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# THE ROGUE RIVER WAR

*"Now the earth went bad."*

The Rogue River War lasted from the spring of 1851, when the cannon blast from Captain Tichenor's crew at Battle Rock killed some thirty Indians, through July of 1856, when Tyee John finally surrendered after the furious battle in the wild country of Big Bend on the middle Rogue River. This five-year struggle was episodic. There were gaps, occasioned by treaties, between most of the major battles, which numbered about two dozen. Yet the citizenries, Indian and non-Indian alike, could never find respite from disagreements, raids, shootings, and lynchings.

Taking into account all of the major Indian wars fought by the United States—about forty in total not including numerous battles, skirmishes, and other armed conflicts—the Rogue River War ranks as one of the most violent and destructive. The death toll in southern Oregon reached 600 or more: the tribes had an estimated 418 to 446 killed, while the whites lost 182. The deadliest United States–Indian wars were the conflict of 1790–1795 with the Miamis, Shawnee, Wyandot, and other midwestern tribes; the Creek War of 1813–1814; the Sioux wars of 1862–1877; and the Apache War of 1861–1886. In each of those wars, the total casualties approached or exceeded 2,500. The Seminole Wars of 1817–1818 and 1835–1842 exacted approximately 1,000 lives. Otherwise, the death tolls in the other major Indian conflicts were lower than the Rogue River War. The conflict in southern Oregon was the largest in the Pacific Northwest and, save for the Sioux and Apache wars, the most costly in the western half of the country. The human losses exceeded those in such well-known conflicts as those between the United States and the Navajos, Nez Perces, Comanches, and Cheyennes.

The number of fatalities in the Rogue River War is not high by today's lights but the impact on those societies was grievous. The American population in southern Oregon amounted to only 2,000 or so, and the loss of 182 people, with many more suffering serious wounds, was immediate and personal. Fear and uncertainty gripped a citizenry that felt fragile, unsure of its safety and stability on that far frontier.

Indian people also saw their hold on the land, the very existence of their societies, as hanging in the balance. They had lost most of their population to diseases. Now, with a populace of not much more than 2,000 between the coastal and upper valley tribes, they lost more than 400 men, women, and children to the battles. Every family, especially in a culture of extended families, must have been directly affected, probably multiple times. Late in his life, John Adams (Applegate Athapaskan and Shasta) recounted the horror that the war brought to his childhood years—and to three generations of his family:

> Pretty rough times! Awful hard time when I'm baby. Rogue River Injun War that time. Well, soldier come, everybody scatter, run for hills. One family this way, one family other way. Some fighting. My father killed, my mother killed. Well, my uncle he come, my grandmother. Old woman, face like white woman, so old. "Well my poor mother, you old, not run. Soldiers coming close, we have to run fast. I not help it. I sorry. Must leave you here. Maybe soldiers not find you, we come back. Now this little baby, this my brother's baby. Two children I got myself. I sorry, I not help it. We leave this poor baby, too." That's what my uncle say.
>
> Course, I small, maybe two years, maybe nearly three years. I not know what he say. Somebody tell me afterwards. Well, old grandmother cry, say: "I old, I not afraid die. Go ahead, get away from soldiers."
>
> Well, just like dream, I 'member old grandmother pack me round in basket on her back. All time she cry and holler. I say, "Grandmother, what you do?"
>
> "I crying, my child."
>
> "What is it, crying, grandmother?"
>
> "I sorry for you, my child. Why I cry. I not sorry myself, I old. You young, maybe somebody find you all right, you live."
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> * * *
>
> [The two survived winter together and then his uncle returned and stayed with them.]

> Pretty soon soldiers come again. That's the time they leave my old grandmother cause she can't walk. Maybe she die right there, maybe soldiers kill her. She cry plenty when my uncle take me away. Well, all time going round in the woods. After while my uncle get killed. Then I'm 'lone. Klamath Injun find me, bring me to new reservation.

Venomous though the miners were in the early 1850s, public opinion among white Oregonians grew ever more hostile as the war moved toward its climax. The cry of "extermination," rather than a slogan among a few hotblooded miners, became the editorial policy of the local *Table Rock Sentinel*, the *Oregon Statesma*n in Salem, and the *Oregonian* in Portland. Those public officials planning to remain in office supported a hard line against the tribes. Politics allowed Territorial Governor John Gaines to negotiate a peace and friendship treaty in 1851, but George Curry, who served during the last three years of the war, was left with little leeway other than to approve local requests to call up volunteer groups to fight the tribes. On at least one occasion, the request to Curry was unvarnished: "The people there [in southern Oregon] now demand extermination of the hostile Indians, and are resolved not to stop short of it." Joseph Lane, who knew better but had his eye on still higher office, assured his colleagues in the House of Representatives that Oregon Indians were "treacherous and ungrateful" and had "commenced all the wars which have taken place between them and the white settlers."

A few moderate voices were heard. Joel Palmer, who as superintendent of Indian Affairs probably had more information at hand due to the amount of time he spent with the people involved, Indian and non-Indian, displayed extraordinary patience and courage in his efforts to stave off violence and the extermination that he knew to be possible. Palmer believed to his depths—and, at the risk of his job, expressed such sentiments publicly—that "the present difficulty in southern Oregon is wholly to be attributed to the acts of our own people. . . . The future will prove that this war has been forced upon these Indians against their will." Another leading Oregonian taking the Indian side was Judge Matthew Deady, who knew how determined Tyee Joe, Tyee John, and other Indian leaders were to preserve the peace promised in the Table Rock Treaty.

The regular military, bound by the rules of war, carried out its duties with considerable distinction. This was especially true of General John E. Wool. A veteran of the Indian wars in the south and commander of all United States forces in the Pacific Department, Wool described the local volunteers as "signally barbarous and savage" and regularly refused to cooperate with them. In 1856, he relayed a report from Oregon that "many citizens, with a due proportion of volunteers, and two newspapers advocated the extermination of the Indians. This principle has been acted on in several instances, without discriminating between enemies and friends, which has been the cause in southern Oregon of sacrificing many innocent and worthy citizens." Wool realized, contrary to conventional military thinking of the time, that a primary obligation of the military, particularly after the treaties, should be to protect Indian people from local hostility. He has been called the first of the "humanitarian generals" in the West.

One of the most compelling figures during the height of the war was John Beeson, a settler in the Rogue River Valley who dared to take up the Indians' cause. Beeson came west with his family from Illinois, where he was well known for his fervid commitment to abolition and temperance. In 1853 they homesteaded in the Upper Rogue River Valley near present-day Talent and farmed. Never before concerned with Indian matters, he and his son Wellborn found Indian campsites on the property they farmed. Although Beeson knew that the Natives had ceded most of their traditional territory lands to the United States and had been moved to the Table Rock reserve, his occupation of Indian land sat on his conscience. Ever the reformer, John Beeson had found a new cause.

