

Episode Four

This podcast contains true stories involving extreme violence. Listener discretion is advised.

Welcome to “This Desire for Peace,” a podcast examining the competing visions of peace in Oregon’s Snake War. I’m Matthew Voelkel, thank you for listening. In the last episode, we looked at the role newspapermen played in the development and prosecution of the war. We examined how the government employed members of rival tribes to attack the Paiutes. The episode also covered the brutal campaigns of George Crook from his arrival in 1866 up through the Battle of Infernal Caverns. In this final episode, we’ll look at the conclusion of the war and the plight of the Paiutes in the years that followed.

The cold months were a time for the Paiutes to rest without fear. They had worked the whole year to set up caches of food, and they depended on that food for survival during the brutal high desert winters. It was how they had lived for time immemorial, but it was about to change.

Looking back on his experiences as a lieutenant in the Snake War, William Parnell recalled Lieutenant Colonel George Crook’s winter campaign of 1867 and 1868. He wrote that the Paiutes were not used to winter combat. Prior to Crook’s arrival in Oregon, winter warfare was rare, but the tactic was becoming more common across the West, especially in Nevada. Parnell stated that Crook planned to do the same to the Paiutes, by attacking them during that period of vulnerability. The purpose was to “kill the bucks, capture their women, and destroy their supply of provisions, and thus so cripple them that they would be glad to surrender and beg

for peace.”¹ This kind of peace mentioned by Parnell meant the unconditional surrender of the Paiutes in the face of death, captivity, and starvation.

Before Crook started his campaign, he had to survive winter himself. He had ordered Camp Warner relocated to the northern end of the Warner Mountains in south-central Oregon, but by the time winter set in, the new camp was incomplete. The soldiers faced the cold in partially-built houses or holes in the ground with canvas acting as a roof. Food supplies ran short. Remembering that winter, Parnell wrote: “There was nothing to forage, the nearest habitation being probably two or three hundred miles distant. We had a few tough old steers, called by courtesy beef cattle, with the ribs and hip bones prominently sticking out, their hides laying close down to their skeleton carcass. To kill them would be an act of humanity...”² To make a bad situation even worse, the temperature dropped to twenty degrees below zero, heavy snow fell, and ice floes on Snake River prevented any kind of consistent resupply. Still, Crook planned his winter campaign.

The campaign began in February, but without the same capabilities of the year before. Because of the length of the Infernal Caverns expedition and the limited supplies at Camp Warner, the horses and mules were in poor health. There were not enough mounts available to carry tents, so troops had to sleep on the snow, wrapped tightly in their blankets. Scouts found a Paiute camp along the Donner und Blitzen River on the western side of Steens Mountain, but by the time the command reached the camp site, the Natives were gone. With the men freezing and supplies dwindling, Crook ordered the column back to Camp Warner.

¹ William R. Parnell, “Operations against Hostile Indians with General Crook, 1867-1868,” in Peter Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890: Vol. Two The Wars for the Pacific Northwest*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2002, 19.

² Ibid., 20.

The soldiers set out again in March and returned to the Donner und Blitzen River, this time finding a Paiute camp. In a brief fight, the Natives put up a stiff resistance and wounded several soldiers before abandoning the camp. Parnell wrote of a dead Paiute at the scene of the battle, noting the man's size and how the body had been shot repeatedly in the legs, torso, face, and right eye. Crook remained in the vicinity for another week, but it gave the Paiutes a chance to strike back.³

During the night on March 20th, Paiutes silently approached Crook's horse herd, stole some, and fired arrows into others before running off. Once the troops realized what happened, they set off in pursuit. Parnell and a few others caught up with the Paiutes near a slushy creek several miles away from camp. The Natives had killed the stolen horses and were butchering one for the meat. The soldiers opened fire, dealing out what Parnell referred to as "Spencer pills" killing all but one of the raiders. To keep the Paiutes from attempting to eat the dead horses, Parnell and the others sprinkled flour on their carcasses. Elsewhere in the West, including to Paiutes in Nevada, some whites sprinkled strychnine, a poisonous white powder, on slaughtered cattle, knowing that the Natives would attempt to eat the meat. Parnell's act of sprinkling flour on the carcasses was done in mimicry of those gross acts. For Parnell and those with him, it was better to have the Paiutes starve than for them to get even one bite of government horseflesh.⁴

Crook kept the troops at every camp in his district busy with the same kind of activity. One expedition out of Camp Harney near present-day Burns, Oregon, slaughtered a Paiute camp near the Malheur River that April. Weahwewa and Ochoco, who were in the camp, somehow managed to escape, though the end was drawing near. Survival became harder and harder for the Natives.

