

FEAR AND LOATHING IN NEW ENGLAND:

A REEXAMINATION OF KING

PHILIP'S WAR

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PHILIP'S WAR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION: THE MILITARY HISTORIOGRAPHY OF KING PHILIP'S WAR	1
ONE: "THAY SHOULD LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS:" COLONIAL DISTRUST AND ANXIETY TOWARD NATIVE AMERICANS, 1655-1675.....	21
TWO: "WE ARE BARE OF AMMUNITION:" THE PROBLEM OF MILITARY PREPAREDNESS IN NEW ENGLAND, 1648-1673.....	54
THREE: "WE MAY JUSTLY FEAR EVERY HOUR:" FRIGHT AND UNPREPAREDNESS IN KING PHILIP'S WAR.....	87
EPILOGUE: UNPREPAREDNESS AND ITS DISCONTENTS.....	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	114

INTRODUCTION

THE MILITARY HISTORIOGRAPHY OF KING PHILIP'S WAR

Mark Twain opined that “there are many humorous things in the world, among them the white man’s notion that he is less savage than the other savages.”¹ Indeed, the historiography of King Philip’s War largely centers on the question of what constitutes a “savage” method of warfare. The English victors wrote extensively on the savagery of their vanquished Indian opponents and attributed their superiority as the primary reason for English victory. The English method of warfare was described in valiant and heroic terms, while the Indian methods were considered savage and cowardly, often derided as “skulking.” The clash of civilizations approach in which the English Puritans were the inevitable victors due simply to their advanced state of civilization was the dominant interpretation of King Philip’s War. This idea continued within the historiography of the war until the 1970s. At that point, some historians began to question the motives and methods of the English toward the Indians, reaching conclusions that put the English colonists in a much poorer light.

Few works have questioned whether or not the English military system really *was* superior to that of the Indians. Many historians have noted the sense of

¹ Mark Twain, Quoted in Morrow, John Howard, *The Great War: An Imperial History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.

terror that pervaded the colonies during the war, but few have examined *why* the sense of fear was so distinct. If the colonists were aware of their superiority over the savage Indians, what reason had they to be afraid? This thesis will attempt to answer that question by examining some of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities present in the New England colonies in the years prior to King Philip's War and in its first tumultuous months. Chapter one considers the rhetoric of New England governments and prominent merchants concerning a possible Indian threat prior to the war. Chapter two highlights the anxiety that stemmed from an uncertain supply of ammunition and weapons within each New England colony. Chapter three illustrates how those vulnerabilities manifested themselves among colonists and colonial governments through feelings of dread, uncertainty, and pessimism. If the colonists felt they had the superior civilization that would inevitably triumph in an all out conflict with Indians, that confidence was not evident in the sources. This thesis will highlight some of the Puritan demonstrations of uncertainty and doubt that many historians either ignore or only tangentially acknowledge.

The most comprehensive military history of King Philip's War remains Douglas Edward Leach's 1958 work, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War*. Leach delves more deeply into the sources than many of his predecessors, and highlights fascinating conflicts between the colonies. He sees the conflict as more of an Indian uprising and seems to agree with the Puritan chroniclers that alleged Philip was brooding about war for a number of years. Leach betrays his prejudices in his first page, asserting that the war and its outcome were "virtually inevitable" due to the "size and strength of the invading force of the

English.”² While Leach’s Indians act like “hoodlums and bandits,” and were almost always “savage,” acting with “perfidy,” colonial actors usually received positive or neutral adjectives.³

This is not to say that Leach glossed over the Indian advantages or colonial disadvantages. He notes that the Indians were highly skilled at “scouting, swamp fighting, and laying ambushes.” The colonists suffered from an acute lack of qualified leadership and “ineptitude in strategy and tactics.”⁴ Leach asserts that the native tactics were “savage” but highly effective. He tries to euphemize English military bumbling as much as possible, but it is difficult to hide the fact that throughout most of the war they repeatedly suffered embarrassing defeats. One of the worst routs of the war involved Captain Edward Hutchinson, whose force was lured into a trap by Indians pretending to lead them to a negotiation outside the town of Brookfield. Hutchinson’s troop “made a brave show” but en route were ambushed by “cowering” Indians. The survivors, “hearts pounding with exertion and terror...raced back to Brookfield.” In other words, the English force was broken up and forced into an unorganized scramble for safety. Leach’s discussions continue on in this manner and the racial dimension is used subtly and skillfully. Leach manages to direct attention away from the inability of the English to react to the ambush or prowess of the Indian fighters. Instead, he focuses on the fear the enemy

² Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip’s War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 1.

³ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 37, 96-97.

⁴ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 93.

struck in the hearts of civilized men that caused “din” and “confusion.” Thus, it was Indian savagery, not military skill that won the day.⁵

Leach largely dismisses Indian actions during the war, preferring to tell the story entirely from the English perspective as if the English actively pursued the enemy rather than responding in a haphazard and defensive fashion. English commanders routinely failed to take the initiative and were often caught completely by surprise, but Leach does not dwell on those shortcomings. When they did take offensive action, it was often in the form of atrocity or total warfare - burning crops or habitations. The Great Swamp Fight, a preemptive attack against the Narragansetts that turned into a massacre, is hailed by Leach as an “audacious venture” that dealt the Indians “a very hard blow.” What could be termed both indiscriminate and foolhardy, Leach calls “the safest means of routing the enemy.”⁶

Leach views the war as the inevitable outcome of two competing systems, one being inherently inferior to the other. The war was meant to happen because the English were irresistibly land-hungry and the Indians hopelessly “savage.” He sees Philip as “misguided” and his struggle “futile.”⁷ He explores the English military system with great detail, but rarely stops to consider the Indian participants. Thus, he ignores an extremely important aspect of the conflict. By reducing Indians to “savages,” Leach magnifies the English contribution and success using the benefit of hindsight. He offers no analysis of the Indian war effort or possible reasons for their actions. Instead, he posits the reasons for the loss were

⁵ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 77-81.

⁶ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 130-134.

⁷ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 241.

Indian disunity and superior English “staying power” - meaning a stronger supply base and population. Nowhere does he allege that King Philip may have been attempting the same goals. In the end, Leach credits English “moral and physical vitality” that carried them to victory through the war and beyond. His ideas were typical of the time, even in works sympathetic toward Indians.⁸

Some of these lingering issues are dealt with in Patrick Malone’s *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians*, written in 1991. This study is far too brief, but does bring to light some of the Indian methods used in warfare. Using a variety of colonial sources that describe native practices, Malone describes how the Indians’ military system functioned. Their leadership structure was not regimented, but fluid, requiring sachems to “cultivate the support of their followers” and “demonstrate ability.”⁹ By definition, a sachem was not a military leader. He (or she) was a respected member of the tribe that could represent it to other groups as a first among equals. It was difficult for the English to understand a power structure without a rigid structure. A sachem’s power was not authoritative or hierarchical; it was entirely based on persuasion and respect. The primary military advantages of the Indians were their mobility, marksmanship, and psychological warfare, which they applied with maximum effect during King Philip’s War. One of Malone’s more perceptive points is that “the colonists wanted the Indians to conform to European standards of military combat.”¹⁰ So too, have historians. Many historians commit the fallacy of evaluating Indian performance in

⁸ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 242-243, 250.

⁹ Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 10.

¹⁰ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 31.

King Philip's War using European military standards, leading them to conclude that the Indian military system was inherently inferior due to their inability to attack a fortified position, for example. One must evaluate them based on their effectiveness in context. The English during King Philip's War acutely feared Indian warriors.

Several of Malone's chapters deal with firearms and technological acculturation. English presence caused Indians to become more competitive among themselves, pushing them to quickly acquire firearms through trade as a tactical advantage. As a result, Indians were far more proactive in developing trade networks that helped them equip the newest weapons. By 1675, most Indian "warriors had flintlock muskets or carbines," state of the art merchandise.¹¹

Malone compares the training given an Indian warrior and colonial militiaman in New England at the time. This approach is particularly instructive as to why English soldiers repeatedly suffered losses during the war. Each militiaman probably received some rudimentary training in European style warfare. They learned how to perform the "postures of the musket" and fire "volleys on command." It was not until after King Philip's War that colonial officials stressed training in "postures and motions but also shooting at marks."¹² In Europe, the ability to fire at a mark was far less important than discipline.¹³ The English were comparatively such bad marksman that many "hired Indians to hunt with firearms," even though this was illegal.¹⁴

¹¹ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 53-66.

¹² Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 78.

¹³ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 71-84.

¹⁴ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 80.

Malone argues that the Indians, received a great deal of practical experience through hunting wild game. Indians valued marksmanship and accuracy, which they honed over years of practice. The English, on the other hand, valued massed volleys and concentration of fire. Picking off individuals through marksmanship was seen as cowardly. Malone explains that the Indian conceptions of hunting were closely related to their conceptions of warfare. Indians stalked their game quietly and made their kill when there was an expectation of success. This preference encouraged Indian acquisition of the newer flintlock rifles since they were more accurate than the older matchlocks that many colonial militias employed. Flintlock muskets allowed the Indians to aim more accurately, fire more quickly, move more stealthily. English forces were not overly concerned with mobility and stealth, but their shortcomings were magnified by the matchlock. These cumbersome weapons fired using a mechanism requiring a lit match and forked stand.

Marksmanship was not all the Indians learned. Malone notes that some Indians were so skilled with firearms that they became blacksmiths, able to repair firearms or even manufacture them out of scrap metal and spare parts.¹⁵ Thus, Malone proves that the “skulking” style of fighting was not only a highly effective method for the region, but they adapted European technology to fit their objectives. As individual warriors, the Indians far out-matched their opponents.¹⁶

Malone does an impressive job of pointing out Indian advantages and English weaknesses. These advantages manifested themselves in “terrible losses on military

¹⁵ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 95.

¹⁶ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 67-97.

units inexperienced in forest warfare.”¹⁷ Malone adds that Indians had incorporated some of the English total war ethos applied against the Pequots in 1637. In this conflict, English commanders burned a Pequot fort containing many non-combatant women and children to the ground. Narragansett observers at the scene cried that the action was “too furious,” but Malone contends that they learned valuable lessons that they would apply during King Philips War. Specifically, the lessons were how to target civilians and their property using “fire arrows and torches against English houses.”¹⁸ Therefore, Malone suggests that Indians were not only using superior tactics and weaponry, but also incorporated advanced war theory from the English.

Despite the Indians’ advantages, Malone views their “ultimate defeat” to be “inevitable long before the death of...King Philip.” Malone finds three major reasons for the inevitability. Drawing from Leach, Malone argues that English “fortified garrison houses and almost unlimited logistical support tipped the scales heavily.”¹⁹ Surrounded and without support, Philip’s insurgents stood little chance. Most importantly, however, was the assistance of Indians allied with the colonists and the adoption of Indian fighting methods by English units. After multiple defeats, the English realized that they would have to “use tactics that they had long regarded with contempt and indignation.”²⁰ Here, Malone draws mostly from the diary of Plymouth military leader Benjamin Church, one of the few New England raiders who adopted Indian fighting techniques and experienced consistent success. His diary was overly self-congratulatory and explained how his company of 200 men “killed

¹⁷ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 106.

¹⁸ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 107.

¹⁹ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 120.

²⁰ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 117.

or captured hundreds of Indians by fighting in the Indian manner.” However, his success mostly coincided with larger circumstances of Indian disunity and decline late in the war. Indeed, it was an Indian from Church’s unit that shot Philip in August 1676 that most historians credit as the action that effectively ended the war.²¹ As for Indian disunity, Philip could not count on the support from Indians west of Massachusetts or the Pequot or Mohegan tribes residing in Connecticut (which avoided any major attacks during the war).²² Some praying Indians also served in English units, increasing their effectiveness.²³ Malone’s book is so brief that he fails to analyze many of his findings or consider them in a larger context. Still, his depiction of Indian warfare is a far cry from Leach’s savagery.

Guy Chet takes a view nearly opposite of Malone in his 2003 work, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast*. Chet’s position is conveyed clearly through his title - that the English defeated the Indians by honing their own style of warfare and not adapting to their methods. This is a bold argument, and flies in the face of King Philip’s War historiography. Chet’s primary concern is to refute the idea that “employing the Indians’ tactical methods against them” was the key to achieving “tactical success against Indian forces.”²⁴ Chet sees the evolution of colonial New England warfare not becoming more Indian, but becoming more British over time.²⁵

²¹ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 118-120.

²² Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 109-112, 122.

²³ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 112-114.

²⁴ Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 2.

²⁵ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 6.

Chet demonstrates the use of European over Native American warfare by using examples of English victories dating back almost to initial settlement in the early 17th century. He notes that in the 1620's, the English used their firearms to great effect, causing fear and apprehension in the native populace. Thus, Massasoit (King Philip's father) "agreed to a peace settlement because of a perhaps misplaced belief in their capabilities." The Pequot War figures strongly in Chet's analysis. In that conflict, English soldiers and Indian allies under Captain John Underhill surrounded, stormed, and burned a Pequot fort at Mystic, leaving only "seven survivors" out of "six hundred inhabitants." Chet contends that this action "intimidated" Indians "into submission by employing extreme violence." This doctrine was "not un-European," since they took the "strategic offensive" and maintained their own position. Chet believes that this overwhelming defeat exposed the weaknesses inherent in Indian tactics. By relying on mobility alone, and not strengthening their defenses, the Pequots eventually "broke down" under the weight of "collective" and focused assaults. Chet believes that this campaign was successful not in spite of European tactics but because of them, particularly "concentrated musket fire" as employed by Underhill.²⁶

Chet asserts that these lessons were not utilized during King Philip's War, to the detriment of the English participants. He argues that "colonial commanders, as a group, were not Americanized; they were simply remarkably inexperienced and unprofessional." They abandoned the "tactical defense" far too often, "with

²⁶ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 25, 30, 32, 34-37.

disastrous results.”²⁷ Chet describes the pattern of surprise and ambush that caused “considerable casualties in town after town during the war.” He finds Indian conduct throughout the war “not very impressive from a tactical perspective” due to their inability to “utilize massed fire,” “capitalize on their advantage,” and their “impotence against fortified positions.”²⁸

Chet alleges that the English were ultimately victorious in spite of themselves. They were “poorly trained in marksmanship” and “repeated their mistakes over and over again.” If they properly employed discipline and concentrated action, Indian tactics would not have been so effective against them. Chet notes that colonial militiamen received poor training in “most aspects of soldiery,” resulting in a “deplorable state of vigilance” that allowed Indian bands to “induce panic and confusion.”²⁹ Chet’s argument reduces Indian victories to English failures. Indian unwillingness to conduct “frontal assaults” on English garrison houses or forts and “strategically reckless offensive operations” caused their war effort to succumb to physical, social, and political exhaustion.”³⁰

According to Chet, the English “long term strategy” of attrition, which included burning Indian crops and property “wherever they came upon them,” was the true deciding factor of the war. English mismanagement and unprofessionalism were the only reasons they suffered so many casualties since they were “consistently successful when they maintained a defensive position” or when they

²⁷ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 39, 40.

²⁸ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 54, 58.

²⁹ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 54-63.

³⁰ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 65.

“maintained formation” and “coordinated fire.”³¹ Chet believes that many of the misconceptions of the war are due to Benjamin Church, the English commander who was the vocal proponent of adopting Indian tactics. His successes occurred because the Indians were already beaten near the end of the war, not because his tactics were superior. Since the English needed a hero to lionize, he was praised in the contemporary accounts that historians rely on. Chet’s conclusions lead one to believe that had experienced European commanders been leading experienced European soldiers, the Indians would have been beaten easily.

The rest of his book provides evidence that American warfare was successful due to adoption of European, not Indian practices through the 18th century. These positions would likely make Carl von Clausewitz cringe since Chet professes a decided preference for mass and concentration while dismissing the surprise and maneuver skillfully employed by the Indians. Still, his refutation of Benjamin Church and descriptions of the New England colonists’ unfamiliarity with warfare offer important contributions to the literature.

Armstrong Starkey tackles the subject with a similar scope in his 1998 work *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815*. In it, he synthesizes much of the existing literature and formulates some new contentions. He calls the entire period a “140 years war” in which both sides adapted their warfare to suit the conditions and opponents. King Philip’s war was a “microcosm” of the entire time period.

³¹ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 58, 60.

Repeatedly, “English advantages in population and material resources were temporarily nullified by superior Indian tactics and marksmanship.”³²

Starkey’s exploration of the Indians’ fighting style echoes that of Malone. He sees them as superior warriors highly adept at exploiting their terrain to their advantage, “masters at the ‘secret, skulking war’ of raid, ambush, and retreat.”³³ This put them greatly at odds with the English, who saw this as far below their standards of courage and bravery. Starkey contends that these tactics “resembled modern infantry” (more accurately: special forces) far more than European practices. Thus, the idea that they fought “savagely” is in the eye of the observer. Starkey explains that such practices as aimed fire, reliance on missile weapons, and using cover and concealment had been abhorrent to European warriors throughout the middle ages and renaissance, but today are accepted, indeed encouraged, practices.³⁴

Starkey’s discussion of the European soldiers brings into focus various research concerning how English colonists organized their militias and how European countries dealt with irregular conflicts, such as in Scotland and Ireland. Mostly, the lessons to be learned from those were only partly applicable to the forest warfare of New England, plus the learning curve did not take effect until the mideighteenth century.³⁵ So the English military system was not well-prepared to adequately prosecute a war with irregular forces in New England.

³² Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 15.

³³ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 19.

³⁴ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 22, 26-29.

³⁵ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 46-54.

Since King Philip's War occurred at the beginning of this transition, it was the most painful for European participants. Unlike Chet, Starkey believes that there was no "well-defined strategy" emanating from either side.³⁶ Instead, both sides operated in *ad hoc* fashion, which ultimately proved more detrimental to the Indians, who had a less stable logistical system for sustaining a war. He argues that the English had "overwhelming advantages" in "numbers, material, and possessed political and social institutions" that allowed them to "mobilize their resources to a devastating effect." Despite that inevitability, Starkey asserts that since the New England Indians faced increasing political, religious, geographic, and economic pressure, they must have felt compelled to rise up in rebellion.³⁷

In *The First Way of War*, published in 2005, John Grenier uses King Philip's War as evidence for his counter argument against Russell F. Weigley's "American Way of War" thesis. Weigley's thesis suggested that all of American military history fell into a succinct framework: "limited victory" necessitated by a relatively weak military followed by "overthrow and annihilation" whereby American forces sought to completely destroy the enemy as in "Sherman's March to the Sea."³⁸ Grenier disagrees. He believes the thesis ignores the warfare experiences of the colonial period that had "less to do with grand strategy" and more to do with "*petite guerre*," or irregular war. This method of war involved such unsavory practices as "razing

³⁶ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 80.

³⁷ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 62-67.

³⁸ Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare*, 2.

and destroying enemy villages and fields, killing enemy women and children, and intimidating and brutalizing enemy noncombatants.”³⁹

Grenier echoes other scholars when he characterizes the Pequot War as the initiation of the New England Indians to English methods of “extirpative war.” Once exposed to such practices, other Indian tribes made peace with the English, realizing that “war against the New Englanders could lead to apocalypse.”⁴⁰ As the English continued to expand, they built “blockhouses to defend against ‘external’ attacks.” Grenier explains that during King Philip’s War, the Indians simply “avoided the blockhouses and instead hit isolated farms,” seeking to “make the frontier an uninhabitable wasteland.”⁴¹

Grenier contends that the response was to “destroy” the Indians “before they could destroy the English settlements.”⁴² The one person to realize how to counteract the Indian methods was Benjamin Church, who “took it upon himself to learn the Indian way of skulking,” by forming America’s “first ranger force.” Other English colonists experimented with this new military innovation with varying degrees of success. Grenier does not credit Church with securing English victory because the Indians “never stood a chance” anyway. Nevertheless, Grenier minces no words when describing English brutality, suggesting that Indians only incorporated “savagery” as a response in kind.⁴³

³⁹ John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2-5.

⁴⁰ Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 29.

⁴¹ Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 30.

⁴² Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 32.

⁴³ Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 33-34, 52.