Beeson was captivated by the beauty of the landscape but found most local people to be lawless and ignorant of the nation's traditions, "for they denied to the poor Indian the common prerogative, peaceful enjoyment of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" Conversations with neighbors and exhortations at public meetings made it clear to him that community leaders had nothing but contempt for their country's promise of peace in the Table Rock Treaty. People told him that "they should not be satisfied until every Indian was destroyed from the Coast to the Rocky Mountains." He knew settlers who disagreed, but none dared come forth.

Moralistic and driven, Beeson could not keep his views to himself. He spoke out in community gatherings and wrote letters to Oregon newspapers—and, when they refused to print them, sent them to out-of-state papers. He ran unsuccessfully for the territorial legislature as a defender of Indian rights. In 1855, as vigilantes were about to launch the murderous raid at Little Butte Creek, he urged moderation but, even in the Methodist Church, no one was willing to support him publicly. In January 1856, he rented a meeting hall in Jacksonville and sent out flyers with the hope of convening a civil discussion on the Indian issue. Nothing of the sort happened, as exterminationists took over the meeting. Other Indian sympathizers had promised to come but did not. Beeson finally gave a long explanation of his views, broken by repeated interruptions, all to no avail: "the meeting broke up, with but one voice raised in behalf of peace."

The Rogue River Valley became too dangerous for Beeson. One of his articles in the *New York Tribune* made the rounds in Jacksonville, as did one addressed to the *San Francisco Herald* that was intercepted at the local post office. An angry group called a meeting to denounce him, but he was not allowed to present his side to the raucous gathering. "The following evening, a friend sent me word that the excitement was getting fearfully high. Several companies of Volunteers were discharged. They encamped near my house; and, as I was informed, some of the most reckless among them, were determined on vengeance." Beeson's wife and son, who worried that some would as soon "kill him as an Indian just because he has spoken the truth out bold," agreed there was only one course. Beeson left home in the dark of night and made it to Fort Lane, where he received a military escort north to safety in the Willamette Valley. Other than a visit, probably in 1868, he did not return to Talent until the early 1880s. He died there in 1889.

John Beeson's midnight escape hardly ended his career as a defender of American Indians. Lecturing widely in the East and publishing many articles and pamphlets, he gained some national prominence. Were it not for Oregon senators Harding and Nesmith, who blocked his nomination, he might have become the commissioner of Indian Affairs.

But John Beeson's greatest legacy was his thin volume, *A Plea for the Indians*, where he set out in full his views on the Rogue River War in particular and Indian Affairs in general. Anchored in his own day-to-day experiences and personal contacts in the crucible of the most violent years of the war, the book carried authenticity. While he documented violence by the whites, he did so as a pious man who came forth out of duty: "If at every point of this melancholy story, I awake unfavorable reflections on the conduct of our fellow-countrymen, it is not because I either will or wish it. Would to God I had sufficient authority to do otherwise. But feeling as I do, that the Indian, though of a different Race, is a brother of the same great family, I should not be true to our common nature were I to withhold a faithful statement of the wrongs I have witnessed."

For Beeson, Americans failed to receive the truth because of the way that the zeal and influence of the local exterminationists controlled the debate. If the public had received the truth, "surely this state of things could not long exist.

John Beeson, outspoken champion of Indian rights, was forced to flee western Oregon in 1856 because of his views. Much later, he felt it safe to return and is shown here in the late 1880s as the graduation speaker at the Wagner Creek School, near his home in Talent. *Photograph from Beeson's* A Plea for the Indians *(a reprint of Beeson's 1857 book) by Bert Webber, Webb Research Group, www.pnwbooks.com.*

The impulsive humanity of the Nation would rise against it. And, doubtless, the reason why there is so little done, is, for the want of data, as to facts." Instead, public impression was driven by "the varied statements, almost all of them overcharged with a cruel and bitter prejudice against the Indians, who cannot write, or proclaim their own grievances by any competent mode of speech."

*A Plea for the Indians* attempted to set the record straight. Beeson disputed the accuracy of some alleged Indian attacks on whites, but more fundamentally he put the Indian-white conflict in a broader context. Repeatedly, he showed, the tribes were not the aggressors: their attacks were made in "self-protection." "The main body of Indians," Beeson wrote, "evidently acted with the greatest discretion, keeping entirely on the defensive." Even given their superiority in terms of rifle power and knowledge of the land, the tribes wanted peace:

> Had the Indians been disposed to destroy and slaughter all they could, there would have been hardly a house left in the Valley; and it was often a subject of remark, that they did so little damage. And so far as Volunteers and Forts were concerned, many thought that fifty determined Indians, bent on their object, could have overthrown and burned the whole in a week.

To illustrate the motives of the tribes and his central belief in the humanity of Indian people, Beeson used as example Tyee John, the great Shasta war leader during the war years of 1855 and 1856. Beeson described John as "a very sagacious and energetic man. He was greatly esteemed by his people, and under ordinary circumstances would have commanded respect in any community." John, who appreciated the importance of diplomacy and signed the Table Rock Treaty, "was faithful in the observance of the treaty, and often lamented the necessity his people were under [in] retaliating upon the Whites."

Tyee John, while an exceptional warrior—Binger Hermann wrote that "of all the Pacific Coast Indians Chief John ranks as the ablest, most heroic and most tactical of chieftains"—was committed to the rules of war and knew that the regular officers in the army acted accordingly. His trust was not always rewarded. Beeson recounted an incident where miners in California accused John's son and a fellow tribesman of murder. John knew them to be innocent. So did Captain Andrew Smith, but duty required him to have the case tried in a United States court in Yreka, California. John reluctantly agreed. The grand jury refused to issue an indictment against the two Indian men but on the way back to Oregon, with a military escort and through no fault of Smith's or the other officers, the miners caught the guards by surprise and brutally murdered the two men. John Beeson eloquently put forth the confusion and deeply held sense of injustice that Tyee John and other Native people endured in this terrible clash of cultures:

> When the aged Chief became acquainted with the fate of his son and his companion, he was astonished and outraged, beyond the power of language to describe; for he had had full confidence in the sincerity and power of the Military to secure their present protection and ultimate justice. He had been impressed with the idea that our Great Father, the President, and all his men, the Soldiers, were the Red Man's friends; but, in the bitterness of grief, he saw that they were either unable or unwilling to save them from their enemies. He had long foreseen the gradual but certain destruction of his people;

> but he now saw that the great train of extermination was in rapid progress. Another conviction was also forced upon him. He saw that the "bad Bostons" were no more under the control of the Great Father, than bad Indians were under his own. And, doubtless, the many cases of insult and wrong which he had borne and witnessed, and from a repetition of which he had no guaranty, crowded on his memory, inciting him to vengeance, and strengthening his resolution to be his own defender. Will any one who believes that man has a right to defend himself, say that the Chief had not the strongest and truest reason for war? Compared with his wrongs, the petty infringements of which our Fathers complained sink into insignificance and become trivial.

