

90th Anniversary Of Modoc Massacre Observed

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Superintendent Irvin Kerr of the Lava Beds National Monument reports that April 11, 1963, will mark the 90th anniversary of the attack by Modoc Indians, led by their chief, Captain Jack, upon the U.S. Peace Commission during the 1873 Modoc Indian War in the Lava Beds.

The ill-fated Peace Commission had the difficult task of negotiating a peace with Captain Jack's victorious and insurgent Modoc band of 160 men, women, and children entrenched in the Lava Beds. During the Battle of Lost River (near the present town of Merrill, Ore.), on Nov. 29, 1872, the Modocs thwarted the army's attempt to arrest them and force their return to the Klamath Reservation. After their escape, the Modocs sought safety in the natural fortress in the Lava Beds which became known as Captain Jack's Stronghold.

On Jan. 17, 1873, the 55 men of the Modoc band scored a sensational victory over more than 325 army and volunteer troops who attacked the Modocs' Stronghold. The Modocs suffered no casualties while they killed 16 and wounded 49 attacking troops.

Following this startling defeat, President U.S. Grant's administration yielded to the humanitarian demands of Easterners to seek a peaceful settlement with the Modocs. Accordingly, the Peace Commission was appointed and sent to the Lava Beds to end the hostilities and to relocate the Modocs on a protected reservation.

The Peace Commission was headed by former Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs (1869) Alfred B. Meacham, and included the Reverend Eleazar Thomas of Petaluma, Calif., and Klamath Reservation Sub-Agent L. S. Dyer. Military adviser and guiding figure of the Peace Commission was Commanding General of the Military Department of the Columbia, General Edward Canby. Canby had gained fame as the Civil War commander of Union forces in the New Mexico Territory, conqueror of Mobile, Ala., and military governor during the Post-Civil War reconstruction period.

Confident with their recent victory over the army, the Modocs attempted to dictate to Peace

Commission messengers from the beginning. General Canby refused Jack's demand that the commission negotiate only in the Lava Beds and without a military escort. When it appeared that Captain Jack was not willing to compromise, Army Chief of Staff William T. Sherman telegraphed advice to Canby to set an example with the Modocs so that "no other reservation for them will be necessary except graves among their chosen Lava Beds."

On April 1, 1873, General Canby moved his reinforced troops to the Lava Beds for a show of force. This movement of troops brought a quick agreement from Captain Jack to meet face to face with the commission.

At the first meeting with the Peace Commission, on April 2, the Modoc chief demanded that the soldiers leave the Lava Beds. He demanded Lost River for a Modoc Reservation and a general amnesty for those Modocs indicted by Oregon authorities for murdering settlers along Lost River. A rainstorm broke up the meeting with an agreement to erect a tent for shelter and to continue the talks.

Immediately after the meeting, Frank Riddle and his Modoc wife Toby (Winema), Peace Commission interpreters, cautioned General Canby to watch for treachery. Canby, however, ignored the warning.

On April 5, the Modocs met the commission at the tent to resume talks. Captain Jack complained about the nearness of the army troops and said that he feared Commissioner Thomas as a religious leader. He advised that if the army would leave and concede Lost River to the Modocs, there would be no more trouble. Finally, Jack asked for the Lava Beds as a reservation. He was advised that if he would surrender to the army, the Peace Commission would try to have the Lava Beds reserved for the Modocs. The next meeting was scheduled for April 8.

On April 7, Toby Riddle (Winema) was sent to Captain Jack's Stronghold. Toby reported that she was secretly warned by a Modoc friend not to go to the peace tent again. When she re-

ported this to the Peace Commission, only Commissioners Meacham and Dyer heeded her warning.

On April 8, Jack sent word that he would meet the commission at the tent with six unarmed Modocs. As the Peace Commission party prepared to leave the army camp for the tent, an army signalman reported six Modocs at the peace tent and at least 20 others hiding in nearby rocks. General Canby refused to let the commission leave camp that day. The Modocs then sent a messenger requesting a parley for Friday, April 11.

