

NZAR ID A29 NZ Military and NZ Armed Constabulary background information

Compiled by John Osborne DTT PhD FSG September 2005

Hone Heke's rebellion led the Legislative Council of New Zealand, on 25 March 1845, to pass the first Militia Ordinance. This provided that all able-bodied European males between 18 and 65 years of age were to hold themselves ready for service and for a period of 28 days' training annually. Each Militia was limited to within 25 miles from the local police office. The Governor of New Zealand was empowered to make regulations and to "draw out" militia units for service. A small detachment of volunteers of the Auckland Militia Battalion served as pioneers and gunners with the British forces in the operations against Hone Heke. Most settlers armed themselves with "Brown Bess" flintlock or percussion muskets and some with single shot pistols and swords and underwent training. Their uniform consisted of "blue shirt, a cap similar to that worn by sailors, and any kind of trousers". In 1847 an Ordinance regulated the raising of native (Maori) levies, who armed themselves in the 1840s-60s mainly with "Tupara" (double guns) and "Patiti" (war hatchets) and who were to be under the same discipline as European troops. Maoris served throughout the wars in the 1860s to the early 1880s, generally in tribal groups, or as members of the European volunteer forces when they were issued with the same arms as the Europeans.

In 1858 a Militia Act, similar to the 1845 Ordinance, was passed by the New Zealand Parliament. In this provision was made for forming special volunteer units. Exempted from militia service, volunteers were required to serve anywhere in New Zealand. The country was divided into militia districts, and a permanent staff (one officer, two non-commissioned officers, and a bugler) was provided in each. These were to train all militia and volunteer units in their district. So great was the number of new units that on 19 August 1859 Captain H. C. Balneavis, an ex-British Imperial officer, was appointed Deputy Adjutant-General, Militia and Volunteers, with his headquarters at Auckland. Until 1872 the North Island Militia were frequently called for "actual service". They were employed as garrisons, sometimes on frontier outposts, and in a few skirmishes.

The Colonial Defence Act of 1862 authorised the formation of the first NZ Colonial Government Regular Force, "Colonial Defence Force" initially a mounted body, not to exceed 500 men, enrolment being voluntary and for a three-year period of service. Maoris as well as Europeans were eligible, and officers and non-commissioned officers were appointed by the Governor. Divisions were formed in Auckland, Napier, and Wellington, the Auckland Division played a significant role during the Waikato Wars and, later, saw action in the Bay of Plenty. The Napier Division took part in the Battle at Omarunnui (1866) and several skirmishes, but the Wellington Division was never in action.

Special forces were raised to meet the Rebellious Maoris in their own element—the bush. The most famous was the New Zealand Forest Rangers (NZFR), the first company of which was formed in August 1863 under Major W. Jackson. Towards the end of that year a second company was formed under Captain later Major Von Tempsky. The NZ Forest rangers were issued with 30 bore Calisher and Terry breech loading carbines, and most Rangers purchased their own percussion revolvers, some bought .36" caliber thumb cocking all steel ex British Navy P1853 London made Colt 6 shot revolvers (cost about 40 shillings), or the trigger cocking .44" cal P1851 5 shot Adams revolver, these were both quickly replaced with the double action .44" cal P1856 Beaumont Adams (same as used by the British Army and Navy (cost new about 180 shillings) and (in Von Tempsky's No 2 company) Rangers were encouraged to purchase their own fixed blade bush fighting knives mostly English, Scottish or European Dirks. Rangers were enrolled for three months at a time and were given high rates of pay (five shillings a day). The Forest Rangers guerilla tactics became so effective that they were soon feared by the rebelling Maori.

In October 1867 the NZ Forest Rangers were disbanded and the New Zealand Armed Constabulary Force (NZACF) took over, and to start with used the same arms as the NZFR, several NZ Forest Rangers enrolled in the NZACF and Von Tempsky was commissioned an Inspector and commanded No 5 Division, unfortunately he was killed in action in 1868, shot in the head. By the end of 1869 some of the NZACF in the Napier and Taupo Districts were issued with Hay Pattern (medium) MKIII Snider 3 band .577" caliber breech loading center fire cartridge rifles, and several NZACF members purchased P1868 .450" caliber Adams 6 shot cartridge revolvers. The last shots were fired in northern Hawkes Bay in May 1872 but there was an uneasy peace until the final surrender of the Maori King and his followers and the Parihaka rebelling Maori on 5 November 1881.