*A Plea for the Indians*, while it went into three printings, never received the attention it deserved. It was published in 1857, while the Indian wars still raged or, in the case of the Rogue River War, had freshly ended. The two books similar to Beeson's work in scope and tone, Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and *Ramona* (1884), were in a much better position to capture a favorable public reaction. By then, nearly all the wars had been fought and the nation, however limited its responses may have been, was more sympathetic to the Indians' plight.

The final years of the Rogue River War, after a long, inspiring, and often successful tribal resistance, ended in a costly but nearly complete victory for the whites. The exterminationists did not achieve their literal objective, but they killed many Native people and, upon Tyee John's final, sorrowful surrender, drove the rest of them out. The mobs also drove John Beeson out, and by 1857 both Joel Palmer and General John Wool, scalded by public derision (Joseph Lane called Wool a "military fogie"), had left their positions. And so we are reminded that heroes, however much they may give guidance and inspiration to future generations, often fail in their own times.

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The Table Rock Treaty of 1853 provided only a brief interlude before violence broke out. Another gold rush was shaping up, this time on the Coast. In 1851, miners had discovered beach gold in the sands at the mouth of the Klamath River in California. The word spread, but the fabulous finds in Jacksonville drew most of the prospectors there. By 1853, however, production from the mines in the Upper Rogue country began to level off—and the gulches were crowded.

The high bluffs along the southern Oregon Coast offered much the same conditions for beach gold as did northern California. Storm waves ate away at those bluffs, tearing out soil and the gold placers buried in some of them. Then the undertow pulled out the lighter soil, leaving the heavier black sand—and some gold flakes—on the beaches. By the summer of 1853, miners from Jacksonville and elsewhere were pulling out gold in paying quantities from the black sand beaches near the mouths of the Coquille, Rogue, and Chetco rivers and other spots along the Coast.

The miners in these wood-shanty mining camps harbored the same dark mindsets about Indians as those in the Sierra Nevada and Jacksonville. Trouble broke out at the mouth of the Coquille. Annoyed by minor insults—thefts of paddles, "insolent" and threatening conduct, and asserted firing of a gun near the whites (the tyee said he was hunting ducks)—the miners swung into action. They called one meeting, then another, in early 1854. In the second meeting, they solemnly adopted a resolution requesting federal assistance and sent it to Agent F. M. Smith.

Before daybreak the next morning—obviously, Smith had had no opportunity to respond—a mob calling themselves volunteers set upon a sleeping Coquille village, slaughtering fifteen men and one woman and torching the buildings. When Agent Smith finally did arrive, he found the raid wholly unjustified. "Thus was committed," he concluded, "a massacre too inhuman to be readily believed."

Miners then took up arms against the Chetco. To serve the new mining camps, A. F. Miller started up a townsite that overlapped a Chetco village. Miller also attempted to take over the vessels of an Indian ferry, now profitable due to the mining, but the Chetco ferry operators refused. The next morning, Miller led eight others on a raid of the Indian village on the north bank of the Chetco, shooting twelve men and ordering two Chetco women, friendly to Miller, to burn down lodges, killing three more. Having received "random fire" from the village on the south bank during that operation, the raiders attacked the second village the next day. Both villages were then burned to the ground. In all, twenty-three Indian men and several women were killed. The military arrested Miller and saw that he was brought to court, but the local justice of the peace dismissed the charges for want of sufficient evidence: all the witnesses were Indians, and territorial law prohibited Indians from testifying against whites.

Violence also struck the Tolowa of Smith River in California, the Athapaskan tribe closely related to the Chetco and Tututni. In 1853, whites burned a large village, killing seventy. A year later, when three miners drowned crossing the river, locals assumed that Tolowas were responsible. They set fire to Indian lodges and, while the death toll is not known, Edward Curtis reported that "many of them" were killed.

Word of the killings on the Coast undoubtedly spread throughout the Indian villages in southern Oregon. In the Upper Rogue River country, the tribes faced a steady drumbeat of killings, rapes, and burnings. The promises of peace in the Table Rock Treaty seemed to make little difference. If anything, the treaty stirred up many of the non-Indians because, to them, it set aside too much land that should be available for mining and homesteading. Indian people lived in terror. Historian A. G. Walling wrote that

> it is a fact that after the Lane treaty was signed, its provisions were repeatedly broken by whites, who deliberately murdered unsuspecting and helpless Indians. . . . [T]he class of exterminators alluded to keep up their efforts to kill off as many Indians as they could, regardless of any moral restriction, whatsoever. Revenge was the motto, and these men lived up to it. Not half of the outrages which were perpetrated on Indians were ever heard of through newspapers.

The whites lived in terror too. Indians made sporadic raids, burning homes and barns and murdering some miners and settlers. Tipsu Tyee was especially flamboyant and notorious. A Shasta, he refused to recognize the Table Rock Treaty or submit to moving his band to the reservation. Tall and handsome, with a goatee, the charismatic Tipsu Tyee "effectually terrorized a tract of country reaching from Ashland to beyond the Klamath, and during many months made unexpected descents upon white settlements, or robbed towns, with almost entire impunity." Federal troops could never catch up with Tipsu Tyee, but in May 1854, a fellow Shasta, Tyee Bill, killed him because Tipsu's actions were causing retribution against the Shasta people.

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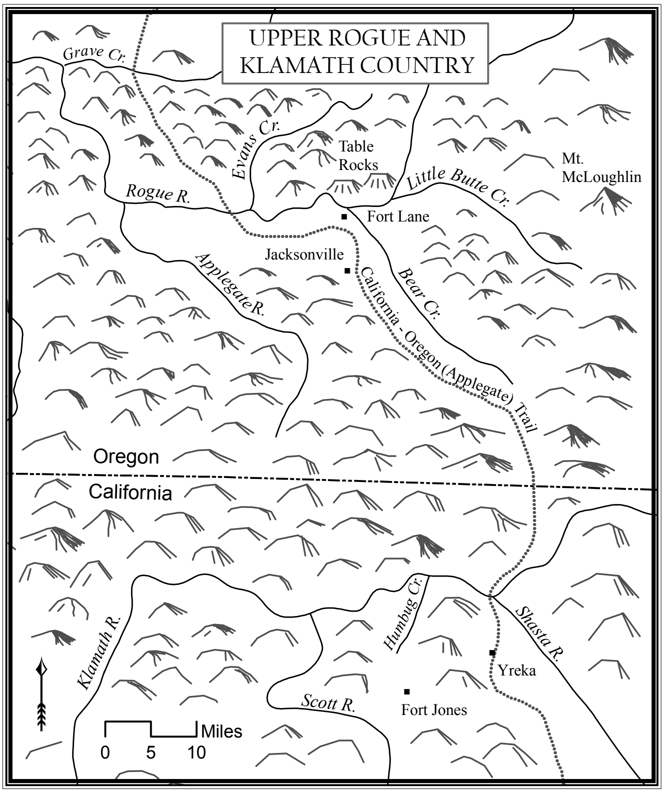
In the absence of any local voice for Indian people other than the maligned and isolated John Beeson, public sentiment in the Upper Rogue River Valley grew ever more toxic. The exterminationists wanted war to finish off the tribes, their reservation, and the treaty; the army, however, under General Wool's command, and the Indian Office, under Joel Palmer, would have none


