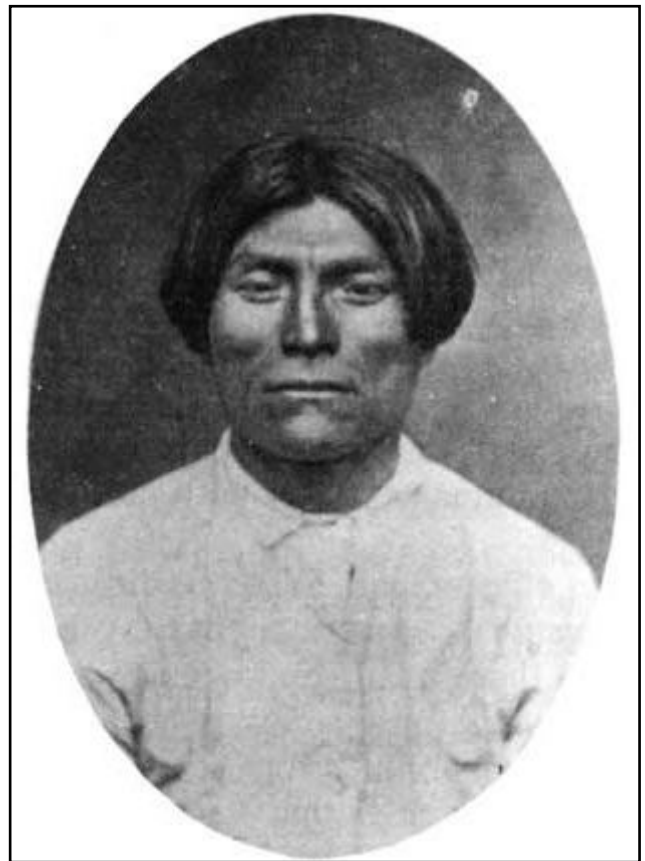


# **THE MODOC WAR: Heartbreak of a Homeland Lost**

By Cheewa James  
[www.cheewa.com](http://www.cheewa.com)

The author is enrolled with the Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma. She is the great-granddaughter of Modoc warrior Shkeitko, “Shacknasty Jim.”



The two men faced each other in the freezing November dawn.

Second Lt. Frazier Boutelle stood coatless in his blue U. S. Army uniform. He had taken off his coat an hour before, knowing that he might need to have the free movement of his arms. Forty U. S. Army men, including a doctor and four men handling the pack train, had ridden through the night from Ft. Klamath, Oregon. By early morning they were numb with cold and the exhaustion of riding almost steadily for sixteen hours, much of it in penetrating sleet and ice. The men found themselves frozen to their saddles at times.

The Modoc man standing in front of Boutelle had a scar running across one cheek. It had given him the name of Scarfaced Charley. He and other Modocs had awakened to the alarming sight of soldiers in the midst of their Lost River village, just a couple of miles north of the California/Oregon state line.

Suddenly both men lifted their weapons and simultaneously fired at each other. They both missed. Neither man on that windy, snow-swept ridge could have known the great significance of the first two shots of the Modoc War in the conflict that became known as the Lost River Battle.

Those two shots, fired November 29, 1872, did not kill anyone. But the many shots to follow would result in huge suffering and anguish to settlers, Modocs, and U. S. Army soldiers throughout the first half of 1873. The shots also

signaled the beginning of a period that would profoundly and irreparably affect the destiny of the Modoc people.

The Modoc War of 1872-73 stands as an amazing conflict in United States history:

**1. It was the most costly Indian war in United States military history, in terms of both lives and money, considering the small number of Indians involved.**

**2. By the end of the six-month war, over 1,000 U. S. military troops were engaged in bringing 50 - 60 Modoc men, who had their families with them throughout the entire war, under control. Army troops outnumbered Modoc fighting men about 20 to 1.**

**3. The Modoc War is the only Indian war in American history in which a full-ranking general, General E. R. S. Canby, was killed. (George Armstrong Custer was not a general at the time of his death.)**

Were it not for Custer's Last Stand at the Little Big Horn against a combined force of Lakota and Cheyenne led by Sitting Bull, the Modoc conflict would probably be remembered as the most significant Indian confrontation in America's western history.

In war it is tempting but simplistic to label the warring factions as "right" or "wrong," "good" or "bad." War spawns cruel acts but also brings humane actions on both sides. The

complexity of any war requires that naïve, one-dimensional conclusions not be drawn. War itself is the true evil.

