



Connecticut Unscathed: Victory in the Great Narragansett War, 1675–1676

by Jason W. Warren.

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Major Jason Warren (US Army War College) has recast the narrative of King Philip's War with special emphasis on Connecticut's war effort. This is reflected in his retitling of the conflict as the Great Narragansett War. By whatever name, the war is ground well trodden by historians, who typically concentrate on the figures of Benjamin Church and King Philip. Warren, however, approaches the conflict from a fresh angle.¹ Specifically, he assesses the war policies of the various New England colonies and highlights Connecticut's strengths, especially in its judicious Indian policies. The colony's moderate attitude toward Indians attracted groups of Mohegan who ignored Philip's and later the Narragansett's entreaties for pan-native resistance to the English colonists. As a result, Connecticut had the advantage of more Indian allies than any other New England colony during the Great Narragansett War.

Connecticut's successes occurred from the utilization of competent Native allies in large numbers from the beginning of the conflict, generating a military division of labor in which colonists and Indians performed duties associated with their respective strengths. This symbiotic relationship served as a basis for effective operations, with Indian battlefield assistance realizing the potential of European tactics. With this support, Connecticut deployed a competent dragoon force, representing a cross-section of its population, including volunteers to boost effectiveness. (13)

*Connecticut Unscathed*² comprises six chapters (plus an introduction and conclusion) analyzing discrete aspects of the war. Chapter 1 concerns Connecticut's Indian policy prior to the war. Chapter 2 treats the war itself. Chapter 3 describes the colony's moderate Indian policy during the conflict. Chapter 4 explains the European nature of Connecticut's defenses. Chapter 5 explains the success of Connecticut's defenses and the final chapter considers its effective offensive operations.

Unlike other New England colonies, except for Rhode Island, Connecticut had maintained good Indian relations ever since the Pequot War (1636–38).³ This was well advised, given the presence of the Dutch to its south and the threats posed to the colony by both the French and the Pequot and Narragansett Indians. Connecticut partnered with chief Uncas and various Mohegan bands who had joined the Pequot to counter the more numerous Narragansett. The postwar collapse of the Pequot allowed Uncas to build a stronger confederacy, in part by garnering the support of Pequot bands moving into Connecticut. Uncas executed the Narragansett chief Miantonomi and forestalled further aggression by Miantonomi's successors. Backing Uncas over other Indian leaders sometimes conflicted with the economic interests of the Winthrop family. Though the distance of Connecticut from the native confeder-

1. See also Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 2010). On the historic memory on the conflict, see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (NY: Knopf, 1998).

2. Originally the author's doctoral dissertation (Ohio State, 2011).

3. Warren is building here on Harold E. Selesky's *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1990).

acy during the Great Narragansett War helped the colony avoid the large-scale attacks endured by other New England colonies, Connecticut was nevertheless subject to a series of small-scale attacks.

Warren stresses the critical shift in leadership of the war after the entry of the Narragansett and their leader Canonchet, who quickly proved to be far more important than Philip. The Narragansett, because of their earlier animosity toward the Mohegan, were more likely to target Connecticut. But they generally turned to easier objectives because Connecticut's many Indian allies made large-scale attacks against it problematic.

The third chapter, the heart of the book, examines relations between Connecticut and the colony's tribes, posing a chicken-and-egg question: were the colony's Indians more loyal because of its moderate policies, or were those policies in place because smaller tribal bands needed to demonstrate greater loyalty to ensure their independence? In any case, the arrangement was mutually beneficial: Connecticut did not try to disarm native bands as other colonies did, and some towns even allowed natives to shelter with them for protection. Colonial leaders stressed identifying bands in order to avoid friendly fire incidents. All this paid dividends when local natives refused to cooperate with the Narragansett and withheld the intelligence necessary to carry out operations. Connecticut also treated native prisoners better than did the other New England colonies, often sentencing POWs to terms of domestic servitude rather than slavery, which made surrender more attractive than resistance:

Although certain actions against local Indians represented the worst of the colonists, Connecticut throughout the war maintained more tolerant relations than its Puritan neighbors. The colony's inhabitants generally adhered to this policy. Connecticut never employed the large-scale concentration camps of Massachusetts and Plymouth, refrained from disarmament, maintained a lenient voluntary-surrender policy, and took positive actions—such as inviting local Indians into their towns for mutual defense and feeding them in the process—to maintain good relations. It avoided unnecessary irritants such as disarmament, which New York even implemented. This pragmatic and ethical approach to local Indians led to sound relationships and ultimately better security. (91)

Although Connecticut sometimes demanded hostages from allied bands, it did not intern natives as Massachusetts did at Deer Island. Most natives remained friendly or at least neutral in their dealings with Connecticut.

The fourth chapter clarifies the influence of the European military revolution in New England. Warren argues that Connecticut's defensive positions resembled European fortifications. Strong fortified points averted Narragansett attacks for reasons of expense, logistics, and intelligence, exacerbated by the loyalty of Connecticut's native allies. Stout fortifications and astute Indian policy reinforced each other. Considering the earlier threats from the Dutch, French, and Narragansett, Connecticut was wise to build fortifications; even though they often fell into disrepair in peacetime, in wartime they were a basis for reconstruction. Multiple garrison houses allowed several unfortified towns farther to the north and west to be abandoned.

Chapter 5 picks up strands of argument in chapters three and four by describing the successful defenses of Connecticut. Warren notes that the colony's distance from the sites of early fighting gave the Connecticut War Council time to put its policies into practice, including rebuilding fortifications and establishing night watches. The Connecticut River Valley—the main invasion route—was too densely settled for the Narragansett to mount an attack in force without alerting the colony or its Indian allies.

The final chapter centers on the value of Connecticut's offensive operations against the Narragansett's use of a defense in depth. Warren observes that Connecticut's well led forces came from a broad array of colonists, not just lower classes pressed into service. He writes that Connecticut's superior forces and reliable native allies enabled it to better solve the problems of strategic consumption than could other colonies facing the Narragansett. He further maintains that the colony's Mohegan and Pe-

quot allies, despite their smaller numbers, evinced better leadership and tactics than other groups in the region. In the field, natives served as scouts and flankers, while the colonists provided firepower at the front. This shrewd division of labor played to the strengths of each.

Warren taps such familiar sources for the war as Benjamin Church's diary and Increase Mather and William Hubbard's accounts of the conflict, but he also diverges from the preoccupations of these materials which reflect the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth versions of the war. Thus he makes more use of, for example, the Connecticut Colonial Records. The decisions as well of the Connecticut General Court and the War Council it established convey a clear sense of the policies being implemented.

This well written study should strongly interest all students of early America, Native America, and colonial military history. It is much enhanced by well chosen illustrations and maps that clarify the author's arguments for the special importance of Connecticut in the Great Narragansett War. Jason Warren has conclusively shown the value of exploring distinct local geographical and political contexts rather than viewing the New England colonies as a monolith. Instead of generalizing about some putative Puritan, New England, or Native American way of war, he offers a more nuanced perspective on telling differences between and within specific local societies.