

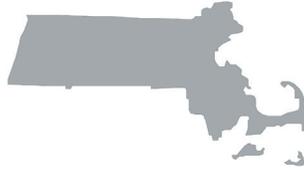


### **Portrait of King Philip (Metacomet) by Paul Revere**

Illustration from the 1772 edition of Thomas Church's *The Entertaining History of King Philip's War*. Thomas' father, Benjamin Church, led colonial troops in what remains the bloodiest war per capita in U.S. history. The war ended when Church captured Metacomet, chief of the Wampanoag. Thomas originally published this work in 1716 under the unwieldy title *Entertaining Passages Relating to Philip's War which Began in the Month of June, 1675. As also of Expeditions More lately made against the Common Enemy, and Indian Rebels, in the Eastern Parts of New-England: With Some Account of the Divine Providence towards Benj. Church Esqr*. Source: Library of Congress.

## “Weltering in Their Own Blood”: Puritan Casualties in King Philip’s War

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**Abstract:** *Recent scholarship has underscored the carnage inflicted by King Philip’s War (1675-76). Colonists faced a diverse assortment of Native Americans led by Wampanoag sachem Metacom (whom the colonists referred to as King Philip). In terms of population, King Philip’s War was the bloodiest conflict in American history. Fifty-two English towns were attacked, a dozen were destroyed, and more than 2,500 colonists died – perhaps 30% of the English population of New England. At least twice as many Native Americans were killed. Some historians estimate that the combined effects of war, disease, and starvation killed half the Native population of the region. The war left an enduring legacy.*

*Less well known, however, is that while the Puritans did attempt to save the wounded, they were far less successful in their efforts to retrieve and properly inter the dead. Puritan commanders did not always safeguard their men, sometimes leaving them “weltering in their own blood.” Concern about casualties was often compromised in the fog of battle. Puritans battled not only the Indians but their own shortcomings in rendering respect to the dead and assistance to the injured. Author Robert Cray is a professor of history at Montclair State University. The author would like to thank Montclair State University for a time release grant under the Faculty Scholarship Incentive Program which made this article possible.*

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At the start of King Philip's War in 1675, Captain Benjamin Church and his men blundered into an ambush. Confusion and fear swept through the untested New England troops as a small number of Wampanoag Indians, perhaps no more than a dozen, threatened to rout the larger force – all of them, that is, except Church. As the frightened settlers-turned-soldiers bolted, ready to leave behind a seriously injured guide, Church “stormed and stamped” at his men to stand fast. Two soldiers, one of them wounded, heeded Church and rescued the dying man. Church returned for the man's horse, calling vainly upon his troops to fight, until whizzing bullets convinced him it was “time to retreat.” Most of his men had already made that decision.<sup>1</sup>

This episode reflects the difficulties New Englanders faced during King Philip's War. Settlers with modest militia training proved more adept at the plow than the musket. They were inexperienced at woodland skirmishing and unnerved by sudden Indian sorties. As such, their opponents – a diverse assortment of Native Americans drawn from the Wampanoags, Nipmucks, Narragansetts, and other American Indian nations – found stealth and mobility remarkably effective. Wampanoag leader Metacom (King Philip to the colonists) led this resistance until his death in 1676.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Church's response remains instructive less for his failure to rally the troops than for illuminating the battlefield recovery of injured and dead soldiers. Rescuers recognized the stakes involved: the bodies of Puritan New Englanders provided inviting targets, if not outright trophies, for Native Americans to dismember and display. Recalling one particular episode, Church cited the Indians' treatment of eight slain soldiers, “Upon whose bodies they exercised more than brutish barbarities; beheadings and dismembering and mangling them in the most inhumane manner, which gashed and ghastly objects struck a damp on all beholders.” Seventeenth century European armies naturally targeted opponents, but tearing apart a corpse for display still represented a particularly odious form of violence

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Church, *Diary of King Philip's War, 1675*, intro., Alan and Mary Simpson (Tiverton, RI: Lockwood., 1975), 77-8.

