

In conformity with the 3rd clause of the above-mentioned Commission, we have caused to be inserted in the principal newspapers throughout the colony, notices calling upon all persons claiming, under any laws or regulations now or in time past in force in the colony, to be or to have been entitled to grants of land, or to remission of money in the purchase of land, as retired members of Her Majesty's forces, or for services rendered in colonial corps, to forward to us applications showing the nature and grounds of their claims.

In reply to these notices we have received 1,582 applications from different persons. We have found that a large number of these claims had little or nothing to recommend them, and that many were based upon the notion that the Commissioners had power to extend or alter the law in their favour, or had at their disposal blocks of land to be awarded as compensation for losses sustained or for services rendered during the war, or for length of service in Her Majesty's forces. We have, notwithstanding, carefully examined them all; taking evidence wherever we could obtain it, and making references to the various departments of Government from which authentic information might be obtained.

In order to facilitate the inquiries we were instructed to institute, we have visited and held sittings at Wellington, Auckland, the Thames, New Plymouth, Wanganui, Napier, Dunedin, Oamaru, Christchurch, and Blenheim.

In determining the various applications we have been guided mainly by these two considerations:—

1st. That it was not within our province to go beyond the law by entertaining claims that might have been valid had they been preferred at the proper time and in the proper manner, but which had been allowed to lapse through the manifest neglect or indifference of the claimants themselves; and,

2nd. That we were required to do justice to those who, from purely technical difficulties, excusable ignorance, or from the neglect or error of those in authority, who ought to have forwarded the claims and furthered the interests of their men, had failed to secure those advantages which the law allowed to them. Amongst these last we have included a number of discharged soldiers, who, from having no one to inform them of their privileges or to advise and assist them in obtaining the land to which they were entitled, either omitted to make their applications within the stipulated time, or were rebuffed by difficulties and technical objections often raised by Crown Lands Commissioners, who were more anxious to augment the provincial revenues than to part with the land.

We have satisfied ourselves that the claimants so recommended completed the requisite period of residence in their respective districts, but as a rule we have excluded all those living in provincial districts where the Acts were never in force, and also those discharged in the colony subsequent to 1861, after which time no plea of ignorance could reasonably be admitted, as the conditions were then well known in all the regiments serving in New Zealand. Where exceptions have been made to this rule there have been special circumstances to influence our decision.

In advocating this extension of the law on behalf of old soldiers we are supported by the Public Petitions Committee of 1879, who recommended "that the claims of soldiers discharged in the colony should be recognized where at any time the claimants have been entitled to grants of land, but through informality or ignorance of the regulations failed to comply with the conditions."

There are two cases, each including many applicants, which we think require special remark, and we give a short summary of the principal points; the full particulars are contained in evidence taken by the present Commissioners; in that taken by Major Gordon, a previous Commissioner; in Reports of the Petitions Committees of the House of Representatives on various occasions; and in voluminous correspondence with the Defence Office. We refer to the claim of Major Jackson and the Forest Rangers, and to that of the Defence Force raised at Auckland by the late Colonel Nixon (which latter was favourably reported on in 1873 by the Commissioner, Major Gordon).

In August, 1863, Major Jackson was directed to enrol for three months a certain number of men for a special service as Forest Rangers. In consideration of the arduous and dangerous duties they had to perform, they received a very