

All this time the troops had been prohibited from lighting fires by day, and the utmost quiet was preserved. The enemy apparently took no precautions, and seemed ignorant of our proximity. We heard a man cry out "Now this evil man will cause the Wanganuis to come down upon us," a speech we attributed to one of Ahitana's people whom we knew to be at Ngaire, living peaceably, and who had refused to join Titokowaru. The "evil man" was believed to refer to the enemy, and this speech satisfied me that he was in one of the kaingas. Later we heard a woman cry out, "Haere mai, haere mai, o te toa, haere mai ki te kai" ("Come hither, come hither, ye brave, come hither to the food")—a speech which seemed to refer to fighting-men. Lastly we perceived that the Natives were carrying timber, evidently for a pa, and this seemed conclusive as regarded the presence and intention of the enemy.

At nightfall I passed fifty Wanganuis and Arawas under Sub-Inspector Gundry across the swamp at the eel-weirs, and had the whole of the Natives employed till 11 p.m. in carrying and placing the hurdle-ladders on the line. The Europeans then marched to the spot, and the Native force crossed without accident or noise. The Armed Constabulary brought more ladders across, and passed the swamp, the last arriving at 4 a.m. on the 25th. I now caused the force to be awakened, and leaving Lieut.-Colonel Lyon to hold the crossing in the entrenchments thrown up by the Natives, so as to secure our retreat in case of necessity, I advanced by the bush as silently as possible. It was growing daylight when we reached the kaingas, the Native force being disposed so as to surround it, which would infallibly have been done, but for a most unfortunate occurrence. The Maoris at the kaingas at length when we were close to them perceiving us, rose and many began to make off; others however ran towards us calling out "haere mai," and holding out a white flag, while those apparently escaping hesitated and seemed disposed to return. At this moment we discovered Kawana Paepae and Aperaniko among the Natives at the kainga, and I was embarrassed what to do, more especially as most of those escaping appeared to be women. I therefore myself ran down with Mr. Booth to the kainga, and was met by Ahitana's son, who protested that all the people were either his own or another neutral tribe from Oraukuku, a place I had never heard of before. I immediately asked him why he was preparing a pa, and he answered plausibly, that he feared as Titokowaru was broken, he might be in danger from his pursuers. He admitted also the speech about the "evil man," and said it referred to Titokowaru, who had been across the swamp three days before. Meanwhile the men sent to surround the place had halted, and the people had crept away by the edge of the swamp; but Tukarangi, (Ahitana's son) undertook to bring them back, and sent a man with one of mine for that purpose. As these continued absent, and Mr. Booth had discovered from a seemingly half-witted old man, that Titokowaru's people, or some of them, had been at the kainga, I despatched the Arawa to bring in the people who had left it. Unfortunately an hour had elapsed when the Arawa (on the return of the messengers without the people) started in pursuit, and as we have uniformly been unable with an hour between us to overtake the enemy or even come up with his women, and as he is travelling light, having lost all his food and baggage, the pursuit of the Arawa was fruitless. The trail lay towards Te Ngutu, and it was followed to the track of General Chute's march.

I cannot describe to you the vexation and disappointment of the force which, after overcoming the difficulties of disguising its presence, bridging and passing the Swamp unperceived, and effecting the surprise of the kainga, believed itself to have been duped out of its reward; but I trust the Government will consider that, even at the price of losing the opportunity, it was well not to have broken faith with Ahitana, on whose neutral or friendly disposition it is said that of the Taranakis depends, and who is closely related to the Wanganuis, who feel great sympathy for him.

I cross-examined Tukarangi, and learned from him that Titokowaru had determined to "die on his own land" at Te Ngutu, where he is at present. That ten of his men, whose names he gave, had been at his kainga when I arrived, but that he had been afraid to tell me so.

I felt the greatest inclination to disarm this young man and his followers, but refrained, because there seemed to be every likelihood of the rest of his people returning, and I ordered him to leave Te Ngaire (under pain of his neutrality being hereafter disregarded) and go to Keteonatea, where he has another kainga. I moreover insisted on his showing me the trail of Titokowaru across the swamp, which, however, he has to-day proved unable to do. I confess I greatly disbelieve all his statements, and feel sure that the women I saw were those of Titokowaru, whose rear guard at least, if not he himself, slept the previous night at Te Ngaire. If I am right, he has probably gone to Ngatimaruru.

Nevertheless, I shall explore Te Ngutu, where I can see no fires at present, and if he is not there (and I can find no trail as yet leading in that direction), he must have gone to the Upper Waitara (Ngatimaruru), a semi-friendly district, where I hardly like to march without distinct instructions as to the proper course to pursue in the event of such an occurrence as that of yesterday morning. Whatever happens, the Government may feel satisfied that Titokowaru's influence is wholly gone, and that he is hiding from the punishment of his crimes. To pursue him in this vast bush is a work of great difficulty, but, improved as are the European and Native troops, one from which I should not flinch for a moment, were I not doubtful whether such a course might not place fresh tribes in the field against us, which at present are not likely to be encouraged by his failure to espouse his cause.

I feel, however, that it is due to the troops to say that the bulk of the force is now fit to go anywhere or do anything that Europeans can be expected to do. They cannot track a fugitive Hauhau as fast as he can run away, especially in a wholly unknown country; but they have shown throughout these late operations that they are no longer at all intimidated by the bush, are quite able to make their way in it at a moderate pace, and that they can live in bivouac for weeks at a time without inconvenience, if required, in any weather.

The Hon. Colonel Haultain, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

G. S. WHITMORE, Colonel.