

Sub-Enclosure 6 to Enclosure in No. 30.

EXTRACT from *New Zealand Gazette*, 1866, No. 54.

Major McDONNELL to UNDER SECRETARY, Colonial Defence Office.

SIR,—

Patea, 4th October, 1866.

In my Despatch No. 94, of the 26th ultimo, I had the honor to state, for the information of the Honourable the Defence Minister, that the rebels in the vicinity of our position at Te Whenuku were becoming so bold and annoying us so much, that unless a blow was inflicted upon them without delay it would be impossible to move outside the redoubt, and also, that notwithstanding the paucity of my numbers and the inclemency of the weather I had determined at all risks to attack them at once.

By dismounting all the cavalry and leaving in the three redoubts occupied by our forces barely sufficient men to hold them, viz. :—at Kakaramaea, 25 of all ranks ; at Hawera, 30 ditto ; at Whenuku, 55 ditto ; I was enabled to parade the following force* at Te Whenuku, and marched out of camp at 6.30 p.m. From information I had collected, I was induced to believe that the bulk of the Ngaruahine were located some distance back in the bush, between the Waingongora and Inaha Rivers, and in a straight line not more than seven miles from our redoubt at the Whenuku, but the late heavy rains had so swollen the Waingongora River that it could only be crossed by the bridge between the two Imperial redoubts near its mouth, thus necessitating a *detour* of over twelve miles.

Of the exact whereabouts of the enemy I had no certain information, but trusted to drop upon them somewhere. Crossing the bridge at 9 p.m., I marched straight inland, and after proceeding about seven miles, entered the bush at 12.30 a.m., at a point midway between the Inaha and Waingongora Rivers, having passed through the site of the village of Ahipaipu, burnt by Colonel Butler, 57th Regiment, in January last. The night was pitch dark, and we lost our way more than once. A cold bleak wind was blowing and the ground was wet and soft. Notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the behaviour of the men was most exemplary. Pursuing the track through the bush for a mile, we emerged into a clearing, and here halted the force under the shadow of the trees to await daylight and to rest the men. When the first streaks of daylight appeared in the sky I moved on cautiously. The track led through alternate belts of bush and clearing and across a tributary of the Inaha, and shortly merged into a broad road. Following this for some distance we came in sight of the village of Pungarehu, situated on the other side of a swampy creek, in a clearing intersected by strong cattle fences and containing several large whares, five of which were fortified. As we crossed this creek and were ascending the other side, the dogs began to bark. I immediately ordered the leading sections, under Captain Newland, to extend from the centre and to rush into the village. As we leapt the fences I called upon the inmates to surrender: they replied by heavy volleys from the doors and windows of the houses. We returned the fire, and rushing to the fortified whares, scraped the earth off the roofs and pulled down the slabs to fire at the inmates. In several instances they ran out of the doors, and, firing their pieces into us, tried to escape into the bush, but were shot down. In half-an-hour we were masters of the position, and the firing ceased. While engaged in setting fire to the whares, and completing the destruction of the village, a heavy fire was suddenly opened upon us from the bush at the opposite side of the clearing, and it gradually increased and extended to our right, towards the road by which we had advanced on the place. As, from the heavy and incessant firing, it was evident that strong reinforcements of the enemy were hurrying up, and we already had three wounded, I determined upon retiring by another track which led across the Inaha River, and which I made some prisoners we had taken, show me. I accordingly extended the whole force along one edge of the clearing and kept the enemy in check, whilst I collected the wounded. I sent three of them and the prisoners down the track I was about to return along, under a strong escort in charge of Sergeant-Major Hall, W.Y.C. I shortly passed the rest of the wounded (who by this time had increased to seven) to the front, and I formed a rear-guard under Captain Leatham, W.D.F., and sent out flank skirmishers to the left under Ensign Poma, N.C., and to the right under Captain Kemp and Lieutenant Wirihana, N.C. These officers did their work so effectually, that the rebels were completely foiled in their attempts to out-flank us and cut off our retreat. They were repeatedly driven back, and lost several of their men, and their leader (who was shot by Poma), and some of their guns; and in a short time they retired altogether, and the firing ceased. On reaching the open, I made stretchers for the wounded, who had hitherto been carried on blankets, and recrossing the Inaha proceeded to Waingongora. Here I cannot speak too highly of the attention and kindness shown to us by Captain Noblett, 18th Royal Irish, commanding the Waingongora redoubts, and Assistant-Surgeon Spencer, 18th Royal Irish.

Captain Noblett sent us carts to convey our wounded across the Waingongora River, and prepared tents and beds for them, and Dr. Spencer gave his valuable assistance in dressing their wounds. As I have no hospital accommodation at Te Whenuku, and to save the wounded the fatigue of the journey to this post, Dr. Spencer has kindly undertaken to attend to them.

The three men returned as dead, expired soon after we reached Waingongora, where they were interred with funeral honors the following day. Giving the force an hour's rest, I resumed my march to Te Whenuku, which I reached at 2.30 p.m.

I enclose a list of casualties. In Farrier-Sergeant Duff, W.Y.C., the country has lost a gallant soldier, and I one of my right-hand men. His conduct was always most conspicuous, and I deeply regret him.

I have conveyed to the force engaged on this occasion my hearty thanks for their gallant and steady conduct; and I now beg to submit for the favourable consideration of the Government the names of Ensign Northcroft, P.R.; Cornet Hirtzell, W.Y.C., and Surgeon Cambell, W.R., for coolness and intrepidity in removing the wounded under a galling fire to the rear, in doing which Cornet Hirtzell, W.Y.C., and Volunteer Wright, were wounded. Private Economides, W.R., for gallantry in connection with the capture of the prisoners; and Ensign Poma, N.C., and Volunteer Sergeants Rushton and

* Staff—field officer, 1; surgeon, 1. P. and W. Rangers—captain, 1; subaltern, 1; sergeant, 1; rank and file, 40. W. Y. Cavalry—subaltern, 1; sergeants, 2; rank and file, 12. W. D. Force—captain, 1; sergeant, 1; rank and file, 10. N. C.—captain, 1; subalterns, 3; sergeants, 2; rank and file, 44. Volunteers—sergeants, 5. Total—field officer, 1; surgeon, 1; captains, 3; subalterns, 5; sergeants, 11; rank and file, 106. Total, all ranks, 127.