³ Ibid., 26-27.

⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

Wilson Wewa, the second-great-grandson of Weahwewa, spoke of that time. **[Begin Wewa audio][26:30]** “Winter was not a time for fighting war. But, um, Crook did his campaign against the Paiutes in the wintertime when there was snow on the ground, and when he did that he destroyed the winter caches of food that was stored up for the use by the villages and the families. And so he, in his campaign, he pretty much starved my people into submission to quit warring...He was just to my people, he was a murderer.”⁵

Surprisingly, the wife of a quartermaster at Camp Warner shared that same sentiment. Julia Gilliss was about 25 years old when Crook and his men returned from their February expedition. In a candid letter to her parents, she wrote critically of the war, saying: “This persecution of the Indians goes against the grain with me. I think it is a wretched unholy warfare; the poor creatures are hunted down like wild beasts and shot down in cold blood. The same ball went through a mother and her baby at her breast. One poor little creature just the size of my baby was shot because he would some day grow up. Ugh! It makes me sick.” Gilliss went on to condemn what she saw as the unjust causes of the war, claiming rather correctly that it was “all for the few grains of gold that tempt the cupidity and avarice of grasping men. The land is wretched. The fact is acknowledged that this country will never be good for anything but its mineral resources, and therefore this race of human beings which God has created and given their place on earth must be crushed to the bitter end. I do not believe such an enterprize will ever be blessed and I think the Indian depredations are a just retribution on their persecutors.”⁶ Her comments contrasted greatly to the views expressed by the newspapers of the era, especially those shared by the *Owyhee Avalanche* over the previous years. But no matter her feelings, it was too late for the Paiutes—resistance was no longer an option.

⁵ Wilson Wewa, interview with the author, February 2022.

⁶ Julia Gilliss, *So Far From Home: An Army Bride on the Western Frontier, 1865-1869*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1993, 166-167.

Constant campaigns raged across eastern Oregon until May 1868, when troops captured the Paiute chief Egan and his band. The commander learned that Weahwewa had told the Oregon bands of the Northern Paiute to surrender. Soon after, Captain William Kelly had a meeting with Weahwewa, on June 6th, and the exhausted chief announced he was ready for peace. Kelly sent a message to Crook, letting him know Weahwewa wanted to surrender. The chief stated that it would take up to ten days for his people to gather at Camp Harney near present-day Burns, Oregon, but that his people would indeed be there.⁷

Some bands were captured before they even had a chance to travel to Camp Harney. The same month that Weahwewa made intentions known, a combined force of white miners and soldiers tracked down a band of Natives in northeastern Oregon and rushed it from two sides. The sixty-one Paiutes, caught by surprise, immediately surrendered. They and their chief, none other than Howluck, had no will to resist further. Only a few days earlier, that same band had been attacked by whites and thirty-four of the Paiutes were killed. This, combined with the disastrous defeat at the hands of Crook a year earlier, shattered Howluck's resolve. Two more of Howluck's bands had yet to surrender, but the chief agreed to find them and bring them in. To ensure Howluck made good on his promise, the soldiers kept his wives and children as hostages until he returned.⁸

In his memoirs, Oregon governor George Woods heaped credit on the contingent of Warm Springs scouts, and even though he got the timeframe wrong, his words reveal his lasting satisfaction with the result. He wrote that the scouts "destroyed seven villages of hostels not leaving one to tell the story, and we had peace before Spring, more than half the tribe being killed & the remnant cried for quarters."⁹ Woods' genocidal method to use Indians to exterminate

⁷ "A Successful Skirmish," *Oregon City Enterprise*, June 27, 1868.

⁸ "Indian News," *The Idaho Statesman*, June 16, 1868.

⁹ George L. Woods, "George L. Woods Recollections, [188-]", 1880.

other Indians was an effective way to achieve peace. However, that type of peace was never meant to be one of peace through harmony, but a peace achieved through the remorseless butchering of Paiute men, women, and children. the Paiutes for the sake of peace.

Since taking charge, Crook and his subordinates had killed over three hundred Paiutes and captured two hundred more. This figure does not take into account the number of Natives killed or wounded during attacks by white vigilantes or the number of Paiutes who starved, unable to survive the frigid eastern Oregon winters. Crook received the message about Weahwewa's desire to surrender, and on June 26th, he set out for Camp Harney with a small escort, including Lieutenant Parnell, Julia Gilliss, and several others.

