

T H E L O N G

*Three hundred thirty years ago, a great Indian*

S H A D O W O F

*chieftain nearly obliterated the New England*

K I N G

*colonies and changed the course of American history.*

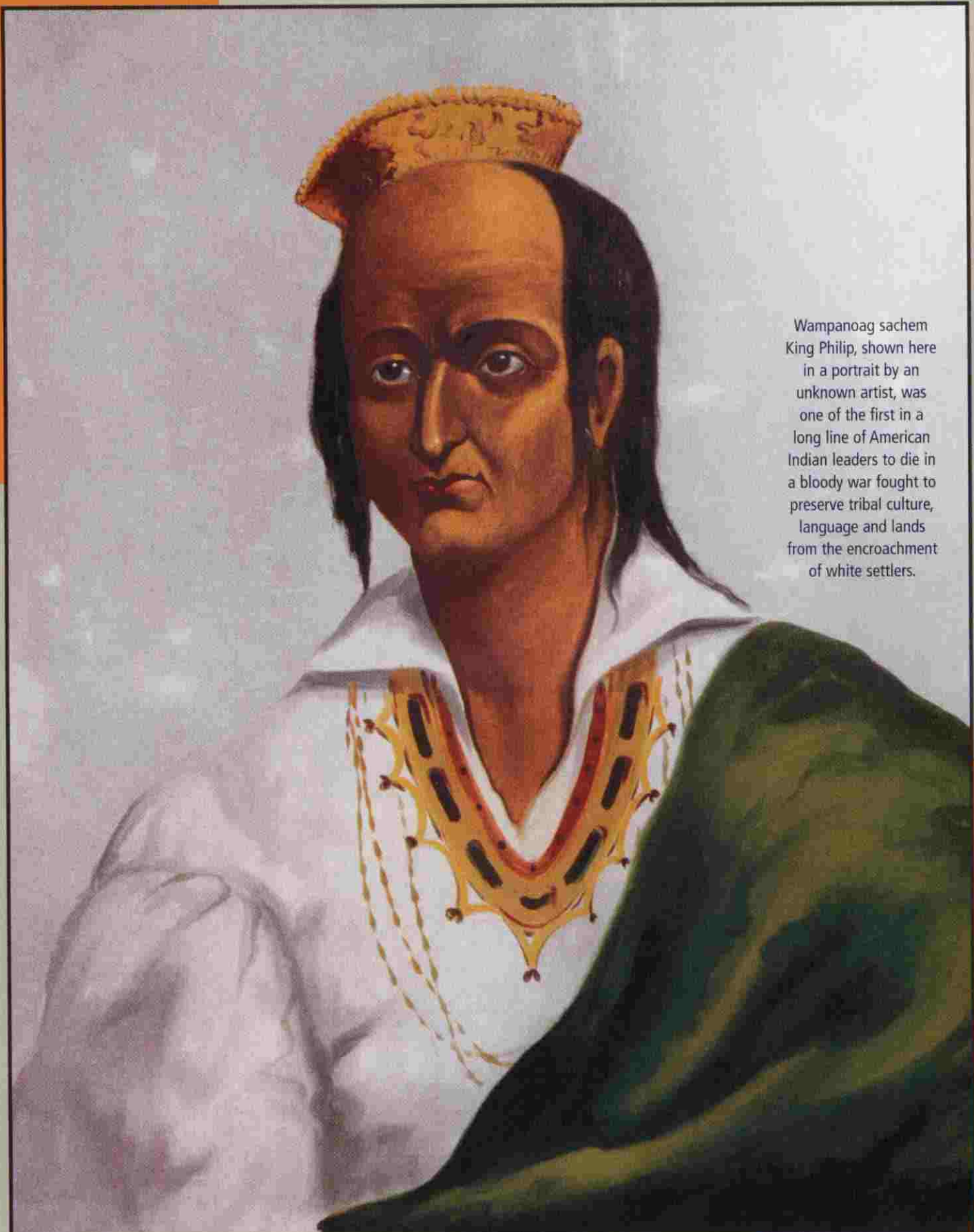
P H I L I P

**ALL THE WAR'S SCARS** have disappeared from the landscape of southern New England, where, more than three centuries ago, the great Wampanoag Indian sachem, or chieftain, King Philip waged a fierce and bitter struggle against the white settlers of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. The old fortresses of the colonists—sturdy blockhouses of wood and stone—have all vanished. So too have the signs of Indian villages in what used to be the fertile lands of the great Wampanoag, Narragansett and Mohegan tribes. But near Bristol, Rhode Island, beneath a gray bluff of rocks called Old Mount Hope, where the Sakonnet River flows

gently into Narragansett Bay, one can still find a place called King Philip's Seat, a rough pile of boulders that legend says is the spot where the Indian sachem planned the ferocious war of 1675-1676, and where, when all was lost, he returned in great sadness to die.

It is in the shadowy places like King Philip's Seat and other obscure landmarks that one may feel the ghostly presence of Philip, the Wampanoag warrior sachem who nearly succeeded in driving the English out of New England in a war that inflicted greater casualties in proportion to the population than any other war in American history. Down through the centuries, though,

BY G L E N N W. L A F A N T A S I E



Wampanoag sachem King Philip, shown here in a portrait by an unknown artist, was one of the first in a long line of American Indian leaders to die in a bloody war fought to preserve tribal culture, language and lands from the encroachment of white settlers.



## King Philip or Metacom?

**WHAT IS THE** proper name to use when referring to the great Wampanoag sachem who fought and died in the conflict called King Philip's War? Modern scholars and Indians cannot agree. Some argue that the chieftain should be known as Metacom, his Wampanoag name, for "King Philip" was a name given to him by the English.

