

SNOW, SMOKE, AND SWAMP:
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY COLONIAL
WARFARE IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

Jamie Gordon Wilson

HIST 586 - A Advanced Seminar in History

December 14, 2017

ABSTRACT: Research finds that environmental factors such as the ecology of the swamp, the terrain, and winter weather had a substantial impact on The Great Swamp Fight of December 19, 1675 during King Philips. Comparison prior battles such as the Mystic River Massacre forty years prior have been overly simplistic. While the tactics used by the English against the Narragansett in the Great Swamp seem inspired by Mystic, the physical landscape and weather conditions altered the outcome. Through environmental histories of the region, first person accounts, and concomitant histories of King Philip's War and the Pequot War, the role of the environment in shaping The Great Swamp fight is clear.

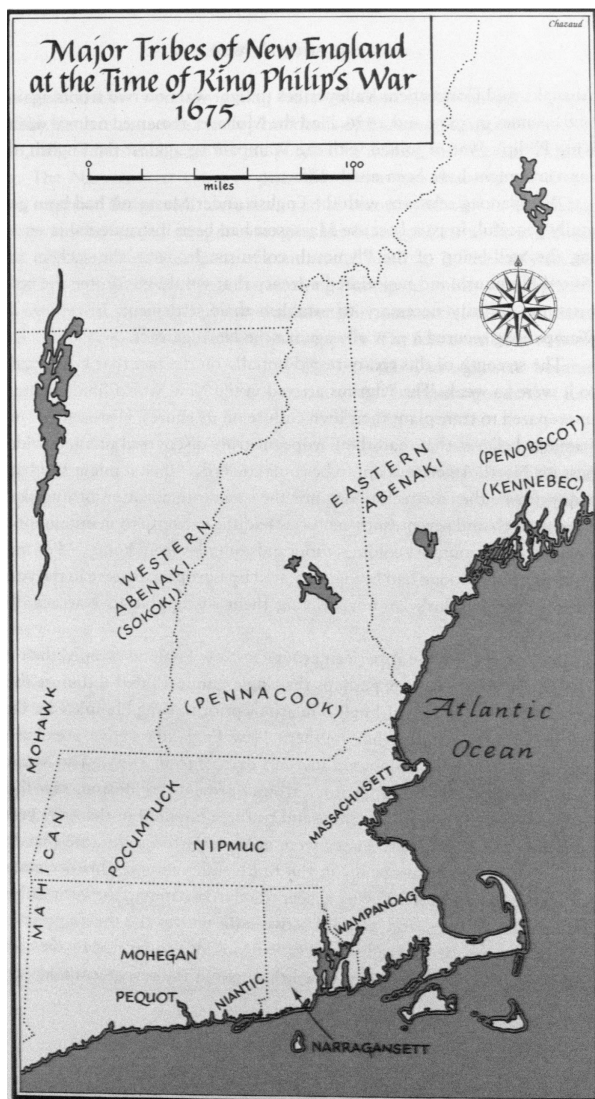
A tall and slender granite stone sits in a clearing of The Great Swamp Management area of southern Rhode Island. The monument is the only reminder in this untouched environment to what happened over three hundred years ago on December 19, 1675. An army from the United Colonies of New England, Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut, advanced into the Great Swamp and assaulted a Narragansett fort built far into the interior. That cold and snow-filled day in December, in an otherwise silent and snowy swamp, was overwhelmed by the crack of smoothbore muskets, war cries, screams of the wounded, the roar of a great fire, and shrieks of those burning alive. The cacophony of sound marked December 19 as the largest battle and the deadliest day of King Philip's War.¹

Before English settlement, Rhode Island was home to the Narragansett, a people who shared the Algonquin language of their neighbors, the Wampanoags, Pequots, Mohegans, Mohicans, and Massachusetts among others. Their location relative to the surrounding tribes is shown below on Map I. Collectively known as Algonquins, the tribes of New England lived mobile lifestyles following seasonal patterns of hunting, fishing, and agriculture responding to resource scarcity which followed people living off the land. The first settlers noted that the natives of New England appeared robust and well-nourished.² Notions of Native Americans as living within a carrying capacity of the land or for a more romantic idea, living in harmony with nature, are nonetheless marked by the plagues which had spread across the Americas after contact with

1. Eric B. Schultz and Michael J. Tougias, *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict*, (Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, 1999), 244.

2. Gloria L. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

Europeans.³ Transmitted indirectly through intermediaries of old trade networks and feral European hogs, smallpox and other Old-World diseases ravaged a land with limited immunities.⁴ What often appears to be a near-perfect symbiotic relationship of



Map I, *Major Tribes of New England at the Time of King Philip's War 1675* by Jacques Chazard. Note the arrow directing towards Rhode Island.
SOURCE: Shultz and Tougas *King Philips War*, 245.

3. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 7-8.

4. Dean R. Snow and Kim M. Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation in the Northeast: The Timing of the First Epidemics," *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 1 (1988): 16

native peoples and the land that they inhabited is incomplete considering massive depopulation which consolidated tribes and drove sedentary settlement patterns.⁵

The facts of the Great Swamp Fight of 1675 show an astute observer a cross section of the clash of cultures of Colonial America and how they interacted with their environment. Local geography, weather conditions, and cultural attitudes towards swamps shaped the events leading up to, during, and after the massacre. While previous historians have written at length on King Philip's War and its impact in shaping American identity, this analysis will provide insights to the environmental and ecological factors of New England life in 1675 and the Colonial-Indian relations in the region. The physical environment and cultural attitudes to that environment shaped early colonial warfare in southern New England. Focus on two battles, forty years apart, sheds light on seventeenth century approaches to colonial warfare. The Great Swamp Fight of 1675 during King Phillip's War and its precursor, the Mystic River Massacre in 1637 during the Pequot War, were driven by the environment rather than by purposeful and planned assault. Captains and Generals reacted to their surroundings reflexively and managed to seize advantages in the environment through positioning and using fire against greater numbers in fortified encampments. Without considering the impact of the physical environment on both the conditions and decisions made leading up to and during the battle, understanding of the Great Swamp Fight is limited.

Prior to European contact, the Algonquin peoples of New England lived in mobile societies that would move with the seasons and when resources in immediate proximity were depleted. Roger Williams' 1643 *A Key into the Language of America* observes this

5. Eric E. Jones, "Spatiotemporal Analysis of Old World Diseases in North America, A.D. 1519-1807," *American Antiquity* 79, no. 3 (2014): 499-500.

feature of Algonquin life where “when the worke of one field is over, they remove house to the other: If death fall amongst them, they presently remove to a fresh place.”⁶ He continues, “their [The Narragansett] great remove is from their Summer fields to warme and thicke woodie bottomes where they winter.”⁷ This attitude was held up to the English settlers when one Narragansett Indian asked if they had run out of firewood in England and had come to America looking for fuel, an accidentally astute reflection of the consumption of English forests.⁸ What limited agriculture they practiced, deprived New England rocky acidic soil of nutrients only after a few years. Exhaustion of local resources pushed communities of Algonquin Indians to live lives of near constant movement.

Responding to environmental and political considerations, the Narragansett moved toward a more sedentary lifestyle. A new trading market emerged in North America with the first settlers and drove a move to permanent settlement. Manufactured metal goods (cooking pots, tools, muskets, etc.) and textiles were hot commodities for all Native Americans. Without a regular supply of furs, the Narragansett and their neighbors turned to wampum.⁹ A trade good and a form of jewelry, wampum beads are made from colorful seashells and was a traditional identifier of status and wealth across North America. It was valued because of the labor-intensive process and rarity of particular shell colors. Europeans used wampum to

6. Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, (London: Gregory Dexter, 1643) in *English Linguistics 1500-1800* no. 299, ed. R. C. Alston, (Menston, England: The Scholar Press Limited, 1971), 46.

7. Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 47.

8. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 49; Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, 59-60.

9. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 10-11.

purchase furs from tribes in Canada and the Great Lakes region and as a legal tender for debts and taxation.¹⁰ The demand for European goods set wampum production into overdrive. Even after the value of wampum fell with the introduction of metal drills, counterfeiting, and increased use of silver by colonists, Narragansett populations sought more permanent settlements on the coast to produce their money.¹¹ To retain rights to use the land and work within the English legal and social framework of land rights, adoption of practices of more settled peoples spread across native people. Differences between the contractual (both verbal and written) right to use land and the sale of land may have been clear when contracts were made, but interpretation in the law courts favored the English.¹² Permanent settlements and herds of livestock established a degree of legal equality with the English who perceived these qualities as being ‘more civilized.’

However, the largest factor that led to sedentarism was war. Threat of raids on homestead or camps far from any military support turned Indians towards larger communities in isolated areas. Forests in and around watercourses and swamps were protected from wild fires and provided dense vegetation for deer as well as principle hiding places during war.¹³ Observing the practices of the Narragansett in the 1640s, Roger Williams noted, “If an enemie approach, they remove into a Thicke[t], or Swampe, unlesse they have some Fort to remove into.”¹⁴ The Narragansett had both, a

10. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 220-224.

11. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 11; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 95.

