**SQUANTO**

The Friendly Indian By Bill Petro

We've all heard the story of how the Pilgrims, landing in Massachusetts on the Mayflower in 1620, were ill equipped to survive the harsh winters of the New World. We've also heard how they met an Indian of the Pawtuxet tribe named Squanto who befriended them, taught them how to survive in their new wilderness home, showed them how to plant crops, and acted as an interpreter with the Wampanoag tribe and its chief, Massasoit.

The fact that he already knew English before the Pilgrims landed is what is remarkable.

Squanto probably was present at the first Thanksgiving celebration held by the Pilgrims. He was certainly was there by 1621 -- after the winter when the Puritans lost half of their population to starvation and diseases -- when another Indian, Samoset, introduced Squanto to the Pilgrim settlers, and he became a member of their colony. Because Squanto could speak English well, Governor William Bradford asked him to serve as his ambassador to the Indian tribes.

But it was over a decade before the Pilgrims landed that Squanto was captured from Massachusetts and taken, along with other Indians, by an English ship captain and sold into slavery in Málaga, Spain.

There, Squanto was bought by a Spanish monk, who treated him well, freed him from slavery, and taught him the Christian faith. Squanto eventually made his way to England -- where he either learned or improved his English -- and worked in the stables of a man named John Slaney. Slaney sympathized with Squanto's desire to return home, and he promised to put the Indian on the first vessel bound for America.

It wasn't until 1618 -- ten years after Squanto was first kidnapped -- that a ship was found. Finally, after a decade of exile, Squanto returned home. There he learned that his tribe had died from an epidemic, probably of smallpox brought by the earlier English colonists. It was while he was living among the Wampanoag near present-day Plymouth, MA that his friend Samoset introduced him to the new Pilgrim settlers.

In 1622, as Squanto lay mortally ill with fever while scouting east of Plymouth, the Pilgrim leader William Bradford knelt at his bedside. According to Bradford's diary, Squanto asked him to "pray for him, that he might go to the Englishmen's God in heaven." Squanto died November 1622, having bequeathed his possessions to the Pilgrims as remembrances of his love."