

OUR RIVER by Joe Doherty

Blood On the Blackstone, Part 6 – “Captan Perse and his coragios Company”

“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 6 of a series about the battle and its aftermath. You can catch up on earlier chapters at www.blackstonedaily.com/ourriver.htm.

In 1943, a Rehoboth historian named Richard LeBaron Bowen was alerted to the existence of a long-forgotten, 267-year-old document that forever changed his thinking about the battle known as “Peirce’s Fight.”

The tip came from a friend, Dr. Harold S. Jantz of Princeton University. Dr. Jantz was researching early New England manuscript prose and poetry when he made the find in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester.

It was a poem of many stanzas, handwritten on fragile leaves of paper measuring only three-and-a-half inches wide by five inches long.

The title, scrawled in ink at the top, read *Captan Perse and his coragious Company ...*

For three centuries historians have pondered the circumstances which delivered Captain Michael Peirce and his Plymouth regiment into the hands of hundreds of enemy Indians on the morning of March 26, 1676. Historical records and contemporary accounts furnish many details about the deadly battle that ensued, but the steps – or missteps -- that propelled Peirce and his men to that fatal encounter have long been clouded by vague references, omissions and wrong information.

The clearest and most reliable descriptions of the events leading up to the battle come from two letters written with days of the massacre.

The first letter was written on the 27th by Reverend Noah Newman of Rehoboth. Reverend Newman kept the garrison at Rehoboth. He was Captain Peirce’s host the night before the battle; in all likelihood he watched the troops depart the next morning and was on hand when one of the few survivors, Thomas Man, returned to Rehoboth. As a witness, his account supersedes all others.

According to Newman, Peirce arrived at the Rehoboth garrison on Saturday the 25th and set out on patrol almost immediately, possibly with only part of his regiment. At some point he and his men skirmished with an unspecified number of enemy Indians at an unnamed place. Peirce felt he had done some damage to the enemy, but thought it wise to retreat to the garrison, get more men and start out again the next morning. “And accordingly he did,” Newman wrote, “taking Pilots from us that were acquainted with ye ground.”

Newman’s version of events is confirmed by the second surviving letter, sent on April 1st to Captain Thomas Savage by the Council of War at Boston. Captain Savage and his second-in-command, Captain Samuel Mosely, were in western Massachusetts at the time, leading a

600-man army in pursuit of a large force of Indians threatening Northampton, Hatfield and nearby towns.

The Council's letter to Captain Savage contains several interesting details about Peirce's Fight, including this brief but important elaboration on the Saturday skirmish: "there was a great body of Indians as ye escaped report and environed them Round," it says. "Capt. Pierce with a smaller party had a skirmish with about 50 of them the day before and did them mischief & came off without loss."

The facts contained in Newman's letter suggest that the group of Indians Peirce encountered on Saturday was considerably smaller than the overwhelming horde he met on Sunday; the letter of the Council confirms it, placing the number at about 50.

(The Council's letter is also significant for what it *doesn't* say. But more on that later.)

For many years, the Newman letter and the Council's letter to Captain Savage may have been unknown or unavailable to historians. The Newman letter appears to have been stored in a collection of family papers, while the Council's letter probably sat unacknowledged in the Massachusetts state archives, one of hundreds of colonial documents related to King Philip's War.

In the meantime, many histories of the war were written. The first to include the story of Captain Peirce and his men was published in London in late 1676, just after the war drew to a close. Entitled *A New and Further Narrative of the State of New England Being a Continued Account of the Bloody Indian War*, it chronicled a series of war incidents occurring between March and August 1676, as reported by a Boston merchant (believed to be Nathaniel Saltonstall).

Saltonstall paints an indelible picture of Peirce and his men as they fought to the death that Sunday morning. Unfortunately, his account contains no mention of the Saturday skirmish.

"Captain Pierce," Saltonstall writes, "... having Intelligence in his Garrison at Seaconicke, that a Party of the Enemy lay near Mr. Blackstones, went forth with 63 English and twenty of the Cape Indians (who had all along continued faithful, and joined with them;) and upon their March, discovered rambling in an obscure woody Place, four or five Indians, who, in getting away from us, halted, as if they had been lame or wounded. But our men had pursued them but a little Way into the Woods, before they found them only to be Decoys to draw them into an Ambuscade: for on a Sudden, they discovered above 500 Indians, who in very good Order, attacked them, being as readily received by ours."

