

The Maroon and Caribs Wars

When: The First Maroon War 1728-1739, The First Carib War 1772-1773, The Second Maroon War 1795, The Second Carib War 1795-1796

Participants: Britain and colonial governments vs Jamaican Maroons and Vincentian Caribs

Key battles and places: Jamaica; Trelawney Town, Accompong Town. St. Vincent; Carib lands in the north of the island, the Maraiqua Valley, Kingston

The British Army also had to face internal enemies on the islands that they controlled. Not only did this sporadically involve assisting the local militia in the suppression of a slave rebellion, but it also brought them into conflict with some of the native peoples of the Caribbean, which, contrary to the popular belief of many even today, had not been wiped out by disease and slavery following the first arrival of Europeans in the region. They also came into conflict with new cultures that had developed from the fusion of indigenous and African elements in the Caribbean since the arrival of Europeans.

The Maroons

The Maroons are an example of a creole culture, different cultures coming together in a new foreign environment, thereby forming a new multifaceted culture. In the case of the Maroons, these were formed from former slaves who had escaped their masters, those who were freed and some of the native peoples of the Caribbean, such as the Arawaks and Caribs. Maroon cultures exist on different islands throughout the Caribbean, with the most famous communities existing on Jamaica. The Jamaican Maroons are notable for not only the way that they have fought the British on several occasions throughout the centuries, but also through the treaties they made with them, which established the Maroon communities as their own separate societies on Jamaica. The Maroons are noted for the martial structure of their societies. Even today, the leaders of their communities are known as Colonels. These treaties saw the Maroons fight alongside the British Army at times and they also assisted in dealing with internal unrest such as slave rebellions.



The Maroon culture on Jamaica developed in the aftermath of the Western Design, and slave rebellions in 1694, 1702 and 1704 saw many escape their bonds and join them, increasing tensions between the Maroons and the colonists. The spread of colonists across the island, claiming more territory, also contributed to these tensions, and hostilities erupted in 1728, in what would become known as the First Maroon War, although in the opinion of many historians, it was merely a continuation of hostilities since the English first arrived on Jamaica 73 years earlier. The Maroons were led on the Windward side of Jamaica by Captain Quao and Queen Nanny, and by Cudjoe on the Leeward side. Faced with superior firepower and numbers, the Maroons adopted guerrilla warfare, which proved to be very effective; they hid in the deep woods and mountains of the island, which provided them with nearly inaccessible defences.

On the colonists' side, the majority of the war was borne by the militia, who also employed slaves to fight the Maroons, promising freedom to those who served. In addition, companies of free black and mixed-race men were recruited, as were some of the native inhabitants of Central America's Miskito Coast, but these had very little effect. Some small-scale reinforcements of regulars were also ineffective. Meanwhile, the Maroons' continuing successes encouraged more slaves to escape and join them. In 1733, the colonists decided to adopt a new system of fortified barracks throughout the island to counter the Maroons more effectively, as well as to target the lands where the Maroons grew their crops, in order to starve them into submission, but this too had little effect. By

1739, the war having waged for over a decade, it was decided to negotiate and an envoy was sent, agreeing terms with both the Leeward and Windward Maroons. These terms assured the Maroons of their freedom, as well as recognising their ownership of sections of the island and granting them significant autonomy. In return, the Maroons were obliged to fight on the British side should Jamaica be invaded or to deal with such matters of internal unrest as slave rebellions.



The major Maroon settlements of Jamaica in the eighteenth century

Matters between the Maroons and the other inhabitants of Jamaica would remain relatively peaceful over the next fifty years, with each side generally fulfilling their side of the agreement, until the 1790s when certain incidents caused relations to deteriorate. The Maroons of Trelawney Town wished to be granted new land where they could grow provisions and hunt as, not only had their own population grown significantly, but some planters had begun encroaching on their existing territory. An incident in which two Maroon men had been publicly whipped for allegedly stealing pigs exacerbated matters. Governor Robert Lindsay, the Earl of Balcarres, made the situation worse when he imprisoned six Maroon representatives, who had travelled to see him in order to resolve matters peacefully. Hostilities increased, leading to the outbreak of war in July 1795. The Governor established a blockade around Trelawney Maroon territory, but the Maroons withdrew into the mountains and launched another guerrilla campaign.

