

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Young Historians Conference

Young Historians Conference 2021

May 19th, 1:20 PM - 2:35 PM

Session 1: Panel 1: Presenter 2 (Paper) -- The Rogue River War 1855-1856

Sara E. Shallenberger
Lakeridge High School

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Shallenberger, Sara E., "Session 1: Panel 1: Presenter 2 (Paper) -- The Rogue River War 1855-1856" (2021). *Young Historians Conference*. 10.

<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2021/papers/10>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Young Historians Conference by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

THE ROGUE RIVER WAR 1855-1856

Sara E. Shallenberger

Dr. Karen Hoppes
History 203 History of the United States
Portland State University
April 27, 2021

THE ROGUE RIVER WAR 1855-1856

The Rogue River War of 1855-1856, a series of armed conflicts between white settlers, the United States Army, and a conglomerate of indigenous groups, was the culmination of years of tension between white immigrants and indigenous people over land and resources in the Rogue River watershed. This time was characterized by the exchange of hostilities between indigenous people and whites, as well as “some of the grimmest examples of mass Indian killings in the history of the American West.”¹ Tensions from these incidents escalated into full scale war in 1855. The Rogue River War was practically inevitable as whites settled upon and misused land that was not theirs and committed brutal retaliations, such as the Lupton massacre, for perceived wrongdoings. The Rogue River War was the most prominent war against indigenous people fought in Oregon, and represented the end of any effective resistance from indigenous groups in the area against white expansion.

The first contact between whites and indigenous people in the Rogue River area occurred in 1827, when Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson Bay Company crossed the Siskiyou Mountains searching for beaver pelts. Early interactions between white and indigenous people were peaceful, but in 1834, Michael Laframboise, a French Hudson Bay Company trapper, killed

¹ Gray H. Whaley, “A Reflection on Genocide in Southwest Oregon in Honor of George Bundy Wasson, Jr.,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 115:3 (Fall 2014), 438.

eleven indigenous people. Soon after, a second trapping expedition, led by Ewing Young, resulted in the first recorded aggression when the party killed two indigenous people. Stricken with malaria and camped on an island, Ewing and his men saw two tribe members swimming towards them. Believing these people were spies preparing for an imminent attack on the party, Ewing's men killed the two boys and buried their bodies on the island. "The murderous behavior of these Americans in southern Oregon was not forgotten by the Indians," and began a decades-long exchange of retaliations between white and indigenous people.² The early behavior of the Hudson Bay Company and other trapping expeditions in the region "contributed to a pattern of hostile Indian-white relations, even before American settlement began."³

The indigenous people of the Rogue River were never a unified group, though they can be broken up into three language categories: the Athabaskans, the Shastans, and the Takelmans, and who lived in small villages. While the Rogue River people were named for their supposedly "warlike" behavior, violence was far more common between individual bands rather than between tribes and white settlers.⁴ However, this did not discourage whites from talking up the violent reputation of the Rogue River people, as one column in the *Oregon Spectator* shows:

After you get to the Siskiyou Mountain, use your pleasure in spilling blood, but were I travelling with you from this onto your first sight of the Sacramento valley, my only communication with these treacherous, cowardly, and untamable rascals, would be through my rifle. The character of their country also precludes the idea of making peace with them, or ever making treaties... self preservation here dictates these savages being killed off as soon as possible.⁵

² Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem For a People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 33.

³ Nathan Douthit, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Indians of Southern Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 93:1 (Spring 1992), 56.

⁴ Nathan Douthit, "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Cultural Divide," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1994/1995), 473-474.

⁵ "Letter to the Editor," *Oregon Spectator*, 2:7 (April 29, 1847), 1.

