OUR RIVER by Joe Doherty
Blood on the Blackstone, Part 4: The Parley

"Peirce's Fight" was one of the bloodiest and most important battles of King Philip's War, and it was fought right here on our own Blackstone River. This is Part 4 of a series about the battle and its aftermath. You can catch up on earlier chapters at www.blackstonedaily.com/ourriver.htm.

Roger Williams was about 73 years old in the spring of 1676. On March 29th of that year, the venerable founder of Providence was confined behind the fortified walls of a garrison house while marauding Indians burned the town he and his friends had built over the past four decades.

Williams established the colony of "Providence Plantations" at the age of 33, although contrary to popular belief he was not the first white settler of what would ultimately become the state of Rhode Island. That honor belonged to Williams's longtime friend and neighbor, the Reverend William Blackstone, whose arrival preceded Williams's by two years. Blackstone's house lay in the Attleborough Gore, about five miles north of Providence on a foothill beside the Pawtucket River, close to where Captain Peirce and his troops had been attacked three days earlier. Mercifully Mr. Blackstone never had to suffer the sight of bloodshed on his beloved river, nor glimpse from the top of his hill a spring sky darkened by the smoke of burning towns. He had died the previous May.

Forty years had come and gone since Roger Williams planted his colony. Despite the disdain his religious and political views incurred among Massachusetts officials, his fluency in the native language had earned him a grudging respect. On many occasions he was asked to "quench fires" between the Indians and the English. In 1636, the same year he was banished from the Bay colony, Williams received an urgent request from Massachusetts magistrates that he go as an ambassador to the Narragansett and Mohegan sachems, to persuade them not to join a dangerous Pequot uprising. Massachusetts sent him on a similar mission to the Narragansetts in 1675, just before the outbreak of King Philip's War.

In the first instance Williams succeeded, preventing a full-scale war between the English and the united Indian tribes of southern New England.

But his more recent pleas to the Narragansetts had been in vain.

Outside the garrison, an Indian horde roamed the streets, looting and burning at will. The few souls remaining at Providence had seen the smoke rising from Rehoboth the day before, yet deluded themselves that the Indians might spare their town and go elsewhere. So misplaced was their confidence that they reportedly made little effort to protect their valuables. "Providence though they saw us in a flame incouraged themselves the enemy would steer some other Course & by that means exposed a 100 bushells of Corn & meal much goods & mony to ye enemys wch was all taken away," wrote Reverend Noah Newman of Rehoboth.

To better picture what transpired that day, it helps to know something about how the town was laid out. In the time of King Philip's War, the heart of Providence was the neighborhood now known as College Hill. The main artery was called Towne Street – today's North/South Main Street. "A straggling village of some two score houses was

set upon the east side of this street, extending along a tract about two miles in length," Richard Bayles wrote in 1891. The west side of Towne Street "lay by the water-side" – that is, it verged on the Providence River and Great Salt Cove (filled in long ago). "It followed the curves of the shore at a proper distance to secure solid ground," states Bayles.

Towards the north end of Towne Street, past the Cove, were the lower falls of the Moshassuck River (which flowed into the Cove) and John Smith's grist mill. The mill, which the Indians burned, is said to have been located near the present intersection of Mill and North Main streets. Smith himself lived in a house across the river, "near the later site of the first stone lock on the Blackstone canal." Bayles observed.

It was here, near the mill, that Towne Street abruptly departed from the water's edge and started up a long, steep slope once known as "Stamper's Hill" (or possibly the Mill Hill) until leveling off at a height of about 80 feet above the river, becoming what we know as upper North Main Street.

From this northern extremity of Towne Street, a "narrow lane" ran east along the present path of Olney Street to connect to a thoroughfare then known only as "the Highway," which later became Hope Street. "The home lots extended from Towne Street up and over Prospect or College hill and back to the road then known as 'the highway' now Hope Street," states a 1937 WPA study on Rhode Island. "In 1664 there were about fifty of these homesteads extending along Towne Street from present Olney Street to Fox Point."