Camp Harney sat in a shallow, dusty canyon along Rattlesnake Creek, on the north side of Harney Valley. It had been established just the year before, and together with Camp Warner, had since become the primary hub for military activity in eastern Oregon. Crook and his party arrived on the 29th, and they arrived to see what was probably the largest Paiute camp ever seen by white men. As Weahwewa said, many of his people came in for the surrender. The Paiute encampment at Camp Harney stretched for over a mile.

The proceedings began on July 1st. At least three hundred Paiutes attended, some with their faces painted red and black. The troops were uneasy, and they stalked through the crowd of Paiutes with pistols concealed in their clothing in case the proceedings went awry. "*Nobody trusts a live Indian,*" wrote Julia Gilliss.¹⁰ Crook stood ready to greet the Natives, and he had his own wife and Gillis stand immediately behind him. A number of armed Paiutes rode up to Crook, perhaps to intimidate him, but Crook refused to speak until they laid down their weapons. For a moment, there seemed to be some debate among the Natives, as some were visibly angry

¹⁰ Gilliss, 176.

and unwilling to give up their firearms. One Paiute who must have had some clout rode among them and managed to somewhat calm down the group.

Tensions were high, and Crook whispered to his wife and Julia Gilliss to remain calm and to stand still. It seemed as if we stood there for hours, while those ugly braves refused to retreat unless they could retain guns and ponies,” recalled Gilliss.¹¹ Eventually, the Paiutes came forward and dropped their guns at Crook’s feet. Among the Paiutes was one who was still furious at the demand, and he wheeled his horse around and galloped away. Most of the Natives chose to obey, however, and soon the crowd was all disarmed.

The Natives sat in a large semicircle in front of Crook, and Weawewa came forward to shake Crook’s hand. The colonel stood motionless, holding his hands behind his back, and coldly told his interpreter to translate: “Tell him that I did not come here to shake hands with him. He has been too bad an Indian; murdered too many people. I come to hear what he has to say for himself.” Weawewa did not know how to react and it took him a moment to get his composure before he responded with an apology. The chief and his people were tired of war. It was time for peace.¹²

Crook replied, “I am sorry to hear this. I was in hopes you would continue the war.” Then, in a matter of fact way, he told the chief that even if the Paiutes killed a hundred of his men, Crook could replace them quickly. Weawewa, however, could not replace his people. Motioning to the Native children seated behind Weawewa, Crook said, “You would have to wait for those little people to grow to fill the place of your braves...In this way, it would not be very

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Azor Nickerson, “Major General Crook and the Indians,” in Peter Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, Vol. 5 The Army and the Indian*, Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2005, 229-230.

long before we should have you all killed off, and the government would have no more trouble with you.”¹³ Weahwewa reiterated his intention to have peace.

The lieutenant colonel later reported that he negotiated the surrender of all Natives from eastern Oregon to Fort Hall in Idaho Territory, and down to the Humboldt River in Nevada.

Meanwhile, a crowd of white civilians gathered just beyond the meeting desiring blood. Crook himself intervened, and he later wrote, “Many of them were feeling ill over their wrongs...and had sworn vengeance against all Indians.” Crook told them of the concluded peace and spoke of how the preservation of that peace was in the best interest of the whites as well as the Paiutes. The whites left reluctantly, only after hearing Crook’s assurances that all would be well.¹⁴

The incident with the whites may have worried Crook that whites in other areas would cause trouble. Soon after the peace agreement, Crook wrote a letter to Governor David W. Ballard, the territorial governor of Idaho, to inform him of what had transpired. In the first half of the letter, Crook wrote of the prospects for a lasting peace: “I have no doubt but this desire for peace on their part is sincere from the fact that about half of their number have been killed, and those that are left don’t know what day their turn might come.” Crook changed tone in the second half of the letter, shifting to a kind of advocacy for the Paiutes: “The only thing I fear now is that white men will commit outrages on the Indians in retaliation.” The possibility was real, and Crook asked the governor to help. If violence on the part of the whites could be checked, he believed the bloodshed would be over. “Get the newspapers in your territory to interest themselves in the matter, and enjoin upon all good citizens the necessity of refraining

¹³ Ibid., 230.

¹⁴ Crook, *General George Crook*, 159.

from retaliation. Give the Indians a chance.” Perhaps due to Crook’s influence, peace held between the Paiutes and whites.