Until Jesse and Lindsay Applegate's creation of a Southern route to the fertile Willamette Valley, interactions between white and indigenous people were usually few and far between, as the only whites travelling through the area were small fur trapping parties. Nevertheless, Lindsay heard the area was "infested with fierce and warlike savages, who would attack every party entering their country, steal their traps" and "waylay and murder the men."⁶ The Applegates correctly interpreted these stories as exaggerations, but their 1846 journey with 200 settlers in 100 covered wagons through the territory served as a catalyst for sporadic violence between the two groups. Additionally, white fears of indigenous attacks intensified in 1847 with word of the Whitman Massacre, in Walla Walla, Washington, and the resulting Cayuse War. Most of these fears were unfounded, as "the actual probability of attack was relatively small if white parties kept Indians out of their camps, maintained a ready guard, and traveled in companies with at least fifteen to twenty men."⁷

While the Applegates led settlers north to the Willamette Valley, the California gold rush resulted in the migration of hundreds of settlers through the area as men searched for gold in the Rogue watershed and beyond. Many Oregonians headed south, while, according to the *Oregon Spectator*, disillusioned Californians headed north, confident "that Rogue River and other streams in that vicinity [would] afford profitable 'diggings.'"⁸ Small mining communities

⁶ Lindsay Applegate, "Notes and Reminiscences of Laying Out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road Into Southern Oregon in the Year 1846," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 22:1 (Spring 1921), 12.

⁷ Nathan Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002), 59.

⁸ "Gold in Oregon!" *Oregon Spectator*, 4:18 (May 30, 1950), 2.

developed along tributaries of the Rogue, altering the river and land along it. “Merchants and packers” arrived with the miners, and Jacksonville became “a flourishing boom town.”⁹

Placer mining was the primary method of gold harvesting in the area. In this technique, miners collected gold from silt in the river. Often, diversion ditches were used to extract water and sediment from the river and carry it to a shallower area where the gold could be separated through either panning or the use of a rocker box. This method has been shown to increase turbidity downstream and harm fish populations downstream of the mine, either through physical barriers caused by the mining operations or decreased oxygenation corresponding with the increase in turbidity.¹⁰ On the Rogue, this technique diminished water quality and “clouded the clear deep holes where the steelhead and rainbow trout lived.”¹¹ Mining decreased the number and size of fish in the Rogue, an important resource upon which the local indigenous people relied.

As the population of miners in the Rogue watershed increased, so did the acreage occupied by white settlers in the area. Under the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, white settlers in the Oregon Territory were entitled to 320 acres of land, free of charge. Plots were pieces of a grid surveyed without respect to or consultation with the indigenous tribes that had occupied the land for thousands of years. While most whites had little sympathy for the indigenous people during the war, many agreed that this practice was a significant factor in the tense indigenous-white relations. Indian Superintendent Joe Palmer wrote “Much of the present

⁹ Willis B. Merriam, “Notes on Historical Geography of Rogue River Valley,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 42:4 (December 1941), 319.

¹⁰ Federal Water Pollution Control Administration Northwest Region, *Effects of Placer Mining on Water Quality in Alaska* (Fairbanks: Federal Water Pollution Control Administration Northwest Region, 1969), 9.

¹¹ Beckham, 69.

difficulty is traceable to the mistaken policy of permitting the settlement of this country prior to the extinguishment of the Indian title and the designation of proper reservations.”¹² Donation land claims were filed around mining settlements and in the places with the most fertile land and easiest access to resources. These settlers “allowed hogs to run free and root out the camas bulbs, killed the game, and plowed under the grass, the seeds of which had been a prime food for the Indians.”¹³

Hostilities between the tribes and white settlers increased during this period as whites settled on indigenous lands, used up precious resources, and damaged the ecosystem of the Rogue River. The tribes had “ample reason for complaint,” as groups of armed miners searched far and wide for gold “without regard for fishing and hunting rights, or for the domestic life of the Natives.”¹⁴ These hostilities were founded in white refusal to respect indigenous society, as “no effort was made to understand the Takelma mentality and no one thought there was anything worth preserving in their way of life. They were expected to live in conformation with white men’s rules. No one deemed it remarkable that they bridged the incredible gulf so quickly.”¹⁵

As hostilities escalated, white settlers began to organize themselves against who they saw were “marauding” indigenous people. The United States Army entered the region in 1851 to protect the settlers, and white farmers and miners organized themselves into volunteer militias. These militias committed “disproportionate retaliations for thefts, threats, or interpersonal

¹² Joel Palmer to George Mannypenny, (October 9, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 59.

¹³ Beckham, 129.