As of 1676, Providence had expanded to about 75 houses -- but it was a ghost town that greeted the Indian invaders. Most homes were empty, their owners and families having fled to the secured island of Aquidneck to wait out the war. Throughout summer and autumn, Rhode Islanders had listened with mounting concern to reports of Wampanoag and Nipmuck hostilities in Massachusetts, but since no Rhode Island settlements had been attacked it was thought that the Indians' dispute was strictly with Massachusetts and Plymouth. Then in December came word that the Narragansetts had joined the war, and a hasty exodus from Providence began.

"The towns of the mainland were now thoroughly filled with alarm, and petitioned the assembly for help, but with little good result. The assembly could do little to help them," Bayles explains "But Newport and Portsmouth generously invited the people of Providence and Warwick to come to the Island and make their homes temporarily. A large portion of the inhabitants of Providence availed themselves of this offer and removed with their families to the Island."

Of Providence's five hundred citizens, "considerably less than fifty" remained. Roger Williams was one of those who refused to abandon the colony. His name and twenty-six others are listed in the early records as those "that staid and went not away." Several other men, including Captain Arthur Fenner, miller John Smith, and Williams' adult sons, Providence, Daniel, and Joseph, are not named on the list; nevertheless, they too appear to have been at Providence during the attack.

The Indians surged into town sometime on the morning of Wednesday the 29th. Fresh from ravaging Rehoboth with flames and chaos, native warriors fanned out across the north end of Providence "and theire did likewise." Any English person not already safely inside a garrison was as good as dead, as the bodies of Henry Wright and Elizabeth

Suckling later attested. The former had adamantly refused to go to a garrison; the latter simply tarried too long.

"All that were in Forts Men, Women and Children, were Saved," Roger Williams wrote in a letter to his brother Robert dated April 1, three days later. "H. Wright would trust God in his own Hous. There they Killed Him with his own Hammer. Elizabeth Sucklin was preparing to goe from Her own Hous to A Fort but delaying they Killed her."

The Indians pressed the attack for hours. Williams, his sons, and many of his longtime neighbors waited inside the garrison. For a time it may have seemed that they had little choice but to remain there until either the attack subsided or the Indians tried to bang down the door.

We can only imagine Williams's ruminations as he listened to the mayhem outside. He had spent the best years of his life befriending the Indians of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, learning their language and ways. He had known the great sachems, Massasoit of the Wampanoags … Miantonomi and Canonicus of the Narragansett … they had welcomed him into their homes and treated him like family. Williams had returned their kindness by opening his own house in Providence to Indians passing through town … It is said there were occasions when he had as many as fifty Indians under his roof, sometimes for days at a stretch.

The old sachems were dead many years but Williams had built bonds of friendship and respect with their descendants and successors. He knew the Wampanoag sachem Philip personally, as well as Canonchet, the young Narragansett chieftain who might at that very moment be somewhere close by, directing the destruction of Providence.

Williams had tried to make them understand the futility of war, to persuade them that it would only lead to the destruction and utter subjugation of their people. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, that Williams met with Philip shortly after the war started: *Williams met with Metacom, riding with the sachem and his family in a canoe not far from Providence. Williams warned Metacom that he was leading his people to extermination. He compared the Wampanoags to a canoe on a stormy sea of English fury. "He answered me in a consenting, considering kind of way," Williams wrote. "My canoe is already overturned."*

Sometime during the afternoon of that "burning Day of God's Angr," as Williams called it, an Indian approached the garrison house at a safe distance. "An Indian that Knew Vall Called from the other Side of the Mill Hill that they might speak together peaceably without their Guns," Williams wrote in the letter to his brother.

"Vall" was Valentine Whitman, a man of about fifty who at various times had served as a surveyor, juryman, commissioner and deputy. He was well known to the Indians and at least once in the past had signed his name as a witness and interpreter in the deeding of Indian lands.