The Paiutes walked away from the surrender believing they had signed a treaty that gave them the right to live unmolested in the area surrounding Camp Harney. But they were mistaken.

[Begin Wewa Quote][31:09]: “And so my people, the Paiute, always referred to that treaty with Crook. They always refer to that as a treaty...And so that was made in the 1860s by the military, that our people would get our own reservation. The United States rebutted, that wasn't a treaty. But General Crook and them told the Indians it was a treaty. You tell an Indian it's a treaty, it's going to remain a treaty in our thinking until...through time immemorial, clear to the present. It was sold to us, it was sold to our people as a treaty and our people continue to look at it as a treaty... But the government always said, No, that wasn't, that was just a cessation of war, while you—but nobody wrote down your words as Captain Crook, and as your Sergeant as the military. You guys never wrote down your words that you guys made us a promise with words, ‘We’ll give you your own reservation.’ That's how—that's how history is distorted. When people are making promises, don't read, write them down in writing. And the people that they're making the promise to remember the words. And they live today through me, and I wasn't there. But it's come down three generations now that that was a treaty. Because that's what my people always believed that to be.”¹⁵

On September 14th, Governor Woods stood before the state legislature in Salem and spoke on the conclusion of the war. His words were the words of a conqueror, as he proclaimed to his fellow politicians: “A new era will now dawn upon eastern Oregon, and her vast fields, hitherto unoccupied, rich in silver and gold, and inexhaustible pasturage, will offer new

¹⁵ Wilson Wewa, interview with the author, February 2022.

inducements to the minder and the husbandman.” The governor’s vision of peace—that whites could settle and use the land without Native interference—had come true.¹⁶

Five months after the surrender, J.W. Perit Huntington arrived at Camp Harney. He had been on a tour of the agencies throughout the state, and was intent on meeting with the Paiutes and observing their condition. During his time at Camp Harney, it appears he had a chance to to speak with the Paiutes about their recent history, and he recounted much of it in a report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs a few weeks later. He wrote: “The War was relentless, cruel and bloody. Two thirds or more of the entire Tribe were killed or perished of starvation. Men, women and children perished alike.” This statement confirms that far more Paiutes died from Crook’s actions than the official military casualty records showed. Huntington gave a rough estimation of the surviving Paiutes in Oregon, putting the number at 1,950, though he admitted that the number may be too high.¹⁷ But if he was correct in that number, as well as in his statement that two thirds of the tribe was dead as a result of the war, it means that nearly four thousand Paiutes died in Oregon during the Snake War. The Natives’ existence during the past two years was one of desperate survival and horrific death as the whites pursued their vision of peace.

Not all the Paiutes surrendered at Camp Harney. Ochoco and others gave themselves up at Camp Warner, Camp C.F. Smith, Camp McDermitt, or on the Klamath Reservation, where the army had placed a number of those captured during the war. Those who had surrendered or had been captured found that life on the Klamath Reservation was nearly intolerable and utterly inhumane. “They are absolutely without clothing,” wrote Huntington. “There were not in the entire camp enough garments of all descriptions—including blankets, dressed skins &c. to equal the amount of clothing two adult whites would ordinarily wear.” The frigid winter weather sat

¹⁶ George L. Woods, *Message of Gov. George L. Woods to the Legislative Assembly, Fifth Regular Session, September 1868*, Salem, W.A. McPherson, State Printer, 1868.

¹⁷ J.W. Perit Huntington to N.G. Taylor, December 22, 1868.

unmoving over the reservation, turning the streams, rivers and lakes into thick sheets of ice. Through all of this, the children were “entirely naked, and all the adults nearly so.” Huntington believed the Paiutes would starve before winter ended. The Paiutes, who ordinarily stashed food for the winter in caches throughout the region, had been so harassed by Crook and his subordinates that they had saved only a fraction of what they needed to survive. After the surrender, they spread out to gather as much food as possible before winter set in, but it was not nearly enough. It was likely that without clothing or rations provided from the military posts that many would not survive for long. The commander at Camp Warner refused to offer the Paiutes anything unless they came in to stay closer to the post. But if the Paiutes did so, they would have to abandon their stores.¹⁸

The treaty Huntington laid out is not like the other two he penned in 1864 and 1865. His handwriting, which was usually neat and even, was ragged and uneven. This may have been due to the cold time of year when he wrote the document, but the contents of the treaty show that Huntington must have been in a hurry or under some stress at the time, because the treaty was empty and promised very little. He promised the Paiutes a reservation, but failed to say where that reservation would be or how soon one would be created for them. Article five of the treaty also stipulated that the Paiutes were to receive food, clothing, and education from the government, but he did not say when or how much they would receive.

