



[Back to "Patuone A Life" Index](#)

Patuone at War

It is known that as a young man, Patuone took part in many skirmishes with his father and brothers. For all the training, he had to be a warrior in fact; a warrior in reality. Reputations were built on exploits and not illusions. But, the record is not so precise when one is under instruction and tutelage; we are simply informed that he took part in many fights, north and south, east and west. Patuone survived and learned and honed his skills. His military training and experience was integrated within a wider curriculum: he had an obligation to become the embodiment and essence of Ngāti Hao but also he needed to know by heart their affiliations and the detailed attendant histories. In battle, there was time for neither ignorance nor indecision. Every genealogical connection right back to Rahiri had to be learned and ingrained since these affected relationships and obligations and set things clearly in Patuone's mind as a hierarchy of knowledge, obligations and *mana*.

The complexity of these relationships is generally not well understood. War and even skirmishes were serious matters: they were part of creating and maintaining balance and there was no sense in becoming involved in situations without good reason given that even for famous warriors, the risk of death was ever-present and therefore the survival of the *hapū*, could be at stake. These things were all part of a highly complex and organised 'system' designed to allow the exercise of power and right and choice of precedence according to specific context and situation.

Patuone's status as a warrior on the field, was thus gained at his father's side but one single event was to set him apart—his hand-to-hand combat with the Te Roroa chief Tatakahanui at Waituna around 1806. Although wounded by gunshot, in Patuone's own words, reported by Davis:

Tatakahanui... rushed on me striking me down. We rose together, when my assailant aimed another blow at me which I warded off. After a short struggle, I felled him to the ground, and calling to my companions, three in number, who were flying before the enemy, they gave me a tomahawk with which I cut off my man's head and carried it away in one of my garments (p.11).

The event had the potential to be a disaster for Ngāti Hao and Ngāpuhi since overall, the battle was a defeat for Ngāpuhi, but Tapua knew better and this single event revealed that Patuone's war leader status could be confirmed within the fighting force of Ngāti Hao.

For all his prowess as a warrior, however, the ultimate contradiction for Patuone was the exhortation of his father that he should be an agent and upholder of peace whereas Nene was to be the bringer of war. This is another peculiarity of the day which is also very Māori: that in order to be an upholder of peace, one had to be a great warrior. The prevailing thinking was that others would not resort to war so readily if they knew the *mana*, capacities and history of those with whom they would be in dispute and instead, would seek a peaceful outcome. Of course, honour and *mana* would also place great obligations upon potential adversaries and thus, even in the face of unlikely odds and certain defeat, battle would be inevitable. Further, this somewhat 'ritualised' process with its attendant principles could lead to situations where, for example, a defeated chief would request to be killed with his own weapon. Honour and respect could also result in a chief killed in battle but held in high esteem, not being desecrated and defiled. For Māori, the rules of war and engagement were as complex as those relating to *utu*.

So, Patuone, the man of peace, conducted the business of peace within the context of constant war since war—somewhat paradoxically—was part of the required process of establishing a lasting peace.

Regardless of his father Tapua's exhortation to him that he should be a man of peace and peacemaker amongst his people, Patuone was involved in many major battles, together with his Ngāpuhi alliance kin and allies of the moment including Te Roroa, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Toa and Ngāti Paoa. In many ways, the boundaries between ally and foe in the Māori world—and more especially in the north—were complex and this stood firmly as a characteristic, regardless of the closeness of kinship links. It also reinforces the point that in Māori societies, the predominant base unit of power and influence was the *hapū*. It was the *rangatira* of specific *hapū* who assessed the circumstances at a given moment and decided whether or not to go to war, either on their own account (which would usually require seeking help and support from other *hapū*) or as part of a combined force with other *hapū* and in response to a request for support from others. The Māori capacity and preparedness for war was therefore highly developed and the responsibilities attached to it, politically very important. In all situations involving war, a refusal to support a specific *take* without valid excuse, might be interpreted as a serious affront and itself lead to *utu*.

