, Status I, and twelve men of the 96th are in the barracks in town. Ensign Campbell, Status I, has a party of ten men of the 96th in the upper blockhouse on Maiki Hill. Lieutenant Philpotts RN, Status II, and Police Magistrate Thomas Beckham, Status I, are with twenty armed settlers in the

¹ The wording in this story is based heavily on three books: *The New Zealand Wars: a history of the Maori campaigns and the pioneering period* by James Cowan; and *The Colonial New Zealand Wars* by Tim Ryan and Bill Parham; and *The New Zealand Wars* by James Belich.



stockade at Polack's house. Mr Cornthwaite Hector, Status II, commands two gun crews emplaced beside the lower blockhouse - he can give orders to any settlers, but not regulars.²

Robertson's work party starts with an ambush because the Maori will not be expecting them so far forward when their raid commences.

The settlers will also be prone to looting (or trying to save their own goods) if the Maori break into the central part of the town.

Characters

Police Magistrate Thomas Beckham. Beckham is nominally in charge of the town, but will have to coordinate with the Army and Navy. He is very cautious. He is possibly lecherous, and something of a ladies man.

Acting-Commander Robertson RN. Jolly good chap, who is jointly in charge of the town with Beckham. Has only just become commander of HMS *Hazard* after the recent drowning of the captain. Respected by his men. An excellent fighter who can 'wield his sword like some hero of old romance'.

Lieutenant Philpotts RN. A fine fella. A plucky young naval officer, though a bit rough and ready, and inclined to be impulsive and erratic. Known as 'Topi' (Toby) by the Maori.

Lieutenant Barclay. A young buck. An amiable and gentlemanly, but rather inexperienced, subaltern of the 96th Regiment. Rather inclined to caution.

Ensign Campbell. A very young buck from the 96th. Also inexperienced, but keen and eager. Carries the curiosity of youth, even to the point of leaving his post if he spies something interesting.

Mr Cornthwaite Hector. A fine fella. Local solicitor. Honourable, brave, excellent fighter and leader, respected by the townsfolk in the town (but, by Jove, from a military point of view, what does this upstart civilian know about fighting?).

² I have reduced the numbers of men and guns involved in the actual battle to suit the 'Sharp Practice' rules.



Maori briefing ³

On the evening of 10 March 1845, Hone Heke sat at his campfire with his ally Kawiti, planning their raid on Kororareka the next day.

“I have said that I will cut down the flagstaff,” stated Heke, “and I am resolved to make my word true.”

“In the morning I will then attack the town of Kororareka from the direction of Matauwhi Bay from the south with my party of Ngati-Hine warriors,” suggested Kawiti. “Meanwhile our Kapotai allies should move in from the east, distracting the *pakeha* by sniping on the town. Thus we will draw the attention of the soldiers who guard the flagstaff, so that you and your party of Ngapuhi warriors, having climbed the hill of Maiki from the north, should have the opportunity to cut the flag down.”

“That is a good plan,” nodded Heke. “But you must not engage fully with the *pakeha*, as we wish to continue trading with them after. Merely make a demonstration to divert their attention so I shall be able to cut down the flagstaff. I will only attack any soldiers guarding the flagstaff, as I have given my word not to harm any *pakeha* in the town.”

When they had finished forming their plan, the *tohunga*, or priests, of the war-party threw darts to divine the event. First they threw one for Heke, which went straight and fair, and fortunate. They then threw two more darts for the soldiers and the flagstaff. Both darts turned to one side, and fell with the wrong side up. When this was told the people they were very glad, and had no longer any fear.

Then Kawiti, who was himself a great *tohunga*, uttered a charm, spat upon two divining sticks and dropped them to see which one would fall uppermost to indicate the victor in the forthcoming battle. Kawiti’s stick went straight and fair, but it turned wrong side up, the omen of death and people. The stick for the British also fell the same way.

“It is good,” declared Kawiti. “Here have I two darts ominous of success, and bravery, and death. Our enemy will prove very strong and brave, they will suffer much from us, and so will we from them. I am not displeased, for this is war and not play.”