While a technically accurate account, the omission of Peirce's initial skirmish with 50 Indians poses a potential pitfall for anyone trying to understand what happened in the hours leading up to the main battle. Yes, Peirce indeed had "Intelligence in his Garrison" that "a Party of the Enemy lay near Mr. Blackstone's" – because he personally clashed with 50 of them on Saturday. In Saltonstall's version, it almost sounds like Peirce may have set out on Sunday morning fully expecting to find "above 500 Indians" -- rather than the original party of 50 from the day before.

Without that distinction, one might judge Peirce incredibly brave – or incredibly foolish. Newman's letter of the 27th suggests neither of these extremes.

More ambiguity seeped into the story a year later, with the 1677 publication of Reverend William Hubbard's *The Present State of New England, Being a Narrative of the Troubles With the Indians*. Hubbard added a wealth of information to the story. He explained in greater detail how the Indians used the Pawtucket (Blackstone) River to their best advantage, cutting Peirce off on both banks and eliminating all possibility of retreat. He put a human

face on the “friendly Indians” by the introduction of their valiant leader, Captain Amos. And it was Hubbard who first recorded the famous anecdotes of how a few English and friendly Indians managed to slip through the enemy’s fingers (see Part 5).

He also introduced a character who over the years has become something of a scapegoat in the story of Peirce’s Fight: the faithless messenger. “It is said also,” Hubbard wrote, “that being apprehensive of the Danger he was in, by the great Numbers of the Enemy, like to overpower him with their Multitude, timely enough sent to Providence for Relief; but ... whether through Sloth or Coward, is not much material, this Message was not delivered to them to whom it was immediately sent.”

The story of the messenger is problematic for anyone trying to reconstruct events. Hubbard is vague about exactly when Peirce sent for reinforcements. He states that it was *after* Peirce became “apprehensive of the Danger he was in, by the great Numbers of the Enemy, like to overpower him.” It is generally believed by historians that Peirce dispatched the messenger as a precautionary measure before departing the garrison Sunday morning. Is Hubbard -- like Saltonstall before him -- implying that Peirce left the garrison armed with the knowledge that he and his 70 men would be ---- “great numbers of the enemy?” And worse, that his arrogance was so great he proceeded without even waiting for a reply?

An alternate interpretation – that Peirce dispatched the messenger directly from the battlefield once he realized the extent of the peril – seems improbable. If Peirce and his 70 armed men were trapped, how could a lone messenger hope to penetrate the enemy lines?

The Hubbard and Saltonstall accounts may seem to provide fodder for an argument that Peirce was forewarned of the actual numbers he and his men would be facing. But such an assertion is not supported by the Newman letter of March 27th, nor the Council’s letter of April 1st. Tellingly, Hubbard’s account, like Saltonstall’s, contains not a whisper about Peirce’s initial skirmish on Saturday, March 25th. Coincidence? Or did Hubbard use Saltonstall’s account as a basis for his own?

Of the several histories published in the aftermath of the war, Hubbard’s outsold and outlasted them all. As decades passed his *Narrative* became regarded as the standard reference on King Philip’s War, an honor it still enjoys today. By default, Hubbard’s version of Peirce’s Fight was for a long time the one that people remembered.

Then, after about 150 years, the letter written by Reverend Noah Newman on March 27, 1676, resurfaced. Sometime in the 1820s, Mr. Hayward Pierce, a lineal descendant of Captain Michael Peirce, showed a transcribed copy of the Newman letter to local historian Samuel Deane of Scituate, Mass. (Captain Peirce’s last residence was in Scituate). Pierce advised Deane that the original letter belonged to Mr. Rossitter Cotton, Esq., of Plymouth, Mass, a descendant of Reverend John Cotton, to whom Reverend Newman had originally sent the letter those many years ago.

When Deane contacted Cotton he learned that the letter had since been given over to the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester. According to Deane, “By the politeness of the venerable President of that Society, the original letter was found and copied for us by Emory Washburn, Esq., of Worcester.”

Deane used the information in Newman’s letter to fashion a new account of Peirce’s Fight. It debuted in Deane’s 1831 book, *The History of Scituate, Massachusetts*. For the first time, the public learned of Peirce’s initial skirmish with the Indians on Saturday, March 25, 1676. Readers saw a different Captain Peirce. A military captain who prudently fell back to the garrison after his first encounter to get more men. Not the kind of man who would

deliberately take his men into an unwinnable battle. Deane included a full transcript of the Newman letter, complete with a list of those killed in action.