James D. Drake's 1999 study, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England*, takes a "middle ground" approach to classify the war.⁴⁴ Drake sees New England as a "covalent" society bonded by "shared social space and economy, as well as overlapping legal and political systems." Instead of viewing the conflict as one "between Indians and English, he interprets it as one among various competing groups."⁴⁵ Drake places special emphasis on what tied the Indians to the colonists of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, asserting that various groups of people had varying goals, including King Philip, who "played the various English colonies off one another."⁴⁶ Peace was the desired condition, but the Sassamon trial undercut Philip's leverage both with the colonists and with young firebrands in his tribe. John Sassamon was a Christian Indian that worked as an advisor of Philip until the early 1670s, after which he worked as an interpreter for Plymouth. In January 1676, his body was found under the ice of a frozen pond. Plymouth colony held a murder trial a few months later and executed three of Philip's most trusted associates. The trial strained relations to the breaking point, since the three accused Indians maintained their innocence while Plymouth was convinced that Philip was secretly planning an attack and ordered Sassamon killed to keep his secret. Soon after the trial, Indian warriors attacked Swansea, the town closest to King Philip's home. Malone argues that this event was the watershed that

⁴⁴ Here I refer to Richard White's "Middle Ground" thesis that stresses shared acculturation between whites and Indians.

⁴⁵ James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 13-14.

⁴⁶ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 67.

sent many Indian groups scrambling to choose sides and thus, the decisions were not clear-cut.⁴⁷

Drake stresses that many Indians vacillated on whether or not to join Philip's band of rebellious Wampanoags. Many decided to throw their lot in with the English or remain neutral, unless external forces pushed them one way or the other. Even then, allegiances could be quite weak, as "all Indian groups and individuals had unique motives in the conflict."⁴⁸ Drake argues that the weakness in Indian motives was the reason for the unraveling of their war effort. As the war progressed and got more difficult for the Indians, many of them were willing to surrender. Conversely, there were no Englishmen who willingly chose to fight on the Indian side. Drake believes that the English were not unified in a particular meaningful sense, but they "perceived a common identity and common threat from a culturally inferior opponent."⁴⁹

One of the best studies of King Philip's War deals not with the war itself, but with the remembrance and writing of wars. Jill Lepore's 1998 work, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* examines the war using four themes: Language, War, Bondage, and Memory. Lepore argues that "war cultivates language," and that whoever writes about a war gains a "literall advantage" that is especially notable when the opponents in a war are not literate.⁵⁰ Each section raises fascinating discussions of the nature of not only this particular

⁴⁷ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 68-74.

⁴⁸ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 92-101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

⁵⁰ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), xxi-xxii.

war, but of war in general. In *Language*, Lepore examines the role of literacy among the English colonists. This involves literate Christian Indians like John Sassamon and James Printer, who occupied tenuous positions straddling both societies. There is not enough evidence to prove who killed Sassamon, but Lepore alleges that “literacy” made him untrustworthy and brought about his murder.⁵¹

In *War and Bondage*, Lepore examines how each side viewed the other and considers the motives for their actions both during and after the war. Lepore asserts that the purpose of writing so much about the war was a form of re-entry into society for those who had too much contact with Indians.⁵²

One provocative chapter analyzes a few Indian quotes written by the Puritans. Prior to killing an Englishmen, Indians were often noted to “taunt” and “insult” them. Lepore analyzes this practice in the framework of religion, since the English perceived that the Indians were blaspheming against God. However, this practice of provocation was widespread among New England Indians over different subjects and during different wars.⁵³

Lepore raises the question of war and identity in her final chapter, which analyzes the different representations of King Philip’s War, including the hit 19th century play “Metamora.” Lepore displays how different actors manipulate war’s memory to serve their own ends, such as the Indian nationalist William Apess or

⁵¹ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 42-45.

⁵² Lepore, *The Name of War*, 128-136.

⁵³ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 33, 23.
Drake, *King Philip’s War*, 124, 126.

Andrew Jackson in his arguments for Indian Removal. Overall, the book provokes a great deal of reflection over the war's particular meaning.⁵⁴

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Historians stress that the outcome of King Philip's War was inevitable. They have changed their ideas concerning the motives and attitudes of the Puritan colonists, but not the assumption that they would be the ultimate victors in a conflict with the natives. This assumption accompanies four hundred years of hindsight and the knowledge that every major Indian uprising against whites in America failed. These assumptions should be examined in the context of the time and through the perspective of those who lived through it. The notions that the English were confident of victory and maintained an inexhaustible logistical stream are not only accepted but rarely backed up by evidence. Quite the contrary, colonial sources belie a distinct fear concerning Indian capabilities, English unpreparedness, and expressions of doubt about the future of the colonies. Leach reaches the same conclusions while simultaneously including a very short chapter describing shortages and rationing by officials.⁵⁵ If there were shortages, the supply could not have been inexhaustible. These and other factors should be considered when judging the conflict's outcome. Indian leadership and respect were based on deeds and success. It seems unlikely that so many would have joined Philip's forces and taunted the English so brazenly if they thought they could not win, or at the very

⁵⁴ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 191-226.

⁵⁵ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 103-111.

least force changes to English behavior and settlement patterns. The English sources before the war demonstrate that the colonial leadership was aware of critical vulnerabilities and their writings during the war display a fear that their way of life was in peril.

CHAPTER ONE

“THAY SHOULD LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS:” COLONIAL DISTRUST AND ANXIETY TOWARD NATIVE AMERICANS, 1655-1675

In early 1676, Governor Edmund Andros of New York received a letter from Lieutenant Governor John Easton of Rhode Island dated December 5, 1675. Easton described how the English and Indians came to hostilities and how he tried to prevent war. He found it difficult to mediate between Metacomet, (known to the English as King Philip of the Wampanoags), and Plymouth colony, the earliest two antagonists in what would become known as King Philip’s War. Easton told Philip that “they should lay [down their arms] for the English [were] too strong for them.” Philip indignantly replied that the English should treat his people as his did when “they [were] too strong for the English.”¹ Was Easton’s claim of English superiority a boast, or simply an exaggeration, intended to intimidate Philip and thus avoid war? And was King Philip threatening Easton or addressing legitimate grievances? This chapter will attempt to answer those questions by surveying documents from King Philip’s War’s two main fronts, Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth, in the two decades prior to the outbreak. The sources indicate that the answer leans toward the latter explanation.

¹ Peter R Cristoph and Florence A. Cristoph, eds., *The Andros Papers, Vol 1, 1674-1676: Files of the Provincial Secretary of New York During the Administration of Sir Edmund Andros, 1674-1680* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 341.

Easton's letter fervently asked the New York governor to intervene for peace in order to avoid "[usurpation] by one to the other." He admitted that the effort to "seecke out after the Indians" would fail because those "most abell to do mischief will escape and women and Children and impotent mai be destroyed." Easton believed that "no English should begin a war" and he informed the Narragansetts that if they "kept by the water" and "did not medell," the English "wold do them no harem."² However, attacks had already occurred that made Easton look deceitful and brutish to Indian eyes.³ The United Colonies (of which Rhode Island was not a member) were already preparing to implement a pre-emptive attack against the primary Naragansett village near present day Bristol, RI.⁴ Easton knew the gamble would not likely succeed in destroying the Indian fighters. What concerned him was the response if the colonial force killed a large number of Indian women and children. It would cause widespread retaliation throughout New England, with Rhode Island at the epicenter. Easton's letter to Andros was a plea to halt that outcome. Easton *feared* the spectre of Indian warfare and he knew Andros did too.

By the winter of 1675, New England was aflame. King Philip's War pitted many of the Indians that resided in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Plymouth against the Puritan colonists. This conflict tore at the hearts of the English colonists like none they had ever experienced. Their homes and livelihoods were at stake - under siege by an enemy that might strike at any time without warning.

² Peter R Cristoph and Florence A. Cristoph, eds., *The Andros Papers*, 344.

³ Cristoph and Cristoph, eds, *The Andros Papers*, 343.

⁴ Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk* (Hyannis, MA: Parnassus Imprints, Inc, 1958), 119-123.

Many historians conclude that there was no way that the Indians could have won the conflict because of their numerical and logistical inferiority. The most prominent historian to express this view remains Douglas Edward Leach. He betrays his prejudices in his first page of *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, asserting that the war and its outcome were “virtually inevitable” due to the “size and strength of the invading force [of English].” He sees the conflict as more of an Indian uprising and seems to agree with the Puritan chroniclers that alleged Philip was brooding about war for a number of years. Leach views the contest as the inevitable outcome of two competing systems, one being inherently inferior to the other. He sees Philip as “misguided” and his struggle “futile.”⁵

Subsequent military historians echoed Leach’s views about the futility of the Indian struggle. Patrick Malone dedicates an entire book to the Indian military system, but ends by stating that “a complete defeat was impossible from the beginning of the war.”⁶ Ian K. Steele places the blame for Indian defeat on a shortage “of food and gunpowder” that ultimately caused them to give up in despair.⁷ Guy Chet has a poor view of the Indians as military adversaries, calling them “mythically terrifying” and lacking the “training, discipline, and large scale cooperation and coordination” to sustain a “long-term war.”⁸ Similarly, Armstrong Starkey admits that the Indians “tactical superiority could not mask the imbalance against them in population and resources” while John Grenier simply states that they “never stood a chance.”⁹ In hindsight, it is

⁵ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 1, 130-134.

⁶ Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 128.

⁷ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 106.

⁸ Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 64.

⁹ Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 79.

perfectly clear that the Indian forces were weaker logistically. However, logistics is only one of the components needed to succeed in war. The confidence of the English colonists in 1675 was not bolstered by their catalogue of resources. The evidence in this chapter will display the English desire to avoid Indian attacks.

Social and cultural historians have also left a strong body of literature, but one that emanates from a certain interpretation. In 1991, Richard White's *The Middle Ground* caused historians to re-evaluate the way they interpreted English-Indian relations in North America. White's thesis encompassed a process of "accommodation" experienced by the French colonists and Algonquian Indians of the Great Lakes Regions. The process began with the "meeting" of whites and Indians and ended with the "breakdown of accommodation and common meanings and the re-creation of the Indians as alien, as exotic, as other." In between, there was a "middle ground," when white and Indian societies melded together to form a "place in between" that incorporates pieces from both cultures. The unique mix of native and European cultures was reinforced because they both needed each other.¹⁰ *The Middle Ground* referred to the French and Indians of Canada, but it has spawned a vast array of literature reinterpreting colonial America. The middle ground thesis is very strong, but the sources reveal some limitations to it. The English in New England were neither comfortable with nor did they trust the Indians in their midst. At best, English colonists enjoyed the economic benefit contact with Indians could bring.

John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.

¹⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ix-xv.

Recent works by two historians use White's framework to analyze King Philip's War. James D. Drake looks upon the conflict as a civil war. His middle ground society in New England tore itself apart in 1675. Prior to the war it was a "covalent" society bonded by "shared social space and economy, as well as overlapping legal and political systems." Instead of viewing the conflict as one "between Indians and English, he sees it as one among various competing groups." Drake's vision of pre-war New England very much reflects the middle ground, but neglects the resentment evident in the sources.¹¹

Jill Lepore's study, *The Name of War*, also takes a page from White's middle ground thesis. Lepore examines the war using four themes: Language, War, Bondage, and Memory. She argues that "war cultivates language," and that whoever writes about a war gains a "literall advantage" that is especially notable when the opponents are not literate.¹² Thus, Lepore focuses on the interpretation of the war by the English (and later Americans) during and after it. In the chapter entitled "Habitations of Cruelty," she argues that the English perceived the violence of King Philip's War as so traumatizing, they barely had words to describe it. The Indians threatened the very fabric of English culture by stripping them "naked" of their clothes, property, and livelihoods.¹³ After the war, the English told the story of their experience entirely through their own lens, seeking not only to demonize the Indians, but to cleanse themselves of any Indian influence.¹⁴ One of Lepore's boldest claims is that the literature produced about King Philip's War contained "the idea that Indians were not...truly human, or else humans of such a vastly

¹¹ James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 1-15.

¹² Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), xxi – xxii.

¹³ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 74-84, 81.

¹⁴ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 129-136.

different race as to be considered essentially...inferior.” From there, the seeds were planted for the “worldview that would create...the Indian removal policy adopted by Andrew Jackson.”¹⁵

Lepore convincingly demonstrates that the war brought the idea to the surface. However, this chapter will demonstrate that the idea of “other” existed in the English consciousness prior to the war through expressions of fear, anxiety, manipulation, and condescension. An appropriate starting point is the documents written by the leading citizen of one of the most vulnerable areas of New England, John Pynchon. Although he was purported to be a friend of the Indians in his area, Pynchon’s correspondence shows that he harbored ill feelings toward them when they were not beneficial to him financially.

John Pynchon was a prominent citizen and pioneer of Massachusetts. His father, William, was one of the original founders of the Massachusetts Bay Company. William served as the treasurer of Massachusetts from 1632 to 1634, and was well known throughout the colony as a man of “considerable wealth” and “cultural credentials.”¹⁶ As a result, John inherited and embodied the necessary attributes of an English gentleman. In 1652, William decided to return to England, leaving his 26-year old son in charge of the family’s interests in New England. Despite the distance from Boston, Pynchon was socially well-connected and his children exemplified the family’s success. His oldest son, John Jr., became a successful Boston merchant and married the daughter of Reverend William Hubbard, who wrote extensively about King Philip’s War. His second son, Joseph, attended Cambridge and graduated from Harvard. John’s wife, Amy

¹⁵ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 166-167.

¹⁶ Carl Bridenbaugh, “Introduction,” to *The Pynchon Papers Vol I: Letters of John Pynchon, 1654-1700* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), xxxi.

Wyllys, introduced him to the Winthrop family of New London, of whom John Winthrop, Jr., served as the governor of Connecticut. Much of Pynchon's correspondence is directed to Winthrop.¹⁷

As a leading gentleman in the western Massachusetts frontier, Pynchon was responsible for much of the development and defense of the region. He garnered wealth mostly through fur trade with the Indians and land acquisition. Thus, he was extremely interested in the conduct of the Indians in his territory because any conflicts among them influenced the fur trade, his primary source of wealth. He learned at least one Algonquian dialect, and reported regularly on the actions of the nearby tribes. These tribes included members of the Pocumtuck Confederacy. This group of Indian tribes lived in the upper Connecticut River valley and included the Norwattock, Pojassic, and Agawam tribes that resided near Pynchon's holdings.¹⁸ He often referred to them as "his Indians," because he dealt with them and thought that they held him in some esteem. Some historians assert that the expressed familiarity implies close, even personal ties, but Pynchon's correspondence suggests the relationships were only economic.¹⁹ When the war broke out, Pynchon took it as a manifestation of God's displeasure with the Puritan settlers. However, it was clear that he saw the danger beforehand and tried to prevent such an occurrence.

Pynchon was very early on concerned with the behavior of the Indians and wanted to avoid upsetting them. He was unhappy about a letter from Connecticut's military leader, Captain John Mason that "much exasperated the upper Indians."

¹⁷ Bridenbaugh, "Introduction" to *Pynchon papers*, xxxi-xxxiii.

¹⁸ 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), 12.

¹⁹ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 39.

Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 86, 88-89, 132-138.

Pynchon wrote to John Winthrop, Jr. in 1658 that he would have preferred that Mason express “respectful messages and thankful acknowledgement” or “at least silent passing by of things” to his Indians for complying with certain demands involving wampum exchange with the Mohegans, a strong Indian tribe residing in Connecticut.²⁰ Both subjects represented to Pynchon the possibility of violence. The Mohegans were traditional enemies of the Pocumtucks. John Mason was the same man who commanded the English forces during the Pequot War of 1637, during which he ordered the burning of the Pequot fort at Mystic. Therefore he held no qualms about resorting to violence against Indians to accomplish his goals.²¹

Later that year, Pynchon again expressed his desire for “a firm peace” between Uncas, the Mohegan sachem, and the Pocumtucks. He felt uneasy about Uncas making, as he wrote, “proud speeches,” since “the last time high words did him much hurt and in particular some speeches of Major Mason’s on Uncas his behalf.” Pynchon desired that the English would “be silent and meddle less” and that “a firm peace” would be “to the comfort and benefit of the English.” He wanted to avoid any sort of confrontation between the Pocumtucks and Uncas or Mason. Maintaining a general peace in the region was an early obsession of Pynchon’s, revealing his concern over the possibility of Indian violence, either amongst themselves or with English. He knew that Indian violence would not only disrupt his trade operations but threaten his way of life. Pynchon would not have expressed such concern over Indian violence if he did not have healthy fear of its consequences.

²⁰ John Pynchon to John Winthrop, Jr. 16 Feb 1658 in Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers Vol I: Letters of John Pynchon, 1654-1700* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), 22-23.

²¹ Steele, *Warpaths*, 92.

Pynchon constantly worried about the actions of the Mohawks, a powerful Iroquoian tribe who resided in western and northern New York. Mohawks facilitated much of the inter-tribal trade and trade with the Dutch and French. They were also traditional enemies of the Algonquians of New England and known as ferocious warriors.²² Any conflicts involving Mohawks affected the security and economic well-being of Pynchon and the whole region. In 1663, Pynchon wrote to the Mohawks via the Dutch on behalf of the Agawam tribe that they would “remain friends” in light of heightening tension between the Mohawks with the Sokoki tribe to the north. Pynchon made sure to stress that the Sokokis were the “only” Indians that “had been killing the Maquas” (Mohawks) and “the ones who fell upon the Maquas and the Indians beyond them to the north and northeast.” In this letter, Pynchon simultaneously revealed his concern over Indian warfare and his desire to facilitate his trade regime.²³

Throughout the 1660's, Pynchon desired “peace betwixt our Indians and the Maquas,” which would “greatly contribute to my endeavors.” He was willing to “act...to my utmost power” toward “effecting a peace” between the two tribes although the Pocumtucks were “getting strength to go against the Maquas.”²⁴ He thought “it would be well for the English if the Indians will be friends with the Maquas” and expressed distress when it appeared that “the hopeful peace...is like to come to nothing.”²⁵ In 1674, one year prior to the breakout of King Philip's War, Pynchon reported that “our Indians...are generally removed to Albany,” why “I know not.” However, “some few

²² George E. Hyde, *Indians of the Woodlands: From Prehistoric Times to 1725* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 86.

Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 90.

²³ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 24 Jul 1663, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 45-46.

²⁴ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 9 Mar 1668, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 81.

²⁵ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 2 Jul 1666, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 57.

Indians that stay...wish they have not gone hard with the Mohawks.”²⁶ Here, Pynchon was clearly interested in the movement of the Indians within his territory and desired them to be as peaceful as possible. He also reveals his anxiety over his ignorance of Indian affairs. He must have been nervous that the Mohawks could be inciting some kind of plot that the English would be impotent to counter. While Pynchon’s efforts for peace were undertaken out of a desire for enhanced security, later letters reveal additional motivations.

In correspondence with his son, Joseph, John Pynchon revealed a different kind of concern. In 1671, Joseph Pynchon resided in London and was concerned about a “bond to Mr. Barnabus.” He wrote to his father asking for money. Pynchon replied that “I am altogether out of trade, wampum being fallen. What estate I had in it is worth nothing and besides there is no trade at all by reason of the Indian wars.” Pynchon felt upset over his inability to help his son, asserting that “it is not that I am not willing but you see and know how it is.” Pynchon described in depth his debts, both in America and England, as well as a lack of cash. He told his son to see Samuel Wickins, who handled the Pynchon estate in England, so that even if Joseph never paid the debt, “it won’t be two pence damage.”²⁷

In February 1672, Joseph was again in financial straits because of a lease owed to one Sir Andrew King, who engaged in “base and unworthy dealing.” At the same time, he “set upon the practice of physic.” His father was unhappy that Joseph did not desire return to New England but was clearly proud over his choice of vocation and prayed, “the Lord bless you in it and make you successful in the undertaking.” Knowing that medical

²⁶ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 9 Apr 1674, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 124.