## **Roots of War**

Bands (small groups) of Modocs were spread over a considerable territory of about 5,000 square miles. The Modoc homeland stretched from the mystical Mt. Shasta, a spiritual place in Modoc religion, eastward to the Goose Lake area. Archaeologists estimate the presence of inhabitants in this area as early as nine thousand years ago. Populations fluctuated between 400 and 800 individuals at any given time.

The Modocs were water people. had marshes and waterways that provided habitat for waterfowl, plants, and fish. The massive Tule Lake's gift to Modocs was the tule reed used in basket weaving and for everything from sandals to covers for their wickiups (dwellings). Plains and forests offered deer, antelope, and mountain sheep. The Modocs' semi-nomadic patterns took them to the right places at the right times for their hunting, fishing, and food-gathering activities. Then the last move of the year brought them back to places like the lush, grassy banks of Lost River, a favored area for building wickiups.

Above all, the Modocs loved their land. They understood the land. It was in every sense, their world. The environment could sometimes be adversarial, but Modocs knew ways to

cope. It was that knowledge that also made them powerful in combat.

The Modocs were never a united tribe. Rather, Modocs lived in individual bands surrounding Tule Lake and other lakes in the area, along Lost River, and near other tributaries. The bands came together only in emergencies like war. The bands were autonomous, with each band having its own leader and governmental base.

The first non-Indians came into Modoc territory somewhere in the middle of the 1800s. Unfortunately, they brought smallpox with them. Like most American Indians, the Modocs had developed no immunity to smallpox. The pox killed them off in great numbers.

But Modocs were to remember an incident in late 1852 even more vividly. Ben Wright was the stuff from which legends are made. With his long, curly hair and swaggering style, he was a notorious Indian killer who often bragged about the number of noses, fingers, and scalps he had taken from fallen Indians. It was Ben Wright and his men who rode into a Modoc camp under a white flag of peace. Coldly, Wright and his men killed more than 30 men, women, and children. Wright's meaning of a white flag was to be engraved in the minds of Modocs forever.

The traditional life of the Modocs ended with the Treaty of 1864. The treaty was never officially ratified, in 1869 the Modocs were coerced onto Oregon's Klamath Reservation along with the Klamath and Yahooskin Band of Snake

Indians. The Klamaths, who greatly outnumbered the Modocs, began to harass the Modocs as they fished and cut timber. The Modocs sought help from Indian agent Capt. O. C. Knapp, a Union Army veteran who was not particularly happy with his role as Indian agent.

## **Man-With-a-Bellyache Takes Over**

*You are directed to remove the Modoc Indians to... the Klamath Reservation peaceably if you possibly can, but forcibly if you must.*

—F.A. Walker, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 11/25/1872

It was at this time that one Modoc emerged who was destined to stand out in Modoc history above all others. His name was Keintpoos, translated as “Having-the-Waterbrash” (pyrosis or heartburn), probably referring to his stomach problems. But his Indian name was not the one people would remember. Keintpoos became known as Captain Jack.

Three times Captain Jack met with Knapp with no action resulting. Finally, during his last visit, Knapp swore at Captain Jack, accusing him of being a chronic complainer. Jack spoke no English but through his interpreter he replied, “If the agent does not protect my people, we shall not live here. If the government refuses to protect my people, to whom shall I look for protection?”

With those words, Captain Jack and more than 300 Modocs left the Klamath Reservation in April of 1870 and returned to their ancestral Lost River homeland some 35 miles to the south. Eventually almost half of the Modocs, under the leadership of Old Schonchin, drifted back to the reservation. It was in this year that Captain Jack made a formal proposal to establish a reservation for the Modocs in their homeland—a six-mile square of land straddling the Oregon/California state line. It never happened.

Some of the Modocs spoke English, although the tribe as a whole still used their native tongue. The Modocs adopted clothing similar to the settlers around them. Work shoes and dungarees had long replaced the skins and tule sandals of their ancestors. Most had their hair cropped short and carried muzzle-loading rifles with powder horns. Only the very old Modocs used bows and arrows.

Yreka, California, had flamed to life at the western boundary of traditional Modoc land when gold was discovered in the vicinity in 1851. Modocs often looked for work as house servants. Ranchers and farmers in the area also hired Modocs as ranch hands.