The Indian shouted that Whitman should meet him at a "point of Land" at "Throgmortens." Unarmed, and perhaps reluctantly, Whitman started off towards the meeting place. But he no sooner left, it seemed, than he shouted back to the garrison that the Indians were asking for Roger Williams to come outside too. "I hasted out and came up to Vall and heard them ask for me," Williams wrote to his brother.

"He is here," Whitman called to the Indians.

"They then desired that wee Would come to the poynt without Arms as they would do," Williams wrote. But this proposal alarmed the people in the garrison. "The Town Cried out to us not to Venter [Venture]. My Sonns came crying afftr me."

The panic in their voices must have given Valentine Whitman second thoughts. He changed his mind and went back to the garrison. But Roger Williams held firm, even though his sons begged him to come back. Many times over the years he had placed his life in the hands of Indians in the interest of peace. "My Heart to God and the Countrie forced me to go on to Throgmortens poynt," he wrote.

John Throckmorton lived in the northern part of the settlement – in fact, he was Roger Williams' next-door neighbor (Williams's house stood near the corner of what is now North Main and Howland streets). Throckmorton's home lot, like Williams' and all the lots on Towne Street, extended across the street to the "water-side" and terminated at the shoreline – in Williams's and Throckmorton's case, at the mouth of the Moshassuck River. "Throckmorton's Point" does not appear on maps or in the early records, but the name may have referred to a rise in the riverbank at the western edge of Throckmorton's property.

It would be interesting to retrace Williams' steps from the garrison to the place where he met with the Indians – but the histories are vague on which garrison he used as a refuge, or where it was located. Based on early Providence records and details from the letter Williams wrote to his brother, it seems likely that the garrison stood on Stamper's Hill, behind the grist mill -- a conclusion bolstered by Williams's reference to "the Mill Hill." A fort is said to have been built there in 1656 and was perhaps refortified in 1675 after Williams petitioned the town meeting to "give me leave & so many as shall agree to put up some Defence on ye hill between the Mill & ye Highway for ye like Safetie of ye women & children in that part of Town."

The trip from Stamper's Hill down to "Throgmortens poynt" (now the junction of Smith Street and Canal Street) might have taken a younger man about ten minutes on foot. But Roger Williams was aged and infirm. Twelve years earlier, in his sixties, he wrote that he was burdened by "old pains, lameness, so th't sometimes I have not been able to rise, nor goe, or stand." Regardless, he clutched his wooden staff, gathered his cloak about him and slowly made his way to the parley.

As he drew near the appointed spot, Williams saw a group of three Indians waiting for him. Unfortunately he did not describe their appearance but they may have been painted for war, or had their faces blackened as at Peirce's Fight. It was a Narragansett custom to blacken the face with soot, sometimes for weeks, when in mourning for a deceased relative. After the massacre at the Great Swamp, every Narragansett had deceased relatives.

Williams did not seem to recognize them, but noticed they were unarmed, as promised. "Who are you?" he demanded.

Narragansetts, they replied. And Cowesetts and Wampanoags and Nipmucks and Qunticoogs (the latter were Indians from Connecticut).

"Is Philip with you?" he asked, for there was a rumor at the garrison that the Wampanoag sachem was among those burning the town.

But the Indians told him no, Philip is not here.

"I asked Whither he was not in these parts," William wrote. "They said no; I asked where he was; They said on this side of Quniticut," or, east of the Connecticut River.

Williams then inquired whether the Narragansett sachems were with them. Again the Indians replied in the negative, saying the sachems were "at their houses at Nahigonset [Narragansett]."

Clearly Williams was looking for the Indian or Indians in charge. He wanted a leader, someone with whom he could negotiate. Someone who could stop the assault on his town.

"I asked who Commanded here," Williams wrote, "they said many Captains and Inferior Sachims, and Counsellors."

