

THE MODOC INDIAN WAR.

Thesis of

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The Modoc Indian War.

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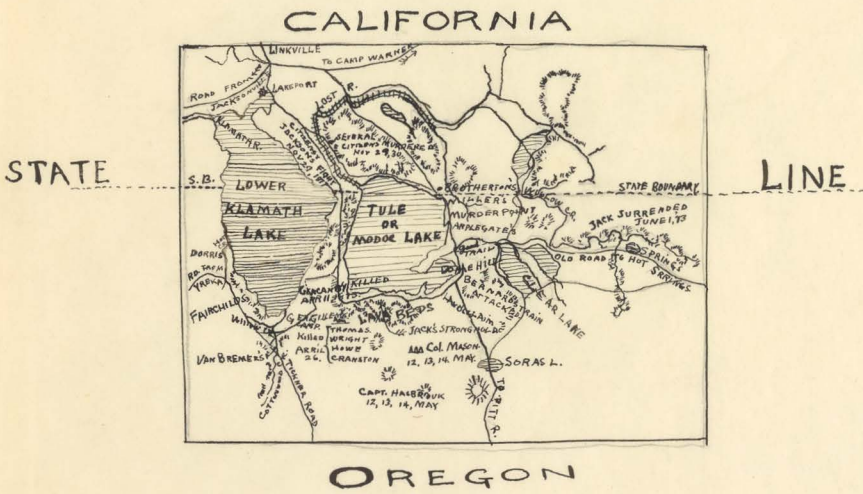
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The Modoc Indian War.

Chapter 1.

The Modocs were a tribe of American Indians living on the borderland of Oregon and California.¹ This district is just east of the Cascade Mountains, and lying on a rocky, broken sagebrush region, containing a number of alkaline lakes, some fertile valleys, and a few mountainous streams, but covered for the most part by volcanic scoria. Their principle habitat was Lost River Valley and the basin of Tule Lake, through which ran the old emigrant road.² At the eastern extremity of Tule Lake were the Lava Beds. These beds were unknown to white men before hostilities arose.³

1. Bancroft's History of Oregon. Vol. 3, Page 556.

2. See map.

3. United Service Magazine. Article by Col. Jackson, pp 1-12.

These Indians were about half civilized. They dressed like the frontier white men, and were well armed with breech-loading and other rifles, which they could handle with skill and precision.¹ Since 1864 the Modocs had been known as a treacherous and murderous band.² Their combative disposition prevented harmony even in their own tribes, which split into three parts or families, known as: Hot Springs, in Northern California; Rock Modocs, in the Vicinity of the Lava Beds; and Lost River Modocs, who lived principally in Oregon.³

1. Johnson's Encyclopedia. Vol. III. p.250.

2. U. S. Service Magazine. Art. by Col. Jackson. p.3.

3. Ibid. p4.

Several treaties were made with these Indians. E. Steele, who was then Superintendent of Indian affairs in California, made one treaty. He really had no right to make it, because the Modocs were under the supervision of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon. He allowed them to follow any legitimate calling, and they were permitted to visit the mining camps.¹ The Indians did not keep this treaty, and the following year, 1864, another treaty was made between the United States and the Modocs.²

1. Bancroft's History of Oregon. Vol. III. p557.

2. Ex. Doc. 1st Session 43rd Congress. No. 122. p5.

The Indians in this treaty relinquished all claim of territory ranged by them, except a certain portion lying north of Lost River Valley. Sconchin, the old head chief, faithfully kept this treaty because he was old and his fighting days were over. It was the young chiefs who violated the treaty. The treaty was made in 1864, and approved by the Senate in July 1866. It was ratified in December, 1869. This long delay made the Indians very suspicious. Captain Jack declared it was not the same treaty, when it was explained to the Indians, but he was convinced by the other chiefs and he

finally agreed to it.¹ The Klamaths and the Yahooskin Snakes also agreed to the terms of this treaty.²