The Modoc language was difficult on the tongues of the non-Indians, so Modocs were re-named. Slatlocks became Steamboat Frank. He was named in recognition of the deep, resounding voice of his foster mother (who later became his wife). Scarfaced Charley's deep scar ran down his right cheek. Shkeitko, meaning "left-handed man," was given the name

Shacknasty Jim. Some say it was because of his mother's untidy housekeeping. Boston Charley was very fair and Black Jim was very dark. Curley Headed Doctor was the shaman (religious leader) of the Modocs. History has also recorded the colorful names of lesser known Modocs— names that make one wonder who dreamed them up: Greasy Boots, Big Duck, Old Longface, Skukum Horse, Humpy Joe, and Tee-hee Jack.

Except for those who followed Old Schonchin back to the Klamath Reservation, Modocs continued to live in their ancestral homelands for over two years after leaving the reservation. Then on the fateful morning of November 29, 1872, the U.S. Army attacked Captain Jack's Lost River village in an attempt to force the Modocs back onto the reservation.

Without authorization by proper military authorities, the attack was launched. A bungling of military orders and a lack of clarity as to whether government officials or the army was really in charge brought too few men to the Lost River village. Thirty-five soldiers from Ft. Klamath were not enough to bring the Modocs into submission, even with the element of surprise on the side of the military.

Captain Jack's village of about fifteen dwellings was burned to the ground. Modocs claimed that an old woman was burned alive in her wickiup. The military disputed that claim. History has obscured the truth, but there is no doubt that war had come. The Modocs fled into the surrounding sagebrush and headed for the nearby water of Tule Lake. With only the



clothes on their backs, men, women, and children began a cold, miserable trip of some 13 miles in canoes across the lake. They headed south toward the lava beds on the other side of the lake where they would take their stand against the military. In that land, known today as the Lava Beds National Monument, located in northern California, they knew they could use the inhospitable, desolate land against their enemy.

Taking advantage of the chaos and fighting at Captain Jack's village, a group of civilians raided Hooker Jim's village across the river. With no military orders and without the knowledge of the army, these civilians attacked the village, wounding a Modoc woman and killing a child.

In revenge, a group of Modocs from Hooker Jim's band rode out around the shores of Tule Lake. They killed fourteen settler men—only men, an unusual act in the war tactics of 1873. Normally there was no distinction made between men and women. No other Modoc band, including Captain Jack's, had any knowledge this was happening. Henry Miller, long time friend of the Modocs, had been out riding the Thursday afternoon before the fateful Lost River Battle. He had assured Modocs he encountered that he knew of no plans for soldiers to be in the area. Because the army neglected to inform the settlers of an impending attack, Henry had no idea there was a problem. Out riding on the day of the attack and killings, he saw a band of Modocs and raised his hand in greeting. He was shot from his horse and went to his grave never knowing what hit him—or why.

## A Killing Time

*If the soldiers had come about fifty or sixty strong, with plenty of ammunition...all this trouble and bloodshed could have been saved.*

—Louisa Boddy, Lost River settler, 1/1873

Historical writings on the Modoc War have not made much note of the role of women in this war, either Modoc or settler. But some of the bravest and most poignant stories are those associated with women. The settler women, whose homes were raided and men in the family killed, left a page in history that is not forgotten.

William Brotherton and two of his sons were shot and killed by Modocs from Hooker Jim's band while cutting wood. Joseph, Brotherton's fifteen year-old son, was with neighbor John Schroeder, who tried to escape the Modocs on his horse. Schroeder did not succeed. The Modocs shot him from his horse. In the confusion, Joseph ran for home. Sarah Brotherton, seeing her son fleeing the Modocs, rushed to meet him with a revolver in her hand. Her younger son called to her to come back, then opened the door and followed her. Turning to the boy, she ordered him back to the house. She told the lad to grab his father's Henry rifle, elevate the sights to eight hundred yards, and blast away at the Modocs. This he did, with his younger sister wiping and handling the cartridges. Sarah grabbed her older son and raced back to the house.

Barricading the door with freshly purchased sacks of flour, she pushed loopholes in the house walls, converting her home to a fortress. With Sarah shouting orders, her entire family bombarded the Modocs with rifle fire, keeping them at bay. Finally the Modocs left, but it was three days before help arrived at the Brotherton homestead.

