

KING PHILIP'S
WARS

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KING PHILIP'S WARS

When King Philip got out of jail for the second time, he moved into a tiny furnished room in Stonington, Connecticut, and got a job as a bellhop at the nearby Foxwoods casino.

The manager of the hotel, a Pequot named Charles Buckman, felt sorry for King Philip, a Wampanoag, and decided to give him a second chance at life. But he refused to put "King Philip" on his name tag, identifying him as "Philip Occum," which was the name on his Social Security card.

Then he sat him down in his office for a talk.

"King Philip's War was lost about 350 years ago," he said. "It's time to get over it."

"I'm over it," King Philip answered.

"Then why do you insist on that ridiculous name?"

"It's my name," King Philip said sullenly.

"It's over," Charles Buckman said again, putting his hand on King Philip's shoulder. "Our Pequot War came before your King Philip's War. But we're not stuck in the 17th century. We're in the 21st century and we're still here. As a tribe. And prospering."

"I'm not prospering."

"You would if you let yourself. You've got a chance to make yourself a life here. Work your way up

the chain. I'll help you. But you've got to lay off the booze and the hatred. Is it a deal?"

King Philip nodded and they shook hands on it. But as soon as he got back to his room, he took out a bottle of whiskey and sat on his sofa drinking and brooding over things that had happened nearly four centuries ago.

It was these hours in the darkness of his little room that got him through his day. Here he could hate to his heart's content, rewriting history into a bloody triumph, striking down his enemy, the White Man, and driving him into the sea.

The terrible mistake of the Wampanoags, he believed, was helping the Pilgrims survive that first winter in the wilderness. The time to have stopped the White Man was at the outset, when he first landed, and that was an opportunity that the Wampanoags, as the tribe in this instance on the spot, had unforgiveably missed.

The native he could least understand or forgive was Squanto, who had befriended the Pilgrims and persuaded the Wampanoag sachem Massasoit to do likewise. All Squanto had to do was nothing, and the Pilgrims would have perished. Instead, he negotiated peace treaties between them and the local tribes and taught them how to survive.

Why he had done this was a total mystery to King Philip. Squanto knew the English well, having been sold by them as a slave in Malaga, and having lived among them in England, before returning to his

native village at Patuxet, where he found that every single one of his tribe had died of the plague.

And still, he helped them! At this thought, King Philip would gnash his teeth and pound his clenched fists. Fool! Fool! The traitor Squanto worked his special relationship to his advantage, getting paid off by both the whites and the tribes for keeping the other at bay.

That was how the native tribes had lost their heritage. They had betrayed themselves. This one aligned with the English, that one with the Dutch, the other one with the French, all looking for advantages over the others.

The division among the tribes was what had undermined the second opportunity to defeat the whites, a generation later, when the Wampanoag sachem Metacom, known to the English as King Philip, attempted to gather all of the tribes on the coast into one vast uprising to push the White Man back into the sea.

Had the tribes banded together then, in 1675, it might still not have been too late, and perhaps all of the centuries of suffering that followed might have been averted. And the land – the land! – might still be the cornucopia it once had been!

Even without the cooperation of all the tribes, in its first year the war went well. Many white settlements were burned, and the whites were pushed back from the frontier.

But the Wampanoag's enemies, sensing an advantage, allied with the English against them – the

Pequots and Mohegans and Mohawks, who drove them from their winter quarters and harassed them mercilessly.

Arrgh! King Philip took another slug of whiskey. If only he had been the sachem of the Mohawks! Instead of driving King Philip from his winter haven, he would have thrown a thousand warriors into the fight! He imagined them descending on the little trading post at Albany and setting it aflame! He swung his empty arms, in his fantasy each one gripping a tomahawk, and felt the shattering of white skulls beneath his clenched fists.

This was what he lived for.

By day he was doing well. He was a large man with pronounced tribal features and bronze skin, which was one reason Charles Buckman was pleased to hire and advance him. The mainly white guests expected Indians at an Indian-owned resort, and King Philip fulfilled their expectations, for which they tipped him handsomely.

By night he crushed their skulls, drove knives between their ribs, set them and their homes ablaze, whooped inwardly as their remnants fled to their vessels and set sail from his native shores.

For King Philip, Thanksgiving was the blackest day of the year. The hotel, naturally, made a big thing of it as the guests poured in for the four-day weekend. There was a Thanksgiving scene in the lobby, complete with Squanto and Massasoit figurines leading a delegation of Wampanoags bearing five slaughtered deer on poles.

The Thanksgiving exhibit at the resort museum detailed the Wampanoag's shame, bragging about how the native tribes had befriended and saved the Pilgrims, saying nothing, of course, about how that friendship had been betrayed.

After all, the white guests had come for a good time.

King Philip hated each couple as he took them to their room. Most of their ancestors had been in Ireland or Germany or Russia when his people had been massacred, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that they had a right to come here to enjoy the fruits of that suffering. And for that, he could not forgive them.

That night, when he got back to his room, he got drunk quickly and staggered back out onto the street. The room could not contain his rage. He needed to hold the entire lost continent in his arms.

As he swayed along the streets of Stonington lined with two- and three-century-old wooden houses, he looked in through the windows at Thanksgiving dinners, savoring his anger, which grew at each scene. There were the victors celebrating the destruction of his people! This was the moment when the death march of the whites from shore to shore had begun!

What had he to be thankful for? The impoverished remnants of his people lay like rags across the continent, their land gone, their culture gone, their way of life gone, waiting to be swallowed up into the swollen belly of the enemy, losing their memory, their history, their rage.

He pounded on a door at random, giving out an unearthly whoop! as it opened and falling upon the elderly man who opened it, beating him with his fists and finally biting his ear off as he pounded his head against the concrete sidewalk.

He felt himself being drawn frantically off his victim, then suddenly fell slack, realizing that this was no longer fantasy. He felt the two parts of him suddenly slide back into each other, become one, and as he waited passively for the police to come he felt strangely relieved, as though he were a child waiting to be taken home.