

The NZ Wars: The Forest Rangers

The following reading is provided for 12-13 yrs + reading age

In 1863 (almost 150 years ago), the government in New Zealand formed the Forest Rangers. This small band of highly skilled, rugged soldiers played a decisive role in the New Zealand wars. Men from different countries who were familiar with guerrilla/bush fighting were recruited and given further training for the New Zealand landscape in order to challenge Maori in their own bush environment.

The men came from a variety of backgrounds and included gold diggers, sailors and bushmen. They fought on foot or on horseback. Writer Richard Stowers tells us they were tough, free ranging desperados, similar to modern day commandos; rough men but very good at their task. Men who transferred to the Forest Rangers from other units were eager to escape the routine of redoubt building, marching, and guard duty. They became the envy of other corps and were able to rove freely, did not bother much with drills, did no navy work and were paid considerably more. They also received a double ration of rum to make up for the rugged conditions they worked in.

Before the Forest Rangers were formed, the rifles and shotguns in use in the New Zealand wars were all muzzle-loading weapons. After each 1 or two shots, the weapon needed reloading. In order to reload, the weapon would be stood on the ground pointing up and the new shot would be dropped down the muzzle and rammed into place. Reloading was very risky for the person doing it, because they would be standing tall. It was also impossible for a mounted soldier to reload a rifle on horseback so they used less accurate pistols.

Each Forest Ranger was armed with a Terry and Calisher breach-loading rifle and revolver. A breech-loading weapon has a hinge between the stock (handle) and the muzzle (barrel) and when it is breeched the ammunition can be loaded at the base of the muzzle. So the Forest rangers had a real advantage over the weapons being used by other government soldiers and the firearms being used by Maori.

The rangers adapted well to conditions in the field and seemed to thrive on barren conditions. Much of their success is due to the fact that their leader General Jackson designed the unit to be self sufficient in the field and encouraged the men to show individuality.

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Nationalities:

At time of enlistment with forest rangers, known details of country of birth are:

England	(62)	Ireland	(44)	Scotland	(31)
Germany	(9)	Australia	(7)	NZ	(7)
Wales	(5)	Jersey	(3),	Denmark	(2)
USA	(2)	At sea	(1)	Canada	(1)
India	(1)				

A further 11 Maori are known to have served.

Occupations:

At time of enlistment with Forest rangers, known details of occupation are;

Miner	(26)	labourer	(20),	Farmer	(19)
Seaman	(18)	Bushman	(7)	Settler	(6)
Gentleman	(5)	Blacksmith	(3)	Clerk	(3)
Butcher	(2)	Engineer	(2)	Grocer	(2)
Soldier	(2)				

Among other occupations that the Forest Rangers left to take up service included:

Surgeon	(2)	Baker	(1)	Carter	(1)
File-smith	(1)	Gardener	(1)	Horse Breaker	(1)
Lawyer	(1)	Miller	(1)	Millwright	(1)
Plate-layer	(1)	Saddler	(1)	Sawyer	(1)
Storekeeper	(1)	Student	(1)	Telegraphist	(1)
Watchmaker	(1)				

(Stowers, p288,1996)

Possible Activities:

Make a word finder based on the nationalities and occupations of the Forest Rangers

Make graphs displaying the various nationalities and occupations

Write why you think up to 10 Maori served as Forest Rangers?

Why would have Maori have fought against their own people?