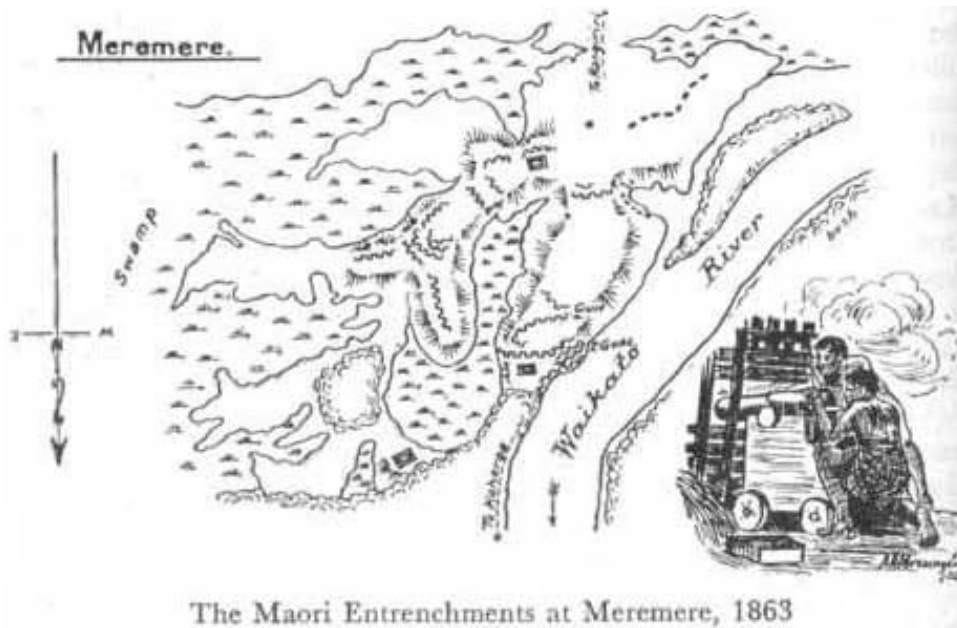


Battle at Meremere Pa 29 to 31 October 1863

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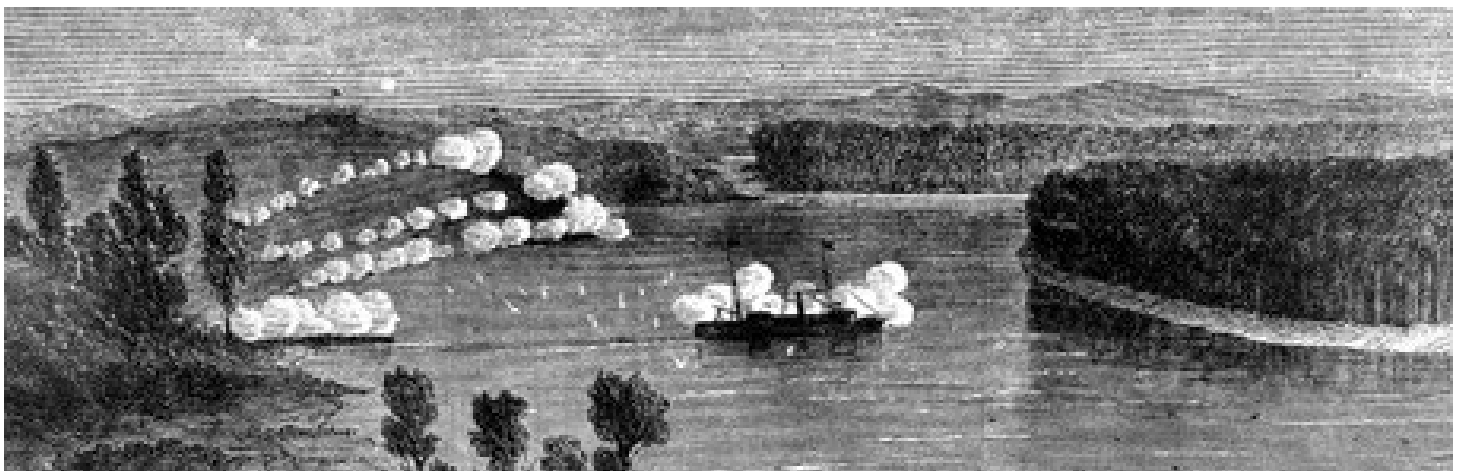
Main cause of the war was the establishment of the rebel Maori King Movement (Kingitanga) as an alternative to the British government, its main objective was to stop Maori selling land to the government and the killing of Maori who had attempted to sell land. Most Maori did not support the rebellion, either remaining neutral or actively fighting with the government.