¹⁴ Willis B. Merriam, “Notes on Historical Geography of Rogue River Valley,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 42:4 (December 1941), 320.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Heckert, *The People and the River: A History of the Indians of the Upper Rogue River Valley* (Ashland: Aquarius Press, 1977), 136.

violence,” often in the form of murder or arson.¹⁶ The local Indian Agent George Ambrose observed that many of these retaliations were against individuals or tribes with no relation to the petty crime, writing:

From the frequent occurrence of these petty offences, the patience of the settlers of the valley has become worn and thread-bare, and I expect daily to hear of an Indian being shot; should one pass by the vicinity of some house about the time of its being robbed, I have no doubt he would be shot upon suspicion. The idea is quite prevalent among the white population that there is a combination among all the Indians, and the chiefs... which is certainly not the case. I do not believe it is in the power of the chiefs to control it; I entertain the opinion that this little band of Shastas and Scotans do all or nearly all the mischief that is done, in pure wantonness, alike thoughtless and regardless of consequences, and with the impression they can charge it to some other Indians, as the mischief is usually done near the camp of some quiet Indians to whom no theft had been alleged for many months prior to the bringing these bands of Shastas and Scotans on the reserve.¹⁷

Although the trespassing, thievery, and occasional violence was most likely committed by small indigenous groups travelling through the area, white settlers perceived the robberies to be a conspiracy against their lives and livelihoods, and retaliated against the nearest tribe or individual for the wrongdoing.

In 1853, after two years of intermittent clashes between the settler militias, U.S. Army Soldiers, and indigenous people, a tentative peace treaty, called the Treaty of Table Rock after the negotiation site, was reached. The indigenous representative was Chief Apserkahar of the Takelma, the most important of several local tribes. The representative from the United States was a former territorial governor of Oregon and a pro-slavery Democratic territorial

¹⁶ Whaley, 439.

¹⁷ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (September 30, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 65.

representative, Joseph Lane. In order to secure leverage, “General Lane had...taken the precaution to secure a son of [Asperhakar] as hostage.”¹⁸

The treaty created the temporary Table Rock Reservation, a stretch of land on the North side of the Rogue River. It also resulted in the sale of two thousand square miles of indigenous territory to the United States, while the Takelma and other tribes received only one hundred square miles of land on the Table Rock Reservation. Lane and the U.S. government also agreed to provide supplies for farming, and a fort, Fort Lane, was constructed on the South side of the river to protect the indigenous people from encroachment by white settlers. Indian superintendent Joel Palmer saw these endeavors as a kind of paternalistic protection, an effort to “save and elevate a fallen race.”¹⁹ However, these efforts proved futile as the three “undersized companies” of U.S. troops stationed at Fort Lane were “inadequate to police nonreserve Indian-white relations.”²⁰

Quickly, Asperkahar and the Takelma discovered that the United States government had no intention of fulfilling its promises. Fort Lane was constructed, but proved useless against the land-hungry whites who attacked the indigenous people both on and off the reservation. Commenting on the shortage of labor on the reservation, Agent Ambrose wrote: “It is with difficulty that hands can be procured who will labor on the reserve; they are in constant dread of their lives being taken.”²¹ Additionally, the reservation “consisted primarily of non-arable land,”

¹⁸ “Captain John. F. Miller” *The Oregonian*, 49:973 (January 25, 1899), 10.

¹⁹ Joel Palmer to George Mannypenny (June 23, 1953).

²⁰ Douthit, “Joseph Lane,” 497.

²¹ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (September 30, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 65.

so tribes could not farm enough to feed themselves.²² Malnutrition and disease ripped through the population. A mere month after the settlement of the Takelma on the reservation, Agent Ambrose grimly observed: “The ratio of decrease vastly exceeds that of the increase; since the eleventh of October last, when they were removed to this encampment, there have occurred ten deaths, seven girls and five boys, and but one birth.”²³

With their tribes on the brink of starvation, many members began to leave, travelling south in search of food. Crop scarcity forced the tribes to rely on hunting game off the reservation, and occasionally stealing livestock and supplies from white settlers. Additionally, the Rogue River indigenous people “considered their former homelands outside the reservation sacred and basic to their survival,” while white settlers considered land “private real property closed to trespassing.”²⁴ White settlers complained about and often took violent action against indigenous people walking through their properties. While whites were rarely held accountable for their actions, indigenous people were often put on trial based on accusations of trespassing, theft and murder. In these trials, “justice was clearly absent, the arrest and trial being merely a ritual preliminary to hanging.”²⁵ Additionally, local politicians greatly exaggerated the wrongdoings of indigenous people “to win votes, playing on fears of an Indian uprising.”²⁶ Agent Ambrose, observing the settlers’ agitation, wrote “already the people talk of waging a war of

²² Kay Atwood, “Oregon Places: “As Long as the World Goes On”: The Table Rocks and the Takelma,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1994/1995), 525.

