Hist 316: Commentary

For this project we were allocated material relating to the Battle of Te Ranga, which took place on 21 June 1864 and aftermath. Our material contained a list of the names of the Maori men and boys who surrendered to the British, and included details in relation to the weapons they carried and surrendered, acknowledgement of their individual Hapu, notes relating to their health and also details regarding their signature (whether it was by name or by the X mark). These details enabled us to easily define categories within our database, which would allow a third party to easily search for a person involved in the Battle and gather what limited information is available on the circumstances of the person’s surrender.

Our first categories are based on the names of the individuals, but they are also sorted into the allocated groups based on their Hapu name. This allows someone to easily manoeuvre through the database, with the option to search for individuals within specific Hapu groups. The database then categorises the particular weapons and ammunition the individual was carrying, and whether they signed with their name or an X (an especially important piece of information in regards to literacy and writing within the Māori population at this time).

The data we received had two interesting different groups of individuals, firstly, those who surrendered immediately and secondly, those who surrendered several days later. Because of this we decided to include a category to define the different groups.

The final section of the database was dedicated to the unique or extra information available on particular individuals. This information ranged from the state of their health, to their age, and interestingly, to the spelling of their names with inclusions of letters not found in the Māori alphabet (whether this was by mistake of H.E. Rice or maybe an insight into the relations between European settlers and the Māori people). At the end of the database we have calculated each category and given totals for each. All these categories together create a small yet intriguing insight into what happened to individuals and Hapu during this period. Insights that we began to see issues like the relationship between those who surrendered first, and the lack of information about their arms. A further insight related to the mode of signing (I.e., by using an X) and the establishment of literacy and whether this had an adverse affect on those Hapu and groups who could not read and understand the issues at hand. This compared with the latter groups (who surrendered later) in which almost every individual was armed, and signed using their name rather than an X.

These series of relationships even based on the smallest amount of detail, allow historical assumptions to be made, something that many historians must do from the lack of further evidence.

Because of the scarceness of the information, the limitations of this historical source are apparent. The main limitation of the source is its bias as Māori perspectives and reasoning have been largely ignored by government discussion. The source identifies a high level of misunderstanding between Māori and Pākehā. George Grey discussed in his letter on July 29th 1864 that while his advisers encouraged a rapid continuation of war, he supported a period of reflection. This was due to Māori being “exceedingly ill-informed as to our intentions and the steps they should take.” This suggests that as the surrenders were dated the 24th and 25th of July 1864, prior to George Grey’s letters, Māori surrendered without full knowledge of, the consequences of surrendering and the courses of action open to them. Rice explained in his letter dated the 26th of July that the “wish and will” of Māori was for peace to be brokered. The surrenders were therefore accepted, prior to Grey’s concerns being addressed, without officials feeling obligated to explain circumstances to Māori. It is unclear whether Māori were aware of the long term consequences that surrendering would have on their long-term land ownership, or whether they were more concerned with short term benefits of having a, still alien, intense battle with high casualties during mid-winter finished. The source simply lists surrenders, without providing any insight into Māori reasoning. This implies that officials at this time were more concerned with settler needs than Māori wellbeing.

Another limitation is that Rice did not collect a list of arms or description of health from the Te Papa site as he did from the Haeriui site. While he states he would send them steamer later, it is unclear whether he did. A comprehensive list of arms would be important in analysing the differing levels of resources between Māori and Pākehā. If arms were evenly balanced, other more immediate concerns such as weather, influential leadership and inexperience could be causes for surrender. Conversely if Māori were logistically inferior, this could be a direct cause of surrender.

In addition to an individual’s name, tribal association and arms found on the person, other information regarding to Māori reasoning would have been important to collect. A) *Reasons for surrendering*: It is unclear whether Māori fully understood the consequences of surrendering. While some Māori were noted as “sick,” sickness cannot conclusively explain surrender. A brief explanation of why each individual surrendered would provide greater insight to the Māori perspective.

B) *Whether an individual was of chiefly or influential status*: The actions of a prominent individual are likely to encourage the actions of others and would influence statistics.

C) *Length of time fighting*: Considering that the battles were playing out in mid-winter, fatigue and numbers of casualties would have been considerable issues for Māori, the length of time spent at war would influence statistics.

In completing this database analysis, our group divided the tasks into three. Tegan compiled the data, created the carte-de-visite. Fin wrote and compiled the base of the commentary. Sheridan addressed the limitations of the sources and identified what further information on these individuals could have been found.