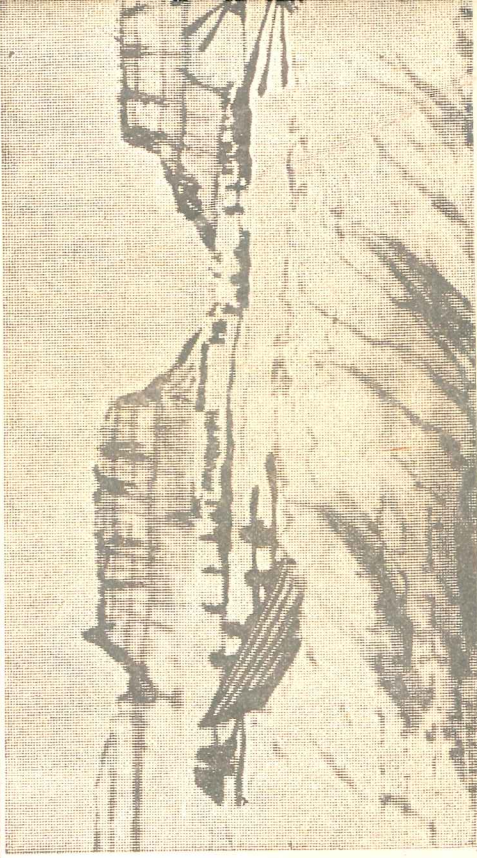




JOHN GUARD, at the age of 80. As a boy of four he was held captive by the Ngati-Ruanui, who unsuccessfully demanded a ransom for his return.

- The recent discovery near the mouth of the Okahu Stream of the anchor from the barque Harriet, wrecked nearby in 1834, is a reminder of one of the strangest stories in the early history of Taranaki. As staff reporter Mark Birch discovered this week, it's a tale of Maori violence and Pakeha treachery . . .



THE BOATS of HMS Alligator returning from the beach

Rescue expedition record of bloodshed

The capture of a Maori chief . . . the epic hauling of a cannon to the top of a 300ft cliff . . . the shelling and burning of two pas — these are some of the turbulent events that accompanied attempts to rescue a Pakeha woman and her two children from Maoris who captured them after the wreck of the whaling barque Harriet a few miles south of Cape Egmont in 1834.

These events are recalled by the recent discovery of an anchor near the mouth of the Okahu Stream.

The 240-ton Harriet was wrecked in a strong westerly gale at 4.30 a.m. on April 29, 1834.

The Harriet was commanded by Captain Richard Hall and was making a voyage from Port Jackson (Sydney) to Cloudy Bay, in the South Island. Among those on board were Captain John Guard (a whaler who partly owned the Harriet), his wife and two children, John and Louisa.

CAMPED

All hands reached shore and camped in tents made from the ship's sails. A number of Maoris began taking goods from the wreck. They were soon reinforced by about 200 warriors and two of Hall's crew who had deserted to the enemy.

The Maoris launched an attack which resulted in casualties and the capture of Mrs Guard and the children.

Mrs Guard had a miraculous escape. She was twice cut down by tomahawk, and was only saved from having her head split open by a large comb which she wore in her hair.

By the force of the blow, some of the teeth of the comb were driven into the skull. Mrs Guard lived for many years after this incident, and during this period 11 pieces of comb worked out from the wounds.

Mrs Guard's life was said to have been saved by the intervention of the chief Te Whiti, also known as Oao-iti or Rophia Haungenge Rua Whiti, who took her under his personal protection.

The rest of the European party, including Captain Guard, walked northwards but were either captured by or voluntarily joined another group of Maoris, who sent them to Moturoa in charge of a guard.

Eventually Captain Guard left Moturoa for Cloudy Bay in Queen Charlotte Sound with five Europeans and three Maori chiefs, to get a ransom for the release of the prisoners. The rest of his party was detained at Moturoa Pa.

Captain Guard's group sailed in one of the Harriet's whale boats, which had been brought from the wreck in a very dilapidated condition and had been laboriously repaired with a hammer, a

pack knife and a few nails.