Following on from the battle at Koheroa 17 July 1863 Kingitanga warriors had fortified the Meremere Pa with earthworks and 15 foot high palisades, they had three ships' guns which were transported overland from Raglan, then brought downstream by waka (canoe). A former East India Company gunner living locally was forced to train Kingitanga warriors to fire these cannon but the rebel Māori had no bomb shells or proper shot so they fired projectiles made up of iron chain, nails and cast iron paoro weeti (steelyard weights), effective at close range on troops but had little effect on armoured vessels 300 yards away. At its peak the Māori force at Meremere numbered about a thousand warriors commanded by Ngāti Haua chief Wiremu Tāmihana. Every chief who acknowledged the authority of King Tāwhiao had warriors at Meremere.



Right: Overall commander at Meremere chief Wiremu Tāmihana with his Tupara (doubled barreled gun).

The first line of defence began at a palisading close to a belt of bush on the Kingitanga Maoris' extreme right, on the edge of the Whangamarino Swamp and close to the river. In front of the landing two 6 pounder ship's guns one mounted on a swivel (pivoting carriage). There were two embrasures in a chamber cut in the clay bank; these openings covered the approach up or down the river, and the swivel gun was shifted from one embrasure to the other with rope tackle. At the rear of the battery up the hillside were eleven tiers of traversed rifle-pits, covering the landing. A covered way led from the first cannon to the second, which was mounted on a rough carriage with wooden wheels. The next system of entrenchments consisted of lines of rifle-pits, extending for several hundred feet along the face of the ridge. Above these rifle-pits, a 24-pounder carronade was emplaced and on the summit, was the trenched Meremere Pa (fort), 28 yards by 20 yards, lightly palisaded.



The 300 ton armoured iron stern paddle wheel steamer gunboat "Pioneer" anchored in the Waikato River shelling the Kingitanga Maori entrenchments and receiving fire from the Kingitanga Maoris 3 cannon and small arms.

On the 29th October the Royal Artillery at Whangamarino Redoubt commenced shelling the Meremere Pa entrenchments from about 1.5 miles away with two 40 pounder and one 12 pounder Armstrong breech loading rifled field guns and the Royal Navy gunners shelled the Pa with two 12 pounder pivot mounted Armstrong breech loading rifled guns mounted in turrets on the gunboat 'Pioneer' anchored from time to time in the Waikato river about 300 yards from the entrenchments.

On the 29th and 30th October the gunboat "Pioneer" made reconnaissances of the Meremere position. General Cameron and his staff were on board. The gunboat was fired on heavily by the Maoris, who used their cannon as well as small-arms, but the fire was not effective. Most of the shots fell short, but on the 30 October a 7 pound steelyard weight fired from the 24-pounder carronade, penetrated the upper works of the gunboat and lodged in a cask of beef. Fragments of iron used as projectiles rattled against the plating and the turrets (cupolas which protected the Armstrong guns and riflemen), but did no damage. On the first day's reconnaissance the "Pioneer" replied to the Maoris' cannonade with her 12 pounder Armstrong guns, and the Armstrong guns in the British Whangamarino redoubt also sent shells into the Meremere entrenchments.



Meremere Pa on the hill top about 1.5 miles away from the British Whangamarino Redoubt. Sketch by Major Charles Heaphy VC

Left foreground two 40 pounder Armstrong field guns firing on the Meremere Pa (fort) and entrenchments (rifle pits) on the hillside to the water's edge about 1.5 miles away. Right foreground a 12 pounder Armstrong field gun aimed towards the Pa. The gunboat *Pioneer* anchored in the Waikato River about 300 yards to the right of Meremere Pa entrenchments.

