

Correspondence

MAJOR BRASSEY AND HIS BOTTLE POST

IN his article on the military reputation of Sir George Grey in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, October 1975, Professor Dalton seems to regard the story of the use of the Wanganui River as a postman for conveying military messages as somewhat of a fable. (Note 97). Actually the incident is well authenticated. G. F. Allen, a surveyor, served in the militia during the Hauhau troubles. Later, he wrote a guide book to some of the scenic areas of the North Island, published by Willis of Wanganui in 1894 with the title *Willis's Guide Book*. This contains a considerable section devoted to the Wanganui River, and in his description of Pipiriki he includes a brief history of the fighting there, from which the following extract is taken:

'Desultory fighting went on for many weeks, the British forces being at one time very hard up for stores and ammunition. Major Brassey, who was in command, adopted several ingenious schemes for informing the authorities at Wanganui of his difficulty. Among others, he wrote messages in Latin, and, putting them in corked bottles, sent them down in the current of the river. One, picked up below the town by the writer, contained the words: — "Omnes sunt recti. Mitte res belli statim," which, being interpreted, is: — "All are well. Send ammunition immediately." This message was, of course, sent at once to the Militia Office. Another Latin message was carried by a "friendly" Maori overland by way of Waitotara. It read: — "Sumus sine rebus belli satis." ("We are short of ammunition.") Ammunition and stores were as soon as possible sent up to Pipiriki, part by way of steamer, and part by canoes.'

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