

Lesson Title: "I Thought I Had Taken Care of That"

Hand Out #9: Captain Jack of Modoc Indians, So. Oregon and N. California

<http://www.militarymuseum.org/Modoc1.html>



California State Military Department
**The California State Military
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Preserving California's Military Heritage

California and the Indian Wars
The Modoc War, 1872-1873

by Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Hasse

This conflict resulted from forces common to all Indian wars: the encroachment of whites upon traditional Indian land until the aboriginal way of life was threatened with extinction. However, it was complicated by the appearance of the Ghost Dance religion, which (it was believed) protected the Indians from the white man's bullets and stirred many of the young braves to fanatical deeds, the presence of bitter rivalries among tribal leaders, and the leadership talents of Captain Jack Kientopos. Roots of the war went back to 1852, when Indians slaughtered sixty-five whites in a wagon train at Bloody Point, and in retaliation forty-one Modocs were murdered by whites at a peace parley. Hostility continued until 1864, when the Modocs signed a peace treaty and agreed to live on the reservation in Oregon. Unable to coexist their enemies, the Klamaths, the Modocs fled the reservation in 1865, returned briefly in 1869, but left finally in April, 1870.

The war began when troops tried to force Captain Jack's band, camped on Lost River, back to the reservation on November 29, 1872. As the Indians fled, they murdered thirteen (or eighteen) settlers. The Modocs retreated to "The Stronghold," a vast lava bed honeycombed with outcroppings, caves, and caverns, making it a virtually impregnable rocky fortress. Efforts to dislodge the Modocs in heavy fog on January 17, 1873, cost the army thirty-five dead and many wounded, with no casualties for the Indians. Weeks of negotiation followed, with the army reluctant to risk more casualties and Captain Jack desirous of stalling until spring so he could more easily maneuver in the mountains. The deadlock ended on Good Friday, April 11, 1873, when General Edward Richard Sprigg Canby was murdered, with other peace negotiators, by Captain Jack, while unarmed and conducting peace negotiations. (Canby thus became the only army general to die in the Indian wars.) The usually astute Captain Jack was goaded to this misdeed by warriors convinced that the army would leave if their leader was gone.

On April 14, 1873, the army laid siege to the Stronghold, and, lacking water, Captain Jack fled southward. After Canby's death, General Jefferson C. Davis, another distinguished Civil War veteran, commanded the troops. At Hardin Butte, on April 26, the bungling army suffered another disaster when a force of some eighty-five men were

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ambushed and suffered two-thirds casualties. By this time the Modoc leaders had a force that varied from forty-nine but never was reported as more than eighty-nine to ward off more than a thousand army regulars, plus volunteers, and Indian allies. The end was near.

