

THE GARRISON'S FINAL DAYS



© Henry CC Graig, English Civil War Society

Newport Pagnell played a vital role in the weeks leading up to the final campaign of the First Civil War. Thousands of soldiers from London, the Home Counties and East Anglia rendezvoused in the area. Cromwell with his cavalry of 600 men rallied the army at Sherington where 'horses and troops were gathered as far as the eye could see'.

A few weeks prior to this Sir Samuel Luke's spies reported that the King's forces were gathering for an imminent attack on the garrison, but both armies finally met on the battlefield at Naseby, Northamptonshire (14th June 1645). Outnumbered, the 9500 Royalists under Prince Rupert were defeated decisively by the 14,500 troops commanded by General Thomas Fairfax (Cromwell was also at the battle) with a cost to the Royalists of 1000 dead and 4500 prisoners.

Luke remained at Newport Pagnell to safeguard the town and made preparations for receiving prisoners. Following the battle, the garrison sent out many patrols rounding-up hundreds of defeated Cavaliers all trying to escape.

As military actions dwindled the garrison troops became increasingly more undisciplined. Bouts of drunkenness, fighting, disorderly conduct, and gambling were everyday occurrences and life in the garrison became 'more like Sodom and Gomorrah' reported an exasperated commander. The elderly Rector of Tyringham was attacked outside Stony Stratford by Roundhead dragoons, who 'took fun' in robbing him of his horse, coat and money leaving him with a half-severed arm.

A period of martial law with fines and strict curfews was imposed by hard-line officers, seconded to the garrison after Luke had retired from the army. Parliament finally ordered the troops to be stood down and the fortifications to be sleighted (pulled-down) in August 1646, but this was not carried out until two years later in 1648.