Yet Metacom seems not to have been the sachem's only Indian name. Eastern Algonquians changed their names periodically—ethnologists have never been able to pinpoint exactly why—and Metacom may not have been the name given him at birth. Moreover, different versions of the name Metacom appear in the 17th-century colonial records, including Metacomet (which reflects the final guttural syllable found in most Algonquian names of the era) and Pometacom. Some scholars believe that Metacom was also known for a time as Wewesawamit or Wewasowannett, and others have noted that he was sometimes called Philip Keitasscot, although the latter name actually seems to be a variation of the word "sachem" in Algonquian.

The Plymouth Grand Court records reveal that it was Wamsutta, Metacom's older brother, who asked the English to rename the two young sachems after their father Massasoit's death, in accordance with the native practice of changing one's name. The court complied with the request, and the two brothers accepted the princely Macedonian names of Alexander and Philip. In time, Philip came to refer to himself

by this given name, especially in his dealings with the English, and he sometimes signed documents with the letter P. Some evidence even suggests he had dropped the name Metacom entirely by the time of King Philip's War. For this reason, I have referred to him as King Philip, or Philip, in the accompanying article, just as most historians continue to call him by that name in their writings. As



Jill Lepore has convincingly argued in her fine study, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (1998): "Since he seems to have initially taken 'Philip' in earnest, calling him 'Metacom' today is no truer to his memory, especially because 'Metacom' became a popular substitute for 'Philip' only in the nineteenth century, when white playwrights, poets, and novelists sought to make the war sound more authentically, and romantically, Indian." G.W.L.

King Philip has not been well remembered. The Puritans scorned him in life and denigrated his memory after his death. In the 18th century, Paul Revere, the famous Revolutionary and self-taught artist, engraved a portrait of Philip that made him look hideous, even comical. Historians of New England have written reams about King Philip's War, but in their descriptions of burning villages, booming muskets and brutal massacres, King Philip the man has been lost.