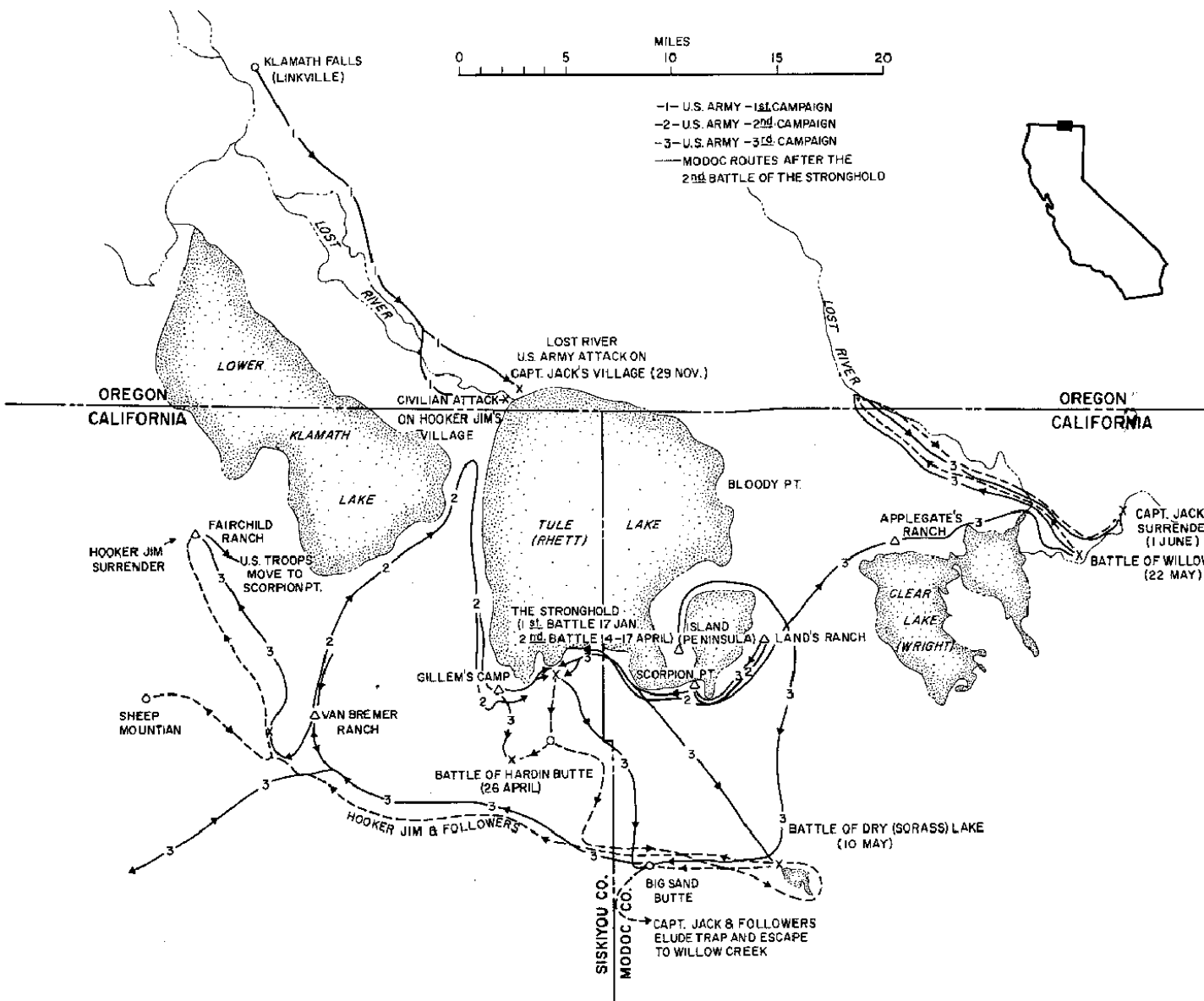
Badly outnumbered, short of supplies, and lacking horses, Captain Jack's followers began to desert him. Hooker Jim led one band to Fairchild Ranch (he knew and trusted the rancher) and surrendered. Braves who had urged a more aggressive policy for the Modoc leader now guided the army in its pursuit. In an attempted ambush of an army unit at Sorass Lake on May 10, the Modocs suffered several casualties, and lost twenty-four pack animals with most of their ammunition. Captain Jack continued to lead the army on a wild chase, but this battle sealed his doom. At Big Sand Butte the resourceful Indian led his band (then only thirty-three) out of an army trap involving more than three hundred soldiers. But one by one the Modocs surrendered, with the guarantee they would be treated as prisoners of war, and on June 1, Captain Jack laid down his rifle.

The Modoc War cost over half a million dollars, the lives of some eighty-three whites, and a total of seventeen Indians. Captain Jack and three others were hanged for the murder of the peace commissioners, while two other Indians had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. The rest of the Modocs were removed to a reservation in Indian Territory.

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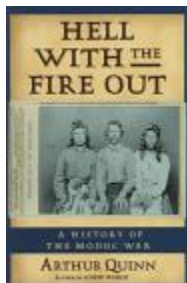
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To learn more about California History, we suggest reading



[Hell with the Fire Out: A History of the Modoc War](#)

by Arthur Quinn

Paperback. Faber and Faber Publishing. 1998

History Editor's Recommended Book: The American war against the Modoc people of northern California and southern Oregon, fought in 1869-72, has

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long been overshadowed by other campaigns in the Indian Wars. Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Cochise made the standard history books, but Captain Jack of the Modoc did not, although his contributions as a leader of his people were as great as those of his more famous peers. Arthur Quinn rectifies this oversight by writing a vivid history of the Modoc War. He notes that the campaign against the Modocs was not universally popular among white residents of the region, that it split the Modoc people into opposing camps, and that it was fought in a difficult landscape of mountains and lava beds. It had, that is, all the hallmarks of classic guerrilla wars. As in other guerrilla wars, Quinn notes, the Americans suffered heavy losses, while Modoc deaths were few in battle but heavy in the aftermath of military and vigilante atrocities. --This text refers to the hardcover edition of this title

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We also recommend the following websites by the National Park Service:

- [**A Short History of the Modoc War**](#)
- [**Captain Jack's Stronghold**](#)

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