UPPER ROGUE AND KLAMATH COUNTRY
Grave Cr.
Evans Cr.
Table Rocks
Rogue R.
Little Butte Cr.
Mt. McLoughlin
Fort Lane
Jacksonville
Applegate R.
Bear Cr.
California - Oregon (Applegate) Trail
Oregon
California
Humbug Cr.
Shasta R.
Klamath R.
Yreka
Scott R.
Fort Jones
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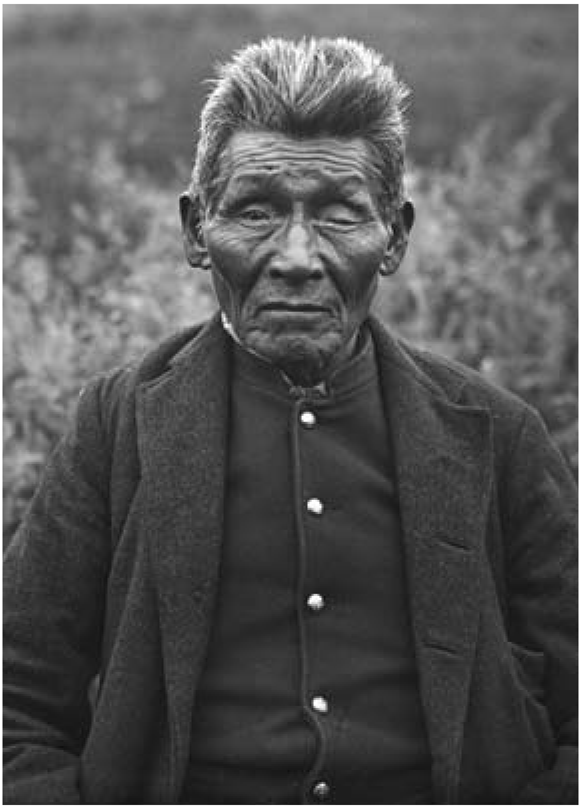
of it. To the consternation and bitter resentment of most southern Oregon whites, Wool and Palmer judged non-Indians as the instigators in most cases and saw their jobs, as federal officials, to safeguard the Indians rather than wage war against them.

By the summer of 1855, the locals were ready to take matters into their own hands. Any pretense would do. All sense of restraint was thrown off in the horrible massacre at Little Butte Creek, which blew the lid off the cauldron of emotions in the Upper Rogue River country.

Two events, mostly taking place in the Klamath River watershed in California, set the stage for Little Butte Creek. The first, on Humbug Creek near Yreka in July, exemplified the confusion and misunderstandings that characterized these times. Miners and Indians died in a drunken brawl of pistol and rifle shots; accounts differ as to who fired first. The next day, an Indian raid took up to a dozen miners' lives. The miners then killed some twenty-five Indians. Each side had indiscriminately lashed out against the other, with most of the dead having nothing to do with the sorry encounter that incited



Klamath Charley, a Shasta, witnessed the incident at Humbug Creek and accompanied Tyee John to Yreka when John reluctantly turned his son and a fellow tribal member over to federal authorities for trial. The two men were acquitted and then murdered by locals. Later in life, living on the Siletz Reservation in the early 1900s, Klamath Charley served as a consultant to Roland B. Dixon in his anthropological research on the Shastas. *Photograph by R. B. Dixon; courtesy of American Museum of Natural History Library, no. 12532.*

the mayhem. The Humbug incident caused temperatures to rise in the Rogue River Valley, both because of the proximity and because five or six Indians from the Table Rock Reservation were in the Humbug area and—though the historical record does not prove it either way—the miners in Yreka believed that Indians on the Oregon side were involved. For Hoxie Simmons, Galice Creek Athapaskan, this was when the die was cast: "Now the earth went bad."

The second round of incendiary incidents involved surviving members of Tipsu Tyee's band. In August, they began a series of raids mostly resulting in property damage—thefts, burnings, and shootings of livestock, predominantly on the California side. In late September they attacked a wagon train ascending the Siskiyous on this California-Oregon Trail from the south, killing and mutilating two male settlers. No doubt the event aroused even greater anger due to memories of the depredations of the hated Tipsu Tyee.

The first week in October was "court week," and Judge Matthew Deady traveled to Jacksonville for hearings, which drew people to town. Extermination talk filled the air. The regular army gave no support to the crowd—General Wool's disdain for the volunteers was well known. At Fort Lane, Captain Andrew Smith knew how much generalized anger was directed toward the Indians, most of whom wanted peace. He saw his primary duty as protecting the Natives on the reservation. This left the field to Major James Lupton. Like many "majors," "lieutenants," and "colonels" in the volunteer armies, he had no formal military title—the locals had bestowed "major" on him. This was one of the many cases in which "volunteers" was a euphemism: Lupton's recruits were vigilantes, a mob, thugs.

Their target was a band of Table Rock Indians living in brush huts at their traditional summer camping site near the mouth of Little Butte Creek. They were off the reservation, which was for the Indian Office and the army to enforce, but otherwise they had done nothing wrong. Lupton called two meetings in Jacksonville to propose his attack. John Beeson rode up from Talent for the meetings and at the second implored the group not to go ahead. No one backed him up.

> I arose, and spoke with all the feeling, and all the power I had, in the behalf of the poor Indians. . . . I begged them, by every principle of humanity and justice, to inflict no wrong upon the helpless. . . . I strongly urged them, as citizens and Christians, to raise a voice of remonstrance, or to call on the Authorities for the administration of justice, and thus avert the impending calamity.

The summer village site at Little Butte Creek was close to the reservation, within sight of Upper Table Rock. Small grassy openings, where the Natives constructed their lodges, were hemmed in by thick vegetation—an underbrush of vine maple and a tall canopy of oaks and willows reaching up a hundred feet or more. But if it was well protected, it was hard to see out: Little Butte Creek enters the Rogue out in the flats of the main valley so that the creek and its banks made only a shallow indentation in the landscape. There was no nearby high ground for a lookout.