<sup>2</sup> For a Native American view on the war, see William Apess, “Eulogy on King Philip,” (speech delivered in Boston in 1836) reprinted in Barry O'Connell, ed. *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 119-28. William Apess (1798-1839) served in the War of 1812 and later became a Methodist preacher and one of the first published Native American writers. See Bernd C. Peyer, “William Apess, Pequot-Mashpee Insurrectionist of the Removal Era,” in Peyer *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

usually reserved for rebellious subjects. That Native Americans employed their own version of these tactics in King Philip's War was an irony New Englanders failed to appreciate.<sup>3</sup>

To avoid this fate, Puritans during King Philip's War needed to secure both the injured and the dead, since anything less might leave them, in Church's words, "prey to the barbarous enemy." How well the Puritans accomplished these objectives during battle (or even its aftermath) remains unstudied. Despite an impressive scholarly literature, few historians have detailed, let alone interpreted, New Englanders' treatment of casualties during King Philip's War. Puritan outrage at Indian atrocities inspired a harsh response, as Jill Lepore has shown, leading to the horrific slaughter of women and children (non-combatants in other words) along with male warriors, but New England soldiers were also inattentive to their wounded and slain in the fog of battle.

The recovery of stricken and fallen companions often involved substantial risk, compelling commanders such as Church to intervene. Then there was the question of burial rites: Puritan New England had never face a prolonged war with heavy casualties, hence necessitating some mechanism for retrieving and safely burying bodies in accordance with their Reformed faith. That the war resulted in massive physical destruction, widespread suffering, and high numbers of injured and dead rendered these issues all the more pressing. If any early American conflict demanded that "no man be left behind," then King Philip's War surely merits attention.<sup>4</sup>

Recent scholarship has underscored efforts to identify and return combatants killed in action. Twentieth century American soldiers prided themselves on bringing comrades home; if nothing else, they would handle and bury the body reverently on the battlefield. Nor were the wounded to be left behind – soldiers often tried to protect injured comrades from

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<sup>3</sup> Church, *Diary*, 75-77; Kyle F. Zelner, "Essex County's Two Militias: The Social Composition of Offensive and Defensive Units During King Philip's War, 1675-1676," *New England Quarterly*, 72: 4 (1999), 577-93; Benjamin Church, *American National Biography*, s.v., Michael J. Puglisi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). On European treatment toward rebels see Ronald Dale Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?': The Violence of the Pequot War," *Journal of American History*, 85 (1998): 876-909, esp. 883-887.

<sup>4</sup> Church, *Diary*, 77-8; Jill Lepore, *The Name of The War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998); James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England* (Amherst: Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). Douglas Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

capture or worse, convinced others would do the same for them.<sup>5</sup> Yet, these sentiments surfaced less frequently among earlier soldiers. Colonial Americans inherited a European tradition in which retreating armies often abandoned their dead and wounded; the enemy, soldiers hoped, would bury the dead and succor the injured, in accordance with seventeenth century norms of warfare and religion. Even so, it was not until the Dettingen campaign in June 1743, during the War of the Austrian Succession, that the wounded received assurances of treatment from both armies. Leaving the wounded on the battlefield in the 1600s might have spared them a jolting cart-ride that could hasten death, but scavengers could despoil and slay the injured before townsfolk or the opposition army intervened. Burying combatants with markers rarely occurred in any event because by custom as much as necessity such ceremonies were simple, hurried affairs.<sup>6</sup>

Puritan New Englanders had to confront wartime notions about the dead and wounded in hitherto unforeseen ways. The first settlers in the 1630s had limited military skills. Their commanders, Miles Standish, John Mason, and John Underhill, while familiar with Low Countries fighting and terrain (modern Netherlands and Belgium), needed to adapt to New England forests. The Pequot War (1637-1638) decimated the Pequot Nation, costing them hundreds of dead, but inflicted fewer casualties upon New Englanders. The total number of dead in King Philip's War, however, exceeded seven thousand if one includes death from wounds, exposure, and starvation. With close to five thousand Native Americans and twenty-five hundred English dead, it was the bloodiest war in colonial history. Puritan chroniclers hailed survivors originally thought slain, chided soldiers who forsook comrades, and praised men who rescued the wounded and buried the dead. Protecting corpses from human and animal predators also fulfilled basic religious obligations. In time, dealing with

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Wong, "Leaving No Man Behind: Rescuing America's Fallen Warriors," *Armed Forces and Society*, 31: 4 (2005), 594-622; Elizabeth D. Samet, "Leaving No Warriors Behind: The Ancient Root of a Modern Sensibility," *Armed Forces and Society*, 31: 4 (2005), 623-27.