Early morning, 11 March 1845: Hone Heke, Status III, and Riwhitete Pokai, Status I, start with thirty Ngapuhi warriors emplaced in ambush on Maiki Hill. Te Ruki Kawiti, Status II, and Pumuka, Status I, are leading thirty Ngati-Hine warriors to approach the town from the south. The Kapotai, under their chief, Status II, enter with thirty men from the east.

All Maori commence the game on blinds and in ambuscade. Hone Heke’s party is only permitted to attack forces protecting the flagstaff. They are not permitted to attack the town itself. The two diverting forces of the Kapotai and Kawiti’s Ngati-Hine cannot engage in fisticuffs unless they

³ This wording is adapted from Frederick Edward Maning’s *Old New Zealand : a tale of the good old times : and A History of the war in the north against the chief Heke, in the year 1845, told by an old chief of the Ngapuhi tribe*.



themselves are attacked. While looting is not their objective, the warriors will be prone to loot if British forces fall back before them through the town.

Characters

Hone Heke. Maori chief said to have ‘a mingling of passionate patriotism, ambition, bravado, vanity, and a shrewdness sharpened by his partial civilization’. The first chief to sign the Treaty of Waitangi with the British Crown in 1840. A strapping chap, universally loved by his men, chivalrous, and an accomplished fighter.

Riwhitete Pokai. One of Hone Heke’s trusted lieutenants. A noted *toa*, or warrior. A giant of a man, who is reputed to be the best shot and fastest runner of the Ngapuhi tribe.

Te Ruki Kawiti. Hone Heke’s uncle, an elderly but still warlike chief. Of average stamp, honourable and an accomplished fighter. Has only reluctantly agreed to sign the Treaty of Waitangi, which he sees as signing away Maori land.

Pumuka. A renowned chief.

Chief of the Kapotai. Chief of one of Heke’s groups, the Kapotai *hapu*, or sub-tribe.



Umpire's Notes

The town of Kororareka is bounded by hills, with a higher hill to the north (Maiki Hill), a pass to the east, and another pass to the south towards Matauwahi Bay. The terrain is roughly forested apart from the town areas. Maori are not affected moving through the terrain, but British are affected unless they are on roads, tracks, in built-up areas or on the beach.

The blockhouses are simple wooden constructions. The guns are emplaced and cannot be shifted. HMS *Hazard* also has a broadside of four guns⁴ that can only fire at right angles to the ship (in other words, only at or over the town itself).

The flagstaff is strengthened with iron hoops and chains, so to chop it down will require a task of 24 (which can be rolled over a number of turns).

The British forces will be placed on the table as explained in the briefing. As the Maori will not be expecting Robertson's work party so far forward when their raid commences, they'll start with an ambush card.

The Maori forces will enter the table on Blinds, and are deemed to be in ambush mode. Maori use the rules relating to War Parties (page 33).

The two diverting forces of the Kapotai and Kawiti's Ngati-Hine cannot engage in fisticuffs unless they themselves are attacked. While looting is not their objective, the warriors will be prone to loot if British forces fall back before them through the town.

Hone Heke's party is only permitted to attack forces protecting the flagstaff. They are not permitted to attack the town itself. The plan is for the Kawiti's Ngati-Hine and the Kapotai parties to just provide a diversion so that Hone Heke's Ngapuhi warriors can cut down the flagstaff, but they may be dragged further into the action if attacked by the British.

Maori are only prone to looting if they pass through parts of the town from which the British have fallen back. Settlers will also be prone to looting (trying to save their own goods) if the Maori break into the central part of the town.

If looting starts, throw to see if looted buildings are set alight on a 5 or 6. If guns are fired at unoccupied town buildings, also check for fire in the same way.

Victory is simply based on the flagstaff – if it falls, the Maori win; if it still stands at the end of the game, the British win.

Optional rules

Two incidents from the real battle can be recreated using these rules:

⁴ For game purposes I have reduced the number of guns in HMS *Hazard*'s broadside.



- If Ensign Campbell hears any gunfire from elsewhere on the board before he is attacked, his curiosity will get the better of him, so that he and half his force will leave the upper blockhouse to watch the action below from the edge of the hilltop, leaving the gate of the palisade open.
- After six moves, throw two dice every move. On 11 or 12, a careless spark accidentally blows up the powder in Polack's stockade. This will be signal a general retreat to the beach where the soldiers and settlers will be picked up and taken out to ships (the ships' boats need not be modeled – any British figures making it to the beach are deemed safe).