The reaction to the settler killings was one of shock and horror. It reverberated across the nation and even the world, with newspapers screaming the story. Modocs from other bands were also affected by the killings.

The Hot Creek band, who lived a considerable distance away from the Lost River Battle site, were under the leadership of Shacknasty Jim. The Hot Creek band had lives very separate from those in Captain Jack's band. Seeing that war was coming, they decided to turn themselves in to military officials at Ft. Klamath. They wanted nothing to do with Captain Jack's war.

Rancher John Fairchild, who had hired many of the Hot Creek Modocs, knew he was living on Modoc ancestral land. On his own initiative, he drew up a "treaty" with the Hot Creeks and paid them a small rent. Fairchild agreed to escort this band of Modocs to Ft. Klamath.

But they never made it. On their way north to Fort Klamath, the Hot Creek band of approximately fourteen men and thirty women and children was intercepted by a group of drunken settlers who threatened to murder any Modoc who crossed the river. Not even Fairchild could contain the frightened Hot

Creeks. They bolted in fear. They rode to the south, eventually joining Captain Jack in the lava beds to the east.

One can only wonder what might have happened if the Hot Creek band had not joined Captain Jack's fighting force, which only numbered thirty to forty men. Would there even have been a Modoc War? Fate intervened and sent Captain Jack fourteen more men, enough to make him feel he could wage a war rather than simply surrender.

## **Preparing the Stronghold**

*We will be prepared to make short work of this impudent and enterprising savage. I feel confident the guns will astonish and terrify the Modocs.*

—Lt. Col Frank Wheaton, 12/26/1872

The terrain was so uneven and rough that no one ventured into it. The Stronghold was bordered on the north by Tule Lake, which provided water to those inside the lava walls of the Modoc war camp. As the weather warmed, water was a major survival issue.

Captain Jack, with second-in-command Schonchin John, chose this rugged landscape because he knew that the land itself would be a wicked enemy of the army troops. The Modocs, in contrast, knew the lay of the land and how to use it. The lava flow was part of their forbears' tribal domain.

They had used the ice caves for food storage and water. The warmer caves were temporary hunting lodges.

The addition of the Hot Creeks brought the number of fighting men with Captain Jack to between 50 and 60. The Modoc army was a young one. Many of the fighters were boys in their early teens. A number of the better-known warriors and leaders were in their late teens and early twenties. The fighting uniform was the clothing they had adopted from the miners and ranchers in the area. Despite some of the glorified descriptions and drawings of Modoc fighters, dungarees, boots, shirts, and bandanas were what they actually wore.

One extraordinary aspect of this war is often overlooked. Modoc women and children (numbering about 100) were with their men in the lava beds throughout the entire six-month war. When battles were fought, the women and children were there. There are records of women actually being armed and fighting.

Captain Jack's Stronghold was over two miles long (north to south) and 300 yards wide. Pit-like depressions and broken lava tubes forming caves served as dwellings for the Modoc families. Other families lived in sites just outside the core of the Stronghold. The Modocs had a herd of about 100 cattle. These animals were driven in and maintained as food for the Modocs. The Stronghold had deep chasms running through the fortress allowing the Modocs to move easily from one end to the other. Jack's men dug additional trenches to strengthen their position. Where the natural terrain did not provide

protection, they constructed artificial barriers and fortifications. Lookouts posted throughout the Stronghold could easily see movement to the east and west.

The Modocs knew their own battlefield intimately. In preparing for battle, they had placed piles of rocks at strategic spots, using them as guideposts.

Here's how Lt. Thomas Wright, a U. S. soldier who fought and eventually died in the Modoc War, described the Stronghold: "The match for the Modoc Stronghold has not been built and never will be...It is the most impregnable fortress in the world."

The unique geology of the lava beds and the Modocs' understanding of how to survive in and use that terrain were the foremost reasons the Modocs were so successful. Bleak and forbidding, jagged, sharp lava boulders jutting high in the air and gaping gulches became the allies of the Modocs, who used the land against their enemy in the truest sense of guerrilla warfare.

Curley Headed Doctor, spiritual leader and shaman to the Modocs, played a major role in the war, for it was his teachings that convinced the Modocs they were invincible. The shaman professed that no Modoc would fall in battle if they followed his beliefs.

