

DESPATCHES

RELATIVE TO

THE LOSS OF HER MAJESTY'S SHIP

“ O R P H E U S . ”

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, BY COMMAND
OF HIS EXCELLENCY.

AUCKLAND.

1863.

DESPATCHES

RELATIVE TO

THE LOSS OF HER MAJESTY'S SHIP "ORPHEUS."

No. 1.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B., TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE, K.G.

Government House, Auckland,
9th February, 1863.

No. 10.

MY LORD DUKE,—

I have the honor to report to your Grace the total loss of H.M.S. "Orpheus," on the bar of the Harbour of Manukau, on the West Coast of the North Island, nearly opposite to the Harbour of Auckland, which is on the East Coast.

2. Eight officers and sixty-one men have been saved from the wreck. The names of the officers who have been saved are given in the enclosure to this Despatch. Twenty-three officers and one hundred and fifty-eight men, it is believed, have perished, as the vessel has entirely gone to pieces, and nothing has been seen of them. The names of the missing officers are also given in the list transmitted herewith.

3. It is positively known that some of these officers and men have perished, as they were killed in the presence of the survivors, by spars and ropes. There is but slight hope that any of them can be alive. They can only have escaped by having been first washed out to sea on some spar, and then washed up on some other part of the coast.

4. The ship, as far as I can collect, was rather to the Southward of the Port, and was, at about half-past one o'clock in the day, with beautiful weather, and a fair wind, making the Harbour under steam and sail, going about twelve knots. Running thus from the Southward, she was intending to make the passage across the bar as laid down in the chart of 1853. Since that time the bar has shifted about three quarters of a mile to the Northward. She was thus rather more than that distance too far to the Southward and touched, first on a small shoal off the middle banks and in a few minutes ran directly on to them, where there is always a very heavy sea, and where her position (about four miles out at sea) was hopeless.

5. At between four and five o'clock, a small coasting steamer, the "Wonga Wonga," which was going out of the Harbour, seeing her peril, went to her assistance, but from the heavy sea breaking was unable to get very near her, but the boats of the "Orpheus" and those of the men who were saved under the shelter of the steamer, managed from time to time to pick up others. They were aided in the most gallant and determined manner by three Maoris from the Pilot Station, who steered the boats.

6. The conduct of Commodore Burnett, his officers, and men was perfectly heroic; I have never heard instances of greater courage, carelessness of self, and efforts to save the ship and others, than have been detailed to me. At about nine at night the mainmast went overboard, the other two masts went in less than twenty minutes afterwards. Those of the crew (and they were a great number) who

had not yet been washed overboard or killed by spars or ropes, were on the masts and rigging, and the poor fellows, as these went, gave three parting cheers and then perished. I am told that not a murmur or cry was heard from the wounded and dying, and yet the manner of some of their deaths was terrible. Altogether it is one of the most affecting events that I have ever heard of, and yet one that excites admiration, from the courage, self-devotion, and energetic resignation both of the many who perished, and the few who were saved.

I have, &c.,

G. GREY.

His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, K.G.

No. 2.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B., TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE, K.G.

No. 11.

Government House, Auckland,
9th February, 1863.

MY LORD DUKE,—

In reference to the melancholy wreck of Her Majesty's ship "Orpheus," with the loss, it is believed, of 181 of the officers and crew, as detailed in the newspapers I have this day transmitted to Your Grace, I have the honor to enclose a copy of a letter dated 4th May, 1861, which was published here in the local papers, containing information that the bar of the Manukau Harbour had shifted considerably to the Northward of its former position.

2. This information, it will be observed, was acquired on board H. M. S. "Miranda," and it is presumed it was communicated to the Commodore and the officers on the station, and by the proper officers to the Admiralty; but means should be taken, without delay, to have the Admiralty charts altered in accordance with it, if this has not already been done.

I have, &c.,

G. GREY.

P.S.—I have further the honor to transmit for Your Grace's information a copy of the Gazette of this Colony, for the 16th August, 1861, in which it will be found stated, p. 218, that the directions given in the Survey of 1853 for crossing the bar of the Manukau now led over shallow and dangerous ground. Six copies of this Gazette Your Grace will find, from the enclosed letter, were transmitted to Commodore Seymour, on the 29th August, 1861, and he was consulted regarding the sailing directions contained in it on the 26th April, 1861.

G. GREY.

His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, K.G.,
&c., &c., &c.

Enclosure 1 to No. 2.

LETTER BY H. MARKS, TAKEN FROM "NEW-ZEALANDER," OF 8TH MAY, 1861.

Onehunga, May 4th, 1861.

SIR,—

Being ordered to proceed to Taranaki, on the 27th April, as pilot on board H.M. steamship "Miranda," Commander Glynn, I discovered, to my surprise, that the bar of the Manukau had shifted considerably to the Northward since I last made the passage. The course laid down by Chart is North-east by East—the Ninepin rock, Paratutai, and Poponga in one. The course at present to be steered should be North-east $\frac{3}{4}$ East, the Ninepin a full breadth open to the Southward of Paratutai.

Yours, &c.,

H. MARKS,
Commanding H.M. Colonial Gun-boat "Caroline."

Enclosure 2 to No. 2.

See "New Zealand Gazette," No. 38, of August 16th, 1861.