After a stormy passage, the boat reached Cloudy Bay. Goods for the ransom were obtained, then Captain Guard and the Maori chiefs boarded the schooner Joseph Weller, bound for Sydney.

The Joseph Weller's captain promised to land them near the pa, but heavy weather made this impossible and the vessel sailed on to Sydney.

The Governor of New South Wales dispatched HMS Alligator, carrying a detachment of the 50th (Queen's Own) Regiment, and the schooner Isabella, with a further detachment of the same regiment to New Zealand. Altogether the regiment provided three officers and 60 men.

PUNITIVE

Originally planned mainly as a "rescue" expedition, this venture changed in character and afterwards became known as the first punitive expedition to visit New Zealand.

By coincidence, the 50th Regiment fought over the same ground along this part of the Taranaki coast 30 years later, during the Maori Wars, and against many of those who had taken part in the affair of the Harriet.

On September 21 the Alligator and the Isabella anchored near the Sugar Loaves. At this period Mikotahi was the site of a strong Maori fortification and there was a stockade pa on Paritutu. An account of subsequent events was given by

William Barrett Marshall, assistant surgeon, Royal Navy, who was aboard the Alligator.

Dr Marshall said that former crew members of the Harriet brought from the schooner the Alligator.

HAGGARD

"They looked exceedingly haggard and poorly stricken," wrote Dr Marshall, "having been scantily fed for the previous months; but notwithstanding, they favoured testimony by them from the of the barbarians."

The ships sailed the coast and landed a party of marines and officers at Te Namu, a

The Maoris, when saw the "red coats" boats, made for the Captain Guard peris commanded the expedition, which consisted about 40 men — so marines and sailors.

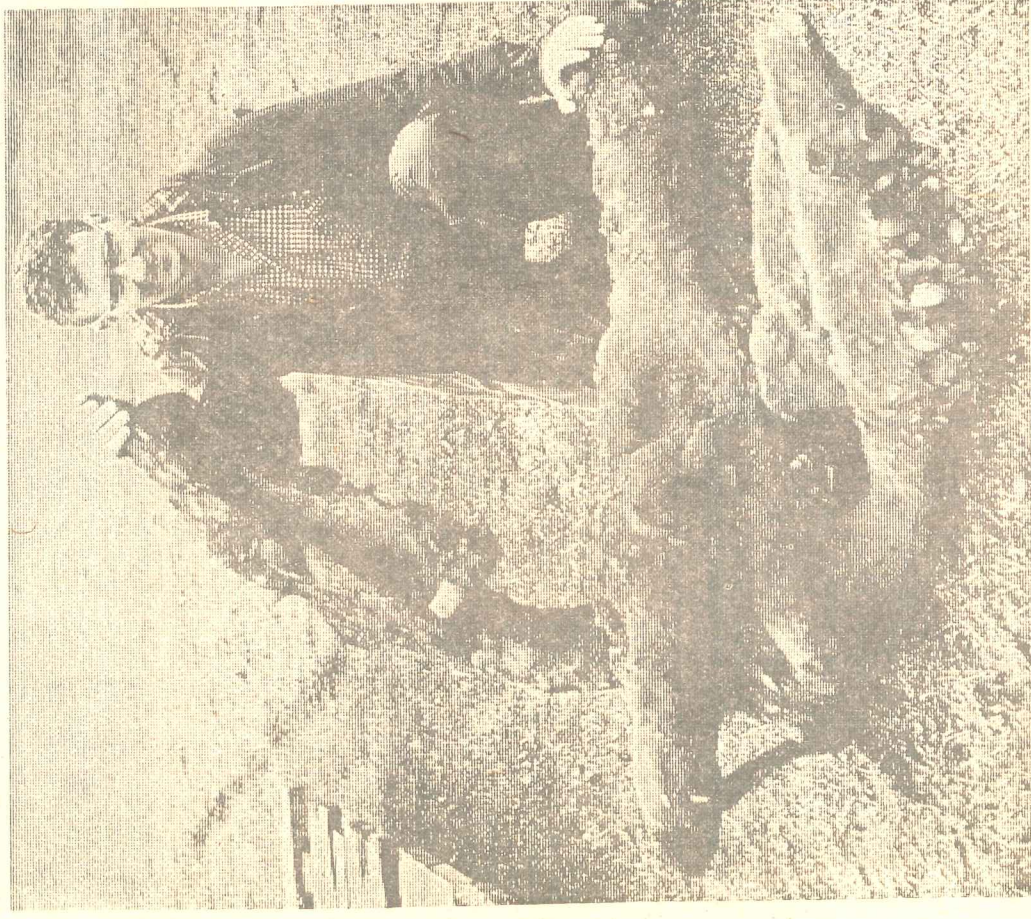
The British force met on the beach unarmed chiefs. One of them addressed Captain Guard in a familiar manner, informing him his wife and children were well and would surrender when ransom, promised by who had been on Dr Marshall wrote there followed "treacherous" capture Oao-iti, unarmed, beach below the Opunake. The children and put in whaling boat by Captain Guard and his men.

