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Colonial Defence of the Upper Connecticut Valley

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THE EVENTS outlined in this paper occurred in the years preceding the establishment of the State of Vermont, and, in fact, antedate the founding of nearly all of its towns. Quite obviously, the defence of the valley could be of no concern to Vermont itself, nor was it, apparently, of great concern to the Province of New Hampshire, the population of which was centered in the area immediately adjacent to Portsmouth and fanning out westward and northward not much farther than the Merrimack Valley. The scope is deliberately parochial. It is not intended to set these events within the framework of the continental and world struggles of which they are only a minor part. It is merely a survey of regional military activities that were of several wars, and yet one. It is also a dreary story of man's inhumanity to man: a tale of blood and tears, shattered lives and families and unfulfilled hopes.

It all began happily enough in early May of 1636, when a group of settlers led by William Pynchon of Roxbury came over the Bay Path to found the town of Springfield. They prospered in a fertile and lovely valley. Pynchon set a high standard of leadership, and the English and Indians lived side by side in harmony for forty years. In 1653, Nonotuck, meadowlands north of the parent settlement, was purchased from the natives and settled by twenty-one families from Springfield and Windsor, Connecticut, thus establishing Northampton. Six years later, in 1659, people from Weathersfield, under the leadership of the Reverend John Russell and former governor John Webster, purchased and settled Hadley. The Massachusetts General Court granted to Dedham people the place

called Pocumtuck in 1669. They came a year later and founded that place of future sorrows, Deerfield. In the same year Hatfield, formerly a part of Hadley, was incorporated. Squakeag (Northfield) was granted in 1672 to John Pynchon, and others, and was settled by "adventurers" from Northampton, Hadley, and Hatfield. The Connecticut River Valley from Connecticut to what was to be the northern Massachusetts boundary was granted and partially settled by 1673. In fact, since Squakeag included lands now part of Vermont and New Hampshire, a start had been made in the area of our greatest interest.

During the period of early settlement, there had been no trouble with the Indians. However, as the events about to be related suggest, the Indians must have been approaching a state of restiveness. No doubt, it had become apparent that the English were a ubiquitous race, and unless something was effected, the Indians would inevitably lose all their lands.

There is no doubt at all that Philip, Chief of the Wampanoags, had come to this conclusion. In early 1675, following a number of aggressive acts on both sides, Philip took to the field with a well-formed confederacy of Wampanoags, Narragansetts, Mahegans, Podunks, and Nipmucks. Not meeting with success in southeastern Massachusetts, Indian activities broke forth in the Connecticut Valley.

The first incident, significantly, occurred at Deerfield when a body of local Indians were attacked by the English as they made their way out of the valley to join Philip's forces. In retaliation, the Indians in late August burned Deerfield and Northfield, which were thereupon abandoned. A relief expedition coming up river was ambushed and destroyed.

Although Deerfield was left uninhabited, grain was still in the fields. As it was important that it be harvested, a party of sixty men from Essex County, on military duty in the valley, was dispatched with some thirty thrashers and teamsters to go to Deerfield and bring in the crops. They worked without incident, but on their return to Hadley on September 18, 1675, at a place since called Bloody Brook, they walked into a trap from which only seven or eight escaped. The sounds of the battle were heard in Hadley. A relief party set out at once which attacked the Indians, then busily

engaged in the grisly task of stripping the dead, and proceeded to kill nearly 100 savages. On the fifth of October, 300 Indians burned Springfield. The last incident of the season occurred on the seventeenth of that month when Hadley and Hatfield were successfully defended from a similar fate. This was due to the presence of additional troops which were stationed in the valley by action of the United Colonies of New England (consisting of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, New Haven, and Connecticut) which was formed in 1643 and was effective until 1684, when the Union was abolished. Its purpose was that of mutual protection against the Indians, Dutch, and French.

The Council of Massachusetts Bay wrote the commandant, Major Thomas Savage, on March 2, 1676, that it would be well for the outer settlements to withdraw to Springfield and Hadley to center the defence of the valley at those places; but the inhabitants refused to comply.

On the eighteenth of May, the English struck a mighty blow in the Falls Fight at what is now called Turner's Falls, just east of Greenfield. Led by Captain William Turner, the English surprised a large camp of Indians and killed about 300 of them. During the return home, the English troops were decimated in a running fight with other Indians in the area, Captain Turner being among the casualties. On the thirtieth of May, Hatfield was attacked by a very large body of Indians and was sacked. They attempted the same enterprise at Hadley on the twelfth day of June, but by that time, 250 more Connecticut troops were in the area, and the Hadley people, spurred on, it is said, by William Goffe, the regicide, who appeared mysteriously out of the house of the Reverend John Russell, were able to beat off the Indians.

