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The Great South Road
The Road of Invasion

The Great South Road was built as a road of invasion. As Governor Grey explained to the Secretary of State For the Colonies in January 1862 this road would mean, "The Waikato River will lie quite open to our attacks at any moment."

On the 12th of July 1863 General Cameron declared war on the Waikato by crossing the Mangatawhiri River. There were battles along the Koheroa Ridge, at Meremere and at Rangiriri. Cameron's British Army troops occupied Ngāruawāhia then by-passed the great defensive line that had been built at Pātirangi and went on to attack the village of Rangiowhia where Colonel Marmaduke Nixon's cavalry galloped into the village and burnt a whare with a number of occupants inside, killed non-combatants who may have been attempting to surrender and fired on residents of the village who had taken refuge inside the catholic church.

There were further skirmishes at Waiari and Hairini and the final battle at Ōrākau. Of the three hundred defenders at Ōrākau one hundred and sixty were killed inside the Pā or as they attempted to escape. The crown then confiscated 1.2 million acres of the Waikato north of the Punui River.

Earlier this year I drove down The Great South Road and through the Waikato visiting these sites. I was inspired to do this after reading Vincent O'Malley's book *The Great War for New Zealand – Waikato 1800 – 2000*.

These paintings are the result of that journey.

1 The Great South Road. Oil on canvas, eleven panels, each panel 41 x 88 cms.

2 My First Objective. Oil on board, three panels each panel 32 x 22 cms.

In May 1861 General Cameron informed the Military Secretary in London, "My first objective would probably be to penetrate the angle formed by Waipa and Horatiu (Waikato) Rivers, and to take possession of a point near their confluence called Ngaruawhia".

3 The Dense Forests and Impassable Swamps. Oil on board, 122 x 30 cms.

"I soon found that from the dense forests and impassable swamps which intervened between Auckland and the country occupied by the Waikato tribes, and from the want of roads or other means of communication, it was impossible to commence operations against them with any hope of success." wrote Governor Grey to the Duke of Newcastle. General Cameron was, Grey added, "pushing on, with all means at his disposal, a military road through the forests and swamps which lay between Auckland and the Waikato River."

4 Maungatautari, Kakepuku and Pirongia. Oil on board, three panels, each panel 26 x 16 cms.

As Cameron's army of occupation marched south these three significant mountains dominated the landscape: Maungatautari in the east, Kakepuku to the south and Pirongia in the west.

5 Wheat Was Being Grown. Oil on board, 40 x 18 cms.

The area around Rangiowhia was often referred to as the garden of New Zealand. Governor Grey himself on an early visit to the area in 1849 wrote, "Flour mills had been constructed and a watermill was planned. Wheat was being grown extensively - in one place on 1000 acres of fields - and orchards of the highest quality fruit trees were everywhere."

6 We were obliged at last to set fire. Oil on board. 18 x 23 cms.

One member of the Colonial Defence Force who participated in the attacks at Rangiowhia on the 21st. of February described how the first assaults on a whare in which locals were sheltering were unsuccessful so, "We were obliged at last to set fire." to it. When the fire drove out three Māori they were shot. Seven more charred bodies were later found inside.

7 Rangiowhia. Oil on board, three panels, each panel 20 x 13 cms.

8 The Sacking of Kihikihi. Oil on Board, 120 x 14 cms

On the 23rd. of February 1864 Cameron's army occupied, looted and destroyed Kihikihi, burning the historic meetinghouse Hui Te Rangiora.

Edward Tedder, a member of the 40th regiment, described the looting in his diary,

"We appeared a queer string going home, everyman loaded with something. Kits of apples, peaches, potatoes, kumara, marrow, cabbages, and every other succulent, while poultry, pigs dead and alive, turkeys, crockery, tubs, buckets, paddles, and a thousand other articles made up the selection."

9 Songs for the Clearances. Oil on board. 180 x 30 cms.

Sometimes paintings take on a life of their own. This started out to be a painting of the band rotunda that now occupies the confluence of the Waipa and the Waikato Rivers at Ngāruawāhia where the Māori King's flagpole once stood, but too many trees grew in the painting, so I called it Songs for the Clearances. Some of the soldiers in the invading British Army would have probably been turfed off their own land during the highland clearances.

For more detailed information about the invasion of the Waikato I recommend Vincent O'Malley's magnificent book The Great War for New Zealand, Waikato 1800- 2000. It is published by Bridget Williams Books.