12. Virginia DeJohn Anderson, "King Philip's Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1994): 611, 621.

13. Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 28.

14. Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, (London: Gregory Dexter, 1643) in *English Linguistics 1500-1800* no. 299, ed. R. C. Alston, (Menston, England: The Scholar Press Limited, 1971), 46.

fort in a swamp. Refugees from the Wampanoags and allied tribes hostile to the English fled raids and military defeat to the north and east found respite in such a swamp, the Great Swamp no less. It is not clear when the Narragansett fort was erected because there is little to no reference to it prior to King Philip's War, but it seems to have been mostly a refugee camp and not the grand and opulent fortified town many European sources make it out to be.¹⁵

The Great Swamp is located adjacent and to the west of modern day South Kingstown, Rhode Island and north of Worden Pond, the largest body of fresh water in the state.¹⁶ The management area that preserves the swamp covers over three thousand acres. Differences in the elevation of the soil and soil composition in the swamp lead to meadows, thickets, boggy areas, and marshland in the swamp. The prevailing large trees, Atlantic white cedar, red maple, white pine, and oaks, favor different soils and elevations creating a patchwork of ecosystems.¹⁷ These trees were key sources of wood for canoes, shelter, nuts (ground into flour,) edible bark, sap, syrup, and dye, not to mention the moss, bushes, and grasses surrounding them.¹⁸ Historically chestnuts are believed to have existed in the area, but a chestnut blight in the early 1900s appears to have killed most of them in the swamp leaving few traces in the modern swamp.¹⁹

The variety of microecosystems would have provided ample space for the Narragansett to create a semi-permanent settlement in the Great Swamp. Archeological evidence does not point towards any large-scale settlement in the Great Swamp Basin

15. Denton R. Bedford, "The Great Swamp Fight," *Indian Historian* 4 (1971): 34.

16. Kenneth E. Wright, "The Great Swamp," *Torreyia* 41, no. 5 (September-October 1941): 145.

17. Wright, "The Great Swamp," 148.

18. Jane Strickland Hussey, "Some Useful Plants of Early New England," *Economic Botany* 28, no. 3 (July-September 1974): 312, 320, 328.

19. Wright, "The Great Swamp," 150.

450 to 2600 years before present, but “large numbers of temporary and task-specific sites located” in the Basin and upland areas supported villages “in coastal, estuarine, and riverine ecosystems.”²⁰ Substantial forage of berries and nuts afforded by the environment provided not only for direct human consumption, but would allow for high caloric game, such as deer and smaller mammals, within a short distance of a settlement or task-specific camp adjacent to or inside of the swamp. After European contact, herding of swine would have supplemented a decreasing deer population and may have prevented seasonal malnutrition.²¹ Swamps and lowlands provided considerable advantages to those who knew where to look.

King Philips War was initially fought between the colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Haven, and their Native American Allies against the Wampanoags, Nipmuks, and Pocumtucks. The war broke out after the murder trial of John Sassamon, a Christianized-Indian who had acted as a go-between the leader of the Wampanoags and the English colonists, resulted in the execution of three Wampanoag men.²² The Wampanoag sachem (chief) Metacomet, known as King Philip by the English, called upon his allies and attacked the frontier town of Swansea. Thus, the war began. Philip later described that issues, “about sovereignty, land, and animals had made war inevitable.”²³ Most engagements during the two-year conflict were raids and ambushes which resulted in large numbers of non-combatants dead or

20. David R. George and Brian D. Jones, “Prehistoric Archeology of the Great Swamp Basin, South Kingston, Rhode Island,” *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archeological Society* 58, no. 2 (1997): 48.

21. Anderson, “King Philip's Herds,” 614; David J. Silverman. “‘We Chuse to be Bounded’: Native American Animal Husbandry in Colonial New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no.3, (July 2003): 515.

22. Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 21-23

23. Anderson, “King Philip's Herds,” 621.

captured. However, the most well-known and momentous engagement of the war occurred when a preemptive attack was launched against the Narragansett fort in the Great Swamp.