Lost, too, is the meaning of Philip's unsuccessful attempt to win a lasting victory against his white enemies. What King Philip experienced in his defeat was a pattern that would repeat itself over and over, down through the subsequent centuries, as whites spread their settlements into Indian territory. The pattern itself was insidious. As a first step, whites would

Nearly 100 years after King Philip's death, when Boston silversmith and engraver Paul Revere published this image of the Wampanoag Chieftain, the Indian's name still raised fear in the minds of New Englanders. Revere, who never saw King Philip, seems to have based the portrait on portrayals of two Mohawk leaders painted more than 50 years before.

invade Indian lands and establish permanent settlements. Later, after a period of trade and friendly exchanges, the Indians came to realize that they were being swindled, usually out of their valuable lands, by the whites. When they resisted, the Indians almost always faced an enemy that outnumbered them and possessed superior weapons and technology. In the end, as the pattern repeated itself, the Indians ultimately faced two untenable choices: extermination or acculturation. In the case of King Philip, he chose to gamble on war—giving his life in the end—rather than acknowledge his white enemy as his master.

Little in his background foretold Philip's later greatness. His life began around 1638 in the Indian village of Sowams, near modern Warren, R.I., and his fellow Wampanoags knew him as Metacom. He was the second son of Massasoit, the principal sachem of the Wampanoags and the same man who had befriended the Pilgrims when they settled at Plymouth in 1620. During the early years of English settlement, Massasoit had worked diligently to maintain the peace with both the Plymouth Separatists and the Massachusetts Bay Puritans.

Keeping the peace between Indians and whites in 17th-century New England was no easy task. The white colonists were hungry for land, and their settlements began to spread quickly throughout the lands of the Wampanoags and other local tribes. Roger Williams, who founded the town of Providence in 1636 after being banished from



Massachusetts for arguing, among other things, that Indians should be paid for their land, said that the English suffered from a disease called "God land"—something he likened to "God gold" among the Spanish. As the years went by, the Wampanoags felt more and more pressure to give up their tribal territory, and Massasoit, wanting to accommodate his white neighbors and reap the trade goods that the settlers often used to pay for lands, sold off increasing amounts of the Indian country. Undoubtedly he understood the awful consequences if he did not comply with English demands for Indian land.

Philip's father, like so many other Indians of New England, took heed of the outcome of the war fought in 1636 by the Puritans against the Pequot Indians of Connecticut, a war that came close to exterminating the entire Pequot tribe. As a result, Massasoit placated the English by continuing to sell land. The Wampanoags, given their proximity to the largest white settlements, were particularly under pressure to accept English culture and laws.

**DESPITE THE CHALLENGES** facing his father and his tribe, Philip lived most of his life in peaceful obscurity. He took one of his cousins as his wife, a woman named Wootonekanuske. Together they lived not far from Sowams, in a village called Montaup (which the English settlers called Mount Hope). The historical records are vague about Philip's children; he and Wootonekanuske may have had several sons and daughters, but the extant sources mention only one son. Little is known about Philip's private and family life because the white colonists paid relatively little attention to him.

Until the 1660s, that is. In the winter of 1661, Massasoit died at the age of 81. Philip's older brother, Wamsutta, became the principal sachem of the tribe. In a gesture of friendship and fidelity, the two brothers appeared before the Plymouth Grand Court and took the English names of the two legendary princes of ancient Macedonia, Alexander and Philip—names appropriate to their high station among the Wampanoag people.

Yet the friendly gestures soon melted away in the heat of suspicion and distrust. The English colonists quickly came to believe that Alexander and Philip were hatching plans for a war against the whites. In 1662, Plymouth authorities sent an armed guard to arrest Alexander and bring him to trial in an English court. When Alexander pledged his undying friendship to the white settlers, the court released him and allowed him to return home, but he had contracted a serious illness in the English settlement and died on the trail before reaching home. Many Wampanoags believed that Alexander had been poisoned by the settlers at Plymouth, and some of the Indians wanted to avenge his death by attacking the colonists.

King Philip, probably in his mid-20s at the time, assumed the duties of principal sachem and managed to calm down the hotheads in the tribe. For the next nine years, he sustained peaceful relations with Plymouth and the other Puritan colonies, all of which had grouped together under a regional governmental body called the United Colonies of New England. As the Puritan colonies banded together for strength, the Indians of southern New England grew increasingly weak in numbers and influence. During these years of peace, Philip continued his father's practice of selling lands to the whites. But he soon found himself on a slippery slope. As he sold more and more land, the white settlers established towns closer to the Wampanoag villages, including the settlement of Swansea, not far from Montaup and Sowams. The colonial authorities also decided to regulate Philip's real estate transactions by requiring him to obtain permission from the Grand Court before selling any more land.