As they had vowed to do at the second meeting in Jacksonville, the exterminators raided the Indians on Little Butte Creek on October 8, 1855. Some forty vigilantes crept to the perimeter of the village during the dark and made their charge before the sun rose. Although Lupton took a fatal arrow to the chest and another raider died, all the other dead were Indians. "Lupton and his party fired a volley into the crowded encampment, following up the sudden and totally unexpected attack by a close encounter with knives, revolvers, and whatever weapon they were possessed of. . . . These facts are matters of evidence, as are the killing of several squaws, one or more old decrepit men, and a number, probably small, of children."

There is no precise count of the carnage. Beeson reported "twenty-eight bodies, fourteen being those of women and children. But as many dead were undoubtedly left in the thickets, and no account was taken of the wounded, many of whom would die, or of the bodies that were afterward seen floating in the river, the above must be far short of the number actually killed." One newspaper account reported forty Indian casualties. Captain Smith estimated eighty. Joel Palmer received a report that one hundred and six Indian people had been killed.

News of this horror swept across the reservation and out to those villages where people still lived in spite of orders to settle on the reservation. Tyee Joe, who might well have argued for restraint, had passed away the year before. Tyee Sam, determined to hold the peace, decided against a reprisal. But for the others, this outrage, coupled with all the others, was too much. The deaths had to be avenged. People rallied around Tyee John, who came to the fore as the dominant force among the Rogue River tribes as the region plunged into all-out war.

The tribal warriors gathered at Table Rocks on the morning of October 9 and immediately launched a ferocious campaign of revenge. The first act was both inflammatory and symbolic. Tyee John himself, who had stayed with his band on the Upper Applegate rather than move to the reservation, killed a young man named William Guin, whom the Indian Office had hired to build a house for John at the Table Rock reserve, one of the houses named in the treaty. In his rage over the slaughter at Little Butte Creek and all the other killings and indignities, Tyee John shouted: "I want no house! I am going to fight until I die!"

John and his men then headed down the Rogue, toward the deep wild country and support from lower river tribes, raiding and burning and killing as they went. Soon joined by the bands of Tyee George and Tyee Lympy, downriver Takelmas who had stayed off the reservation, they lashed out against women, and sometimes children, as well as men. On October 9, they killed between fifteen and twenty-seven whites. The whites, miners and farmers alike, whatever contempt they might express toward the Indians, knew that they were fierce and able warriors—well armed and determined. "It would be difficult," Walling wrote, "to picture the state of alarm which prevailed when the full details of the massacre were made known.

Self-preservation, the first law of nature, was exemplified in the actions of all. The people of the Rogue river valley, probably without exception, withdrew from their ordinary occupations and 'forted up' or retired to the larger settlements." As for the tribes, women, children, and elderly men needed protection at least as much: they could not possibly remain in the villages at the mercy of the miners. Some received military protection at Fort Lane or the Table Rock reserve, while many others went down into the canyons with the warriors.

It is unnerving the extent to which the majority society, even with the perspective of time, conceived of Indians as completely apart from the Oregon populace—apart, it seems, even from the human race. Walling wrote in 1884 that "the ninth of October, 1855, has justly been called the most eventful day in the history of Southern Oregon." Even Frances Fuller Victor, one of the finest nineteenth-century western historians, writing in 1894, called October 9 "altogether the bloodiest day the valley had ever seen." Yet, catastrophic and brutal though that day was, even more blood had been spilled the previous day on Little Butte Creek.

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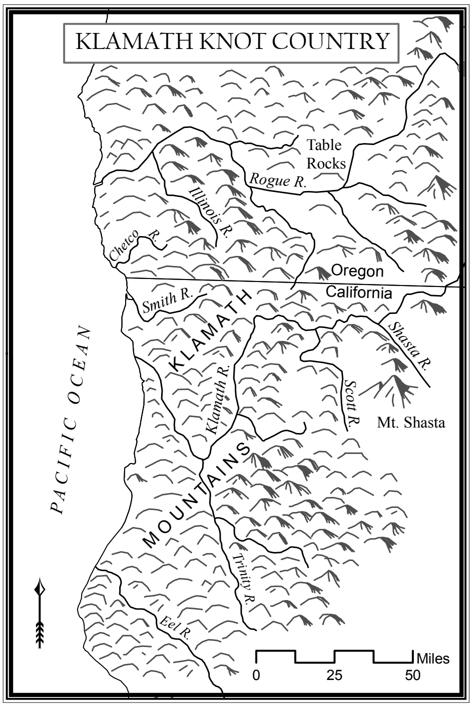
The whites furiously put together an imposing military force. Even Joel Palmer, with his sympathies for the Indians, knew that the time had come. On October 13, he wrote George Ambrose, the agent at Table Rock: "Great wrongs have undoubtedly been done the Indians, but when war comes between the races who can hesitate to act!" A month later, he underscored the seriousness of the crisis in a letter to Commissioner Manypenny: "War is upon us, and whatever its origin, when defenseless women and children are murdered and the property of our citizens destroyed by the ruthless savage, no one can hesitate as to the course to be pursued towards those in the attitude of enemies." Governor Curry issued emergency calls for volunteers, and within a fortnight some 500 men had enlisted under the command of John Ross. By November 1, the volunteer force reached an estimated 750 recruits. The regular army also jumped in: Captain Smith had 105 soldiers at Fort Lane. They and still others would be needed, for the tribes, in passionately defending their homeland, presented singular challenges to this foreign army. There were an estimated 400 warriors and, according to Victor, "four times that number of white men would be required to subdue them on account of their better knowledge of the country, their ability to appear simultaneously at several points, and of disap-

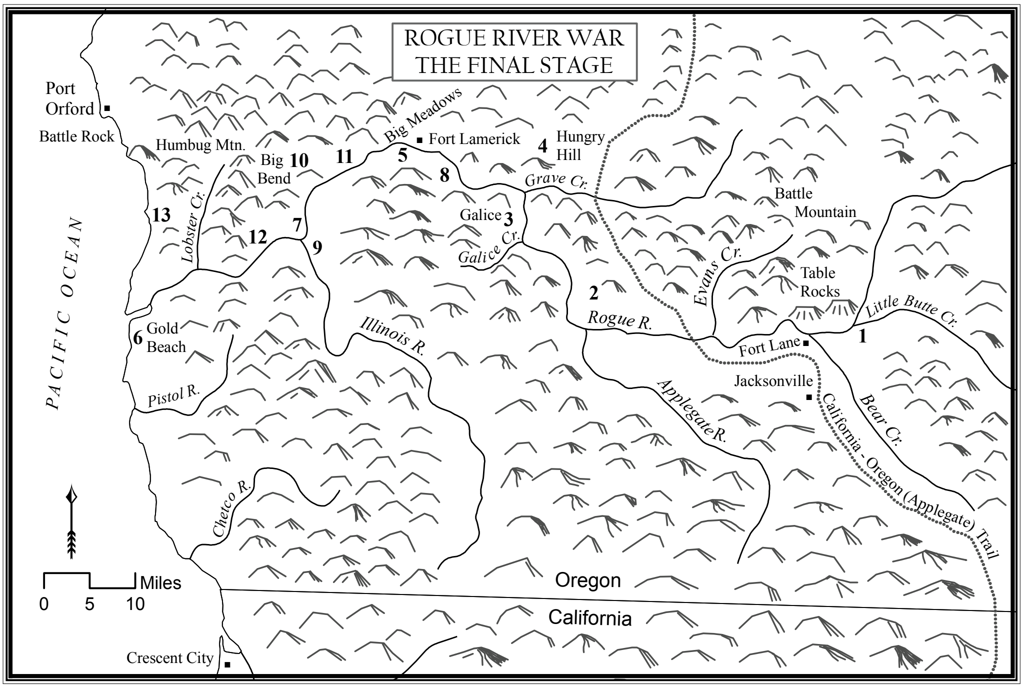


pearing rapidly in the approach of troops, wearing out the horses and men engaged in pursuit."