²³ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 30, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 59.

²⁴ Erasmo Gamboa, “Mexican Mule Packers and Oregon’s Second Regiment Mounted Volunteers,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 92:1 (Spring 1991), 42.

²⁵ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 188.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

extermination, and calling upon the citizens of Yuka for assistance, which, if they should do, would be quickly granted them, for they are ready at any and all times for an Indian fight.”²⁷

Ambrose continued on to say that these false accusations (mainly against the people of Chief Toquahear, or “Sam”) and murmurs of a concerted white retaliation only exacerbated the violent exchanges between the two groups, writing:

Sam's people, doubtless, desire peace and to remain on the reserve; they have not left it the past summer, nor have they taken part in any difficulty, or been engaged in any thefts that I can ascertain; though from Sam's previous reputation, they are charged with nearly everything that is done... The fact of charging crimes upon innocent Indians, and those desiring to remain friendly, has the worst possible effect; it impairs their confidence in our people; they have no guarantee of safety, be their conduct what it may; nothing to stimulate them to do right; in fact, its tendency is to drive them all into that same channel of vice and crime.²⁸

From Agent Ambrose and the white settlers to Chief Toquahear, it looked to everyone that an explosion of violence was imminent.

This long awaited eruption occurred on October 7, 1855, when white settlers held a meeting in the town of Jacksonville led by territorial representative James Lupton. Lupton proposed an “extermination” of all indigenous people in the area not living on the reservation. Most of the attendees supported this proposal, and the events of the following day became known as the “Lupton Massacre.”²⁹

On the morning of October 8, Lupton’s volunteer militia split into several groups, the largest one composed of 35 men and led by Lupton himself. This group headed for an indigenous village at the mouth of Little Butte Creek, a tributary on the South side of the Rogue. There, they

²⁷ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (September 30, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem For a People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 152.

committed a “cold-blooded slaughter at close quarters.”³⁰ Other groups sought out similar encampments and proceeded to brutally massacre their inhabitants. Indian Agent George Ambrose surveyed the destruction:

Upon arriving at Sambo's camp we found two dead women; one had died a natural death, and one had recently been shot... We then proceeded to Jake's camp, where we found twenty-three dead bodies; and a boy who escaped said he saw two women floating down the river; and it is quite probable several more were killed whose bodies were not found.³¹

Eighteen of the 25 people killed at “Jake’s camp” were women or children.³² One was a child “six months old, tied to its basket-cradle.”³³ The massacre there was representative of what happened in many smaller indigenous villages in the area—including the dead at “Jake’s camp,” 40 indigenous people were killed that day, over half of which were women and children. In a report to Congress, General Charles S. Drew defended the brutality, writing: “The attack commenced while it was yet too dark to distinguish one Indian from another, and by this reason it happened so that several squaws and children were killed. None were killed after it became light enough to distinguish the sexes.”³⁴ Two white men also died in the attack, including Lupton.

³⁰ Elizabeth Heckert, *The People and the River: A History of the Indians of the Upper Rogue River Valley* (Ashland: Aquarius Press, 1977), 186.

³¹ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (October 9, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 66.

³² H.M. Judah to Major E.D. Townsend, (November 2, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 38.

³³ “Our California Correspondence,” *New York Herald*, 6:7,094 (January 31, 1856), 3.

³⁴ U.S. Senate, Charles S. Drew, *Communication from C.S. Drew: Late Adjutant of the Second Regiment of Oregon Mounted Volunteers, Giving an Account of the Origin and Early Prosecution of the Indian Wars in Oregon*. (May 9, 1860). U.S. Senate, 36th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), S. Mis. Doc. No. 59.