Increased contact between Indians and whites bred increased suspicion and distrust on both sides. Repeatedly during the late 1660s and early 1670s, the Plymouth magistrates—often the victims of their own paranoia and gullibility—suspected that King Philip was plotting with the French in Canada or the Dutch in New Netherlands to attack the settlements of New England. Philip denied any involvement with the French or Dutch, but he failed to convince the Plymouth officials of his innocence. In 1671, after the colonists' suspicions became a conviction that Philip was planning to attack their towns, they forced him to sign a new treaty that pledged his friendship to them. They also extracted a promise to pay them an annual tribute of 100 pounds sterling and to surrender his warriors' muskets to the Plymouth authorities. Not all of Philip's men gave up their guns, however, and the Plymouth officials saw the lack of total compliance as another threat of war. On September 29, 1671, King Philip signed yet another treaty with the whites that brought about what he had been trying to avoid all along: the subjugation of his people under the laws of Plymouth colony and the English king.

Philip did not seem to take the agreement seriously. He held the colonial authorities in utter contempt and complained on one occasion that the Plymouth magistrates did not hold the highest station in their government. If they wanted him to obey them, they



A witness watches from the background as one of John Sassamon's murderers hides his body in a pond, under the ice. The murder, blamed on King Philip, served as a catalyst for a bloody outbreak of violence between Indians and whites.



Benjamin Church, shown at right in a Paul Revere engraving, used the knowledge he gained from years of contact with New England Indians to emerge as one of the premier colonial leaders in the war against them.

should send their king to negotiate with him, not their governors. "Your governor is but a subject," he said. "I shall treat only with my brother, King Charles [III] of England. When he comes, I am ready."

It is nearly impossible to know what Philip was planning in the mid-1670s as he and the English veered closer and closer to war. A reconsideration of the scarce available evidence suggests that Philip never did develop an overall policy toward the English, or a grand design for a conspiracy against them; however, he may have hoped on more than one occasion to rid himself of his white neighbors by attacking their settlements, or finding allies who could help him subvert the colonists' rising dominance. Styled "king" by the English, Philip actually lacked the sweeping political authority over his own people attributed to him by ethnocentric whites who assumed that the governmental structure of Indian tribes resembled the English monarchy. Rivalries with other Algonquian tribes—and the success of the English policy of divide and conquer—precluded any military coalition among the Wampanoags and their Indian neighbors.

**WHETHER OR NOT** King Philip was conspiring with other Indians to wipe out the English, the white authorities certainly thought he was. So did some Indians. John Sassamon, an Indian who had served for a time as Philip's aide and translator, believed the Wampanoag sachem was indeed planning a pan-Indian conspiracy against the English. A convert to



COL. BENJAMIN CHURCH.

Christianity who had studied for a time at the Indian school at Harvard College, Sassamon lived for many years among the whites in Massachusetts, but in the 1660s he abandoned the English and joined Philip's band at Montaup. Later, Sassamon, who was described by another Indian as "a very cunning and plausible Indian, well skilled in the English Language," lived with a community of Christian Indians in Natick and eventually became an

Indian preacher.

In late January 1675, Sassamon, saying he feared for his own life, told Governor Josiah Winslow of Plymouth that King Philip was hatching a plot against the English. Despite all their earlier suspicions about Philip, Winslow and the other Plymouth officials refused to take Sassamon seriously—until they found his body beneath the ice in a pond. An Indian witness claimed that he had seen three Wampanoags murder Sassamon and throw his body into the water. Quickly the Plymouth authorities rounded up the suspects—all of whom belonged to Philip's band—and took them into custody. With great speed, the three Indians were tried, found guilty of murder and sentenced to be hanged. On June 8, 1675, two of the Indians were executed. But when the rope around the neck of the third man broke, allowing him for the moment to escape death, he confessed to Sassamon's murder and declared that Philip had masterminded the crime. The condemned man's confession did him no good; within a month he was executed by a Plymouth firing squad.

