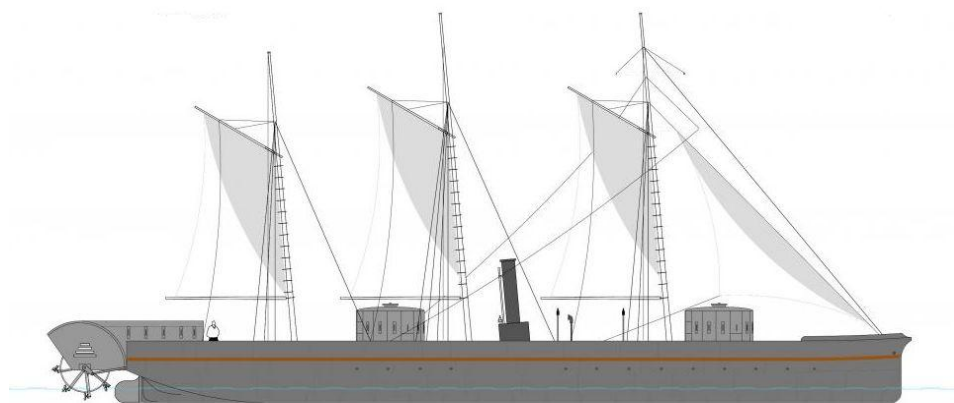


Pattern: *Pioneer*, Steam driven stern wheel gunboat; Introduced in to NZ Service: 1863; Withdrawn: 1867
Builder: Australian Steam Navigation Co., Sydney 1863; Tonnage: 304; Dimensions: 153' x 20' (42.6 x 6.0 m)
Sail Plan: 3 mast schooner, main & top masts removed for river operation; Hull: 3/8 in iron plate.
Machinery: twin steam engines of 30 hp; Speed: 9knots.

Armament: As built 4 x 24 Pdr Howitzers one in each cupola (fixed turret) mounted on a revolving mounting, two on deck, on arrival in NZ replaced with 2 x 12 Pdr. BL Armstrong guns mounted in cupolas, 2 x Congreve rocket launchers, steam pipe system around hull to repel boarders, 24 Terry Rifles, 24 Colt revolvers and 24 Cutlasses.



PIONEER



Naval Armstrong gun

New Zealand Service

Pioneer was a flat-bottomed, stern-wheel paddle-steamer of 304 tons, made of 3/8 inch (9.5 mm) iron. She was 42.6 m long; 6 m beam, and drew only 0.9 m fully laden for travel on the Waikato River. With twin 30 hp engines and a 3.7 m (12 foot) stern wheel she had a speed of 9 knots. She had two iron cupolas or turrets, which were pierced for rifles and cannon. The cupolas were 2.4 m (8 feet) high and 3.6 m (12 feet) in diameter and had 4 gun ports.

She was built in Sydney to the order of the New Zealand colonial government by the Australian Steam Navigation Company and cost 9,500 pounds. Launched on 16 July 1863, she was towed across the Tasman Sea by *HMS Eclipse*, leaving Sydney on 22 September and arriving at Onehunga on 3 October 1863. Here her main mast was removed and additional armour plate fitted. When she first arrived she was fitted with four 24 Pdr Howitzers but these were replaced by two 12 Pdr Armstrong guns from *HMS Curacoa*, one in each cupola. She also carried two 40 Pdr Armstrong field guns which were later offloaded at Whangamarino on the Waikato River. The following small arms were provided for the crew: 24 Terry Rifles, 24 Colt Revolvers and 24 Cutlasses purchased in Australia. Control of the ship was handed over to the Royal Navy.

At this point she was manned by officers and men from *HMS Eclipse*, Lt Boughy in command and carried two companies of bluejackets and marines from *HMS Curacoa*; under the command of Commodore Sir William Wiseman. She proved of immense service in the battles on the Waikato River in 1863 during the Waikato Campaign of the New Zealand Wars, providing reconnaissance for General Cameron and firing on the Maori pa at Meremere and Rangiriri, and transporting troops. As the campaign moved deeper into the Waikato her two cupolas were removed on 1 December 1863 and she became a stores and troop carrier, making many trips up to Ngaruwahia, which was the limit of her navigation due to her length.

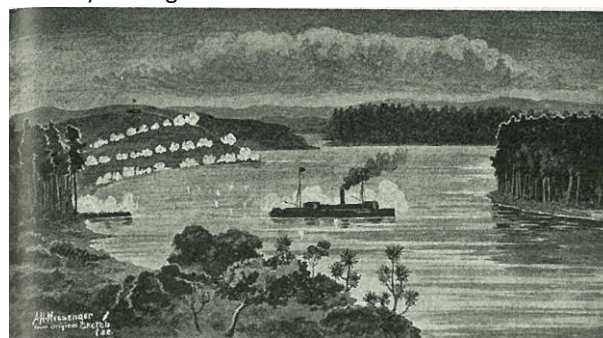
On 24 December 1867 she was wrecked on the Manukau bar, after dragging her anchor in a Waikato flood and being swept out to sea. The two cupolas are on display in Mercer (as part of the war memorial) and Ngaruwahia.



Pioneer Cupola at Ngaruwahia



Mercer



Pioneer in action at Meremere October 1863

Acknowledgments: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_\(paddle-steamer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_(paddle-steamer)) J Osborne FSG, N Taylor FSG

The Waikato River Gunboats by Grant Middlemiss