

MAJOR-GENERAL PRATT, C.B., TO GOVERNOR GORE BROWNE, C.B.

Head Quarters,
New Plymouth, Taranaki,
16th October, 1860.

SIR,—

(No. 306.)

I have the honor to state for the information of your Excellency, that on the morning of the 9th instant I moved out from New Plymouth with a force detailed in the Return enclosed, for the purpose of attacking three strong Pahs, named Puketakariki, Orongomahunguai, and Mataiau, held by the rebel Maories of the Taranaki Tribe, and situated two on the right and one on the left bank of the "Kaihihi" river, about eighteen miles distant from this place.

The Force reached the Tataraimaka Block the same afternoon and encamped for the night, next morning after passing through a most difficult line of country, particularly for Artillery, reached within three-quarters of a mile from the Pahs by 8 o'clock in the morning, when the camp was pitched, entrenchments thrown up, and when this was completed, two strong reconnoitering parties proceeded to examine the best approaches to the Pahs, that on the left was through very high fern crossed by a deep gully and found totally impracticable for Artillery; the party was fired upon from rifle pits from the bush and the fire was returned—there were no casualties—the right party found open ground near the pahs with a space of 150 yards between the first Pah and a strong belt of bush.

I had in conjunction with Colonel Mould, Commanding Royal Engineers, decided upon advancing upon these Pahs by a somewhat regular sap, and endeavour to shew to the Maories that their pahs could be taken without that loss of life to our Forces which had before occurred. To carry this into effect, a working party and guard (strength as per foot-note*) proceeded at 6 a.m. next morning and at once commenced to throw up a parallel within 250 yards of the second named Pah; strange to say, the enemy permitted this to be carried out and to let the Troops get somewhat under cover without firing a shot, and by 9 o'clock the guns were sent on from the Camp, and by 12 o'clock were in position and shortly afterwards commenced a steady fire upon the Pah. The enemy seeing it was not our intention to rush up to the Pah, had commenced firing from it, and rifle pits at 11 o'clock and kept up a continuous fire upon the working party and troops during the whole day; the 8-inch gun, 24 pounder Howitzers, and small mortar poured their fire at fixed intervals during the whole day, but the Pah which was covered with green flax shewed little signs of a breach, and firing ceased at nightfall on both sides; fresh working parties to make an advanced sap were at work during the night.

At 6 a.m. next morning a flying sap was begun, approaching slowly to the Pah, with a mantelet; skirmishers were thrown forward, and the howitzers advanced to play upon an angle of the Pah; a bag of gunpowder had been ordered to assist in making a breach, when it was found that the enemy—apparently dismayed at this new mode of attack—had evacuated the Pah during the night, and the Troops entered it.

This Pah was found of a very strong character, with rifle pits all round, covered passages, and all the usual appliances which the Maories are so capable of constructing: it was full of their provisions, (potatoes,) which were carted away and given to the Troops. Had the enemy chosen to defend this Pah even with our mode of approach it could not have been carried without much loss of life.

Having crossed the Kaihihi river myself with Lieut.-Col. Carey, D.A.G., and examined the Pah there, I had ordered 50 men of the 65th regiment, with some friendly Natives, to proceed to the left bank of the river, and open fire upon the Pah and rifle trenches, when, by a signal agreed upon, they would know that the first named Pah was being assaulted; this they did, found that the Mutaiiao Pah had also been abandoned, entered and destroyed it: it was not as strong as the other two.

The troops and artillery then advanced upon the Puketakariki Pah, standing upon an eminence, and about 300 yards from the Pah just taken; a few shells were thrown into it, to which there was no response, and the troops rushed into it and destroyed it. This Pah was also of a strong construction with all the usual appliances for defence and was full of potatoes.

Between the first and second Pahs the enemy had placed a long line of rifle pits, evidently supposing that the Troops would at once have advanced up the open ground between the line of rifle pits and the belt of bush—and had this been done we should have suffered severe loss—and I have every reason to believe that the enemy were entirely baffled by the new mode of attack.

I have before mentioned that the Pahs had since they were reconnoitered been covered over with green flax (*phormium tenax*), rendering them quite impervious to musketry, and by its tenacity preventing even the heavy gun from making any great impression upon the Pah.

Our casualties were five wounded (state here enclosed), amongst whom I regret to say was Captain Pasley, R.E., serving on my Staff, and acting as Engineer in the Trenches, and a most valuable soldier Serjeant Howatt, R.E. All the wounded are doing well.

The loss of the enemy will never be known as they always conceal it; blood and stretchers on which people had been carried away were found, and a Chief named Luke is known to have been killed.

* *Guard of the Trenches*—1 Captain, 3 Subalterns, 5 Sergeants, 2 Drummers.—Rank and File, 150.
Working Party—2 Captains, 2 Subalterns, 2 Sergeants, 2 Drummers.—Rank and File, 250.