²⁷ John Pynchon to Joseph Pynchon, 14 Nov 1671, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 99-100.

training was expensive, Pynchon dug deep and ordered Wickens to provide Joseph with one hundred pounds from the estate to “furnish yourself with drugs and necessary requisites.” Still, Pynchon expressed frustration that he had “no trade” and was “altogether out of that capacity of helping with money.”²⁸ The same problem afflicted Pynchon when he wrote his son in June 1675 on the eve of King Philip’s War. He reiterated to Joseph that he was “wholly out of trade since ever since you went from this country.” Since the colonists were “like to be engaged in a war with the Indians,” recovery of trade was unlikely. He made sure to let his son know that he believed Plymouth colony most responsible for the hostilities due to their behavior. He certainly did not implicate himself. Pynchon did not relish the coming conflict, leaving “the issue of it” to “the Lord,” indicating the heavy sense of dread he felt about fighting with the Indians.²⁹

These letters provide a great deal of insight into Pynchon’s inner feelings toward Indians. The primary cause of Pynchon’s financial trouble was the disruption of Indian trade. If the Indian conflicts could be stopped, Pynchon could resume his lucrative ventures and not have to make excuses to his son. Clearly, his financial impotence was a source of embarrassment. While letters to officials like Winthrop expressed altruistic motives, personal letters to his son betrayed that his wishes for peace among the Indians lied not in his wish for a bi-racial society, but rather his own monetary wealth. Pynchon was happy with the Indians as long as they were helping him make money and not threatening his security. His apparent goodwill toward them was inseparable from his

²⁸ John Pynchon to Joseph Pynchon, 20 Nov 1672, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 109-111.

²⁹ John Pynchon to Joseph Pynchon, 30 Jun 1675, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 135-136.

self-interest. The disruption of financial security represented almost as serious a threat for Pynchon's way of life as the lack of physical security.

Pynchon wanted to use the Indians to his benefit but he never fully trusted them. All the colonial powers were jockeying for position in North America. One source of English anxiety was the Dutch threat. After the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, many in England hoped to wrest dominance of the seas from the Dutch and gain possessions of the Dutch West India Company. This quest included the colony of New Netherland, which was taken by the English in 1664 and renamed New York, after James II, Duke of York. The future English governor of New York, Edmund Andros, solidified his military career by participating in the ensuing war at Barbados and the Leeward Islands.³⁰

The Dutch were never particularly worried about New Netherland. Their few colonists were well-treated by the English and the colony did not produce the massive wealth that West Indies trade did. Accordingly, trade disputes and a naval arms race led England to declare war against the Netherlands in 1665. At first, the war proceeded largely in England's favor, but by early 1666 the Dutch acquired France, Denmark, Sweden, and Brandenburg as allies through treaty negotiations. Officials in England moaned that "the Dutch war goes very ill." Serious doubts surfaced regarding England's ability to finance a war against all four parties, even though the navy was capable.³¹

In Massachusetts, John Pynchon worried about the influence of European powers over Indians. Obviously, Pynchon did not want any Dutch or French tradesmen

³⁰ Charles Wilson, *Profit and Power: A Study of England and the Dutch Wars* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 116-118, 128.

Cristoph and Cristoph, eds., *The Andros Papers*, xiv-xv.

³¹ Wilson, *Profit and Power*, 127, 134-135, 142.

benefitting at his expense either by co-opting Indian trade or disrupting it with further conflict. In England, propaganda and conspiracy theories were used to inflame opinion against the Dutch.³² The same phenomenon took place in the colonies, which troubled Pynchon greatly. In July 1664, the invasion of New Netherland was underway and a “deadly feud” raged between the Pocumtucks and Mohawks. Pynchon wrote to John Winthrop, Jr. complaining of “reports” raised “to incense the Mohawks against the English.” Pynchon reacted with alarm upon hearing news that the English were allegedly “privy to the murder of Mohawk sachems” sent on a peace mission. Pynchon hoped to alleviate that “falsehood.” Such allegations could be a Dutch plot to undermine the English in Mohawk eyes, encouraging an attack or an effort to “persuade the Indians to root out the Dutch.” Pynchon maintained that any rumors “cannot be by Indians” and that he told his “Indians” that “they must not meddle with the Dutch.” His primary concern centered on Mohawk reactions. He had intimate knowledge of their “deadly” feuds and wanted no fighting directed at the English.³³

In early 1665, Pynchon again expressed anxiety over possible attacks. He told Winthrop that “at this dead time...what we hear is so confused and uncertain.” Winthrop’s last letter had caused such a stir that Pynchon and local leaders quickly ascertained the state of “every man’s arms and ammunition” and which ones were “in a posture for real service.” The commotion was caused by a rumor that “Sunnuks” [Senecas] were “coming this way.” Pynchon tried to explain to Winthrop the unlikelihood of a Seneca attack because of the distances involved and blamed “the

³² Wilson, *Profit and Power*, 116.

³³ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 25 Jul 1664, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 50-51.

Dutch... in helping on such reports.” Still, such rumors could not go unheeded and they revealed the settler’s underlying fear of an uprising.

Pynchon actually saw an opportunity in the confusion. Noting intelligence that the Mohawks were set to attack the Senecas “with all their force” he thought it a perfect opportunity for the Pocumtucks to “go against” them and take advantage of their over-extension.³⁴ Pynchon justified the action because the Mohawks repeatedly “declined” to make “a peace” with his “Indians.” He “perceived” that the Pocumtucks could “get the Narragansetts, Pequots, and other Eastern Indians” to join them in defeating the Mohawks. Such a confederation would “doubtless easily deal with the Mohawks.” Thus, Pynchon’s trade difficulties could be solved by war where diplomacy had failed. The only barrier to this plan was the Mohegan sachem, Uncas, who was “false” to the Pocumtucks and “informs the Mohawks against them,” including “where they live,” and “in what posture they are.” Pynchon hoped Winthrop would intercede and persuade Uncas to stop spying on the Pocumtucks. This letter represents a complete reversal from his previous position only two years earlier when he wrote to the Mohawk sachem asking for peace and proclaiming friendship on behalf of the Pocumtucks. Not only that, but he complained about Dutch conspiracies while encouraging one of his own. These machinations would not be the last time Pynchon attempted to pit one Indian tribe against another to accomplish his goals. If he could not stop Indian inter-tribal violence, he at least could channel it toward his competitors and away from the English and their

³⁴ Both the Mohawks and Senecas were Iroquoian tribes, members of the “five nations” Iroquois Confederacy – Mohawks, Cayugas, Senecas, Oneidas, and Onandagas. During this period the Mohawks were resistant to various peace efforts with the French that the other four nations accepted, resulting in skirmishes.

Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 97-103.

interests. Once again, Pynchon's primary goal was to avoid damaging Indian warfare and hopefully resume a profitable trade. He was willing to take whatever steps necessary to avoid conflict with Indians.³⁵

Pynchon continued to monitor the effects of unfavorable European contact with Indians. The Dutch-French alliance was as disconcerting to the English colonists in America as it was to those in England. In July 1666, Indians reported that the Dutch at Albany spoke "slightly and contemptuously of the English" and boasted that "they shall be masters over [them]." Pynchon retorted that they would "entertain" them both with "powder and bullet." However, Pynchon admitted that such talk occurring so "commonly" among Indians was unhelpful and "in conjunction with other things seems...ill." Some of the ill effects are evident in his careful notation of a Dutch sale of "two iron guns which will carry three pounds of bullets apiece and for furnishing... ammunition" to the Mohawks.³⁶

A month later, Pynchon reported that the Mohawks fought on the side of the French, which caused him great alarm. A Mohawk force "surprised" some English messengers, capturing them and their Indian guides. If the Pocumtuck guides were killed, "it would be a foul indignity and I see not how it can well be put up." The problem stemmed from legitimate English weakness; they were not able to provide adequate security for the messengers. The Indian guides complained that a guard of only "eight men were not enough." They gauged that twenty guards were needed "to secure them." The English did not have twenty men to spare for such an expedition.

³⁵ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 2 Mar 1665, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 53-54.

³⁶ John Pynchon to Richard Bellingham, 11 Jul 1666, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 58-59.

Not only that, but “the Indians complain much for want of powder.” Pynchon did not want to admit to them that “we are in an ill case ourselves for want of it,” especially since rumors flew that up to 900 enemy Indians were poised to attack in “about six or seven days.” Pynchon, the leader in charge of his area’s security, was willing to give the Pocumtucks powder “if we had it.” Obviously there was sufficient powder to provide a basic defense, since rumors of Mohawk attacks prompted accounting of powder and ammunition stores. At this point, Pynchon was willing to arm friendly Indians to attack enemy Indians, but he was not willing to sacrifice the English advantage in powder to do so. This calculation indicates there were limits to Pynchon’s trust in “his Indians.”³⁷

Part of the fear of Indians stemmed from a more general fear of the unknown. Colonial Englishmen were extremely concerned about the safety of travelers through the woods. In Plymouth colony, townspeople would discourage solitary travel. One Edward Winslow “was found dead...[over] traveling.” His servants testified that they “[persuaded] him not to go,” but he “refused to harken to them.” The spectre of turbulent weather was bad enough, but the threat of hostile Indians created an atmosphere of dread that the colonists would prefer to remedy.³⁸

Pynchon described one such case in a letter dated May 10, 1671. A murder occurred near Dedham, Massachusetts and Pynchon believed he knew who the culprit was. “An Indian called Ascooke” who worked for the Reverend William Blackstone at Roxbury, had “went from his master two days prior.” Pynchon described in detail the apparel of the Indian in question, and made special note that had “a gun and powder and was seen to fit a slug for his gun.” Later on, Ascooke boasted at Roxbury about “how

³⁷ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 7 Aug 1666, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 65-66.

³⁸ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 3, 1651-1661* (Boston: William White, 1855), 70.

easy it was to shoot an Englishman alone in the wood” while at war. Two days later, an English colonist from Watertown named Smith was found murdered, “shot through” by “a bullet or slug.” Pynchon called on Winthrop to “seize that person before described” in order to punish and make an example out of him as “a means to prevent secret murder of the English in their travels.”³⁹

Pynchon had no doubt of Ascooke’s culpability, even though the evidence he relied on was circumstantial. Indian superiority as marksmen and in woodland fighting was well known at the time, and Indian males often boasted of their prowess. Indeed, in King Philip’s War, insult and intimidation were powerful tactics used by Indian warriors.⁴⁰ Those methods were usually not used, however, for “secret murder,” but Pynchon and most Englishmen interpreted it that way. Since the Indian was seen with a gun and ammunition, he must have delivered the “slug” that murdered Smith. Smith was a fugitive from Rhode Island because he committed fornication, so there were likely a variety of motives for his murder. That distinction mattered little to Pynchon. The armed Indian was dangerous; a threat to public safety and the most likely suspect.⁴¹

Another incident in 1673 garnered little sympathy from Pynchon, even when the accused Indian was a friend. Two Indians that stood accused of a “villainous murder” were held in custody at Albany by Captain Salisbury, who reported that they “both confessed.” The pair included one “elder...big fellow,” and a “younger fellow (which is but a lad).” Each blamed the other for the killing. The elder alleged that it was “the younger that struck the first blow,” but himself confessed to cutting the victim’s

³⁹ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 10 May 1671, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 86-88.

⁴⁰ Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 84.
Lepore, *The Name of War*, 105, 118-119.

⁴¹ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 10 May 1671, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 86-88.

“neckbone in two with the ax.” The “lad” in question was the son of Chickwallop, a sachem of the Nonuntucks (of the Pocumtuck confederacy). Pynchon dealt with Chickwallop personally and cordially five years earlier, and now in 1673 he asked that his “only son be spared...one being enough to die for one.”⁴² Pynchon saw no need to grant leniency to Chickwallop’s son. He believed it to be “a favor of God” that the two Indians were discovered and hoped that “they would receive the due reward for their wickedness.”⁴³

The testimony pointed toward the older Indian as more responsible for the death. The boy did not likely have the physical strength to accomplish the murder and may have been an unwilling accomplice. Still, Pynchon wanted justice for the “wicked” villains. Chickwallop must have felt betrayed by Pynchon, who regularly benefitted from the information he fed to him. Nevertheless, at this point Pynchon showed no regard for the life of Chickwallop’s son and refused to intercede on his behalf. Pynchon saw it as a personal quest to make sure that “murder done by the Indians on English or Dutch might not escape unpunished, whereby they might be hardened in such villainy.” He even sent money to New York for the purpose of apprehending “those villainous murderers.”⁴⁴

Of importance is the fact that only Indian murderers interested Pynchon. After using Indian agents to help fund the capture and execution of supposed Indian criminals, one wonders why Pynchon felt so betrayed at the Pocumtuck attacks against his property during King Philip’s War. The death of a son was cause for blood feuds among the

⁴² John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 5 Mar 1669, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 79-80.
John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 5 Apr 1669, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 83.

⁴³ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr, 10 Feb 1673, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 113.

⁴⁴ John Pynchon to Gerit Van Slichtetenhorst, 12 Dec 1673, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 118-119.

Indians.⁴⁵ Not only did Pynchon show ambivalence toward the execution of Chickwallop's son, he advocated for it. His own distrust of Indian testimony led him to betray one of his strongest Indian allies. It is not surprising, then, that the Pocumtucks were eager to join Philip's forces. Here was a man who was purported, both by his contemporaries and by generations of historians, to be a great friend to Indians.⁴⁶ He traded with them and even arbitrated on their behalf. However, his personal correspondence clearly displays wariness, distrust, manipulation, and suspicion toward enemy and friendly Indians alike in the two decades preceding the war. His friendship toward Indians went only as far as his profits while his trust and affection for them was even less. In official colonial records, similar sentiments can be ascertained.

Metacomet gained his nickname from the Plymouth colony leadership, and his territory was within their boundaries, so it is appropriate to examine how the Plymouth government treated the Indians in their midst during the same period that John Pynchon was manipulating Indians in western Massachusetts. The Plymouth General Court was the major governing body of the colony. It included the governor and consisted of the members elected by colonial "select-men," usually economic and religious leaders in the community. The committee wrote laws, issued executive orders, and resolved judicial disputes when they could not be solved at the town level. It usually met four to six times per year, hearing cases on a wide variety of issues such as land grants, domestic disputes,

⁴⁵ Thomas S. Ablor, "Beavers and Muskets: Iroquois Military Fortunes in the Face of European Colonization" in R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1992), 153-154.

⁴⁶ Richard I. Melvoin, *New England Outpost: War and Society in Colonial Deerfield* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), 33, 44.

Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 86.

Drake, *King Philip's War*, 38-40, 49.

peace infractions, and Indian affairs. Usually the court served to affirm the legitimacy of Indian land sales to Englishmen, but it often dealt with them on more personal and security-related levels. In the next section I will examine the court decisions in Plymouth that echo Pynchon's sentiments, thus demonstrating that feelings of anxiety and distrust toward Indians spread beyond western Massachusetts and Pynchon.⁴⁷

In 1654, the commissioners of the "United Colonies" determined that an expedition should be "sent to warr" against "[Ninegret], the Niantic sachem." What Ninegret did to inflame the colonists is not clear, but he was rumored among the English to be a liar, schemer, and a threat. He was considered such a security risk that the colony directed that 50 men be assembled for the undertaking. Many historians present the years between the Pequot War and King Philip's War as a peaceful period.⁴⁸ However, when presented with a suspicion, the court did not hesitate to muster soldiers for defense. The very existence of the "United Colonies" suggests that the New England colonies were not confident about their ability to defend themselves. The organization was a loose security pact originally drawn up in 1643 between Plymouth, Connecticut, New Haven (later absorbed into Connecticut), and Massachusetts. However, it was revived only occasionally, was not binding, and often cooperation broke down due to competing colonial interests. Therefore, the colonies only cooperated when beneficial interest served all of them equally. Ninigret's territory lay in southeastern Connecticut. The threat to Plymouth was low, since Philip and the Wampanoags often quarreled with the

⁴⁷ James West Davidson, et al., *Nation of Nations: A Concise Narrative of the American Republic 4th ed* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 74.

⁴⁸ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 48-51.
Steele, *Warpaths*, 96-98.

Niantics (related to the Narragansetts).⁴⁹ Clearly, Plymouth saw interest in participating fully in the expedition. The colonial government believed Ninigret was a danger to their colony. Since he was known for plotting against the English, Plymouth believed his plots could extend to their own territory. The Court ordered that the required number of soldiers be “fully furnished” with arms, ammunition, and provisions, and “have them in a readiness att a [day’s] warning for march,” suggesting that heightened states of alarm existed during a supposedly peaceful period between Indians and Englishmen. The outcome of the expedition was inconclusive; Ninigret claimed that he was provoked by other Indians into making statements in anger.⁵⁰ The following year, the soldiers were finished with their terms and some petitioned the court for lack of payment.⁵¹

Individual Indians also caused problems for colonists, which caused some to take matters into their own hands. In these cases, Indians received fewer rights and harsher punishments than Englishmen. Ownership of weapons was not only a concern, but a cause of jealousy for some residents of Plymouth. At the court session of October 4, 1655, one Teague Jones complained that an Indian called Masshantampaine stole a gun from him. However, he could not prove that the gun was his, so the Court ordered the constable “to see the gun delivered unto...the said Masshantampaine.” However, at the same court session Masshantampaine was accused of having “a [chest] full of tools of all sorts which hee had stolen from the English.” In order to clear his name, he had to deliver his keys to the court so that they could “serch his [chests].” This case

⁴⁹ Wilcomb E. Washburn, “Seventeenth-Century Indian Wars,” and Bret Salwen, “Indians of Southern New England and Long Island: Early Period,” both in Bruce G. Trigger, ed., *Northeast, Vol 15* of William C. Sturtevant, ed. *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 90-92, 171.

⁵⁰ Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965), 171-172, 377.

⁵¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 67-69.

demonstrates the prevailing belief that Indians were distrustful thieves. Jones hoped that the prejudice would be sufficient to remove the gun from Masshantampaine's possession, but his evidence was sorely lacking.⁵²

Selling guns to Indians was a serious offense. In June 1656, William Leuerich stood trial for "changing a gun with an Indian, contrary to order." He was summarily fined "the summe of fifteen pounds," but the court reduced it to ten after "some considerations."⁵³ At the next court in 1657, an Indian named Sampson, the son of Masshantampaine, accused a "Mr. Prence" of "selling powder and shott to the Indians." Sampson was "warned" to appear at the court for making such accusations, but was "found to speake [lies] about the same." Clearly the distrust for Masshantampaine extended more so to his son. The court decided that he should appear the next court session with the Indians who bought the contraband. There was no mention of Mr. Prence, indicating that Sampson was the suspicious character in the Court's eyes.⁵⁴

In 1665, the Court released "an Indian called John" from prison after a "long duration" for "stealing a gun and an axe from Willam Harvey." He was only released because "the said Harvey" never "[appeared] at the Court to prosecute against him." Even though Harvey never testified against John, he was still imprisoned and ordered to "satisfy the wrongs" by reporting to Harvey to work for him. The Plymouth Court was visibly more interested in prosecuting and punishing Indians for arms violations; it was far less proactive regarding Englishmen. The Plymouth government perceived a strong

⁵² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 90-91.

⁵³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 102.

⁵⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 131.

enough threat from even one armed Indian to jail him indefinitely without strong evidence against him.⁵⁵

A blatant double standard existed over Indian possession of guns, as evidenced by a case in 1668. “An Indian called Powas” accused Peter Pitts of Taunton “for detaining of his gun from him on pretence of [non-performance] of a bargaine about breaking up of ground.” The court ordered that “the said Indian shall breake up twenty rodd of ground for the said Peter Pitts.” Only then shall he “have his gun returned to him againe.”⁵⁶ In this case, an Englishman stole a weapon from an Indian to extort work from him. Pitts received no punishment for extortion; instead, he benefitted by violating Powas’s property. Powas’s rights to his own property were superceded by Pitt’s right to collect his debt.⁵⁷ There are no similar cases where such an altercation happened between whites during these years.

The sale of other items that could be used to advantage Indians was also forbidden. One colonist named William Nicarson was “disfranchised his freedome” in 1656 for “the selling of a boat to the Indians.” This practice was outlawed by town law, yet Nicarson ignored it and later lied about it. The Plymouth government was conscious of their mobility disadvantage to the Indians. During King Philip’s War, this disadvantage was evident when Philip escaped capture by escaping by water, allowing him to rally more Indians to his cause.⁵⁸ This case shows that the authorities were very

⁵⁵ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 4, 1661-1668* (Boston: William White, 1855), 112.

⁵⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 183.

⁵⁷ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 183.