~~A~~ Seonegin was chief of the tribe when they went to live on the Klamath Reservation. They had agreed to go on this reservation in the treaty of 1864. The reserve was much colder than that which they had been used to.³ When they were established there, they went to work with a good deal of interest to build their cabins and enclose ground for cultivation. They were so much annoyed by the Klamaths that they soon complained to their local agent, who instead of

1. Bancroft's History of Oregon. Vol. III. p557.

2. Ibid. p558.

3. United Service Mag. Article by Col. Jackson. p3.

protecting them in their rights, endeavored to compromise the difficulty by removing them to another location. At this place the same difficulty arose and a third selection of land was made for them.¹ The Indians then fled from the reservation, alleging that the last location was a trap to place them in the power of their enemies.² All subsequent attempts to induce them to return failed.³ They desired to be established on Lost River where they would be free from the Klamaths.

1. United Service Mag. Art. by Col. Jackson. p3.

2. The Klamaths were ancient enemies of the Modocs.

3. Ex. Doc. 1st sess. 43rd Cong. No. 122. p5.

No action was taken for some time to make the Indians return to the reservation. The authorities agreed to let them alone for the present. The Modocs, however, were of such a disposition that the settlers soon found much cause for complaint and wished their removal from the Lost River Valley.¹

1. Ex. Doc. 1st sess. 43rd Cong. No. 122, p6. giving letters of inhabitants of Lost River in which they complained of the outrages of the Modocs.

Chapter II.

The Indian agent of the Klamath reservation made repeated efforts to induce the Indians to return to the reserve, but every effort met with contemptuous refusal and the declaration that they would fight rather than leave their present location.¹ The settlers complained to the authorities. They charged the Indians with killing their cattle and abusing their families in the absence of the men. They also accused them of knocking down fences and of stealing hay and household utensils.² The Indians had even

1. Dr. Brady's Northwestern Fights and Fighters, Chap.II. p259. Art. By Jackson. This attitude was assumed by Captain Jack.
2. Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 43rd Cong. No. 122 p6. Gives letters of the settlers.

threatened the lives of several white men living near Lost River, Oregon.¹

In Feb., 1872, about fifty of the most important citizens sent a petition to A. B. Meacham, Superintendent of Indian affairs in Oregon, asking him to remove the Modocs. The undersigned citizens were from Lost and Link rivers, Klamath and Tule Lake Country.² They stated that they had suffered years of annoyance from the presence of the Modocs, and through the delay of the military and Indian Department had

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122, 1st Sess. 43rd Cong. p6. This complaint is given in a letter from J. M. True, from Lost River, Oregon.
2. Ibid, p8. In this the petition and names of the fifty citizens are given.

not been removed to the reservation as stipulated in the treaty of 1865. Three hundred Modocs were roaming about the settlements. They might at any time begin a desolating Indian War. The settlers felt that the Indians knew their own power and that the government by failing to enforce the treaty had only lead them to despise instead of respect its authority.¹ They recommended A. D. Applegate², of Yaimax, as a suitable man to take charge of the expedition for their removal. The petition voiced the sentiments of the best citizens in the county, and shows how they resented the delay to remove the Modocs.³

1. Ex. Doc. No.122. 1st Sess. 43rd Cong. p8

2. Mr. Applegate is a very well known pioneer of Oregon.

3. Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. No.122 p8;

Other letters voicing the same grievances were written at this time. One was a scorching letter from Jesse Applegate¹ to A. B. Meacham, telling him the former's opinion in regard to the Modoc question. Governor Grover, of Oregon, also wrote a letter to Gen. Ed. R. S. Canby, asking him to give his attention to the affair. He told of letters he had received from citizens².

