

Appendix to Account of George Alfred Adlam.

Involvement of the 43rd Regiment in actions on the East Coast in 1864.

In January 1864 a force of 700 British soldiers under Colonel Carey, escorted by 3 warships was landed at Tauranga, and encamped at Te Papa. It was considered that the Ngaiterangi people, while not at first openly hostile, were in fact supplying the Waikato insurgents with volunteers and supplies, and the purpose of the expeditionary force was to stop this trafficking without actually taking the offensive. From the beginning of March on, the Ngaiterangi became more and more belligerent, sending the commander of the British troops, now Col. Greer, a series of challenges to attack them, even offering to build a road for the soldiers to get to the pa they wished him to assault. They also drew up a code of regulations for the conduct of the fighting, binding themselves not to practise any barbarous customs, to spare the wounded and any of the enemy who surrendered, not to mutilate the dead, and not to harm unarmed Pakehas or women and children. They were very put out when no reply was received to their challenges. To keep his young men from becoming bored with the lack of activity, Rawiri, the war leader of the Ngaiterangi, allowed them to make a fairly half-hearted attack on the British camp at Te Papa, which was aborted when one of the attackers was accidentally wounded when a gun went off.

By early April the British had been reinforced by the H.M.S. Miranda, with the 68th Durham Light Infantry under Col. Meurant, and the 43rd Monmouthshire Light Infantry under Lieut. Col. Booth, with later contingents from other regiments, including the 1st Waikato Regiment, making a total of about 2000 troops. This was increased to 2600 when General Cameron arrived on the 21st of April on H.M.S. Esk, and 600 seamen and marines were disembarked from H.M.S. Miranda, Curacoa, Esk, and Harrier on the 26th. (Accounts of the exact numbers of the British forces vary, but I have followed Gilbert Mair.) They also had 15 heavy guns.

The Ngaiterangi were also awaiting reinforcements, from the East Coast tribes (Tai Rawhiti) who had been assembling at Matata since January, eventually numbering from 7 to 8 hundred. They were planning to join Rawiri, but were refused passage by the Arawa who remained loyal to the British cause. Towards the end of March, 200 men of the 43rd under Major Colville were sent from Tauranga to Maketu, where they constructed a redoubt on the site of the old Pukemaire Pa. The Tai Rawhiti had attempted to break through the Arawa resistance at Rotoiti on the 7th, 8th and 9th of March, but were repulsed, and returned to Matata. On the 21st of April they arrived at the Waihi Estuary to the east of Maketu, and Major Colville, out duck shooting with two of his men was lucky to escape. He returned with a party of the 43rd and 3rd Waikato, and the two sides fired at each other across the estuary. Four privates were wounded. There was another skirmish the next day; the Tai Rawhiti dug in among the sandhills on the opposite side of the river. (This would be the presentday site of Pukehina.) On the 26th, H.M.S. Falcon and Sandfly joined the fray, shelling the Maoris from the sea, and driving them back across the estuary again. At this stage 300 Arawa entered the battle, and there was a running fight along the coast to Matata, where the Tai Rawhiti were finally defeated in what became known as the Battle of Kaokaoroa (the long ribs) on the 28th. In May Major Colville and the 43rd were replaced at Maketu by Major Kirby and the 68th.

On the 3rd of April the Ngaiteranga began to build a strongly fortified pa on a grassy knoll at Pukehinahina, about 3 miles (5 km.) from Tauranga, and the same distance from the Army camp at Te Papa. They seem to have been fairly leisurely about it and had no difficulty in bringing some of the materials required for its construction from a considerable distance. It was situated between two arms of the Tauranga harbour, where they had been connected by a ditch dug by the missionaries, and a post and rail fence with a gate at the top of the ridge, hence the European name "Gate Pa". There were actually two redoubts; the major one was 90 by 30 yards, (82 by 27 m.) and was garrisoned by 200 Ngaiteranga; and the lesser one, about 25 yards (23 m.) square, was held by 35 of their allies, mainly Ngati Koheriki. So the Maoris were outnumbered by at least ten to one.

On the afternoon of the 28th of April, General Cameron launched a sham attack, which continued till dark. No casualties were suffered by either side, but the distraction enabled Col. Greer with 730 men of the 68th Regiment to leave camp after nightfall and make their way unobserved over the mudflats and take up a position in the broken and bush covered land in the Maori rear, cutting off their avenue of retreat inland - or at least in daylight.

Most of the 29th was spent bombarding the pa with artillery. The British were equipped with 8 mortars, the heaviest of which threw a 46 lb. (21 kgms.) shell;

2 24 lb.(11 kgm.) howitzers; 2 32 lb.(14.5 kgms.); and 5 Armstrong guns. The Armstrongs represented the latest in ordnance technology - they were rifled and breech-loading, and cast by a new process which made it possible to discharge a huge weight of shell without a corresponding increase in the weight of the gun. There were 2 6-pounders, (2.7 kgms.) 3 40-pounders (18 kgms.), and 1 enormous 110-pounder (50 kgms.). Such was the power of the bombardment that it has been estimated that 30 tonnes of shot and shell were dropped on or near the Maori position - 300 lbs. (136 kgms.) for every one of the defenders !