On December 19, 1675, some 1,000 colonists successfully attacked the fortified Narragansett village in the Great Swamp of Rhode Island. On this, the bloodiest day of the war, there were more than 1,000 Indian casualties, while the colonists lost only 70 dead and 150 wounded.





When word of the executions reached King Philip, he ordered his tribe to prepare for war. The Wampanoags sent their women and children to safety across Narragansett Bay and gathered their men together for war dances. Deputy Governor John Easton of Rhode Island visited Philip and tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Plymouth and the Indians. Even Plymouth's Governor Winslow sent letters of peace and friendship to the Wampanoags. For about a week there was a possibility that the crisis would pass without bloodshed.

Then the storm broke. On June 18, several Wampanoags raided a few deserted houses in the English settlement of Swansea, just north of Montaup. Two days later, more Indians returned to the settlement, entered the abandoned houses and set fire to two of them. Meanwhile, the Swansea settlers took refuge in fortified garrison houses and sent a messenger to Plymouth asking for military assistance. On June 23, a young English boy shot and killed an Indian who was looting his house—the first bloodshed in what was to become New England's most devastating war.

**NO ONE SEEMED ABLE** to control events, least of all King Philip. If his plan was to fight the English rather than submit to their ways, his military strategy revealed an utter lack of careful thought or purposeful design. On June 24, the Indians attacked Swansea in force, killing a total of 11 white settlers (including the boy who had fired the war's first shot) and wounding many others. Yet the approach of militia troops from Plymouth made it apparent that Philip could not remain in Swansea or even in Montaup.

Fleeing Montaup, King Philip led his warriors east

to the Pocasset country. A small group of white soldiers, commanded by militia Captains Benjamin Church and Matthew Fuller, tried to surprise Philip and his Wampanoags at Pocasset, but the Indians fled before the colonial troops could attack. Later, Church's company was ambushed in a fierce attack by Philip's Indians, who pushed the soldiers back to the Pocasset shore. Pinned down at the beach, Church and his men finally escaped when some Rhode Island patrol boats rescued them in the nick of time. Church later thanked "the glory of God and his protecting Providence" for helping to effect their narrow escape.

While soldiers from Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay assembled near Swansea and organized themselves into an army, Philip and his small force struck effectively at nearby undefended white settlements. During early July, Philip's warriors attacked the towns of Taunton, Rehoboth, Middleborough and Dartmouth, killing settlers and burning houses. Stealth and speed became Philip's greatest weapons, causing the English to live in constant fear of surprise attacks. Every noise in the forest sounded like the footsteps of moccasins or the echoes of war whoops.

On July 19, Church and his men, hoping once more to trap King Philip, returned to the swamps of Pocasset and fought a desperate battle with the Indians. The English suffered many casualties in the fight and withdrew, leaving behind seven or eight of their dead. After regrouping, Church and his men tried to surround the marshlands and force Philip to surrender. Instead, Philip and his Indians slipped through the swamp and disappeared into thick woods, leaving no trace. One English soldier observed that fighting in muddy swamps and tangled forests made victory for the whites nearly impossible. It was, he

said, "dangerous...to fight in such dismal woods," where the leaves muffled movements, "thick boughs" pinioned arms, and roots shackled feet and legs. "It is ill fighting with a wild Beast in his own Den," he complained.

Philip's escape from the clutches of Church and the colonial militia meant that the war would no longer be fought simply within the relatively small area around Mount Hope, Swansea and Pocasset. The conflict now burst out into the open country of New England, and the spread of its flames could not be contained. As Indian attacks multiplied throughout southern New England during the summer of 1675, white settlers believed that King Philip had taken supreme







command of a large army of Indian allies, although such was not the case. At best Philip led a war party of some 300 Indians, most of whom were Wampanoags or members of other bands residing in the vicinity of Montaup.