At last orders were finally received by the Supt. of Indian Affairs in Oregon, Hon. T. B. Odeneal, to secure their removal, peacefully if possible, by force if necessary.³ On his arrival in Salem, Mr. Odeneal, having called upon the Modocs without avail to return to the reservation, determined to place the matter in the hands of Capt. Jackson.⁴

Capt. Jackson, with 35 men of Co. B. 1st U.S. Cavalry, left at once for the Modoc camp. Mr. Odeneal requested Capt. Jackson to say that

1. A Pioneer of Oregon, well known.

2. Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 43rd Cong. No. 122 p16.

3. Ibid.

4. Northwest Fights and Fighters. Art. by Ivan D. Applegate, Chap. IV. p273.

they did not come to fight but to ask them to go peacefully to Camp Yaimax, on Klamath Reservation, where ample provision had been made for their sustenance, and wherem by treaty, they agreed to live. They were to fire no gun except in self-defense. Mr. Ivan Applegate acted as interpreter.¹

Capt. Jackson was accompanied from Fort Klamath by Lieut. Bontelle, Dr. McElderry, 36 men of B. troop in column and four with pack trains, guided by Ivan D. Applegate. They marched all day and night, through a heavy rainstorm, and arrived at the principal camp of the Modocs about daylight. Forming line they moved down on the camp at a trot, completely surprising the Indians and creating great commotion among them. Halting just at the edge of the camp, Capt. Jackson called upon them to lay down their arms and surrender. Mr. Applegate interpreted Capt. Jackson's intentions and asked them to comply with the orders of the Indian Dept.² Some of them seemed willing to do so, but Scar Faced Charley and Black Jim kept their guns and began to make

1. Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 43rd Cong. No. 122 p36

2. Ibid. p43.

hostile demonstrations against the troops. After repeated demands on them to lay down their arms and surrender had been unheeded, and seeing that the hostile Indians were getting more numerous and determined, Captain Jackson directed Lieutenant Bontelle to ~~take~~ some men from the line and arrest the leaders, if possible.

This order was followed by hostilities on the part of the Indians, and a general engagement immediately ensued. The troops poured volley after volley amongst their worst men, driving the Indians to seek refuge in the brush and hills, from whence they kept up a desultory fire for some time.¹

One soldier was killed during the engagement and almost at the first fire. After the Indians were driven out of range, it was necessary to care for the wounded, to prevent the squaws from killing and mutilating them. A slight skirmish line was sent ahead with Lieutenant Bontelle, Captain Jackson took what men could be spared, and had the dead and wounded carried to the river bank, then canoed across the river to

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122, 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. Jackson' report.

Crawley's ranch, about half a mile distant.

At the same time that Captain Jackson moved on the main camp of the Modocs, a smaller camp on the north side of the river was attacked by ten citizens. They also demanded the surrender of the Indians, which demand was not acceded to. When the firing commenced at the main camp, the Indians at the small camp opened on the citizens.¹ One citizen was killed,² and several Indians were killed and wounded. The citizens, after the first attack, retired to Crawley's ranch, and kept up the firing at long range, preventing the Indians from crossing the river and attacking Jackson's flank on the rear.

Two citizens coming up the road, not knowing of the fight, were shot, one being killed and one seriously wounded.

Soon after the fight, Mr. Applegate, Burnett, Brown, and others, left to warn citizens in other places of danger, leaving but a small force at the house where the wounded had been sent, and where a family resided.³ Mr.

1. Ex. Doc. 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. No. 122. p43.

2. The citizen was Mr. Thurber (From Ex. Doc. 122)

3. Ex. Doc. NO. 122. 43rd. Sess. p 43. Jackson's report.

Crawley rode up and asked for protection at the ranch, saying that the Indians were preparing for another attack.¹

Capt. Jackson mounted his command and marched out at a trot for the ford, some eight miles up the river, sending Lieut. Boutelle with a skirmish line to clear the Indians out of the sage-brush, which he did effectually.²