## **Forward, March!**

*I have never before encountered such an enemy, civilized or savage, occupying a position of such great natural strength as the Modoc Stronghold. Nor have I ever seen troops engage a better armed or more skillful foe.*

— Lt. Col. Frank Wheaton 2/7/1873

The first important battle to take the Stronghold and force the surrender of the Modocs took place on January 17, 1873. It pitted approximately 300 regular U. S. military men, volunteers, and Klamath Indian scouts against the small band of 55 or so Modocs. Many of the soldiers had fought in or were deserters of the Civil War.

Lt. Col. Frank Wheaton was the commander of this battle. The military strategy for the upcoming confrontation was “gradual compression,” meant to squeeze them out. Troops would move in and compress from both the east and west. To the north was Tule Lake, a natural barrier, and to the south was the inhospitable no-man’s land.

The day before the battle Wheaton wrote to General E. R. S. Canby, commander of the department of the Columbia, “I don’t understand how the Modocs can think of attempting any serious resistance, though of course we are prepared for their fight or flight.”

The day of the battle dawned cold, dismal, and foggy. Troops were readied, and the order was given to advance. Soldiers soon discovered that to obey this command was not the same task as it had been in the Civil War or other wars. Skirmish lines—a row of men marching forward in unison— were quickly found to be virtually impossible.

Not only were there rocks to be skirted, but also a seemingly level stretch of land would suddenly break into a yawning chasm. Fog had settled in and overhung the lava bed like a quiet sea. It was not only difficult to know where the Modocs were, but determining the positions of their own units became a problem. In the confusion, the strategically placed Modocs were able to fire their rifles without revealing their positions. Wheaton noted, “There was nothing to fire at but a puff of smoke issued from cracks in the rock.”

Modoc Bogus Charley, who spoke excellent English, yelled out through the fog at one point, “Don’t shoot this way, you are firing on your own men.” Military firing was actually called to a halt until one of the soldiers informed his commander of the hoax. Several times during the campaign soldiers were thrown into confusion listening to the well-modulated voice of Bogus Charley.

One volunteer officer told of a very young soldier who had lost his way and ended up in the volunteer army ranks. The boy soldier was totally terrorized by the fighting. When the man next to him was shot and blood spurted out, the young man staggered back and retched violently. Then he



deliberately pointed his own carbine at his foot and pulled the trigger. He was through with soldiering for that day.

Howitzers, cannons that fired projectiles in a high curved trajectory, had been shipped to the lava bed specifically for this battle. They proved of no value when the enemy's position was hidden from view as it was in this battle. No one could tell where the rounds were landing. Afraid of hitting their own troops, leaders ordered the guns silenced. In Lt. William Boyle's words, soldiers were afraid they "would do more harm to our troops than to the enemy." It was back to rifles.

## **The Major with the Magic Glove**

The command, "Forward, march!" became meaningless. Major John Green gave an insight into what the military faced:

*It was impossible to make the proposed charge, the nature of the rocky ground preventing men moving faster than at the slowest pace, and sometimes having to crawl on their hands and knees. It is utterly impossible to give a description of the place occupied by the enemy as their stronghold.*

At one point, Green became infuriated at his own men, who when given the command to move forward, did nothing. In great frustration and disregarding the heavy fire, he leaped up

in plain view of both soldiers and Indians and began a profane tirade on the character of his men.

The Modoc were thrown off guard and absolutely astonished at this figure in blue jumping from rock to rock. Green snatched off his military glove and as he danced among the rocks, he pounded the glove into his other hand, punctuating his tongue-lashing with blows of his hand. For years to follow, the Modocs spoke of the magical properties of John Green's glove that protected him during the Modoc War.

Reports were that the Klamath Indian scouts did not serve the army well. They not only fired their guns into the air but they kept the Modocs informed of all that transpired among the troops. It goes without saying that the Klamaths were relieved of their duties. Wheaton chose Warm Springs Indian scouts for all subsequent military encounters in the Modoc War.

After ten hours of battle, the U. S Army returned to its base camp, bruised, completely demoralized, and having suffered twenty-five wounded and twelve killed. The soldiers' clothing was in shreds from crawling among the rocks and their shoes were badly worn. Because of this defeat, Wheaton was relieved of his command, although many protested that move, and was replaced by Colonel Alvan Gillem.

Before the battle had begun, shaman Curley Headed Doctor had placed a tule rope dyed red around the perimeters of the Stronghold. He told the Modocs that not a soldier could cross that rope and not a Modoc would die.