⁵⁸ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 54.

early aware of this disadvantage and wished to contain the Indians as much as possible by restricting their mobility.⁵⁹

Nicarson's dealings with the Indians near Yarmouth were problematic for Plymouth. In 1667, the Plymouth court forbade him "to make any further bargain or contract," because he gave Indians "diverse goods...for some land... but never agreed how much or upon what [terms]." Nicarson played both Indians and the colony to his benefit. Usually the court upheld land deals that defrauded the Indians, but Nicarson was willing to give Indians too much, which forced the colony to rein him in.⁶⁰

The Plymouth Court did not tolerate assault or violence against individuals, but a racial double standard existed. English violence toward Indians was not encouraged, but it certainly was not punished as severely. In 1666, an Indian "called Daniell, alias Pumpanaho...dangerously" struck Samuell Hicks, causing him to be "much hindered in his time and occasions." The court sentenced Pumpanaho to pay "a [sum] of four pounds and four shillings" as restitution as well as 50 shillings more to repay Hicks's various expenses. However, when an Englishman struck another Englishman, the fine was usually less than one pound, sometimes only a few shillings.⁶¹

Even when Englishmen egregiously invaded Indian homes, the punishment was not severe. In 1654, Rehoboth resident John Woodcocke entered an Indian home and took away "an Indian child and [some] goods" on account of a debt the Indian owed him. As punishment, the court sentenced him to "sitt in the stocks an [hour] on training day,

Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 101.

⁶⁰ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 162-163.

⁶¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 138.

Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3* - 132, 140.

and to pay a fine of forty shillings.”⁶² Another colonist, Adonijah Morris, was fined forty shillings for entering an Indian’s home and stealing some goods, but avoided the hour in the stocks since he did not kidnap any children.⁶³ One hour in the stocks was not enough time to make someone very uncomfortable, but being sentenced to it for any length of time was somewhat of an embarrassment.⁶⁴

These cases demonstrate Plymouth’s sensitivity to Indian weapon possession and the sense of distrust that drove their selective application of justice. Plymouth officials held similar views toward Indian justice as Pynchon did. Crimes by Indians against Englishmen were unforgivable, but English crimes against Indians were tolerated or weakly prosecuted. Both the towns of Rehoboth and Taunton were raided during King Philip’s War.⁶⁵ The treatments of Indians by Englishmen like Peter Pitts and John Woodcocke was certainly a factor in the Indians’ desire to destroy them. Plymouth colony did not tolerate Indian violence or the possibility of violence through their weapons. With respect to Philip’s tribe, the Wampanoags, Plymouth used weapons as political tools to restrict Indian independence and reduce the threat they represented.

Massasoit was a well-respected Wampanoag sachem that greatly helped the Plymouth settlers when they first arrived. Accordingly, during his life relations between the Wampanoags and Plymouth colony were relatively peaceful. However, his sons,

⁶² John Woodcocke’s house, about 30 miles from Boston on the road to Providence, would later serve as a garrison for colonial soldiers during King Philip’s War. His plantation was the target of several Indian attacks. He was wounded and one of his sons was killed on April 27, 1676.

Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 47, 124, 172-173.

Nathaniel Saltonstall, “A New and Further Narrative of the State of New England, 1676,” in ed. Charles H. Lincoln, *Narratives of the Indian Wars* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 94-95.

⁶³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 3*, 74.

⁶⁴ Typical punishment for lying or profane speech was 2-3 hours in the stocks.

J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut Vol I 1636-1665*, (Hartford, CT: Brown & Parsons, 1850, reprinted by New York: AMS Press Inc., 1968), 538, 547.

⁶⁵ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 66.

Wamsutta and Metacomet, came of age when Indians were routinely ruled against even as they tried to address grievances through the English justice system. Wamsutta, known by the English as “Alexander,” became sachem after his father’s death. In June 1660, he brought forward several complaints to the General Court. Mostly these injustices dealt with crop losses from trampling English livestock. But more importantly, he “requested libertie to purchase a [small parcell] of powder for the use of him and his brother.” Most likely, he desired the powder to facilitate hunting, necessary for their way of life, defense, and trade with other tribes. Still, the Plymouth officials were wary. They allowed him “a small gratuitie of [half] a dozen pounds of powder, but will not [permitt] him to purchase...any.”⁶⁶ The colony, like Pynchon, wanted the Indians to help them to “promote...trade in this colony,” but they did not want to set a precedent for Indian access to powder.⁶⁷

Wamsutta died not long after that appearance during a visit to Duxbury in order to answer charges about Wampanoag conspiracies. The entire affair left a bad impression on many Indians, who believed that he was poisoned, although there is no evidence leading to that conclusion.⁶⁸ Philip became sachem, which worried Plymouth, since he was the less trusted of the two sons. By 1667, Plymouth was apprehensive about the Dutch War. The colony decreed at the court session of April 2 that the “Duch and French be looked upon as our common enemies.”⁶⁹ The tension was so high that Indians were “advised to [employ] their men in looking out to...give speedy intelligence to the English.” They were also called upon to “join us for defence of our [common] interest

⁶⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 194.

⁶⁷ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 5, 1668-1678* (Boston: William White, 1855), 24.

⁶⁸ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 23.

⁶⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 144-145.

against a [common] enimie” and “forbidden the firing of any guns” at night so as not to cause a false alarm. Not only were the Plymouth colonies worried about Indians joining the Dutch cause, they did not trust Indians to fire weapons against any enemies, only to report their whereabouts. The English were not well equipped to perform intelligence functions, which became clear during King Philip’s War. John Pynchon noted several times during the war that the English forces were “somewhat awkward in scouting out and spying” and had trouble determining “which way [the Indians] had gone.”⁷⁰ Clearly, the colonists realized the Indians’ superiority and their own shortcomings in intelligence gathering in 1667.

Even though Plymouth desired Indian assistance in the struggles against the Dutch and French, they were suspicious of Philip. He was accused of being “in compliance with the French against New England” and was forced to defend himself at the Court session of June 5, 1667. Philip argued that Ninigret started those rumors. The Court did not take his word, but sent two agents to investigate the issue. The Court trusted neither Indian sachem, but were more inclined to believe rumors about Philip than not, since they sent Ninigret “notice” of “what is charged against him.”⁷¹ Plymouth was all too willing to send a military expedition against Ninigret ten years earlier, but now his word was trusted just as much as Philip’s. To Plymouth, neither sachem’s word was reliable.

The Court summoned Philip to the next court session on July 2, 1667, where he suffered remarkable humiliation despite a strong defense. English agents found that the Indian who reported Philip’s conspiracy with Plymouth’s enemies was “one of Phillip the

⁷⁰ John Pynchon to Governor Leverett and the Assistants, 30 Sep 1675, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 154.
John Pynchon to Governor John Leverett, 10 May 1671, *Pynchon Papers Vol I*, 161.

⁷¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 151.

said sachem's men, whoe freely and bold did avouch it." Again, Philip "stifly denied it" and accused Ninegret of hiring "this Indian to accuse him." Even though Philip professed "his [love] and faithfulness to the English," that alone was not satisfactory. He "[presented] a letter from another Indian sachem of Narragansett speaking much to the same purpose" but the court suspected that it might be a forgery. Even a letter from Roger Williams of Rhode Island that supported Philip and revealed his accuser to be "a very vile fellow" was insufficient. The only action that would ameliorate the Plymouth Court was his willingness to "surrender up his arms to the custody of the English." With the Indian guns in their possession, the Court decided after twenty days that Philip was sincere enough to "carry towards him as formerly." They returned Philip's arms only after that time period and a payment from Philip of forty pounds, a considerable amount. Even the government of Plymouth was willing to "detain" Indian weapons from untrustworthy Indians. Ceding his arms was the only way Philip could get the Plymouth government to trust him, and even then they determined to "keep a watchful eye [over] him."⁷²

Plymouth's "watchful eyes" never turned their gaze far from Philip or Indian weapons in the ensuing years; instead, they only grew more uneasy. The sale of arms to Indians was already prohibited by 1671, but the Court felt it necessary to strengthen the law at the June 5 session. If "any Indian or Indians [shall be] found to have any powder or shott, armes or liquors" and they were found to come from any "[person] of the English," that person would be "[prosecuted] accordingly" and tried.⁷³

⁷² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 4*, 165-166.

⁷³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 5*, 59.

Guns were on the colonists' minds because in April 1671 Philip appeared at Taunton to once again answer charges over an alleged plot against the English. William Hubbard included the treaty's text in his *Narrative of King Philip's War*. Philip and his top advisors were forced to admit that he had "evil intent against" the English and that he was "deeply sensible of [his] unfaithfulness and folly." Therefore, he pledged to "freely...resign up unto the Government of New Plimouth, all my English Arms, to be kept by them for their Security so long as they see reason."⁷⁴ Such an admonition, after he so vehemently denied such charges in the past, demeaned Philip and his people. Regardless of his exhortations of fidelity to the English, they refused to accept the presence of possibly aggressive armed Indians in their midst.

By the time of the Plymouth General Court session of July 1671, Indian weapons were not yet completely in colonial hands. The council of war ordered that "two messengers" be sent "with speed to the Indians...to bring in all their English arms within four days..." Some historians allege that Philip did not understand the treaty and perhaps thought he was only meant to surrender the arms he carried with him to Taunton on April 10.⁷⁵ The records, however, reveal that Philip knew full well what was expected of him and tried to convince other colonies to intervene on his behalf.

He went to Massachusetts, hoping that Governor John Leverett would mediate between him and the Plymouth leaders. Philip must have known that getting other Englishmen to take his side was difficult. In Connecticut, the government was pleased with the decision to disarm the Wampanoags. The Connecticut General Court thanked

⁷⁴ William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (Roxbury, MA: W. Elliot Woodward, 1865, reprinted by New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 54-55.

⁷⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 5*, 74-75.
Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 27.

the “goodness of God” for the agreement that would insure “peace...in our country.”⁷⁶ Increase Mather, the Massachusetts minister and historian, wrote that after Philip “confessed” at Taunton, he then “repaired to Boston, endeavouring to possess the English there with lying informations about injurys done to him by...Plymouth.”⁷⁷ Plymouth was both livid and unnerved at Philip’s attempts to “insence our neighbour collonie against us by misinformation.” Once again, Plymouth set itself on a war footing. The continuation of tension caused officials to order “all towns” to initiate patrols, watches, and allow the people to “carry their armes” with them at all times, even to church. Plymouth was clearly on edge if it was willing to take emergency security measures as a response to Philip’s entreaty to Boston. Still, Philip’s plan almost worked. The Massachusetts governor did write Plymouth, offering his support to “[help] in the [achieving]” of “a compliance” with “the said sachem.”⁷⁸

Plymouth, however, subverted Philip’s efforts for intervention. The Council of War invited the commissioners of Massachusetts and Connecticut to participate in a “fair and deliberate hearing of the [controversy] between our collonie and...Philip.” The new resolution, drawn up on September 13, 1671, stated that Philip “neglected to bring in the [remainder] of his English armes,” in breach of the Taunton treaty. He was forced to admit in front of the colonial dignitaries that he engaged in “lies and false stories to them.” In light of the charges brought against him, the commissioners “[persuaded]” Philip to “humble himself upon the majestates...and to amend his ways.” Philip signed an agreement on September 29th, 1671 that forced him to “acknowledge” his

⁷⁶ J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut Vol 2: 1665-1678*, (Hartford, CT: Brown & Parsons, 1850, reprinted by New York: AMS Press Inc., 1968), 162.

⁷⁷ Increase Mather, *Early History of New England*, ed. Samuel G. Drake, (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 78 State Street, 1864), 232.

⁷⁸ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 5*, 76, 77.

subservience to the King of England and Plymouth colony and “if any difference falls between the English” and his people, he was to “rectify the difference” only to the “Governor of Plymouth,” not any other authority. Plymouth also ordered him to pay one hundred pounds (an immensely high sum) over three years as restitution for the whole affair.⁷⁹

The Plymouth officials were likely pleased at the outcome of the Taunton affair. Their brinkmanship with the Indians paid off, as it had successively for twenty years. They forced significant armament and monetary concessions from the Indians within their territory and received inter-colonial approval. However, the very same apprehensions that lurked in the 1650’s through 1671 once again manifested in 1674, when a Christian Indian named John Sassamon was found murdered and the ensuing trial ended with the execution of three of King Philip’s most trusted advisors. This time, Plymouth’s attempt at provoking the Indians into concessions would erupt into the violent war that most colonists desperately wanted to avoid.⁸⁰

Although there are few sources that allude to the character of King Philip, we can infer that he was a proud man concerned with his reputation and that of his people. He was known to openly showcase his wealth of wampum and rapidly responded to accusations he felt were untrue.⁸¹ Therefore, it is unlikely that two decades of degradation, double-standards, and unfair treatment went unnoticed. Like John Pynchon, the Plymouth colony acted with a mix of anxiety, distrust, suspicion, and manipulation

⁷⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol 5*, 78-79.

⁸⁰ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 31-35.

Lepore, *The Name of War*, 23-25.

⁸¹ Russell Bourne, *The Red King’s Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 1, 5-6.

toward the Indians in their midst. The colony desired to take advantage of Indian trade and extort payment from them, while simultaneously restricting Indian means of resistance. The English resented Indian presence and tolerated them due to their commercial benefits. Both John Pynchon and the Plymouth General Court harbored the prejudice that Indians were liars and schemers. Even friendly Indians could not be trusted. Indians surely sensed this when they were punished twice as severely as Englishmen while enjoying fewer rights under their system.

In late seventeenth century New England, a “covalent society” or “middle ground” perhaps appeared evident on the outside, but in reality, a deep-seated fear and a resultant sense of loathing simmered in the English consciousness toward Indians. Thus, the outbreak of King Philip’s War should not have been a surprise to the English. It was no “civil war,” for that implies that the opponents were once one society.⁸² The war itself did not create new “habitations of cruelty” that led to an “increasingly racialized ideology of the differences between Europeans and Indians.”⁸³ In a world where Indians’ supposed English advocates called for the unwarranted execution of an Indian child and where a major government echoed societal prejudice through law and adjudication, there was no room for an increase in racial distinctions. The “racialized ideology” already existed.

The sense of foreboding over Indian violence is noticeably conveyed through both Pynchon’s letters and Plymouth’s government records. The outcome of King Philip’s war was not clear to the English when war broke out in 1675. On the contrary, colonial Englishmen had very little confidence of their security against the Indians that

⁸² Drake, *King Philip’s War*, 14.

⁸³ Lepore, *The Name of War*, 166.

surrounded their towns in murky swamps and dark woodlands. The English did not see themselves as invincible, although many historians try to argue that they were. John Pynchon in western Massachusetts and the government of Plymouth colony obsessed for two decades over Indian conflicts, the number of arms in Indian possession, and the possibility that Indians might betray them, execute an insidious plot, or join their enemies. Thus the 1675 exchange between John Easton of Rhode Island and King Philip of the Wampanoags is turned on its head. Easton bluffed and King Philip alluded to obvious injustices when he maintained that the English should treat his people like they “treated the English” upon their arrival.

CHAPTER TWO

**“WE ARE BARE OF AMMUNITION:” THE PROBLEM OF
MILITARY PREPAREDNESS IN NEW ENGLAND, 1648-1673**

By the late summer of 1675, John Pynchon was in great distress. King Philip’s War had begun in earnest. Philip was away from his home territory and had successfully incited many of the Nipmuc Indians that inhabited the Connecticut River region in western Massachusetts where Pynchon resided. On August 25, 1675, Pynchon marveled at how quickly the Indians he feared had “suddenly...all removed” from their homes. Revealing the depth of his unfamiliarity with them, he concluded that it must have been “a contrived business,” planned well in advance. There was no way “his” Indians could have caused such damage without prior plans.¹

As a prominent colonial businessman, Pynchon was quickly given the title of Major and made responsible for defense, a charge that he proved incapable of performing and desperately wanted relief. He complained in several letters how difficult it was to hold “many soldiers” that were embarrassingly ineffective in protecting towns from destruction. A significant worry for Pynchon was the supply of Indian arms compared to what he and his compatriots had. In a letter to the New York authorities, Pynchon sought confirmation that the authorities indeed suppressed the “sale of ammunition” to

¹ John Pynchon to John Allen, 22 August 1675 in Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers Vol I: Letters of John Pynchon, 1654-1700* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), 149.

unfriendly Indians. He revealed his frustration in a not-too-subtle aside that “none of your people I hope will adventure to do it privately.”² On August 12, Pynchon complained to his friend, Connecticut governor John Winthrop Jr., that “I am in straits on every side what to do.” He was “afraid what the Indians may be,” meaning he was afraid of how many hostile Indians lurked in his vicinity. He requested “men to bring us some lead, etc” for “we are bare of ammunition having spared much to [friendly] Indians and other soldiers,” and thus had little to defend his vulnerable towns.³ To his dismay, Pynchon’s own estate in Springfield was burned in early October 1675. He complained that “there can be no holding the place without many soldiers and it’s hard now to maintain them here.” Pynchon’s experience indicates a lack of preparation and logistical support to counter an Indian uprising. His complaints illustrate the depth of colonial unpreparedness to initially counter the Indian threat. However, as we saw in the last chapter, colonists’ anxieties about Indian capabilities and possible violence stretched back two decades prior to the outbreak of King Philip’s War. Was there also a concern about logistical preparedness prior to the war? The sources indicate that there was.⁴

The details of colonial logistics have not received extensive treatments by historians. Douglas Edward Leach remains the only historian to give the issue a separate chapter, entitled “Men, Materiel, Money” within his 1958 book on the war, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*. The chapter spans eight pages, explaining briefly how colonial leaders impressed, clothed, and outfitted soldiers. Mostly, Leach describes the antiquated “waterways and cartpaths available as routes for carrying the supplies,” and how “carts

² John Pynchon to English Authorities at Albany, 8 September 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 151.

³ John Pynchon to John Winthrop Jr. in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 143-44.

⁴ John Pynchon to Governor Leverett and the Assistants in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 159.

and horsed were used.” Leach remarks that “ammunition was rapidly used up in battle, requiring constant replenishment,” and that soldiers had to be “reminded not to waste the precious powder.” Just the fact that soldiers had to be constantly reminded indicates that they were not conservative with their supplies. Leach, however, does not comment on any difficulty in providing ammunition.⁵

Some discussion is given to the “thankless” job of commissary, who was expected to use primarily local resources to find food. Leach does note that “famine was always an imminent prospect” and that the war “tended to hamper all phases of agriculture. Leach mentions the colonial “restrictions upon exports, sometimes to the detriment of neighboring colonies,” particularly a dispute between Massachusetts and Connecticut over the latter’s food embargo. A “general shortage of foodstuffs” is noted, but ammunition is not mentioned, other than a retaliatory measure on the part of Massachusetts to impose an ammunition embargo against Connecticut.⁶

Leach does not question the strength of the colony’s logistical system or question supply as a factor in colonial vulnerability. He does mention that “the burden of taxation was rapidly approaching its practical limit” in Massachusetts, indicating the difficulty of financing the war effort. Nevertheless, Leach concludes his book with the assertion that “the English as a group clearly possessed the greater staying power” and that “their potential resources in men and supplies were almost limitless.”⁷ Leach’s statement seems like a bold claim that flies in the face of the demonstrated difficulty with provisions found in colonial records prior to the war.

⁵ Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk* (Hyannis, MA: Parnassus Imprints, Inc, 1958), 103-106.

⁶ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 107-109.

⁷ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 110-111, 243.

Patrick Malone describes the Indian military system in *The Skulking Way of War*. He details the colonists' inefficiency with muskets, especially when compared to the Indian emphasis on aimed fire. Malone notes Indian advantages, but does not acknowledge English weaknesses besides their lack of skill and the fact that they were outfitted with matchlock muskets. Instead, he concludes that the colonists' "overwhelming numbers, fortifications, and vast network of technological and logistical support" made Philip's uprising "suicidal" and an English defeat "impossible."⁸ This assertion disregards the anxiety found in the colonial records regarding arms.

Ian K. Steele's fusion of ethnohistory and military history posits that the history of colonial North America was "not created in peace and interrupted by war," but rather was "established amid such violence" and grew because of it. Of course, because logistics is an essential element in winning a war, Steele addresses problems associated with it in various colonial conflicts, including King Philip's War. However, his analysis only unearths the Indians' logistical weaknesses. Steele notes that "Philip's strategic position was...unfavorable" and that the "crucial, and quite unavoidable weakness was Amerindian dependence on European arms, ammunition, and gunpowder." Not much attention is devoted to colonial weaknesses, despite acknowledgement of shortages in Virginia in the 1640s and later during 18th century wars. He explains that colonial defense required "coordination of forces and supplies between remarkably independent towns" and that "gunpowder...all imported from Europe, was expensive, difficult, and dangerous to store or transport."⁹ If the Indians had trouble acquiring and distributing

⁸ Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 54-66, 71-87, 127-128.