His forces scattered by the pursuing English under Talcott, Philip then retreated from the Connecticut Valley into the Assowamset Swamp, where he was finally killed and his forces annihilated on August 12, 1676.

It will be noted that the force which successfully defended Hadley was from Connecticut. In this war, success was achieved by united action of the English and by bringing the battle to the Indians. The frontier settlements were to be badgered almost to death for 90 more years because the colonies could not, or would not,

put this formula together again. The total defeat of Philip's forces, however, did not solve the Indian problem for the residents of the Connecticut Valley. It had been suspected that the Indians to the north had had a hand late in the war, and in 1677 their enmity was made manifest by raids on Deerfield and Hatfield on the nineteenth of September.

King William's War opened with attacks all along the frontier, the most terrible being at Dover, New Hampshire, in June of 1689. Abenaki Indians based at St. Francis and on Missisquoi Bay at Swanton, Vermont, were to provide much of the fighting for three generations. This war, in which raids were made yearly upon Deerfield, or Hatfield, or both, stopped inconclusively in 1697. Sir William Phipps had taken Port Royal in 1690, but it had fallen to the French three years later. The three-pronged attack upon the St. Lawrence in 1690 was a fiasco, even though there had been attempts at Albany in May of that year to form a united effort against the French. There had been some co-operative action, as Massachusetts had troops in New Hampshire helping that province ward off the Indians, but Phipps withdrew the Massachusetts troops because of a reluctance of New Hampshire to help pay for them.

Indian raids did not halt merely because a peace treaty had been signed. In 1698 Hatfield was raided and prisoners taken. A rescue party left at once and overtook the Indians along the river at Vernon, Vermont. Here the English ambushed the captors and regained two prisoners. It was, apparently, the first English-Indian struggle on Vermont soil.

Queen Anne's War also opened with raids along the eastern frontier. Casco and Wells, Maine, were destroyed on August 10, 1702, and except for 1705, the fringes of New England and New York were singed by fiery enemies.

Once again there were attempts on Port Royal, which finally fell on the third try, in 1710. Benjamin Church destroyed two French towns in Acadia. Out in the Connecticut Valley, Deerfield was attacked in the fall of 1703, and then on February 29, 1704, the French and Indians, under Major Hertel de Rouville, reappeared at Deerfield and killed forty-seven inhabitants and captured 119 more. This brought out the English scouting parties, and in the spring of that year Lieutenant Caleb Lyman, with a small party of

Northampton men, killed seven Indians at Coös. During the winter of 1704 and 1705, Captain Jonathan Wells came up the Connecticut to the mouth of the river now named for him and built a small fort there. His party remained there until spring, being visited by smallpox, but no Indians. Deerfield was visited again in February of 1709, when Thomas Baker was captured. Captain Wright took to the woods again in May and killed some Indians up on the Winooski River. Thomas Baker of Deerfield, returned from captivity, led a party to Coös in 1712 without notable results; whereas in July of that year, Chief Graylock attacked Northampton with more success. The War was ended in 1713 by the Treaty of Utrecht, which once again solved nothing.

The Indians were quiet for several years. During that time the settlements strengthened themselves and places such as Northfield, deserted since 1675, re-established themselves.

In 1712 the southern boundary of Massachusetts was surveyed, and it was discovered that there were nearly 108,000 acres of land settled under Massachusetts patents which actually belonged to Connecticut. As the inhabitants thereof preferred to remain in Massachusetts, and that province was eager to keep them within her bounds, Massachusetts offered equivalent lands to Connecticut. Some 44,000 acres were located north of Northfield. When the equivalent lands were auctioned in April 1716, the proceeds were given to Yale College. A combine bought the entire lot, and parcels were assigned to individuals who made up the group. Thus Lieutenant Governor William Dummer, William Brattle, Anthony Stoddard, and John White became the owners of land now lying in the State of Vermont in the neighborhood of Brattleboro.

Following a disastrous raid on Topsham, Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire declared war on the Indians on June 13, 1722. Graylock came down from Missisquoi Bay in August of 1723 and raided Northfield. From there he went to Rutland, Massachusetts, and upon returning stopped at Northfield once again.