Many settlers in the watershed “preferred to avoid general warfare.”³⁵ However, the group “must have had the tolerance, if not the active support, of the community at the time,” given Lupton’s position of prominence as territorial representative.³⁶

At this point, the indigenous people of the Rogue River split into two groups, uniting behind two different leaders. The first group, consisting mainly of Takelman people, “camped at Fort Lane,” seeking safety on the reservation.³⁷ They followed their primary leader, Chief Toquahear (“Chief Sam,” anglicized), the brother of the late Chief Asperkahar, who had died of tuberculosis a year earlier as the disease swept through the reservation. According to Agent Ambrose, Toquahear was “willing to submit to anything for the sake of peace,” and allowed himself and his followers to be removed from the area and brought under military protection to the Grand Ronde reservation some 200 miles to the North.³⁸ The journey was traumatic, walking for “thirty-three days and 263 miles in cold, wet winter weather.”³⁹

The second group fled downstream, killing 18 whites in the process. While this group was a conglomerate of several tribes, one influential leader was Tecumtum (“Chief John” to the whites), who was either the leader of a northern branch of the Shasta tribe, or a group of the Athapaskan people. One particular attack occurred at the mouth of Galice Creek, where most of a settlement was burned and four miners were killed. With winter nearing, “this was not the usual

³⁵ Douthit, “Joseph Lane,” 473-474.

³⁶ Heckert, 186.

³⁷ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (October 11, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Douthit, 163.

time of the year when Indians took up arms against whites.”⁴⁰ Without their crops, the fleeing indigenous people had limited access to food, just as the coldest, most barren months approached.

The white settlers and government had little sympathy for the indigenous people, who they regarded as brutal, reckless, and dangerous. Agent Ambrose asserted:

A greater destruction of life will probably never be caused by the same number of people, or more horrid atrocities be perpetrated than by those Shasta Indians. They are well provided with arms, both guns and revolvers, and skilful in the use of them. I do not believe more desperate or reckless men ever lived upon the earth, and I have no doubt but they have made up their minds to fight till they die.⁴¹

Indian Superintendent Joel Palmer agreed with Ambrose, and in a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote: “I apprehend nothing short of annihilation of these bands will terminate hostilities.”⁴² The strategy was set: the U.S. government would not negotiate, and the war would not end until total destruction of the Rogue River tribes was accomplished.

On October 31, the most well-known battle of the Rogue River War occurred near Grave Creek, where indigenous forces had “assembled in considerable numbers.”⁴³ American troops from Fort Lane led by Captain Andrew Jackson Smith had located the site and were planning to launch a surprise attack. Colonel John E. Ross, and his company of mounted volunteers, joined Smith’s troops. The two groups headed towards their positions where they could flank the

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴¹ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (October 9, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 67.

⁴² Joel Palmer to George Mannypenny (October 16, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 71.

⁴³ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 4, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 93.

indigenous forces. However, “due to miscommunication and misguidance in the darkness, by daybreak the next day the forces had missed their agreed-on flanking assignments and instead found themselves knotted up together, facing their opponent across a two-mile-wide, 1,500-foot-deep canyon.”⁴⁴ The element of surprise was lost as well when smoke from a warming fire gave away their position. “It was a cold foggy morning, and the men built fires,” wrote one newspaper correspondent. “No sooner had the smoke began to ascend than the opposite hill was alive with Indians, collecting their stock and preparing for attack.”⁴⁵

The group was disorganized—volunteers carried “sabers, pistols, squirrel guns, and almost anything they could call a weapon.”⁴⁶ The heterogeneous makeup of the American force also contributed to the confusion. Volunteers desired an “energetic prosecution of the war,”⁴⁷ as well as “nativist policies and the removal or even outright genocide of Oregon’s indigenous people.”⁴⁸ In contrast, officers in the U.S. army favored “negotiation and paternalistic (if less deadly) solutions.”⁴⁹ The conflicting goals of the two groups created confusion about the legitimacy of command and orders for each party. The result was a band of individuals with no convincing leadership, rather than a unified force.

⁴⁴ Mark Axel Tveskov, “A ‘Most Disastrous’ Affair: The Battle of Hungry Hill, Historical Memory, and the Rogue River War,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 118:1 (Spring 2017), 46.

⁴⁵ “Our California Correspondence,” *New York Herald*, 6:7,094 (January 31, 1856), 3.

⁴⁶ Beckham, 69.

⁴⁷ Bernarr Cresap, “Captain O.C. Ord in the Rogue River Indian War,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 54:2 (June 1953), 84.