Perhaps the most telling feature of the document is the seventh article, stating that the treaty was merely a preliminary agreement until a more formal treaty could be made. Neither of Huntington’s other treaties carried the same statement, making it even more strange. The reality was that Huntington did not know what to do with them. He noted that he could either create a new reservation for them at Camp Harney (which he claimed would be expensive over the long

¹⁸ Ibid.

term), or they could be transported to an existing reservation (he mentioned the Klamath and Siletz reservations as his two options). Between those choices, Huntington favored sending the Paiutes to the Siletz Reservation. He figured that the initial cost to transport the tribe would be costly, but that over the coming years it would be cheaper because Siletz had more abundant resources. Perhaps most importantly, he mentioned, was that the location of the reservation was far from the Paiute homeland, which meant the Natives would not be tempted to escape to their ancestral homes if they chose to run from the agency.¹⁹ Paulina's escape from the Klamath Reservation in 1866 may have convinced Huntington that the complete removal of the Paiutes from their homeland was the only way to ensure a lasting peace in eastern Oregon.

As Huntington pondered the fate of the Paiutes, storm clouds that lingered on the horizon of his personal and political life arose and defeated him. He took ill the next spring, and he died on June 3, 1869. The last few years of his life were punctuated by the deaths of six of his seven children, the sixth having died just two weeks before he went to the grave himself. The passing of the last child occurred about the same time that he was relieved from his office as the Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He left the Oregon Superintendency in disarray, and his successor Alfred B. Meacham was bitter. All Huntington left for him was the furniture, though it was not long before Meacham had a few Paiute scalps adorning the walls. Meacham wrote that he had no funds and no information to fulfill his duties as the new superintendent. Only when he personally visited the agencies and the annual agency reports trickled into his office in Salem did he finally begin to comprehend the state of affairs.

Meacham visited the various reservations under his jurisdiction from late-1869 and into 1870. One of his stops was at Camp Harney, and he brought with him an escort of Warm Springs Natives, including some who had taken part in the Snake War. His stated intent was to finally

¹⁹ Ibid.

place the Paiutes on a reservation. Weahwewa, Ochoco, and Egan attended the meeting, and the proceedings began with Meacham and the chiefs offering pipes as an act of goodwill. Meacham announced that he was ready to move the Paiutes to the Klamath Reservation, but the chiefs were “suspicious and wary,” according to the superintendent. They put him off by saying they could not make any decision until Winnemucca, who had fled from Nevada to Steens Mountain, arrived to participate in the talks.²⁰

Meacham agreed to postpone the negotiations for the moment, and spent his time acquainting himself with the Paiute people. One day, he rode with Weahwewa. Meacham, whose views of the Paiutes were clearly founded in the prejudices of his time, recalled that he was afraid of Weahwewa, remembering the many heinous deeds of murder and robbery the chief supposedly committed upon the whites. As they rode on, Meacham learned that Weahwewa was very intelligent and that he could speak English. It’s not clear where the chief learned the language, but nevertheless he could speak well enough for Meacham to understand. Weahwewa related his experience as a captive of the whites in 1859, and showed the superintendent the scars made by the chains used to restrain him.

The chief brought up the war and explained he had only acted in the defense of his people. Meacham wrote: “[He] sought to impress me constantly that he had only acted in defense of his own rights. There was in the face of this man a cunning, treacherous look that was anything but reassuring.” Despite Weahwewa’s assertions, Meacham was completely dismissive.²¹

Winnemucca finally arrived two weeks after Meacham paused the negotiations. Upon his arrival, he met with the other chiefs privately to discuss the proposal to move to the Klamath

²⁰ Alfred B. Meacham, *Wigwam and War-path; Or, the Royal Chief in Chains* (1874, reis. Frankfurt am Main: Outlook Verlag GmbH, 2020), 139.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

Reservation. As the negotiations reconvened in the cold air, Meacham again explained his desire to relocate the Paiutes to the reservation. Many of the Paiutes arrived at the meeting with their bodies painted as if for war. Meacham remembered that most of them also had firearms hidden under their deerskin robes. Apparently the whites feared the possibility of violence and likewise concealed pistols on their persons, as well. Meacham's proposal won few followers in the meeting. Most of the head men were opposed to moving. They were in their homeland and wanted to stay. A medicine man who was present drew a knife and stabbed it into the dirt and informed Meacham that the Paiutes would die before leaving their land.²²