<sup>6</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking, 1976), 112-13; Keegan and Richard Holmes, with John Gus, *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle* (New York: Viking, 1986), 144-46, 160; J. J. N. McGurk, "Casualties and Welfare Measures for the Sick and Wounded of the Nine Years War," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 68: 273 (1990), 22-35; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 78-9, 331-34; Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), 547-51; Richard A. Gabriel and Karen S. Metz, *A History of Military Medicine*, 2 vols., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 2: 110. On 17<sup>th</sup> century English military codes, part of which insisted that honorable soldiers did not abandon comrades, see Barbara Donagan, "The Web of Honor: Soldiers, Christians, and Gentlemen in the English Civil War," *Historical Journal*, 44 (2001): 369.

the wounded and the dead commanded considerable attention on the part of clerical commentators and provincial governments.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier conflicts such as the Pequot War provide scant but enticing clues for decoding the Puritan treatment of wartime casualties. Much has been written about the 1637 raid on the Pequot settlement, Mystic Fort, described by John Gronier as "the most infamous event in the early military history of New England."<sup>8</sup> Seventy-seven Puritans along with a contingent of Narragansett and Mohegan allies attacked the fort, torched the buildings, and butchered almost the entire population, many of them women and children, killing perhaps seven hundred. As for the Puritans, one injured soldier narrowly avoided immolation, spotted by a quick-thinking officer who removed him from the flames. Two other soldiers died. However, twenty Puritans suffered injuries, their situation worsened by the lack of a doctor and too little food or water. Five hundred Pequot from a nearby settlement shadowed the retreating force. Only a small force of sixty Mohegan Indians, who served as human stretcher bearers, enabled the Puritan wounded to reach safety, while the able-bodied survivors maintained a rear guard.<sup>9</sup>

The Puritan army had almost snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The fate of the two dead men remains obscure. To have left them unburied among the charred Pequot corpses would almost certainly invite desecration. To have carried them with the injured would have shown a heightened sensitivity about proper burial rituals, something seventeenth century European armies did not always display. Nevertheless, the Mystic Fort raid revealed the thin line between victory and defeat. A triumphant

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<sup>7</sup> Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 36; John E. Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 8-10; Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (Latham, MD: Madison Books, 1991), 21-2, 31-5, 54-60; Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 13-14. Perhaps the most detailed examination of Indian deaths can be found in Sherburn F. Cook, "Interracial Warfare and Population Decline among the New England Indians," *Ethnohistory*, 20 (Winter, 1973): 1-25. The estimates supplied in the text come from Neal Salisbury, ed., *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God by Mary Rowlandson with Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin), 1.

<sup>8</sup> John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>9</sup> John Underhill, "News from America," in Charles Orr, ed., *History of the Pequot War* (Cleveland: Helman-Taylor, 1897), 81; John Mason, "A Brief History of the Pequot War," in Orr, ed., *ibid.*, 31-2; Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 25-6; Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 224-25. Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 146-155, *passim*; Karr, "Why Should You be so Furious," 876-909.

raid into an adversary's territory entailed dealing with one's own dead and wounded.<sup>10</sup>

In 1675, Wampanoag sachem Metacom clashed with the Plymouth Colony. What might have been a simple conflict between the Wampanoags and the colony grew into an inter-colonial, inter-tribal battle. Whether, as James Drake has claimed, the conflict represented an Indian civil war or – as Francis Jennings has averred – a Puritan ploy to grab Indian land should not obscure the war's destructive force. People, livestock, crops, and buildings became targets. Native Americans stripped English corpses, displayed the clothes, and dangled body parts on their persons; the English took scalps, impaled Indian heads, and set dogs to tear apart their enemies. Over time, New Englanders adopted a "Skulking Way of War," combining swiftness and the element of surprise, while employing Indian allies to achieve results; they also learned to safeguard their wounded and dead.<sup>11</sup>

Amidst such savagery, the fog of battle sometimes left men leaderless, abandoned, and very much alone. An initially successful 1676 attack against the Indians along the falls by the Green River in Massachusetts, for instance, disintegrated into a retreat. Jonathan Wells, a sixteen-year-old soldier, heard Captain William Turner say, "it is better to lose some than all," leaving the rear guard to face the Indians alone. Weak from blood loss, Wells was left behind in the company of John Jones, another wounded man, by a small remnant of the troop. Jones declared his wounds mortal, and the two agreed to separate to search for a path. Wells later affirmed that he was "glad to leave him, lest he should be a clog or hindrance to him." That Wells, a man deserted by his comrades, should have voiced such sentiments remains revealing; in such instances, it was every man for himself apparently. Wells dodged Indians and flaming woods and was reduced to gnawing flesh from horse bones before finally arriving in Hatfield, Massachusetts, on the Sabbath. He was greeted as

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<sup>10</sup> See Andrew Lipman, "'A Means to Knitt Them Together': The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 65 (2008): 3-28, for a fine discussion of bodies and heads as war trophies.