⁹ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 44, 99-109, 220.

imported war materiel, then the Puritan colonists did as well. The colonial records demonstrate that difficulty.

In his treatment of colonial American military history, Armstrong Starkey argues that the English colonists' were nearly inevitable due to their resources. Starkey acknowledges that the colonists faced a "difficult supply situation" and mentions that "even in good conditions, supplies for 1,000 men would have strained colonial resources." Yet despite the apparent difficulties, he argues that "the English had overwhelming advantages in numbers and material" as well as institutions that allowed them to "mobilize resources to devastating effect."¹⁰

Kyle Zelner's study of impressment practices in Massachusetts during King Philip's war occasionally mentions problems with supply. He notes that "a lack of muskets was especially prevalent in the early days of the war," and that Massachusetts' "short supply of ammunition and gunpowder" was an issue regarding export restrictions.¹¹ However, Zelner attributes the lack of muskets to the "necessity of changing one-third of all militiamen from the pike to the musket, in the middle of hostilities." He does not question whether or not there was a supply problem prior to hostilities.

Historians have neglected the decades prior to the war when evaluating Indian and English strengths and weaknesses. More often than not, they assume because the English had access to European trade, they could easily supply the war effort. As this chapter will demonstrate, there was a distinct concern among the colonial leadership about supply

¹⁰ Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 68, 74, 75.

¹¹ Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 43, 55.

consistency and defense and a chronic shortage of military supply in many towns. Supplying vulnerable towns was not easy for the English colonists. The first several months of King Philip's War revealed that the English colonists were woefully unprepared to fight back against Indians, not only because they were less skilled, but because they were less than adequately armed and prepared. Colonists had reason to fear because their logistical readiness to combat the Indian threat was noticeably lacking. The two decades prior to the war foreshadow the distress John Pynchon and others expressed when trying to provide supplies for their forces.

Each colony in New England struggled with a chronic arms shortage throughout much of the seventeenth century. In Connecticut, strict laws governed the stocks of gunpowder that each town and military company was charged to maintain. The Connecticut Code of Laws ordered that "by reason of the Indians and otherwise...there should be a Magazine of Powder and Shott provided and maintained in the Country, in each Towne within this Jurisdiction." The general court was supposed to provide military supplies to the major towns. For example, Hartford was to maintain "two barrills of Powder, six hundred weight of Lead, and six score fathom of Match."¹² Training days were to be held several times throughout the year. However, the court called for arms inspections on a regular basis in response to towns' shortages and complaints appeared that demonstrate that the intended dispersion of supplies did not always occur. On July 12, 1648, the general court became aware that "severall souldgers...have not bene allowed some powder upon their training dayes. The court ordered that "halfe a pound

¹² J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* Vol I 1636-1665, (Hartford, CT: Brown & Parsons, 1850, reprinted by New York: AMS Press Inc., 1968), 543.

of powder a peece, for a yeare: and so from yeare to yeare, for the future” was to be provided to the “masters and governors of each familie unto which the souldgers doe belong, to bee called forth...at the discretion of the Captaine...of each Trained Band.”¹³ The law required training days to take place, but clearly the towns did not have enough supplies to comply fully.

Arms inspections were often required by Connecticut because towns were deficient in their defense requirements. On May 15, 1656, the court ordered that the clerks of the “Trained Bands” in “Stratford, Fairfield & Norwalke...have power” to “examin & censure all defects of arms in their several towns.”¹⁴ The Court had to address the same problem in May 1657, when George Graves was ordered to “judge the defects in traynings, watches, and arms” in Middletown.¹⁵ Such delegation of arms inspections must have proved inadequate. On May 17, the Court ordered that “all defects in Armes or neglects in traineing...shalbe determined by any one Magestrate or Assistant” and that “this order” was to take place “notwithstanding former orders.”¹⁶ Clearly, the towns in Connecticut did not live up to the defense standards that the colonial government set forth and many towns tended to be deficient in powder stores and military training periods.

Still, powder did not always find its way into the hands of those that requested it. Wills from the same year indicate that even wealthy individuals, who made up much of the officer corps, possessed only small amounts of powder and weapons. Henry Smith and William Whiting were wealthy merchants from Wethersfield, located near Mohegan

¹³ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 165.

¹⁴ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 282.

¹⁵ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 299.

¹⁶ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 350.

Indian lands. Whiting had even been charged with providing provisions and pay to soldiers during expeditions in the 1640's. Upon their death, neither individual's estate included more than ten pounds worth of ammunition or powder.¹⁷ Individuals such as these were often the leaders of "trained bands" or local militias, but their own leaders only possessed a small amount of powder to defend their own extensive holdings. One pound of powder per soldier was required for training. For combat, two pounds of powder per soldier was preferred.

Ammunition, powder, and weapons were very expensive in 19th century America; the cost was often inflated significantly when transported across the Atlantic.¹⁸ The wills of these individuals were so meticulous as to record such items as "iron kettles, warming pans, looking glasses, pewter bottles, fish hooks, etc."¹⁹ Expensive items like muskets or ammunition would surely be listed as part of an estate. William Whiting only owned seven pounds worth of powder and ammunition upon his death, enough only to equip a handful of soldiers for an expedition and far less than the value of many of his other possessions. Given the lucrative trade in powder, it would be one of the more valuable items in any estate. Under normal circumstances, this amount was sufficient for his uses, but in the event of any altercation, this small amount would be problematic.

Military commanders were usually responsible for providing provisions for expeditions the Court ordered them to undertake. At the session of April 9, 1657, the Connecticut General Court received word of "severall insolent injuries & insufferable outrages committed against inhabitants of South Hampton by some Indians upon Long

¹⁷ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 131, 503-508.

¹⁸ Steele, *Warpaths*, 106-107.

¹⁹ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 497.

Island.”²⁰ In response, the court ordered Major John Mason to “sail to South Hampton, where you may meet ith the Magistrates there and then interpret to the Montacutt (Montauk) Sachem” the will of the colony. The Court required Mason to assess the damage done by Indians and demand restitution from the Montauks. It was Mason’s duty to “take charge” of the “provision and ammunition” of the nineteen men under his command, as well as “all other that you shall see meet to raise there to the furtherance of this work.” The colonial government ordered the expedition, but the supplies required for them were the responsibility of the officers they appointed. The colony could not provide the expedition with supplies.

That the colony did not provide Mason with arms for the Montauk expedition reflects the inefficiencies in munitions distribution. Powder did not arrive regularly to Connecticut, so when a large shipment did arrive it aroused special interest in the General Court. Conflicts with the Dutch regularly raised tensions within the New England colonies. During the session of April 14, 1653, Connecticut was in a state of “general alarm” because of apprehensions about a possible Indian uprising and hostilities between England and Holland. The Court ordered Captain Mason to Seabrook “for the service of the country and defense of the place,” and that “one barrill of powder” be “speedily sent downe” for his use and another barrel from “the Bay” was to be held in Connecticut’s possession. Luckily, “a parcell” of 358 pounds worth of “arms and ammunition” was recently sent by a “corporation in England.” The Commissioners of the United Colonies divided it so that Massachusetts received 90% of the shipment, the remaining 10% to be divided among Connecticut, New Haven, and Plymouth. The General Court ordered that

²⁰ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 295.

“this Collonye should have its proportion of the whole military provision, in all respects & particulars.”²¹

Two months later, at the Court session of June 27, 1653, the court decided that “the certaine barrells of powder and ammunityon that came out of the Bay into this River & Jurisdiction...from our friends in England” should “be kept entire, not divided, untill the expedition now in hand bee over, or else this court give other order to the contrary.”²²

Thus, when a colony looked out for its own interests, it was all too eager to hoard military provisions, depriving its fellow colonies. Even when supply shipments came from England, there was no guarantee that the parties due to receive the supplies would actually receive it. Jealousy, competition, and distrust between colonies later became a serious issue during King Philip’s War.²³

Anxiety over military preparation was not only due to colonial shortcomings. Much of it was generated by the perceived strength of the colonys’ enemies. The Connecticut General Court tried to overcome this fear by legislating against trade with the Dutch and Indians, whom they often saw as collaborators bent on domination of colonial trade at English expense. On September 18, 1649, the Connecticut General Court ordered that “it shall not bee lawfull for any Frenchman, Dutchman or person of any [foreign] nation, or any English living amongst them, to trade with any Indian or Indians within the limmitts of this Jurissdiction, either directly or indirectly.” The reason for the ban was because the French and Dutch “ordinarily” traded “gunns, powder, shott, etc. with the Indians to our great prejudice, and the strengthening and animating of the

²¹ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 239.

²² Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 244.

²³ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 59-60, 94-95.

Indians against us, as by dayly experience wee finde.”²⁴ Such strenuous economic competition made the English colonists very fearful of their precarious situation.

Indeed, the English found evidence of Dutch and Indian collusion practically every time any transaction took place near their colony that did not involve them. This suspicion was likely well founded. Daniel K. Richter notes that Indians had “ample access to French, English, or Dutch purveyors of firearms” and that the Dutch were the “principle source of tools, cloth and weapons” to the Iroquois.²⁵ The Puritan leadership had at best a vague understanding of what kind of trading relationships existed between the Algonquians of southern New England and other tribes. Generally, they assumed the worst. In May 15, 1651, a man named John Dyer of Seabrooke facilitated Indian-Dutch trade, for which his vessell had been confiscated. Dyer admitted that he advised some Indians “which was the Dutch vessel” and transported them to it. Others testified that the Indians spent considerable time on the Dutch craft, so much that he “went home and dynded,” before he came back to “sett the Indians ashoare when they desired it,” which apparently he never did. Dyer argued that “hee knew nothing but the Dutch might trade coates...not gunns, powder, and shott.”²⁶ Not only was Dyer engaging in an illegal activity by working with the Indians and aiding their trade, he was contributing to strength of the colony’s competitors which the government wished to limit.

The colonial government of Connecticut was intensely interested in the Indians’ powder supply, and wished to eliminate their ability to buy it. The Court required “the neighboring Indyons...to give an evident testimony of their fidelity to the English by

²⁴ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 197.

²⁵ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 75, 99.

²⁶ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 219-220.

[giving] up their gunns & other armes to the Governor or Magistrates.” A likely reason for this course of action was not to gain the friendship of the Indians, but to strengthen the limited English supplies and weaken those of their potential enemies.²⁷

Not only were Indians to give up their guns, they were also “not to shoot...any gunn in the night, or walk in the night, except they come with a message to the English.” In the case of a message, they were to surrender themselves to the watch, and if the Indians “[ran] away from the watch,” the soldiers were authorized to shoot them as they fled.²⁸ Clearly, the colony was worried almost to the point of paranoia regarding potentially hostile Indians. Other judgments attempting to restrict Indian arms were issued in 1657, 1658, and 1660.²⁹

The military capability of the Indians in its midst made the Court more anxious when compared to Connecticut’s own limited amount of provisions. The court ordered in August 1658 that “no souldier ...shall diminish any of the proportion of powder that the...Countrey imposeth on him for his store.”³⁰ In the May 17, 1660 session, Connecticut was reluctant to lend New Haven any guns. The court relented to New Haven’s request, but stipulated that they had to be returned whenever “the Court see cause to recall them.”³¹ Along with the numerous arms inspections taking place in the same period, these incidents demonstrate the colony’s unease when it came to its military supplies relative to their perceptions of Indian capabilities. In 1672, the Court “thought good to order that the cheife military officers in each plantation take special care that the

²⁷ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 240.

²⁸ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 240.

²⁹ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 294, 318, 351.

³⁰ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 322.

³¹ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 352.

arms of their plantation...be viewed and set in sufficient repayre...[and] that the plantations be furnished with ammunition.”³²

Inspections were necessary because arms deficiencies were repeatedly discovered and reported. The Court session of July 6, 1665 began with Court “understanding that the Armes in the respective plantations are deficient, and that it proves difficult to procure them to be repayed.”³³ Despite orders to resolve those deficiencies, the Court received a report from “the severall Plantations that they cannot at present provide their proportions of powder and shot.” The Court granted leniency because of the towns’ difficulties, remitting the fine and giving them another year to comply.³⁴ However, the court session of October 1666 noted that “the great care and endeavors of the respective Plantations in this Colony to procure ammunition...have been ineffectuall” and again remitted the fines associated with non-compliance.³⁵ In 1673, three years prior to the outbreak of war, the court once again noted with frustration that “as complaints are still made of intolerable insufficiencies and gross defects in armes and ammunition” particularly in certain districts. Again, military leaders were ordered to “take view of their armes” and fines to be levied for deficiencies. No significant action must have been taken, however, because once the war started, again the colony fretted about the “great tendency to the want of provisions in the Colony.”³⁶

Not only were the colonists in Connecticut not adequately armed, they did not wisely use the firearms they had nor were they trained well to respond to an alarm. In

³² J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut Vol II 1665-1678*, (Hartford, CT: Brown & Parsons, 1850, reprinted by New York: AMS Press Inc., 1968), 181.

³³ Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut Vol II*, 19.

³⁴ Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut Vol II*, 25.

³⁵ Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut Vol II*, 52.

³⁶ Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut Vol II*, 270.

July 1666, the Court ruled that no one should fire “any gun at any time between sunne set and sun rising, such actions proving very prejudiciall to the comfort and safety of the Plantations.” If anyone did so, they would “pay as a fine five pounds.” Next, the court ordered that “if the souldiers do not repaire to the severall Squadrons...any person neglecting or refusing to attend his duty herein shalbe punished by five pounds fine or imprisonment.”³⁷ The necessity of these rulings signifies the lackadaisical attitude of many of Connecticut citizens toward their training. A significant number were neither very responsible with their arms nor serious about preparing or practicing for town defense, or else the colonial government would not have needed to revisit the issue repeatedly.

The colony of Rhode Island had many provisional problems and was urgently desirous of a steady supply of powder and arms. The powerful Narragansett Indians tribe resided mostly within Rhode Island’s boundaries, and the colony wished to counter their military capabilities as much as possible. The fact that Providence was burned by Indians in 1676, destroying many of the colonial records, confirms that the Rhode Islanders’ anxieties were well founded; it was by far the most vulnerable colony.³⁸ In 1650, the government ordered that each town be “allotted...a constant supply” for its magazine, and if the town’s stores were below what was ordered, then penalties would be levied.³⁹ In 1655, Bartholomew Hunt confessed that he “had two hundred weight of powder, and all or the greatest part not given [account] of” along with 7 pistols. Because he had not

³⁷ Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut* Vol II, 45.

³⁸ John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England Volume 1: 1636 to 1663* (Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856, reprinted by New York: AMS Press, 1968), vii.

³⁹ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1*, 223.

recorded the transaction, the town had confiscated it. The Court ordered that the town of Newport “pay for Hunt’s powder and lead” that was taken from him, suggesting that merchants like Hunt desired to hoard and hide what powder was available in order to sell it, possibly to Indians, at the same time town and colonial governments were reporting provisional difficulties.

Just one year prior to the confiscation of Hunt’s powder, the Court ordered “that there be a sub-committee...to consider about some way of preventing the sale of ammunition to the Indians.”⁴⁰ Three months after that recommendation, the situation was perceived to be so grave to the Rhode Island’s leaders that Roger Williams was practically reduced to begging to help secure his colony from Indians. Williams wrote to the Massachusetts General Court that “our dangers (being a frontier people to the barbarians) are greater than those of other colonies, and the ill consequences to yourselves would be not a few nor small...were we first massacred or mastered by them.” He went on to lament that “barbarians all the land over, are filled with artillery and ammunition from the Dutch, openly and horridly, and from all the English over the country (by stealth).” The Indians were so strong and their “insolence...so high” that “they daily consult, and hope, and threaten to render us slaves, as they long since have made the Dutch.”⁴¹

Williams acknowledged the profitability of arms trading (and his own moral superiority) by stating that “For myself, I have refused the gain of thousands by such a murderous trade,” but complains that “no law yet extant” in any colony “[will] secure enough against such villainy.” This letter explains much about the thinking of colonial

⁴⁰ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1320*.

⁴¹ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1, 324*.

leaders. Despite numerous existing laws prohibiting arms trading with Indians, the enterprise was extremely profitable. To Williams, every time an arms transaction took place between a merchant and Indians, the colony's security and the authority of its government was undermined. Furthermore, there was no way to judge whether the Indians were simply engaging further in the munitions trade or whether they were stockpiling weapons to use in a campaign against the English. Much of Williams' rhetoric stemmed from his uncertainty about the future of his colony. In his view, the Dutch were being subjugated by the Indians. Colonial leaders were aware that their own supplies were limited while they had no idea how extensive the Indians' supply line was.

In an attempt to strengthen Rhode Island's position, the colony sent John Clark, formerly the colonial treasurer, to England as an agent. Much of his job was to procure arms and munitions. The colony continued to have serious trouble providing arms to its towns. In 1658, a colonial commission concluded that "the Town councils supplyeing such as are not able to get armes" because the revenues generated from "what fines are taken" for defects in training were not sufficient to purchase adequate supplies.⁴² So towns in Rhode Island could not generate enough revenue to pay the high prices for an adequate stock of munitions. Clark did his best to lobby for Rhode Island's interests in England, but still the revenue was insufficient. In November 1658, the colony needed "twenty fower pounds...six pound in each towne, to make restitution for the powder and shott sent from England by Mr. John Clarke," but to raise this amount would take until "the next court of election," held six months later.

Unable to raise cash, the Court in Warwick wrote a letter in which it profusely apologized to Clarke for their lack of "English coyne," but thanked him graciously for

⁴² Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1*, 373.

“that supply of powder and shott.” Instead of cash, the commissioners sent “betwixt twenty and thirty pounds worth of goods,” mostly furs.⁴³ That amount of money was significant, about the equivalent of 3-5 cows or horses, or 5-10 acres of land.⁴⁴ The colony continued to struggle to finance Clarke’s efforts, increasing the levies required to pay for his services in 1662.⁴⁵ Considering his fervent petitions to the king, the money was spent in earnest, if not successfully.⁴⁶ Rhode Island’s leaders were aware that their colony’s situation was precarious, not least because of the large number of Indians in their territory or inter-colonial competition, but because of their inability to adequately maintain stocks of weapons and supplies in the colony’s towns. Rhode Island’s difficulties hardly suggest that the colony would fight from a position of strength in the event of any Indian uprising.

The problem of preparedness continued to plague Rhode Island. The court noted in 1664 that there was a “great neglect and deficiency in the use of military exercise,” requiring the colony to revisit its regulations governing military affairs. Individuals not compliant with the training or arms requirements were to be “fined by the Counsell in each town,” and if that was not sufficient, the military leaders would be fined for further “defects in such cases.”⁴⁷ The same problem occurred again in 1666, when the commanders of the Newport trained band presented a petition regarding the “great neglect of the due execution of the enacted laws of this Colony concerning the militia.”⁴⁸ Newport’s efforts to improve its military apparatus must not have satisfied the Court for

⁴³ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1*, 395, 398-399.

⁴⁴ Wills in Trumbull, ed., *Records of Connecticut Vol. 1*, 480-490.

⁴⁵ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1*, 481.

⁴⁶ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island Vol. 1*, 485-489.

⁴⁷ John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England Volume II: 1664 to 1677* (Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856, reprinted by New York: AMS Press, 1968), 51-52.

⁴⁸ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island vol. II*, 171.

long, since in 1667, the Court required Lieutenant Joseph Torrey and Ensign John Bliss to “go from house to house throughout the towne...villages and precincts thereof, and to take a precise and exact account of all the armes, ammunition, and weapons of warr each person is furnished with, or hath in his house to spare to others, and in what condition with regard to service the same is in.” The directive did not specify how individual defects would be addressed, but ordered that Newport “sett against all excuses, and forthwith require all such armes” should “be supplied,” presumably by those who had surpluses (to be discovered by the search).⁴⁹ This three year dispute illustrates the inefficiency of the colony’s internal defenses as well as its chain of command and the insecurity that the colony wished to remedy. Certain Rhode Island towns were less than enthusiastic about maintaining a ready defense, requiring the colony to adopt strict measures to force compliance.