The medicine man must have wielded considerable influence over the chiefs, because after the talks, Weahwewa spoke with Meacham and stated that if it were not for the medicine man, he would take his people to the Klamath Reservation. In the end, only Ochoco elected to remove his people to the reservation.²³

Ochoco and those with him did not remain long on the reservation. Strong prejudices existed between the Klamaths and Paiutes, often adding to the hardships of subjugation and attempted assimilation. Some Klamaths had even volunteered to aid the whites during the war, and it's possible that was a maddening fact for the Paiutes. Within two years, Ochoco and his band were back in the vicinity of Camp Warner. A number of Paiutes chose to remain and make the best with what they could, but they still faced challenges of government mismanagement and intertribal rivalries, and some of those difficulties have persisted to this day.

Perry Chocktoot, the Director of Culture and Heritage for the Klamath Tribes, spoke on those difficulties on the reservation in that time and since. He said that the feelings of resentment between the Paiutes and Klamaths have slowly changed over time as individuals intermarried

²² Ibid., 141.

²³ Ibid.

between tribes. **[Begin Chocktoot quote][25:50]** “Any type of interaction tribe versus tribe probably was regretted, because life on this reservation post contact after 1864 wasn't pleasant. The things that the government promised never occurred. They tried to put people in power that the tribes didn't acknowledge as being people of power. You know, it was that divide and conquer thing. That's it. They were really good at it...You can still hear sometimes when people say ‘Aw, those Paiutes this and that and this and that,’ but you don't hear it much anymore because a lot of them are through all three tribes. Klamath, Modoc, and Paiute. And so they're real careful with it anymore. But it was real prevalent when I was growing up in the 70s, you could hear it you know, but that was—that was during a time of transition where everybody was being a little bit of all three tribes. So it—it can show its ugly face depending on who...who's doing the talking. But if a tribal elder is usually near, they try to correct people. They try to let them know, ‘Hey, you know I’m Paiute, you’re Paiute. So you shouldn't take that type of a stance against something that happened way back then.’”²⁴

Eventually Ochoco received his own small reservation at Fort Bidwell, a military post in the northeastern tip of California. Their descendents still live there today.

For those who chose to remain near Camp Harney, the suffering was far from over. They did receive a reservation in the Harney Valley, and the first agent, Samuel Parrish, dealt fairly with the Paiutes. But there was a shift in relations when, in 1876, a new agent replaced Parrish. The new agent had been a foe of the Paiutes in the war. His name was William Reinhart, and he had, at one time, served as the commander at Fort Klamath during part of Paulina’s residency on the Klamath Reservation. After mustering out in 1867, he moved up to the John Day area and operated a store. Some of the chiefs on the Malheur recognized Reinhart, and knew he did not have any special affection for the Paiutes. Sarah Winnemuccas, the daughter of Chief

²⁴ Perry Chocktoot, interview with the author, January 2022.

Winnemucca who served as an interpreter between the agents and the Natives later wrote of a conversation she had with chiefs Egan and Oytes about Reinhart (Weahwewa had died some time before). “We know this man who is going to be our father. He is a bad man,” they told her. “He used to be over at Canyon City. He has sold me many bottles of firewater,” said Egan.²⁵ They had no faith that Reinhart would do the right thing, and soon the chiefs’ worries were realized.

Reinhart ordered a meeting of the Paiutes, and he told them the reservation was property of the federal government, and if they wanted to remain on the reservation, they had to work and do whatever Reinhart asked them to do. The statement confused the Natives, who had been told by the previous agent that the land was theirs. Reinhart continued, saying they would be paid for their work. Egan stood and spoke, saying: “Our father...we don’t want the Big Father in Washington to fool with us. He sends one man to say one thing and another to say something else. The man who just left us told us the land was ours, and what we do on it was ours, and you come and say it is government land and not ours.”²⁶

The new agent, already shaking from nervousness, grew angry. He retorted, “Egan, I don’t care whether any of you stay or not. You can all go away if you do not like the way I do.” Dazed by Reinhart’s terseness, the Paiutes got to work.²⁷ Reinhart was a physical manifestation that the whites still pushed their version of peace upon the Paiutes—a peace that meant an end to the Native way of life and the continual submission of the Paiutes to whatever the whites forced upon them.