Williams may have begun to suspect that this was an advance party and that the real architects of the attack had yet to show themselves. "What are your names?" he asked.

"I am Wesauamogue," one of them said loudly. "What Cheere, this is my ground which you have got from me."

Williams said nothing. The land Providence was built upon, "the lands and meadows upon the two fresh rivers called Mowshausuck and Wanasquatuckett," had been granted to him in friendship by the old Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi.

The second Indian identified himself as "Pawatuck, the Old Queens Counseller" who may have been Potucke, a Narragansett counselor from the lands around what is now Point Judith. Pawatuck introduced himself and the remaining member of the Indian threesome. "I am Pawatuck and Sukamog, Captain Vennor's [Fenner's] Great Friend."

Captain Arthur Fenner belonged to the local militia and was well-known to Roger Williams. He had charge of the William Field garrison house towards the southern end of Towne Street.

The introductions complete, Williams put the Indians' candor to the test. He boldly asked them: were they "the Company that burned Rehoboth and Swansie?"

The Indians told him yes. "They owned it," he wrote.

The question he did not ask, but for which an answer of sorts would be proffered later: *Were they the same Company who met Captain Peirce and his men on the river above Pawtucket Falls?*

The three Indians volunteered that their force consisted of about 1500 Indians and that they were bound for all the towns around Plymouth colony after spending two more days at Providence. (In his letter to his brother, Williams observed this did not come to pass and that they left on the afternoon of March 30th.)

But the mere threat of another two days of destruction must have rattled the old peacemaker. He asked why they assaulted the people at Providence when they always had been kind neighbors to them. Then he turned, directing their attention to his own house, gutted with flames. "This Hous of mine now burning before mine Eyes hath Lodged kindly Some Thousands of You these Ten Years," he reminded them bitterly.

The Indians stood their ground. Williams wrote "They answered that we were their Enemies Joyned with Masathusets and Plimouths, Entertaining, Assisting … Guideing of them."

The accusation was not altogether groundless. While Rhode Island furnished neither men nor arms for the Great Swamp campaign the previous December, the colony had facilitated the importation of Plymouth troops into the Narragansett Country. Providence troops had also participated in the battle at Nipsachuck in August 1675.

But Williams cut them short. "I said we had Entertained all Indians being a Thorough-fare town, but nither Wee nor this Colloney had acted Hostilitie against them.

I told them they were all this While Killing and burning themselves Who had Forgot they were Mankind, and ran about the Countrie like Wolves tearing, and Devouring the Innocent, and peaceable. I told them they had noe regard for their Wives, Relations … nor to God Whome they confessd made them and all things."

The three Indians permitted him to him finish, then spoke plainly. "They Confessd they were in a Strang Way," Williams wrote. Secondly, that "we had forced them to it," and thirdly, "that God was [with] them and Had forsaken us for they had so prospered in Killing and Burning far beyond What we did Against them" – almost certainly an allusion to the Great Swamp massacre.

Maybe it was the overwhelming sight of all the neatly arranged houses on upper Towne Street being consumed by gouts of orange flame, or the despair of knowing that a vital part of his life's work was being laid to waste right before his eyes. But at that moment it seemed Roger Williams no longer cared about the Indians' grievances or what was right or fair, only which side was stronger.

"I answered it was fals [false] for They began with us and God had prospered us so that wee had driven out the Wampanoogs with Phillip out of his Countrie and the Nahigonsiks out of their Countre, and had destroyed Multitudes of them in Fighting and Flying, in Hungr and Cold etc.: and that God would help us to Consume them Except [if] they hearkened to Counsel."

Perhaps the shock of hearing himself claim racial superiority on the basis of military actions like the Great Swamp massacre restored his better judgment. "I told them I had Quenched fires between the Bay and them, and Plimoath, Quniticut and them," he wrote. "And now I did not doubt (God assisting me) to Quench this and help to restore Quietnes to the Land againe."

