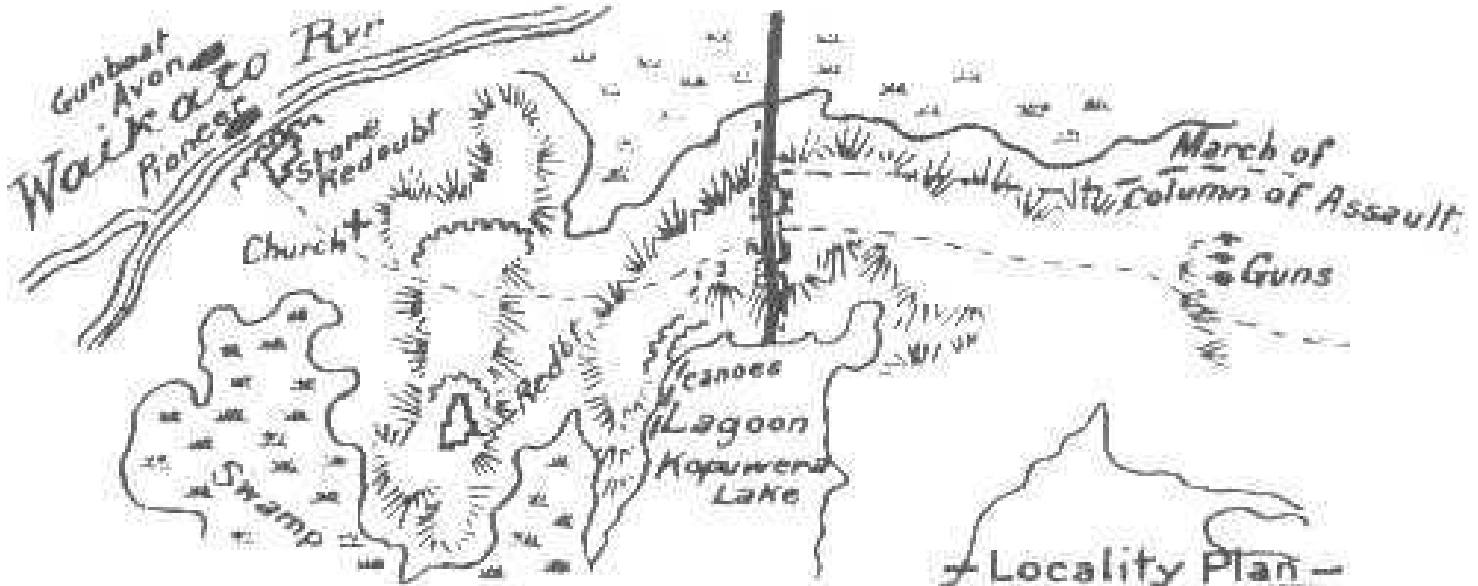


Battle at Rangiriri Pa 20 November 1863

by Dr John Osborne MG DTT PhD FSG jcosborne@xtra.co.nz

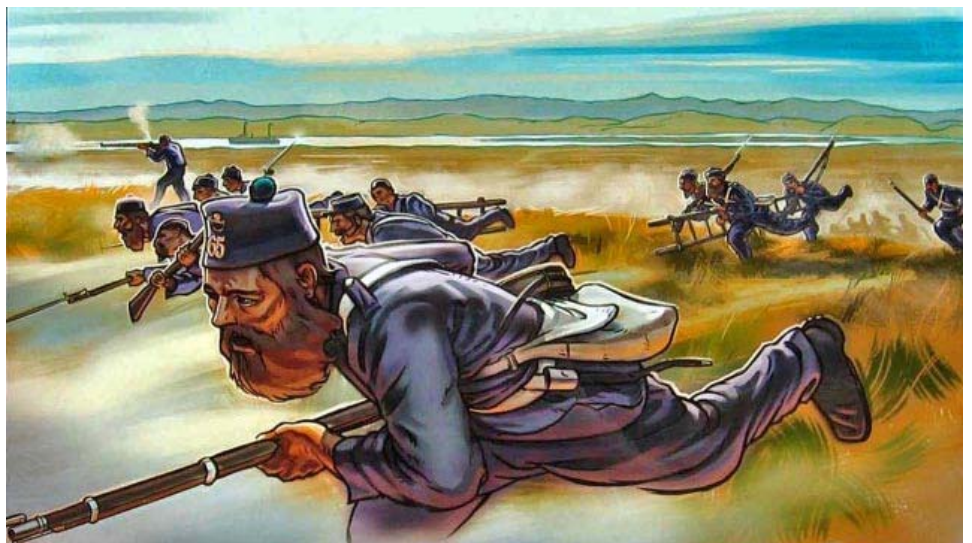
Main cause of the war was the establishment of the rebel Maori King Movement (Kingitanga) as an alternative to the British government, its main objective was to stop Maori selling land to the government and the killing of Maori who had attempted to sell land. Most Maori did not support the rebellion,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

