

= Battle of Machias =

The Battle of Machias (also known as the Battle of the Margarett) was the second naval engagement of the American Revolutionary War , the Battle off Fairhaven being the first . It took place on June 11 ? 12 , 1775 , in and around the port of Machias in what is now eastern Maine , and resulted in the capture by Patriot militia of a British schooner .

Following the outbreak of the war and the start of the Siege of Boston , British authorities enlisted the assistance of Loyalist merchant Ichabod Jones to assist in the acquisition of needed supplies . Two of Jones ' merchant ships arrived in Machias on June 2 , accompanied by the British armed sloop Margarett , commanded by midshipman James Moore . The townspeople , unhappy with Jones ' business practices , decided to arrest him , and in the attempt , decided to go after Moore and his ship . Moore was able to escape out of the harbor , but the townspeople seized one of Jones ' ships , armed it and a second local ship , and sailed out to meet him . In a short confrontation , they captured Moore 's vessel and crew , fatally wounding him in the process .

The people of Machias went on to capture additional British ships , and fought off the landing of a large force intended to take control of the town in 1777 . Privateers and others operating out of Machias continued to be a thorn in the British Navy 's side throughout the war .

= = Background = =

On April 19 , 1775 , the American Revolutionary War began with the Battles of Lexington and Concord in the British Province of Massachusetts Bay . Following the battle , the militia that had mustered to oppose the British besieged the city of Boston where the British troops were located .

Boston 's British military leaders , Admiral Samuel Graves and General Thomas Gage , both had reason to do business with the people of Machias , a small coastal logging community located in what is now eastern Maine , but was then part of the Province of Massachusetts Bay . Gage required lumber to build barracks for additional troops arriving in the besieged city . Graves wanted to recover the guns from the wreck of HMS Halifax , which had apparently been intentionally run aground in Machias Bay by a local pilot in February 1775 . The ship 's guns were reported to be of interest to the Patriots of Machias . Graves authorized Ichabod Jones , a Tory Machias merchant who had ships in the port of Boston , to take flour and other food supplies to the town of Machias aboard his two ships Unity and Polly in exchange for Gage 's needed lumber . To guarantee that this would happen , Graves sent the armed schooner Margarett (sometimes also spelled Margueritta or Marguerite in historical accounts) , under the command of James Moore , a midshipman from his flagship HMS Preston , to accompany the two merchant vessels . Moore also carried orders to retrieve what he could from the wreck of the Halifax , which they would pass on the way .

= = Arrival at Machias = =

On June 2 , 1775 , Jones ' ships arrived in the port at Machias , while the Margarett was delayed retrieving the guns from the Halifax wreck . Jones met resistance from the community by refusing to sell his pork and flour unless he was allowed to also load lumber for Boston . In a meeting on June 6 , the townspeople voted against doing business with Jones . The hostile climate led Jones to ask Moore to bring the Margarett within firing distance of the town . This prompted the town to meet a second time ; this time they voted to permit the trade , and the Unity was docked at the wharf to begin unloading .

Following the vote , Jones announced that he would only do business with those who had voted in favor of trade . This angered those who had voted against , and Colonel Benjamin Foster , a local militia leader , conspired with militia from neighboring towns to capture Jones following the example of Brunswick militiamen a month earlier . Their plan to seize him at church on June 11 failed when he noticed the group of men approaching the building . Jones ran into the woods , from which he eventually emerged two days later . Moore and his second @-@ in @-@ command , who were also attending the services , also managed to get back to their ship .

= = Prelude = =

Some of the militia men boarded the docked Unity , removed the remaining supplies , and also removed her sails . Others went around by land near the place where the Margaretta was anchored , and demanded her surrender . Moore refused , threatening to fire on the town . This threat was more bluster than real , as Margaretta sported only a few mounted guns capable of firing one @-@ pound shot . More of the militia men rowed out to the Polly , which was anchored downstream from the Margaretta , and attempted to tow her into the harbor . This attempt failed when she ran aground , possibly due to low tide . Moore raised anchor and came alongside Polly , intending to recover her . After a brief and inconsequential exchange of gunfire with the militia men on the shore , however , he again raised anchor and went further downstream to a safe anchorage .

The next day , the men of Machias regrouped . Foster took about 20 men to East Machias , where they commandeered the Falmouth Packet , a local schooner . The remaining men commandeered the Unity . They rerigged her , installed some planks as a makeshift breastwork to serve as protection , armed themselves with muskets , pitchforks and axes and then set out after the Margaretta , which by that time had reached the waters of Machias Bay . Moore had brought aboard as pilot one Captain Toby , near whose sloop he had anchored overnight , and was looking to depart the scene . In jibing into brisk winds , however , the Margaretta 's main boom and gaff broke away , crippling its navigability . As a result , once in Holmes Bay , Moore captured a sloop , took its spar and gaff to replace the Margaretta 's and also took captive its pilot , Robert Avery , of Norwich , Connecticut .