The three Indians quietly reflected upon this proposal, then invited him to come "ovr [over] the River to them and Debate matters at larg [large]." Williams probably intuited that they wished him to speak with their superiors. But he declined, saying "it was not Fair without Hostage to desire it."

Sukamog, Captain Fenner's friend, asked where the Captain was.

"At his garrison," Williams said. "Shall I fetch him, and Vall?"

The Indians said yes, they would wait, and and as a show of good faith promised to suspend hostilities immediately.

Williams hastened back to his garrison to get Whitman. Presumably the two men would walk down Towne Street to the Field garrison, convince Captain Fenner to accompany them and then return to the waiting Indians. But as before, the people at Williams's garrison vehemently protested. "All ours Diswaded me affirming itt was A plan to shoot us thre [three]," he wrote.

Again Williams spurned all warnings. He set out alone for the Field garrison, halting only when "some came running, and affirmed that J. Laphams Hous in the Way was full of Indians."

Now he was torn. Wesauamoge, Pawatuck and Sukamog had promised "cessation" yet the hostilities had not abated. Lapham's house, which was "in the Way" between his garrison and Captain Fenner's, was being ransacked by hostile Indians. He had no guarantee they would let him pass unmolested.

Frustrated, Williams retreated to his own garrison, but still felt honor-bound "to goe or send word" to the three Indians "of the reason of my not coming with A. Fennor, yet none would goe or suffr me to go."

Finally Williams set out alone again, coming once more to Throckmorton's Point where he found the three Indians still waiting. The 73-year-old Englishman must have been tired and possibly in pain after so many trips back and forth. "At Last I got to the poynt againe, and told them the truth and how since we parted Divers Houses were fired as J. Mattisons on that side and Ep. Olnys on this."

The Indians told him they had tried. "They said they Had sent to all to be quiet but Some would not Stop," he wrote. "They prayed me to come ovr" the river.

Williams may have been fatigued, but he would not be gulled. He suggested that one of theirs "come ovr" instead, "Saying they Had bin Buring [Burning] all the Day on this side and were they afraid of an old unarmed Man in the same place."

The Indians' hackles must have gone up because suddenly they asked Williams to open his cloak "that they might see I had noe Gun," he wrote. "I did so."

Soon thereafter, a new delegation of Indians approached the point, presumably from across the river. *These* Indians Williams seemed to know.

"Then came one Nawham," he wrote, "Mr R Smith's John Wall Maker, an ingenious Fellow and peaseable."

This Indian was better known as "Stonewall John," described by historian Samuel G. Drake as a "by-no-means-unimportant Narragansett captain." Before the war, he earned a reputation as a talented stone mason and was often hired by English settlers. He performed like services for the Narragansetts, reputedly designing their forts at the Great Swamp and at Wickford. He also had basic metalworking skills, enabling him to repair guns and fashion other weapons. His forge was destroyed in the siege of the Great Swamp fort, but he escaped with his tools. He is said to have aided the attack on Rehoboth.

With Stonewall John, Williams wrote, came "Matalog A Neepmuck Sachim." This "Matalog" was probably a Nipmuck chief by the name of Mattaloos, also known as Matoonas, perhaps the most infamous of the Nipmucks who took up Philip's cause. His son was executed by the English in 1671. Four years later, Mattaloos/Matoonas led an attack on Mendon, Massachusetts, in which four or five settlers were murdered.

The third member of this triumvirate was "Cuttaqune A Qunniticutt Sachim, A Stout lustie brave Fellow," Williams observed, "and I think the Chief in Command amongst them." Information about this Connecticut chief is scant, but he may have been Kutquen, one of the Indians involved in the capture of Mary Rowlandson and others from Lancaster, Massachusetts a little more than a month earlier.

Of the six Indians gathered on that bluff above the river, at least three would be executed by the English within a matter of months. But for the moment, they had come to discuss peace with Roger Williams.