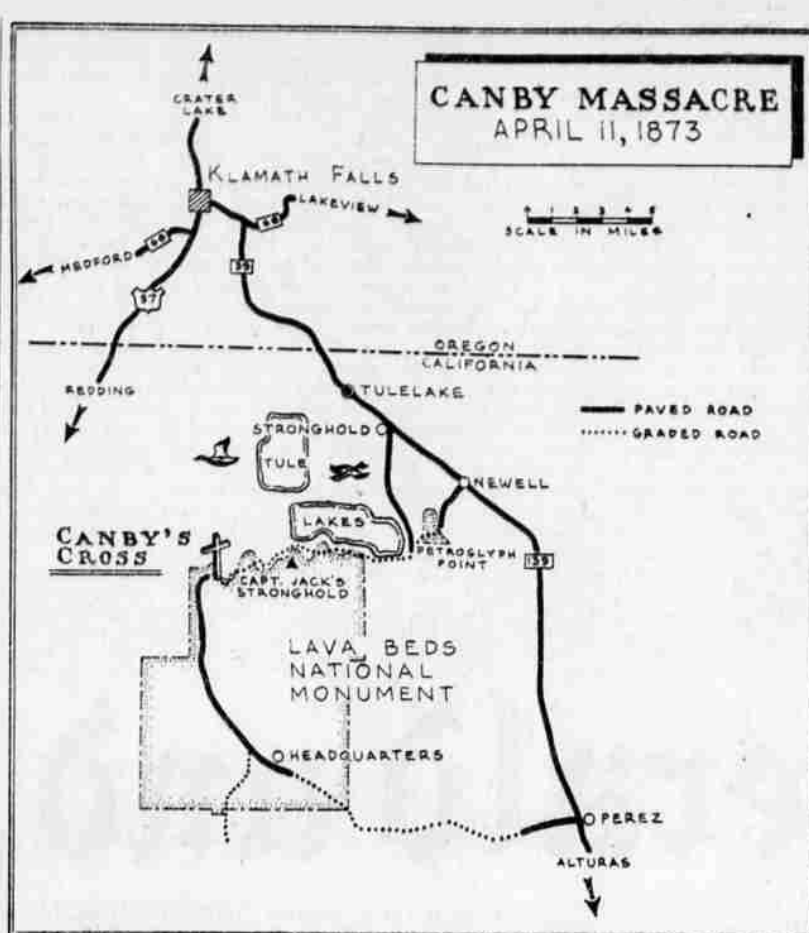
On the night of April 10, the Modocs agreed to kill General Canby and the Peace Commissioners at the next day's meeting, believing that killing the leaders would cause the army to withdraw and leave the Lava Beds to the Modocs. On the fateful Good Friday, April 11, 1873, the Modocs arrived early at the meeting tent.

Frank and Toby Riddle's continued warnings of disaster were discounted by General Canby and Reverend Thomas. Commissioners Meacham and Dyer, however, armed themselves with derringers.

Arriving at the meeting tent, the commission party found eight Modocs, two of whom were armed. As talks began, the Modocs revealed an ominous attitude which alarmed Commissioner Dyer and Frank Riddle, both of whom moved to the edge of the group. Sensing imminent danger, Toby Riddle casually stretched herself out on the ground into a more protected position.

Suddenly, with a signal to the other Modocs, Captain Jack drew a concealed revolver and shot the surprised General Canby. At the same moment, Boston Charley shot Commissioner Thomas. Dyer and Frank Riddle immediately ran for the safety of the army camp. Hooker Jim chased Dyer until Dyer drew his concealed derringer, whereupon, Hooker Jim ceased pursuit. Frank Riddle reached the army camp close behind Dyer.

With the killing of Canby and Thomas, Schonchin John and other Modocs wounded Meacham who fell, apparently dead, among



the rocks. Boston Charley was interrupted in his scalping of Meacham, when Toby Riddle (Winema) shouted, "The soldiers are coming!" This bluff saved Meacham's life, for the Modocs hastily retreated to their Stronghold before the troops left camp.

Violating the truce by their attack upon the Peace Commission, Captain Jack and his band were doomed to relentless pursuit. However, three more costly and violent battles were fought in the Lava Beds before the Modocs could be captured, and Captain Jack and three others hanged for their treachery.

The place where General Can-

by fell was marked with a rock monument. Atop the monument a cross was later erected which bore the inscription "General E. R. S. Canby was murdered here by Modocs April 11, 1873."

