

I then held a consultation with Majors Fraser and Mair, when we agreed that, as it was evident the hostile party was about us (we were fired upon several times while halted there), and as we had come so far, it was advisable to push on. I accordingly issued four days' rations to the men, telling them, that with the potatoes, &c., found on the road, these were to last for six; and started up the Waimana, intending to go right up to Maungapoatu.

A few miles further on, on turning out of the river to climb a steep hill at Te Ponga, the advance of Arawas and Tauranga Volunteers under Major Mair was fired upon. Major Mair and his officers gallantly led the way up under a heavy fire, well followed by some sixty of the Arawas and the Tauranga Volunteers; one of the former, I regret to say, receiving a mortal wound. Again the enemy bolted into the bush, evidently retiring towards Tawhana; I was thus driving them step by step, and at some one place, either Tawhana or Maungapoatu, they must stand.

As I was about to follow, I learned, to my surprise, that the whole of the Arawas declined to go any further on. They stated that they were averse to the country in which we were fighting; that they wished the attack to be made from Matata (though we explained that we had no power, but to follow up an attacking party); and even threatened to carry off Major Mair with them. They went off. Even then I would have gone on had not my guides also deserted me. I had then no option but with bitter regret to order the retire. My feelings of disappointment were shared by all the officers and men of the force. I retired, destroying all cultivations on the road, so that between Tawhana and Ohiwa any attacking force must now carry its own provisions.

On the Arawas' return to Otara, they surprised a Hauhau scout, who seeing but few of them, and imagining, no doubt, he was among friends, called out to them that he was the "advance of Kereopa, for whom they were to prepare provisions." I regret to say that, instead of being taken prisoner, he was shot dead by the Natives; the shots alarming a small party in the rear of him, who fired, and it seems took the same road back, some track through the bush unknown to us, and of course warned Kereopa. Had they taken this scout, I should most likely have got the whole party, and extracted important information. He was recognized as having come from Ruatahuna.

I need not say how bitterly I felt the desertion of the Arawas and guides, as, with the force I had, I am confident I should have reached the head-quarters of the rebels.

Neither Major Mair nor myself doubt that the scout spoke in perfect good faith, and that Kereopa is in our neighbourhood. If so, it will not be long before we hear of him, and I trust that I may be permitted to make an effort to catch him. I will guarantee that privations will not stop my men in a pursuit.

My force is, according to orders, reduced as per enclosed state, but I cannot suppose it will remain so long, as, with Kereopa to urge them on, the enemy is certain to be on the move.

I have, &c.,
J. H. H. St. JOHN, Major,
Commanding Opotiki District.

The Under Secretary,
Colonial Defence Office, Wellington.

Enclosure in No. 31.

MILITIA AND VOLUNTEERS.—DUTY STATEMENT.

Opotiki, 17th March, 1868.

Distribution.	Field Officers.	Captains.	Subalterns.	Staff.	Sergeants.	Corporals.	Buglers.	Rank and File.	Remarks.	
PRESENT ON PAY—										
<i>Militia.</i>										
Garrison duty	1	1	1	2	3	4	...	25	1 Captain, Quartermaster, and Adjutant; 1 Sergeant acting Quartermaster-Sergeant; 1 Sergeant acting Sergeant-Major; 1 Corporal, Orderly-room.	
Expedition ... ..	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
<i>Opotiki Volunteer Rifles.</i>										
Garrison duty ... ..	...	...	...	...	1	1	1	25	
Expedition ... ..	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
<i>Poverty Bay Volunteer Cavalry.</i>										
Garrison duty ... ..	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2	Escort with Major Mair to Whakatane.
Expedition, &c. ... ..	...	1	...	...	...	1	1	16	
ON DETACHMENT—										
Waioeka Blockhouse	1	...	1	1	...	20		Opotiki Volunteer Rifles. Militia.
Otara Blockhouse ... ..	...	...	1	...	1	1	...	20	
ATTACHED WHAKATANE—										
Hawke's Bay Constabulary	1	2	3	2	6	8	2	108		
Tauranga Volunteers ... ..	...	...	1	...	2	2	...	25	
Native Contingent	1	...	3	...	...	...	...	163	
Total	3	4	7	3	12	13	5	346		

J. H. H. St. JOHN, Major.
Commanding Opotiki District.