Early on 20 November 1863 a field force under Lt General Cameron commander of the British forces marched from Meremere to Rangiriri where rebelling Maori forces had constructed a formidable line of earthworks across the isthmus between the swampy margins of Lake Kopuera and the Waikato River. The fortification blocked the bullock track, which led to the south. Lt General Cameron planned a two-pronged attack under cover of a bombardment from the gunboats *Avon* and *Pioneer* and the Royal Artillery field guns. As a 900-strong ground force attacked from the north along the crest of the ridge 520 men were to land simultaneously from the gunboats and attack from the rear - up the slopes on the south side of the Pa.



The attack on Rangiriri Pa 20 November 1863 began with an artillery bombardment from 6 and 12 pounder Armstrong Field Guns at a range of about 700 yards, and shell fire from the 12 pounder Armstrong pivot guns mounted in turrets on the Paddle Steam Gunboats HMS *Avon* and HMS *Pioneer* anchored in the Waikato River, and continued for nearly two hours. The earthworks were virtually undamaged but casualties were sustained by the Maori defenders in the open trenches and pits of the Pa (Maori Fort). The British force totaled about 1400 and the Kingitanga defenders about 500.

Four companies of the 65th Regiment with a detachment of Royal Engineers and the 14th Regiment attempted an assault on the trenches and forced the Maori defenders to fall back from the first line of defences to the second line of pits which was also soon over-run by the British. With the outer works under the British attackers' control, the Maori defenders were crowded into the central Pa (fort) which was surrounded by a wide ditch about 17 feet deep.



Left: Maori defender armed with a Tupara (percussion double barrel shotgun firing musket balls) and a Mere (stone club), alongside a Sergeant in the 65th Regiment armed with an Enfield percussion short rifle and Yataghan sword bayonet. Right: Soldiers in the 65th Infantry Regiment armed with Enfield long rifles and triangular blade socket bayonets. The twin engine steam powered rear paddle wheel gunboat *Pioneer* on the Waikato river in the distance .

Late in the afternoon, the 40th Regiment captured a series of entrenchments on a spur close to the Pa and detachments of the 65th Regiment attacked escaping defenders. The main body of the 65th and 14th attempted to storm the central Pa but failed because their ladders were too short to reach the top of the parapets.



Royal Artillery, storming the Pa armed with Beaumont Adams revolvers & Yataghan sword bayonets, the attack was repelled.

Lt General Cameron ordered Captain Mercer, of the Royal Artillery, to storm the Pa with 36 of his men armed with Beaumont Adams revolvers and Yataghan sword bayonets. Captain Mercer was fatally wounded and Sergeant Major Hamilton was shot in the arm. Only a couple of men reached the top and the attack was repelled



From a sketch by Major C. Heaphy, V.C.]



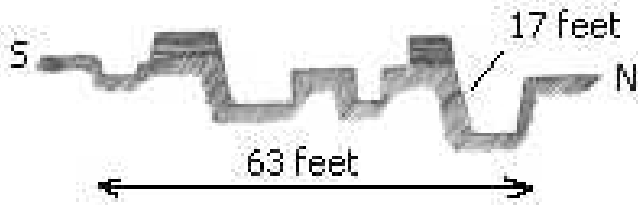
Left: The repulse of the Royal Navy storming party, Rangiriri Pa. 20th November 1863. Right: Chief Wiremu Tamihana with his Tupara, he together with King Tawhiao & about 200 other Maori defenders escaped from the Pa during the night of the 20th

Lt General Cameron then ordered an assault by Captain Mayne of the Royal Navy with ninety sailors armed with Enfield sea service short rifles and cutlass bayonets and when this assault was also repelled, Commander Phillimore and a party of seamen charged up the ditch & threw hand grenades into the Pa. This attack was also unsuccessful. With night approaching, the Pa was surrounded by British troops who camped in the ditch & occasionally threw hand grenades into the Pa. During the night over two hundred Maori defenders including their King Tawhiao & Chief Wiremu Tamihana, escaped from the Pa.

A pre-daybreak attempt on the 21st November 1863 by the Royal Engineers to mine the main Pa failed when the fuzes could not be found. Shortly after daybreak, the remaining Maori defenders showed a white flag. Lt Pennefather entered the Pa with his men mingling with the Maori defenders for about 10 minutes he then demanded their arms which they gave up in surrender to Lt General Cameron.



