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chapter. His accounts of the organizational pathologies that either throttled the development, or later worked to ensure the demise, of elite special operations units is especially pertinent to the fledgling USSOCOM.

Of more historical interest is Ian Dear's *Ten Commando, 1942-1945*. This book tells the fascinating story of the special Inter-Allied Commando unit raised from men who had fled their own countries in Nazi-occupied Europe and had volunteered for service in the British Army. Among its members were Poles, Belgians, Norwegians, German Jews, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen who served in separate "troops" within the unit representative of their respective nationalities. The book is based largely on interviews of Ten Commando's veterans and surviving family members. The author's dependence on oral sources possibly accounts for the book's sometimes turgid style and overly detailed descriptions of Ten Commando's exploits and personalities. Although a crisper, faster paced narrative would have made for better reading, Dear has nonetheless pieced together a remarkable tale about one of the Second World War's most interesting military units.

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Belich, James. *The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict: The Maori, the British, and the New Zealand Wars*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.

It has become almost an axiom that the history of British military conflict with non-European peoples, from the eighteenth century victories of Clive in India to the crushing of the Dervishes at Omdurman, is an account of small British forces eventually triumphing over enormous odds. The reasons for such victories, or the emphasis put upon the various reasons, has changed with time. Moral and racial superiority was a more popular explanation of success in the nineteenth century, and technological superiority is favored in the later twentieth. Nevertheless, the general picture of continuing British victory, at least in the final battle, remains.

This view is based on the substantial evidence of the successful expansion of British power in Africa, India, the Far East and Australasia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The British did after all manage to conquer or occupy a very significant fraction of the earth's surface, and ended up ruling an even larger proportion of the world's population by the end of the nineteenth century. Mr. Belich's book, however, suggests to us that the legend of the invincible Briton may have less substance in reality than even many modern "revisionist" historians had thought.

This study is confined to an examination of the wars between the British — both imperial troops and settlers — and the Maori which took place

in North Island, New Zealand between 1845 and 1872. However, despite its limited scope in both place and time the methodology used and the conclusions reached may have important implications for the study of other conflicts in other areas.

The brief introduction surveys some of the unique local conditions which form a background to the conflict. Besides giving some basic information on the location and names of the various tribal groups this short essay outlines the main problems facing Maori resistance to the inroads of the British settlers. Firstly, the Maori numbers were small — possibly 60,000 in total at the time the wars were being fought. Secondly, their economy was unable to support a continuous war by a large force of warriors for a long period of time. Thirdly, the Maoris were divided. Tribal wars had been common before the arrival of the British settlers but they did not all agree on the price they were prepared to pay for this contact. Thus, the already small Maori forces were always divided and some *kupapa*, or pro-government forces, always fought on the British side. Finally, there was a technological gap which enlarged as time went on, but which was not as great as in many other areas of colonial conflict. The Maoris were always able to buy good side-arms and ammunition, but could not, of course, compete with the British in artillery.

Belich sees the almost thirty years of sporadic warfare as one long imperial war in which he recognizes five separate phases; the Northern War, the Taranaki War, the Waikato War and the campaigns against the Maori leaders Titokowaru and Te Kooti. The bulk of Belich's book is concerned with a description and analysis of each of these phases of the war, in which he shows that almost all the campaigns have certain features in common.

Firstly, the numbers of troops involved were small; the largest British force ever deployed fought in the Waikato War and only numbered about 18,000 men. But, in relation to the size of the local population, this army was extremely large; as Belich points out it was the equivalent of attacking modern India with an army of fifty million!

Secondly, the casualty rates seem, by the standards of many wars, to be tiny. The figures are often given in single digits and rarely go beyond one hundred killed and wounded for either side. Yet the savagery of the fighting leads the author, on more than one occasion, to compare the battles to miniature versions of First World War clashes, an example which has some validity as attacking British forces were often only stopped by casualty rates of more than forty percent.

Thirdly, unlike the wars in many other areas where small British armies were often attacked by much larger native forces, in New Zealand it was the Maoris who were constantly outnumbered by the invading British. Despite this discrepancy in the size of their forces, the British constantly failed to achieve a decisive and crushing defeat over the Maoris. Indeed at the Battle of Gate Pa in Tauranga, a British force of about 1,700 troops was defeated by a Maori force which Belich estimates was only one seventh its size.

Given the apparent hopelessness of the Maori position, why did it take the British nearly thirty years of conflict to establish even an incomplete control over North Island? At the time, and in many more recent histories, this was accounted for by a variety of excuses. Explanations ranged from incompetent leadership, overwhelming numbers of Maoris and even cowardice of the troops, to the difficult terrain the British had to fight in. At most, such explanations only allowed the Maoris the simple and straightforward attribute of being courageous or more familiar with the terrain.

Belich offers an alternative hypothesis. While acknowledging that individual incompetence did exist, he suggests that the British commanders — in particular Lieutenant General Duncan Alexander Cameron, and Colonel G.S. Whitmore — were very competent indeed. The main British problem was, Belich maintains, the military skill of the Maori leaders, especially the chiefs Rewi Maniapoto, Wiremu Tamehana and Riwha Titokowaru. Faced with the overwhelming fire-power of the larger British forces, he suggests that the Maori adopted a flexible response which was at the same time strategically offensive but tactically defensive.

Belich, however, does more than describe the wars and analyze their strategy and tactics. He attempts to explain why the descriptions of these conflicts have been so distorted in the past and to suggest some of the consequences of the Maori success in these wars. He concludes that the nineteenth century interpretation of the wars was greatly influenced by the current racial beliefs. Whilst it was acceptable to praise the Maoris as being brave, chivalrous and noble savages, it was a basic assumption of the Victorians that no “savages” could possess the “higher mental faculties.” Lacking these they could not have evolved a coherent and successful set of strategies and tactics to defeat the British — even to imagine them doing so was impossible for most nineteenth century writers. Hence the accepted view that the British military campaigns were hindered by incompetency, the terrain and even cowardice on occasions. But the idea that the superior race or technology finally triumphed became enshrined in the historiography. Evidence which conflicted with this comfortable and acceptable view was played down or just forgotten.

Nevertheless, the Maori resistance was effective in slowing down the British domination of North Island, and the final success of the British, Belich suggests, often owed as much to the efforts of their kupapa allies as to the settler forces. From this he makes a plausible case that the kupapa Maori’s performance in the New Zealand wars, and the settlers’ need for that help, was a powerful political influence in gaining the Maori a greater degree of political power and social acceptance as equals in the post-war settlement. Thus the superior status of the Maori in New Zealand compared to the aborigines in Australia or the non-Europeans in other British colonial areas may owe a debt to the strength and skill of the Maori resistance in the New Zealand wars.

Belich’s book is a result of extensive investigation in New Zealand and Britain and he has produced a well researched and persuasively argued exposition of his own theory that forgotten history is only forgotten, not lost. By

a wide reading of the original documents he has been able to exhume an alternative account of the New Zealand wars and has succeeded admirably in his self-appointed tasks of taking the first step “towards integrating the most important conflict fought in New Zealand into the story of the country as a whole” and of exploring “the possibility that preconceptions systematically affect interpretation.” Belich has excavated some of the forgotten history of the New Zealand wars; it is to be hoped that his work may stimulate similar research with other examples of the Victorian “small wars.”

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