Historians have discussed the relationships that English settlers and the various Algonquin tribes prior to King Philip's. *Changes in the Land* by William Cronon, a preeminent source of environmental history of New England, notes the differences in how land was used and cultivated, "Indian villages moved from habitat to habitat to find maximum abundance, ... [whereas] the English believed in and required permanent settlements."²⁴ Cultural differences in land use between a mobile and sedentary village, Cronon argues, is the crux of the resentment between Indians and the English. Supplementing Cronon's argument, Virginia DeJohn Anderson's, "King Philip's Herds" delves specifically into the role livestock had in creating and exacerbating animosity between the natives and newcomers which would set the stage for a spark to incite a war. English pigs and cattle were a source of the conflict and a nuisance to Indians because the livestock invaded Indian cornfields and rooted out food caches. Legal disputes that favored the Europeans left little room for Indian communities such as the Wampanoags to prevent the destruction that ravaged the land or to attempt to manage their own swine. Sights on both sides escalated tensions. Anderson does not claim the "problem of livestock" was the explicit cause of King Philip's War but it presented an ever-present reminder and a source of friction between two cultures living in close proximity.²⁵

24. Cronon, "Changes in the Land," 53.

25. Anderson, "King Philip's Herds," 623-624.

Nominally neutral, the Narragansett sachems had not joined Philip's coalition against the colonies and had made multiple peace treaties with the English. A part of those treaties included a "promise to remain loyal to the English, and to surrender any of Philip's subjects who might fall into their hands."²⁶ One of the strongest tribes in the region, able to field roughly 3500 warriors, the Narragansett had a great animosity to Uncas, the sachem of the Mohegans who had murdered a former sachem, and by extension this animosity spread to Philip's coalition.²⁷ Nevertheless, when rumors spread of strange Indians, possibly Wampanoags, spotted in Narragansett territory, tensions between the colonies and Narragansetts flared.²⁸ Indeed, some Wampanoags had fled into Narragansett territory seeking to surrender in Rhode Island to receive a more lenient sentence. The Narragansett sachems agreed to turn over their Wampanoag guests by October 28, but due to internal disagreements, did not follow through.²⁹ Fearing an attack from the Narragansett, the United Colonies prepared to eliminate the perceived threat before the Narragansett had an opportunity to sack Rhode Island and join up with King Philip.

The logistics of a winter campaign necessitated careful planning. The Commissioners of the United Colonies having decided that an army of a thousand men were to be sent to enforce their treaties with the Narragansett, faced the task of

26. Douglas E Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York: The Norton Library, 1966), 112.

27. Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial North East*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 49; Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 8; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 112; James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 109.

28. Drake, *King Philip's War*, 117; Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 94; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 113.

29. Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 114.

assembling, equipping, transporting, and suppling such an army. Each colony was asked to provide a proportionate number of men, stockpile provisions, and participate in the rudimentary supply network.³⁰ The planning for the winter campaign was optimistic for what the colonies could offer after months of war; nonetheless, the Commissioners called for “provisions of all sorts and Ammunition shall be provided and sent to the place of their Rendezvous sufficient for two months.”³¹ Soldiers were drafted, food was stockpiled, and ships were prepared for transport. Troops were clad in their own winter coats and bundled up in scarves and gloves of their own because the colonies did not have the resources to give everyman a uniform.³² This may have been a blessing; the colonies were responsible for worn-out and damaged clothing on campaigns and the soldiers would like have been warmer in what they could provide themselves rather than an all-weather uniform designed in milder climates of Europe.³³ The armies of the Colonies were to be well supplied on this winter campaign. In the eyes of many colonists the Narragansett were soon to be punished for their transgressions.

Preparations culminated in the amassing of force on the Rhode Island coast. Over one thousand soldiers from Plymouth, Connecticut, and Massachusetts Bay as well as 150 Mohegans arrived piecemeal to the towns of Wickford and Pettaquamscut, shown in Map II below, in early December. As the Army of the United Colonies assembled, the forces commanded by Governor Winslow of Plymouth Colony managed to capture a