He proved to be correct. The Modocs were convinced they were invincible.

## **Here Come the Modoc Ladies**

Modoc women were with the men throughout most of the war. But little heed was paid to them by the press or in military/government documents. Princess Mary, Captain Jack's sister, was fluent in English, served as his translator, and often handled negotiations. She was prominent throughout the war using her translator skills in military and government meetings. It was generally conceded that were it not for the accident of being born a woman, she might have been an acknowledged and commanding leader of the Modocs.

The letters of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Harry Dewitt Moore, recovered well over a hundred years after his death, talked of seeing Princess Mary at a distance on the rim of the Stronghold:

*She was the principal operator on the Modoc side...who made herself conspicuous by the flaming red dress she had on...she wears high- heeled brass tipped boots such as you see on the feet of actresses...I am convinced that whatever her other attractions, she has a most powerful voice.*

A few Modoc women figured prominently throughout the war by serving as messengers and interpreters for both sides. The women spoke fluent English unlike Captain Jack. But Jack was not especially pleased with these two serving as couriers.

The San Francisco Call reported that Jack was “against using women as couriers...as women do not understand when men lie.” On one mission riding back and forth between Modocs and soldiers with messages, the *Call* reported One-Eyed Dixie arrived “her horse completely blown. She...at once let her tongue loose. Artena arrived shortly thereafter with her horse flecked with foam. Riding at one point to search for bodies of fallen soldiers, the two women claimed that they had ridden 18 miles without water.”

The mother of Shacknasty Jim, known as Madame Shacknasty and later to be known as Sally Clark, commanded an important position and held it against the assaults of U.S. soldiers. Former Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs and writer Alfred Meacham said U. S soldiers “repeatedly heard her cheering her men, and on one occasion they saw her pass, under fire, from one cliff of rocks to another.”

The women in the Stronghold had the task of combing the battlefield after a skirmish, as related by Meacham:

*The soldiers' dead bodies lie stark and cold among the rocks. The Modoc men distain to hunt up victims of the fight...Look now in the Modoc camp when the squaws come in, bearing the arms and clothing of the fallen United States soldiers. See them parade these before the Indian braves.*

One teenage girl collected guns and clothing on the battlefield. She lived to tell of it, her death not occurring until 1950. Jennie Clinton was the last survivor of the Modoc War.

## The Good Friday That Wasn't So Good

*Don't be discouraged, my darling. I will take good care of myself and come home as soon as possible.*

—Gen. Canby to wife Louisa, 4/1873

During the next three months no major battle took place, although Modocs and their families still inhabited Captain Jack's Stronghold. A peace commission was officially established shortly after the battle for the

Stronghold. After the terrible defeat of the army, words now seemed to be a better route than weapons.

Good Friday, April 11, 1873, was the date set for the meeting of four U. S. peace commissioners and the Modocs. General Canby headed the commission. Canby was respected by Indian groups with whom he had worked. He was willing to work with the Modocs to find a solution. He was entirely confident that the results of the peace conference would be positive and end animosity.

Alfred Meacham had been with the commission since its organization. Like Canby, he had worked successfully with Indian groups. But unlike Canby, he was very apprehensive about the conference. Toby Riddle, a Modoc woman later in her life to be named Winema by Meacham, and her non-Indian husband Frank, were to serve as interpreters at the conference. Toby had frantically warned Meacham that the

Modocs were planning an attack at the conference. She and Meacham had become great friends when years before he had issued an edict that no white man could live with an Indian woman without marriage. As a result, Toby and Frank had married.

The night before the conference, the Modocs had met to discuss what was to be done. Modoc society operated on consensus. All decisions, both civil and war-related, were made by consensus of the people. With the Modocs gathered around him, Captain Jack had stood in front of his cave and made a plea for peace. But a Modoc jumped up beside him and placed a woman's basket hat on Jack's head and a shawl around his shoulders. "You are a fish-hearted woman," the Modoc said.

A consensus was finally reached. The decision was to kill the commissioners. Any misgivings the Modocs had about breaking the truce and killing the commissioners were swept away by memories of the Ben Wright massacre. The ghosts of Wright and his Modoc victims had found their way to the windswept, desolate site of the Good Friday peace conference.