Game Cards

British	Maori	General
Police Magistrate Thomas Beckham	Hone Heke	Tiffin
Acting-Commander Robertson RN	Riwhitete Pokai	Blank Card
Lieutenant Philpotts RN	Te Ruki Kawiti	
Lieutenant Barclay	Pumuka	
Ensign Campbell	Chief of the Kapotai	
Mr Cornthwaite Hector	Kia Kaha I	
Grasp the Nettle I	Kia Kaha II	
Grasp the Nettle II	Kia Kaha III	
Grasp the Nettle III		
Sharp Practice		

Bonus Cards

The British have the Hard Fighters card (as per the Portuguese Fighting Cocks card on page 58).

The Maori have the Mana card (as per the Spanish Ancient Relics card on page 60).

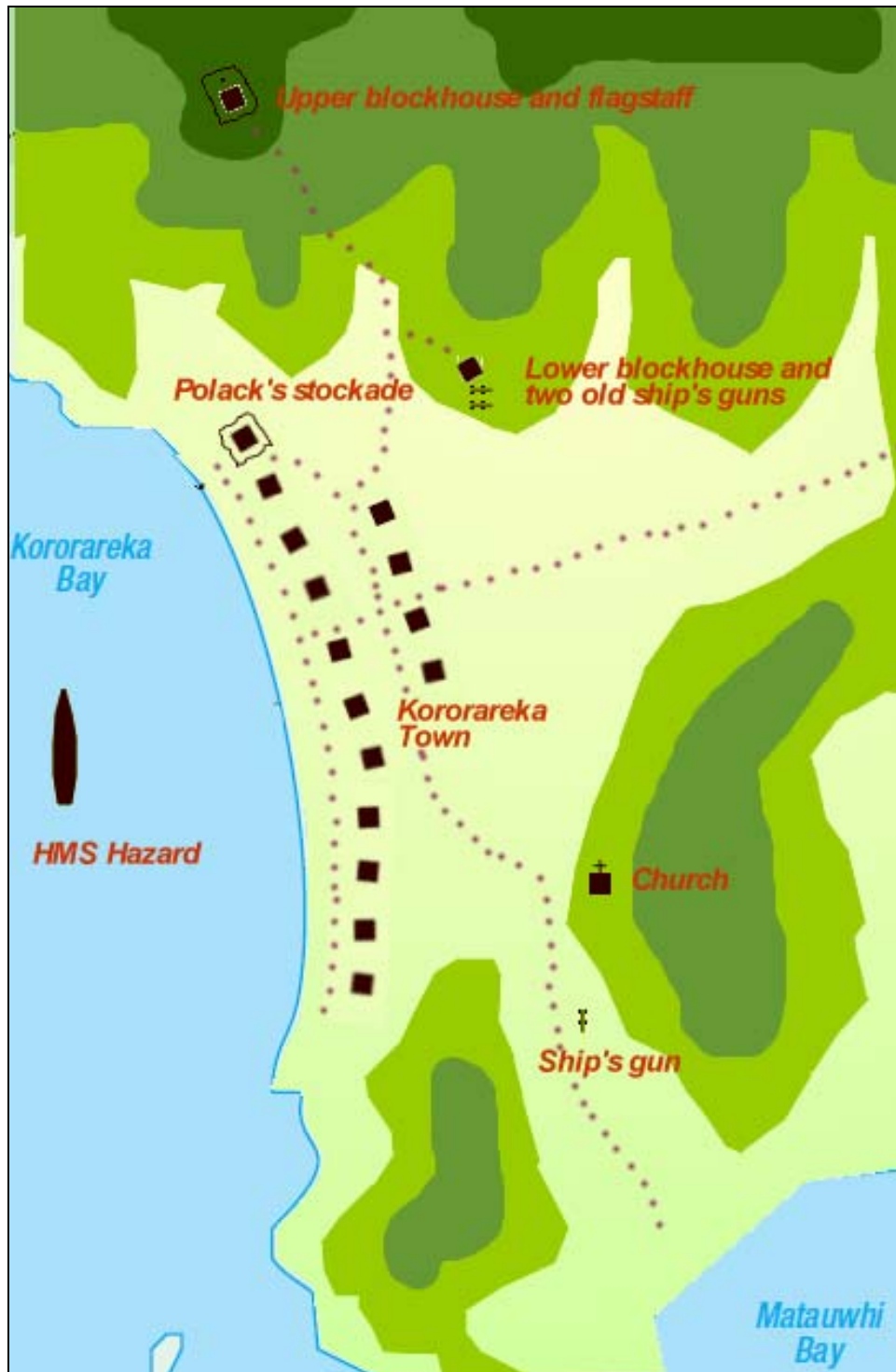