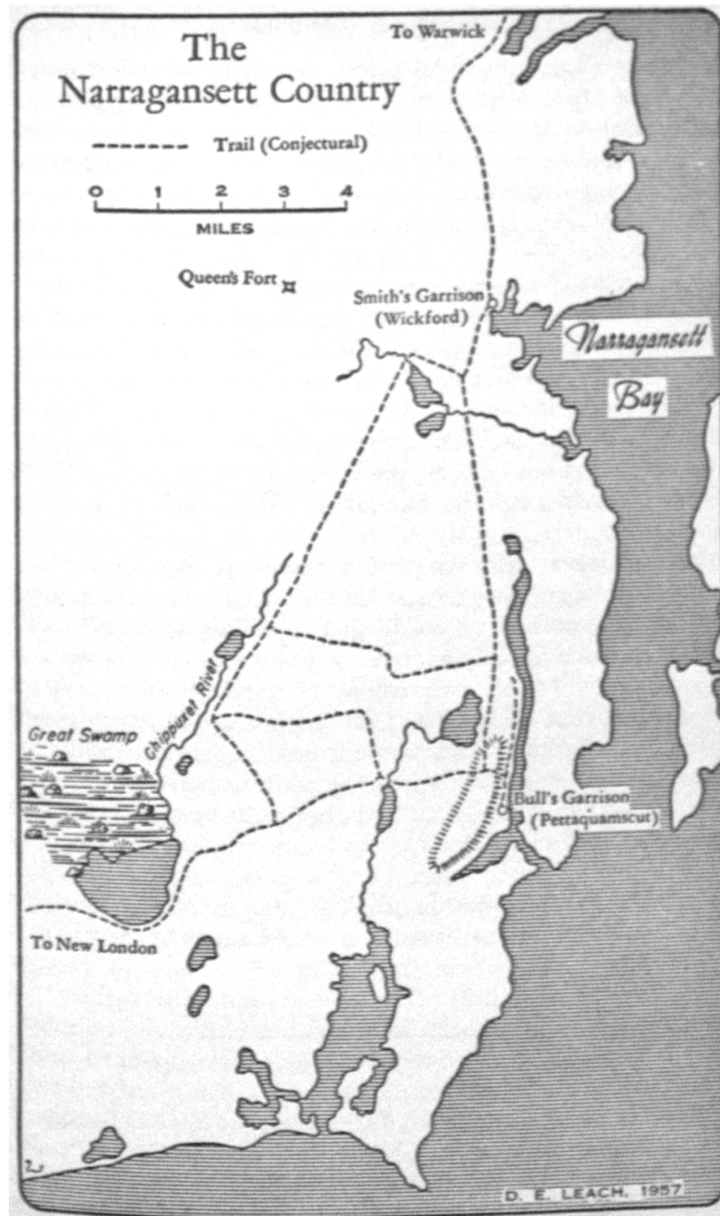
30. Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 119-120; Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 49-50.

31. Daniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, vol. 5, 1674-1686 (Boston: W. White, 1854), 357, quoted in Shultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 248.

32. Steven C. Eames, *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the New England Frontier, 1689-1748*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 44

33. Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, 44-46

Narragansett, called Peter, in a small raid.³⁴ Raids on both sides continued until the December 19 when the Colonial soldiers left Bull's Garrison in Pettaquamscut on the coast for the swamp before sunrise. Around one o'clock in the afternoon the armies



34. Leach states that Peter "had turned traitor on his own people, agreeing to serve as a guide to the English forces." *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 126. Other historians count multiple guides, but most treat Peter as a wartime captive rather than traitor.

Map II, *The Narragansett County* by D. E. Leach. In a straight line, Bulls Garrison is only seven miles from the location of the swamp fort.

SOURCE: Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 157.

reached the Great Swamp where they presumed Narragansett fort to be.³⁵ Winter weather had made the marching slow, but the cold had made the swamp firm and navigable. The thickets, dense bush, and miry ground of spring and summer would have been practically impossible to navigate by the colonial forces without severe attrition and losses. Instead, the Europeans encountered clear lines of sight from defoliated winter trees and stable ground under the snow. The winter weather made a march feasible with the cold and snow as the major obstacle for the soldiers.

An exact weather report for December 19, 1675 is unavailable, but accounts present a bleak environment. Colonel Benjamin Church of Little Compton Rhode Island, one of only a few Rhode Islanders who actively participated in the battle, recounts a few nights earlier that it “was very cold but blessed with the moon.”³⁶ On the eve of battle, with the garrison house of Pettaquamsuct burnt down, the soldiers slept “in a cold stormy evening, finding no other defense all that night, save the open air, or any other covering than the cold and moist fleece of snow,” according to William Hubbard’s *Narrative of the Indian Wars*.³⁷ The following day, the nineteenth, they marched west into the forest where the conditions were likely not much more favorable than during

35. The exact distanced marched is unclear, as the crow flies Bull’s Garrison in Pettaquamscut is seven miles from the location believed to be the Narragansett fort. Histories have described the march as anywhere from fifteen to eighteen miles long. Accounting for scouting parties, the frigid winter weather, and an indirect route, such a distance and time is believable. Schultz and Tougas. *King Philip’s War*, 258-259.

36. Benjamin Church, *Diary of King Philip’s War 1675-76, Tercentenary Edition*, (Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975), 95.