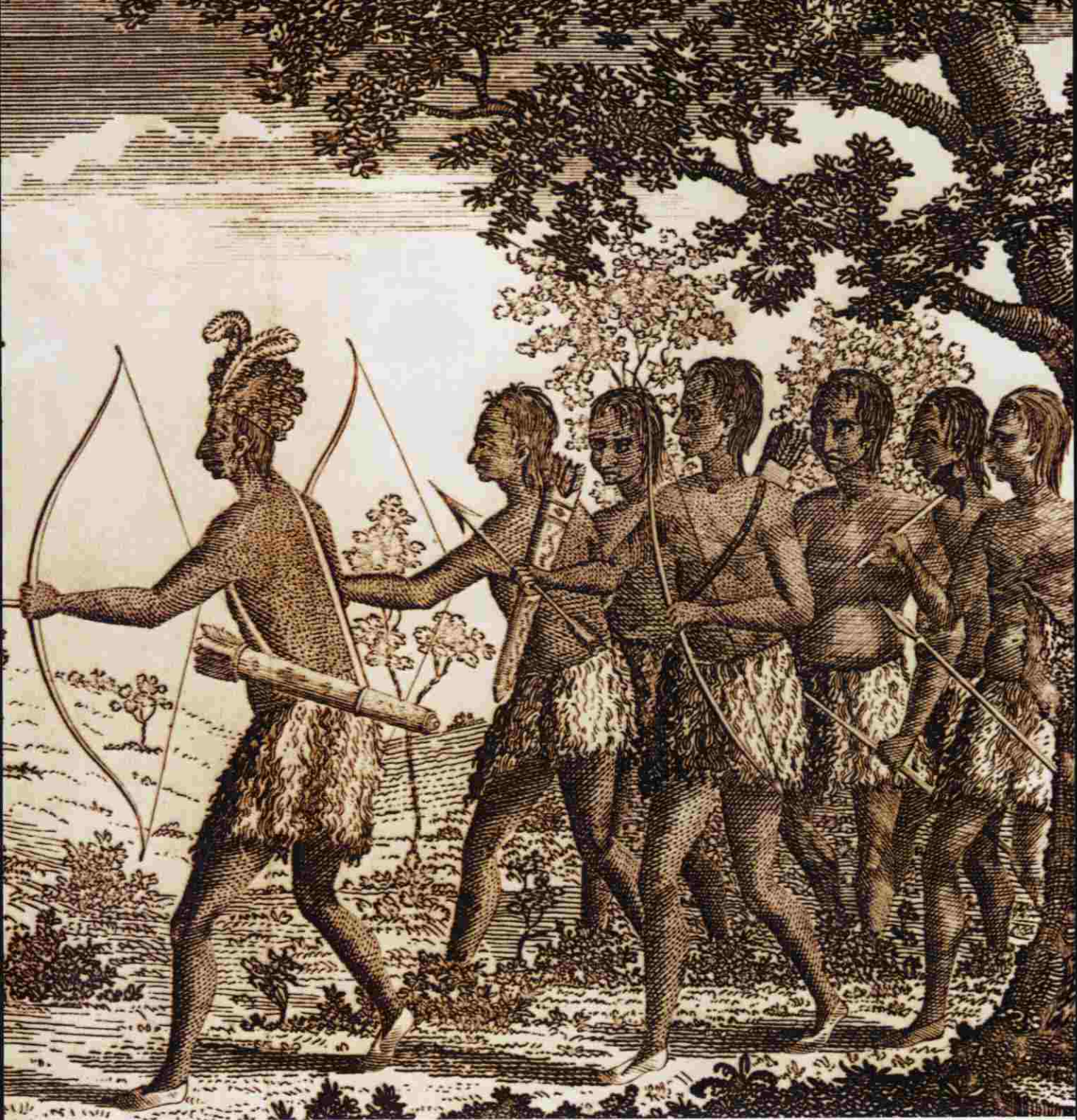
At the end of July, Philip took his warriors out of Wampanoag territory to link up with the Nipmucks of central Massachusetts. No one knows precisely

Although the engraver chose to portray the Indians half-naked and wielding bows and arrows in this standoff with colonists during King Philip's War, most Indians had adopted English firearms and some elements of European clothing.

what he did or where he went for the next several weeks. Throughout August, reports came into Plymouth and Boston that he was spotted in Massachusetts, or seen in Connecticut, but most of the reports were unconfirmed or vague in their details. Actually Philip seemed to be everywhere at once, or nowhere at all.

