

**Particulars of Wateno Skirmish 01 June 1865**  
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Draft

Sir, I have the honour by direction of the Honorable Mr McLean to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 9<sup>th</sup> instant enclosing a statement from Lieutenant Johnson giving an account of a skirmish with the rebel natives which took place at Wateno on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1865. It is with much pleasure that I am instructed by Mr McLean to convey to Lieutenant Johnson and the men who served under his command on that occasion the thanks of the Government for the gallantry displayed – such intrepid bravery reflects the greatest credit on all... Mr McLean regrets... was not properly noticed at the time the deeds were performed. You will be good enough to furnish Lieutenant Johnson with a copy of this letter. I have &c., W. M.

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Major Stapp, Commanding Taranaki to the Acting Under Secretary of the Defence Office, Militia & Volunteer Branch 09 Dec 1872

Sir, I have the honor at the request of Lieutenant Johnson to forward the enclosed letter for the favorable consideration of the Hon. Minister for Colonial Defence. Lieutenant Johnson states that they were not even thanked in orders or otherwise on that occasion or since, it was one of the many acts of great gallantry displayed by the Taranaki Cavalry Volunteers during the war under Captain Mace. I would state that all the men named in the margin were granted land by the Government. Lieutenant Johnson received two hundred acres, the others eighty and sixty according to rank. Richard Peed was turned out of the Corps for misconduct and Arthur Harrison left the settlement.

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Lieut. Johnson, late Cornet Taranaki Cavalry Volunteers, New Plymouth to Major C. Stapp, Commanding District New Plymouth 28 Nov 1872

Sir, I have the honor to submit for your information the following statement of the skirmish at Wateno, near Opunaki on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1865 in which I was engaged, being in Command of eight (8) men. Names as per margin, all members of the Taranaki Cavalry Volunteers.

Sergt. J. Johnson, Privates Ed. Olson, C. Curtis, J. Hoskin, T. Mace, A. Harrison, Rd Peed, P. O'Neill

On the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1865 I received orders from Colonel Colville 43<sup>rd</sup> Regt Commanding at Opunaki, to be ready to accompany him with my detachment Cavalry towards Wateno about 8 miles south of Opunaki, we started about 12 noon, I and my detachment acted as escort for Colonel Colville, Act. Adjut Clark 43<sup>rd</sup> Regt and Lt Clarke 57<sup>th</sup> Regt. On our arrival at the Maori Village of Wateno Col. Colville gave me orders to proceed with the men some distance inland not more than about two miles to look for some cattle and if I could find any to drive them into Camp, he and his two Officers would remain at the Village until my return. At the same time he gave me instructions to return by that road, I immediately started and after riding about a mile I saw some Natives walking along the track that I was on, I rode on until I was about 25 yards

from the hindmost Native when I shouted to them to stop as I did not know whether they were friendly or not, they paid no attention to me, so on getting to within 10 yards I drew my revolver and turned my horse across the track, to see how close my men were, the fern and tutu being so high and thick that we were obliged to ride singly, the nearest man to me was Pte Olson, directly I turned my horse, the natives fired two or three shots at me, the firing brought my men up, I gave them orders to push through the fern on the right to get ahead of the natives and close on them, while doing so Pte O'Neill turned off the track to the left and rode close on to the native immediately in front of me the native fired and hit him in the shoulder, he fell off his horse almost on to the native and close to my horse's nose, my men then commenced firing with their revolvers we had no carbines or swords with us. I told two men, A. Harrison and T. Mace, to carry O'Neill to the rear in case of our having to retire, the fight then became general and continued until five natives were killed. I would mention that at the commencement of the skirmish Pte Peed's horse took fright and rushed through the fern among the natives, one of whom struck him with the butt end of his gun, rending him almost senseless until the affair was over. One native got away being outside Peed and near to a clump of bush, the men who actually fired and killed the natives were Sergt. J. Johnson, Pts Olson, Curtis, Hoskin and myself, as Peed was struck senseless at the commencement, O'Neill wounded, and Harrison and Mace engaged by my orders taking O'Neill to the rear directly the firing ceased I saw five natives lying dead in the track and leaving my men to secure their guns &c and to look after the wounded man I rode further on to look after the remaining native, I came up to him in the clump of scrub before mentioned, he had had time to reload and was waiting with his gun pointed at me - I should here state my revolver was unserviceable being broken in consequence of my having struck one of the natives on the head with it during the action, I had fired 4 out of the 5 chambers, the fifth missed fire and I instantly... it by the barrel and hit him on the head which broke my revolver, the native was immediately killed by one of the men - I halted and was watching the native when Act. Adj. Clark 43<sup>rd</sup> rode up to me this was the first I had seen of him since I left him at the Village with Col. Colville. I said to him "Here is a native... back and get the wounded man's revolver and we will have him" he did so when he came up to me again I pointed to the native and said "There he is have a shot at him" he rode round the scrub and back to where the men were which was about 50 yards distant I then went back and the native got away, I then returned with the wounded man leaving the five natives dead on the track and was joined by Col. Colville and Lt. Clarke 57<sup>th</sup> about half way to Wateno, they had ridden on, on hearing the firing. Pte O'Neill died a few days after from the affects of his wound, on our way back to Camp O'Neill being in great agony and his horse having bolted when he fell off I asked permission of Col. Colville to send a man on to Camp to bring a Stretcher, he said "no it is not safe", I then volunteered to go myself and started, the Colonel saying "Well you shall not go by yourself I will go with you" which he did, I left orders with Sergt Johnson to get in as quick as he could and if the natives came down that he must gallop for it towards camp. On the Colonel arriving at Camp he sent a party with a Stretcher for O'Neill, who was sent in to Camp and we all went back to the scene of the skirmish, but saw no natives except the five dead bodies which were lying where they fell.

Added note – Acting Under Secretary for Defence to the Hon. Mr McLean 18 Dec 1872 – though rather late, I think Lieut. Johnson and those who served under him should now be thanked for their gallant conduct at Wateno, near Opunake, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1865.

