

Battle of Munnaccommock Swamp / "Pequot Swamp Fight" July 13-14, 1637

After 380 years, the Pequot War remains one of the most controversial and significant events in American history. This conflict influenced the development of New England's political and social landscape, and impacted policies toward Native Americans throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Although it began on the Pequot (Thames) River in present-day Groton, the last battle of the Pequot War was fought at Munnaccommock Swamp, known today as the Pequot Swamp, located in Southport, CT.

Between 1611 and 1633 both the Dutch and Pequot benefitted from a trading relationship in which the Pequot exchanged wampum (white and purple beads made from whelk and quahog shells) for European goods. In 1633 the Dutch established a fortified trading post, the House of Hope, in present-day Hartford. Political and economic relationships in the region were disrupted during the winter of 1633-1634 when thousands of Natives died from a smallpox epidemic that swept local communities. Soon after, hundreds of English traders and settlers migrated into the Connecticut River Valley in 1633-1635. Tensions heightened as the English and other Native tribes attempted to break the Pequot-Dutch dominance over the region. English settlers disregarded Pequot and Dutch territorial claims when they established the towns Windsor, Wethersfield, Hartford, and a fort at Saybrook.

The Pequot War began in August 1637 when Massachusetts Bay invaded Block Island and attacked Pequot villages on the Pequot (Thames) River to avenge the deaths of two English traders. The Pequot immediately laid siege to Saybrook Fort through the fall and winter of 1636-1637 attacking English soldiers and traders along the river. After the Pequot raid on Wethersfield, the Connecticut River towns raised an army of English soldiers and allied Indians under the command of Captain John Mason. This combined force destroyed the Pequot fortified village at Mistick on May 26, 1637 which was a devastating blow to the tribe. In the weeks that followed the Pequot vacated their homeland and a large group followed their Sachem, Sassacus, west towards the Hudson River. The English and their Native allies pursued Sassacus and his followers to Quinnipiac (New Haven) and west where they intercepted them at Sasquanicut (Southport). The Battle of Munnaccommock Swamp was fought between July 13-14, 1637 as English-allied forces attempted to surround the swamp and defeat the Pequot and their allies. Two hundred non-combatants (women, children, elderly) surrendered to the English and were later sold into slavery. The remaining Pequot-allied warriors fought the English overnight and were able to break out of the swamp at dawn. Although few casualties occurred on either side, this proved to be the final battle of the war and the Pequot were not able to mount any further opposition. Six months after the battle, English settlers from Massachusetts Bay arrived at Quinnipiac to establish New Haven Colony and began to settle towns along the shoreline, including Fairfield.