By 4p.m. a large breach had been made, the paling fence and all above-ground defences had been flattened, and it was considered (as so often in W.W.I under similar circumstances) that the intense bombardment must have left very few of the defenders alive, especially as scarcely a single shot had been fired from the defences all day. So the assault was ordered, the first party consisting of 150 Naval Brigade under Commander Hay, and 150 of the 43rd Regiment under Lieut. Col. Booth. The 43rd was considered to be an elite unit. There was a covering party of 170 men of the 70th under Major Ryan concealed in the fern 100 yards (91 m.) from the pa to keep the enemy's heads down, and a reserve totalling 300 from the 43rd and the Naval Brigade under Captain Hamilton was in close support.

Under covering fire from the 70th, and from the 68th in their positions at the rear, the storming party, four abreast, with hurrahs and cheers, rushed towards the breach, undeterred by the rain and the gathering darkness. They were quickly through the breach, and there may have been some hand-to-hand fighting with a few defenders at the outer wall, as told by Hori Ngatai, but actually only 3 of the British casualties showed other than gun-shot wounds. There seems to have been a brief lull, and General Cameron, watching from quite a short distance, was confident that the pa had been taken. But suddenly there was a furious and destructive fire from within the innermost recesses of it, upon the by now closely packed attackers. These volleys came from a maze of bunkers, zig-zagged trenches, tunnels and deep gun pits, covered over with timber and brush, so that the British were actually standing on the defenders and shot from below. After a few minutes of this they could stand it no longer, and turned and ran.

At the renewed outbreak of firing, General Cameron had ordered the reserves into action, and they quickly became mingled with their comrades, whose only idea was to get out of the pa. Captain Hamilton attempted to rally them, but was soon mortally wounded. Many of the fresh attackers were caught in a deadly crossfire between the larger and smaller redoubts, and soon the rout became general. Cameron decided to break off the action, and had his troops dig in about 100 yards from the pa, ready to renew the assault in the morning. However, during the wet and dark night the Maoris, after collecting all the British arms and accoutrements they could carry, infiltrated the lines of the 68th and got clean away, leaving the pa empty. But the rings, watches, money, trinkets, clothing etc. of the British dead were left untouched, and before the Maoris left the pa some of the wounded were given water.

The British casualties totalled 38 killed, of which a disproportionate number were officers, and 73 wounded. The 43rd lost their C.O., Lieut. Colonel Booth, 4 captains, and a lieutenant; the Naval Brigade lost Captain Hamilton, a commander, a lieutenant, and another officer. A number of other officers were wounded, some severely. The Maoris lost about 30; of these only 15 were killed in the massive bombardment.

The debacle at the Gate Pa was a terrible shock to the government and public both in N.Z. and the U.K.; a defeat "perhaps unparalleled in the British Military Annals" (Dalton) There was no understanding as to how it had come about; indiscipline and cowardice among the attackers was the popular opinion, even among men on the spot. At the sight of the storming party recoiling in rout, "the general (Cameron) dashed his field glass on the ground, turned his back on the fugitives, and retired to his tent to conceal his emotion." (Samuel Mitchell and the Victoria Cross) He declined to visit or even enquire about the wounded officers of the 43rd. Arch-deacon Octavius Hadfield wrote, "There can be no doubt that the men of the assaulting party were a lot of arrant cowards." And the men themselves felt humiliated and disgraced. "The night of the 29th of April was, in the British camp at Tauranga, a night of deep humiliation and mutual reproach. The men were disgraced in their own eyes, and what would the people of England say? There is not a more gallant regiment in the service than the 43rd...But now where were all the laurels they had won in the Peninsula and India? Soiled and trampled in the dust, and by whom? Not by forces equal to them in arms and discipline; not by foemen worthy of their steel; but by a horde of half-naked half-armed savages whom they had been taught to despise." (Samuel Mitchell and the Victoria Cross.) Governor Grey considered

a peaceful settlement; General Cameron returned to Auckland with 700 men, leaving Colonel Greer in charge

But all was not lost. On the morning of the 21st of June Col. Greer marched out of the Te Papa camp on a reconnaissance in strength. Four miles (6.5 km.) he came across Rawiri and about 500 of his men fortifying a potentially strong position. But the pa was unfinished, being nothing more than a line of incomplete rifle pits. Greer deployed his men, mainly the 43rd and 68th Light Infantry, with a detachment of the 1st Waikato Militia, opened fire, and sent to Te Papa for reinforcements. When these were near enough to offer support- 220 men and 1 Armstrong gun - Greer ordered an assault. The Maoris fired a volley which was aimed too high, (apparently a failing of theirs) and did little damage, and before they could reload the British were upon them with fixed bayonets, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued, the men of the 43rd being "mad for revenge." The Maoris fought back bravely until Rawiri himself was killed, then they broke and fled, after suffering heavy casualties- 107 killed, 27 wounded, all severely, and 10 prisoners ; practically all suffered bayonet wounds. British losses were 13 killed and 39 wounded.

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