



Tiaki Omana, August 1960

John (Jack) Ormond was born at Mahia on 18 December 1891; he was commonly known as Tiaki Omana. Tiaki was the fourth child of George Canning Ormond, a sheepfarmer, and his wife, Maraea Kiwiwharekete of Ngati Kahungunu. The family hapu was Ngati Rongomaiwahine. His grandfather was John Davies Ormond, the politician and superintendent of Hawke's Bay.

As there was no school in Mahia, Tiaki began his education at home under the supervision of a governess. While still of primary school age, he was sent to Wallingford, the large country estate near Porangahau acquired by his grandfather in 1857. Here classes for the local children were held in the chapel. Tiaki attended a private preparatory school until he was 14. He was then sent to Christ's College in Christchurch, where he quickly learned how to be frugal and save all his pocket money so that he could make the long journey home for the school holidays.

In 1908 Omana made the Christ's College First XV, but his promising early showing as a schoolboy rugby player was cut short by illness in 1909. He was sent home and confined to bed for six months. When his health returned, he went straight back to the football paddock and by 1910 was turning out regularly for Mahia in the junior competition. In 1911 Omana was playing senior grade rugby and earning a reputation as a fast and reliable winger.

In June 1917 Omana was conscripted into the New Zealand army. He joined the New Zealand Maori (Pioneer) Battalion and on 8 February 1918, as a lieutenant, sailed to join the fighting in France. Even while on active service Omana still managed to play rugby. He was selected for the Pioneer Battalion team and played with distinction on the wing. In 1919, when the battalion returned to New Zealand, he was included in the squad which represented the soldiers in a very successful series of home-coming games. The team played a nine-match provincial tour during which Omana established himself as a highly mobile flanker.

In the next two seasons Omana played club rugby for Tapuae and Mahia, and from 1923 he represented Hawke's Bay. He played in 10 defences of the Ranfurly Shield. Omana earned one outing as an All Black: in 1923 he played against a touring New South Wales team. In 1924 he led the Wairoa representative side and played for Northern Maoris in the Te Mori Rose Bowl. He retired from representative rugby in 1925 but maintained an active interest in the sport as an administrator.

Omana was a successful sheepfarmer and runholder. As there was no road access to his property, Kini Kini, all the stores and farm supplies had to be transported from Mahia Beach by boat. Tiaki would think nothing of rowing his little clinker for over two hours in open sea with piles of purchases stacked to the gunwales. He sponsored

the annual farm tennis tournament in which he usually played a match or two himself. He generously provided prizes for the tournament winners.

In the 1930s Omana became involved in the Ratana movement. The only electorate which still eluded it was Eastern Maori, and after a visit by T. W. Ratana to Kiri Kiri, Omana was persuaded to stand as a candidate. He unsuccessfully contested the seat in 1935 and 1938. Following the healing of the local split between Ratana and Labour Party followers, Omana stood as the Labour candidate for Eastern Maori in 1943. He won the seat, defeating Apirana Ngata, who had been the incumbent since 1905.

In a speech on 13 July 1945, Omana raised issues closely identified with the Ratana movement. On behalf of his elders, he began by asking that ample time be set aside for the consideration of land claims. Previous commissions had worked to quite limited time-frames where not all the evidence was able to be heard. Omana suggested that no acceptable settlement could be reached unless full and proper investigations had taken place.

He then remarked on the poor quality of Maori housing and health. He observed that independent Maori efforts to improve the standard of both were continually frustrated by the inability to raise loans or take advantage of tax concessions. Without access to investment capital or a sustainable economic base, Maori people could not be expected to break the cycle of subsistence living. Omana argued that rich timber assets owned by rural Maori which could have provided the raw materials for any number of new houses remained untouched simply because no finance was available to mill the resource.

Omana was also highly critical of what he considered to be the unequal and sub-standard service Maori soldiers experienced when seeking assistance from the Rehabilitation Department. Although Maori had made a significant contribution to the war effort and had themselves raised several thousand pounds for the rehabilitation of their own veterans, few Maori returned servicemen ever received any financial support. There were lengthy delays in assessing cases, and some applicants were referred to the wrong agency.

Lastly, Omana spoke about his regret that he was not able to address his own people in Maori while speaking in Parliament. He recommended, unsuccessfully, that all parliamentary reports and records of proceedings be published in Maori. However, a suggestion made by Omana and other Maori MPs was adopted when the word 'native' was replaced with the term 'Maori' in all government titles.

When Parliament was in session Omana travelled to Wellington by railcar. He dressed in a snappy well-fitting suit and wore old tennis shoes to alleviate the suffering caused by gout. He nearly always made the journey from Mahia back to the capital with a big box of kumara tucked under one arm as a present for his friend but political opponent, Keith Holyoake.

Omana served on the Board of Native Affairs and was involved in the Maori taxation commission of 1952. He retired from Parliament in 1963. In his last speech, he asked to express his thoughts in song. To a plaintive introduction played on

harmonica, Tiaki Omana sang in Maori a verse of the lament 'E noho ra, e haere ana ahau' (Goodbye, I am going).

Tiaki Omana married three times. His first wife was Nellie Airini Elizabeth Perry; they married in the Cathedral Church of St John the Evangelist, Napier, on 23 February 1921. They had twins, a girl and a boy. The couple were divorced on 29 November 1922. On 6 February 1926, at Wairoa, Omana married Polly Gemmell; they had one child, a daughter, who died in infancy. Polly died in 1949. Omana's third wife was a widow, Rangiwahakio Rarere (née Kemara); they married at Wairoa on 15 March 1962. Rangiwahakio died in November that year.

Tiaki Omana was well known as a wise and kindly advocate who represented to the best of his ability the interests of his people. He died on 24 June 1970 at Napier and is buried at Mokotahi, Mahia Beach.