

LESSON 2 | WAR AND REMOVAL

# The Rogue River Wars

1851-1856



# Overview

- The Rogue River Wars lasted from 1851 to 1856 with the most intensive fighting between 1855 and 1856
- The Rogue River Wars were one of the most violent and destructive "Indian wars" in U.S. history
- More than 600 people died in the conflict, making it the largest war in the Pacific Northwest
- When the fighting started only 2,000 or so settlers were living in Southern Oregon—182 of them died during the war
- Native people suffered many more casualties, including many that were never officially counted

# Failure of the Table Rock Treaty

*"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 [in their view] should be available for mining and homesteading"*  
(Wilkinson, 2010, p. 115).

# Violence Escalates

- Despite the presence of the regular military charged with honoring the treaty, Tyee John and other Native people in the region found that they could not trust settlers, who harassed and attacked them without reason or with flimsy excuses.
- This occurred throughout the region. For example, settlers burned Chetco villages in 1854 to gain control of the ferry and massacred people from the village at Nasomah, near present day Bandon.

# Violence Explodes

- October 1855, Lupton Massacre: A volunteer group of settlers and miners massacres more than 50 (and possibly as many as 100) men, women, and children on Little Butte Creek with little cause.
- Tye John, Tye Lympy, and Tye George respond by attacking homesteads and settlements throughout the Rogue Valley.
- Full-scale warfare breaks out.

# Extermination!

- Settlers across the region call for outright extermination of all Native people living in Southwest Oregon and Northern California
- "These Indians must be whipped, aye, they must be *exterminated*, or there will be no peace or safety in any part or portion of the country [emphasis in original]."

*Oregonian-Extra* (March 28, 1856). Cited in Whaley, 2010, p. 231.

# Military vs. Volunteer Militia

- There was tension between the regular military, bound by the “rules of war,” and the volunteer militia bent on extermination.
- One commander described the local volunteers as “barbarous and savage” (Wilkinson, 2010, p.109), as volunteers adopted names like the “Exterminators” or “Squaw Hunters.”
- Army officers knew that the primary obligation of the military after the treaty was signed was to protect Indians from local hostility.
- BUT the military was unwilling to use force against settlers to actually protect Native people and instead focused on defeating Native people as quickly as possible once the fighting started.

# Native Victories

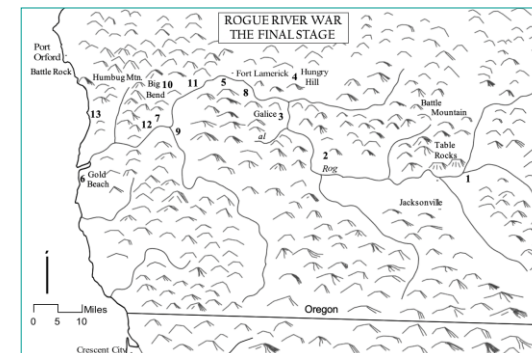
Native people were outnumbered and outsupplied but won several important victories during the war including:

- The Battle of Hungry Hill (October 31, 1855)
- The sacking of Gold Beach (February 22, 1856)

## Rogue River War Timeline

### 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)



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# War Ends

- Ultimately, superior numbers and supplies gave the U.S. Army an advantage
- Different Tribes and bands surrendered at different times
- Many bands surrendered at the Oak Flats Council (May 20, 1856)
- Native forces nearly defeated the U.S. Army at the Battle of Big Bend (May 27, 1856) before reinforcements arrived
- Tye John's people were the last to surrender on July 2, 1856

# Scope of the War

- War and violence spread far beyond the Rogue Valley and the attacks against Takelma, Shasta, and Athapaskan-speaking people
- Lower-Rogue and Coastal Athabaskan-speaking peoples, including the Tututni, Chetco, Tolowa, Sixes, Euchre, and Port Orford, were also forced into the fighting or suffered unprovoked attacks on their villages
- Other Tribes faced threats and intimidation from settlers: Hanis and Miluk Coos people were kept under armed guard by settlers at Coos Bay during the fighting in 1856

# Reparations ... for Settlers

- Settlers were allowed to petition the federal government for reparations for fighting in the Rogue River Wars, even though volunteers had stoked the violence and caused the fighting
- Nearly \$2.5 million paid out (more than \$75 million in 2022 dollars)
- Native people were forced to leave their homelands and resettle on the Coast (Siletz) Reservation

# Timeline Activity Continued

- What were the main events leading to the Rogue River War?
- Continue the timeline you started with the Treaty of Table Rock and through the surrender of Tyee John and his band in July 1856.

# Timeline Questions

Get into groups of two for Think-Pair-Share and consider these questions:

- What were the general/overall cause(s) of the Rogue River Wars?

# Wrap-Up Discussion

- What do you think were the main causes of the Rogue River Wars? Could we group those causes into general themes?
- What ideologies or ways of thinking about Native people enabled settlers to behave in the way they did?
- Could a leader have changed their actions to produce a better outcome? Why or why not?

# Different Ending

Working with your partner, imagine a new ending to this timeline:

- What actions or events would need to be different for this alternative ending to be possible?
- What political or economic ideas would have to change for settlers to accept the rights of Native people to their land?
- How would ideas about nature and land ownership have needed to change?

# Battle of Hungry Hill

- Took place on October 31 and November 1, 1855, in the mountains between Cow Creek and Grave Creek.
- Represents one of the biggest victories by Native people fighting against the U.S. military in the Pacific Northwest.
- American forces proved unable to dislodge Native defenders and were forced to retreat in disarray
- Although the battle was an important turning point in one of the largest wars fought between the U.S. government and Indigenous peoples, it is not well known today.



# What Would They Say?

Sources	Questions
Kautz and Hawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do the stories of Kautz and Hawley compare?</li><li>• How does Kautz describe volunteers?</li><li>• How does Kautz describe military commanders? How does Hawley explain the behavior of the volunteer militia?</li><li>• Notice Hawley's descriptions of the casualties. Why do you think he exaggerates the number of Native people who were killed?</li></ul>
Mrs. Johnson	<p>No one asked for Mrs. Johnson's version of events until nearly 80 years after the events took place. How might asking for her perspective earlier have changed how these events are viewed?</p> <p>It's rare to have recollections like this survive from Native people who were involved in the fighting. What do you learn about the battle after reading Mrs. Johnson's memories that would have been difficult to understand from the first two accounts?</p>
Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do all the newspapers have the same point of view? What differences do you see?</li><li>• Do you notice a difference about how the battle was reported based on where the newspapers were located (how far from the fighting that they were located)?</li><li>• Do newspapers seem to support Hawley's or Kautz's perspective more—why do you think that may be?</li><li>• Do newspapers consider things from Mrs. Johnson's perspective? Why or why not?</li></ul>