The troop arrived at the ranch about four o'clock, where they took post to await for supplies and to care for the wounded. While moving around the ranch some straggling Indians collected on the other side of the river and burned a haystack and a house belonging to Mr. Monroe.³ Then they moved down toward Tule Lake for their refuge in the caves and rocks south of the lake. One band from the north side of the river who had been fighting the citizens moved down on that side of the lake during the fight and commenced killing the unarmed inhabitants of Tule valley.^{Lake}

The following morning Capt. Jackson learned that there were still more unwarned settlers. He immediately sent a detachment with Mr. Crawley to ascertain the condition or fate of these people.⁴ The first place he came to was the Boddy ranch. Here he found everything in order. The

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st. Sess. 43rd Cong. p46. Tel. & reports.

2. Northwestern Fight and Fighters. p. 82.

3. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st. Sess. 43rd Cong. p43.

4. Ibid. p44.

house was deserted, a dog was tied to the door-step, and animals were in the corral. Thinking from appearances that the family must have been warned and fled, and that warning had been carried on down the valley, Mr. Crawley came back and so reported.

That evening Capt. Jackson moved to the ford to meet the supply train and prevent prowling bands of Indians from intercepting it. The pack train came up at midnight, and the next morning, Dec. 1, the command moved back to Crawley's ranch, until supplies sufficient for a campaign should be collected.

On the evening of Dec. 1, two citizens came in and reported that all the men of the Boddy family had been murdered right after the fight, and that the women of the family had escaped to Lost River ridge, and then to Linkville. Lieut. Bontelle with a detachment was sent down, and some of the bodies of the Boddy family were found in the timber, quite a distance from the house, where they had been cutting and hauling wood. The detachment was proceeding down the valley when it was met by Ivan Applegate, Mr. Langell and some others, who had come up the valley, visiting the ranches on the north side of the lake.¹

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122, 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. p44.

They reported the killing of the men of the Brotherton family,¹ two herders, and Mr. Henry Miller. Mrs. Brotherton and her two little boys had fought the Indians away from the house, wounding some. The next day² a large force moved down the valley to hunt the remains of the murdered inhabitants. A detachment was sent to Clear Lake for the protection of Mr. Jesse Applegate's family. The only places that were still threatened were Langell valley and Clear Lake. It was the intention of Capt. Jackson to send the next reinforcements to that place.³ A company of Klamath Indians, thirty six in number, was sent out on the trail of the Modocs, to keep them from raiding until the troops could move to their hiding place.⁴

1. Three men, a father and two sons, from Ex. Doc. No. 122.

2. Dec. 3.

3. Northwestern Fights and Fighters, p 46.

4. Ex. Doc. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. No. 122, p44. From reports sent to Washington.

Chapter III.

After the first encounter Jack and his band retired post-haste to the lava-beds. He molested no one on his retreat, but Hooker Jim and his followers killed every one they met, in all some seventeen settlers.¹ After this they joined Captain Jack in the lava beds.

The Lava beds were at the extremeity of Tule Lake, and had heretofore been unknown to white men. "The ocean breakers in all their fury, as they dash on a rocky coast, suddenly petrified, will give you an idea of the surface,² and the difficulties of carrying on military operations in such a country." About a mile from the lake front the lava had poured over the abrupt and irregular cliffs, forming as it cooled, a rock wall almost impossible of ascent. On the crest it had broken away and formed a deep crevice, which in an irregular line followed the lake shore and made an almost perfect defensive work. There was no part that was not covered with a line of fire from the natural rifle trench, while at the angles, masses of rock had fallen forward.³ The lava beds were of irregular shape, estimated to be thirty-

1. Northwestern Fights and Fighters, by Dr. Brady, p 234.

2. U. S. Magazine. Art. by Col. Jackson, U.S.A. p2.

3. Ibid. p2.

five miles north to south and twenty five east to west, and washed by Tule lake on north east and east side. Most of it was of a dark color, about the same as the color of the Indians. The fissures formed admirable natural defenses, the Modocs retiring from one crest to another as the troops advanced; and invariably, from their concealed position, inflicting loss.¹

