

= Mount Hope Bay raids =

The Mount Hope Bay raids were a series of military raids conducted by British troops during the American Revolutionary War against communities on the shores of Mount Hope Bay on May 25 and 30 , 1778 . The towns of Bristol and Warren , Rhode Island were significantly damaged , and Freetown , Massachusetts (present @-@ day Fall River) was also attacked , although its militia resisted British activities . The British destroyed military defenses in the area , including supplies that had been cached by the Continental Army in anticipation of an assault on British @-@ occupied Newport , Rhode Island . Homes as well as municipal and religious buildings were also destroyed in the raids .

On May 25 , 500 British and Hessian soldiers , under orders from General Sir Robert Pigot , the commander of the British garrison at Newport , Rhode Island , landed between Bristol and Warren , destroyed boats and other supplies , and plundered Bristol . Local resistance was minimal and ineffective in stopping the British activities . Five days later 100 soldiers descended on Freetown , where less damage was done because local defenders prevented the British from crossing a bridge .

= = Background = =

In December 1776 , after completing the conquest of New York City , British Lieutenant General William Howe detached a body of troops from his army which occupied Newport , Rhode Island without significant opposition . The Newport garrison came under the command of Brigadier General Sir Robert Pigot when the original commander , Brigadier General Richard Prescott , was captured in the summer of 1777 in a daring commando operation led by Continental Army Major and Warren , Rhode Island , native William Barton .

Since the British occupation began American and British forces had been in a standoff . Major General Joseph Spencer had been ordered by Major General George Washington to launch an assault on Newport in 1777 , but he had not done so , and was removed from command of the Rhode Island defenses . In March 1778 Congress approved the appointment of Major General John Sullivan to Rhode Island . By early May , Sullivan had arrived in the state and produced a detailed report on the situation there . He also began logistical preparations for an attack on Newport , caching equipment and supplies on the eastern shore of Narragansett Bay and the Taunton River . General Pigot was alerted to Sullivan 's preparations by a local Loyalist , and organized an expedition to raid Bristol and Warren . On the evening of May 24 he ordered a force of 500 British and Hessian soldiers under the command of the 22nd Regiment 's Lieutenant Colonel James Campbell to march to the northern end of Aquidneck Island , from where they took whaleboats across to the mainland .

= = Warren and Bristol raid = =

Arriving early on May 25 , Campbell 's forces landed on Bristol Neck , between Bristol and Warren . Campbell divided his force in two , sending one detachment into Warren , and the other to areas along the Kickemuit River where boats and other supplies were cached . The latter force destroyed 58 of 70 small boats that General Spencer had originally stored there , along with other military supplies and a corn mill . They burned down a bridge that crossed the river , and set fire to a sloop . After the British left , locals put out the fire on the sloop , which only suffered minor damage .

The Warren detachment had expected some resistance upon reaching the town , but Continental Army forces , numbering about 300 under the command of Colonel Archibald Clary , had fled the town upon rumors that the British force was much larger than it actually was . The British destroyed military supplies , and set fire to the local powder magazine . The ensuing explosion destroyed six homes and the town 's meeting house . The troops also burned a sloop and destroyed five cannon . As they marched from the town , the first signs of organized resistance began to appear . The two British detachments rejoined and headed for Bristol .

Word of the British landing had reached Providence , and Colonel Barton immediately sprang into action . Recruiting about 200 volunteers , he rushed south , turned Clary 's retreating force around , and caught up with the British shortly after they left Warren , heading for Bristol . The two forces skirmished as the British marched southward , with both sides incurring minor casualties . The notable exception was Colonel Barton , who took a musket ball that did him sufficient damage that it effectively ended his military career , although he continued to fight on that day . Campbell 's men reached Bristol in good order despite the ongoing skirmishes , and engaged in a destructive rampage . In addition to military supplies and cannon , they destroyed 22 homes and a church , and looted everywhere , making , according to one account , " no distinction between their Friends and Foes " .

Their work completed around noon , the British returned to their boats . They embarked , covered by the guns of the frigate HMS Flora and HM galley Pigot , and returned to Aquidneck Island and Newport . The raid prompted General Sullivan to renew calls to area governors for increased militia assistance . This recruiting did not have material effect before the next raid occurred .

= = Freetown raid = =

Pigot next organized a smaller raiding force to go to lower Freetown (a portion that was later separated to form Fall River) . On May 30 , a force of 100 men led by Major Edmund Eyre (who had served under Campbell in the previous raid) sailed up the Taunton River into lower Freetown , where they landed near the mouth of the Quequechan River . The local militia was under the command of Colonel Joseph Durfee , a Continental Army veteran , and had established a watch . The British landing was spotted by a sentinel and the alarm was raised . Forty men , including militia from Freetown and nearby Tiverton , mustered to give resistance . Eyre 's men fired grapeshot from a small cannon and slowly pushed the militiamen uphill . As this took place , some of his men proceeded to burn a house , grist mill and sawmill , nine boats , and 15 @, @ 000 feet of planking . The militia eventually reached a bridge across a stream , where about 25 men established a defensive line behind a stone wall on the far side . In a battle lasting about 90 minutes , Durfee 's men repulsed repeated attempts by Eyre 's men to gain control of the bridge . The British soldiers then took one local resident prisoner , set fire to his property , and retreated to their boats . The militia followed , harassing the soldiers with musket fire . The prisoner was eventually released several days later . The British suffered two killed and five wounded in the battle , while the Americans suffered no casualties beyond the one captive .

= = Aftermath = =

The destruction of the boats and supplies was a minor setback to American plans . In mid @-@ July , General Washington informed Sullivan that a French fleet was available to assist in operations against Newport . This had a galvanizing effect on recruiting , and local shipbuilders embarked on a crash boatbuilding program to replace the boats destroyed in the raid . By early August , the French fleet of the Comte d 'Estaing had arrived off Newport , and Sullivan commanded a force of 10 @, @ 000 militia and regular army troops . Bad weather and the timely arrival of a British fleet to oppose d 'Estaing frustrated allied plans . Sullivan , who had occupied the northern part of Aquidneck Island , was forced to retreat by the mass desertion of militia after the French withdrew their fleet and troops . General Pigot then broke out of his lines in pursuit , but Sullivan successfully fought off his attack in the Battle of Rhode Island on August 29 before retreating off Aquidneck Island .

The British occupied Newport until October 1779 , when the garrison was withdrawn for operations elsewhere . The raided communities continued to contribute to the American war effort despite the damage and difficulties caused by the raids .

Major Edmund Eyre , leader of the Freetown raid , was by 1781 promoted to lieutenant colonel , when he again led British forces during a raid on New London and Groton , Connecticut . He was wounded early in the Battle of Groton Heights , and his troops were accused of engaging in atrocities in the aftermath of the battle .