⁴⁸ Tveskov, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

At 10 a.m., the group of soldiers, militiamen, and volunteers “four hundred strong” charged after sighting the indigenous force on a hill and realizing their position had been discovered.⁵⁰

They were quickly surrounded from the high ground, where indigenous forces “were posted securely on a steep hill, covered with forest, and had cut down trees to form obstructions to any attack.”⁵¹ The indigenous force, consisting of about 200 men, was outnumbered, but well equipped with guns and ammunition.⁵² Sharpshooters could sit on the ridge above the ravine, and pick off members of the disorganized group, which fought without “order or system in the attack, the troops were mixed up without regard to corps or companies; the officers did not pretend to exercise any control.”⁵³ At one point, U.S. troops obtained the high ground, but it was treeless and provided little cover. Attempts to flank or push the indigenous force down the hill proved futile. Agent Ambrose put it plainly: “the fight lasted through the day without anything effective being done.”⁵⁴ By early evening, fatigue and casualties forced an American retreat. Nine Americans had been killed, and another 25 wounded.⁵⁵ They called the conflict the “Battle of

⁵⁰ Terence O’Donnell, *An Arrow In The Earth* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1991), 227.

⁵¹ John Withers to Colonel S. Cooper, (November 12, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 14.

⁵² Accounts of the size of the indigenous force vary from 300 men to “seventy five to one hundred and fifty.” See: John Withers to Colonel S. Cooper, (November 12, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 14. and George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 4, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 93.

⁵³ “Our California Correspondence,” *New York Herald*, 6:7,094 (January 31, 1856), 3.

⁵⁴ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 4, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 93.

⁵⁵ John Withers to Colonel S. Cooper, (November 12, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 14.

Hungry Hill” because the men spent the night after the battle nursing their wounded without food, water or shelter.⁵⁶ After a short and inconsequential skirmish the following morning, the fighting concluded with “the whites being worn out with fatigue and hunger, not being provided with either food or blankets; and finding themselves unable to rout the Indians without great loss of life, they concluded to return and get supplies.”⁵⁷ Only a handful of indigenous soldiers were killed, making the battle a resounding victory for Tecumtum and the tribes.

Over the next few months, fighting moved westward towards the coast, “as runners from upriver constantly urged [coastal indigenous tribes] to join in the fighting.”⁵⁸ Settlers, militiamen, and indigenous groups clashed as the area of conflict spread from the Rogue towards present day Gold Beach and Port Orford and as far south as Crescent City in modern-day California. These hostilities resulted in the burning of dwellings throughout the area now known as the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. One notable incident began on February 22, when a large group of white coastal residents gathered in Gold Beach for a dance celebrating George Washington’s birthday. The celebration lasted through the night, and in the early morning, a band of indigenous warriors attacked the local militia encampment. When word of the attack reached the town, white miners and settlers fled to a half-completed structure called Fort Miner. There, they worked to shore up defenses as the indigenous force burnt buildings and killed some 23 militiamen.⁵⁹ The indigenous siege of the fort lasted nearly a month, although their forces rarely went near the

⁵⁶ Tveskov, 47.

⁵⁷ George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 4, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 94.

⁵⁸ Heckert, 204.

⁵⁹ Beckham, 174.

defenses. They were content to “remain mostly out of range,” while “killing livestock” and “burning the rest of the settlements.”⁶⁰

The second influential battle in the Rogue River Wars occurred on May 27, 1856, on the Big Bend of the Rogue. A week earlier, several indigenous bands had arranged for their surrender after months of flight from and conflict with U.S. troops. The negotiation was made at the camp of Bvt. Lt. Colonel Robert Buchanan on the Illinois river. indigenous forces were to surrender a week later at the camp of Capt. Andrew Smith at Big Bend. Indeed, by the evening of the 26th, indigenous leaders had brought their followers near Smith’s camp, preparing to surrender the next morning.⁶¹

However, Tecumtum had refused to capitulate, saying at the previous week’s negotiation:

You are a great chief... So am I. This is my country; I was in it when those large trees were very small, not higher than my head. My heart is sick with fighting, but I want to live in my country. If the white people are willing, I will go back to Deer creek and live among them as I used to do. They can visit my camp, and I will visit theirs; but I will not lay down my arms and go with you on the reserve. I will fight.⁶²

Tecumtum’s band was also present at Big Bend on the night before the surrender. On May 26, Captain Smith “received word from “George,” the chief of the second important band, “to look out,” that [Tecumtum] was going to attack him the next morning.”⁶³ Accordingly, Smith ordered his men to carry their weapons and be prepared for either a battle or a surrender.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 176.