²⁵ Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, (1883, reis. Las Vegas: Arcadia Press, 2017) 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 57-58

²⁷ *Ibid.*

When the Natives later approached Reinhart to receive their promised pay, he announced he was retaining most of their pay, charging them exorbitant fees in advance for goods they should have been able to purchase on their own at much lower prices. These were supplies necessary for their survival, such as blankets and food. This angered the Paiutes, and the exasperated Egan once again spoke to Reinhart, saying “Why do you want to play with us? We are men, not children. We want our father to deal with us like men.” He continued, berating the agent for not keeping his promises to pay them for their work. Reinhart heatedly reiterated that if the Paiutes did not like the way he ran the agency, they could leave.²⁸

The actions of Reinhart demonstrated that the plight of the Paiutes in the aftermath of the Snake War was far from over. Their trials had merely shifted from one form to another. The white man’s peace held little promise for the Paiutes.

Wilson Wewa, a descendant of Weahwewa and Egan and member of the Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs spoke of the mismanagement of Reinhart. **[Begin Wewa quote][35:22]** “Well, he—he made our people farm. And they farmed because Parrish taught them how to farm, but all the ones that—that helped to irrigate and open the gates for irrigation and keeping the fences up and harvesting the food, he made them buy the food he set up a demerit system. And even though you worked in a field if you got demerits, and that took away from your—your share of food from the farm, and that caused conflict. And he was selling—and this is all historic—It's in documents—he was selling the beef to the miners in John Day. And nobody knows where the money went. Because it didn't go for the care of the Paiutes.”²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., 56.

²⁹ Wilson Wewa, interview with the author, February 2022.

Tensions grew on the reservation as Reinhart continued to withhold rations. The agent's bad behavior moved beyond verbal abuse to physical violence. He once threw a young boy to the ground by the ear, nearly tearing the ear off, and kicking the screaming boy—all for the harmless act of laughing at him. Reinhart later savagely beat an elderly Paiute man nearly to death for taking too long to put on his moccasins, and drew a pistol and threatened to shoot a boy who failed to understand him.³⁰ Hunger began to set in, and the Paiutes desperately needed food and supplies. Egan and Oytes risked the agent's wrath and once again approached Reinhart, and Egan pleaded with him, saying his children were dying of starvation. The chief begged him to give them the wheat they had been promised. Reinhart coldly responded that the wheat was property of the federal government, not of the Indians.³¹

Then Egan, desperate and earnest, cried with a heartrending eloquence, and the grief and anguish of all the previous years crossed his lips as he spoke. "Did the government tell you to come here and drive us off this reservation? Did the Big Father say, go and kill us all off, so you can have our land? Did he tell you to pull our children's ears off, and put handcuffs on them, and carry a pistol to shoot us with? We want to know how the government came by this land. Is the government mightier than our Spirit-Father, or is he our Spirit Father? ...and what have we done that he is to take all from us that he has given us? His white children have come and have taken all our mountains, and all our valleys, and all our rivers; and now, because he has given us this little place without our asking him for it, he sends you here to tell us to go away."³²

Egan and the Paiutes were tired of violence and deception. They wanted no more of it. Reinhart was only one more manifestation of the treacherous nature of the whites and their dealings with the Natives. His behavior drove many of the Paiutes from the reservation just as

³⁰ Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes*, 59-61.

³¹ Ibid, 61.

³² Ibid., 61.

Bannocks in Idaho went to war with the whites. The Bannocks wanted help, and they came to the Paiutes, where some readily joined in, while others participated only reluctantly. Those who chose not to join left the reservation and went into hiding.

Unlike the Snake War, the Bannock War was over quickly. The government offered a bounty on Egan who, though he opposed war, reluctantly accepted a leading role in the conflict against the whites. Perry Chocktoot spoke about Egan and his fate at the hands of those he called upon for help, the members of the Umatilla tribe: “And so everybody wanted to be the government's friend. So the Umatilla, they called a big meeting, and one of their warriors killed Egan—cut his head off. And when he handed it over to the government just said, “Me good Indian, me killed the bad Indian for you.”...For what? Because they knew that the people were coming like the stars in the sky. And the only chance you had of survival for you, your people in your family was to conform to conform to this, this genocide.”³³ For some Oregon Natives, peace meant conforming to the government’s aims. It meant betraying friends if necessary.