On December 27, 1723, the Massachusetts General Court voted to build a block house named Fort Dummer in the most convenient place on the lands called the Equivalent Lands, above Northfield. In addition, forty men, English and Western Indians, were to be stationed there to scout the area. Work was begun in February 1724

under the direction of Lieutenant Timothy Dwight of Northampton, who brought four carpenters, twelve soldiers with narrow axes, and two teams to the site, which was in the southeast corner of Brattleboro and now under the waters of the Vernon Dam.

Nevertheless, in June 1724 Graylock appeared at Northfield. He was lurking about Fort Dummer with forty compatriots a few days later, but made no attack.

In August a Massachusetts force went up to Norridgewock, Maine, the seat of a mission under Father Sebastian Rasle. The town and church were destroyed, and Father Rasle was killed. Whatever the priest's position in the matter of the raids into lower New England was, they stopped coming from this Indian center after his death. Indians fleeing from this debacle went to Swanton and joined Graylock.

In the fall of 1724, that chief was again around the settlements of Deerfield, Westfield, and Northampton. At Fort Dummer he killed four or five men on October 11.

The next spring Captain Thomas Wells went north to Missisquoi Bay, but he accomplished nothing. The final act of this war in the area was an ambush of six men on scouting duty to the west of Fort Dummer. Only one man escaped.

The English and Indians signed a treaty of peace at Boston on December 15, 1725, which resulted in nearly twenty years of quiet. These twenty years provided an opportunity for expansion up the river and, indeed, in the entire region of Western Massachusetts. The Massachusetts General Court was petitioned by Captain Joseph Kellogg for permission to establish a trading post at Fort Dummer. He pointed out that it was not disadvantageously situated for such activities with Indians north and west. The legislature thought well enough of the idea to approve the plan as a means of exerting English influence among the natives, and Kellogg was appointed the agent for the province in this matter. The Court also authorized the purchase of trade goods and a small force to garrison the fort, which became known as the Truck House.

Settlers slowly appeared in the valley. In 1736 the plats of the townships of Chesterfield, Westmoreland, Walpole, and Charlestown were approved by the Massachusetts General Court, and proprietors were empowered to organize their townships, which were

then numbered 1 to 4, south to north. On the Vermont side, Westminster was granted at the same time to people from Taunton, but did not receive its first settlers until after King George's War. Putney was unchartered until 1753, although there were settlers in the town by 1741, and a fort built. Below Fort Dummer there were permanent settlers in Vernon in 1736, when both Josiah Sartwell and Orlando Bridgman built "forts" for the safekeeping of their families. In 1743 the Reverend Ebenezer Hinsdell built a fort across the river from Fort Dummer, for which he was chaplain.

Meanwhile, the trading activities at Fort Dummer progressed well. Facilities were enlarged in 1729 and in 1731. In 1734 Kellogg hired three Indian assistants from the Scaticook and Caughnawaga tribes who remained at the Truck House for ten years. In 1737 Fort Dummer was the scene of the signing of a treaty by the Caughnawaga Indians and Massachusetts Bay.

In the year 1740 the Massachusetts-New Hampshire boundary was settled to the advantage of the latter province. Massachusetts lost twenty-eight towns, including those along the river. Although Fort Dummer was now the property of New Hampshire, Massachusetts continued to garrison it and in the same year rebuilt and strengthened it. In 1744 Governor Shirley of Massachusetts wrote Lord Newcastle that New Hampshire should assume responsibility for it, but that Massachusetts would continue to care for it until New Hampshire could act. Despite advice from London, the New Hampshire legislature refused to do anything about Fort Dummer, pointing out that there was not a community within fifty miles of the fort that had been granted by New Hampshire. Furthermore, since it was vital to the defence of the Massachusetts frontier, Massachusetts would not let it fall into disrepair. However, after reconsidering, the assembly voted some halfhearted measures and requested Massachusetts to turn over the fort to its authorities. Massachusetts refused to do so, considering the measures of protection inadequate. The matter came up in 1749, but again no action was taken.

King George's War opened on the Connecticut in 1745, four years after it had begun in Europe. In 1744 Massachusetts Bay had established forts at Hoosuc (Adams), at Heath, and at Rowe, called Forts Massachusetts, Shirley, and Pelham respectively. Two hun-

dred troops to man the frontier were raised, and 96 barrels of powder went west to the settlements. Colonel John Stoddard of Northampton was commander of the region, with Colonel Ephraim Williams in charge at Fort Massachusetts. Scouts were offered a bounty of £30. per scalp.

In 1745 the French and Indians came down the valley. In early July, William Phipps was killed at Putney. The New Hampshire towns also had visitors of similar nature. In October, Putney was attacked again and two men killed and the cattle driven off.