The Indians were well prepared for this emergency. They had a sufficiency of dried roots and jerked beef to last them a year, and Jack boasted that they could hold out against one thousand soldiers.² This seemed absurd to the soldiers until after they met with such terrible losses in attempting to reach the Indians' stronghold.³

In January, the troops having assembled and having been joined by a contingent force of California volunteers and Klamath Indians, General Wheaton organized an attack on both sides of the Indian stronghold, expecting to crush them out between the forces.⁴ Col. Barnard, Captain First cavalry, with two cavalry companies, and Klamath Indian allies, was directed to move upon the Modocs from the north, while General Wheaton, with a battalion

1. Northwestern Fights and Fighters. Art. by Brig. Gen. Perry, U.S.A. p292. Gen. Perry fought in this war.
2. United Service Mag. Art. by Col. Jackson, p6.
3. Ibid.
4. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. p63.

of the 21st infantry, two cavalry companies and the California volunteers, attacked from the south of the lake on which the stronghold faced, being respectively the right and left of the assaulting line. The lava beds being impracticable for horses, the troops dismounted and operated on foot.

A dense fog settled over the whole lake basin, and continued through the next day, growing even denser.¹

Bernard's troops had comparatively ten miles of hard scrambling before they could reach the point from which the attack was to be made on the following morning.²

The next day the lines formed in skirmish order by daylight, and advanced to the attack despite the dense fog.

General Wheaton's line had struck the lava wall on the southwest, too long to flank and too abrupt to scale.³

Bernard, finding that he could make no headway in such a country, halted. The men quickly took as advantageous positions as could be found. They sought in vain for the Indian warriors.⁴

1. United Service Mag. Art. by Jackson. pp7-8.

2. Ex. Doc. No. 122 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. pp64.

3. Northwest Fights and Fighters, by Brady. Art. by Jackson. p60.

4. United Service Mag. Art. by Jackson. pp 7-8.

Col. John Green, of General Wheaton's command, while trying to get into the rear of the Indians, struck the rocky glacis that faced the stronghold, and followed it until he reached Bernard's right. He lost heavily in killed and wounded. The attack failed more on account of natural obstacles, than the Indians. It was decided to withdraw because the rations had run out, and the wounded had to be cared for.¹

When Gen. Wheaton arrived in camp he found an order from Washington forbidding an attack on the Modocs.² The message stated that he should use the troops to protect the inhabitants and if possible to prevent a war.³

The authorities at Washington decided to send a peace commission to the scene of difficulties, in order to settle the affair peaceably, if possible. The commissioners were: Gen. E. R. S. Canby, Gen. Gillem, Dr. Thomas, A. B. Meacham, and Mr. Dyer.⁴

The peace tent was near the stronghold, and the peace commissioners accepted the terms to come unarmed. The tent was one half mile from the camp in a rocky depression. The Modoc Squaw, Mrs. Riddle,⁵ acted as

1. United Service Mag. Art. by Col. Jackson. p 8.

2. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. p66.

3. Ibid. Message from Gen. Sherman.

4. Ibid. These men were chosen by authorities at Washington.

5. Mrs. Riddle was loyal at all times and repeatedly warned the commissioners. U.S. Mag. & Ex. Doc. No. 122.

interpreter. She warned them of the treachery of the Indians, but they went anyway. Gen. Gillem was too ill to attend.