By mid-October, American military leaders knew only that tribal fighting men from the valley to the Coast had gathered in the canyons and meadows below Grave Creek. They did not know how many warriors there were or where they had set up camp. And they did not know the country: John had led his people deep into the northern reaches of what geologists call the Klamath Knot—the 150-mile mass of mountains, gorges, ravines, and gashes stretching from the Trinity River to the Klamath and the Rogue, one of the three or four most remote and inaccessible regions in the continental United States. Even today, the majestic but unforgiving terrain of the Rogue River watershed below Grave Creek is lightly settled; Congress has established two large wilderness areas and declared this stretch of the Rogue as a Wild and Scenic River. The landscape had become as central to the Rogue River War as the two opposing military forces.

The tribes battered the Americans in three early encounters. Captain William Lewis had set up headquarters at Galice Creek for his volunteer forces. On October 17, tribal warriors attacked the facility. Lives were lost on both sides, but the assault forced Lewis's company to retreat from the area. A week later, by complete accident a group of ten regular army soldiers, led by Lieutenant A. V. Kautz, were scouting for a suitable wagon road route when they stumbled upon the main body of tribal warriors in the steep forest land above Lower Grave Creek. Indian soldiers charged Kautz's group, killing two and capturing several pack animals, but the Americans managed to escape to Fort Lane.

Despite its misfortune, Lieutenant Kautz's expedition provided key information to the Americans. Now they knew where Tyee John's men were encamped. Captain Smith promptly set out for Grave Creek with a force


ROGUE RIVER WAR
THE FINAL STAGE
Port Orford
Battle Rock
Humbug Mtn.
Big Bend
Big Meadows
Fort Lamerick
Hungry Hill
Grave Cr.
Galice
Galice Cr.
Battle Mountain
Evans Cr.
Table Rocks
Little Butte Cr.
Rogue R.
Fort Lane
Jacksonville
Bear Cr.
California - Oregon (Applegate) Trail
Applegate R.
Illinois R.
Lobster Cr.
Gold Beach
Pistol R.
Chetco R.
PACIFIC OCEAN
Miles
0
5
10
Oregon
California
Crescent City
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13

*Major Events*
*1) Little Butte Creek Massacre (Oct. 8, 1855)*
*2) Indians attack settlements (Oct. 9, 1855)*
*3) Battle of Galice Creek (Oct. 17, 1855)*
*4) Battle of Hungry Hill (Oct. 31-Nov.1, 1855)*
*5) Battle of the Meadows (Nov. 26, 1855)*
*6) Indians burn Gold Beach (Feb. 22, 1856)*
*7) Troops burn main Mackanutuni village (March, 1856)*
*8) Troops attack Indians at Battle Bar (April 27, 1856)*
*9) Oak Flat council (May 20, 1856)*
*10) Battle of Big Bend (May 27-28, 1856)*
*11) Indians Come in to Big Bend for removal north (May 30 -June 15, 1856)*
*12) Troops attack Shasta Costa and Painted Rock Village (June 5-6, 1856)*
*13) Tyee John surrenders (July 2, 1856)*

of about 100 regulars. Colonel Ross brought 250 or more volunteers. While enthusiastic, these armies had a rag-tag, makeshift quality to them. Walling described the volunteers as "ill-organized, unpaid, ill-fed, ill-clothed and insubordinate." They also were ill-armed, carrying "sabers, pistols, squirrel guns, and almost anything they could call a weapon." The regulars had military training and were better paid and clothed, but they, too, suffered from a lack of quality arms: two-thirds of them had only musketoons, short-barreled, inaccurate rifles with limited range.

The combined American forces marched to the vicinity of the tribal encampment at Hungry Hill on the evening of October 30. Estimates vary, but probably about 200 Indians were positioned there. The next morning, the day of the intended assault, Captain Smith's men made a crucial error, building campfires to cook breakfast and capture some warmth in the chilly autumn morning. In addition, two companies of volunteers, seeking to stake a position opposite from the regulars and create a surround, climbed a ridge and inadvertently came into full view of the Indians. Seeing the smoke and the soldiers, the Indian fighting men made ready.

The Battle of Hungry Hill lasted two days. The Indians, fighting from the concealment of pine trees and thick underbrush, repeatedly repulsed charges from the Americans. The volunteers' attempt to trap the tribal warriors from the rear failed because of the exposure they faced coming down the bare ridgeside. Heavy fire raged for most of the day. On the second day, the Indians surrounded their opponents but were beaten back. By the afternoon, the Americans had had enough. Eleven regular and volunteer soldiers had died, and twenty-seven were wounded. Exhausted and short of water, the regulars and volunteers made their way back to Fort Lane and other parts of the Upper Rogue River Valley.

The tribes lost the most men, twenty, but all acknowledged that they were the victors in this pitched battle: they had defended their homeland and forced the retreat of the largest American fighting force ever assembled in Oregon. No doubt could remain about their staying power and military capability. A letter to the editor in the *Oregon Statesman* lamented: "God only knows when or where this war may end. . . . These mountains are worse than the swamps of Florida." Lieutenant George Crook, who met the returning American soldiers at Fort Lane, called the Indians the "monarchs of the woods."

The Battle of Hungry Hill gave a bracing dose of confidence to southern Oregon tribes. As a teenage girl, Frances Johnson, a Takelma and niece of Tyee George, participated in the battle, as did a few other females. Frances remembered the excitement. "Boy, those bullets sounded funny when they fly by your head! Hwhoooo . . . Hwhoooo . . . Hwhoooo. . . ." She also took lifelong pride in the way her people had risen up and beaten back the Americans. "You bet your life," she would say firmly in her later years. "That night I danced with white man's scalp on a stick."