<sup>11</sup> Drake, *King Philip's War*; Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Philip Ranlet, "Another Look at the Causes of King Philip's War," *New England Quarterly*, 61: 1 (1988), 79-100; Lepore, *Name of the War*; 80-82; Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*; Richard Melvoin, *New England Outpost: War and Society in Colonial Deerfield* (New York/London: W. W. Norton, 1989) 92-123; Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 32-4.



**Goffe Rallying the Men of Hadley (in Defense of Indian Attack during King Philip's War), Hadley, MA, 1675-1676**  
Anonymous, 1883

Villages in western Massachusetts were subject to numerous attacks during King Philip's War. The war challenged the viability of English settlement in New England. It led many colonists to question why they had fallen so far from God's favor and to wonder at the potential coming of the apocalypse. Source: Library of Congress.

“one having risen from the dead,” according to an account based on Wells’ later retelling of the episode.<sup>12</sup>

Wells was not the only survivor. At the same battle, Isaac Harrison learned a valuable lesson about battlefield honor. He had permitted John Belcher to mount behind him, possibly saving his life, as the tide of battle turned against New Englanders. After Harrison slid off the horse, weak from a wound, Belcher cowardly rode off, leaving his rescuer to fend for himself. Separated from the troops, the expedition’s chaplain the Reverend Hope Atherton went three-and-a-half days without regular food before finding a settlement. When hostile Indians refused to accept Atherton’s surrender, running from the sight of him, the minister attributed it to Divine Providence – a message he related to his flock. Similarly, a survivor from Captain Richard Beers’ overwhelmed 1675 expedition hid in a gully covered with leaves before reaching safety six days later, hungry and disoriented. Robert Dutch of Ipswich, who had also been with Beers’ troop, proved even luckier. Wounded by a bullet in the skull, his body slashed by tomahawks, Dutch appeared dead when the Indians stripped his clothes. According to one version, a friendly Indian chanced upon him, and carried Dutch fifteen miles to safety. Another variation of the tale, related by the Reverend William Hubbard, had oncoming soldiers driving off the enemy Indians and spotting Dutch, who seemed “almost miraculously, as one raised from the dead.”<sup>13</sup>

Such accounts inspired ministers to hail the glorious workings of Providence. People could draw comfort from stories of survival. Even so, as Church had noted, troops could still desert injured comrades and commanders. Captain Beers’ men had fled to Hadley after a surprise Indian attack, leaving Beers and a few stalwarts to die. The Indians placed the heads of the New Englanders atop poles as an object lesson in battlefield terror. On the other hand, concern for the wounded and dead sometimes impeded otherwise successful attacks. In July 1675, an expedition against Metacom foundered as frightened soldiers ventured into a boggy

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Gardiner Drake, ed., *The History of King Philip’s War by the Reverend Increase Mather, also a History of the Same War by the Reverend Cotton Mather* (1862; rept. Bowie, MD: Heritage, 1990) 255-259; Quoted in George Sheldon, *History of Deerfield, Massachusetts* 2 vols. (Deerfield: E. A. Hall, 1895), 1: 162, 165-166.

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon, *History of Deerfield*, 1: 166-168; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 202-04; Eric B. Schultz and Michael J. Tongias, *King Philip’s War: The History and Legacy of America’s Forgotten Conflict* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1999), 168; *The Present State of New England with Respect to the Indian War* (1676; rept., Readex Microprint, 1966), no pagination, for the friendly Indian quote; William Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars in New England*, Samuel Gardner Drake, ed., 2 vols. (1865; rept., New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), I: 120-22.

swamp firing at every bush (and sometimes hitting their own men). New Englanders abandoned pursuit, allegedly concerned about fallen comrades but perhaps too fearful to continue. Although the dead and wounded were safely collected, Metacom survived to fight another day.<sup>14</sup>

