

CORRESPONDENCE RELATIVE TO A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON THE PETITION OF J. W. PEAKE AND OTHERS.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from MAJOR GENERAL CHUTE to HIS EXCELLENCY SIR GEORGE GREY, K.C.B.

SIR,—

Head Quarters, Auckland, 12th March, 1866.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your Excellency's letter (No. 85 A., Dec. 1st, 1865,) enclosing an extract from the Journal of the House of Representatives relating to a Resolution of the House on a petition of J. W. Peake and others.

I thank your Excellency for affording me an opportunity of distinctly denying the accusations there set forth against the Imperial troops now under my command, and who for some years past have been employed on active service for the protection of the Colony of New Zealand.

The documents which your Excellency transmits me do not contain the evidence laid before the Committee, on which they deem it their duty to record their condemnation of the conduct of Her Majesty's troops, to bring under the notice of your Excellency what they term "the disgraceful conduct of the detachment of the 18th Royal Irish;" and add that "No good would appear to have come from the appeal which was made to the Lieut.-General lately commanding."

It is a matter of much regret to me that the honorable members of the Committee, before recording an opinion so disparaging to the army, did not afford the Military authorities an opportunity of answering the malicious accusations laid to their charge; and I cannot but express my surprise that such a censure should have been supported by the honorable House of Representatives on *ex parte* statements made by interested parties claiming compensation for real or supposed damage to their property during the war, without the accused being allowed to defend themselves.

I cannot remark on the grounds on which the Committee have arrived at this decision. As I have already stated, the evidence has not been laid before me, but I am in a position to state to your Excellency that all reports made to the Military (however frivolous) on the subject of alleged depredations, have invariably been carefully investigated. If proved, the depredators have been punished; when not proved, precautions have been taken to prevent the bad conducted, who must exist in all communities, from bringing disgrace by their misconduct on the entire body.

I enclose for the perusal of your Excellency extracts from voluminous correspondence that has passed on the subject. Your Excellency will there see that complaints have been enquired into; that in the case proved, the individuals were dealt with by the civil power; and that in other cases, where the general accusation could not be proved, every opportunity was given to civilians to identify the supposed culprits, and steps taken by check rolls, regulation as to dogs, &c., &c., to prevent depredations (by the Military) being committed on the property of settlers, although there was every reason to presume that the depredations complained of had been caused by other parties.

The troops, it is true, were stationed at the Redoubts for the protection of the settlers, in so far as to protect them against the enemy, and to induce them to remain on their own lands and properties; but not, as appears to be supposed, that the troops should act as police to look after houses and flocks deserted by the settlers, or that they should be accountable for loss of sheep and cattle allowed by their owners to roam without sufficient care-takers.

It appears to me that the loss complained of by J. W. Peake, and others, could not have occurred without the depredators being discovered, had these gentlemen looked after their flocks, or taken the simplest precautions against robbery, by application to the civil power at Wanganui, when they found their sheep continually disappearing, their houses plundered, &c., &c., in lieu of bringing vague charges some time after the alleged robberies had taken place, and finally ending by a claim for damage to the amount of £1409.

I have no desire to defend soldiers guilty of crimes, and I am most anxious to see discipline strictly maintained, yet I cannot allow the troops under my command to be aspersed by the honorable The House of Representatives without raising my voice against what I consider an injustice. It seems overlooked that the troops were sent to Woodall's Redoubt because marauding parties of the enemy, and the unsettled state of the neighbourhood rendered property at the time insecure. It is far from improbable that the losses complained of actually occurred previous to the arrival of the troops at the Kai-iwi Redoubts; and it is much more likely that these losses did occur through the enemy, by civilians in public employ, contractors, idlers, vagrants, and other inhabitants in the Colony; through want of care of the settlers themselves, and in some instances through intention on the part of settlers willing to risk loss in chance of future compensation from the public purse, rather than to the troops stationed at the Redoubts and carefully looked after.

I trust that your Excellency will take all steps necessary to have these accusations withdrawn or fully proved—both sides of the question being heard; and in the meantime that you will be pleased to direct the same publicity to be given to my denial of the accusation against the Military as has already been given to the censure passed upon them by the House of Representatives.