

PAPERS RELATIVE TO MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE REBEL NATIVES.

No. 1.

Copy of a Letter from Colonel WHITMORE to the Hon. Colonel HAULTAIN.

SIR,—

Patea, 23rd October, 1868.

I have the honor to report my arrival at this place, this morning at 10 a.m., with the whole of the Wanganui and Ngatiapa Natives (about 400 in all) now on pay, except fifty-one left in garrison at Weraroa.

I reached Wanganui on the 18th, and found that, in consequence of a report which, like many others I have lately received, proved to have no real foundation, Lieut.-Colonel Gorton had turned out the Wanganui Cavalry, and proceeded to Weraroa himself. I obtained horses and started in the same direction; but after riding twelve miles met Lieut.-Colonel Gorton coming back, and learned from him that he had moved the detachment under Sub-Inspector McDonnell from Weraroa to Nukumarū.

You will remember that you informed me that you had given Major Fraser orders to send thirty Europeans to Weraroa. These had not arrived; and I received from Lieut.-Colonel Gorton the enclosed letter showing the consequence on the Natives. I also ascertained that the Natives at Weraroa had been visited by Lieut.-Colonel McDonnell, and had been addressed by him on various political and other topics, but that they had not shown any disposition to give any serious trouble to the Government. I also am led to believe that the Wanganui Press has been busy suggesting that the Natives would not serve under my orders. The result, however, has shown that, notwithstanding the non-arrival of the thirty men promised from Patea,—notwithstanding the removal even of the twenty Europeans actually there, and in spite of my condition that fifty Natives should be left, an arrangement to which they were extremely averse,—the Natives at my first request marched to Patea, leaving a sufficient party to hold the Weraroa; and even showed me a letter from Lieut.-Colonel McDonnell which he had sent to them, a copy of which I hope to send you. It is not very directly objectionable, though extremely embarrassing to me.

But I anticipate. On the 18th I embarked in the "Woodpecker," and at 7 a.m. was off Waitotara, when the rising wind and sea compelled the captain to return. The 19th I spent at Wanganui. At 6 a.m. on the 20th I embarked again, and by 1 p.m., when the tide suited, I was no further than the day before, and the Captain had to return, reaching Wanganui at 10 p.m. with difficulty, and not without some danger, having shipped several seas which almost extinguished the fires, and striking on the bar fortunately just clear of the breakers. In the voyage of this day the steamer had been so much injured as to require repair; and as it appeared likely that some delay might occur, I determined to proceed on the 21st overland *via* Weraroa. The 21st proved a very wet day, and Mr. Booth, R.M., and I left town at 9 a.m., reaching Nukumarū at 2 p.m., and Weraroa at 3 p.m. Finding that if I remained the Natives would go on the next day, and would rather not give me an escort by Wairoa, I slept at Nukumarū, after addressing a few words to a meeting at Weraroa. At this meeting Mete Kingi replied to me, and urged a retreat to Wanganui, saying that that was all he had promised to the Parliament. I answered him very shortly that I looked to Kemp, not to him—that I left to Kemp the duty of selecting the men to remain and the party to go, and left the Natives to settle such details amongst themselves.

Kemp fixed that if the next day proved fine he would move—if not he would await fine weather. Next morning proved wet at first, and then cleared up. When, at 7 a.m., I got to Weraroa the Wanganuis had already started to get potatoes; so Kemp asked me as a favour not to go beyond the Waitotara Heads, at which point he would join me by night with all his men, except those he selected to remain at Weraroa. Though anxious to reach Patea, I thought it advisable to agree to this. A cattle escort had to be provided for, and till Kemp actually left Weraroa I could not decide whether the men he left required further support. At night I sent orders to Acting Sub-Inspector McDonnell to go to Weraroa with his twenty men and twelve others, recruits from Wanganui, whom I had caused to march by Nukumarū, to join the cattle party, which would have been met from Patea if the Natives had not gone on. On the 23rd, this day, I reached Patea. I very much regretted, on arrival, to receive the tidings I cannot but regard as disastrous of the evacuation of Kakaramea. The diminution of Major Fraser's force was his reason for that operation; and I very much fear that, not only in numbers but in *esprit*, the European force here is very much below what is desirable. I caused the Wellington Rifles to be paraded at 2 p.m., when I read their articles of agreement, and called for men who did not dispute their obligations. Some stepped on one side, and I am assured that by to-night (for I extended the time till then) every man worth keeping will have asked to be allowed to withdraw from any participation in the movement of the rest. I have put three men in confinement for a Court-martial.

I then fell in the Taranaki and Nelson men. These men deserved considerate treatment, and I gave it to them. While pointing out that I did not dispute their claim to discharge, I still told them I was sorry to lose them, and that the Government would be glad of their services in the Constabulary. I am not yet aware whether the greater proportion will stay or will go; but it is probable that many will stay.

The European Contingent is, I hear, infected, but I have not yet seen them. The remaining troops are staunch. Under these circumstances my force consists chiefly of Maoris, under very