⁶¹ Ray Hoard Glassley, *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars* (Portland: Binfords & Mort Publishing, 1953), 105.

⁶² Frances Fuller Victor, *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon* (Salem: Frank C. Baker, State Printer, 1894), 407.

⁶³ Dr. Rodney Glisan, *Journal of Army Life* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft Publishing, 1874), 332. Glisan was an Army surgeon who served at the battle of Big Bend. This manuscript is a collection of his diary entries during his time in service.

In the late morning of the 27th, the two groups—more than 150 indigenous soldiers and a similar number of U.S. troops—engaged in combat.

Quickly, both sides found themselves hard-pressed to pull off a victory. Like at the Battle of Hungry Hill, the position of Tecumtum's forces was geographically dominant. However, they lacked the man and fire power to decisively end the battle. The position of the U.S. troops was also rather inflexible. Backed into the end of a ravine and surrounded, the soldiers had no choice but to "entrench [themselves] as the only means of safety"⁶⁴ until reinforcements arrived.

Fighting paused at night, but picked up on the morning of the 28th. No progress was made by either party until 4:00 p.m. when reinforcements "came upon the scene of Captain Smith's desperate battle in the nick of time" and flanked Tecumtum's soldiers, who scattered.⁶⁵ The Americans quickly claimed victory, as "the enemy was routed and driven into the river, and it is said quite a number were killed and wounded and nine taken prisoners," according to one correspondence to the *Oregon Statesman*.⁶⁶ The specific number of indigenous casualties was unknown, but 10 Americans had been killed.

Over the next month, various bands of indigenous people surrendered, and Tecumtum himself on July 2. The U.S. government did not keep tribal or language groups together, splitting up the surrendering groups onto a number of reservations. Some went North to the Grand Ronde reservation, where Toquahear and his band of Takelma people had been brought months before. Others were removed to the Siletz reservation, joining coastal tribes such as the Clatsop, Tillamook, and Nehalem. To say reservation life was difficult was is understatement. In the first

⁶⁴ "Port Orford Correspondence," *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, 4:27 (June 24, 1856), 2.

⁶⁵ Glassley, 106.

⁶⁶ "Umpqua Correspondence," *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, 4:26 (June 16, 1856), 2.

two years after relocation, “205 out of 590 upper Rogue River Indians died of sickness and disease on the Grand Ronde and Siletz reservations.”⁶⁷

For the indigenous people of the Rogue River, direct casualties from war were steep, as “the number of Indian male casualties in the war represented a significant decline in the overall male population of the Indian bands of southern Oregon, and especially of the “hostile” bands.” Many indigenous women became the sole providers for their children and elderly relatives. Some found a way to ease this burden and live on their homeland by entering into a “relationship with a white male as a source of economic support.”⁶⁸

Tecumtum and his followers were placed on the Siletz reservation. The group of 35 men and about 180 women and children were forced to travel on foot from Port Orford all the way up to present-day Newport, a distance of nearly 125 miles.⁶⁹ On the reservation, he remained a vocal leader for his people, demanding that the promises of U.S. government officials were kept. In 1858, he was arrested for threatening an Indian agent that murdered his son after the young man killed an indigenous doctor. Tecumtum was taken to prison in San Francisco, but was released in 1862. Two years later, he died back in Oregon on the Siletz reservation.

The removal of indigenous people of the Rogue River from their homeland also had tangible cultural impacts. The landscape of the Rogue River watershed, especially the two Table Rocks, featured prominently in Takelma mythology, but most traditions from the area have been lost on the reservations:

The Table Rocks endure today as both place and symbol. Here Takelma culture flourished, and here, in a forcible exchange of land for payment and exile, it crumbled. Highly visible and immovable, the landmarks connect surviving

⁶⁷ Douthit, 163.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 162.

⁶⁹ Heckert, 215.

