

# The Tragedy

## ... of the ...

# "JEAN BART"

THE French corvette Heroine, under Captain Cecille.

was at the Bay of Islands toward the end of the year 1838. On September 28 an American whaler, the Rebecca Sims, arrived, and told Captain Cecille of the loss at the Chatham Islands of the Jean Bart, a French whaler. The crew had been killed and the ship burned.

The French captain requested the American ship and a French whaler, the Adele, to guide him to the Chathams to enable him to make reprisals. The two whalers were to precede him, decoy the Maoris aboard, and hold them prisoner till the Heroine arrived next day. It was feared that if the Heroine appeared with the others the Maoris would be suspicious and refuse to come aboard at all.

The three ships left the Bay of Islands on October 6 and arrived at the Chathams on October 17; but while the two whalers proceeded alone to the anchorage, the Maoris seemed suspicious, and refused to come aboard unless hostages were first sent ashore. However, Captain Ray, of the Rebecca Sims, persuaded on board the Chief, Eitouna, his wife, two other Maoris, and four young Maori women. No others would come. Later in the day their visitors wished to go ashore, but they were arrested and detained.

The Chief's wife managed to reach the side of the ship, jumped overboard, and swam to shore. She had almost reached it when a sailor, taking her for a man escaping, shot at and killed her. This gave the alarm to those on shore; and, seeing their Chief did not return, and that at least one of their number had been killed, they feared the worst, and started firing on the ships, but without serious result.

The Heroine appeared later as arranged, and the Chief was examined on board the corvette before the officers, when the following story was told:

The Jean Bart arrived at the Chathams in the beginning of May, and as usual the Maoris thronged on board for trade. The captain did not like so many of them on board at one time, so he told Eitouna to order his men ashore, and prepared to sail out of the anchorage. Eitouna gave the order, and most of his men obeyed, only 18 remaining; but there was also a Chief, Pomare, and as Eitouna had no control over his people, they all remained.

Eitouna cautioned the captain against Pomare, and I have learned from a manuscript letter of Shand, who was for many years a resident on the Chathams, that these two chiefs were at the time on unfriendly terms, and would not move about in the vicinity of each other unarmed. This accounted for many of the Maoris being armed when they came on board to trade, and it was evidently this which caused the captain to be uneasy, for he was not to know the relation in which the two chiefs stood to each other.

Eitouna and several of his chiefs went into the cabin, and while there heard a great noise on deck. They hurried out, but on reaching the companion-way a wounded Maori fell from the deck, and they all returned to the cabin. Soon the partition was burst, and someone tried to kill them through the opening. They seized and loaded guns to defend themselves, and killed two of the crew. At once the companion and skylight were barricaded, and

after a while all was quiet. Eitouna thought that the crew, on seeing the Maoris had secured guns, had barricaded the openings so as to give them the chance of making off in their canoes; for when they reached the deck no one was visible.

There had been killed 28 Maori men and one woman, and 20 others wounded; nine of the killed and three of the wounded belonged to Eitouna's people; he named them all.

This story is rather confused, but it is what was gathered from the chief. Next day 100 armed men from the European ships went ashore, but they failed to catch any of the people, who had taken to the bush, so they destroyed the village and seven canoes; and by 4 in the afternoon there remained only the ashes of a settlement which had covered about three-quarters of a mile.

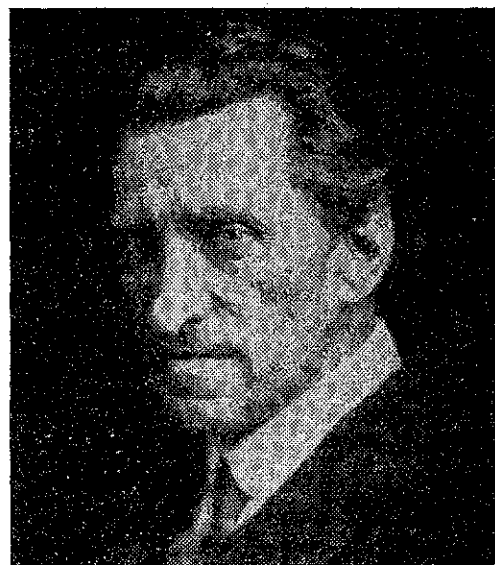
The destruction of the houses, while it would mean great labour in their reconstruction, was not so very dreadful; but the loss caused by the burning of the canoes was irreparable. They had been brought from New Zealand, and there was no timber on the islands sufficiently big to allow of others being built.

All pigs and potatoes found were collected and taken away. All this was considered a just reprisal for the destruction of the Jean Bart.

THE chief was kept on board, and he naturally wanted to know what was to be done to him. He maintained that he himself had always dealt justly with Europeans, and Captain Ray confirmed this.

He was told he was to be taken to France, and no doubt clemency would be shown him by the French King. He requested that his wife might be allowed to accompany him, but was told that their rules forbade the carrying of women on French ships of war. He was not told that his wife had been killed, and instructions were issued that he was to be kept in ignorance of this. He said good-bye to the young women, sending instructions to his people and giving keepsakes to those about to be sent ashore. Even the officers found the scene affecting. The women were then sent ashore, but the two men were kept prisoners.

In Captain Cecille's report, he said that the Maori reprisals too often were provoked by the aggression of white people. There was one fact he did not report, for he did not know it. J. Busby reported it later to the Government of New South Wales. It was this: Two years earlier the Caroline, of Hobart, had been whaling near the Chathams, and had employed a number of Maoris cleaning bone, promising them a cask of tobacco as payment. When the work was finished, however, payment was refused, and three or four of the Maoris who were on board at the time were kidnapped and made to do sailor-work. One of the mates of the Caroline was the man Grimwood, who was acting (Continued on inside back cover.)



Johannes C. Andersen.

Many pages of New Zealand's early history are disfigured with accounts of shocking tragedies such as that of the taking by the Maoris of the "Jean Bart," while lying at anchor at the Chatham Islands. That the Maori was, on many such instances, merely exacting vengeance for some cruel or despicable act played on him by the whites, is maintained in this article by one of New Zealand's foremost authorities on Maori life and history.

Johannes C. Andersen

The first of a series of  
2YA Talks