Tending and transporting large numbers of hurt soldiers could understandably impede armies. The number of casualties and the size of an opponent's force, along with an army's physical state, influenced decision making. The fear of pursuit by the Indians obviously factored into the treatment of wounded during retreats. After Indians ambushed Captain Wheeler and a troop of twenty men near Brookfield, Massachusetts, in 1675, Thomas Wheeler, the captain's son, although injured, gallantly saved his father. A nineteenth century account speculated that "the wounded had likely been borne . . . and laid at their protectors' feet; and the brave company awaited night's friendly shade to bear them gently to a place of relief." But the Indians fired the woods and the Puritan retreat turned into a rout. Eight other men had been left for dead or at least were presumed dead — there was no turning back for them. Five of the wounded, while bleeding, hung on as best they could through unfamiliar terrain until arriving at Brookfield. Pursuing Indians made tending casualties impossible.<sup>15</sup>

Yet sometimes the wounded suffered even after an apparent success. On December 19, 1675, in what has been labeled the "Great Swamp Fight," one thousand New Englanders attacked the Narragansetts who were wintering in a swamp in West Kingston, Rhode Island, at an almost completed fort. While the settlement's size remains in dispute, the Indian defenders inflicted heavy casualties among the New Englanders. Even so, the Puritans carefully removed their dead and wounded, before continuing the assault and driving the Indians off in a wave of carnage in which "everyone had their fill of blood." A debate then broke out over the next course of action. A wounded Captain Church wanted to remain in the well-provisioned village, an ideal field hospital for the injured. The expedition commander, Governor Josiah Winslow of Plymouth, at first concurred, until an angry, unidentified captain, according to Church, threatened to "shoot his [the governor's] horse under him," unless he agreed to burn the fort and leave. The expedition's doctor seconded the decision, observing

<sup>14</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 68-9, 87; Drake, ed., *History*, 62; Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, I: 110-111; Schultz and Touglas, *King Philip's War*, 168.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred S. Hudson, *History of Sudbury, Massachusetts, 1638-1689* (Boston: R. H. Blodgett, 1889), 241-42; Thomas Wheeler, "A Thankful Remembrance of God's Mercy," (Cambridge, 1676) in Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom, eds., *So Dreadful a Judgment: Puritan Response to King Philip's War, 1676-77* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 243-46.

the wounded Church “would bleed to death like a dog before they would endeavor to staunch his blood.” The commanders torched the fort, immolating hundreds of the Narragansetts’ aged, women, and children still huddled in the houses. Shocked soldiers wondered openly how burning an enemy alive could square with Gospel principles as they placed their own wounded upon horses. At least eight (and possibly more) of the English dead were left behind. As for the injured soldiers, many of them froze to death during the snow-covered December march.<sup>16</sup>

Josiah Winslow had ordered the casualties to be cared for at the Rhode Island garrison house of Richard Smith, placing himself in the barn to ensure the injured more room. Yet, one of the wounded, John Bull, later recalled being carried twenty miles “in a very cold night,” before being placed in a “cold chamber” with a wooden pillow for a headrest and the snow-driven wind for a covering, suggesting a different level of care than Winslow had intended. Chroniclers offered up comments aplenty. The Reverend William Hubbard touted the large number of enemy dead but acknowledged that many of the wounded might have survived, “if they had not been forced to march so many miles in a cold and snowy night before they could be dressed.” Joseph Dudley bemoaned the death of expedition leaders: “we admire there remained any to return,” less moved apparently by the plight of ordinary soldiers dying in their tracks. A disgusted Church grumbled that the wounded men “might have a good house to lodge in, which otherwise would necessarily perish with the storms and cold.”<sup>17</sup>

Church’s complaint was probably accurate despite the difficulties of tending the wounded at battle sites. Unlike broken limbs that might heal if splints were applied, penetration wounds to the lungs or intestines were extremely serious. And musket wounds could introduce foreign matter from clothes (and hence infection) into the body. The less seriously injured might indeed recover, as did Church, or become too impaired to serve. After the Great Swamp Fight, at least thirty-four men died in Wickford,

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<sup>16</sup> *A Farther Brief and True Narration of the Great Swamp Fight in the Narragansett Country* (1676; rept., Providence, RI: Society of Colonial Wars, 1912), 10; Drake, *King Philip’s War*, 119-20; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 131; Church, *Diary*, 32; George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers of King Philip’s War*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (1906 rept., Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 1967), 193-94; Denton R. Bedford, “The Great Swamp Fight,” *The Indian Historian*, 4: 2 (1971), 27-41. Church, *Diary*, 101; Benjamin Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, 2 vols., (New Haven, CT: Maltby, Goldsmith, and Samuel Wadsworth, 1818), I: 341.