On 31 October 1863, 600 men of the 40th and 65th regiments were loaded onto the armoured gunboats *Pioneer* & *Avon* and four armoured barges, landing 6 miles up the Waikato river from Meremere. General Cameron planned to cut off Meremere from its support at Pukekawā on the other side of the river. The British land force were to attack the Pa from both north and south. Meremere's Kingitanga defenders realized they were outflanked and had little choice but to withdraw to the east that night by way of the swampy ground at the rear. The next day 1 November 1863 the British occupied the abandoned Meremere Pa which was found deserted; two of the Kingitanga cannon, one musket, and three canoes were all that were captured. The British troops occupied the position, and built a redoubt on the highest point.

Kingitanga Maori losses killed or wounded from the shelling and Enfield rifle fire are unknown. One British seamen on the gunboat *Pioneer* received a slight scalp-wound.

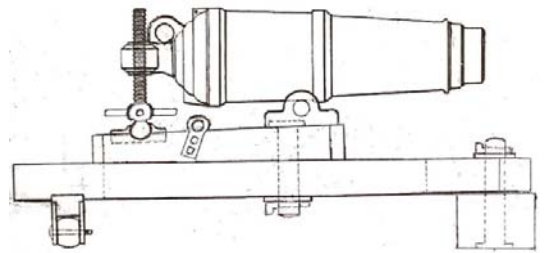
Examples of the main arms used by the Maori defenders at the Battle of Meremere 29 to 31 October 1863



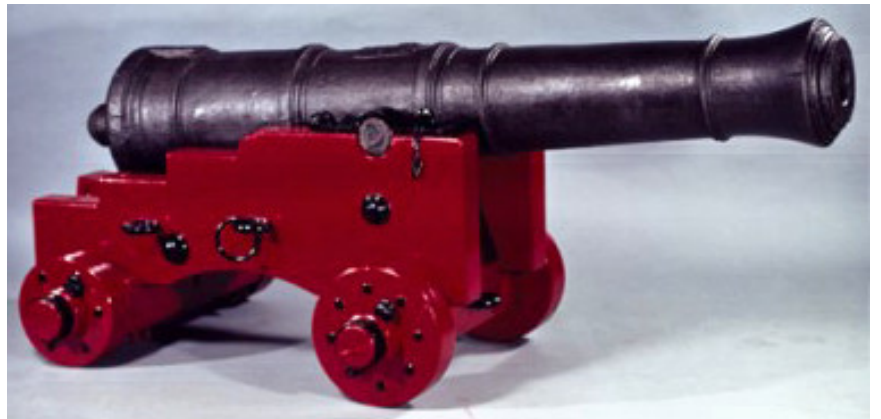
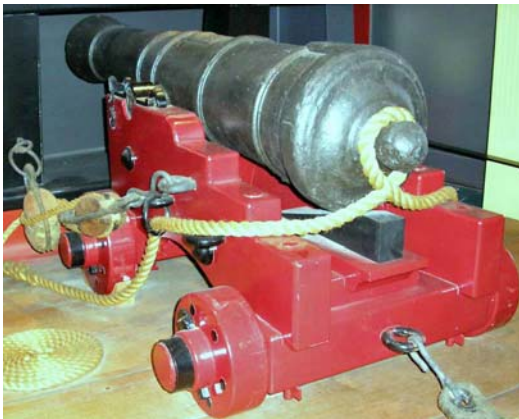
Musket bore (.75" caliber) 39" barrel percussion smooth bore musket pattern 1839 also pattern 1842 ex British military



Musket bore 29" barrel hooked breech smooth bored percussion Tupara (double barreled musket) the Maori warriors favorite firearm, fired the older standard British military ball cartridge sometimes both barrels together also buck shot, very effective at close range, but the fire was not effective against the British gunners and riflemen in iron clad gunboat Pioneer.



Example of a c1800 British pattern Carronade mounted on a pivoting slide carriage made in all sizes from 4 to 68 pounds, the Kingitanga Maori at Meremere are believed to have used a 24 pounder carronade to fire a variety of projectiles made up of iron chain, nails and cast iron paoro weeti (steelyard weights) all proved ineffective against the iron clad gunboats.