The four commissioners—Canby; Meacham; Rev. Eleazer Thomas, a Methodist minister from Petaluma, California; and Indian Agent Leroy Dyar—came under fire at exactly noon. Captain Jack raised his gun from a distance of five feet, pointed it at Canby's head and fired. The gun misfired. Jack re-cocked the gun and fired again, delivering a death shot below the left eye. Thomas was shot in the chest by Boston

Charley. “Don’t shoot again, Boston. I shall die anyway,” Thomas stammered as he rose to his feet. He, like Canby, was not to survive.

Both Meacham and Dyar had also come armed to the peace conference and Dyar made a quick retreat, threatening Modocs with a wave of his derringer. Meacham turned to run, tripped, and fell unconscious as a bullet creased his forehead. Boston Charley began to scalp him, a bit difficult as Meacham was mostly bald. Toby Riddle, seeing her friend in deep trouble, yelled out, “The soldiers are coming,” causing Boston Charley to dart away from Meacham.

When soldiers arrived a half-hour later, they found Toby sitting beside the wounded Meacham. They also found the bodies of Thomas and Canby where they had fallen. The Modocs had stripped Thomas and Canby naked.

## **Back to War**

*We are very uncomfortable here. We have no tents and I live in a den of rocks... rattlesnakes are a plenty and scorpions abundant.*

—2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Harry De Witt Moore, 4/1873

From April 13-17 the Stronghold was once again under siege. But this time it was different. There were 650 men primed for battle. Four Coehorn mortars were ready for use. This heavy

artillery allowed a ball to be lifted up into the air and deposited in the Stronghold. Colonel Gillem was in command but was extremely unpopular with his men, who at times simply disobeyed his orders.

The army was much wiser in the second battle for the Stronghold, realizing that a pile of rocks or an innocent looking clump of sagebrush might suddenly spout fire. Slowly and methodically, soldiers moved forward, instructed to build stone shelters to hold five or six men. With a rock for a pillow, soldiers had a refuge at night.

The three-day battle ended on April 17 when the soldiers entered the Stronghold. Much to their amazement, only a few older, infirm Modocs were there and were killed. During the night, using rock pile guideposts in the dark, the Modocs had vacated the Stronghold through a route running south through the lava beds. The army had believed that this area of the lava beds was an impassable no-man's land. Scouts recalled how they had thought they had heard children crying during the night but had not investigated.

Where were the Modocs? That thought plagued Gillem. On April 26 he sent out a patrol of approximately sixty-five soldiers. Around noon, soldiers stopped by a 200-foot knoll—Hardin Butte. The men took lunch, pulling off their shoes and relaxing. They had no sooner started to put their shoes back on when the Modocs, under the command of Scarfaced Charley, attacked.



As the orange flashes of gunfire blazed down on them, many soldiers panicked, some running in bare feet with weapons and rations beings tossed aside. Pandemonium took over for much of the patrol. It was short and it was brutal. Two-thirds of the patrol was wiped out, including the patrol commanders Captain Evan Thomas and Lt. Thomas Wright, two young officers who were both from prominent military families.

About three o'clock in the afternoon Scarfaced Charley suddenly broke off the attack. He called down to the helpless men below him, "All you fellows that ain't dead had better go home. We don't want to kill you all in one day," thus saving the remaining patrol from death.

Gillem delayed sending out a rescue patrol and by the time he did, the weather had turned bitter with driving sleet and snow. Lt. Boyle was part of the patrol and in sorrowful terms later wrote:

*Never did men suffer as did the officers and soldiers on that night, hearing the wails of the dying and with the fearful spectacle of dead men packed on the backs of mules. The sufferings of that night's march made many a young man old. Many felt Gillem's actions were inept.*

At this critical time in the war, the "Gillem problem" created huge discord in the military forces. Following the Thomas-Wright Battle, Wheaton was reinstated.

A few days after the Thomas-Wright Battle, a sentry on duty at Gillem's Camp, the military headquarters during the war,

was startled to see a strange object traveling down the trail. As the object came closer, the sentry saw a figure starkly outlined against the black lava rock. He realized it was a woman with a long, gray lace veil streaming from her hat. As she drew nearer he saw that she was beyond her middle years. The mother of Lt. George M. Harris had journeyed day and night from Philadelphia to the bedside of her dying son, wounded in the battle. Twenty-five year-old Harris had received rifle balls through the lung, back, and ribs. Mrs. Harris had gone from Pennsylvania by train, then by stagecoach, had hired a supply wagon, and finally came into the camp on the back of a mule. During the last twenty-four hours of Harris's life, the son was with his mother, lucid and able to know she was there. He died in her arms sixteen days after he had been shot.