"We had much repetition of the former particulars Which were debated at the Poynt," Williams wrote. "Nawwhun [Stonewall John] Said that we broke Articles and not they (as I alleadged). He said they Heartilie Endeavoured the Surrendr of the Prisoners. They were abroad in Hunting, at Home, and could not Effect it."

Exactly which prisoners he meant is unclear. If indeed it was Kutquen with him, Stonewall John may have been referring to Mary Rowlandson and the other captives

taken from Lancaster on February 20th. Mrs. Rowlandson was finally ransomed on May 2, 1676. The story of her ordeal in the wilderness became the best known Indian captivity narrative in American history.

But there was nothing cryptic about Nawwhun's next remark as recorded by Williams. "He said You have driven us out of our own Countrie and then pursued us to our Great Miserie, and Your Own, and we are Forced to live upon you." Coming from a survivor of the Great Swamp attack, this charge may have had a painful ring of truth.

"But there are ways of peace," Williams told them.

The Indians asked how.

"I told them if their Sachims would propound something and Caus [Cause] a Cessation [of hostilities] I would presently Write if (it were to morrow) by two of theirs to Boston," Williams wrote. "I told them planting time was a coming for them and us."

But the Connecticut sachem had tired of this talk of peace and planting. He grew insolent. According to Williams, "Cuttaqueen Said they cared not for Planting these Ten Years. They Would live upon us, and Dear. He said that God was with them for at Quawbaug and Quoneticut (Excepting old Men and Women] we had Killed noe Fighting Men but Wounded some" – and here Cuttaqueen held out his arm so that Williams could see the wound upon it – "but they had Killed of us Scores, and Hundreds."

"Go," Cuttaqueen bid him arrogantly, "Look upon thre [three] Score and five now unburied at Blackstones."

And there it was. The answer to the question not asked.

These Indians, these Narragansetts and Cowesetts and Wampanoags and Nipmucks and Qunticoogs, who burned Providence that day and who had burned Rehoboth the day before, were the same warriors who defeated Captain Michael Peirce and his Plymouth colony troops on a field of battle beside the Pawtucket River, Sunday morning, March 26, 1676.

The taunt enraged Williams. "I said they were A Cowardly People and got nothing of ours but by Commuotin [an archaic term suggesting cheating or stealth] our [Houses] our Cattle and Selves by Ambushes and Swamps, and Great Advantages, and told them [they] durst not come Near our Forts" but that "We entred theirs."

And then, incredibly, Roger Williams challenged Cuttaqueen to face him in battle. He growled that "if Providence Men would yeld [yield] to Me. We would Viset them with an Hundred out of [illegible] by Mid-night."

"We will meet you an Hundred, to an Hundred," Cuttaqueen countered, "to Morrow upon a Plain."

"I said it was not An Hundred, to An Hundred," Williams wrote, "Except we had an armie nigh acquivalent etc: but I told them they Should find many Thousands would be on them, and R.C. [King Charles II] would spend Ten Thousands before he would loos this Countrie."

At last, their venom spent, Williams and Cuttaqueen prepared to part company. "I again offered my Ser[vice]," Williams wrote. "In a way of pease Cuttaqueen said a month hence after we have been on the Plimouth side." In other words, they still had more burning to do in Plymouth colony.

"[I told] Them God would stop them or plague them Hereafter Except they [that] Repented of these their Robberies and Murthers."

But the Indians argued no more. “We parted,” Williams wrote, “and they were so Civill that they called after me and bid me not goe near the Burned Houses for their might be Indians [that] might mischief me, but goe by the Water Side.”

Estimates of how many houses the Indians burned at Providence range between thirty and fifty, with no way of knowing which figure is right. Most historians do agree, however, that the northern part of the settlement bore the brunt.

How many days and nights the bodies of Captain Peirce and his men lay unburied and exposed beside the river, none can say with surety either. Rogue bands of Indians made even brief excursions away from the garrisons a mortal risk. More than three weeks after his town was set ablaze by Indians, Reverend Noah Newman of Rehoboth reported that “Yesterday one of our Towne being abroad wth a teame alone was shot at but was not hrt his oxen one was kild & the other wounded, he carelessly went forth both alone 3 mile for ye towne & wthout any gun.”