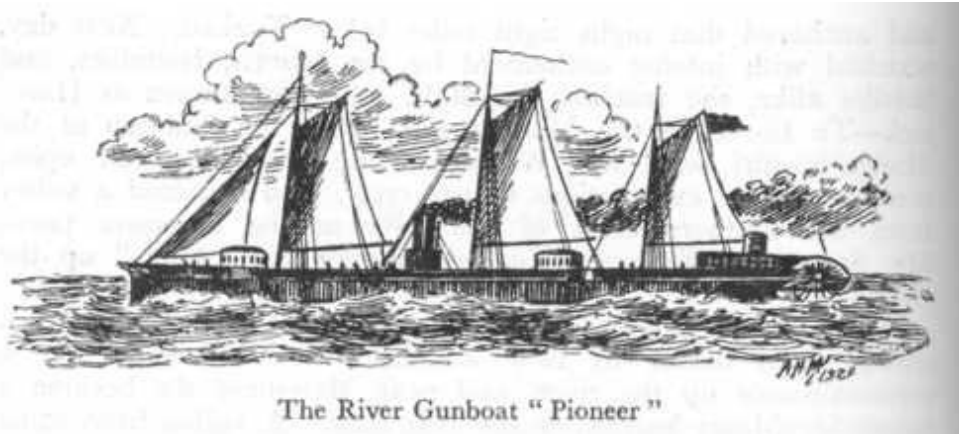
An example of an Armstrong pattern 1753 on a trucked (wheeled) sea service carriage from HMS Endeavour, these were made in all sizes from small 2 pounds to 42 pounds, the Kingitanga Maori at Meremere are believed to have used two 6 pounder long cannon one mounted on a carriage with wooden wheels similar to the above the other mounted on a pivoting slide carriage, to fire a variety of projectiles made up of iron chain, nails and cast iron paoro weeti (steelyard weights) all proved ineffective against the iron clad gunboats.

The Kingitanga Maori had many other types of close combat small arms but these were not used at Meremere as the Maori defenders wisely abandoned the Pa and escaped before the British ground forces attacked.

Examples of the main arms used by the British forces at the Battle of Meremere 29 to 31 October 1863



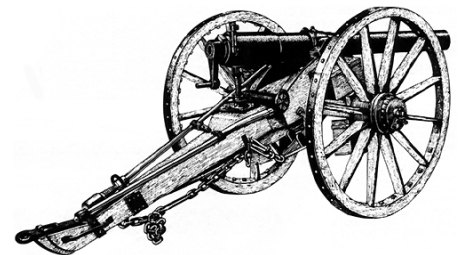
25 bore (.577" caliber) 39" barrel Enfield Long Rifle pattern 1853 used by riflemen from the protection of the turrets on the iron clad gunboat *Pioneer*. The British forces had other types of rifles and carbines and close combat small arms including bayonets, revolvers and swords but these were not used at Meremere as the Maori defenders abandoned the Pa and escaped before the British ground forces attacked.



The 300 ton 153 foot iron stern paddle wheel steam river gunboat *Pioneer* (with three masts for seagoing rig, the center mast was removed for river action) the first naval vessel built for the New Zealand government & capable of carrying 300 men, built in Australia and launched in October 1863, armed with two pivot mounted 12 pounder Armstrong guns inside the turrets. The iron paddle-steamer *Avon* 43 ton 58 foot built in Lyttelton New Zealand was armed with a 12-pounder Armstrong gun and a Congreve rocket system and four armoured iron clad barges were prepared in New Zealand and used to transport 600 British troops landing 6 miles up the Waikato river from Meremere.



Left: Royal Artillery with two 40 pounder Armstrong breech loading rifled field guns in Australia before being shipped to New Zealand and used to shell Meremere in October 1863. Right: 12 pounder Armstrong rifled breach loading field gun 3" bore.



Acknowledgements and special thanks to

Phil Cregeen FSG, NZ National Archives <http://archives.govt.nz/>, Osborne Arms Museum armsmuseum@xtra.co.nz,

James Cowan <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cow01NewZ-c28.html#Cow01NewZ-fig-Cow01NewZ254a>

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