37. William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New-England, From the First Planting Thereof in the Year 1607, to the Year 1677*, (Battlebrough: William Fesseden, 1814), 130.

the night; they marched “without even fire to warm them, or respite to take any food.”³⁸ Historian Daniel Mandell describes on this day that a “fierce storm had blown into the area that would by the end of the night dump nearly three feet of snow in the area.”³⁹

The march through the frigid swamp was not the only obstacle the English armies faced in their campaign. On a five-acre hill, the Narragansett had erected a fortified town with thick wood and brush walls, blockhouses, and a moat.⁴⁰ These defenses would allow for the Indians with flintlock muskets to fire at English forces funneled into field of fire from defensive positions. Flintlocks were the preferred hunting and martial tool of Algonquin Indians by the late seventeenth century. More reliable and lighter than the cheaper matchlocks, which gave off a pungent odor and light from the lit wick or match, flintlock muskets replaced bows and arrows for Native Americans as firearm repair became widespread.⁴¹ In the fort of the Great Swamp, a blacksmith would likely have repaired and outfitted the soldiers with these guns.⁴² Compared to the average colonial soldier, the Algonquin warriors were much more experienced with firearms; deriving most of their meat from hunting instead of through raising livestock, the Indians of New England were superior marksmen to their European counterparts.⁴³ More crucial in skirmishes, this greater accuracy was mitigated in a siege such as the

38. Hubbard, *Narrative*, 130.

39. Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 85. Mandell does not give a source for this observation of the weather, but it agrees with the description Hubbard gives above.

40. Wooden buildings with gun holes and windows used to fire upon an enemy behind cover.

41. Patrick M. Malone, “Changing Military Technology Among the Indians of Southern New England, 1600-1677,” *American Quarterly* 25, no 1. (March 1973): 52-53; Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 11-12.

42. Malone, “Changing Military Technology Among the Indians of Southern New England, 1600-1677,” 58.

43. Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 54.

Great Swamp Fight where the defensive nature of muskets could prevent an attacker from advancing.⁴⁴

The exact layout of the fort is unclear as contemporaries did not sketch it nor have foundations survived. Most accounts write that an unfinished wall or secondary entrance lay at the rear of the fort. Historical disagreement exists about the nature of the rear entrance. It has been hypothesized that it was simply an unfinished wall in mid-construction, but some argue it was a second exit in case the Narragansett were trapped or an intentionally weak point to draw attacks into a killing zone.⁴⁵ Design of the fort is often attributed to an Indian known as Stonewall John, a skilled mason who had previously worked for some settlers. It was here, at the weak point, that General Winslow was directed by a native scout and without much planning, assaulted.

Logistical necessity, not blind rage and emotion, drove General Winslow to attack the fortified village. Despite the careful planning, stockpiles, and supply networks, the soldiers had not enough food to take a more precautionous action. General Winslow was fighting the clock in terms of both supplies and environment when the army reached the fort. He could neither create an effective siege with what little rations they had, nor retreat with both the Narragansett and the cold to deplete their numbers. As Guy Chet argues in *Conquering the American Wilderness*, “lack of provisions afforded Winslow only the narrowest opportunity of success,” and made him “desperately aggressive.”⁴⁶ The commission’s plan to supply the troops for at least two months had faltered after fewer than two weeks.

44. Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 59.

45. Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip’s War*, 260.

46. Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 52.

Actions taken during the fight exacerbated the environmental factors present in the swamp. Beaten back twice by counter attacks, the English managed to force themselves through the breach taking considerable losses and set fire to the wigwams.⁴⁷ The account of Benjamin Church, a local to Rhode Island and aid to General Winslow, presents Winslow's decision to burn the wigwams and the Indian provisions as a calculated if lamentable decision against Church's wishes.⁴⁸ In the moment, it appears that the English General desired to remove any strategic advantages the Narragansett and Philip's coalition could gain from the fort, even if it meant the English would not receive them either. William Hubbard, however, offers a less sterilized account of the burning of the village, "the English seeing their advantage, began to fire the wigwams where supposed to be many of the enemy's women and children destroyed, by the firing of ... their smoaky cells."⁴⁹ Casualties from the fire, from burning alive or smoke inhalation, are unknown and figures are speculative.⁵⁰ The scene would likely have evoked memories and stories of the Pequot War forty years prior. The decisive battle of that war was the massacre at Mystic River in Connecticut where a contingent of Puritan forces with Narragansett and Mohegan allies surrounded, set fire to, and shot into the palisaded settlement leaving only a handful to escape.⁵¹

The completeness of that massacre on the Mystic was due heavily to both the sudden surprise attack and the complete surrounding of the fort. Here in the Great

47. White cedar bark huts built by Algonquin Indians covered about 315 square feet and could accommodate about five people. Bedford, *The Great Swamp Fight*, 34; Hussey, *Some Useful Plants of New England*, 328.

48. George M. Bodge, *The Narragansett fort fight, December 19, 1675*, (Boston: Privately Printed, 1886) 7; Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 100-101.

49. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New-England*, 133.

50. Bedford, *The Great Swamp Fight*, 38-39.

51. Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965) 145.