Superintendent Kerr points out that most of the battle areas of the Modoc War, including the site of the Canby Cross where the Peace Commission was attacked, are located at the Lava Beds National Monument and are preserved and protected by the National Park Service as a part of the nation's historical heritage. Kerr added that the Lava Beds National Monument is open the year-around and people are in-

ited to visit the authentic battle areas to recall the violent and historic conflict of 1873.

Canby's Cross Erected At Scene Of Slaying

Editor's Note: Following is a reprint of a story published in the Herald and News on April 11, 1948, on the 75th Anniversary of the Canby massacre, written by a former managing editor of the Herald and News, Malcolm Epley, regarding the placing of the Canby Cross.

By MALCOLM EPLEY
Sunday, April 11, marks the 75th anniversary of the Canby massacre, sanguinary highlight of the Modoc Indian War of 1872-73, that drew the nation's awed attention to the rugged Modoc Lava Beds near Tule Lake.

A lonely wooden cross, held upright by a pile of stones, stands today at the scene of the massacre, exactly as it was placed there 66 years ago by Lt. John S. Parke of the United States Army.

This weatherbeaten monument, easily accessible from the west side Tulelake road or from the Lava Beds road by way of Newell, is worthy of a pilgrimage by those aware of its significance and interested in the Indian war that made the most stirring chapter in the history of the Klamath country.

The story of the war and the massacre has been often told, but few may know how it happened that the cross was placed there on a windy September day in 1882.

Lieutenant Parke thus marked the spot on his second visit to the Lava Beds. Fortunately, the lieutenant was a writer of no poor ability, and after making two trips into the historic area, wrote a complete account for the His-



CANBY'S CROSS — Still well preserved, the original cross that was placed on the spot where Gen. E. R. S. Canby was killed by Modoc Indians on April 11, 1873, stands guard over this historic spot. It was placed here in 1882 by Lt. John S. Parke of the United States Army. The inscription, still essentially the same after these 81 years reads, "General E. R. S. Canby was Murdered Here by the Modocs, April 11, 1873."

torical Section of the Army War College. A copy is owned by Don C. Fisher, present custodian of the Lava Beds National Monument.

Parke first visited the Lava Beds in 1880, just seven years after the end of the war, going into the area from Gillem's Bluff on horseback. It was wild, unsettled country then, with no roads

such as are available to the modern traveler. The lieutenant was accompanied on the trip by John A. Fairchild, whose ranch was 22 miles west from the Lava Beds. On that occasion, he first saw the scene where Gen. E. R. S. Canby and Dr. Eleazar Thomas were killed at a peace conference with the Modocs. Parke himself gives a graphic account of the meeting of Indian leaders at a council tent with the peace commissioners, which included Canby, Thomas, a Methodist minister, L. S. Dyer, Indian agent, and A. B. Meacham, Indian superintendent.

This occurred on April 11, 1873. Although warned by Frank Riddle and his squaw, Winema, that the Indians intended treachery, the peace commissioners went out to the tent a mile in front of the Army encampment near the present entrance of the Lava Beds National Monument. In the course of the interview, they were attacked; Canby and Thomas were killed, and Meacham was wounded. Dyer escaped

to the Army camp. Winema, who had befriended the whites throughout, was present at the conference as an interpreter, and a shout by her, probably a false warning that soldiers were coming, saved the lives of Meacham and Dyer by frightening the Indians away.

Lieutenant Parke, on his first visit in 1880, was tremendously impressed by the significance of the scene of this incident. He found there an old board, with an inscription almost obliterated by the elements. He wrote:

"It was with a feeling of awe that I stood on the spot so still and quiet then, which now is seldom disturbed by human footsteps, and on which few eyes ever rest save those of some wild bird as he wings his flight over its bloodstained rocks."

The Army officer recalls his second visit as follows:

"My second visit to the Lava Beds was prompted by a desire to see that the exact locality of these stirring events, and especially the place where the council tent stood, should be so marked and when this historic place comes to be visited by the interested and the curious, it may not be of such uncertain location as to be a matter of speculation and discussion, but that the visitor may say when he visits this spot, 'This is where General Canby and Dr. Thomas were murdered by the Modocs.'"

"Accordingly, on being ordered to Fort Klamath in 1882 on some temporary duty, I took advantage of the opportunity and asked permission of the department commander, General Miles, to go a little out of my way on my return to headquarters for this purpose. As it involved no serious loss of time, nor expense to the government, my request was granted.

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