

191. *The Chairman.*] The distance from Opotiki to Tauranga is between seventy and eighty miles?—I believe that is the distance.

192. In going that distance, were persons in the habit of keeping along the beach? Will you describe the route from Opotiki to Tauranga at the time you were there?—We went along the beach for a considerable distance. Then, near Whakatane you struck inland, went down a very steep hill till you struck the Whakatane River. You go over the Whakatane River, and go along the beach then for a long way. In some places the track might run in and out the sandhills. You arrive at Maketu, and then you have some beach-work and some sandhill-work until you arrive at Tauranga. I went a considerable way inland to Tauranga. I left my horse at the Maori pa, and went over in a canoe, leaving the beach a long way. That is as near as I can recollect it.

193. Is the country very much broken between Ohiwa and Whakatane?—Oh, yes; it is broken along the beach there.

194. You have referred to the Waimana country. Do you recollect if the Waimana Bush extends right down to the bluff?—We went through no bush. We went over a fern range.

195. Do you recollect patches of bush?—Yes. There were patches of bush all along the route.

196. At that time was there a considerable volume of water in the Whakatane River?—I believe there would be. I could not say. We had bad weather about then.

197. Therefore the Whakatane would be in flood?—Yes.

198. Do you recollect an immense swamp to the north of the Whakatane River?—Yes.

199. Would you be surprised of the extent of that swamp if I said it was about 50,000 acres?—I would be surprised at that.

200. Would you be surprised if I said it was 45,000 acres?—I would be surprised if you said it was 5,000.

201. Was that low-lying country?—Yes.

202. Was it capable of being drained, do you think?—I have no idea.

203. What is your opinion as to whether there was any cover for ambuscades in that swamp for hostile Natives?—Of course there was.

204. You are aware as soon as you crossed the Whakatane you get amongst the hostile tribes?—Yes; returning from Tauranga.

Captain GEORGE AUGUSTUS PREECE sworn and examined.

205. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Your name is George Preece?—George Augustus Preece.

206. Are you residing in Palmerston North?—Yes.

207. You are a captain in the Militia and a holder of the New Zealand Cross?—Yes.

208. What were you in 1867?—In 1867 I was in Wairoa. I was then Clerk to the Court, and had been acting as interpreter to the Forces, with rank of ensign.

209. How far is Wairoa from Opotiki?—Wairoa is in Hawke's Bay. I was down here [position indicated on map].

210. Were the affairs happening on the coast known throughout the Provincial Districts of Auckland and Hawke's Bay?—Yes.

211. Were you in the way of hearing all that was going on?—Yes; we heard where there was fighting. People who were connected with the Forces knew what was going on.

212. Afterwards?—I was afterwards stationed at Opotiki.

213. In what year would that be?—I came round from the West Coast to the East Coast in 1869 with Colonel Whitmore.

214. Were you a member of any corps then?—I was then lieutenant on Colonel Whitmore's staff, and I was through the Urewera campaign, and then in Taupo.

215. You knew all these districts?—From 1869 to 1875, when I was stationed at Opotiki, I was through all these districts.

216. Did you at that time hear of any particular act of heroism performed by Wrigg or McDonald?—No.

217. At what action was it that you got the Cross?—For the first attack on Ngatapa Pa on 3rd December, 1868.

218. Were you recommended by the officer commanding the corps, Colonel Whitmore?—Yes.

219. Did you apply for it?—No, certainly not. The first thing I heard of it was Colonel Whitmore told me he had recommended it.

220. Do you know how many there are who hold the Cross?—I think, nineteen or twenty.

221. When you heard that Mr Wrigg had got the Cross did you feel at all surprised?—Yes, I did feel very much surprised.

222. Did you represent the matter to the Defence Department in the way of a protest?—I did.

223. Is that a copy of the letter you sent in?—Yes. [Letter to Defence Department, 24th March, 1898, put in—Exhibit No. 26.]

224. We have heard of some correspondence between yourself and Captain Bower, and a letter of his has been put in. You were asked for the letter you sent him: have you got it or a copy?—No, I have not. I may say that letter was written to Captain Bower without any knowledge that he had recommended Mr. Wrigg for the Cross. I was writing to Captain Bower asking if he knew of the circumstances of Mr. Wrigg's alleged action of bravery, as I had heard nothing of him. I wished to get information.

225. *Mr. Wilford.*] You have been taking a very great interest in this matter, Captain Preece, have you not?—Yes.

226. And wrote to the papers as well?—Yes.

227. Did you write a letter dated the 12th August and sign it, "An East Coast Resident of Thirty Years"?—I did not.