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This photograph is believed to be of Tyee John. If it is in fact an image of the tyee, it was presumably taken late in John's life, which ended in 1862. The historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, looking at another photograph (location unknown) of John with his son, described him as having "an intelligent face" and "the look of an earnest, determined enthusiast." Bancroft added that his features were "marked with that expression of grief which is often seen on the countenances of savage men in the latter part of their lives." B. F. Dowell, an Oregon attorney who knew Tyee John, "always thought his features, height, and shape resembled General Andrew Jackson." *Courtesy of Oregon Historical Society, no. ba018607.*

Tyee John moved his people, women and children as well as warriors, still farther downstream to Little Meadow, part of the "Meadows" area, thickly forested but interspersed with occasional grasslands for grazing the horses. Slashed with ravines and the woods full of downed timber and chaparral, the Meadows presented even more difficulties for the American troops. On November 26, some 400 soldiers began an assault on the tribes' stronghold on the north side of the Rogue. But the Indians learned they were coming and, as American soldiers began to ford the Rogue, tribal riflemen rained bullets down on them from the ridges above. The Americans withdrew later that day. Tyee John's forces had again prevailed. Then, for months the cold and rain of a severe winter kept the Americans from making large movements of troops.

Along the Coast, as in the valley, daily life in late 1855 was punctuated by regular incidents instigated by Indians and non-Indians alike. Call them skirmishes or scrapes, but it was rattling and tragic whenever a person was shot, hanged, or scalped or when a farm house or cedar plank lodge went up in flames. The relentless displays of violence soured everyone's daily lives.

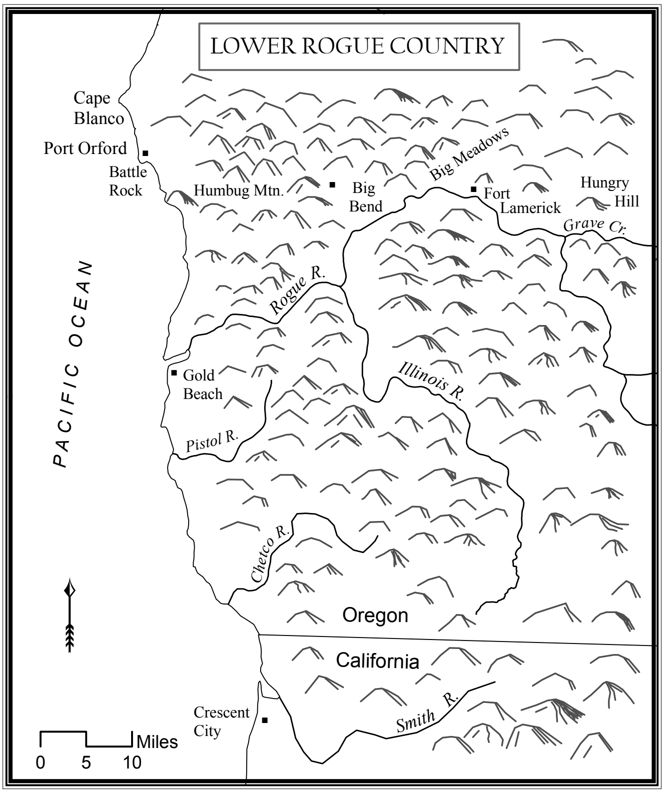
Tututnis, while not directly subjected to extermination threats, knew of the violence in the upper valley and the beach goldminers' unprovoked attacks to the north and the south. Now a vigilante group calling itself the Gold Beach Guard set up shop at the mouth of the Rogue. Fearing the worst, the tribes took preemptive action.

On February 22, 1856, Tututnis and some Chetcoes and Mackanutinis conducted an all-out, early morning raid on Gold Beach. Of the twenty-three murdered, one of the first was Ben Wright, an Indian agent who for months had been meeting with both sides, trying to keep the lid on. The Indians then proceeded to burn the town of Gold Beach to the ground. The following days brought more killings and burnings. The coastal tribes were squarely in the Rogue River War.

General Wool ordered troops from forts in Vancouver and California and from Fort Lane to the east, to converge on southern Oregon and launch a spring offensive "for terminating the Rogue river war by United States troops." The string of Indian victories was about to come to an end, for Joel Palmer spoke the truth at the Table Rock negotiations when he told the assembled Takelma, Athapaskan, and Shasta people: "I have said the white man have come and more are coming. . . . It is no use to make war upon them for if one be kiled ten will come in his place."

Wool appointed Colonel Robert Buchanan to head up field operations. After arriving in late March, the colonel sent nearly 200 regulars to attack and burn Indian villages, including the main Mackanutini village, on the Lower Rogue up to the Illinois River. Troops from California fought Chetco and Pistol River bands on their way north, and volunteer groups from Gold Beach, Port Orford, and Coquille raided Tututni villages. Indians were killed and taken prisoner—and they scattered under the pressure, further diminishing the tribal military capability.

Buchanan knew that Tyee John's forces were holed up in the Meadows area but decided not to mount his offensive on them during the heavy spring rains. By early April, several volunteer groups were moving down the Rogue toward the Meadows. The weather was miserable, with heavy snows. Nonetheless, within weeks General John Lamerick of Jacksonville had 535 volunteer troops at the Meadows under his command, and they were in no mood to wait for Buchanan. They found that Tyee John had abandoned the encampment at Little Meadows and moved most of the Indians downstream yet again. Scouting the area further, the Americans soon discovered a large camp on the south


LOWER ROGUE COUNTRY
Cape Blanco
Port Orford
Battle Rock
Humbug Mtn.
Big Bend
Big Meadows
Fort Lamerick
Hungry Hill
Grave Cr.
PACIFIC OCEAN
Rogue R.
Gold Beach
Illinois R.
Pistol R.
Chetco R.
Oregon
California
Crescent City
Smith R.
Miles
0 5 10

bank of the Rogue, now called Battle Bar, occupied by Tyee Lympy's band.

In the early morning light of April 27, Colonel John Kelsay, with 100 men, charged the camp. It was a rout:

> Many Indians had not yet got out of their huts. The soldiers poured a heavy fire on them. Men, squaws and children were all together in great confusion—nothing saved them but the river. The enemy took positions behind rocks and trees (and fired). The squaws and children disappeared in a dense growth of fir. The enemy lined themselves behind trees above their camp and while they were watching our movements, the detachment (150 men) under Major Bruce came down in great haste without being discovered. Capt. Abel George poured in the whole fire of his company. A fire was kept up during the day. There were 20 or 30 of the enemy killed.

Intermittent firing continued for two more days—the volunteers lost but one man—after which the surviving Indians were forced to escape downriver toward Big Bend. The volunteers then made a significant strategic move: they constructed Fort Lamerick on Big Meadows on the north side of the river and staffed the stockade with 200 soldiers.

The Indian fighting force had been weakened and Tyee John's men were caught in the pincers created by the upriver volunteers at Fort Lamerick and the army soldiers on the Coast. And, given months of experience, the Americans had gained a much better sense of the lay of the land. They knew the hiding places, ambush sites, and escape routes.

