

WAB-OFFICE, February 15, 1861.

Lord Herbert has received a Despatch and its inclosures, of which the following are copies, addressed to the Military Secretary by Major-General Pratt, C.B. :—

Head-Quarters, New Plymouth, Taranaki,
SIR, 10th November 1860.

REFERRING to my Despatch of the 16th ultimo, I have the honour to state, for the information of His Royal Highness the General Commanding-in-Chief, that the Governor's letters were to the effect that the Waikato tribes had marched in force to join William Kingi, on the 11th October, and it became necessary for me to restore the men to the Waitara Camp, which had been denuded of half its force for my expedition to the South, and also to strengthen the town and out-posts.

The reports from the Native Department were, from the peculiar character of the Maori movements, of the most fluctuating character, and varied day by day; at one time the enemy were in the immediate neighbourhood and might be expected on any day, at another they would not move before the end of November, or in December, thus rendering it impossible to form any decisive plan regarding them.

On the evening of the 5th instant, however, I received from Mr Drummond Hay reliable information that the Waikatos had crossed the Waitara River in force that morning, for the purpose of joining William Kingi, and that they would be at Mahoetahi, about eight miles from this, that night or next morning.

I immediately arranged that a column (strength as per margin)* should move from this under my personal command at 5 A.M., so as to reach Mahoetahi at 8½, and also that another column (see margin)† under Colonel Mould, R. E., should move from the Camp at the Waitara and join me at Mahoetahi at the same hour.

The intended move from New Plymouth was carried out, and the Mangoraka river crossed without opposition, and on nearing Mahoetahi Hill, the site of a dilapidated Pah, with a few palisades and wharves, which my column did a little after 8 A.M., we were met by a heavy fire from the Waikatoes, who occupied it, as well as the swamp, gullies, and fern land contiguous.

This was returned by the skirmishers of the 65th Regiment, posted on the road leading to the Pah. The guns were quickly brought into position, and the Militia directed to take post to the left.

The ammunition and camp equipage being now mostly over the river, I ordered the Militia to seize a hill a little in advance on the left, close to the Pah, and to occupy it; this being effected, a portion of the 65th Regiment, under Captain Turner, were directed to fix bayonets and storm the Pah in front, the Militia being ordered to do the same on the left flank of it. This was done by both in the most gallant manner, the enemy

still retaining, for a short time, hold of a portion of the Pah, and keeping up a most galling fire from the fern and swamp.

The 12th and 40th Regiments having now succeeded in bringing up the whole of the ammunition, camp equipage, &c., extended the right of the line, throwing it forward, while Colonel Mould, with the column from the Waitara Camp, came into action on the left. The enemy finding himself thus hemmed in and under a murderous cross fire, after an action that lasted two hours, turned and fled with much loss.

I pursued with a portion of the force, consisting of the 12th, 40th, 65th,* and with two guns crossed the Waiongona River; and the retreat was so rapid and the rout so complete, that at two miles from the Camp several wounded prisoners were taken, and dead bodies found. The road all along was stained with blood. Then, having swept round by Ngatiparirua and the Onuku-Kaitara stockade rejoined the force at Mahoetahi, where, leaving 300 men under Colonel Mould, R.E., to occupy this position, and eventually another more desirable in its neighbourhood, the troops returned to New Plymouth after a long and arduous day's work, and a portion of the force from the Waitara rejoined the Camp.

Amongst the killed are five very important Chiefs, the first being the leading man of the Maori King movement, the four others, very influential chiefs; there were also many chiefs of minor note killed; it is not easy to obtain accurate intelligence of the numbers of the enemy who were in the field or who have been slain; but, from the bodies counted on the spot, which we buried, and that were being brought in wounded from the fern where they lay concealed, I should think from 80 to 100 were killed and wounded, of this latter five were brought in as prisoners, and one unwounded man.

I never saw a more gigantic or powerful set of men than these tribes, and being armed with well finished English Rifles and double barrelled fowling-pieces they were able to keep up a most continuous fire, whilst their power of concealment was most marvellous; indeed, when closely upon them, we only knew of their whereabouts by the smoke from their guns. Many of these arms were captured by our men on the field and brought into Camp.

I trust this defeat of the enemy will have good effect, and it is a curious circumstance that an insulting challenge (which I inclose) was signed by the first named Chief, who was killed the very day after he crossed the Waitara.

Our loss was 4 killed, and 2 officers and 13 men wounded, as per casualty return.

I append the report from Colonel Mould, R.E., relative to the column under his command, remarking only, that the east end of the Pah was, in my opinion, occupied a little earlier than Colonel Mould supposes, but that the arrival of his column aided most materially in driving the enemy from the slope of the hill on the outside of the Pah, and from their strong position in the swamp.

I have now the great satisfaction of testifying to the gallant behaviour of the troops; Artillery, Engineers, Line, Marine Artillery of the Naval

* Column from New Plymouth.—5 Field Officers, 9 Captains, 13 Subalterns, 6 Staff, 23 Serjeants, 10 Drummers, 617 Rank and File.

† Column from the Waitara.—2 Field Officers, 1 Captain, 8 Subalterns, 1 Staff, 10 Serjeants, 4 Drummers, 291 Rank and File.

* 2 Field-Officers, 4 Captains, 8 Subalterns, 1 Staff, 17 Serjeants, 8 Drummers, 400 Rank and File.