## **A Last Battle, Surrender and War's End**

*I hardly know how to talk here. I don't know how white people talk in such a place as this.*

—Captain Jack, testifying at trial, 7/8/1873

The Modocs were now not only plagued by lack of water and food but were in a state of exhaustion. In a last ditch attempt, on May 10 Captain Jack launched a surprise attack on military troops at Sorass (Dry) Lake. Although managing to kill five soldiers, the Modocs were overpowered and had to flee.

Another event was even more ominous. One of the Hot Creek Modocs, Ellen's Man George was killed. He was cremated, as was the Modoc way, near the battlefield. As the flames licked at his body, General Canby's watch and hundreds of dollars in gold that had been in George's pocket slipped into the fire.

The Hot Creeks claimed that Jack kept his men to the back and the Hot Creeks to the front, resulting in Ellen's Man George's death. Dissension and discord between the Modoc bands resulted in a vote to determine what to do. Two-thirds of the warriors decided there was no point in continuing the battle.

Yet during the night, Captain Jack's band left with most of the guns and horses, leaving the other Modocs defenseless. It was the beginning of the end. In May of 1873 the Hot Creek band of Modocs surrendered. Then on June 1 Captain Jack also surrendered saying simply, "Jack's legs give out."

Thus came to an end the six-month long Modoc War—one of the most grueling and expensive Indian wars ever fought. Even leaving out the huge expense of paying soldiers, estimates are that it cost \$10,000 per Modoc warrior—in 1873 money—to subdue these Indians in battle. If the cost were to be calculated in current money, it would amount to some \$300,000 per Modoc.

Military orders directed that a stockade be built at Ft. Klamath to house the captives—44 men, 49 women, and 62 children. Four months were spent in this 150 X 50-foot stockade. A July

1873 official dispatch from Ft. Klamath commented on the unity of Modoc families:

*The harmony existing in these Modoc families is wonderful to behold. Never have I seen its equal in any other country or among any other people. The woman has things her own way all the time...build the fire, clean up the premises, bring all rations from commissary, bring wood and water with which she cooks...The male Modoc never gets underfoot...he seldom if ever trifles or interferes with the domestic arrangements of the family as long as he gets enough to eat.*

Heavily shackled prisoners were placed in wooden cells in the guardhouse. It was reported that the Modocs huddled together, and no noise could be heard two feet from the door. Six were put on trial for the peace commission murders. The trial was highly unusual. The five-man military commission appointed to decide the fate of the Modocs included three military officers who had been under attack by the same men they judged. The Modocs spoke only limited English, if any at all, so interpreters were used. Some of the Modocs would slump to the floor and sleep at times.

Captain Jack, Boston Charley, Schonchin John, and Black Jim were found guilty and hanged on October 3, 1873. They were buried at Ft. Klamath, although their heads were shipped to the U. S. Army Museum for study. Shortly thereafter, some 150 Modoc men, women, and children were taken as prisoners of war to Redding, California. There they were put on a train carrying them to exile in Oklahoma Indian Territory.

The Modoc homeland was destined to become only a memory.

## **A New Life**

*The Modocs plow and sow and reap with the same resistant courage with which they fought.*

—H.W. Jones, Quapaw Agent, 1874

Exhausted, hungry, and cold after some three weeks on the train, the exiled Modocs arrived on a bleak November day in Baxter Springs, Kansas. Soon afterwards they were transferred to their new home on the Quapaw Indian Agency near present day Miami, Oklahoma. Having fought a battle that created international headlines in its time and that would spawn writings for over a century, history then turned its back on the Modocs. This tribe now started down an obscure road of little interest to the American press or anyone else.

The Modocs worked hard to adapt to their new life. But their path to recovery was to have a major barrier. The Quapaw Agency administration was involved in a scam common for its time known as an Indian ring. Government funding meant for the Modocs was diverted by corrupt government officials and merchants. Modocs were given sub-standard food and goods. Even worse, they were denied medical supplies and services. They were devastated by consumption (tuberculosis)

—almost wiped out by an enemy more lethal than guns. The Modoc population numbers dropped dramatically. For half a century the Modocs struggled to survive.

But survive they did. This was the tribe that wouldn't die.