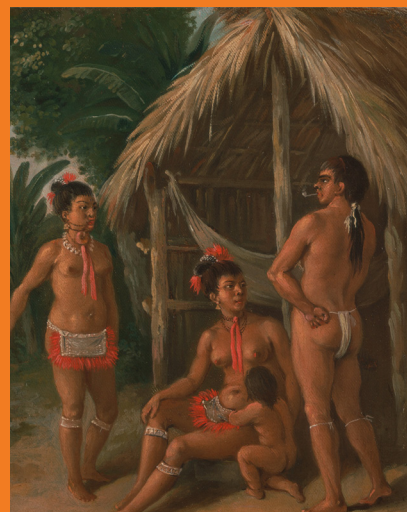
An ultimatum failed to convince them to surrender so the Governor ordered a general attack, which was unsurprisingly unsuccessful. He then switched to a policy of burning the land where the Maroons grew their crops and called up the militia, but neither of these actions had much effect. The Maroons succeeded in killing Colonel William Fitch, the British commander, in an ambush in early September, and by the end of the month British casualties since the start of the war were 70 men dead, whilst the British could not confirm they had killed a single Maroon. The new commander, Colonel George Walpole, adopted a different strategy, fighting the Maroons with similar guerrilla tactics and cutting down the bush that provided the Maroons with cover. These tactics turned the tide against the Maroons, and they negotiated a peace with Walpole in December 1795.

The aftermath, however, was not peaceful. The Jamaica Assembly and the Governor decided to exile the majority of the Trelawney Maroons from the island, although Walpole had given a commitment that this would not happen. The Assembly and the Governor argued that, as the majority of the Maroons had not given themselves up by 1st January 1796, as stipulated in the agreement reached with Walpole in the December, that they were not bound by this promise. Walpole refused to accept the Sword of Honour that the Assembly voted him and, when he was later elected to the British Parliament, he campaigned on the Maroons' behalf. Some of the exiled Maroons later returned to Jamaica, following the abolition of slavery.

The British Army and colonists of St. Vincent also came into conflict with a native Caribbean society during the eighteenth century. There were several years of tensions arising from the colonists' attempt to purchase lands in and build roads through Carib territories, whilst the Caribs harassed settlements. The First Carib War broke out in 1772, the colonists advocating that the Caribs be removed from the island by force. 2,500 soldiers were gathered on St. Vincent, with additional marines and artillerymen for support, in the hope that their very presence would be enough to convince the Caribs to agree to a treaty as the Maroons had done in the 1730s. However, this was not to be and the Caribs, led by Joseph Chatoyer and others, were prepared to fight. Like the Maroons, the Caribs made excellent use of the terrain and were able to hold the British forces at bay. The war proved controversial in Britain, and an inquiry determined that it was unjustified. With new orders, Major Dalrymple negotiated a treaty with the Caribs in February 1773.

The Caribs

The Caribs are one of the native peoples of the Caribbean, from whom the region derives its name. They still live in pockets across the Caribbean, including reservations on Dominica and St. Vincent. In the past, a number of escaped slaves took refuge with some of the Carib communities on the islands. On St. Vincent this gave rise to a creolised 'Black Carib' society, also known as the Garifuna. Like the Maroons, following wars, they eventually established treaties with the British, which led to some volunteering to join the British West Indies Regiment in the First World War.



Joseph Chatoyer,
leader of the Caribs of St.
Vincent in both Carib Wars

Yet the treaty was unsatisfactory on both sides, and the colonists still sought more Carib lands, whilst the Caribs reoccupied much of the 2,000 acres they had agreed to cede. Again, discontent increased over time, resulting in the outbreak of the Second Carib War in March 1795. Occurring in the middle of the French Revolutionary Wars, the French Republicans encouraged the Caribs to take up arms and offered them support. Chatoyer accepted this offer and by the end of the first month of the war, they had laid waste to much of the island, although Chatoyer was killed during this time. By early June, the Franco-Carib force had advanced so far that they were in striking distance of the capital at Kingston. Reinforcements arrived and the French and Caribs were repelled, with the British overcoming the enemy position at the Vigie on the southwestern side of the Maraiqua Valley and eventually driving into Carib territory.

However, the British withdrawal from St. Lucia meant that the French were free to send reinforcements to St. Vincent, which resulted in French gains in the late August and September. The British situation recovered thanks to reinforcements from Martinique at the end of September, including the Second West India Regiment, who saw combat for the first time. The Franco-Carib force had once again secured a position at the Vigie, but were driven off on 2nd October after a day-long battle in heavy rain, forcing them back towards Carib territory. Engagements would continue into the new year, with the 2nd West India Regiment fighting their first battle on 8th January 1796, although the cost was high; they lost 152 of the 200 men they fielded. They would go on to engage the enemy on several more occasions before the war ended.

The Caribs eventually capitulated in October 1796. Following the war, many of the Garifuna were banished and the descendants of these exiles still live in Belize and across the eastern coast of Central America.