Enclosure 3 to No. 2.

GOVERNOR GORE BROWNE, C.B., TO COMMODORE SEYMOUR.

Government House, Auckland,
29th August, 1861.

SIR,—
I have the honor to forward for your information, and that of the Officers commanding Her Majesty's Ships under your command, six copies of the "New Zealand Gazette," of the 16th instant, containing Manukau Harbour Regulations.

I have, &c.,

T. GORE BROWNE.

Commodore Seymour, H.M. Ship "Pelorus."

Enclosure 4 to No. 2.

GOVERNOR GORE BROWNE, C.B., TO COMMODORE SEYMOUR.

Government House, Auckland,
26th April, 1861.

SIR,—
I have the honor to forward for your information, copy of a letter addressed to the Superintendent, from the Pilot of the Manukau, suggesting certain sailing directions for insertion in the Harbour Regulations, now under revision.

I have, &c.,

T. GORE BROWNE.

Commodore Beauchamp Seymour,
Commanding H.M. Naval Forces.

No. 3.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B., TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF
NEWCASTLE, K.G.

No. 15

Government House, Auckland,
12th February, 1863.

MY LORD DUKE,—

I find that in the Despatch I wrote to Your Grace upon the 9th instant, detailing the melancholy loss of H.M.S. "Orpheus," I stated that when the vessel went on shore her speed was estimated at twelve knots an hour, I now find that various opinions exist as to her speed at the time, some stating it at only eight knots. As I am very anxious that no inaccuracy should exist in my Despatch on this subject, I should feel much obliged to Your Grace if you would allow the rate of speed to be altered from twelve to eight knots.

2. And Your Grace will have observed in my Despatch that I state that, "Those of the crew, and they were a great number, who had not yet been washed overboard or killed by spars or ropes, were on the masts and rigging, and the poor fellows, as these went, gave three cheers and then perished." I have seen in an account published in one of the Newspapers here, and which from internal evidence must have been furnished by some Officer of the "Orpheus," that this fact is denied. But I have been informed by the most competent authority that "when the mainmast went, the men on it gave three heartrending farewell cheers which were answered by the men on the other masts, and all was then over."

I have, &c.,

G. GREY.

His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, K.G.

No. 4.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B., TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF
NEWCASTLE, K.G.Auckland, New Zealand,
February 24th, 1863

No. 22.

MY LORD DUKE,—

Adverting to my Despatch, No. 10, of 9th February, in which I reported the melancholy loss of the "Orpheus," I beg to call your Grace's attention to the names of the following four Natives of

New Zealand, Nehana, Kuki, Roma, and Timiona, who on that occasion very much distinguished themselves in the boats in their successful exertions to save life.

2. I would respectfully request your Grace to endeavour to obtain from the Royal Humane Society for these men the medals to which they have a just and fair claim.

3. All the surviving officers of the "Orpheus" have gone to England, but, upon application to the Admiralty, your Grace could obtain from these gentlemen, and from the Warrant and petty officers, certificates of the conduct of the Natives whose names I have transmitted, which would, I have no doubt, gain for them the medals to which I believe they have established a most legitimate claim.

I have, &c.,

G. GREY.

His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, K.G.

No. 5.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE, K.G., TO GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B.

NEW ZEALAND.

Downing Street, 15th April, 1863.

No. 38.

SIR,—

I have received and communicated to the Lords of the Admiralty your two Despatches, No. 10 and 11, of the 9th of February, in which you report the loss of Her Majesty's ship "Orpheus" with the greater part of her officers and men.

I need hardly say with what regret I have received this sad intelligence. But I am desirous of recording the admiration with which I regard the unwavering gallantry and self-possession which seem to have been shewn by all on board while expecting their fate, and by those who perished even in the moment of meeting it. Such conduct while it throws a lustre on this lamentable disaster shows also unhappily the value of what Her Majesty's Service and the Country have lost by it. I feel sure that nothing was left undone in New Zealand to alleviate what I fear must have been the sufferings of the survivors.

I have, &c.,

Governor Sir George Grey, K.C.B.,
&c., &c., &c.

NEWCASTLE.

No. 6.

COPY OF DESPATCH FROM HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE, K.G., TO GOVERNOR SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B.

NEW ZEALAND.

No. 48.

Downing Street,
24th April, 1863.

SIR,—

In my Despatch No. 38, of the 15th of April, I informed you that I had communicated to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, copies of your Despatches Nos. 10 and 11 of the 9th of February, reporting the circumstances attending the loss of Her Majesty's ship "Orpheus," on the bar of Manukau Harbour.

In the first of these Despatches, you draw attention to the gallant services rendered by three Maories from the Pilot Station at that place, in assisting to save a portion of the survivors, and I have much pleasure in informing you that their Lordships have determined upon assigning a gratuity, not exceeding twenty pounds, to each of these Maories.

I request therefore, that you will take the necessary steps for ensuring the payment to them of the amount specified by the Lords Commissioners, in such manner as you may think most expedient; and that you will likewise convey to them, in conformity with their Lordship's wishes, the thanks of the Board of Admiralty for their gallant conduct on this occasion.

I have, &c.,

Governor Sir George Grey, K.C.B.,
&c., &c., &c.

NEWCASTLE.