The recurrence of inspections and frustration of the colonial government indicates that towns were either slow to comply with colonial military regulations or were chronically unprepared. In 1671, the colony feared “treacherous designes and practices from the Indians” and called on its towns to prepare a defensive posture. However, knowing that supply was limited, the Court voted that “for the more certaine supply...the sum of two hundred pounds in New England silver, be delivered unto our Agent,” John Clarke. The expense required new taxes on Rhode Island’s towns, which some resisted, requiring the court to take severe measures of punishment. Yet again, the harsh, almost desperate measures Rhode Island resorted to illustrate that its efforts to provide adequate defenses was problematic prior to King Philip’s War.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island vol. II*, 171. 196.

⁵⁰ Bartlett, ed., *Records of Rhode Island vol. II*, 171, 412-414.

Massachusetts, regarded by the other colonies as the most secure, also had problems during the 1650s regarding their preparedness for war.⁵¹ In 1650, the General Court ordered that “some course should be taken for the renewing of the country’s stocke of powder.” The magistrates expressed concern that the current level of powder had “not proved effectuall” and the colony’s store was “not so augmented as was then intended.” The Court also attempted to keep the powder stores from further diminishing by preventing individuals that changed location from taking powder from their old town to the new one. The court resolved “the question on the negative,” when colonists petitioned to take powder from one town to replenish the stock of the other.⁵²

Massachusetts regularly called for inspections of military provisions and regulation of the colonial supply in response to the illicit market in powder. In October 1651, the Court acknowledged that “severall quantities of powder and other ammunition” were imported into the colony. However, merchants had clearly not been reporting their transactions to the government. A 40 pound penalty was assessed on those who failed to give “particular notice of the quantity thereof to the publicke notary” when they received an arms shipment. If merchants attempted to engage in arms transactions without approval from the government or “pleade ignorance thereof,” they were liable for a fine of 100 pounds, an amount equivalent to a substantial estate. Such large fines demonstrate the importance of arms shipments to the colonial government and

⁵¹ The leaders of Plymouth colony, especially, were almost conspiratorial in their belief that Massachusetts hoarded a surplus of military supplies. In 1667, a Plymouth court memoranda instructed its commissioners to “signify unto the Massachusetts commissioners that we take it ill that wee can not for our moneys be supplied with ammunition, although they have good quantities in their hands.” Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 4, 1661-1668* (Boston: William White, 1855), 157.

⁵² Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Volume 4 part I 1650-1660*, (Boston: William White, 1854), 3, 35.

their determination to catalog and regulate the supply of arms in the colony.⁵³ The Court was rarely satisfied with the supply of powder, as it regularly called for inspections and reports. The problem was still evident in May 1656, when the Court ordered the surveyor general to give a yearly “account to the councill of the [said] stocke,” because a “more constant supply...of powder and ammunition” was necessary.⁵⁴

Massachusetts was not particularly well prepared to operate its military forces or equipment in an efficient manner. The colony spent significant sums in its attempt to keep up its military stores and weapons, yet various towns and leaders were often lax in their duty. At the session of October 19, 1652, the Court became aware that “severall great gunnes of the country’s in Boston and other towns...lye uncounted and neglected.” The magistrates were incensed that local leaders would act so negligently concerning their own defense, so it was ordered that “all towns that have any such gunnes... unmounted are enjoyned to speedily take care..to be in [readiness] before the next Court of Election.” Failure to do so would cause the Court to place the weapons under the supervision of the surveyor general instead of local leaders.⁵⁵ Potential conflict with other colonial powers caused Massachusetts to require a minimum level of defense that the individual towns did not take seriously. In May 1655, the court again lamented that “in many towns severall peeces of ordinance...lye uncounted, or not...fitt for service,” not to mention that “some forts and [batteries]...are out of repair.” The Court commanded the selectmen of the towns to provide for the “security of the said tounes,”

⁵³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 57.

⁵⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 258.

⁵⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 105-106.

although up to that point those selectmen had been severely lacking. Colonial leaders would not be satisfied by future efforts.⁵⁶

Not only were some Massachusetts towns apathetic about their defensive preparations, but they were often hard pressed to pay for them. In 1654, the Court responded to late payment for powder, ordering that “if the severall towns shall not within one sixe weekes send doune [sufficient] pay...for their... proportions of powder” then it would be forfeit and placed in the “colony’s account.”⁵⁷ In order to pay for the “common stocke of powder for the country,” the Treasurer was ordered in October 1656 to “send forth his warrants to the severall constables, to levy and collect” taxes from the towns. The towns were not paying for their provisions, forcing the colony to send tax collectors to try and force payment.⁵⁸ The efforts must not have been successful, since in May 1659, the Court ordered the treasury to pay for “seven or eight” barrels of powder “out of the custome of wines, or other ways.”⁵⁹ Later that year, in November, the Court resolved that “the rent for the [beaver] trade this year be laid out...for powder for the country’s store.” Less than a year later, the colony again ordered the surveyor general to inspect “the country’s ammunition” and use “the custome of wines and [beaver]...be improved for no other use untill the such supply be made.” The magistrates appointed a committee to find ways to “improve” the “customes of wines” so that the funds could be used to buy an annual supply of powder.⁶⁰

Clearly, Massachusetts went to great expense trying to furnish its towns with an adequate supply of powder, raising taxes on the colony’s exports multiple times.

⁵⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 222-223.

⁵⁷ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 195.

⁵⁸ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 281.

⁵⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Vol. 4 pt. I*, 366.

⁶⁰ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 423.

Nevertheless, the efforts produced mixed results at best. By October 1660, the Court remained frustrated by the inadequate powder supply in many of its towns. Having initiated “severall orders...that each towne should be provided with a stocke of powder & other ammunition” the surveyor general once again reported that “some townes...made report” of sufficient stock, while “others did not.” The Court repeated its order and charged the “selectmenn or constable” with maintaining and reporting an adequate supply.⁶¹ As the wealthiest colony in New England at the time, Massachusetts could afford to buy more powder than the other colonies, often ordering ten or twenty barrels per year.⁶² However, the cost of doing so proved to be a financial burden that did not bring the desired results. The colony had to repeatedly raise the level of taxation required to furnish powder, foreshadowing the financial difficulties of King Philip’s War.⁶³ The repeated concerns of the Massachusetts General Court throughout the 1650s revealed its frustration that many towns remained without adequate military supplies even when a concerted effort was made to provide them. Somewhere along the line, local interests were either selling powder for personal gain or the amount provided was not equal to the amount required.

Massachusetts continued to be vexed by military concerns up to the start of the war. Raising the funds necessary to buy provisions was one of the serious problems that colonial leaders faced. The treasury’s budget for provisioning defenses and expeditions in 1664 was five hundred pounds, an amount that seems on the surface to be more than

⁶¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 440.

⁶² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt. I*, 423.

⁶³ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 110.

adequate. However, the next day the court ordered the treasurer again to “procure...one hundred pounds in ready money” for the “commanders in cheife, etc...”⁶⁴

Despite the generous outlays of cash, the court still required that soldiers without arms “be furnished in part of their wages, & not at the charge of the country,” indicating the difficulty of the expense related to outfitting units. “Cloathing” and “whatever provision” was also needed would similarly be deducted from soldiers’ wages.⁶⁵ The stress on the colonies finances was severe. The treasurer was required to levy extra taxes “on the severall towns...in proportion to the present country rate,” and also “half a single rate upon the inhabitants as an addition...towards defraying the public charges.” The Massachusetts Court felt obliged to state in October 1664 that the colony’s obligations “have been extraordinary this year,” reflecting the monetary stress caused by military preparation. Occasionally, the court noted that there was “a sufficient supply in the treasury” to “answer the occaisions of the country,” but such abundance was short lived. When the colony desired to purchase some “great gunnes” and the ammunition required for them, it instructed its agents to purchase them “at the cheapest hand” for a “reasonable advance.”⁶⁶ Even when it desired to prepare effective defenses, Massachusetts found that it had to resort to paying for it on credit.

Personnel problems and poor performance of soldiers caused the Court serious consternation. Historians have noted how colonial soldiers were “military novices” and often tried to avoid service during the war by hiding from constables, or in the case of

⁶⁴ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Volume 4 part II 1661-1674*, (Boston: William White, 1854), 123.

⁶⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 124-125.

⁶⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 534, 565.

wealthy families, openly resisting impressments or defying commanders.⁶⁷ This behavior occurred before the war as well. In 1663, the Court ordered that “all soldiers, whither horse of foot, who shall disobey the lawfull commands of their superior officers upon any training day” or those who “refuse to performe any service...shall be punished.”

Resistance also manifested in a lackadaisical attitude toward training. The court was very unhappy that some soldiers “vainly expend their time & powder by inordinate shooting in the day or night after their release.” Such infractions were to be dealt with by “sharp admonition,” “military punishment,” or by “the magistrate.”⁶⁸ In 1666, the Court heard complaints from military leaders that “orders” to serve “are not so attended,” so fines were to be assessed for those who did not report.⁶⁹

Failure to report for training days was perplexing for Massachusetts leaders because they took place so infrequently and from their perspective required only a small inconvenience. In 1671, the Court increased the number of regiments from three to six, requiring “every sergeant major to draw forth his regiment once in three years.”⁷⁰ This was less frequent than Plymouth or Rhode Island, yet there is evidence of significant absenteeism in Massachusetts during the years preceding the war. The Court reacted sternly in 1672 when it noted that “diverse soldiers, who by law are commanded to attend military exercise upon training days” were found “delinquent, either in arms or trainings” and worse, acted “boldly & provokingly to the clerke and other officers.” All constables were ordered to “attend their duty” by administering full punishments. The punishments did not deter many people, because the following year the Court reported that many

⁶⁷ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness* 11; Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms*, 59-61.

⁶⁸ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 97.

⁶⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 296.

⁷⁰ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 486.

participants in trainings “were not employed” and “spending their time unprofitably” by “ideling” or “gaming” while others attended their duty. Some colonists found creative ways to avoid the fines or punishments by abusing certain exemptions. Fishermen were exempted from military duty, but the court had to change it and require them to be at training “when they are at home.”⁷¹ The necessity of these regulations suggests that colonists were using the loophole to avoid training days, probably by claiming to be needed on a fishing expedition.

Sometimes the men would refuse to train because of disagreements or unhappiness with the leadership. In 1670, the militia in Norfolk county were “at an unsettlement for want of a sergeant major under whose command they might be...exercised in regimental service.” For some time, the colony discovered that it was “difficult for them to make address” to their leaders. The Court appointed someone who the militiamen would accept, regardless of his capability.⁷²

Massachusetts was somewhat better off than Plymouth and Rhode Island regarding arms deficiencies. At certain times, the Court reported that colonial defenses in certain towns were adequate. In 1663, Captain James Oliver petitioned the Court for “a due & meete allowance of powder for saluting of ships and other expense.” The Court ordered that “henceforth there be two barrels of powder allowed him for that service.” There seemed to be no problem in allowing a significant amount of powder to be spent for ceremonial purposes at that point in time.

In 1666, an inspection committee proudly reported that “wee entered a well-contrived fort, called Boston Sconce” and another fortification in the same region called

⁷¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 552.

⁷² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 452.

Merries Point, which was “less safe than the other,” but still adequate. The committee judged “the defence to be considerable & the offense to be available for the thing intended.” There was no mention of powder or ammunition stocks, but the positive assessment suggests that these forts were adequately supplied.⁷³ Conversely, the Court noted in 1672 that “our forts and artillery...in Boston, Charlestown, Salem, & Marblehead do need much to repair them,” so the Court’s assessment of the strength of forts could rise and fall.⁷⁴

Even though many New England citizens did not take regional defense seriously, the General Court certainly did, even when it concerned the other New England colonies. In 1665, referencing a potential conflict with the Dutch, the Court declared that it wanted to “assure [the neighbor colonies] of all friendship from us,” and that “we will protect them from injustice & oppression” as well as “invasion.”⁷⁵ So the seriousness of arms deficiencies, inspections, and military orders should not be doubted. Petitions to the Court about problems with personnel or supplies were not submitted frivolously. The colony took these issues seriously and fervently desired for its trained bands and town defenses to be as secure as the “Boston Sconce” was in 1666.

In May 1666, the Court commissioned a powder factory under the direction of Richard Wooddey and Henry Russell. They were granted the power to “press teams & carts for their use” in order to fulfill the “necessity of having a supply of gunpowder.” By October, only five months later, the Court had to order the selectmen of every town to increase the production of saltpeter for the gunpowder factory. A fine was to be levied if

⁷³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 297-298.

⁷⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 511.

⁷⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 159-160.

any selectmen refused “such necessary orders.”⁷⁶ This effort to stabilize the colony’s powder supply proved ineffective due to a lack of resources for the manufacture of gunpowder.

To provide powder to the “country’s stocke,” Massachusetts had to resort to taking it from private interests or certain military commanders, suggesting that the distribution was poorly organized. In 1667, the Court ordered the treasurer to “procure six barrels of powder now in the hand of Captain William Davis” and others. To pay for the re-allocations, the treasurer would have to subtract from the pay due to other military leaders and with “a piece of ground lying near the prison.” Even though the colony purported to have twenty-two barrels of powder in its stock, certain towns complained that they had insufficient supply. Salem made “a humble motion” for three barrels of powder, which the court granted.⁷⁷ The Court was not confident that it could defend against a significant foe like the French or Dutch, however. In a letter to Sir William Morrice, a member of the king’s privy council in England, the Court declared that it was preparing for their defense according to their “weak ability,” but fervently asked for help, since they were “in eminent danger” and “far remote from relief.” The Court usually reported communication with royal officials in their records only when it was important, so it should not be assumed that such utterances were purely rhetorical.

In September 1673, less than two years prior to the war, the Court ordered its agents to “procure & purchase five hundred new...fire lock muskets...for the country’s use.” Again, the colony did not pay for them up front, but on credit; flintlocks were quite expensive. They were already popular among Indians because of greater reliability and

⁷⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 296, 320.

⁷⁷ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay Vol. 4 pt.II*, 332-333.

usefulness in a forest environment. New England Indians were able to acquire them via trade with the Dutch and French, or other Indians that traded with them. The colony realized that it sorely needed the more advanced flintlock muskets to replace the less effective matchlock muskets that most colonists owned. Historians have noted that the matchlock was a “cumbersome musket” and that the English colonists were at a disadvantage as a result of them.⁷⁸ However, they argue that colonists did not fully perceive this disadvantage or attempt to rectify it until the war was already underway. Douglas Edward Leach states that the matchlock was “impractical...and so...largely abandoned” in 1675. Patrick Malone also states that the colonies used the matchlock at first because they were “restricted by allegiance to cultural traditions and to standard military practices.” The court order in September 1673 proves that the colonial leadership was not only aware of the disadvantage, but seriously desirous to remedy it. The problem was not indifference or ignorance, but rather the limited funds available to purchase the weapons and the colony’s inability to see to it that all towns were adequately supplied.

Plymouth colony also experienced difficulty and inefficiencies concerning military supplies in the mid seventeenth century. In May 1653, the Plymouth General Court ordered the constables in every town to impress men and furnish them with arms and ammunition in preparation for a possible attack by the Dutch, while each town was forbidden to transport “any provisions out of the jurisdiction.”⁷⁹ The town contributions

⁷⁸ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 12-13, 68;

Malone, *The Skulking Way of War*, 70-77, 85-87.

⁷⁹ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 3, 1651-1661* (Boston: William White, 1855), 29.

was necessary since the Court acknowledged one month later that the colonial supply consisted only of “five barrels of old powder, five hundred weight of led, ten guns, tens swords, and twenty belts, and ten lockes.” That limited stock was all Plymouth had to divide among the towns until a new supply arrived.⁸⁰ One barrel of powder was used at general trainings in Yarmouth in 1660 and Plymouth in 1661 and the Court’s guidance on soldier provisions for expeditions in the period were that each soldier “bee sufficiently furnished with...one pound of powder and one pound of bullets.”⁸¹ One pound of powder would have provided a soldier with 10-20 shots, depending on his skill, and usually around fifty to one hundred individuals were present at trainings or called to expeditions.⁸² Based on Plymouth’s reporting of its powder usage, it can be assumed that one barrel of powder was sufficient for one company of soldiers to fire their weapons between 10 and 20 times.

Some towns may not have been able to provide enough powder to its soldiers at any one time. In the session of June 1655, the Court found “the town of Sandwidge for being defective in not having their full proportion of common arms according to order.”⁸³ Again, locals may have been selling powder for personal gain or the town never received the arms they were supposed to get. Further compounding the problem was the high price of powder. Towns were not easily able to pay for it, causing the colony much consternation. In 1654, the treasurer reported that various towns owed the colony almost 50 pounds to pay for their proportion of ammunition, for which the colony had already

⁸⁰ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 34.

⁸¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 25, 68, 191, 219.

⁸² Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 11-13.

⁸³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 82.

paid 99.⁸⁴ In 1673, two years prior to the war, Plymouth found it very difficult to pay for a potential military expedition against the Dutch in New York. The treasurer was “impowered to procure provision...upon credit...to be payed next fall.” Even when supplies could be acquired, the colony could not afford to pay for them.⁸⁵

Even when a supply did arrive, it was not always kept in a safe place, leaving it vulnerable to plunder by thieves or Indians. The Court ordered Captain Standish in 1652 to “see that a convenient place bee made to keepe the common stocke of powder and shott.”⁸⁶ However, the Court still searched in 1655 for “a place...to secure the country’s powder.” Two years later, a suitable facility still could not be found. The Court ordered that “for the securing of the country’s powder,” Lieutenant Southworth and the Plymouth deputies were to “[hire] workmen to make a place” for it to be paid for by the treasurer. For most of the decade, Plymouth’s powder supply was not secure.⁸⁷

Not only was Plymouth’s stock not adequately protected, it was not particularly large. The Court reported in October 1658 that its supply consisted of “six barrels of powder, two barrels and a halfe of shott, and a cake of lead.” It divided that stock among the military leaders of the larger towns.⁸⁸ Therefore, the entire colony’s stock of powder in 1650s was very limited and would be under extreme stress in the event of a conflict. In the event of a hasty mobilization, the colony only had enough powder available to fight one battle.

The problem did not go away in the following decade. Another inspection was ordered on June 10, 1663 to “take the Invoice of what Liquors, Powder, Shott, and Led is

⁸⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 65.

⁸⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 4., 137

⁸⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 14.

⁸⁷ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 87, 120.

⁸⁸ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 3, 151-152.

brought into the Government,” but again these efforts proved inadequate.⁸⁹ In 1667, the constables of various towns were ordered to address the “defects” in arms, which the Court seemed to anticipate. Despite the Court’s efforts to improve the colony’s readiness over the years, individual commanders were required to provide their soldiers’ weapons, shifting the responsibility away from the colony and to the units, indicating a recurring inability to remedy the shortfall. Even the threat of significant fines did not always result in town readiness. Given the lucrative armaments trade, even a fine of 5 or 10 pounds was enough for a town to ignore.⁹⁰

Towns defied the colony in more than just arms quotas. Training and staffing the colonial militiamen regularly and properly proved difficult on a regular basis. In June 1663, Plymouth “suspended generall training” for the year because of “diverse reasons and considerations,” and ordered that it should be observed the following year. The most likely problems were unmotivated participants and a lack of capable officers to direct training activity. Colonists did not particularly enjoy serving at training days, especially if they had to actually train.⁹¹ Some tried to avoid service. Personnel issues many times involved a soldier’s inability to furnish a firearm or adequately perform his duty. Kyle F. Zelner notes that “in the early days of the war,” there were “problems with the soldiers’ equipment,” including “a lack of muskets.”⁹² Zelner argues that the problem involved the transition from matchlock to flintlock muskets, creating a shortage of serviceable muskets. This conclusion seems inadequate since, as we have seen, the colonies had a shortage of muskets long before the war, requiring numerous inspections that always

⁸⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 4, 11.

⁹⁰ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 4, 142-145.

⁹¹ Harold E. Selesky, *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 13-14; Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms*, 33.

⁹² Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms*, 55.

found deficiencies. The limited number of muskets may have made a convenient excuse for soldiers to avoid service, but there is sufficient evidence that the shortage was real.

