

## Royal New Zealand Fencible Corps (1847-1854)

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Times were tough in Ireland in 1847 and when notices were distributed around all military barracks that a new body of ex-soldiers, to be known as the **Royal New Zealand Fencible Corps**, was to be raised to defend the new capital of New Zealand, Auckland, against the native tribes from Waikato and the Coromandel, many Irishmen flocked to join it. Indeed of the final Corps of 780 soldiers, 63% were Irish, eleven coming from the 27<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot and one from the 6<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Dragoons. The conditions under which the pensioners were enrolled were:

- he must be a man of good character and industrious habit with at least fifteen years good conduct service;
- he should not exceed forty-eight years of age;
- he should be medically approved as being fit for the occasional military duties required;
- he would be enrolled for seven years on the following terms;
- he would receive a free passage for himself and his family to New Zealand;
- on arrival, each pensioner would be put in possession of a semi-detached two roomed cottage with an acre of land attached;
- he would be found work for his first year at the rate of at least 1 shilling and 6 pence per day;
- he would attend military exercises twelve days per year and a weekly church parade in review order uniform with arms;
- if called out in aid of the Civil Power, each Private would be paid 2 shillings and 6 pence per day;
- on the satisfactory termination of his seven years' service the cottage and ground would become the absolute property of the pensioner.
- these soldiers were also in receipt of their Regular Army pension which varied from 6 pence per day to 1 shilling and 6 pence depending on length of service and rank with the average pension for the Fencibles being 11 pence per day.



Fencibles around a campfire



The Force was stationed in four newly built villages each with a stockade and usually two churches, an Anglican and a Roman Catholic, at the narrowest part of the isthmus about 4 miles south of Auckland. There was 1 Company and the Headquarters at Onehunga, the main West Coast port in New Zealand for communication with Australia or the U.K.; 3 Companies in Howick and one each in Panmure and Otahuhu. During the 7 years of the Corps' existence, it never had to fight and was only called out once in 1851 when 250 native warriors arrived by canoe in Auckland angry that their chief had been assaulted by a Government native policeman. They, however, did disperse after negotiation but undoubtedly the speedy response of the Fencibles made a lasting impression on Maori.

The first couple of years brought many difficulties for the Fencibles but things gradually improved. The influx of 2436 Fencibles, including their families, into the Auckland District, when the European population of Auckland was only 2813 made a lasting impression and many of their descendants still live in the area. After their seven years of service were up, most took up the Government's offer of 10 acres of land for 20 guineas and became successful farmers or merchants. It is interesting to note that in the 3 Companies in Howick, there existed 10 shoemakers, 8 publicans, 6 carpenters, 5 shopkeepers, 5 bakers, 1 hatter, 4 teachers, 3 taylor, 2 dealers, 1 butcher, 1 clockmaker, 1 post master, 1 rope maker, 1 machine maker, 1 smith, 1 glazier.

The eleven pensioners of the 27<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ship</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Born</b>	<b>Died</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Trade</b>
Conlon, Anthony	Minerva	Cpl. 18y	1806, Mayo	1887		Weaver
Doulton, Thomas	Berwick Castle		1811	1867		Mason
Donnelly, James	Ann	15y	1802, Cork	1868	Wife	
Feeny, Patrick	Oriental Queen		Longford			
Foley, Rod. Michael	Inchinnan	17y	1812, Cork	1869		
Hill, George	Ramilles		Dublin			
McGrath, Patrick	Clifton	18y	1809, Mayo	1877		
O'Donnell, James	Oriental Queen		Armagh			
Porter, James	Clinton		Boyle	1858		Blacksmith
Sullivan, John	Sir George Seymour		1828		Wife & 3d.	Shoemaker
Tierney, Matthew	Minerva			1848	Wife & 2ch.	

The 6<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Dragoon was:

Bates, Beales William	Oriental Queen	22y	1804, Enniskillen	1866	Wife & 5ch.	
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Corporal and Mrs Heath at their Fencibles' cottage

Corporal Heath at the 1897 Fencibles' reunion

While the privates were allocated a semi-detached 2-roomed cottage and the sergeants a single unit cottage, the seven Commissioned Officers accompanying them fared rather better both in conditions and pay. The seven officers were the Commanding Officer Brevet Major J.W.Grey 85F(King's L.I.), not to be confused with a Lieutenant Grey nor with the Governor, George Grey, nor the Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey, Captain W.H.Kenny 61F (Gloucesters), Captain C.H.M. Smith 60F(KRRC), Captain Alex. Macdonald (unatt.), Lieutenant J.A.Hickson 31F (Huntingdonshires), Lieutenant O.Grey and Captain (Dr) J.T.W.Bacot. With the exception of the surgeon, they were all on half pay, i.e. 10s & 6p per day for a Brevet Major or Captain and 8s & 6d for a Lieutenant, and described in the Army List as 'Staff Officers of Pensions (employed in the Payment of Out Pensioners and Commanding Local Companies)'. In addition they received 1s per day command money and 'an allowance of not less than £50 per annum for carrying out duties as an Interpreter of Militia, Inspector of Public Works, or as a Colonial Magistrate'. He would be 'provided with a suitable house of at least four rooms and a kitchen with 30 acres for a subaltern, 40 acres for a Captain and 50 acres for the Commanding Officer'. On the termination of his service, as well as retaining his house and land, he would receive the remission of the purchase money of an officer one grade higher in rank. In the case of death, his wife would receive his pension for life and the choice of his land and house or a free passage home for herself and her children. The widow of a Private on the other hand would not receive a passage home and his pension for only six months which it was considered, was ample time to get a new husband.

Thanks are due to the Howick Historical Village, Auckland, New Zealand for assistance in the compilation of this article and it is strongly recommended that anyone visiting Auckland pay it a visit, particularly on a re-enactment day.

Mrs Beswick with six of her children outside her cottage

Howick Village 1863