= = Conflict = =

The Unity crew , about 30 Machias men , elected Jeremiah O 'Brien as their captain , and then sailed out to chase down the Margaretta . As the Unity was a much faster sailing vessel , O 'Brien 's crew quickly overtook the crippled Margaretta , while the Falmouth Packet lagged behind . Maine historian Roger Duncan , among others , indicates that both the Unity and the Falmouth Packet engaged the Margaretta , but other sources disagree . Early 20th @-@ century Machias historian George Drisko claims that the Falmouth Packet either ran aground or never caught up to the Margaretta , and that the men aboard the Unity alone battled the Margaretta directly .

Seeing the Unity approaching , Moore opened full sail and cut away his boats in an attempt to escape . As the Unity pulled closer , he opened fire , but the Machias crew managed to avoid that fire and pull alongside the Margaretta . It took two tries , but they tied alongside and stormed on board the Margaretta , led by O 'Brien 's brother John and Joseph Getchell . Both sides also exchanged musket shots , and Moore tossed hand grenades onto the Unity until Samuel Watts took him down with a musket shot to the chest . As Duncan reports , the Falmouth Packet then managed to pull along the other side of the Margaretta , and the combined crews overwhelmed the Margaretta .

As Midshipman Moore was grievously wounded , his second , Midshipman Stillingfleet , surrendered the crew and vessel . Moore was taken into care in Machias at the home of Stephen Jones , the nephew of Ichabod Jones , but died the next day . At least three other members of Moore 's crew were also killed , as was Robert Avery , the colonist taken by the British . The remaining crew members of the British schooner were held at Machias for about a month , and were eventually handed over to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress . There were also reports circulated , likely exaggerated , that as many as 100 British men died in this and other skirmishes in the Machias area . Machias lost two men , John McNiell and James Coolbroth . Coolbroth died after the skirmish of his wounds . Three others were badly wounded but survived . They were John Berry , who had a musket ball enter his mouth and exit behind his ear , Isaac Taft , and James Cole .

= = Aftermath = =

The Machias community , expecting the full wrath of the British Empire in revenge , immediately petitioned the Massachusetts Provincial Congress for guidance , supplies and assistance . They organized for the defense of Machias and maintained vigilance in the event of British retaliation . Jeremiah O 'Brien immediately outfitted one of the three captured vessels (sources disagree on which vessel ; Polly and Unity are both mentioned , and historian James Volo suggests that recent scholarship favors Polly) with breastwork , armed her with the guns and swivels taken from the Margareta and changed her name to Machias Liberty . In July 1775 , Jeremiah O 'Brien and Benjamin Foster captured two more British armed schooners , the Diligent and the Tatamagouche , whose officers had been captured when they came ashore near Bucks Harbor . In August 1775 , the Provincial Congress formally recognized their efforts , commissioning both the Machias Liberty and the Diligent into the Massachusetts Navy , with Jeremiah O 'Brien as their commander . British retaliation occurred as the burning of Falmouth in October .

Following rumours that an assault on Nova Scotia was being planned , with stores stockpiled at Machias , a small British fleet carrying 1 @, @ 000 men attempted to take Machias in August 1777 ; the locals successfully fought off the landing . The rumors were only partly true ; the idea had been proposed , but no significant military planning had taken place .

During the war , Machias men refitted and armed a variety of ships ? including the Margareta ? and sailed off looking for battle with the British . Jeremiah O 'Brien and John Lambert were both commissioned into the Continental Navy . The Machias Liberty and the Diligent were used to intercept merchant ships supplying the British in the siege of Boston . John and Jerry O 'Brien built a twenty @-@ gun ship and began privateering under an American letter of marque . Jerry was captured off New York late in 1777 ; he escaped from prison in Britain , and continued privateering throughout the war .

The British naval command was continually frustrated by the actions of the Machias seamen during the war , and by the use of Machias as a staging point for militia actions (such as the Eddy Rebellion) in Nova Scotia . Graves more than once attempted to subdue Machias ; he gave commands in 1776 to " proceed and reduce Machias " , and ordered Sir George Collier to " Go , ? destroy Machias " in 1777 . One British officer , presumed to be Collier , said " The damned rebels at Machias were a harder set than those at Bunker Hill . "

= = Liberty pole story = =

There is a widely told story concerning this affair that Machias men erected a Liberty pole after meeting in the Burnham Tavern to discuss the battles of Lexington and Concord . This story , which persists in modern history books and travel guides , has been shown to be an 1831 fabrication by Machias resident John O 'Brien . There is no mention of the Liberty pole in any earlier accounts , including the official report sent by the residents of Machias in 1775 , and the letters of other participants in the events .