Figures and terrain

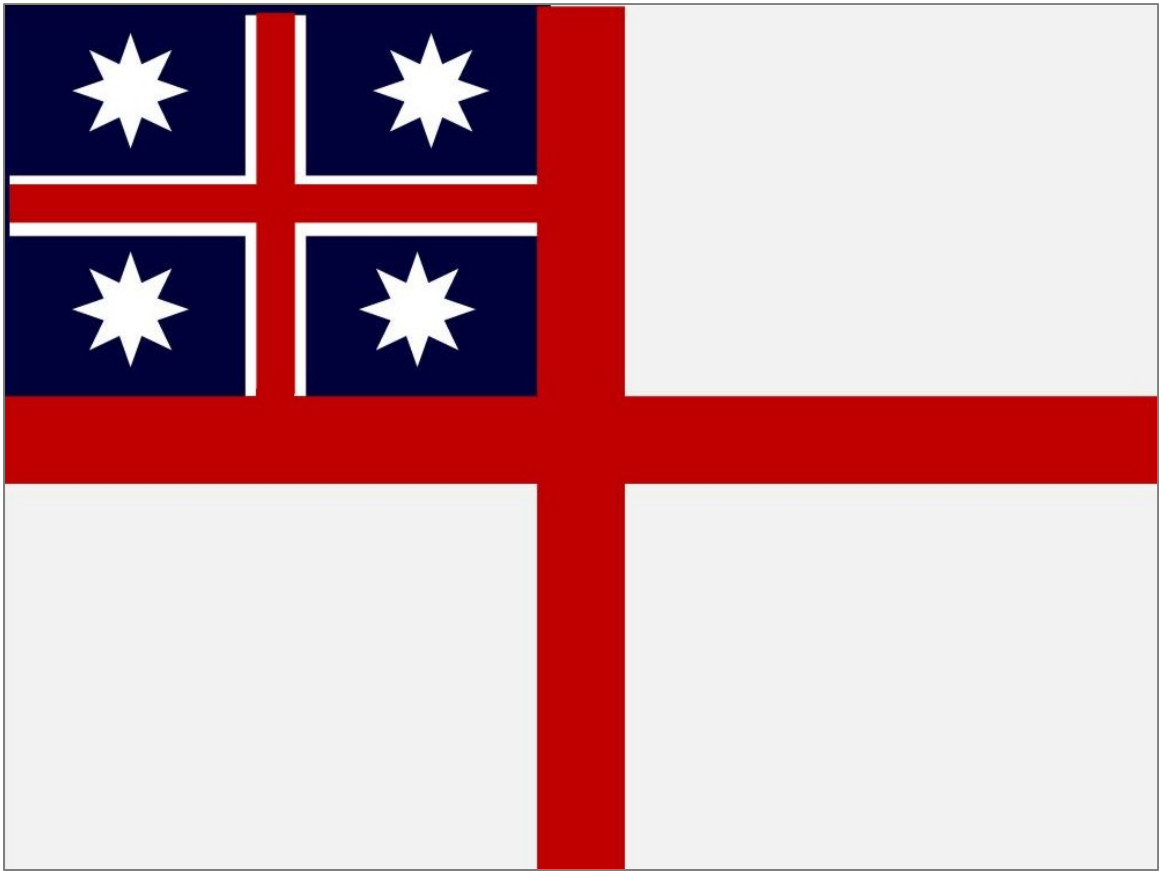
Kororareka was a straggling town lining a gravelly beach, faced with European-style single and two-storied weatherboard stores and public houses, along with traditional Maori *whares*, or houses, of slab and fern, tree-trunk and raupo. This juxtaposition of architectural styles could be represented by using model buildings aimed at the American West along with some Dark Ages thatched houses. The blockhouses were simple wooden buildings pre-constructed in Auckland and assembled on site – any sort of model wooden strongpoint should do.