Deane's work triggered a revival of interest in Peirce's Fight. Within five years his account inspired no fewer than three other historians to revisit the story. John Daggett of Attleborough, Mass., took the best elements of Saltonstall's, Hubbard's and Deane's accounts, combined them with his own knowledge of local history and lore, and published a more detailed version of Peirce's Fight than any of his predecessors. It appeared in Daggett's 1834 book, *History of Attleborough*. (The towns of Attleborough, Rehoboth and Cumberland were all once part of a territory known as "the Attleborough Gore," thus the story of Captain Peirce is also part of Attleborough history despite that the main action occurred in Rehoboth, Cumberland and Central Falls.)

In 1836, Leonard Bliss used a thinly disguised version of Daggett's account in his own *History of Rehoboth*, published in 1836. That same year, the celebrated American historian Samuel G. Drake adapted Deane's and other accounts to tell the story of Peirce's Fight in his *Book of the Indians of North America*.

These newer accounts swiftly replaced Hubbard's *Narrative* as the best resource for information about on Peirce's Fight. Other writers have explored the incident in the 170 years since, each in his own style, but few have veered from the storyline as set down in the 1830s by Deane, Daggett, Bliss and Drake.

Rehoboth historian Richard LeBaron Bowen would prove to be one of the exceptions.

Richard LeBaron Bowen waited five years before unveiling the existence of a new and potentially significant piece of source material related to King Philip's War and Peirce's Fight, in particular – an ancient, handwritten poem entitled *Captan Perse and his coragious Company*. Bowen devoted a whole chapter to this lyrical creation in his book, *Early Rehoboth: Documented Historical Studies of Families and Events in This Plymouth Colony Township, Volume III* (he published *Volume I* in 1945 and *Volume II* in 1946).

The poem was part of an 18-page document consisting of two poems and one prose article. The manuscript, Bowen judged, "appears to have been written between 26 March and 30 May, 1676." It was signed: "P. Walker."

Bowen must have recognized the signature the moment he saw it, despite its great age. It belonged to a man who was not only one of Rehoboth's wealthiest and most prominent citizens at the time of King Philip's War Philip Walker – or, as he was also known, Deacon Philip Walker. He served as a deacon in Reverend Noah Newman's church – the same Reverend Newman who wrote the pivotal March 27th, 1676 letter about Peirce's Fight..

Deacon Walker wore many hats in early Rehoboth. He owned a local sawmill (see Part 3, Ring of Fire), but he is also described as a farmer, a weaver, a constable, and, following the discovery of his manuscript, a self-styled poet.

Captan Perse and his coragious Company is a ballad occasioned by the Indian ambush of Captain Peirce and his men. Written in what Bowen believes to be "a Scottish dialect," the poem decries the loss of Peirce's brave company. It, condemns the Indians who committed the "dredfull stroke" and calls for revenge upon all enemy Indians.

The poem is 34 stanzas in length, but it was within the lines of the first stanza Bowen that believed he had found an important clue to one of the longstanding mysteries of Peirce's Fight.

The stanza reads as follows: (free translation)

*It fell unlucky that this march was sooner
than the appointed time to that meroner
in they pickeering thou Lacks those musketeers
and his Experience gained amongst Buccaneers*

To understand why this cryptic verse stirred Mr. Bowen's imagination, it helps to know a little about a man whose name had never been uttered in conjunction with the known history of Peirce's Fight: Captain Samuel Mosely of Boston, the deadliest Indian-fighter in New England.

"Capt. Samuel Mosely was one of the most conspicuous and best-known officers in King Philip's War," Bowen writes. "A cooper by trade, he later became a skillful mariner and married Anne, daughter of Governor Leverett's sister Anne, wife of Mr. Isaac Addington."

Mosely, who reportedly had some experience as a privateer or buccaneer in the Jamaica trade, was hired by Boston merchants in late 1674 to sail off in pursuit of some Dutch pirates preying on their ships. In April 1675 -- slightly more than two months before King Philip's War broke out -- Mosely sailed into Boston harbor with the pirates in tow.

His capture of the Dutch pirates made Mosely, at the age of 34, one of the most prominent and popular figures in the Massachusetts Colony. The pirates themselves also fired the public's imagination. "There is evidence in the trial, as in the subsequent action of the Court, of much popular sympathy for the Dutch prisoners," writes historian George Madison Bodge Lucky for the pirates, the colonies stood on the brink of war. Five of the pirates received death sentences, with execution deferred due to hostilities with the Indians. Two other pirates were pardoned and one acquitted.