Swamp colonial forces had neither. A formal proclamation for war and preparation for a winter campaign against the Narragansett along with skirmishes, raids, and a brief parley between Stonewall John and the English at Wickford the week leading up to the battle ruined any element of surprise the English had. The only consolation was that the Narragansett may not have suspected a winter campaign was imminent until soldiers landed on the shores of their territory in early December. The approach the English took in attacking the fort was not the form of organized lines encircling the fort, but two charges through what are described as formidable defenses.⁵²

Not simply tactical factors affected the outcomes of the Mystic River and The Great Swamp Fight, but environmental ones too. In both cases the English forces had marched since before day break but encountered different weather and terrain. At Mystic, the English and their Narragansett and Mohegan allies approached a hilltop fort under a morning May sun rather than through deep December snowdrifts.⁵³ After hours of fighting and inhaling the smoke from the guns and the torched wigwams, the soldiers at Mystic River faced a “very hot and dry” day with little water. Seeing that they could not bear to remain in hostile territory under the beating sun, they made a retreat to the supply ships on coast.⁵⁴ The physical circumstances of the two assaults on native forts in southern New England share considerable similarities in long marches and extreme weather, but the nature of that weather, hot or cold, and unique terrain created different experience for the soldiers and commanders. For distinct reasons, the Indian

52. The quality of the fortification is under some debate and it is not a leap to argue that the fortifications were exaggerated in Colonial accounts and histories. Bedford, *The Great Swamp Fight*, 35.

53. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England*, 37.

54. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England*, 39.

fortifications and dwellings were burned down. At Mystic, torching of the birch wigwams on a hot and dry day to reduce the numerical advantage of the Pequots resulted in a greater loss of life than in the swamp. There, the snow and damp limited the power of the flames believed to help the colonial armies push their advantage, preventing the devastating force of the fire which gave the English a victory at Mystic River.⁵⁵

The decision to torch the fort left the English forces without the option to stop, recuperate, and resupply in the settlement and forced them to return in the bitter and bleak landscape of December in Rhode Island. Benjamin Church's *Diary of King Philip's War* notes a doctor who remarked, "by tomorrow [December 20, 1675] the wounded men will be so stiff that there will be no moving of them."⁵⁶ Church goes on to mention that through the march through "the storm and cold..." the soldiers became acquainted with the "miseries that attended them."⁵⁷ Their only option was to march back to Pettaquamscut and hope for provisions because they "had not so much as one biscuit left."⁵⁸ Hubbard adds to the general lack of options for the army "after they had burned all they could set fire upon, they were forced to retreat, after the day light was almost quite spent, and were necessitated to retire to their quarters, ... whither, with their dead and wounded men they were force to march, a difficulty scarce to be believed and not to be paralleled in any former age."⁵⁹ Outside of the more formal records and accounts, Chet mentions in *Conquering of the American Wilderness* that a soldier recalled "we

55. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England*, 133.

56. Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 101.

57. Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 101.

58. Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 100.

59. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New-England*, 134.

having burnt down almost all their Wigwams, as also all their Corn that we could find, they thereby have less Shelter and less Subsistence left them, which Misery of theirs is much aggravated by [the] great Snow.”⁶⁰ And what a great snow it was. Hubbard regards the snow storm as large enough to prevent an army from passing through for weeks.⁶¹ Contemporary and modern estimates of the number of dead Indians range wildly between 100 to 340 of both warriors and villagers, far below the completeness of Mystic River. More precise numbers are available for the Colonial forces who lost 68 dead and 150 wounded. Most died of their wounds after the fighting and of exposure to the biting cold of winter.

The Great Swamp Fight was a significant loss for the Narragansett not in terms of raw casualties, but because the battle drove the Narragansett into open war and out of a defensible settlement. Despite possessing a greater number of troops than before the events in the Great Swamp, King Philip’s coalition had grown in only one aspect: more warriors but with few resources to supply and care for them outside of limited trade with nations to the north and west. For the English colonies, the engagement could be considered a partial success; having achieved the goal of preventing the Narragansett from assisting Philip’s coalition from a position of strength, Winslow’s expedition did what it was commissioned to do. Many of the losses were due to not accommodating nor planning adequately for the environmental conditions and acting in a reactionary fashion. Memories of the campaign often do not reflect on the aforementioned strategic deficiencies regarding the environment but dwell on the extreme measures that resulted

60. Charles Henry Lincoln, *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1688*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913) 61, In Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 64.

61. Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New-England*, 136.

in the civilian casualties from the conflagration and stray musket-balls.⁶² However, by the following July, Colonial forces were in a position to range out of their borders looking for warring Indians.⁶³ In August 1676, Philip was killed.

