

## **Ko te Mahinga i Kawau:**

### ***The Kawau Incident:***

#### ***Rangiriri:***

By the morning of the 21 November 1863, the battle of Rangiriri had ended with the surrender of around 183 Waikato prisoners which included Wiremu Kūmete, Tara Hawaiiiki, Te Kihirini, Te Aho, Tapihana, Wini Kerei, Tioriori, Maihi Kātīpa, and Ta Kerei te Rauangaanga, a relative of King Tawhiao. During the previous night the main body of the Kingite garrison escaped, including Wiremu Tamehana and King Tawhiao. The prisoners were secured in a native church near the battle scene and later taken by river to Mangatāwhiri where they were marched to Auckland and imprisoned.

As there were no land based prisons available in Auckland to secure the prisoners, which now numbered 214, they were confined to the coal hulk the ‘Marion,’ in the Auckland Harbour,

*‘The hulk was moored so that she swung head to the wind, in the centre of the inner harbour of Auckland, at a distance of 500 to 600 yards from the shore, immediately in front of Government House, and the windows of the Government offices. She was thus equally under the eye of the Government and the public.’<sup>1</sup>*

This ship of 347 tons contained two decks especially fitted to contain the prisoners, but had been certified to hold 219. Reports via the Rev. Charles Baker of the Church Missionary Society who was acting as the prisoners’ chaplain seemed to suggest that the prisoners received quality care. This was supported by a letter written by the prisoner Te Oriori who, writing to his sister, stated that the treatment they were receiving was good and that they had been provided with clothing, provisions and utensils.<sup>2</sup> Other sources suggested that the conditions on the hulk were such that it forced Governor Grey to improve their conditions and move them to Kawau Island.

Although Grey sought a parole of the prisoners, his advisors countered that their parole could not be relied on. While his ministers preferred to keep the prisoners secured, Grey prepared a

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<sup>1</sup> William Fox to British Government, Memoranda and Reports Relative to Māori Prisoners, No. 73, 30 September 1864, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> William Fox, (1866). The War in New Zealand, pp. 159-167.

proposal to have the prisoners paroled to his island at Kawau, north of Auckland. Considered an ideal location as the island had no inhabitants other than the Governor's servants and was surrounded by water it would make escape near impossible without boats. As a consequence of Grey's persistence the prison hulk was towed to Kawau Island on the 2 August 1864. Governor Grey was to spend some considerable time on the island seeing to the prisoners welfare and work efforts. As the island appeared secure from escape, the prisoners were supervised by only a handful of guards.

### ***Ka Puta ngä Toa:***

#### ***The Escape:***

Early on the morning of the 11 September 1864 the settlers of Auckland found to their consternation that the majority of the prisoners had escaped from the island. Rāhui Te Kiri of Ngāti Manuhiri, the daughter of Te Kiri Patuparāoa, informed a Mr. Henry Brown that it was her father Te Kiri who arranged the escape. Te Kiri Patuparāoa had sent word to the prisoners that when the weather was right he would light signal fires on the mainland below the Matakana Heads, and send whale boats to uplift the prisoners.<sup>3</sup> On effecting their escape the prisoners landed at Waikauri near Matakana and made for Tamaahua the nearest high point, to construct a fighting pā. At the time the media supplied a lot of detail about the escapees and their pā at Tamahunga. The prisoners appear to have been well armed, the arms having probably been provided by the chief Te Kiri Patuparāoa.<sup>4</sup>

The Pā site was situated about four miles from Ōmaha Bay and situated on the highest point of that mountain range. The Herald at the time supplied the details of the fortifications,

*'To take it by storm would be attended... with a large sacrifice of life, the ascent is steep and rugged, and the pah itself is built with a double palisading and covers about half an acre of land. The uprights of the inner palisading are placed at intervals of three inches apart, and within them, round the whole pah, are lines of rifle pits – the outer palisading reaching only to within about fifteen inches from the ground. The men in the rifle pits can fire through the inner palisading and*

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Brown cited in Brett & Hook (1979). *The Albertlanders*, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> According to James Cowan's sources the Waikato believed that the Government were going to return them to the hulk and sink it in the Hauraki Gulf. Refer James Cowan (1983). *The New Zealand Wars*, vol. 1. pp. 334-335.

*under the bottom of the outer ones at an attacking party. The palisading is constructed with great strength and solidity.’*<sup>5</sup>

According to Cowan, the pā was situated on a narrow ridge on Tamaahua, which had a commanding view over the flats towards the coast and out into the Hauraki Gulf. The Waikato had built a number of nikau huts and the site was partly fenced with ditches, which were about 150 yards in length and 15 to 20 yards in width. The site was surrounded by precipices with only a narrow spur giving access to the site.<sup>6</sup>

From media sources of the time the settlers were in an extreme state of fear, which caused Grey to come under some criticism for his part in the affair. On the 8 October 1864 the Herald wrote the following,

*‘We regret to have to announce that the news from the neighborhood of the rebel pah at Ōmaha is of a very exciting and disastrous character, and again we urge upon Sir George Grey, before it is too late, to retrieve, as far as possible, his unhappy blunder in allowing these prisoners to escape into the hitherto peaceful district, by taking decisive measures before the dissatisfaction spreads generally throughout the north.’*<sup>7</sup>