The hills around the town were covered in bush, which can be represented by dotting the hillsides with trees and scrub. A particularly distinctive plant found in the New Zealand bush is the tree-fern. You could place the occasional model palm-tree amongst your other model trees, although palm-trees are actually a bit taller and slimmer than the New Zealand tree-fern.

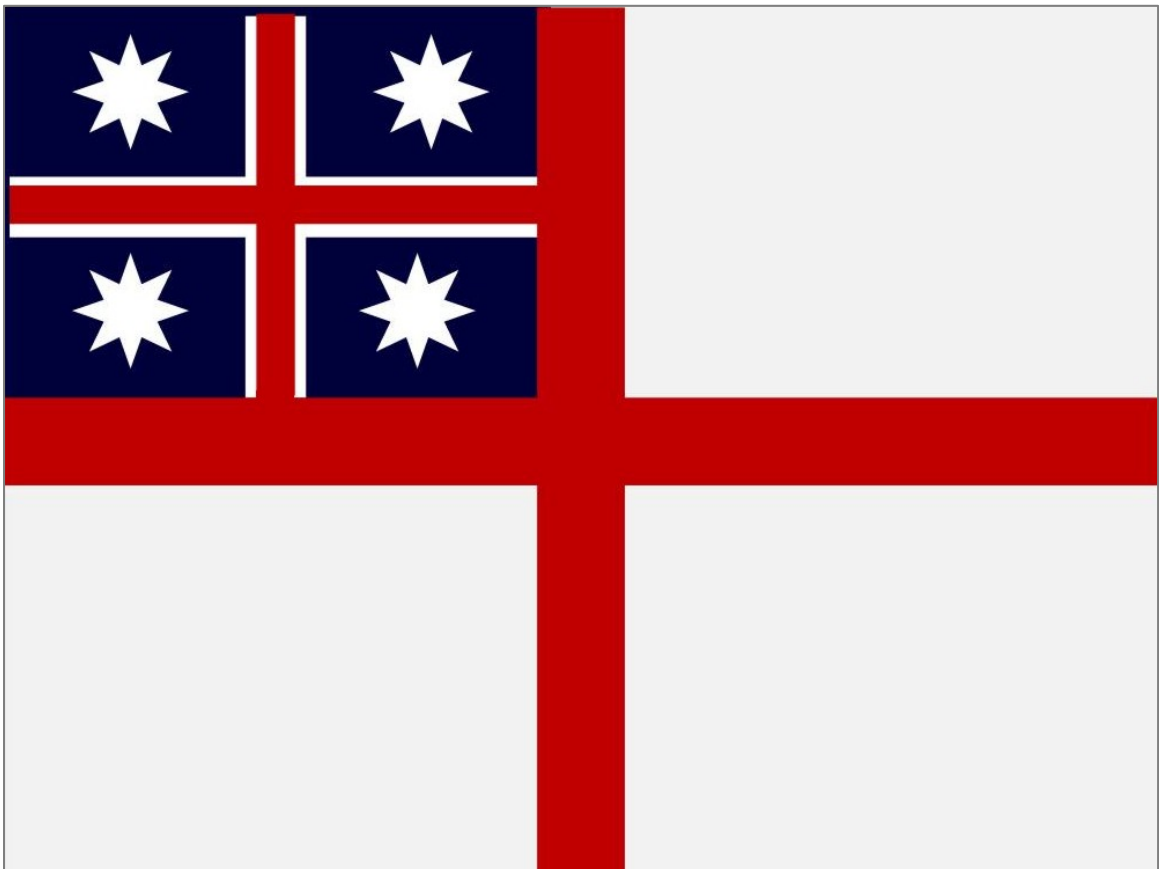


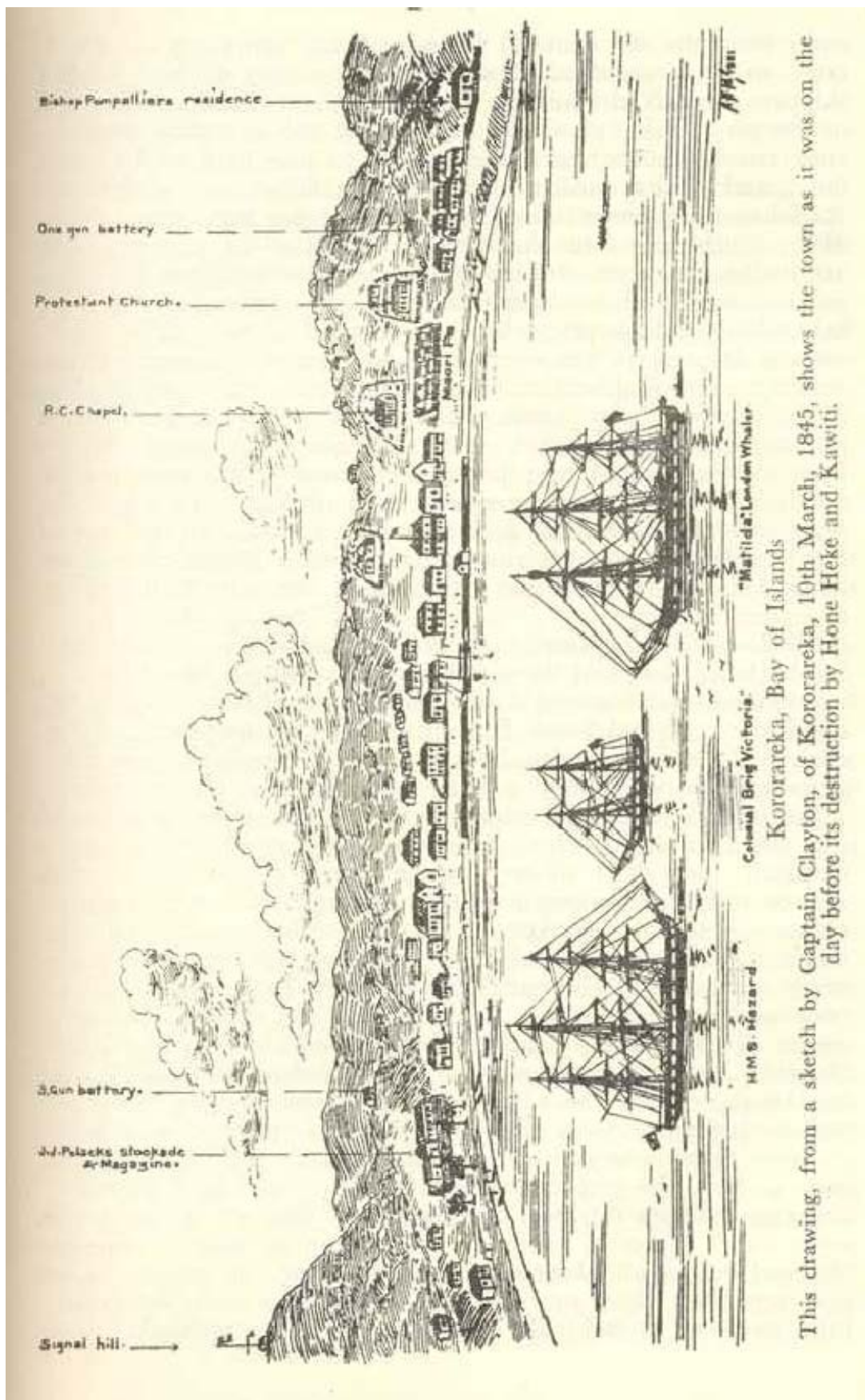
Empress Miniatures have recently announced a new range of 28mm Maori Wars figures that would be perfect for this scenario. They include soldiers (in shell jackets and forage caps), armed settlers and Maori warriors. Alternatively, you could use the 28mm New Zealand Wars range from Old Glory.





Design for Maori blind, based on the flag authorised by King William IV for the United Tribes.





This drawing, from a sketch by Captain Clayton, of Kororareka, 10th March, 1845, shows the town as it was on the day before its destruction by Hone Heke and Kawiti.