Meanwhile, the frontier exploded from Connecticut





to Maine with one Indian attack after another. The Narragansetts, who at first declared Philip their enemy, eventually allied with him as the fighting continued during the summer of 1675. But not all New England Indians rose up against the whites. The Niantics of southern Rhode Island, the Mohegans and Pequots of Connecticut, and several other smaller tribes throughout southern New England served with the English as scouts and warriors against Philip's forces, or maintained a nominal neutrality during the conflict.

English towns, however, remained vulnerable to surprise attacks, and one settlement after another was abandoned in the wake of devastating Indian assaults that took place from the summer to the late autumn of 1675. Taken off guard by the Indian uprising, and poorly prepared to fight a major war of any kind, the New England colonists seemed unable to win any decisive victory against their Indian enemies.

That situation changed in December when a combined English force invaded the territory of the Narragansetts in southern Rhode Island in hopes of



capturing Philip at an Indian fortress in the Great Swamp. On December 19, the soldiers assaulted the palisaded fort at a weak, unfinished corner, but Indian resistance was strong and effective. Impetuously, the English troops decided to fire the fort; in doing so, they burned the Indians' supply of food, which the soldiers themselves needed for their return march out of the swamp.

The Narragansetts fled the fort, leaving behind about 100 dead and 50 wounded warriors, and perhaps as many as 1,000 casualties among their women and children. The English lost 70 dead and about 150 wounded, many of whom later died in the winter cold from their wounds. The whites had at last won a victory, but at a very high cost. More important, the English troops had failed to capture King Philip.

Earlier intelligence reports had proven false; he was not in the fort at the time of the attack.

While the Narragansetts took flight from the Great Swamp, Philip and his Wampanoags were traveling west on a long journey through the winter snows. Philip's hope was to stay the winter with the Mohawk Indians of New York and convince them to join the war against the English. In January 1676, he encamped on the east side of the Hudson River, about 20 miles north of Albany, where he negotiated with the Mohawks and successfully avoided the English patrols that searched in vain for him throughout the New England countryside. But Philip's plan for Indian assistance backfired when Sir Edmund Andros, the governor of New York, persuaded

the Mohawks not only to remain loyal to the English but also to attack the Wampanoags in their winter camp.

So the war went on, and the casualties mounted with every engagement. Fleeing from the overpowering might of the Mohawks, King Philip took his followers to the upper Connecticut River valley. In March their attacks on white settlements grew even more merciless. On a single day, March 26, 1676, the Indians surprised several English towns and troops in separate assaults—at Longmeadow, Marlborough and at the Blackstone River, north of Pawtucket Falls. A few days later, the Indians attacked Rehoboth in Massachusetts and Providence in Rhode Island.

Even so, the tide of war was beginning to turn. Because the Indians had not planned on war, their stores of food and other supplies were being rapidly depleted. As spring approached, the tribes could not return to their seasonal camps to plant crops or to hunt the scarce game in the New England woods. Indians began starving to death. Others became convinced they could not totally defeat the English, who greatly outnumbered them and whose supplies of food and ammunition seemed unlimited. During the spring, many Indians decided to abandon the war and surrender to the English forces.