In early May, Colonel Buchanan marched his 200 regulars up the Rogue and sent word to Tyee John and the bands aligned with him that he would like to hold council at Oak Flat, near the mouth of the Illinois River, to talk peace. A large delegation, including the tyees, came down from Big Bend for the meeting, set for May 20. By then, Joel Palmer, although he could not make it from Portland in time for the Oak Flat gathering, had solidified plans to remove all southern Oregon Indians north to the new reservation at Siletz. At the grassy bench above the surging Illinois, Buchanan urged the leaders to surrender and agree to move north. At first, the Indians refused to go to the reservation, but then Tyee George and Tyee Lympy agreed, recognizing the overwhelming number of American troops. They would bring all their people to Big Bend in one week to surrender formally and be escorted to the Coast for the transit north.

But Tyee John would not relent. The chief, probably now in his fifties, still believed that he and his warriors could prevail in battle. He addressed Colonel Buchanan and made his stand with some of the most memorable words in Oregon history:

> You are a great chief. So am I. This is my country; I was in it when those 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 the 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. Good-by."

Buchanan stayed at Oak Flat. When the time came to meet at the broad meadow on the north side of the Rogue at Big Bend, he sent Captain Smith and his 200 men of Company C from Fort Lane to receive the surrender. Tyee John and his comrades met them, not with a white flag but with an extraordinary, last-ditch campaign to preserve their freedom and their homeland.

The Indians failed to show at the Big Bend meadow on the appointed day, May 26. Sensing trouble, and warned by Indian boys, Smith moved his men out of the open, flat meadow to high ground in order to establish a more secure site. After dark, they ascended a narrow, north-south ridge above and to the west of Big Bend. The slope at the south end of the ridge gave the Americans a defensible position and there they located their howitzer, dug trenches, and established breastworks. The trenches, eroded away, remain visible today. It was a good defensive posture from the American point of view: the Indians could never attack from the west, which was a virtual cliff, and the terrain dropped off sharply in the other directions as well. This battlefield was compact. The ridge was only 200 yards long—with most of the action taking place at the south end—and the ridge's crown spread just 12 to 30 feet across. In the Battle of Big Bend, the opposing forces would be right up against each other.Early on May 27, John's warriors began arriving at the meadow below. Although some of the Indians had intended to surrender, Captain Smith and his men knew that Tyee John—historian Frances Fuller Victor termed him "the iron chief"—would renew his colleagues' resolve. As many as 300 or 400 Indian fighters moved up the hillsides toward the ridge and took their positions. At about 11:00 in the morning, with John barking orders, they opened fire. The fighting went on all day and, for the second night in a row, the army soldiers went with little sleep, food, or water. In spite of the steep terrain and Company C's strategic location, the Indians had the Americans nearly surrounded.

On the next day, both sides, but especially the exhausted Americans, continued to take heavy losses: seven Americans were killed and twenty injured and the tribal losses were severe, although there is no known count. Tyee John took to taunting Captain Smith. At the Oak Flat council, Smith had made the mistake of telling John "we will catch and hang you, sir; but if you go on the reservation, you can live in peace." John resented the threat, and he knew that, despite Smith's assurances and given the broken promises under the Table Rock Treaty, there would be no "good life" at the new reservation. Perhaps Captain Smith himself would like to live there? John made his points and inspired his warriors by getting within hearing distance of Smith and waving a rope that the Shasta general soon intended to place around the captain's neck:

> Hello, Captain Smith! You go on the reservation? You go on the reservation?
> Hiyu chick chick (many wagons travelling); Hiyu ikta (a great many good

> things); hiyu muckamuck (much food); Hiyu clothes; wake klatawa reservation (not go to the reservation); take rope Capt Smith; do you see this rope Captain Smith?

By mid-afternoon, Tyee John's forces had the clear edge and seemed poised to claim yet another victory. Military historian Jeffery Applen, who conducted on extensive site survey, reports this:

> After 30 hours of fighting the soldiers were in extreme peril. The battle situation was simple and uncomplicated; the soldiers were surrounded by Indian warriors and had suffered so many casualties that their fighting efficiency and capabilities had been degraded by at least 28% based on casualty figures alone. For the soldiers, after the first few hours of combat, their tactical options became limited, a breakout maneuver was not possible without abandoning their dead and wounded. Consequently, they were limited to fighting the battle to its conclusion where they stood. For the Indians, because their initial assaults failed to overpower the soldiers of Company "C", their options too became limited. Without overwhelming strength in manpower to defeat the soldiers outright, the Indians were limited to containing the soldiers within their defensive position, and reducing their strength by fire. Given time, this course of action would ultimately lead to the erosion of the soldier's capability to resist until, by weight of numbers, the Indians could carry their position.

But the Indians were not given time. Late in the afternoon, the balance tipped the other way. As a precaution before moving out of the meadow, Captain Smith had sent a rider to Colonel Buchanan at Oak Flat to get reinforcements. Captain Auger finally arrived with seventy-five dragoons. Although two of those men were killed and three injured, the Americans now had the advantage and the ferocious Battle of Big Bend was effectively over. The Indian warriors fled the battlefield, leaving behind a pile of ropes that Tyee John had expected to use to hang Captain Smith and the army soldiers.

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Joel Palmer, who had arrived with Captain Smith, engaged the tyees in their scattered camps, urging them to assemble at Big Bend for surrender, a march to Port Orford, and transport north by ship to the reservation. Hundreds of people straggled in over the next two weeks. Others went voluntarily to Port Orford or were rounded up and brought in by regulars and volunteers. Even though the tribes were resigned to the move north and, combat over, Governor Curry ordered the volunteers to disband on May 31, some of the volunteers wanted more Indian blood. On June 5 they burned a Shasta Costa village and shot four Indian men while they were fishing. The next day they attacked a village of men, women, and children on Painted Rock Creek, killing at least twenty.

Tyee John's people, 35 men and 180 women and children, were the last to come in. The agreed-upon place was Reinhart Creek, north of Gold Beach. Trying, perhaps, to revive the never-say-die heroism they had displayed for the past many years, John and his soldiers shouldered their rifles and fired, but their shots were off mark and landed harmlessly. The soldiers returned fire and John's men retreated to the woods. John insisted that he and his men be allowed to keep their arms, but Captain Smith refused. Then, during the afternoon and evening, John's people gradually filed in and turned over their weapons.

Finally, Tyee John himself walked into the circle of American soldiers and ceremoniously laid his rifle against a rock. Even then, he rebelled against the surrender. Probably as much from instinct as design, the tyee suddenly grabbed his rifle. The fifty soldiers were quicker and leveled their weapons at him. And so Tyee John—Tyee John of the iron will; Tyee John of the blood commitment to his people and his land; Tyee John, one of the great Northwest war chiefs along with Leschi, Kamiakin, and Joseph—handed over his weapon.

At that moment, on July 2, 1856, the Rogue River War came to an end.