



MEMORIAL SITE: Aroha Chamberlin holding Tiah Parker at the unveiling of a memorial for Maori slain during the Battle of Katikara.

Photo: MARK TAYLOR

Memorial unveiling sparks attack

By JULIET SMITH

THE Government came under attack during an unveiling of a memorial near Oakura for more than 20 Maori warriors killed there 139 years ago.

Parihaka kaumatua Te Ru Wharehoka said if there was a true partnership between Maori and the Crown the site would have been marked 100 years ago.

"Why did it take so long? It's not historical, it's hysterical."

Partnership was not happening, he said. "Where are we sharing? What are we sharing? We fought for our land. They died for what?"

Unease spread through the crowd of about 60 people, including many government and New Plymouth council officials during Mr Wharehoka's impassioned speech at Fort St George, near Oakura yesterday afternoon.

The memorial is the first the Crown has commemorated for those who fought against it in the New Zealand Wars.

Mr Wharehoka said the issue of the Pekapeka block, at Waitara, was com-

ing back up, and this was related to the present memorial.

"Are you giving it (Pekapeka land) back to the owners or are you going to stuff it in your pockets?"

"There was despair about what happened there so the government came here and tried to take more land."

The memorial marks the deaths of Maori who were killed during the Battle of Katikara.

Hymns were sung and the Reverend Albie Martin blessed the site. A concrete slab, a large boulder and a granite tablet mark the dead who are also buried beneath.

Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Judith Tizard and Associate Minister of Maori Affairs Tariana Turia unveiled the new memorial.

Ms Tizard said it was proper the dead should be honoured. "They were warriors but they were also sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. It's not just historic it's about who we are and where we will be in the future."

According to historical accounts, Governor Grey decided to return the Waitara Pekapeka land block to Maori,

acknowledging it had been wrongly purchased.

However, before he did so and without warning, Grey ordered the militia to reoccupy the Tataraimaka block, which settlers had been driven off during the first Taranaki land wars of 1860-1861.

Historian Chris Pugsley said the move was seen as an aggressive act by Maori and Grey had intended it so — to entice Taranaki Maori and their allies into war.

Local Taranaki Maori plotted to kill Grey by ambushing him on the way to Tataraimaka. However, a small party of soldiers was ambushed instead and one of the party killed.

On June 4 1863, a regiment of 873 marched on Fort St George, supported by artillery from the steamship HMS Eclipse, to exact revenge.

Against heavy odds, Maori retreated from the palisades to the inner earthworks, where they were trapped and killed. The lucky ones were able to flee into the bush.

The memorial was created by Nga Mahanga a Tairi hapu and the Crown.