When word of the first Indian attack reached Boston, "Drums beat up for Volunteers, and in three Hours Time were Mustered up about an Hundred and ten men, Captain Samuel Mosely being their Commander," Saltonstall wrote. "Among these," states Bodge, "were many of his old 'privateers,' i.e. those who had served with him in his expedition, and several of the released pirates." Mosely's volunteer company was also renowned for traveling with a pack of dogs "that proved serviceable to them, in finding out the Enemy in their Swamps ..."

Mosely's company spent almost the entire war in the field, ranging through the forests and swamps of Massachusetts in search of Indians to kill or capture. He and his men became familiar faces at Massachusetts and Plymouth Colony garrisons, where they often quartered or rendezvoused with other companies. In December 1675, Mosely was appointed to lead the Massachusetts contingent in the United Colonies' raid on the Narragansett fort at the Great Swamp. His adventures "can never be known fully," wrote Bodge, "but what we have shows him to be brave, popular with both the army and at home, and wonderfully successful."

Mosely owed some degree of his success to his "volunteer" status. He did not belong to the military and thus not constrained to follow orders or regulations. He received special dispensations which earned him the wrath of other commanders in the field; meanwhile his successes against the Indians won him the admiration of soldiers throughout the colonies. Some say his marriage to Governor Leverett's niece bought him immunity; others chalk it up to his popularity with the public, especially that portion known as "Indian haters."

“This popularity with the army, and the violent party of Indian-haters, together with his eminent success in the field, and probably his near relationship with the Governor’s family, supported him in many notorious acts of insubordination and insolence towards his superiors, and even the Council,” Bodge observed.

Mosely was an Indian hater himself. His record is blackened by numerous instances of Indians brutalized by him and his men – even friendly Indians. And there was one disturbing incident so cruel it transcended abuse and went beyond even murder.

In October of 1675, while Mosely was stationed at Hatfield, Massachusetts, his company seized an Indian woman, or “squaw,” at Springfield. Mosely and his men pressed her until she confessed that her people were planning to attack three nearby towns.

“Wee are told by an Indian that was taken at Springfield that they intended to set upon these 3 townes in one day,” Mosely wrote in a letter to the Massachusetts Governor dated October 16, 1675. In the margin of this letter, in Mosely’s own handwriting, is revealed the terrible fate of this unfortunate Indian woman. To this day, it stands out as one of the most depraved episodes of King Philip’s War: “The aforesaid Indian,” Mosely reported, “was ordered to be torn to peeces by Doggs and she was soe dealt with all.”

Bodge said of this incident: “It seems to us too horrible to be conceived of as the act of Christians.”

This was Captain Samuel Mosely, pirate hunter turned Indian fighter.

The “mariner” in Deacon Philip Walker’s poem.

The complete text of Walker’s poem first appeared in Volume III of Richard LeBaron Bowen’s *Early Rehoboth* series, but Bowen previewed that lone first stanza of *Captain Perse and his coragious Company* two years earlier in a chapter of Volume II, entitled “The Original King Philip’s War Lists.” Here’s Bowen’s interpretation of the poem in 1946:

“Philip Walker is apparently deploring the lack of experience of Capt. Michael Pierce, and praising the experience and fighting ability of Captain Mosely and his company of pirates who had spent considerable time in Rehoboth, having been there in June and in December 1675, and probably at other times.”

By 1948, however, Bowen had apparently changed his mind. No longer was Deacon Walker’s poem a simple criticism of Peirce’s military experience – it had become an indictment of Captain Peirce for having willfully sabotaged what was supposed to be a united campaign against the Indians.

“It has always been inexplicable that Captain Pierce should have marched his small company of English across the Seekonk Plain to attack the Indians at Blackstone River, a distance of some five miles away from the Newman garrison house, at a time when it was generally known that the Indians were concentrating in very large numbers around the town,” Bowen explains.

“In the first stanza of his poem Deacon Walker states unequivocally that Captain Pierce marched his company to attack the Indians at Rehoboth before an appointed time when he was to have been joined by a company of musketeers under the command of a ‘meroner’ who had gained his experience among buccaneers,” Bowen continues. “The noun ‘meroner’ is perhaps an incorrect spelling of ‘marooner,’ the old meaning of which was buccaneer. On the other hand, the word may be an incorrect spelling of ‘mariner.’ In either case there can be no doubt as to the identification of the mariner and musketeers referred to, for the man could have been none other than that famous mariner Capt. Samuel Mosely and the musketeers his Boston company of privateers.”