The Paiutes’ participation in the conflict cost them their homeland for nearly one hundred years. They were exiled from Oregon, and the reservation was opened up to white settlers, ending any claim the tribe had to the territory. The settlers finally obtained their vision of peace: the majority of the Paiutes were gone. The tribe did not get any of the previous reservation back until the 1970s, and even then it was only a small fraction of the earlier reservation, which itself was a small fraction of their traditional homeland.

For the few scattered remnants of the shattered Northern Paiute people working out their lives in isolated pockets across eastern Oregon, life remained difficult. The Paiutes living near Lakeview, Oregon, just southwest of Camp Warner, did their best to adjust to life under the whites. Marie Lee, the curator of the Lake County Museum, said this of those living near the

³³ Perry Chocktoot, interview with the author, January 2022.

town: **[Begin Lee quote][11:43]** “They tried to Americanize. You could tell from the photos that in many ways they tried to Americanize or they had to Americanize and some of their styles of dress and some other customs on the other hand they clung to their old styles.”

The whites held a sort of fascination for the Paiutes living in the area. Lee, who is a descendant of early settlers in the region, has studied the lives of two of the Natives, namely Indian John, sometimes called Lakeview John, and his wife Maggie. **[Begin Lee quote][3:04]** “Maggie and John, actually were revered themselves. It was a good relationship. In the end, when you take in perspective, take into account the perspective of how people viewed social status and their lives at the turn of the century, especially out on the frontier land such as we are now because it was the—they liked Maggie and John. Maggie washed clothes. My grandmother would talk about, as a child, of Maggie washing clothes for her....And there really are some horror stories, to be honest, when you go back and search through the archives of things that Maggie and John and their peers endured here in this area, because one of—one of the problems was that they were very addictive to alcohol. And so apparently, you know, some of them [the whites] thought this was kind of humorous to—to let them have alcohol, and of course because of that hard things happened. There was—there were murders, attempted murders, there were suicides, and attempted suicide. As a matter of fact, there was one one article in the *Lake County Examiner* that talked about Maggie herself had attempted suicide. This was in the *Lake County Examiner* of October 6, 1901. ‘Maggie tried suicide last Thursday because of John's drinking and flirting by eating wild parsnip. She was carried to the sweat house, wrapped in a blanket, and piled hot rock around her. Dr. Steiner and druggist Beal brought her out of it.’ She and John have a daughter Bonnie and the article went on a little bit but these things happened. There were other articles about the attempted suicides.”³⁴

³⁴ Marie Lee, interview with the author, January 2022.

Alcohol was the final undoing for Maggie. She was found unconscious outside the First National Bank in Lakeview, and she passed away soon after. Lee quoted the the local newspaper's obituary of Maggie: **[Begin Lee quote][23:16]**“Well known Indian woman imbibes too much firewater. So there you go. For Maggie has gone. Few indeed are the people of this section who will not know Maggie, the wife of indeed John, chief of the fast disappearing fires. For years and years. The aged couple have made their home on the hill back of town. And they have always been familiar figures on the streets...It was sad indeed, to witness the pain suffered by John at the side of his departed wife this morning. And many an eye has been dimmed by tears at the old man's sorrow. He is evidently nearing the century mark, and his few remaining years will no doubt be lonesome.’ So you can see all the always written in the style of, of that time that there was really that definite affinity that the community had.”³⁵

It could well be said that Maggie was a victim of Oregon's Snake War. Though no soldier's bullet took her life, the war had devastated her way of life. It opened up eastern Oregon to increased white settlement and led to the deaths of so many of her fellow Paiutes. Her story is but one of many written and unwritten tragedies of her people at the hands of whites. She was a victim of the white man's peace.

Today, when dawn breaks over the northern Great Basin, a vast, open land is illuminated. The same mountains and valleys that had been the sanctuaries of a people, and that had also witnessed the complete dispossession of that people, remain. No monuments stand over the sites of the massacres, murders, and battlefields. Those few individuals who now live in the small, isolated communities across that wide landscape know little of what occurred there over 150 years earlier. The war, its causes, and its aftermath are fading from memory. **[Begin Wewa quote][2:09]** However, Wilson Wewa explains: “Our identity is important because we're

³⁵ Ibid.

connected to the land. And even though some of our people have been displaced from their homelands, it's our stories that keep us in connection with where we're from, and the lands that we once occupied.”³⁶ Though the war may be slipping into total obscurity, the consequences remain: A lost homeland, a nation nearly destroyed, and a foreign population now settled in its place—each a product of competing visions of peace in Oregon’s Snake War.

³⁶ Wilson Wewa, interview with the author, February 2022.