1746 was more active. Bridgman's fort in Vernon was attacked. Two whites were killed, two were wounded and two captured. A scouting party of twelve men under Captain Timothy Carter was nearly captured just below Fort Dummer. Farther south, Bernardston was attacked. The troops at Fort Massachusetts were captured by eight or nine hundred French and Indians under Governor Vaudreuil on the twentieth-first of August, 1746. A party of Indians from this force then went on to Deerfield.

The 1747 season began with a three-day siege at Charlestown from the fourth to the sixth of April. The French and Indians under Debeline were repulsed by the settlers and thirty Massachusetts soldiers led by Captain Phineas Stevens. The Indians then struck at Northfield and Fort Massachusetts which had been rebuilt during the winter.

In July, Massachusetts scouts under Mathew Clesson went up the Black River and on to Otter Creek, looking for a fort believed to be building there by the French. There was no fort, but on the way home they were ambushed below No. 4. Finally, in late October, Bridgman's fort was burned.

Despite the precautions of sending 100 Massachusetts troops to No. 4, another 100 to Fort Massachusetts, and increasing the scalp bounty to £100., 1748 was a bad year of Indian troubles, beginning early in the spring. No. 4 was hit on the fifth of March, several casualties resulting. Five men under Lieutenant John Sargeant were on their way to Colerain, Massachusetts, from Fort Dummer and were killed or captured on the twentieth-ninth. In May, Captain Eleazer Melvin, from Fort Dummer, with Captains Stevens and Hobbs of No. 4, joined forces with 78 men to clear the Indians out of the region. They went up the Black River and divided at Otter Creek,

Stevens and Hobbs going north, Melvin going on to the lake. There, in sight of Crown Point, Melvin's men fired on some Indians in two canoes. The Indians caught him in Londonderry and killed six of the patrol before they could fight free. Stevens and Hobbs returned to No. 4 without incident and without accomplishing anything. Indians ambushed fourteen men going from Hinsdell's to Fort Dummer and killed or captured ten of them. A rescue party found nothing but the bodies.

Ten days later, on the twenty-sixth of June, Captain Humphrey Hobbs and forty men of No. 4 were en route to Fort Shirley. They were ambushed in Marlboro, but fought their way out against heavy odds, with the loss of only three men.

On the fourteenth of July, Sergeant Thomas Taylor and sixteen men were on their way from Northfield to Keene to reinforce that post. They were attacked near Hinsdell's fort and only four escaped. The Indians tested Fort Massachusetts again in August, but found it stoutly held under the leadership of Colonel Williams. So ended another summer of death and destruction without any real steps taken to halt the slaughter. Meanwhile, the war ground to a halt in Europe, and hostilities ceased in North America.

Forts Massachusetts, Dummer, and No. 4 were manned throughout 1749, and the winter of 1749-1750, but No. 4 was hit in June of 1749. During the five-year interim of 1749 to 1754, towns such as Dummerston, Putney, Westminster, and Rockingham, Vermont, and Winchester, New Hampshire, received settlers or were re-established. Towns in western Massachusetts such as Lenox and Pittsfield came into being. In New Hampshire the settlements were creeping northward from Concord.

At the beginning of the Seven Years' War, France controlled central North America (north of Mexico) with the exception of the area around Hudson's Bay and along the Atlantic Coast. The French were moving deeper into the Ohio Valley and the English were getting nervous. On the fourteenth of June, 1754, representatives met at Albany to try to effect a union of purpose among Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island, and Maryland. The Congress failed, possibly because Governor Shirley of Massachusetts was too ambitious, and the divided colonies faced the war with French Canada.

Colonel Israel Williams, commanding officer of the Hampshire County regiment, recommended to Governor Shirley that the defences along the northwestern frontier of Massachusetts be altered and strengthened. He suggested that Forts Pelham and Shirley and No. 4 be abandoned, as they offered no real deterrent to the enemy. Forts Massachusetts and Dummer should be strengthened, as well as defences at Northfield, Bernardston, Colerain, Greenfield, and Deerfield. Also, he thought that the Deerfield Valley should have outposts at frequent intervals. The Massachusetts General Court approved his plan except for the abandonment of No. 4 and placed Colonel Ephraim Williams in command at the forts.

The first attack of 1754 was over in Dutch Hoosuc, New York, about ten miles west of Fort Massachusetts. The savages then went down as far as Stockbridge. Although New Hampshire finally saw fit to send twenty men to No. 4, that place was attacked on the thirtieth of August, and the Johnson family was captured.