"On his brief passage the ship," wrote Dr Marshall, "insult followed suit, one fellow with his arm, etc, a thirding him with the bayonet.

"Thrown to the of the boat, she was ed off before he could cover himself, who had no sooner done he jumped overboard attempted to swim to prevent which repeatedly fired from the boat; until he had been the calf of the leg again made prison

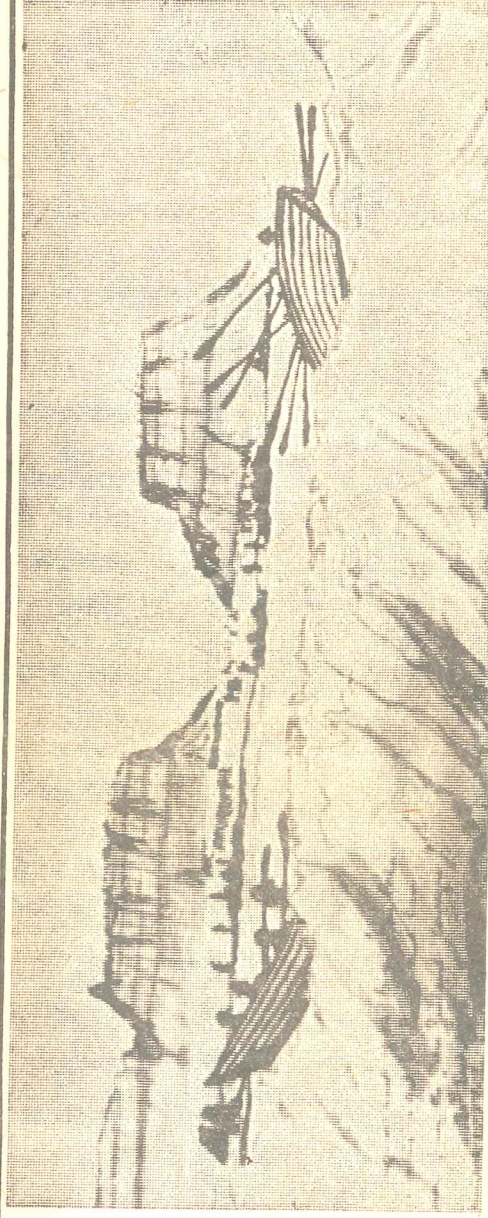
STABBE

"Having been a time secured he was ed to a thwart, and bed and struck so



ABOVE: The Harriet's rust-encrusted anchor. With it is Mr William Gibson, a member of the group that recovered it at a spot near the Okahu Stream. BELOW: A sketch of the two pas at Waimate, drawn by Lieutenant Moore of the Alligator from the vessel's deck. The original sketch is in the possession of the Taranaki Museum.





THE BOATS of HMS Alligator returning from the beach below the Waimate pas.