Officers were elected by the towns, often due to their popularity, not military expertise, in what some historians call an “excess of democracy.”⁹³ In 1666, the Court was unhappy with the military company in Scituate. Having “taken notice of [Scituate’s] vote...[we] must signify unto you that wee judge that your vote was very unadvised.” The Plymouth court ordered Sergeant John Damman to “take charge and command” of the military company, disregarding of the wishes of the voters in the town because they wanted someone with some military knowledge to “drill and exercise them...to the best of your ability.” The Court rarely intervened in officer selection, so this case must have been especially egregious. However, many officers were not very capable and displayed their incompetence during King Philip’s War. Overall, Plymouth colony displayed remarkably inefficient preparation for military conflict throughout the entire quarter century leading up to the war and its leaders knew it.⁹⁴

All the New England colonies demonstrated difficulty and anxiety over the inadequate preparation of their military forces. Even more worrisome for them was the fact that many New England townspeople did not take militia training seriously, or trained as if they were going to fight in Europe against a European army.⁹⁵ So not only were the New England soldiers not trained sufficiently, but there was no guarantee that any town was supplied well enough to last more than a few days in the event of a protracted conflict. This problem did not subside as potential conflict drew closer with New England Indians during the 1660s or early 1670s. In fact, it would only become

⁹³ Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms*, 35.

⁹⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol 4, 127.

⁹⁵ Selesky, *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 13-14.

worse, creating an atmosphere of hysteria and pessimism once a conflict with Indians broke out.

CHAPTER THREE
“WE MAY JUSTLY FEAR EVERY HOUR:” FRIGHT AND
UNPREPAREDNESS IN KING PHILIP’S WAR

The consequences of unpreparedness were both dire and terrifying for the colonists as King Philip’s War broke out in 1675. John Pynchon was no exception. Justifiably nervous about Indian military capabilities for the preceding two decades, he was anxious that the Indian conflict that began in Plymouth in June would spread. He noted to his son that “we are like to be engaged in a war with the Indians” that “arises from Plymouth,” but “there was no speech” about it lately in Boston.¹ Two days later, Pynchon confided to John Winthrop, Jr., that he trusted God to “not leave us to be a reproach to the heathen.”² As the war escalated by August, Pynchon told the governor of Massachusetts that “we are very raw and our people of this town extremely scattered.” What was worse, Pynchon expressed a strong sense of uncertainty, fretting that when “the Indians may be upon this town we know not.” On August 7, anxiety in Springfield was so conspicuous that Pynchon reported that “indeed our people are so extremely frightened that, in the very heart of the town, people remove from their houses to any next that they judge more strong...all our people fear...a sudden surprisal at home.”³ The

¹ John Pynchon to Joseph Pynchon, 30 Jun 1675 in Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers Vol I: Letters of John Pynchon, 1654-1700* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), 136.

² John Pynchon to John Winthrop, Jr, 2 Jul 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 137.

³ John Pynchon to John Winthrop, Jr, 7 Aug 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 142.

colonists own homes were inadequate protection against what might be lurking in the woods.

As the weeks passed, there was no comfort for Pynchon, despite the presence of colonial units, some under his own command. The inability of colonial forces to counteract Indian raids led Pynchon to wonder why “our forces do so little?” An expedition sent southward resulted in “little success.” Not only did the English find no Indians, but they returned “in such a manner as if they were afraid which Indians were there.”⁴ By October 1675, the futility of the English military operations combined with the ability of Indians to attack at will terrorized the colonists so much that they were paralyzed with fear. Pynchon informed Massachusetts Governor John Leverett that “we are in great hazard if we do but stir out for wood, to be shot down by some skulking Indians.” The colonists did “justly fear every hour,” and with good reason, for they were very “afraid what the Indians may be,” meaning that Pynchon had no clue how many Indians lurked beyond their sight and what they might be capable of.⁵ The colonists did not feel safe in their homes nor under the protection of colonial troops.

Pynchon’s excuse for his own failure was that the war “was a contrived business of the Indians,” so well planned that he was powerless to react effectively. He complained his pursuits of Indians were fruitless, because they did “so skulk in swamps we cannot find them and yet [the Indians] waylay our people to destruction [and] burn our houses.”⁶ By October, attacks on Springfield and Pynchon’s estate caused him to bleakly speculate that the “livelihood of the owners may meet with the same stroke” as

⁴ John Pynchon to Governor John Leverett, 8 Sep 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 152.

⁵ John Pynchon to John Winthrop, Jr, 7 Aug 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 141; John Pynchon to John Winthrop, Jr, 7 Aug 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 144.

⁶ John Pynchon to John Allyn, 25 Aug 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 149-150.

their houses. In a pessimistic letter to John Russell of Hadley, Massachusetts, Pynchon wrote that many families were “destitute of subsistence” and he did not see “how it is possible for us to live here...the “sooner we were...off the better.”⁷ Pynchon, like many leading colonial residents, feared that the Indian uprising might be the end of the New England colonies, at least in the interior. Pynchon’s experience from August to October of 1675 caused him to express doubt that the towns in his area could survive. Instead, he thought the English would have to abandon them.

Pynchon’s writings directly counter the ideas of historians who contend that the outcome of King Philip’s War was inevitable because of an “almost limitless” supply of “potential men and resources.”⁸ Some note that the “inability” of colonial forces produced “both fear and frustration” in New England, while others acknowledge that “morale was low.”⁹ Nevertheless, Pynchon’s expressions are clear. Indicative of more than “low morale,” his letters provide an example of the anxiety and fear colonists associated with Indians, and how those feelings turned to despair following numerous setbacks early in the war. Like Pynchon, many colonists struggled with their apparent impotence to combat the Indians, and ignorance of the Indians’ capabilities. The hindsight of four hundred years provides historians a sense of confidence that New England colonists did not have. Quite the contrary, the New England colonists of 1675 were not at all assured of victory. Like Pynchon, many settlers regarded the Indians with

⁷ John Pynchon to John Russell of Hadley, 5 Oct 1675, in Bridenbaugh, ed., *The Pynchon Papers*, 157.

⁸ Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk* (Hyannis, MA: Parnassus Imprints, Inc, 1958), 243; Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 81.

⁹ Michael Leroy Oberg, *Dominion and Civility: English Imperialism and Native America, 1585-1685* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 158.

Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 103.

a paralyzing fear that some Indians would occasionally exploit, which caused them to wonder if their society would even survive.

The public records of the colonies provide some indication of the nervousness that pervaded the towns. Of course, leaders would not acknowledge within their public record the full extent of their precarious situation, but there is evidence that the colonial leaders knew they were unprepared for an internal uprising by the Indians, and struggled to deal with it when it occurred. Problems of supply dogged the Massachusetts leadership. In the court session of July 9, 1675, about ten days after the start of hostilities, the Court ordered that an expedition “be impowred by the constable to impresse fower thousand of bread and sixe barreles of powder.” There was also an acknowledgement of Plymouth’s lack of powder. The Court ordered that “conveyance of such ammunition” to Plymouth as it requested.¹⁰

Whatever provisions were made between July and October were not nearly sufficient, because at the Court session of October 13, the magistrates recorded that there was a “great necessity of a speedy supply of fire armes, muskets, and carbines,” indicating that the impressments order of July was either ineffective or insufficient. The Court called for “a thousand fire armes” to be procured “with all convenient expedition” to be “proportionately distributed to the severall townes.”¹¹

An inadequate supply of arms was a serious problem for individual units and was likely one reason why the soldiers and residents did not feel confident. The Court noted that “diverse persons have been impressed” who were supplied with the arms “of other

¹⁰ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Volume 5 1674-1686*, (Boston: William White, 1854), 44-45.

¹¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 47-48.

inhabitants.” Arming a soldier sometimes meant leaving other citizens unarmed. The colony was particularly concerned with returning the arms “to the right owners” so the “country might not be unduly charged.”¹² Those who had their arms taken from them to supply the military could only hope that an Indian attack did not occur in their own town. Thus, the colony had to reduce the security of some areas to provide it elsewhere.

Massachusetts was required to impress not only men from the populace, but arms as well. The committees of militia were authorized to “asses upon all such persons of estate within their towns so many fire arms, muskets, or carbines, with a proportionable stocke of powder and ammunition...to always be kept in their hands.” There would be a penalty if individuals with arms or ammunition did not provide “for the furniture of every private soldier.” The scarcity of arms for soldiers was so great that a colonist could be exempted from “being sent abroad to the wars” if he provided “three fire arms.”¹³ Individual soldiers were worth less than three firearms from the colony’s perspective, indicating the depth of its desperation.

The colony also impressed the supplies of merchant vessels. Captain James Oliver and Mr. Thomas Brattle “seized eight barrels of powder which was exporting out of this jurisdiction...craving that they may have one half of the said powder.” The Court approved their request and authorized the two men to “search all vessels that are...suspicious to them” of having powder and breaking the prohibition on exporting supplies.¹⁴ These cases demonstrate the desperation of the colonial government. October 1675 was a disastrous month of the war, yet some merchants were willing to export eight

¹² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 51.

¹³ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 48-49.

¹⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 57.

barrels of powder, enough to supply several military units, while leaders like John Pynchon could not maintain his defenses.

Supplying adequate food was also a serious concern. The situation had declined markedly by November, when the Court acknowledged “what hinderance” the war was for the “raising of supplies of provisions amongst ourselves.” To try and alleviate some of the stress, the colony lifted a prohibition against “importation of wheat, biscuit, & flour.” The Indians knew that attacking the colonial food supplies would weaken them. They burned crops and food stores whenever possible. The English were powerless to protect their exposed food supplies because they ensconced themselves in garrison houses during an attack. Ian K. Steele describes the sacked frontier New England towns as a “foodless barrier” that eventually caused the Indians more hunger than the English.¹⁵ It took months, however, for the English to move grain stores from “the barnes of several inhabitants” to “the command of the garrison of the respective towns.” By the time this response went into effect, many towns were abandoned due to the lack of “preservation of the grain.”¹⁶

Not only was supplying the war effort and protecting that supply difficult, but financing the war effort proved extremely vexing. The court quickly levied a “single country rate” in July 1675 when the conflict began to “defray the charges in the present expedition against the Indians.”¹⁷ The casual nature of that order betrays the nonchalance that Massachusetts Bay had at the outset of the war. The court seemed to think that the conflict would be no different than previous expeditions sent into Indian territories. This notion quickly gave way to desperation. At the October 13 session, the Court noted “the

¹⁵ Steele, *Warpaths*, 106.

¹⁶ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 66.

¹⁷ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 44.

great & dayly growing charge of the present war with the Indians & the absolute necessity...of a further supply & recruit of armes & ammunition.”¹⁸

The Court admitted in February 1676 that “the present warr...hath so far exhausted the country treasury, that there is not a sufficiency to prosecute the said warr to effect.” The Court was forced to resort to issuing IOU’s to merchants or individuals willing to finance the war effort: “For the encouragement of such merchants...that are able & willing...this colony shall...stand firmly obliged for the repayment of all...sums disbursed & lent for the use of the public.” The magistrates also promised that debts would be repaid using lands gained from the Indians in the war.¹⁹ Therefore, the colony’s position was extremely tenuous both from a supply and finance standpoint. Statements involving an exhausted treasury and unstable supply lines hardly reflect a confident wartime government that felt invincible from defeat. Rather, Massachusetts Bay’s leadership seemed acutely conscious of the possibility that their colonial experiment might have to end due to the conflict.

The experience of Mendon, Massachusetts provides an example of the course of events that leaders feared might have happened writ large. Mendon was one of the first towns in Massachusetts to experience an Indian attack. On July 14, 1675, the residents were surprised by an Indian raid that killed “several of the inhabitants,” sending a “shock” to the Court in Boston.²⁰ Many residents evacuated and a garrison was placed in the town under the command of Major Clarke. The garrison was not particularly successful and more importantly was not perceived as adequate protection by the residents. In October 1675, the Court ordered Clarke to increase the garrison’s force by

¹⁸ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 55.

¹⁹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 71.

²⁰ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 66, 74.

ten.²¹ Despite the presence of these extra soldiers, many residents refused to return because they feared large Indian forces were lurking just beyond the woods surrounding their homes. One of the officers of the Mendon garrison acknowledged the townspeople's fears. Lieutenant Phineas Upham wrote to the council that the residents realized that "in all our marches we finde no Indians." As a result, they thought that the Indians were "drawne together into great bodies far remote from these parts." He also noted that the town was in "desolate condition," the garrison "poore" and the defenders' arms "very defective."

The problem continued throughout the month. On October 29th, the Court received a letter stating that ammunition was still very scarce in Mendon. The letter noted that a "fair [gentlemen] sayeth that there would not be 1 pound of powder for the garrison soldiers" and certainly none for the "forty others that came up." There were also stirrings among the residents that "1000 Indians" might be in combination waiting to attack them.²² In an environment where the soldiers lacked the supplies they needed and heightened fears filled people's hearts and minds, it is no wonder that Lieutenant Upham noted that "it is the more pity to have it [Mendon] deserted by their people."²³ The Court tried to make the best of a bad situation by seizing the abandoned property to help pay for the war. It ordered that the residents who "already [abandoned] their habitations at Mendon" forfeited their "interest in that place."²⁴ The former residents of Mendon must not have cared, instead choosing to protect their lives over their property. Their abandonment indicates that the townspeople distrusted colonial efforts to protect them.

²¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 61.

²² Massachusetts Archives, vol 68: *Military*, p. 31.

²³ George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1967, originally published 1906), 287-288.

²⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay vol 5*, 65.

Worry that the entire colony might succumb to Mendon's fate must have been present throughout the colony, spread quickly by colonists who abandoned their towns and houses that were so much a part of their identity.

The General Court recognized such failures, although they interpreted it as a breakdown of their righteousness. They saw their losses at the hands of the Indians as evidence that "we have neither heard the word nor rod as we ought" and have been "effectually humbled" by the "burning & depopulating of several hopeful plantations." The Puritans saw these tragedies as God's message to the English colonists to "search and try [their] ways" and "return again unto the Lord...whom we have departed with a great backsliding."²⁵ The Massachusetts Court recorded that their failures were due to God's displeasure; however, the futility and ineffectiveness of their military efforts were evident to the Court magistrates as well as the fleeing residents of Mendon and other towns. During the fall of 1675, the colony could legitimately fear that they might "backslide" even further, leaving abandoned towns burning throughout the land. Nothing about the Mendon experience suggests any measure of confidence on the part of the colonists during the first half of the war.

Connecticut was spared from most of the Indians' fury, but the colony remained on edge during the depths of the war. Connecticut's leaders were well aware of the tribulations of other colonies, receiving letters that expressed great dread. The Massachusetts Court wrote to Connecticut on January 4th, 1676 that "wee conclude no assurance of peace or hope from [the enemy Indians] without more considerable advantage against them...which wee find very difficult by reason of unknown and almost

²⁵ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay* vol 5, 61.

unpassable woods, rivers, and other hindrances.” The Massachusetts leaders asked their Connecticut counterparts to speak to Uncas, the Mohegan sachem who was friendly with the English, about attacking the hostile Indians allied with Metacomet. By requesting Indian assistance, the colonists revealed their doubts in their own ability to defeat the Indians. In February, Connecticut replied that they had made some uncertain progress with Uncas, so they apparently agreed with the sentiment.²⁶

The General Court in Connecticut expressed some of the same anxieties about war materiel that Massachusetts and Plymouth did. The war had been raging since July, but the Court session of October 14, 1675 indicated that Connecticut had made few preparations. The governor, John Winthrop, Jr., and an assistant, “Mr. Roberts,” were personally “engaged in behalf of the Country for some powder and lead,” which required the Court to order the Treasurer to provide the necessary funds.²⁷ The Court also noted that “the present state of affairs” was “a great tendency to the want of provisions in this Colony.”²⁸ The Colony was demonstrably unprepared to provide arms and foodstuffs, requiring the governor personally to scramble for supplies during one of the worst months of the war.

Most distressing was the fear “of great combinations and threatenings of the Indians against the English,” which had been deduced by “reason of intelligence.” The Connecticut leaders expressed great worry that the “threatenings” were directed “against the greatest part of this Colony” so they quickly saw “cause to call backe the present forces unto Hartford to be improved.” Intelligence reports of powerful Indian forces and

²⁶ J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut Vol II 1665-1677*, (Hartford, CT: Brown & Parsons, 1850, reprinted by New York: AMS Press Inc., 1968), 488.

²⁷ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. II*, 274.

²⁸ Trumbull, ed, *Records of Connecticut Vol. II*, 270.

the knowledge of English impotence against them sent the populace into a state approximating hysteria. The Court noted the “deep sense of eminent danger that all plantations are in by the nakedness of each and every place.” The use of the word “nakedness” is particularly instructive. Jill Lepore writes that the possessions of the English - their houses, their clothes, were what “differentiated” them “from Indians.” When English property was destroyed by Indians, colonists ran the risk of losing their identity. To be stripped “naked” was to remove the distinctions that separated Englishmen from Indians. The English had found America to be “naked land” and “their descendants in 1675 feared it would soon be naked again.”²⁹

The colony ordered that “suitable places of defense” for “women and children and others...to repair to in case of assault.” Here, the Connecticut Court indicated that most of its towns, and even the capital o were “naked,” exposed, and vulnerable to an Indian attack. The fear was so apparent among the public that the colony was forced to restrict freedom of movement. The Court declared that “the present distress of this Colony...requires the just assistance of all persons...in warr as in peace.” However, there were “many persons...led by inordinate feare” that the Court feared might desert the colony. In response, the Court ordered that if “any male person above fourteen years of age or under the age of seventy...removed out of this Colony...without license from the Council...[he] shall forfeit to the public treasury...one hundred pounds” or be subject to corporal punishment if not able to pay. Such draconian measures indicate a high level of distress and uncertainty felt by the people and understood by the General Court. Indeed, the colony faced the risk of becoming naked due to abandonment.

²⁹ Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 79.

Plymouth Colony, as the instigator of King Philip's War, expressed its fair share of consternation about the state of affairs during the first half of the war. By October, Plymouth's Court impressed large numbers of soldiers from each of its towns, even the smaller ones. On October 4, it ordered that "every one that comes to the meeting on the Lords Day" was to "bring his armes with him...furnished with att least six charges of powder and shott." Failure to comply resulted in a fine. The concern over ammunition availability was serious. Colonists were not to "shoot of any gun on any...occasion...except at an Indian or a woolfe." If one did so they forfeited "five shillings for every such shott."³⁰

Plymouth realized that its town layouts had been poorly thought out. The "barbarous heathen" were able "to spoile and destroy most of the habitations" in the town of Dartmouth (nearby present-day New Bedford) because of their "scattered way of living." The Court ordered that any "rebuilding or resettling" would involve living "compact...as they may be in a capacity both to defend themselves" and conveniently "better attend the publicke worship of God."³¹ The colony's acknowledgement of their defenses and the reasoning that it was due to God's "provocation" reveals the anxiety underlying the Court's words. If the war was a message of God's displeasure, then there was no guarantee that the destruction of a few towns was sufficient to forestall God's wrath. The distinct possibility remained that the colonists would continue to have defensive difficulties. By October 14, Dartmouth was back under Plymouth's control, although completely abandoned by its inhabitants. The Court prohibited "all and every of

³⁰ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England Vol 5, 1668-1678* (Boston: William White, 1855), 176-177.

³¹ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth Vol. 5, 177.*

the former inhabitants” from returning because “satisfactory security” could not be established.³²

On December 6 the Court sent a letter to “severall plantations” that urgently requested them to offer up soldiers for the Great Swamp expedition. The court specifically desired the “ablest and most suitable men” that were “improved in the service.” The specific request reveals that previous requests yielded unfit fighters. Kyle Zelner notes that in Massachusetts, the local militia committees often impressed the towns “undesirables,” such as outsiders, vagrants, or those with a history of crime. Many town leaders chose those to fight based the desire to empty their towns of unwanted people, not their military prowess.³³ This time the Plymouth Court wanted quality recruits, but unfortunately, there was not enough money to pay them. As an incentive, the Court offered “the lands and other profits of the war” as “security for the soldiers pay.” The towns were also responsible for supplying the soldiers with “well-fitted clothing, knapsacks and ammunition.”³⁴

Several weeks later, the Court’s frustration was on full display. At the session of December 30, 1675, the council of war ordered that if those “pressed into the country’s service...shall neglect or refuse to go forth on the service,” they would “forfeit ten pounds in money” or “suffer imprisonment” for up to six months. Another court order directed the colony’s constables to apprehend anyone who left “his own town” when impressed for service and went “to another [town] within this colony.” Later in the same session the Court expressed great concern over the “damage and prejudice” done to the

³² Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol. 5, 179.