As a result Grey visited the Ngāti Manuhiri chief Te Kiri Patuparāoa at his pā and asked him if he knew anything about the escape. When Te Kiri replied that he knew where the prisoners were, Grey counted that he would hold him responsible if any harm came to the settlers. Te Kiri replied that he would accept responsibility if the Governor would supply the prisoners with food. It appears that the Governor accepted the condition and food was provided to the chief who passed it on to the Waikato.<sup>8</sup> With the non-appearance of any Colonial force to take them back into custody a party of Waikato warriors went to the Kaipara Maori at Puatahi to solicit their assistance in starting a second battle front in that area. While they were welcomed, their request was turned down, although a number of Puatahi warriors are said to have joined the Waikato.

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<sup>5</sup> NZH, 8 October 1864.

<sup>6</sup> James Cowan. (1983). *The New Zealand Wars, A History of the Campaigns and the Pioneering Period*, vol. 1. 1845-1864, pp. 334-335.

<sup>7</sup> NZH, 8 October 1864.

<sup>8</sup> H. Brett & Henry Hook. (1979). *The Albertlanders*, p. 178.

Blame for the escape now rested with a number of suspects other than the Ngāti Manuhiri chief Te Kiri Patuparāoa. In William Fox's report to the British Government, Tapihana Tiriwā, a Kāwhia chief, informed Governor Grey that he had planned the escape.<sup>9</sup> James Cowan's sources suggested that Tapihana had the assistance of Wi Karamoa, and Wiremu Te Whitoria of Waikato.<sup>10</sup> The superintendent of Kawau Island furnished a report to the Native Secretary in Auckland to the effect that the escapees had been accompanied to Tamahunga by the chief Tauwhitu of Ngā Puhī.<sup>11</sup>

Te Hemara Tauhia of Ngāti Rongo also seems to have been blamed for the escape, an accusation, which he strenuously denied in his communication with Mr. Fox.<sup>12</sup> It appears that the Government was unable to lay the blame on any one individual, but it is possible that all of the above named had a hand in the escape, Te Kiri Patuparāoa because of his close ties with Tainui, Tauwhitu because Ngā Puhī were supplying the Waikato with provisions, and the Tainui chiefs because it was their people.

By the 28 December 1864 the situation relating to the escaped prisoners had not been resolved, although a number of the prisoners had surrendered to the Government after a meeting arranged by Te Hemara Tauhia at Pūhoi.<sup>13</sup> The Waikato were still at large, and with their numbers being boosted by some local Māori, there was some considerable consternation amongst the settlers. Meiklejohn a settler of Matakana had his house and provisions sacked, but it appears that this was in retaliation to him destroying the pā at Tamahunga while Waikato were absent.<sup>14</sup> Other settlers in the area also reported their homes and provisions being ransacked, some at gunpoint.

The escapees failed to incite local Māori into rebellion at their meeting with the Puatahi people and this caused their return to Waikato. According to Henry Brown, the Waikato got tired of their sanctuary at Tamahunga and when no attempt was made by the Government to

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<sup>9</sup> William Fox to British Government, Memoranda and Reports Relative to Māori Prisoners, No. 73, 30 September 1864, p.50.

<sup>10</sup> Cowan, Māori Wars, p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> T. White to the Native Secretary, Reports of Mr. White and Mr. Searancke of the events subsequent to the escape of the Prisoners from Kawau, App. G, 16 September 1864, pp. 56-59.

<sup>12</sup> E. Puckey, 9 November 1864, encl. to no. 71, Memoranda and Reports Relative to Māori Prisoners, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Daily Southern Cross, 18 November 1864. It appears that Grey attended this meeting, but remained on board the 'Falcon' while his representatives Fox and White spoke to the Waikato on the beach at Pūhoi.

<sup>14</sup> NZH, 28 December 1864.

return them to custody, some of them gradually made their way home, though a number settled in the north and intermarried. <sup>15</sup> Cowan records that,

*'The Government wisely left them alone, and they presently made their way across to the Kaipara, and thence to the west Waikato.'* <sup>16</sup>

Tainui recognized Ngāti Manuhiri's participation in the escape of the prisoners, and for their assistance sent a family by the name of Mohi to look after the Ngāti Manuhiri chief Te Kiri Patuparāoa and his wife Pēpei in their old age. This family eventually married into the hapū. Further recognition came with Te Kiri Patuparāoa's daughter Rāhui receiving a tā moko from Tainui reflecting the intimate connections between the Waikato people and Ngāti Manuhiri.

It appears that the Government never considered confiscating land from Ngāti Manuhiri for their participation in this incident and one can only assume that the Government had its hands full at the conclusion of the Waikato wars. Obviously they would not want to incite Ngāti Whātua or Ngā Puhī into any action that might prove costly to the Government. What did evolve from this incident was the re-establishment of the intimate connections that existed between Ngāti Manuhiri and the people of Waikato, all descendants of Tainui.

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<sup>15</sup> Brett & Hook, the Albertlanders, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> Cowan, The Māori Wars, p. 335.