<sup>17</sup> “A Continuation of the State of New England: Being a Further Account of the Indian War” in *King Philip’s War Narratives* (1676; rept., Ann Arbor: Readex Microprint, 1966), 8; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 130-32. Bodge, *Soldiers of King Philip’s War*, 173, 194, 484; Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, I: 150-51; Church, *Diary*, 98-101; Drake, *King Philip’s War*, 120.



Rhode Island, the next day, with several more in the days ahead. Follow-up care for survivors required resolving certain political difficulties. Approximately one hundred fifty persons, their wounds dressed, remained in Rhode Island, necessitating the governor's personal intervention, because some "churlish Quakers were not free to entertain them." The chronicler, a Puritan, remarked angrily, "of so inhumane, peevish and untoward a disposition are these Nabuls, as not to vouchsafe civility to those that had ventured their lives, and received dangerous wounds in their defence." Governor William Coddington of Rhode Island, recalling the persecution of Quakers in Massachusetts, could retort that "Our Houses are now open to receive your Wounded and all in Distress, we have prepared an Hospitall for yors, but you a House of Correction for all that repaire to our Meetings, is this soe do as you would be done by?" Old animosities between Puritans and Quakers died hard.<sup>18</sup>

Interring the dead also became a regular by-product of the war. Contemplating death, even in times of peace, was an important Puritan devotional exercise, vital to New Englanders' religious conception of self. Hence death could not be ignored or trivialized but rather embraced with the appropriate rituals. Prayers for the dead and dying were expected with the clergy leading the service. Typically, Puritans buried bodies on their backs with heads to the west (which would have allowed the deceased to sit up facing east upon Resurrection Day) and covered the dead with winding sheets. Well-to-do individuals might merit more elaborate ceremonies – mourning rings and gloves began appearing among late-seventeenth-century mourners – and even the destitute could merit a coffin from the town fathers.<sup>19</sup>

In wartime, such social customs fell by the wayside. The unfortunate Captain Beers and company, whose dismembered bodies dangled from trees, their heads atop poles, received "hasty funeral rites" from a relief

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 223-24; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 132, Coddington quote, 135; "A New and Further Narrative of the State of New England" in *King Philip's War Narratives*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Gloria Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Culture in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 183-86; Gordon E. Geddes, *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 142-43, 147-49; Maris A. Vinovskis, "'Angels' Heads and Weeping Willows': Death in Early America," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 546-63; David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: a Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110-17. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 226-27, 232-34, 238. None of these works examine battlefield deaths and burials.

expedition commanded by Major Robert Treat. Beers did end up in a separate grave, however, a courtesy due his rank and status perhaps. Nevertheless, the dead in nearby Squakeag received shabbier treatment: Treat evacuated the survivors of an Indian attack without burying their slain friends and neighbors. One nineteenth century chronicler attempted to explain away Treat's actions: "As they had been dead five days, and may have been in an advanced state of decomposition, there is some excuse for neglecting the rite of sepulture." The Reverend Stoddard, however, dryly remarked "they left the bodies unburied," since interment meant delay and perhaps risk of further Indian attacks.<sup>20</sup>

Battlefield burials did entail risks – Indians could attack unwary soldiers who interred comrades. Leaving bodies in the field, however, also invited desecration from animal predators as well as Indians. In northern New England, a scene of especially fierce fighting, Lieutenant Roger Plaisted ordered a squad of soldiers to assist a settler under attack in 1676. The Abenakis surprised and killed two soldiers forcing the others to retreat. The next day Plaisted yoked a team of oxen to recover the bodies, intent on providing Christian burial, when the Indians pounced again. As the Reverend Increase Mather noted, "the greater part of the English did unworthily forsake their leader in that business." Plaisted, his son, and another man died.<sup>21</sup>

Such actions, however cowardly, left unfinished what the Reverend William Hubbard labeled the "last office of love": Christian burial. Early Christians had buried individuals in hope of preserving the body for its eventual resurrection with the soul; later Christians maintained the tradition. Hubbard never commented upon the decision to leave some of the dead behind and unburied at the Great Swamp Fight in Rhode Island. That they finally received sepulture from a group of friendly Indians, non-Christians, instead of their retreating countrymen is ironic. By contrast, Increase Mather spared few words about bodies lying unburied in fields as a result of Indian violence; he described corpses as "weltering in their own blood." When an Indian assault forced soldiers to leave their dead behind, Mather proclaimed that they had left comrades "as meat for the fowls of