The winter campaign by the United Colonies against the Narraganset was in all aspects driven by environmental factors. Animosities between distinct cultures were shaped by interactions with land use and property rights, and brought Colonial forces and Algonquin tribes into conflict. Narragansett monopolies on the production of wampum on Long Island Sound and Narragansett Bay established trade networks and sedentary settlement patterns with increased English trade. Historical and cultural use of swamps as places of safety from both the cold and warfare brought a large Narragansett and refugee population to the Great Swamp where this tale took place. As well, the weather of that dismal December day in 1675, shaped the actions of the colonial army assaulting the swamp fort.

Early colonial warfare in Connecticut and Rhode Island is more or less defined by two large battles of poorly-understood wars: The Mystic River Massacre of May 26, 1637, during the Pequot War, and The Great Swamp Fight December 19, 1675 of King Phillips War. Both engagements brought English colonial forces to bear on encamped and entrenched native positions. Unique environmental factors such as the weather and the terrain heightened tactical and strategic differences between the two battles. Yet, the similarity of the events poses the possibility of the beginning of a doctrine of war developing in the early colonies. However, evidence for a continuation of tactics has not come to light. Colonial warfare after 1700 turned to conflicts between empires fought

62. Bedford, "The Great Swamp Fight," 27.

63. Lepore, *The Name of War*, xxviii.

over underfunded and undermanned forts and palisades on the frontier and assaults of fortified positions that had a numerical advantage were not made.⁶⁴ Winter campaigns did become common, but rarely for a single raid. New Hampshire Council and Assembly in 1704 urged for winter campaigning because enemies “cannot be pursued so well in the spring.”⁶⁵ However, the cost of supplying soldiers in winter was prohibitive and tracking enemy footprints in the snow is a double-edged sword. Superior firepower and the degree of surprise, both used tactically by the Puritans at Mystic as well as by the English in the 1675 winter campaign in the Great Swamp, are generally thought to have led to the outcomes of the battles.

64. Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 72; Eames, *Rustic Warriors* 11.

65. Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, 83.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Virginia DeJohn. "King Philip's Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1994): 601-624. doi:10.2307/2946921.
- Bedford, Denton R. "The Great Swamp Fight." *Indian Historian* 4 (1971): 29-41, 58.
- Bodge, George M. *The Narragansett fort fight, December 19, 1675*. Boston: Privately Printed, 1886. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxta9b>
- Chet, Guy. *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.
- Church, Benjamin. *Diary of King Philip's War 1675-76, Tercentenary Edition*. Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975.
- Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Drake, James D. *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999.
- Eames, Steven C. *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the New England Frontier, 1689-1748*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.
- George, David R. and Brian D. Jones. "Prehistoric Archeology of the Great Swamp Basin, South Kingston, Rhode Island." *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archeological Society* 58, no. 2 (1997): 44-56.
- Hubbard, William. *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New-England, From the First Planting Thereof in the Year 1607, to the Year 1677*. Battlebrough: William Fesseden, 1814. First published 1677 by The Governor and Council of Massachusetts Colony.
- Hussey, Jane Strickland. "Some Useful Plants of Early New England." *Economic Botany* 28, no. 3 (July-September 1974): 311-337. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4253521>
- James, Sydney V. *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975.

- Jones, Eric E. "Spatiotemporal Analysis of Old World Diseases in North America, A.D. 1519-1807." *American Antiquity* 79, no. 3 (2014): 487-506. <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/43184918>.
- Leach, Douglas E. *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War*. New York: The Norton Library, 1966.
- Lepore, Jill. *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Main, Gloria L. *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Malone, Patrick M. "Changing Military Technology Among the Indians of Southern New England, 1600-1677." *American Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (March 1973): 48-63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711556>
- Mandell, Daniel R. *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
- Schultz, Eric B. and Michael J. Tougias. *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict*. Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, 1999.
- Silverman, David J. "'We Chuse to be Bounded': Native American Animal Husbandry in Colonial New England." *William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no.3, (July 2003): 511-548. doi: 10.2307/3491550
- Snow, Dean R., and Kim M. Lanphear. "European Contact and Indian Depopulation in the Northeast: The Timing of the First Epidemics." *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 1 (1988): 15-33.
- Vaughn, Alden T. *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965.
- Warren, Jason W. *Connecticut Unscathed: Victory in the Great Narragansett War, 1675-1676*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014.
- Williams, Roger. *A Key into the Language of America: 1634*. English Linguistics: 1500-1800, no. 299. Menston, England: The Scolar Press Limited, 1971.
- Wright, Kenneth E. "The Great Swamp." *Torreyia* 41, no. 5 (September-October 1941): 145-150. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40597414>