

“A Doleful Slaughter Near Black Point”

The Battle at Moore’s Brook, Scarborough, Maine, June 29, 1677

By Sumner G. Hunnewell

In June 1677 the General Council in Boston decided to send troops to answer the constant attacks in the eastern territory of Maine. They also wanted to reclaim lands, including Pemaquid, that lay to the east of Scarborough and that had been abandoned by settlers because of the unrest.

The deployment of the forces would be approached in two ways. Lieutenant James Richardson would take the English soldiers and friendly Indians under his command to range the woods between the Merrimack and Piscataqua Rivers and then march to Scarborough. To encourage the men, Massachusetts promised them twenty shillings for every enemy scalp and twice that for any prisoners taken. The plan was for Richardson’s troops to march up the coast of Maine until they reached Black Point. Major Thomas Clarke and Captain Benjamin Swett would take a seaward route with the bulk of the army in three ships. The rendezvous date was set at June 26, but the ships did not arrive in Scarborough until June 28.

As the men marched toward Black Point’s garrison, behind them lay Saco Bay. On their left were Blue Point and Dunstan and the crescent sands of Saco. To the right lay the woods of the neck and farther on, the plains where once the families lived by farming and husbandry, much of their efforts destroyed the year before. An expanse of marshland spread ahead of them, where freshwater springs and the sinuous Nonesuch River wound its way.

Marching in two or three files, the men saw the land give way to an expanse of marshland on their left, while the land rose before and to the right of them. It took less than half an hour to march to the vicinity of Moore’s Brook, a small waterway that led down to the marsh. They were about two miles from the safety of the garrison, walking along an open plain. As the men began to cross over Moore’s Brook and head up the hill on the other side, the Indians attacked.

The English were not outnumbered, but the surprise was their undoing. Squando, a sachem and tribe leader, laid his trap well. The war whoop was very real and must have struck the less resolute soldiers with terror. The Indians rose from behind the bushes, from the marshland to their left, and across the plain from their right. What had started as pursuit of a few Indians turned into a full pitched battle.

The initial slaughter on the side of the English must have been horrific. Lieutenant Richardson was cut down soon after the first volley along with others of his men. English and friendly Indians fell wounded or dead; others tried to carry the wounded to safety, but shelter was two miles away and they were facing an enemy who knew the territory well. Some badly wounded English soldiers found ways to hide. Some men, several of whom had served with Swett before, held their ground. Others, inexperienced soldiers, left their comrades to bear the brunt of the attack. There is good reason to believe that the friendly Indians in Richardson’s company stood their ground; there is no record that shows any treachery or perfidy on their part. The townsmen had shown their lack of resolve earlier with their encounter with Mogg the preceding year, but how they reacted at the Moore’s Brook battle is not known. In no time, the ranks of the English and Indians friendly to them were thrown into disarray.

Swett, showing great courage, rallied what men he could and made a torturous retreat toward the