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<sup>20</sup> Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, I: 110-11; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 87; Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 163-68; Bodge, *Soldiers of King Philip's War*, 131-32; Drake, ed., *History*, 81; Josiah H. Temple, *A History of the Town of Northfield, Massachusetts* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1875), 75. fn. 3, 78-9; Lepore, *Name of the War*, 286, fn. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Drake, ed., *History*, 91-2; Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, II: 120-121; Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 307-08; Drake, *King Philip's War*, 162-66.

heaven and their flesh unto the beasts of the earth.” The unspoken message was equally clear —soldiers should return and bury their dead.<sup>22</sup>

Removing fatalities from battle sites had military consequences, too. Indians typically removed their dead, leaving opponents, especially the Puritans, reliant upon guesswork for body counts. In Hatfield, when Native Americans attacked the town on October 19, 1675, several Massachusetts companies stationed in and coming to the aid of the town, “killed about 100 of them,” a suspiciously round figure, while losing less than twenty men themselves. One account claimed that the Native Americans had placed sixty bodies on horseback, making the final tally of casualties no more than a rough estimate.

Similarly, an anonymous and perhaps irritated Puritan correspondent could not ascertain how many Narragansetts died at the Great Swamp Fight because “they would carry away as many dead Indians as they could.” That the English did much the same in Ireland during the Nine Years War (1593-1602), deliberately concealing their dead while publicly exposing the Irish slain, reveals the strategic uses of dead bodies. Even earlier in 1569, Sir Humphrey Gilbert had set decapitated Irish heads along the path to his tent to intimidate his opponents when they came to parley. Consequently, Puritans learned to recognize the advantage of employing the dead in warfare, too. Increase Mather believed that the winter campaign against the Narragansetts, in which some of the Puritan dead had been removed, was nonetheless successful because hostile Indians found few bodies, which “did greatly astonish them.” Mather may have been exaggerating the impact, but his thinking illustrates the military advantages behind the quick removal of the dead.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the military significance of sepulture, Puritans stressed the need to bury the dead. Religious concerns figured more prominently than strategic considerations. That people attempted interments, sometimes in dangerous situations, testifies to the power of this belief. Witness the wounded Jonathan Wells, whose discovery of a human head unearthed

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<sup>22</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, trans., A. C. Campbell (New York and London: M.W. Dunne, 1901), 218; Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, II: 120; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 131; Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion*, 158-59; Drake, ed., *History*, 66-7, 85; Bedford, “The Great Swamp Fight,” 40.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel White and Reuben Wells, *History of Hatfield, Massachusetts, in Three Parts* (Springfield, F.C.H. Gibbons, 1910), 79-80; “A Farther Brief and True Narration of the Great Swamp Fight,” 5; “Continuation of the State of New England,” 6; McGurk, “Casualties and Welfare Measures for the Sick and Wounded of the Nine Years War,” 25; Karr, “Why Should you be so Furious?” 887; Cotton Mather, “Decemium Luctuosum” 1699, Charles Lincoln, ed., *Narratives of the Indian Wars* (1913 rept., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), 224; Drake, ed., *History*, 113.

by animals, compelled him to search for the original grave during his trek to safety. He “laid the head by the body,” covering it with wood to prevent further desecration. Daniel Warrin and Joseph Peirce waded in knee-deep cold water to find bodies, removing them by canoe. Captain Michael Pierce and his ambushed Plymouth Company, of which perhaps fifty-four were slain by the Narragansett in Rhode Island on March 26, 1676, required three days to be buried, according to the Reverend Noah Newman; men from Dedham, Rehoboth, and Medfield assisted in the gloomy task. Edward Cowell, a conscientious commander, insisted on returning to a battle site to dig graves for several men and was aided by Indian troops. Consequently, Captain Samuel Wadsworth and over twenty of his men were put in a common grave, the bodies placed at right angles with stones atop to deter wolves. Not surprisingly, such ceremonies were modest affairs often bereft of clergy, coffin, or tombstone.<sup>24</sup>

King Philip's War ended in southern New England in 1676, while the Abenaki fought in Maine until August 1677. Still, the unfinished emotional and fiscal business of warfare continued. Gravediggers such as Warrin and Peirce asked compensation from the Massachusetts government in 1679; others petitioned for assistance when their injuries — visible reminders of the fighting — prevented them from working. The aforementioned John Bull, who had been carried twenty miles to safety by his comrades, gained a public pension after presenting evidence of his wounds. In 1703 he received a yearly two-pound pension that continued until 1719. Another veteran, Jonathan Jackson, received four pounds per year in 1720, while James Marshall went into the Boston Poor House until transferred to the Castle Fort in 1720, a de-facto old soldiers' home inhabited by those with long service records. Descendents of the slain also requested relief. Surviving veterans, some well past their prime, asked compensation from colonial Massachusetts as late as 1735. The consequences of the fighting, including the impact upon the wounded as well as family members of the dead, figured as ongoing social welfare concerns long after the war's end.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Drake, ed., *History*, 259; Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower, A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 407 footnote; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 167; Bodge, *Soldiers*, 225-27; Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 216-17.