³³ Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip’s War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 107-108.

³⁴ Shurtleff, ed., *Records of New Plymouth* Vol. 5, 182.

colony “by the withdrawing of the inhabitants therof in this time of publicke calamitie and trouble.” The magistrates ordered that colonists were to “abide in each town...to which he belongs and not depart.” If one did decide to evacuate, he would forfeit his “whole personal estate” to the “colony’s use.” The Court authorized government magistrates to “make seizure” of anyone with the intent to withdraw from their estates as well as “all such barques, boates, or carts as shall be found employed in transporting of the goods” of those individuals. This court session reveals a population under extreme stress and hardship. Many decided to abandon their homes and towns for safer locales, and many soldiers either directly or avoided impressments. Halfway through King Philip’s War, Plymouth colony’s populace was neither confident nor stable. Instead, the colonial government faced the difficulties of motivating an unwilling populace to fight when they were apt to retreat from their homes.

Rhode Island colony’s public records offer some evidence concerning their leaders’ appraisal of the situation during King Philip’s War. Rhode Island suffered some of the worst damage of the war including the burning of Providence. Indians, possibly zealous Narragansetts, attacked the town in July 1675 and a severe attack burned most of the town’s structures in March 1676, including the home of Roger Williams.³⁵ In a letter addressed to the residents of Providence and Warwick, the Rhode Island Assembly acknowledged that the “present troubles with the natives is and hath been great, very hazardous, and prejudiciall to the inhabitants of this Colony.” The magistrates told the town leaders that the colony was “not of the ability to maintaine sufficient garrisons for the security of our out plantations.” They advised the residents that the best course of

³⁵ Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 66, 168.

action would be to “repaire to this Island that is the most secureist” (Aquidneck Island). The letter was not a strict evacuation order; the colony would “not positively oppose you therein” if anyone wished to remain. However, they warned that “those that do so doth make themselves a prey, and what they have as goods...will be a reliefe to the enemy at their pleasure.”³⁶ Here, the Rhode Island leaders fully acknowledged that the colony was incapable of defending against enemy Indian attacks, admitting that the resources of those towns was likely already forfeited to hostile Indians. Eight months into King Philip’s War, Rhode Island colony was advising its residents to abandon their homes and seek shelter elsewhere, hardly the words of confident war administrators.

William Harris was one of the prominent Rhode Islanders who evacuated to Aquidneck Island. He wrote a lengthy letter to an acquaintance in England after the capture of Philip at Mount Hope in August 1676 in which he described the experience of the war. From the start, Harris acknowledged how difficult and trying it was. Harris apologized for lack of communication between Rhode Island and England, explaining that “the lines of communication are so interrupted by the war that there is no safe sending or passing...without mortal danger.” The colony was in “a very lamentable condition since the war began, causing much concern what would become of the inhabitants.”³⁷ Harris spoke to the trepidation felt about the Indians when he said, “indeed, could [the Indians] but have continued to have gott powder...and not been divided, they might have forced us to some Islands, there to have planted a little corn, and

³⁶ John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England Volume II: 1664 to 1677* (Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856, reprinted by New York: AMS Press, 1968), 533-534.

³⁷ Douglas Edward Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports on King Philip’s War: The Second William Harris Letter of August, 1676* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1963), 16.

fished for our living.”³⁸ That lifestyle did not excite Harris. Here, he confirms the feelings of other colonial leaders that the war brought into question the viability of New England. The Indian attacks caused merchants and landowners like Harris to envision a colony under constant harassment by Indians, where commercial activity would be impossible. Harris reiterates toward the end of his letter that “the present sad war hath impeded...travelling aboute” and “all persons” had been removed from the lands threatened by Indians. He lamented that “fifteen hundred English souls or thereabout” were slain, revealing the extreme sense of loss and helplessness shared by many colonists. Harris felt that the English living on Aquidneck Island were not defenders, but prisoners in a land where God had forsaken them.

Harris acknowledged the English shortcomings in prosecuting the war. He remarked that Indian ambushes “did the English great & sore damage, by reason of their unpreparedness at such unexpected times.” He described an altercation where Indians killed about sixty Englishmen, but “the English sent out slowly, taking much time in council & difference in debates, while the Indians with the greatest expedition did great mischiefs.” Harris’ description portrays the Indians as a confident and deadly force, while the English were correspondingly slow, indecisive, and ineffective in their responses.

Harris’s fear of the Indians was intense and reveals a remarkable acknowledgement of the English perceptions of Indian strength that historians have tended to dismiss. Harris theorized that the war was planned for quite some time. He alleged that Philip “hath resolved this war...and all the Indians with him in these partes, appears, by their preparation for it” including “great quanteties of corne...powder, shot

³⁸ Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 18.

& arrows.” The English perceived this accumulation, but the Indians lied and “pretended [that] their preparation [was] against the Mohawks,” but it was really “aimed at the English.”³⁹ Harris shared the prejudices of most of his compatriots that the Indians were conniving, scheming liars, which made them all the more dangerous. In a letter from the commissioner of the United Colonies to William Coddington, governor of Rhode Island, the commissioner reinforced the notion of a “plot” that was “generall (if not universal) among the Indians, and strikes at the interest of all the English in N.E.”⁴⁰ The common feeling among the English was that the Indians had planned their destruction for some time and lied about it, and there might be no limit to how many Indians were waiting to attack.

Harris’ descriptions of some Indian attacks reveal that the Indians realized the English feared them. Indeed, the Indians harassed and taunted them when possible in order to stoke those fears. Harris noted that early in the war the Indians “did much hurt...burning houses, taking cattle, killing men, and women and children, taking others captive.” At the same time the enemy was “triumphing and boasting that God was departed from the English & was with them.”⁴¹ Here the Indians demonstrated that they understood the Puritan religion well enough to use a kind psychological warfare intended to undermine their confidence even further.

Even non-hostile Indians joined in the derision. Harris complained that “some Indians that were friends to the English derided the English’s sparing delay.” These friendly Indians mocked the English by telling them they “spent much time in council &

³⁹ Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 22.

⁴⁰ “The Commissioners’ Letter” in *Further Letters on King Philip’s War* (Providence, E. L. Freeman Co., 1923), 18.

⁴¹ Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 19.

answerably in feasting & drinking wine.” These Indians even remarked that “when they heard of some slayne...they were sorry for them,” but when more were sent they “came to the same end” and it seemed that the “English were in want of Arms & provisions.”⁴² These Indians were clearly aware of the English weaknesses and must have understood how to exploit them. More importantly, however, is the fact that Harris knew that the Indians were well aware of English vulnerability, justifying his lack of confidence about the colony’s future.

Harris described a few more episodes that showcased the Indians’ ability to manipulate English fears and weaknesses. He told the story of one Captain Pierce, who wrote a letter to Providence asking them if they “would the next morning aide him to fight the Indians” in March 1676. The letter was never sent but Pierce and his unit of seventy still attempted to chase some Indians the next morning “who seemed to flee.” After being led out some distance, Pierce found himself “beset rounde with about a thousand” Indians, who “fought till their ammunition was spent.” The Indians sensed the Pierce’s helplessness at that point and then “ran upon them, killed some, and took others.” Harris then alleged that the prisoners were tortured in the “most cruel, barbarous manner.” The Indian combatants in this scene obviously knew the English carried limited ammunition and were also aware that they would waste what supplies they did have. Harris believed that this same group of Indians “came to Providence” a few days later, “with shouting and yelling coming all together...at one side of the town.” The sound of shrieking Indians frightened the colonists into a garrison. Some settlers on the inside managed to kill some of the Indians, which caused them to withdraw, but not before “they burned many houses...drove away many cattle and horses, then killed near a

⁴² Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 34.

hundred cattle” but “let them lie and did not eat them.” A day later the Indians went to Patuxet, where there was only one garrison. The Indians “bid them [the inhabitants] come out quickly or they would eat them, and began to undermine the garrison.” Luckily, the garrison held and the Indians withdrew when they “saw they could not safely enter.”⁴³

The Indians’ seeming indifference toward eating cattle and professed interest in eating colonists no doubt had a terrifying effect that the Indians were well aware of. The war not only took an extreme toll on the colonies physically and financially, but also mentally. William Harris described a populace under extreme stress, where seemingly the English colonists’ worst nightmares came true and everything they valued was forfeited. Under such conditions, it is hard to believe that the average colonist or the leadership felt particular confident about New England’s situation.

Other colonial leaders shared the New Englanders’ doubts as well as their fears. Governor Berkeley of Virginia expressed these sentiments in some letters to interested parties in England. Wilcomb Washburn excerpts these letters in his 1957 article, “Governor Berkeley and King Philip’s War,” which deals with communication between Massachusetts, Virginia, and England. Washburn’s conclusion is that the leaders of Massachusetts and Virginia “both saw the hand of God applied to chasten the pride of man” when difficulties faced the other colony. Both wished to impress England that their colonization model, be it purification of the Church of England or acceptance of royal

⁴³ Leach, ed., *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 44-46.

authority, was the superior course.⁴⁴ However, the letters from Governor Berkeley reveal that the Virginia leadership was well aware of the damage done to New England during King Philip's War and feared that a similar destructive conflict might break out in his own colony.

Writing to an agent of Virginia in England, Berkeley remarked that "the Indians in New England have burned divers considerable villages and have made them desert more than one hundred and fifty miles of those places they had formerly seated." Every time the New Englanders met the Indians in battle, even with the numbers equal, "the Indians have alwise had the better of it." Also, the "New England men are in a deplorable want of come and if this warr continue two years longer many of them must be forced to desert the place which divers already had done."⁴⁵ Berkeley's remarks reflect the attitude of many New Englanders who felt that those colonies could not sustain the war. His opinion was that the Indians had the upper hand in the conflict and the New England colonists would eventually have to abandon their colonies if hostilities did not cease. The acknowledgement of supply problems confirms that most colonists familiar with New England knew that they were not well prepared to fight the Indians in a prolonged conflict.

In April 1676, Berkeley wrote to Thomas Ludwell that the Indians in New England "destroyed divers towns...killd more than a thousand fighting men, seldom were worsted in any encounter, and have made the New England men desert above a hundred miles of ground which they had...built towns on." Berkeley was very concerned about

⁴⁴ Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Governor Berkeley and King Philip's War," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Sep., 1957): 363-365, 377.

⁴⁵ Governor Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell, 16 Feb 1676 in Washburn, "Governor Berkeley and King Philip's War," 366-367.

how New England's expansion over the past few decades was so easily rolled back by an Indian war. The goal of the colonies was to grow and prosper, and unmistakably the Indians reversed decades of growth and investment. Berkeley noted again that New England was in "such want of provisions" but that Virginia could not (or would not) supply them. Furthermore, "they had lost all their Beaver trade" and "have nothing to carry to the Barbadoes." Berkeley concluded that "if this war lasts one Yeare longer they in New England will be the poorest miserablest People of all the Plantations of the English in America."⁴⁶

In another letter to Secretary Henry Coventry, Berkeley wrote that King Philip's war "in all reasonable conjectures will end in their utter ruine."⁴⁷ Several times in his letters to England, Governor Berkeley reiterated the dire situation of New England and his belief that those colonies would be at best severely weakened and at worst impoverished beyond rehabilitation. His sentiment echoes that of John Pynchon, the magistrates of the New England General Courts, and William Harris.

Is it possible that Berkeley was exaggerating the situation in New England to gain favor for his colony in England? This is Washburn's contention, but it cannot be known for certain. Given Berkeley's anxiety over Virginia's possible Indian enemies, it seems unlikely that promotion of Virginia was the major motivation for his letters. Berkeley was nervous that what happened to New England might also happen to Virginia.

Washburn writes that "by a series of blunders, Virginia, in the fall of 1675, fell into a war

⁴⁶ Governor Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell, 1 Apr 1676 in Washburn, "Governor Berkeley and King Philip's War," 371.

⁴⁷ Governor Berkeley to Henry Coventry, 1 Apr 1676 in Washburn, "Governor Berkeley and King Philip's War," 373.

with the Susquehannock Indians of Maryland.”⁴⁸ Berkeley was perplexed about the recent loss of “about forty men, women, and children in Potomac and Rapahannock.” He was thankful that “our neighbour Indians are pretty well secured for it is no doubt...they alsoe would be rid of us if they could.” He was also very concerned about reports from New England that they could not destroy the Indians’ “smiths shopps of which they say they have seene many.”⁴⁹ Berkeley seemed to harbor many of the same fears and anxiety about Indian strength that New Englanders displayed.

Like the New England colonists, Berkeley had very little trustworthy intelligence regarding Indian strength. He articulated a strong sense of anxiety over rumors of Indian uprisings in his vicinity and the possibility King Philip’s War would spread southward. The address to the King from the Governor and Assembly of March 24, 1676 expressed “to our grieffe we find by certain intelligence...that those Indians have been and still are endeavouring to hyre other Nations of Indians” to “come downe upon James River.” The concern was that “a generall Combination, of all from New England hither” would fall upon the English at Virginia. The Assembly acknowledged that “we much feare that those Indians of New England having been unfortunately successful there...will be a great encouragement to ours here.”

Berkeley was worried about defending against a large Indian force, which could not be done “without a vast expence.”⁵⁰ Writing to Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson, Berkeley argued that the “New England Indians...sent emissaries as farr as our parts to

⁴⁸ Governor Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell, 16 Feb 1676 in Washburn, “Governor Berkeley and King Philip’s War,” 366.

⁴⁹ Governor Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell, 16 Feb 1676 in Washburn, “Governor Berkeley and King Philip’s War,” 366-367.

⁵⁰ Address to the King from the Governor and Assembly, 24 Mar 1676 in Washburn, “Governor Berkeley and King Philip’s War,” 369.

endue our Indians to do the like and it is almost incredible what intelligence distant Indians hold with one the other.” The possibility of a confederated Indian assault was not something Berkeley wished to face, since “all English planters hold more land than they are able to defend.”⁵¹ In Virginia, the colonists were also afraid of the Indians. Even though the governor tried to criticize New England’s leadership, he was susceptible to the same fears and anxieties to which New Englanders succumbed.

Berkeley’s letters to England demonstrate that the fear of Indians was real and not mere rhetoric and not even confined to New England. Very few English colonists felt confident about their ability to fight an Indian force on their own terms. The Indians, more savvy than many give them credit for, understood that the English feared them and designed their attacks to maximize their psychological advantage. The English were not confident about victory for much of King Philip’s War. Every New England colony expressed pessimism about the state of its defenses and some colonial leaders displayed clear gloom about their future. Historians have been too quick to attribute strength and inevitability to the colonists simply because they were scions of the more civilized society. From the perspective of the colonists at the time, the outcome of the war was anything but inevitable. Some even noted themselves that they were unprepared for such a conflict. Inevitability seems dubious when the historical actors themselves were so uncertain.

⁵¹ Governor Berkeley to Joseph Williamson, 1 Apr 1676 in Washburn, “Governor Berkeley and King Philip’s War,” 375.

EPILOGUE

UNPREPAREDNESS AND ITS DISCONTENTS

For generations, King Philip's War was characterized by historians as an inevitable contest to determine who would ultimately control New England: the English or the Indians. Historians have tended to downplay the advantages of the Indians and stress the overwhelming superiority of the English due to their purported advanced level of civilization.¹ This idea continued through the 1970s, even though some historians began to revisit the race war thesis. By the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, a number of fine studies emerged examining the war, but many reiterated the theme that the English military system was inherently superior, the logistical supply "vast," and complete defeat of the English "impossible," while Indian weaknesses were simultaneously "crucial."² However, Indian and English actions during the period suggest that a view less colored by hindsight might be useful. The assessment of the situation by an English colonial leader in 1675 would have been utterly the opposite.

A fresh look at some of the sources from the period prior to and during King Philip's War paints another picture. Prior to the war, for decades, New England colonists nervously monitored Indian actions, particularly concerning weapons. These observations were out of mere curiosity, but rather sincere concern that Indians could

¹ George W. Ellis and John E. Morris, *King Philip's War* (New York: The Grafton Press, 1906), 54-56.

² Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 128.

Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 108.

become violent and seriously disrupt English enterprise in the colonies. The English both distrusted and feared Indians, particularly when armed, fearing that any armed Indian could easily murder an Englishman. During King Philip's War these nightmares would come true, resulting in intense hatred and accusations of a long-held conspiracy.

The colonial justice system prosecuted Indian arms infractions far more diligently than those committed by colonists. In whatever way possible, they tried to restrict Indian arms acquisitions or otherwise keep weapons out of Indian hands. Those efforts were futile. Control over the illicit arms trade was non-existent because both Indians and enterprising European merchants realized the immense profitability of it. The colonists were well aware of their shortcomings in restricting Indian access to arms.

English knowledge of Indian affairs was at best sparse and at worst non-existent. Few Englishmen understood what went on in the Indian villages outside their immediate surroundings or even how many Indians might be lurking in not-too-distant woods. John Pynchon tried desperately for decades to keep abreast of Indian affairs, only to find that his people were woefully inadequate at discovering anything about them once war broke out. Leading New Englanders were long aware of the danger Indians represented and were also aware of their own shortcomings in defeating the Indians on their own terms. For this reason, assistance from friendly Indians was desperately sought by the New England colonies to combat hostile Indians. For years, John Pynchon admonished his friend John Winthrop, Jr, the governor of Connecticut, to maintain good relations with the Mohegan Indians. He knew that if those Indians turned against the colonies the consequences could be dire. King Philip's War proved him correct.

For decades prior to King Philip's War, right up to its outbreak, colonial leaders constantly tried to bolster their supplies of arms and ammunition. Some historians argue that New England at the time suffered from some "geopolitical insecurities."³ However, the unease was more focused than that. The decades-long obsession with arms inspections and powder stocks reflect the colonial knowledge of fundamental shortcomings in their ability to fight a war. Time after time colonial leaders tried to coerce their towns to uphold security standards to their liking. These efforts were mostly in vain. While some towns did comply with colonial orders regarding their military preparedness, many did not, and these were often the ones that suffered seriously in King Philip's War. When colonial records reveal chronic shortfalls in powder supplies, how can the English logistical system be termed inexhaustible? It cannot.

Finally, the colonists' own words during the war suggest anything but confidence. Few colonial leaders felt that the interior could be held and town after town was abandoned. Colonists were forced to leave their homes and livelihoods, and often everything they owned. They reacted with terror during Indian attacks and imagined thousands of hostiles in the woods beyond waiting to fall upon any town, even substantial ones like Providence or Springfield.

The Indians stoked this fear, taunting and baiting the English when given the opportunity. The English believed that there were enormous combinations of enemy Indians waiting to descend upon their helpless towns. So called intelligence reports circulated, possibly by the Indians themselves, fueling the fires of hysteria. The Indians used those notions to their advantage by burning the colonists' most prized possessions

³ Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England 1675-1678* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), 33.

and mocking their practices. Even friendly Indians noted the futility of English military efforts and derided them for it. English sources from the time portray a society in turmoil, recoiling from serious defeats. If questioned whether they would ever recover, most English colonists would have answered, “no” until the late spring of 1676.

The conclusion to be drawn from this study is simple: the English were scared. They were scared for at least decades prior to King Philip’s War. There was much consternation over the issue of surrounding Indians, their trustworthiness, and their weapons. There was good reason to be scared of the Indians because the English were ill-prepared to fight a prolonged conflict with them. Finally, those fears came to a head in 1675 when King Philip’s War broke out. The worst nightmares of the English colonists came true, revealing an atmosphere of terror throughout the colonies and causing many to lose all hope and abandon their homes. This is hardly confidence, and historians should reconsider attributing inevitability in war to a people who expressed anxiety, fear, and doubt throughout much of it. The colonists both feared and hated the Indians in their midst. They feared Indians before the war because of the threat they represented. During and after the war, the English colonists hated them because the Indians so visibly revealed the ineptitude and unpreparedness of the English.

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