Bowen argues that Walker's poem rises to the standard of credibility: "Deacon Walker's statement cannot be lightly passed over," he insists, "for it is an 'on the spot' record made by one of the town officials who was in a position to know what he was talking about. In addition to being a deacon in Mr. Noah Newman's church, he was also one of the two Rehoboth constables and was undoubtedly quartered in Minister Newman's garrison house, the Rehoboth headquarters of Captain Peirce."

Bowen then implies this new revelation tarnishes Captain Peirce's armor, so to speak: "That he [Peirce] was to have been joined by Captain Mosely but decided to make the attack alone without waiting for reinforcements places the whole affair in an entirely different light, for this fact is mentioned by none of the historians and is an extremely important addition to our meagre knowledge of Peirce's Fight."

Almost sixty years have passed since Mr. Bowen published his theory that Captain Peirce broke his appointment with Captain Mosely and led his men into battle without proper reinforcements. In all that time, no one has ever questioned the legitimacy of Bowen's view, yet it has found its way into at least two other works on King Philip's War.

Dr. John G. Erhardt, for example, makes an uncredited reference in his book, *Rehoboth, Plymouth Colony, 1645-1692*, following a transcription of Reverend Newman's letter. "Later, it was discovered that Peirce was to be joined by Captain Mosely, but chose to attack the Indians on his own," Erhardt writes, then adds in parentheses, "Shades of Custer."

Bowen's theory also turns up in Douglas Edward Leach's famous history of King Philip's War, *Flintlock & Tomahawk*. Leach writes, "Bowen has advanced the theory that Peirce was to have been joined by Moseley's company, but that instead of waiting for their arrival he went into action with only his small force."

It's quite an allegation. But does it hold water? Bowen's theory has been assimilated into the canon of literature about Peirce's Fight. It has cast a shadow on Captain Peirce's historical reputation. It seems only right to put it to the test, starting with the source of the story.

Deacon Philip Walker was many things – sawmill owner, weaver, constable – but he was not a historian. Nor was he, like his townsman Reverend Newman, soberly recording news of a massacre for delivery by horseback to Plymouth. Philip Walker was a poet. Using rhyme, meter and imagery, he expressed his thoughts creatively, and not necessarily factually.

In a special web-only companion piece to this series entitled "One Hideous Act Near Us" (see <http://blackstonedaily.com/tman.htm>), it was demonstrated that Philip Walker may have mingled fact with fancy in another poem related to local events in King Philip's War. In that instance, town records provided some basis for Walker's claims but it also seems he applied poetic license to conjure a scene that was likely at odds with the historical reality.

In this case, there is no corroborating evidence that Captain Mosely was scheduled to assist the Peirce expedition. Certainly Reverend Newman would have known if an additional company of 100 men was due to arrive at his garrison and rendezvous with Peirce. He says nothing about it.

Likewise, there is no indication that Mosely and his company arrived at Newman's garrison later to find they had been stood up by Peirce. That's what would have happened if you take Bowen's interpretation of Walker's poem to its logical conclusion. What a difference it might have made if Mosely and his "company of pirates" *had* shown up – the burning and destruction of Rehoboth on March 28th (see Part 3) might have been prevented.

Why, then, would Deacon Walker insert Captain Mosely into his poem? Wishful thinking, perhaps. Walker may have been impressed by Mosely during his previous stays at the Rehoboth garrison. Or it could be Walker admired the captain on the basis of his reputation alone. The two were of a kind -- Walker, like Mosely, was an Indian hater and a strong believer in the war. He felt the English should take to the woods and flush out the enemy, not cower in garrisons waiting to be attacked. During the March 28th Indian raid on Rehoboth, the Indians burned Walker's sawmill to the ground. In the thirtieth stanza of *Captan Perse and his coragios Company*, Walker proposes the English kill the Indians by giving them poisoned alcohol.

There's no telling how Captain Mosely would have greeted such an idea, but Richard LeBaron Bowen saw merit in it. He writes: "This suggestion of poisoning the Indians' liquor was a novel idea. At the time the Indians burned the houses in Rehoboth they undoubtedly first rolled all the barrels of cider out of the cellars before putting the torch to the houses. Had this cider been poisoned there might not have been enough live Indians left in the following day to burn the town of Providence."