<sup>25</sup> Bodge, *Soldiers*, 227, 245, 248, 252, 289, 484-85; Jack S. Radabaugh, *The Military System of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1740*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1965), 497-98; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 247-48.

What might we conclude about the Puritan treatment of the dead and wounded in King Philip's War? In peacetime, the dead merited a certain ritual to fulfill basic Christian obligations; in wartime, soldiers were left behind, sometimes shockingly so, by comrades or commanders too frightened or outnumbered to assist them. The wounded could be abandoned, roughly handled, or valiantly protected — the circumstances varied. Puritan ministers moralized about soldiers' behavior, but their admonitions and praise represented after-the-fact judgments that military realities often trumped.

Yet while the need to succor the wounded and compensate survivors received attention, New Englanders' shock over King Philip's War limited and perhaps compromised their treatment of the dead. The war was simply too bloody, costly, and devastating. Benjamin Thompson, a contemporary New England poet of King Philip's War, attempted to put the dead's plight into perspective by means of verse. His account, *New England's Crisis, or a Brief Narrative*, published in 1676, noted the reception accorded deceased soldiers and civilians:

War digs a common grave for friends and foes,  
 Captains in with the common soldier throws  
 Six of our leaders in the first assault  
 Crave readmission to their Mother's vault  
 Who had they fell in ancient Homer's day  
 Had been enrolled with hecatombs of praise.

But these men were clearly not in "ancient Homer's day." Such praise as existed came more from the pens of the Puritans than from any rituals toward the fallen, as Thompson indicated.<sup>26</sup>

It would remain for a later generation to remember the dead by marking where they perished. When Captain Samuel Wentworth was interred alongside his men under a pile of stone, his son, Benjamin, had been only six years old. Yet the memory lingered with Wentworth, and later, as President of Harvard, Benjamin made a pilgrimage of filial piety to the site in 1730, placed a marker over the grave, and memorialized the dead. More such actions would follow in the centuries to come as people and municipalities attempted to consecrate wartime sites with signs and markers.

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Thompson, "New England Crisis, or a Brief Narrative" (Boston, 1676) in Slotkin and Folsom, eds., 224.

The Society of Colonial Wars, a group that traced its lineage back to colonial soldiers, often led the campaign for commemorative markers. Yet, by the late twentieth century, the descendents of the Narragansett could challenge the memory of King Philip's War, in particular, the Great Swamp Fight, which had devastated their nation. To the Narragansett, it had been less a fight and more a massacre. Such battles could not be undone, but the memory of King Philip's War could still be contested by later generations of New Englanders and Native Americans.<sup>27</sup>

HJM

## INTERPRETING IMAGES OF NATIVE AMERICANS

**Editor's Note:** The opening "portrait" of King Philip used to illustrate this article was selected because no other image could be found. However, it is critical to note that no contemporary images exists of King Philip and it is doubtful there is any authenticity to this rendition. In the 1770s, as the one-hundred year anniversary of the war approached, there were numerous reprints of King Philip's War accounts, including Thomas Church's *Entertaining History* and Mary Rowlandson's *Narrative*. Renewed interest was also sparked, perhaps, by newspaper coverage of the Indian troubles in the Ohio Valley at the time (Dunmore's War). Philip's clothing and weapons portrayed here are more the style of the eighteenth-century Ohio Valley than seventeenth-century New England. Like all depictions of the war and of Philip, the image is more reflective of contemporary perceptions and concerns. (Thanks to Dr. Mark A. Nicholas for this analysis.) Another theory is proposed by historian Jill Lepore. She states that Paul Revere copied his engraving of Philip from "John Simon's 1710 engraving of Mohawk chief Joseph Brant." See Lepore, *The Name of the War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (NY: Vintage, 1999), p. 198.

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<sup>27</sup> Bodge, *Soldiers*, 140-41, 230; Clifford Shipton, ed., *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 17 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933- ), IV: 83-7; Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 227-28. Lepore, *Name of the War*, 236-238. Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, details memorials to King Philip's War.