The year 1755 opened with great expectations. A force of British regulars was on the scene commanded by General Edward Braddock. The fiasco before Fort Duquesne on the ninth of July is well known. Governor Shirley succeeded to Braddock's command, but his campaign against Fort Niagara was cancelled because French reinforcements slipped into the St. Lawrence past a British blockade.

On the local scene, a fort was rebuilt at Putney with ten or twelve New Hampshire troops as garrison. A number of neighborhood families lived in it during the war. The rangers were out in force, spurred on by a handsome bounty for scalps. The inhabitants were required to be armed at all times, and Massachusetts sent more troops into the area. Even so, in June, Charlestown, Walpole, Hinsdale, New Hopkinton, Keene, and Rice's fort in Charlemont, Massachusetts, were all attacked. A rebuilt Bridgman's fort at Vernon was entered by subterfuge when fourteen prisoners were taken and the place was burned again. Possibly the reason the Indians acquired access to it was that the interior of the fort was clearly visible from the tops of nearby hills. During that summer nineteen persons were killed or captured within a two-mile radius of Fort Dummer. Although Fort Dummer was undermanned at this time, New England troops were in force on the Bay of Fundy, and that vital gateway to Canada was in British hands by the end of June

1755. During the summer a large force of colonists was up on Lake George building Fort William Henry and beat off an attack by Dieskau on September 8, but the forts of Crown Point and Ticonderoga remained in French hands.

1756 opened with nine men on guard at Fort Dummer. The Massachusetts House of Representatives voted to survey a road from No. 4 to Crown Point and to build a fort between the headwaters of the Black River and Otter Creek. Preparations were made, but nothing else was accomplished.

The Indians came down in June, striking at No. 4, Winchester, Greenfield, Fort Massachusetts, Northfield, back to Fort Massachusetts and Williamstown. They attacked almost at will and always with some success, and were just as happy to pick off a farmer in a field as to ambush a patrol of twenty-six men.

The arrival of Montcalm in Canada meant bad news on the larger scene, as he destroyed Fort Oswego and Fort George and on August 9, defeated Monro at Fort William Henry. A planned attack by the British upon Louisbourg failed when the British fleet was wrecked in a hurricane off that harbor. On the local scene things were quiet. No. 4 was attacked, but the presence of Massachusetts rangers at Hinsdell's fort under Captain John Burk acted as a deterrent.

Another dismal failure to take Ticonderoga in July 1758 was offset by Amherst's victory at Louisbourg and Forbes' reduction of Fort Dusquesne. Once again the Connecticut Valley was relatively quiet. Hinsdell's fort and No. 4 were raided in early March. The Indians proceeded to Colerain, Massachusetts, to make their last attack in western Massachusetts. One hundred men were stationed at No. 4 during that winter, but there were no incidents to test their mettle.

1759 was a year of victory. Fort Niagara was taken, Ticonderoga and Crown Point were blown up by the French, and Quebec fell. Robert Rogers made his famed attack on St. Francis and destroyed that center of Indian activity on the fifth of October.

The war was over for the valley except for a final raid on the seventh of June, 1760, when the entire family of Joseph Willard of Charlestown was killed or captured.

From the foregoing narrative, it is clear that the Indians of the

eighteenth century were unbeatable on the terms that the colonies chose to fight. The defence of the valley, such as it was, consisted chiefly of sending sorties after Indians who had already completed their work. These scouting parties invariably were a failure, usually being unable to locate the marauders and sometimes being ambushed themselves. Scouting parties sent out as preventative measures also seemed to have little visible effect upon the Indians.

The answer lay in a truly united effort by the colonies against the Indians on their home grounds and against their sources of supply. The situation was further compromised by the presence of the French, who kept the Indians in arms and made the raids profitable. Nevertheless, the greater population of English America should have made such a campaign feasible. The political and economic bickerings between provinces made that impossible, even as it made a joint defence of the valley by New Hampshire and Massachusetts difficult. The cost was in human lives. Ultimately, a common effort was obtained through the agency of the British high command, which first made its appearance in 1754. With the French and Indians busily engaged in purely military matters, they had less time and energy for depredations on the English frontier. In the end, the combined pressure of colonials and British regulars brought defeat to France and her Indian allies.

One thing stands out in this otherwise unhappy tale, that being the unquestioned courage of the families that came first and faced the enemy. To them belongs the credit of the final victory, for without their willingness to keep the outer reaches of civilization intact, the frontier surely would have receded, and the French might have secured the continent.

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