Bowen was a meticulous historian. His four *Early Rehoboth* books are masterpieces of local history and genealogy. Yet one wonders if he researched Captain Mosely's activities during late winter and early spring of 1676. It is a documented fact that on February 8th -- the same day Plymouth Colony voted to authorize the Peirce expedition -- the Commissioners of the United Colonies approved the recruitment of 600 men for a military campaign in the Nipmuck Country and Connecticut River valley of western Massachusetts. According to Saltonstall, this large army was to be sent out "under the Conduct of Major Thomas Savadge and Captain Mosely, as next in command to him."

The Savage expedition lasted until April 7th. During those two months Mosely and his men marched from Sudbury to Marlborough, then on to Brookfield with Captain Savage, arriving March 2nd or 3rd. We can place Mosely at Hatfield, Mass., about March 15, following an Indian attack on Northampton. Bodge writes, "The Indians, meeting this unexpected repulse at Northampton, hastened away for an assault upon Hatfield, but finding it also defended by Capt. Mosely and his men, they hastily withdrew".

Mosely's whereabouts become uncertain over the next two weeks but we know that it was a time of great peril in western Massachusetts. Indians swarmed throughout the Connecticut River valley. In March alone, they attacked Westfield, Northampton, Longmeadow, Marlborough and Simsbury. The situation was so dire that on March 28th (two days after Peirce's Fight), Mosely's commander, Captain Savage, sent the Council a letter stating that the enemy were so numerous, he didn't have the capacity to pursue them; that the Connecticut forces had been called home; and that he feared for the people in the towns if he and his army were drawn off, too.

Given these conditions, it seems implausible that Mosely and his company of 100 men would have broken off from Savage's army to march roughly 100 miles to Rehoboth.

Bowen's theory is further undermined by the Council's response to Captain Savage on April 1st. This is the same letter wherein the Council notified Captain Savage of Captain Peirce's defeat. At no point in the discussion of Captain Peirce does the Council mention Captain Mosely or suggest that he was to join with Peirce.

A reference to the Indians who attacked Peirce is also telling: "there was a great body of Indians *as ye escaped report* & environed them Round."

The Council of War appears to be stating that the large party of Indians who killed Peirce's regiment had eluded official military notice. Which begs the question – if these 500-900 Indians went unnoticed by the military, what reason would there have been for Mosely's company to rendezvous with Peirce in the first place? Especially when Savage's army had its hands full in western Massachusetts? The "escaped report" comment also seems to refute the notion that Saltonstall and Hubbard claims that Peirce had prior knowledge of the Indians' overwhelming numbers.

The Council of War closed its April 1st letter to Captain Savage by ordering him to return to Boston. "In accordance with his instructions Major Savage withdrew his troops about April 7," Bodge writes, "leaving one hundred and fifty-one men with Capt. Turner to garrison the towns, and with four companies under Capts Mosely and Whipple, and Lieutenants Gillam and Edward Drinker, marched homeward."

Based on available evidence, it appears that Captain Samuel Mosely and his "company of pirates" spent February 15th - April 7th, 1676, battling Indians in the remote towns of western Massachusetts.

And in the imagination of one Deacon Philip Walker.

So what *did* happen in the hours leading up to Captain Michael Peirce's final battle?

Probably a series of events very much like those described in the Newman letter of March 27th and the Council letter of April 1st, 1676. Factor in Hubbard's messenger -- along with a little common sense to fill in the blanks – and the scene looks something like this:

On Saturday, March 25th, 1676, while on patrol in the woods around Rehoboth, Peirce and his men skirmished with a party of about 50 hostile Indians. They successfully routed them, getting in some good licks before the Indians vanished into the woods. Peirce thought about giving chase but wisely decided against it, possibly because he'd gone out with only a portion of his regiment. He ordered a retreat to the garrison, planning to return with more men the next day.

Having rounded up a handful of local recruits to serve as guides, Peirce readied his troops to march on Sunday morning, the 26th. The plan was to pick up the trail of the same band of Indians they had tangled with the day before. As a precautionary measure, Peirce sent a messenger to Providence requesting reinforcements. He didn't wait for a reply, either because he had instructed the Providence troops to meet him in the field or because he wasn't very worried about getting into a tight spot – hadn't he beaten the Indians yesterday with even fewer men?

Captain Peirce and his courageous company of English soldiers and Indian scouts moved out, bravely marching off into the history of our river ...

NEXT: CANONCHET

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