**KING PHILIP, HOWEVER,** refused to surrender. In July 1676, he and his Wampanoags returned to the Pocasset country, back to the lands where the war had begun the year before. All around southern New England, small expeditions of white soldiers were rounding up Indians and selling them off into slavery for profit. For almost a month, Philip and his people avoided capture by hiding in the woods and swamps. But he could not remain hidden forever. On July 20, Benjamin Church led a small expedition of English and Indian allies and attacked Philip's camp near Bridgewater. More than 170 Wampanoags were captured or killed in the battle, but King Philip escaped into the forest. Among the prisoners, however, were his wife, Wootonekanuske, and their 9-year-old son. After much debate, the colonists decided to spare their lives by selling them into slavery in the West Indies for a pound apiece. When Philip heard of their fate, he is reported to have said: "My heart breaks. Now I am ready to die."

Captain Church continued in hot pursuit of Philip. When an Indian deserter who blamed Philip for the death of a relative revealed that the sachem had returned to Montaup, Church led his men to the vicinity of the old Wampanoag village and down to the craggy shoreline below the impressive bluffs along the Sakonnet River. In the early morning hours of August 12, Church and his company found the small band of Indians sound asleep near the spot later known as King Philip's Seat. Philip had posted no sentries around his camp. Without warning, Church and his men attacked, but Philip, aroused by the noise of battle, saw an escape route and ran quickly toward a swamp. As he ran for his life, a shot rang out, and the sachem slumped to the ground. The great King Philip—the most feared Indian in New England—was dead. The shot had been fired by John Alderman, one of Church's trusted Indian friends. Like Crazy Horse 200 years later, King Philip was slain by a fellow Indian.

Church inspected the body of the fallen sachem and in disgust called him "a doleful, great, naked, dirty beast." The captain's men let out a loud cheer. Then Church ordered the body to be hacked to



A colonial attack on his Mount Hope village early in the war forced King Philip to flee and led him to carry the fight far beyond the Wampanoags' traditional territory.



King Philip lies dead in a swamp, as two attackers approach. The great Wampanoag sachem was killed by an Indian musket ball during a joint Puritan-Indian ambush in mid-August 1676.

pieces, butchered in the manner of the standard English punishment for treason. As a reward, Alderman received Philip's head and one hand. The rest of the sachem's body was quartered and hoisted on four trees. Later Alderman sold the severed head to the Plymouth authorities for 30 shillings, the going rate for Indian heads during the war, and it was placed on a stake in Plymouth town, where the gruesome relic remained for the next 25 years.

**THE DEATH OF KING PHILIP** signaled an end to the war. About 9,000 people had lost their lives in the conflict, including some 3,000 Indians. Nearly 50 English towns and countless Indian villages had been destroyed. Many Indian captives, like Philip's wife and son, were sold into slavery. Unlike the English settlers, the Indians of southern New England never entirely recovered from the devastation of the war. Some Indian tribes, including the Wampanoags and the Narragansetts, were almost entirely annihilated.

Indian survivors of the war huddled together in remote communities where they hoped to avoid scrutiny by the whites, but in subsequent years the local authorities made sure that these remnant bands of Indians came under close supervision of the colonial—and later state—legislatures. In the spirit of King Philip, these native peoples did their best to sustain their culture, traditions and identity despite their dwindling numbers, intermarriage with African Americans and uncharitable treatment by their white lords and masters.

The Pequots and Mohegans—some of whom intermarried with the Wampanoag survivors in the centuries after King Philip's War—may have thought they had chosen the winning side by fighting against Philip's Indians during the war, but they ultimately suffered the same cruelties of harsh white policies and bigotry that all Indians in southern New England experienced well into the modern era. Among their greatest losses, besides the tragic loss of life that occurred on both sides during King Philip's War, were the lands that were gobbled up by hungry whites whose appetites could not be satiated until every last morsel had been consumed.

As for King Philip and his loyal Wampanoags who



chose to fight rather than submit to English demands, they paid the highest price of all. Today the memory of Philip remains strong among the Indians of New England. Standing in the long shadow of King Philip, his descendants and other New England Indians still work for justice and fair policies toward their people. Outside of New England, however, few Americans know Philip's story or the privations experienced by the Indians of New England after his death. Under the circumstances, it is intriguing to wonder just how different American history might have been if King Philip had won his terrible war. □



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