

## NOTICES

# Ancestors Can Tell Us About Terrorism

submitted by Frank Simmons

### Fair Play

What Cheer House, San Francisco, Aug. 12, 1856

Editors True Californian:

In reading the papers brought by the last steamer from Oregon, I could not but remark the great injustice done to two worthy officials of the general government, as well as to those of our citizens who sympathize with their views.

One paper declares that the dismissal of Gen. Palmer from the Indian Superintendency is "good news to the people of Oregon, for he had done them more harm than the Indians, by his falsehoods and aspersions."

Another paper represents the people of Oregon as having been between two fires, "the Indians on one side and Gen. Wool on the other."

These are serious charges, and as there is not to my knowledge any writer in Oregon or California who has written a word in explanation or defence, and as I have lived in the midst of the scenes of war in Southern Oregon from its commencement, I desire to make the following statements. I make them as the result of earnest observation of the parties concerned, and of deep, deliberate conviction of their truth. I am prepared to say that the reports of Gen. Palmer, in regard to the origin of the war, are not falsehoods, are not aspersions, but true to the letter.

And, moreover, his action in collecting the scattered tribes upon the reserve, for which he was so bitterly opposed, was in accordance with honor, with the highest dictates of humanity, and official duty. And as he performed this service under a high sense of conscious right, and benevolent impulses in the face of popular prejudice, of threatening and danger, he deserves honor and esteem for his heroism and integrity, instead of dismissal and calumny. And I am assured this assertion will be sustained by hundreds of intelligent citizens whose views he has carried out, but whose sentiments have not been abroad through the Press.

And as to the veteran Major General Wool, what is his fault, that there should be such torrents of denunciation and not a word from any quarter in his defence. The legislative House of Oregon and the Governor of the territory have done their utmost to dishonor him before the nation by representations of defective judgment, and inefficiency in the station he holds; a multitude of men whose pecuniary interests are at stake, headed by a Press united against him. Surely against such a power, and in the absence of any supporting aid, a man, under ordinary circumstances, would be crushed to death. But as the General is sustained apparently without help, I propose to show the reason. Doubtless his age, his patriotism, his tried skill and courage, weighs well in his favor; but these altogether could not sustain him against the overwhelming force of numbers, provided they had sufficient reason for their charge. But the fact is, they have nothing to stand upon that will bear the light of reason and truth, and the Governors and others, who are justly responsible, may well tremble in view of what history may someday expose to public gaze in relation to the origin and conduct to the present war.

I do not wish, Messrs. Editors, to spin out a long letter of details; it is enough to say that intelligent men, whose knowledge of facts entitles their testimony to respect, declare the war to be unnecessary, and therefore unjust; that it was commenced by the cruel aggressions and robbery of the Indians by the same class of men who get into office by perjury and fraud, in order the more easily to rob their fellows. The Indians were treated in such a manner, by these men, and having no press, no pleaders, and no "Vigilance Committees" to guard their

interests, they had but one alternative, to combine for self-protection or be cut off like helpless brutes.

I speak more particularly of Southern Oregon, when I say that for months previous to the open outbreak, the chiefs had complained again and again of their grievances. They asked most piteously, "Why do the Bostons want to shoot us?" "We do not want war, **but peace and protection.**" On one occasion, when assembled at Fort Lane, they desired the document upon which the treaty was written, might be read aloud, and, as sentence after sentence was uttered, they appealed to those present, and repeatedly asked, "Have we not kept that – have we not kept that?" and so on to the end of every article. At the same time, whites were shooting them with impunity whenever they had an opportunity. So many were cut off in this way, that old Chief John refused to make treaty, because, (said he), "I had more men **killed during peace than war**" and yet, when in retaliation, a white man was killed, it was published abroad as savage outrage, for which they ought to be exterminated. And scores of men, in the summer of '55, went from Northern California, openly declaring their intention to make war upon the Indians, on their way to the new mines in Northern Oregon.

But the sub-agents and the civil authorities assumed as though the Indians only were guilty, and they alone should be "chastised" (i.e. killed), and the Governor forthwith called the people to arms, and thus the law and peace-loving citizens, being surrounded and overwhelmed with the horrors of war, were obliged to participate, as a matter of self-defence. Under these circumstances, is it any wonder that General Wool should demur at engaging the National forces in a war against a people pleading for mercy and protection; in a war brought about by blacklegs and rowdies. For, let it be known, there was no time during the winter, but the Indians were anxious for peace, and could they have had assurance of protection, gladly would they have made treaty; but the volunteers threatened a general massacre, if treaty was made; they protracted the war for months, on pretence that the Indians must be whipped.

It is morally certain that if Governor Curry (and I believe the same may be said of Gov. Stevens and the Northern war) had exercised his legitimate functions in the preservation of peace, instead of going out and beyond his sphere for other purposes, there would have been no Southern Oregon war, and all this misery, blood, and treasure might have been saved. The very idea of soldiers, who engage in warfare with honorable motives of patriotism and defence of country, to be degraded in the perpetration of a destructive war, without necessity; a war with no noble object in view; in which success was no profit, and victory no honor, is repulsive and humiliating in the extreme.

And Gen. Wool deserves, and will ultimately receive full credit for the manner in which he has at once maintained his own dignity and the National honor.

Respectfully yours,

John Beeson

Beeson to *True Californian*, 12 August 1856, in United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 609, NADP Document D40.