Left: British forces in occupation of Rangiriri Pa 21 November 1863. Right: Some of the Maori taken at Rangiriri Pa 21 November 1863

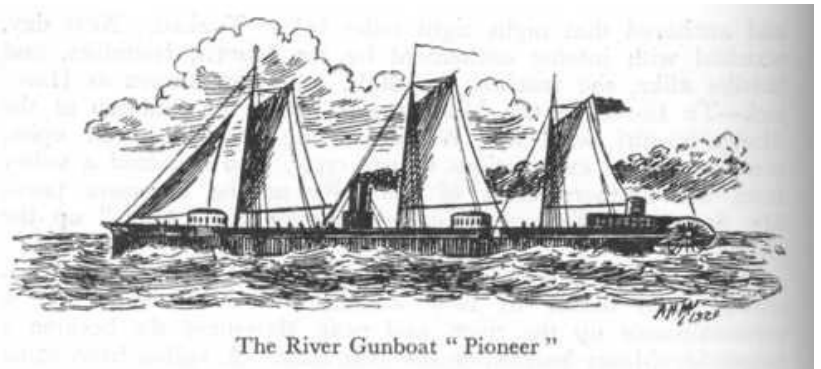
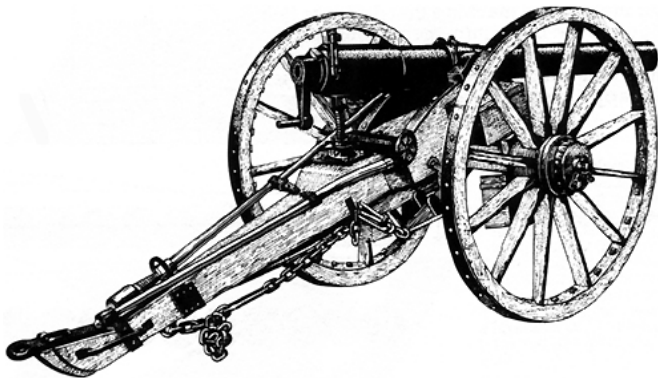


Cross-section of central Pa. Trench width approximately 63 feet, depth 17 feet.

Colonel Gamble found 182 firearms and large supplies of ammunition in the Pa. Captain E. Brooke Royal Engineers, surveyed the site, including measurements of the extensive fortifications and Major Charles Heaphy VC drew sketches (used by the NZ Herald newspaper) showing the British troops attacking the parapet.

Maori losses were at least 41 including 6 chiefs and 5 warrior women killed and 183 prisoners several wounded; British losses were 38 killed and 93 wounded 10 later dying from their wounds. The Maori dead were buried in the trenches and in a mass grave next to the Maori church that served as a hospital during the battle. The British dead were buried in the Rangiriri township cemetery.

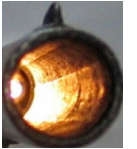
Examples of the main arms used by the British forces at the Battle of Rangiriri 20 November 1863



Left: 12 pounder Armstrong rifled breach loading field gun 3" bore, the 6 pounder Armstrong gun similar but smaller. Right: 300 ton iron clad stern paddle wheel steam river gunboat *Pioneer* 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 clad paddle-steamer *Avon* was armed with a 12-pounder Armstrong gun and a Congreve rocket system. Four armoured iron clad barges were prepared in New Zealand as troop carriers.



25 bore (.577" caliber) 39" barrel Enfield Long Rifle pattern 1853 together with a triangular 17" blade socket bayonet.



25 bore (.577" caliber) 33" barrel Enfield short Rifle pattern 1856 and later variations all with iron furniture for land service sergeants together with a Yataghan sword bayonet. A similar short Rifle pattern 1858 with five groove rifling and brass furniture for sea service together with cutlass sword bayonets.



25 bore (.577" caliber) 24" barrel Enfield Artillery Carbine pattern 1856 and later variations all with brass furniture together with a Yataghan sword bayonet.



54 bore (.44" caliber) five chamber Beaumont Adams percussion revolver, carried by officers and Royal Artillery forces

Examples of the main arms used by the Maori defenders at the Battle of Rangiriri 20 November 1863



11 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. The Maori defenders also used other arms including carbines and Toki Patiti (short handled steel headed hatchets) and other traditional stone and wooden arms very effective in close combat.

Acknowledgements and special thanks to New Zealand Historic Places Trust www.historic.org.nz, Phil Cregeen FSG, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/maori-entrenchments-rangiriri>, Rangiriri Heritage Center www.rangiririheritagecomplex.co.nz NZ National Archives <http://archives.govt.nz/>, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cow01NewZ-c33.html>, Osborne Arms Museum armsmuseum@xtra.co.nz, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/gun-boat-pioneer-anchor-meremere> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Rangiriri.