The riverside battlefield, what historians would dub “the bed of honor,” was about five miles distant from Rehoboth, in a remote and wild landscape. The nearest house, if the Indians hadn’t gotten around to burning it yet, was probably that of the late Mr. Blackstone -- his “Study Hall, so-called -- a mile or two upstream from where Peirce and his men fell. Here in early April, little more than a week after “Peirce’s Fight,” Connecticut soldiers routed a large party of dangerous Narragansetts.

That Peirce and his company were interred at all under such circumstances is a testament to the respect and devotion of the people of Plymouth Colony, especially the residents of Rehoboth. How much simpler it would have been to leave the dead in the hands of nature, to let time and scavengers do their work while the living applied themselves to rebuilding their homes and villages.

“The buryall of the slaine tooke us 3 days the burden of it lying upon our towne,” Reverend Newman wrote in the same April 19th letter wherein he reported his townsman being shot at by Indians. “The 3d day we had some from Dedham & Medfield that afforded their helpe therein …”

A grim duty it must have been. If there were any incidents of mutilation of the dead, scalping, etc., they do not appear in the records; however, a letter sent from the Council of War to one Major Savage alerting him of the Peirce defeat reports that the Indians spirited away all weapons from the field, along with “two horse loads with provisions.”

But that’s not all the Narragansetts may have carried away.

Later that same year, Increase Mather wrote in his book *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England*, “How many of the Enemy fell we know not certainly, only we hear that some Indians, which have since been taken by the English, confess that Captain Pierce, and those with him killed an hundred and forty of them before they lost their own lives.”

What became of those 140 dead Indians? While it’s possible the Indian prisoners may have inflated the number to appease their captors, sixty or more armed soldiers firing at close range must have caused some reduction of the opposing force. And yet, nowhere in the correspondence of Reverend Newman, nor in any of the contemporary accounts of Peirce’s Fight, is there a single mention of an “Enemy” body on the battlefield.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it's not unreasonable to think that the victorious Narragansetts bore the bodies of their fallen brothers off the battlefield, to be buried in some secret place in the woods, ever facing southwest.

The remains of the Plymouth soldiers and their "friendly Indian" compatriots were not carried away by loved ones or carted off to church yards or burial grounds; instead, tradition tells us, they were buried on the spot, either in a mass grave or individually.

Reverend Newman reported that on the first of the three days, volunteers laid twenty souls to rest – "17 English & 3 Indians buryed." On the second day, "that I might expresse my respect to Capt Peirce & Leift: Fuller, who dyed so honorably," the Reverend himself "went forth & that day we buryed 18 English and one Indian." On the third and last day "they buryed 7 or 8 Eng[lish] and one Indian.

A total of 47 or 48 bodies – yet even the most conservative estimates of Peirce's battalion, including the Cape Cod Indians, place the complement above 60 men. Reverend Newman noted the discrepancy "… search hath been made but no more Can be found," he wrote. "I know not but some might wander & perish in ye woods being strangers."

The unaccounted-for soldiers evidently troubled Reverend Newman, but he had done his best under difficult conditions. In the fearful aftermath of Peirce's Fight, as the shadow of the hawk fell upon his own town of Rehoboth, he had dutifully prepared a list of the dead and dispatched it to Plymouth, so that the dead soldiers' relatives could be notified as soon as practical.

Two of the names on the list belonged to Samuel Lennet of Barnstable, Massachusetts and John Mathews of Yarmouth. The Lennet and Mathews families were no doubt devastated when informed that their sons had been ambushed and killed by hundreds of Indians.

Their bereavement must have lasted right up until the moment the two young men came home alive …

NEXT: ESCAPE FROM PEIRCE'S FIGHT

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