

= Battle of Machias (1777) =

The Battle of Machias (August 13 ? 14 , 1777) was an amphibious assault on the Massachusetts town of Machias (in present @-@ day eastern Maine) by British forces during the American Revolutionary War . Local militia aided by Indian allies successfully prevented British troops from landing . The raid , led by Commodore Sir George Collier was executed in an attempt to head off a planned second assault on Fort Cumberland , which had been besieged in November 1776 . The British forces landed below Machias , seized a ship , and raided a storehouse .

The outcome of the raid was disputed . Collier claimed that the action was successful in destroying military stores for an attack on Fort Cumberland (although such stores had not been delivered to Machias) , while the defenders claimed that they had successfully prevented the capture of Machias and driven off the British .

= = Background = =

The small community of Machias , located in the eastern district of Massachusetts that is now the state of Maine , was a persistent thorn in the side of British naval authorities since the start of the American Revolutionary War . In June 1775 its citizens rose up and seized a small naval vessel , and the community had ever since been a base for privateering .

In 1777 John Allan , an expatriate Nova Scotian , was authorized by the Second Continental Congress to organize an expedition to establish a Patriot presence in the western part of Nova Scotia (present @-@ day New Brunswick) . Although Congress authorized him to recruit as many as 3 @, @ 000 men , the Massachusetts government was only prepared to give him a colonel 's commission and authority to raise a regiment in eastern Massachusetts to establish a presence in the St. John River valley . Allan based his effort in Machias , and had by June landed some 40 men in the area . However , British authorities in Halifax had received some intelligence of Allan 's intended mission , and a larger British force arrived at the St. John River on June 23 . Men Allan had left at the settlements near the mouth of the river skirmished with the British but then withdrew upriver . Allan was forced to make a difficult overland journey back to Machias after his small force retreated up the river . He was joined on this journey by a number of sympathetic Maliseet Indians that he had persuaded to join the American cause . In early August the Massachusetts Provisional Congress voted to disband forces recruited for Allan 's expedition , because of the imminent threat posed by the army of General John Burgoyne in upstate New York .

Papers documenting Allan 's fairly elaborate plans , including a projected attack on Fort Cumberland , were taken during the action on the St. John River , and fell into the hands of Captain Sir George Collier , second in command to Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot in the naval station at Halifax . This spurred Collier to act , since there had already been one attempt on Fort Cumberland the previous year . He therefore organized an assault on Machias , Allan 's base of operations and the source of many of his recruits . Because Collier and the commander of land forces at Halifax , General Eyre Massey , did not get along , Collier decided to launch the expedition without taking on any British Army troops . He sailed from Halifax in late July in the frigate HMS Rainbow , accompanied by the brig HMS Blonde , planning to use the marines aboard those ships in ground operations . He was joined by the frigate HMS Mermaid and the sloop HMS Hope while making the passage to Machias .

The defense of Machias consisted of local militia under the command of Colonel Jonathan Eddy , the leader of the 1776 attack on Fort Cumberland . He had been warned that the British were organizing an attack . The militia laid a log boom across the Machias River , and constructed several earthen redoubts further upriver , armed with cannons taken from local privateers . The defense was coincidentally reinforced by 40 to 50 Maliseet , Passamaquoddy , and Penobscots that Colonel Allan had called to Machias to explain what had gone wrong with his expedition .

= = Battle = =

After leaving Halifax , Nova Scotia , Collier 's fleet arrived at the mouth of the river early on August 13 . He boarded 123 marines onto the Hope , and ordered her and the Blonde up the river . Word of this reached the militia , and 35 men mustered to oppose them . The ships reached the log boom , and a firefight began between the two forces . The militia resistance was sufficient to keep the British from attempting a landing that day . Early the next morning , under the cover of fog , the marines were landed . They cut the log boom , seized a sloop carrying lumber , and set fire to a storehouse , seizing stores of flour , rice , corn , shoes , and ammunition before returning to the ships .

The two ships then moved further up the river until they reached the town itself . All along the way they were harassed by musket and cannon fire from the shore , as the militia and their Indian allies positioned themselves to dispute possible landing sites . When darkness set in the Indians reportedly began chanting and shouting in an attempt to magnify their numbers . At this point , " To the great Surprise and Astonishment of every one [,] in Less than half an Hour after Coming to an Anchor , the Brig & Sloop Both Gote under way without firing a Gun " and " made down the River against the Tide of flood . " The Hope , however , ran aground while making its way downstream in the twilight . The militia hauled a swivel gun to a nearby shore , and peppered her with shot the next morning before she was refloated by the tide and made her way into Machias Bay .

= = Aftermath = =

Colonel Allan ascribed the militia 's success to British concerns that they might be entering a trap . He also grandiosely likened the encounter to another battle , writing " not an Action during the War Except Bunker Hill there was such a slaughter " . American estimates of British casualties ran from 40 to 100 , while claiming their own casualties at one killed and one wounded . The British reported their losses as three killed and 18 wounded , which were mainly incurred when the Hope grounded .

After departing from Machias , Collier cruised the Maine coast , capturing smaller American ships , and raided communities on the Sheepscot River . There he captured a frigate laden with mast timbers destined for France . In his report Collier declared the mission a success , and claimed to have successfully forestalled another invasion of Nova Scotia . He also believed that with another 100 men " the destruction [of Machias] would have been compleat " . General Massey , whose troops had been preparing to participate in the expedition but were excluded by Collier 's abrupt departure from Halifax , wrote that Collier " wanted the whole honour of destroying Machias " , and that he " stole out of Halifax , made a futile attack on Machias , was most shamefully drove from thence ... "

Machias was not attacked again during the war , although it became somewhat isolated when the British occupied Castine in 1779 , establishing the colony New Ireland . Collier returned to successfully defend New Ireland from the American patriot Penobscot Expedition . (Machias and other parts of eastern Maine were successfully occupied by British forces during the War of 1812 , again the British created the colony New Ireland , but were returned to United States control after the war .)