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HAGGARD

"They looked exceedingly haggard and poverty stricken," wrote Dr Marshall, "having been but thinly clad and only scantily fed for the four previous months; but notwithstanding, they bore favourable testimony to the treatment experienced by them from the hands of the barbarians."

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edly that on reaching the Alligator he was only able to gain the deck by a strong effort, and after struggling a few paces aft, fainted and fell down at the foot of the captain in a gore of blood.

"When I dressed his wounds, I found 10 inflicted by the point and edge of the bayonet over his head and face, one in his left breast which it was first feared would prove what it had evidently intended to have proved, a mortal thrust, and another in the leg."

The Alligator had a narrow escape from being lost as she was leaving Te Namu. She was ready to sail when the wind fell to a calm and the sea was fast driving her on to a reef on which the waves were said to be breaking with an awful violence.

The Alligator was saved because her anchor was dropped in time. However, she had to remain among the rocks until morning, when a light breeze came off the land.

On a later occasion Oao-iti was landed from the Alligator at Waimate Beach.

DEFIANCE

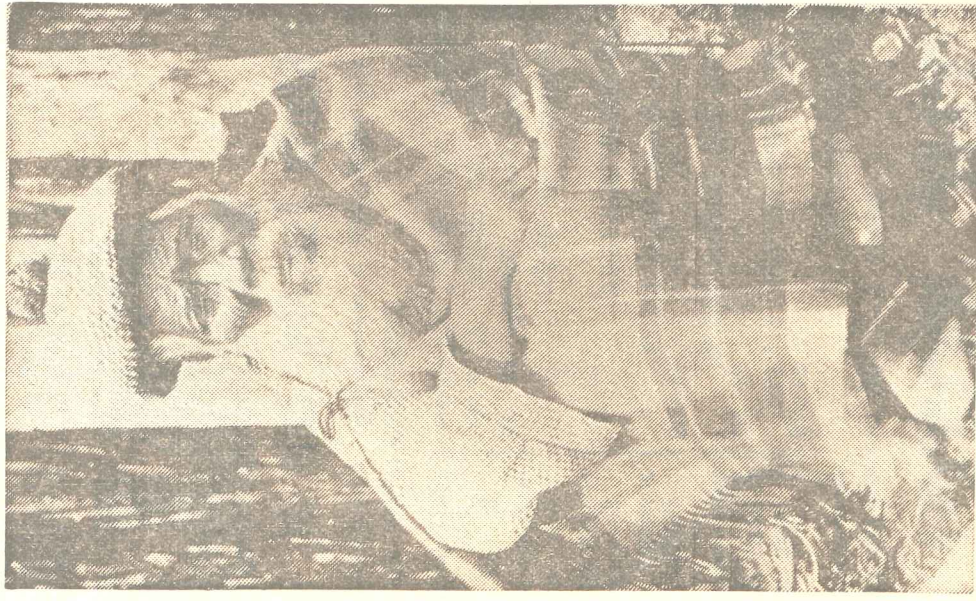
"The Maoris continued to show indications of being very defiant," wrote Mr W. H. J. Seffern in his book "Chronicles of the Garden of New Zealand, known as Taranaki."

"They went through their war dance on the beach, and in an excited manner uttered the most horrid piercing yells which must have been heard miles away," wrote Mr Seffern.

"They also hoisted on poles several human heads, exposing them to view of those on board the vessels."

Dr Marshall wrote that Oao-iti, whose wounds had been carefully dressed for the last time, received a supply of trifling articles as farewell gifts and was rowed to the back of the surf, where a canoe waited to carry him through it. He addressed the Maoris on the beach.

Dr Marshall said Oao-iti's anxiety to be released lent him strength for the occasion, while his wounds, sufficient to have killed outright any man with a European constitution, appeared to occasion him



THE CHIEF Oao-iti in old age . . . According to a contemporary account, the wounds inflicted on him by the troops from the Alligator were sufficient to have killed outright any man with a European constitution.

comparatively little inconvenience beyond a weakness incidental to excessive haemorrhage.