In Patuone's early years, many of the fights in which he was involved were related to the consolidation of the various *hapū* groupings which came to be called Ngāpuhi. With the Kaihohe and the Hokianga areas as a base, groups such as Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pou and Ngāi Tāhūhū were displaced through small-scale wars of attrition. These events took place largely in the years prior to 1800. Additionally, there were many fights with Ngāti Whātua and Te Roroa, both of whom were linked by kinship to each other as well as with the Hokianga *hapū* of Ngāpuhi. Waituna took place around 1806 and Te Moremonui in 1807, both defeats for Ngāpuhi ¹. There were other battles and expeditions towards the south and east of

Aotearoa, leading up to the Ngāpuhi/Ngāti Paoa expedition to Tai Rawhiti in 1818 and the first Amiowhenua expedition of 1819, the latter combining Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Te Roroa and Ngāti Toa.

There were also, however, raids from the south and Ngāti Maru from the Hauraki area were particularly problematic over an extended period from around 1793. Many of the predations from the south from the 1800-34 period were directed towards the Whangarei area and associated territories north and south. As well as Ngāti Maru, Waikato, Ngāti Paoa and Ngāti Whātua were involved in various *taua* north. These attacks were directed at groups such as Te Parawhau, Patuharakeke and coastal *hapū* occupying territories north towards Pēwhairangi such as Ngāti Wai. While connected to Ngāpuhi, these groupings were not always involved in expeditions south, however, they often bore the frontline anger of the southern groups and paid the price for their greater proximity to the territories of the south as these groups sought *utu* for the acts of Ngāpuhi kin further north. *Utu* was so often about approximations, associations and vicarious guilt.

Although Patuone and Nene were not involved in all of these events—especially those of a defensive nature in territories other than their own in the Hokianga—they were part of many offensive actions south against Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Paoa and to a lesser extent, Waikato ². Famously too, they were involved in the first Amiowhenua of 1819 which brought together an alliance including their great friends Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata of Ngāti Toa.

Following the Treaty of Waitangi, signed on 6th February 1840 with the oratory of Heke, Nene and Patuone being highly significant in inducing many chiefs to sign, apart from local conflicts and incidents which had no great consequence, the major battles in the north would be connected with a disillusioned Heke, Kawiti and their forces who sacked Kororareka and created great alarm. Ranged against them were the British and their allies, including Nene and Patuone. The various fights which took place during 1845-47 period saw losses on both sides. Heke and Kawiti's forces had the capacity to deploy and move rapidly as well as the use of well-constructed *pa*, designed to minimise the effects of artillery. The British forces were constrained in their movement of heavy artillery and other equipment relevant and necessary for an imperial army, this being exacerbated by the difficult terrain, thick bush (forest) and a lack of roads as well as by the very wet weather so typical of the sub-tropical north. Another issue which was especially noted by Nene was the 'tactics' used by commanders in the British forces and an apparent inability to accept that guerrilla warfare was far more appropriate under the circumstances in order to match the highly adaptive strategies employed Heke and Kawiti.

And yet, in spite of Patuone's involvement in active fights throughout the north and many areas south, his preference was always to prevent conflict where possible and this critical role as Peacemaker he shared with his brother-in-law, the Pēwhairangi chief, Te Wharerahi ³. The role was exercised within many Māori situations but also in relation to *pākēhā* situations, famously following the *uru* on the Whangaroa mission in 1826 which was then re-located to the Hokianga under Patuone's protection.

1. The battle of Waituna may also be that known as Ripiro. See Ballara (2003), p.182. Ballara refers to this battle as Te Kai-a-te-Karoro but this is an error. Te Kai-a-te-Karoro refers to the battle of Te Moremonui in 1807 which was a major defeat for Ngāpuhi. ([back](#))

2. In relation to Waikato, one particular constraint for both Patuone and Nene was their kinship links to Waikato. Patuone and Nene also had good relations generally with Potatau Te Wherowhero and this alliance was later to be used by the government to ensure the protection of the northern and southern borders of the town of Auckland through the great *mana* of these *rangatira*. ([back](#))

3. Te Wharerahi was closely related to Hongi, as were his wife Tari and her brothers Patuone and Nene. ([back](#))