



# Turikatuku

by Angela Ballara

## Biography

Turikatuku was the daughter of Mutunga II, and belonged to Te Hikutū and Ngāti Rēhia, who were related to Ngāpuhi; their territories stretched north from Te Puna and Rangihoua in the Bay of Islands towards Whangaroa. She was related to Te Pahi, a major leader of Ngāpuhi. She was born probably in the late eighteenth century, and may have been in her late teens when she and her younger sister, Tangiwhare, became the wives of Hongi Hika. Turikatuku was Hongi's senior wife, and the mother of at least two of his children, a son named Hāre Hongi, and Rongo, later given the Christian name of Hariata, who was to become the wife first of Hōne Heke and then of Ārama Karaka Pi. Turikatuku may also have been the mother of another daughter of Hongi, Mātenga, if that were not an earlier name for Rongo.

Hongi Hika had other wives, but Turikatuku was probably his closest friend and confidante as well as his senior and favourite wife. Those who met her regarded her as 'extraordinary', and it is recorded that Hongi never travelled or fought without taking her as his chief adviser. The devotion of Turikatuku to Hongi was witnessed by the earliest missionary visitors in 1814.

About 1816 Turikatuku suffered an inflammation of the eyes which made her completely blind, but she did not allow the handicap to prevent her from carrying out her usual tasks. Although she was the wife of the most powerful leader in the Bay of Islands she took a full part in the physical labour of cultivating food. Samuel Marsden, the chaplain of New South Wales, observed her in 1819 digging and weeding in Hongi's kumara gardens at Te Puna, with as much, or more, efficiency as those who were sighted. Marsden and Turikatuku made an exchange: Turikatuku received an iron hoe; Marsden was presented with Turikatuku's weeding tool which was sent to the Church Missionary Society in London.

In 1819 Hongi and Turikatuku received word that the people of Whangaroa had interfered with the bones of Turikatuku's father, Mutunga. An expedition proceeded against the guilty party. Hongi did not take their *pā* but fired on them, killing five or six persons; peace was then made. Turikatuku accompanied Hongi on his three great expeditions against tribes in the Coromandel and Hauraki Gulf, Waikato and Bay of Plenty, between 1821 and 1823. The scheme to deceive Ngāti Maru into a sense of false security by a feigned withdrawal is said to have originated with Turikatuku; Ngāpuhi returned and surprised Te Tōtara *pā* three days later. According to Wiremu Te Wheoro, it was Turikatuku who escorted Toha, also known as Matire Toha,

daughter of Rewa of Ngāpuhi, to Waikato as a wife for Kati, a kinsman of Te Wherowhero. The marriage, which took place in 1823, was a peacemaking alliance after the defeat of Waikato at Mātakitaki in May 1822.

Turikatuku's role in the 1825 campaign against Ngāti Whātua was recounted to the missionary George Clarke by one of the participants, Pākira of Ngāti Rēhia. The expedition set out from Kerikeri on the morning of 20 February 1825, taking a month or more to work its way down the east coast to Mangawhai, south of Bream Bay. From here the war party worked its way inland to a place called Te Ika-ā-ranganui, at the junction of the Kaiwaka River and the Waimako Stream, where contact was made with the enemy. When battle seemed imminent Hongi made a speech pointing out the way Turikatuku and the other women and children were to escape if by chance he was killed and Ngāpuhi conquered. After three days the Ngāpuhi camp was moved to a nearby hill where rites were performed, the tohunga sprinkling each warrior with water. While this ceremony was taking place Ngāti Whātua approached to within 300 yards. Turikatuku now addressed the assembled Ngāpuhi; she urged them to be courageous, and to remember that their peaceful return to their wives and children depended entirely on their valour through the day. She reminded them that if they were defeated they would, if not killed and eaten, be wretched slaves for life.

After this speech, firing commenced; Wharepoaka of Rangihoua was wounded, which caused a temporary retreat by Ngāpuhi; for three days they worked at repairing canoes burned and broken by the enemy, and then fighting began in earnest. Te Whareumu of Kororāreka (Russell), leading the largest portion of the war party, was either driven back or made a planned withdrawal; the section led by Hongi charged, and met the full attack of Ngāti Whātua. In the ensuing fighting Hāre Hongi, the son of Hongi and Turikatuku, was shot and killed. Ngāpuhi won a complete victory; in anger at the loss of his son, Hongi ordered all the prisoners to be killed.

During 1826 a series of domestic troubles and political reverses led to Hongi's decision to attack Ngāti Uru and Ngāti Pou of Whangaroa, not only to punish them for their ill treatment of Europeans but also to establish a new home for himself and his people. Although Turikatuku was very ill, Hongi Hika insisted on taking her with him when the war party set out in December 1826. They arrived in January 1827 to find that several Ngāti Uru leaders had fled. With the remaining Ngāti Uru, Hongi set out to drive out the other hapū, Ngāti Pou; during the pursuit he himself received a ball through his chest. On his return to Whangaroa a few days later he found that Turikatuku had died. She was buried at Whangaroa, and a number of Hongi's people were left to guard her grave; it was Hongi's intention to take back her bones to bury at Waimate North. He himself died in March 1828; it is not known whether his wishes were carried out.

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## Links and sources

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