Mrs Guard and her daughter Louisa were launched from the shore and transferred to the Alligator. (John, the four-year-old boy, was living inland, away from his mother.)

PRESENTS

Mrs Guard was dressed "in native fashion, being completely enveloped from head to foot in two superb mats, the largest and finest of the kind I have ever seen," wrote Dr Marshall. "They were parting presents of the tribe among whom she had been sojourning. She was, however, bare footed."

On a later occasion the Alligator returned to secure the boy John.

The Maoris brought him lashed on the back of a very stately Maori who wore a white feather in his hair and a very handsome mat on his back. The boy sat astride the chief's shoulders.

A ransom was demanded but refused. One of the sailors reached forward and cut the flax which bound the child, who dropped to the ground. Another sailor picked up the boy and ran with him to the boat, which went back to the Alligator.

(It was later learned that the boy had been looked after by a Ngati Ruanui woman who was said to have cried for three days after he was taken to the ship.)

Volleys of shots were exchanged. The Maoris were said to have had at least 200 muskets.

After many difficulties, the sailors got a cannon to the top of a 300ft cliff. They had dragged the gun along the beach, over rocks and across cliffs, till they came to a chasm 200ft deep, the bottom of

which was formed of immense rocks with a rapid stream running through them.

Both pas at Waimate were heavily shelled and then taken. They were found to be of formidable appearance. Whares in the pas were burned.

In one of the pas was found the cured head of either Captain Hall of the Harriet or one of his men. Mrs Guard later said this head had been often shown her to terrify her; but the Maoris otherwise treated her kindly. They particularly liked her son, whom they made a chief.

TREACHERY

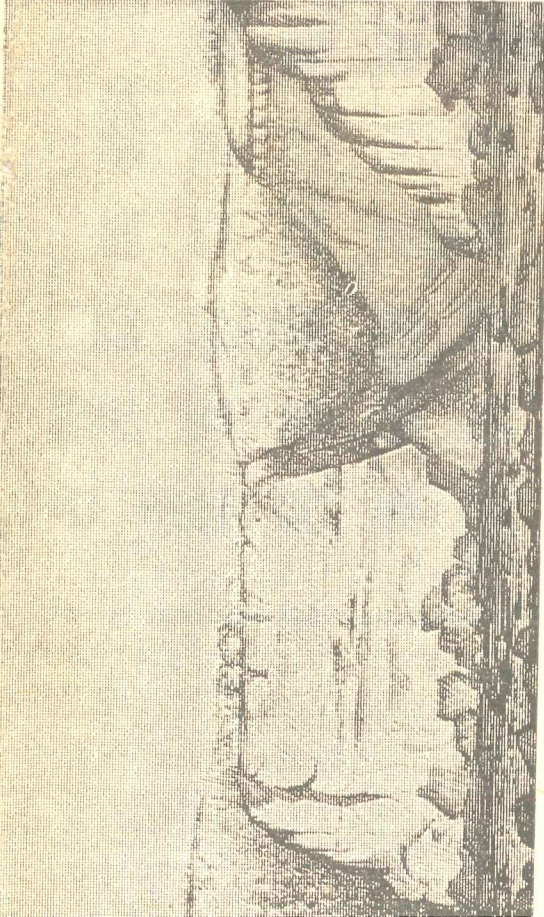
Dr Marshall wrote that the Alligator and Isabella eventually left the Taranaki coast, "leaving a record of treachery, bloodshed and ruthless destruction of property that is hard to understand and realize at this distance of time."

However, it was said that Captain Lambert (master of the Alligator) did his best to treat fairly and openly with the Maoris, although the thirst for revenge, callousness and disregard of control by the whaling element in the landing force seemed to break down such discipline as there was among the soldiers.

"Mrs Guard was a woman of courage and resource," wrote Mr Seffern. "Those who met her at Port Underwood spoke of her as being very kind and hospitable."

"Captain Guard acted as pilot in Cook Strait until his death."

• The historic photos on this page appear by courtesy of the Taranaki Museum.



OWEN'S