Native Americans with their cultural traditions. In doing so they also provide, to all people, tangible points of reference for the domination and betrayal that occurred there.⁷⁰

Undoubtedly, both parties involved in the Rogue River Wars committed violent acts of theft, arson, and murder. However, it is not true that “both sides were to blame,” as many white historians and leaders would like to assume.⁷¹ The tension sparking the conflict was the creation of white settlers and leaders, who claimed the land as their own without regard for the people who had lived on it for thousands of years. Through mining and agriculture, they ruined the natural resources upon which the indigenous people of the Rogue River depended. White politicians like Lupton stoked fears of indigenous attacks to win votes, fostering an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion that often erupted into disproportionate retaliations. The temporary Table Rock reserve was woefully inadequate in size and resources, and the federal government failed to deliver on promises of food, shelter, and other materials necessary for survival. The military presence at Fort Lane was also ineffective at calming white fears or facilitating positive indigenous-white relations. Most importantly, “no course except submission or integration was offered” to the indigenous people of the Rogue River.⁷² They were faced with an impossible choice, with either option stripping them of their homeland and culture. Unfortunately, the victory of the whites in the war was unsurprising and inevitable. The forced submission and removal of the Rogue River people was the final stride towards the complete theft of indigenous lands and livelihoods in Oregon.

⁷⁰ Kay Atwood, “Oregon Places: “As Long as the World Goes On”: The Table Rocks and the Takelma,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1994/1995), 517.

⁷¹ Cresap, 84.

⁷² Heckert, 229.

Bibliography

Applegate, Lindsay. "Notes and Reminiscences of Laying Out and Establishing the Old Emigrant Road Into Southern Oregon in the Year 1846," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 22:1 (Spring 1921), 12.

Atwood, Kay. "Oregon Places: "As Long as the World Goes On": The Table Rocks and the Takelma." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1994/1995), 516-533.

Beckham, Steven D. *Requiem For a People*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

Cresap, Bernarr. "Captain O.C. Ord in the Rogue River Indian War." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 54:2 (June 1953), 83-90.

Douthit, Nathan. "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Indians of Southern Oregon." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 93:1 (Spring 1992), 25-64.

Douthit, Nathan. "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Cultural Divide." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 95:4 (Winter 1994/1995), 472-515.

Douthit, Nathan. *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002.

Gamboa, Erasmo. "Mexican Mule Packers and Oregon's Second Regiment Mounted Volunteers." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 92:1 (Spring 1991), 41-59.

George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (November 4, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 93.

George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (October 11, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 68.

George Ambrose to Joel Palmer, (October 9, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 67.

Glassley, Ray H. *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*. Portland: Binfords & Mort Publishing, 1953.

“Gold in Oregon!” *Oregon Spectator*, 4:18 (May 30, 1950), 2.

Heckert, Elizabeth. *The People and the River: A History of the Indians of the Upper Rogue River Valley*. Ashland: Aquarius Press, 1977.

H.M. Judah to Major E.D. Townsend, (November 2, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 38.

Joel Palmer to George Mannypenny (June 23, 1953).

John Withers to Colonel S. Cooper, (November 12, 1855). U.S. House of Representatives, 34th Cong. 1st Sess. (1856), H. Exec. Doc. No. 93, pg. 14.

“Letter to the Editor,” *Oregon Spectator*, 2:7 (April 29, 1847), 1.

Merriam, Willis B. “Notes on Historical Geography of Rogue River Valley.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 42:4 (December 1941), 317-322.

O’Donnell, Terence. *An Arrow In The Earth*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1991.

“Our California Correspondence,” *New York Herald*, 6:7,094 (January 31, 1856), 3.

“Port Orford Correspondence,” *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, 4:27 (June 24, 1856), 2.

“Umpqua Correspondence,” *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, 4:26 (June 16, 1856), 2.

Tveskov, Mark A. “A “Most Disastrous” Affair: The Battle of Hungry Hill, Historical Memory, and the Rogue River War.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 118:1 (Spring 2017), 42-73.

U.S. Senate, Charles S. Drew, *Communication from C.S. Drew: Late Adjutant of the Second Regiment of Oregon Mounted Volunteers, Giving an Account of the Origin and Early Prosecution of the Indian Wars in Oregon*. 36th Cong. 1st Sess. (May 9, 1860).

Whaley, Gray H. “A Reflection on Genocide in Southwest Oregon in Honor of George Bundy Wasson, Jr.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 115:3 (Fall 2014), 438-440.