

Proceeding in skirmishing order, we arrived at about half-past 2 o'clock p.m., at the skirt of the bush leading to the ranges on which the pa was situated, and after an half-hour's struggle through the bush, we came to a clearing. Halting, the Captain ordered our half ration of rum to be distributed, sending on the advance guard immediately after. When on having proceeded a few hundred yards, it became apparent that the advance guard had lost, or struck off the track, but that we had gained it. I then proposed to Captain Swift to advance and act as scout to the party, to which he immediately assented, cautioning me not to proceed more than thirty yards in front of the main body. After advancing in this order for about three-quarters of a mile, I observed tracks of Natives, and in large numbers; this I pointed out to the Captain, and a little farther on, I heard the Natives in loud debate, on which (expecting that they were returning on the track that we were pursuing), I again informed Captain Swift, who ordered the men to lie down in the bush, at the same time ordering them not to fire until he gave the word of command; however, on finding that the Natives were not advancing, I crept up to within twelve yards of them, when, from their conversation, I judged they were under the influence of liquor. Captain Swift immediately called to advance, ordering the men to "fix bayonets and charge," we advanced to within six yards of them when they opened a most terrific fire; Captain Swift and Lieutenant Butler were at this time leading on the men, and after receiving the enemy's fire, the men gave a cheer and returned it in grand style, Lieutenant Butler shooting down a Native on his right, turned his revolver to the left—as quick as thought, I saw him come on his knee, at the same time discharging the remainder of the barrels of his revolver, bringing another Native down at the same time that he fell himself. Seeing that he was wounded, I ordered Corporal Ryan and one of the men to take him to the rear, when he ordered me to lead the men to the front; on turning to my left I found Captain Swift mortally wounded: and after speaking a few words to him, he desired me to take his revolver and lead on the men, as at that time I was loading. With one loud huzza, we charged, burning to avenge our officers. I now found myself in an open clearing of a few yards, the rebels flying to cover on our front and left, where they opened fire on my small party, who at this time numbered 2 sergeants, 1 bugler, and 35 men. Seeing that we were greatly outnumbered, I determined to hold on our position, if possible, until dark, trusting that the men in charge of Captain Swift and Lieutenant Butler had retired well to the rear, and been joined by our lost advance guard; if so, I knew they would be able to make well towards the Redoubt before darkness set in, when probably I should be able to join them; but I found at about a quarter to six o'clock that the enemy had got round to our rear, thereby cutting off our retreat by the way we came. I immediately ordered a charge, but was met by a volley that killed one and wounded three men. On trying again, I found it hopeless to attempt it; I therefore determined to retreat down the hill which was covered with fern, and sending on our wounded, I threw out a line of skirmishers, ordering the front rank to "fire and retire." In this order we retired down the hill in a steady and orderly manner, the Natives coming out of the bush and raining down a complete shower of bullets on us, when, although we were not above 100 or 150 yards from them, not a man was hit. At this time it was near dark, but we managed to scramble through the bush until at last we lost the track, when I ordered the men around me, and told them I should stay there until morning, ordering not a word to be spoken or a pipe to be lighted. I now found that four of the men were missing, and knowing that it would be completely useless to attempt, at that time, to find them, I determined to wait until morning, hoping in the meantime to hear them about in the bush. At 4½ o'clock a.m., on the morning of the 8th, we commenced to try and gain a track out of the bush, and at about eight o'clock a.m. we succeeded, and were met about half way from the Redoubt by Colonel Murray and his party, and then learned that our esteemed Captain was dead. After detailing a man to return as guide to Colonel Murray, I continued my march to the camp, which we reached at about eleven o'clock a.m., completely exhausted. I am sorry to report our casualties (as per margin)† were very great, but taking into consideration the number to which we were opposed, being near seven to one, we have every reason to be thankful that it was not greater.

I hope it may not appear presumptuous on my part to bear testimony to the cool and gallant manner displayed by the late Captain Swift and Lieutenant Butler in this desperate affair; the Captain issuing his command as if on parade, and even when wounded, refusing to take one man from the force to take him to the rear, until he was told that I would not be able to keep my position much longer; and Lieutenant Butler, even when brought on his knee, in the coolest manner possible, deliberately fired the shots from his revolver into a crowd of Maoris.

I need scarcely add that the men behaved most gallantly; in fact, it would be impossible to recapitulate the many acts of individual courage, when each man emulated the other in acts of heroic bravery.

I however beg to bring to your favorable consideration the valuable assistance I received from Sergeant Bracegirdle, who supported me throughout in a most intrepid manner; as also Lance Corporal Ryan, Privates William Bulford, John Talbott, John Cole, and Benjamin Thomas, for the devotion they manifested to their officers, by staying with them until 7.30 p.m. on the night of the 7th instant. Captain Swift died at that time, after which they hid his body in the bush and waited until morning, and then carrying Lieutenant Butler in their arms, they returned, meeting Colonel Murray and force. Corporal Ryan returned with Colonel Murray, and pointed out the spot in which Captain Swift's body was hid.

I also beg to enclose the report of Sergeant Meara, in charge of our advance guard; also a plan of the scene of action.

† 66th Regiment.—Killed: Captain Swift, Private Bellringer (Richard), Private Grace (Stephen). Wounded: Lieutenant Butler, Private Powell, Private McLane, Private Whittle. Missing: Private Bryan.