About the time of the conference an Indian appeared with a white flag on a rocky ridge, in front of Mason's camp. Lieutenant Sherwood and Captain Boyle started out, the Indian fell back slowly. When the officers halted the Indian fired. Sherwood was shot, but Boyle gained the cover of the pickets.¹ This was the signal for the firing in the peace tent.² There the Indians fired on the commissioners, and Gen. Canby and Dr. Thomas were killed, Mr. Meacham was seriously wounded, and Mr. Dyer escaped.³

On Dec. 26, Major Green ordered Capt. Thomas with about seventy soldiers, and fourteen Warm Spring Indians, to make a reconnaissance in a southeasterly direction to a point about four miles from camp.⁴ About 12 A. M. the party reached the point and were resting. Suddenly they were fired on by the Indians. Part of the command became panic stricken, and organization stopped. All the officers and part of the men stayed together and fought

1. Northwestern Fights and Fighters. p 82.

2. United Service Mag. Art. by Col. Jackson, p 10.

3. Ex. Doc. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. No. 122. pp75-6.

4. Ibid. p88.

like heroes, but the Indians had the advantage.¹ Stragglers arrived in camp about 1:30 P.M. Major Green at once went to the assistance of Captain Thomas. Upon searching the lava beds, he found the bodies of Captain Thomas, Lieut. Howe, Lieut. Crayton, Lieut. Harris, Lieut. Wright, and thirteen enlisted men. Surgeon Seming and sixteen others were seriously wounded.²

Shortly after this unfortunate attack and the massacre of the Commissioners, the last attack began.³ The lake front was captured, and the Indians' supply of water was cut off. The troops moved slowly, covering each advance with rifle pits of rock to prevent loss of life. A mountain howitzer battery was carried to the crest of the rock foundation, and with this they shelled the Indians from their stronghold. They retreated into the black lava vicinity, a very inaccessible place.⁴

The Indians finally separated, roughly speaking, into two bands. A portion remained with Captain Jack, and the rest under Hooker Jim. General Davis constantly tightened the cordon around the Modocs. The situation of the Indians became extremely difficult. Dissensions arose, as was

1. North Western Fights and Fighters. p 189.

2. Ex. Doc. No.122 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. pp88.

3. U. S. Magazine. Art. By Jackson. p 10 .

4. " " " " " " .

natural in a body so loosely coherent and comprised of so many diverse and independent elements. They finally decided to leave the lava beds. ¹

On May 10, in the morning at daybreak, the cavalry and the Indian allies at Dry Lake were attacked fiercely by all the hostile Modocs, a number of whom had crept inside the pickets about sixty yards from the soldiers.

Jumping from their blankets, the soldiers charged in front of the cavalry, and the Warm Springs were moved on the flank. The Modocs were driven quickly from camp, and seeing the Warm Springs making for their flank, broke into such a rapid retreat the the troops could not keep up with them. ²

Hasbrouch and Jackson closed in on the Indians from the North and East, Mason from the West, and Perry from the south. The situation of the Indians was desperate. They quarreled and finally separated on the old lines, and crept out of the lava beds at night.

Striking the trail of the Hot Springs, the cavalry brought them to bay in the mountains of northern California, and compelled their surrender to General Davis.

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122, 1st Sess. 43rd. Cong. p 89.

2. U. S. Mag. Art. by Col. Jackson. p 11.

Captain Jack's party thoroughly concealed their tracks, but some of the captured Indians revealed the hiding place. They were found in a gorge in the mountains north of Clear Lake. They were driven from it, followed closely, overtaken and surrounded in the rocky canon near the head of Lost River valley. Here the Indians surrendered to Col. Green.

Captain Jack with two or three bucks escaped during the night, but were trailed to willow spring canon and captured by Col. Perry's command. The Modoc War was ended.

Chapter IV.

The court for trial of the principal men of the hostile Modocs was convened at Fort Klamath, Oregon, July 1, 1873. These men were arraigned and tried:- Captain Jack, Seonchis, Black Jim, Boston Charley, Bamcho (One Eyed Jim) and Sloluck (Bok), Modoc Indian captives.

Charge I,- Murder, in violation of the laws of war.

Charge II,- Assault with intent to kill in violation of the laws of war.¹

Finding,- The commission having maturely considered the evidence adduced, finds the accused Captain Jack, Seonchis, Black Jim, Boston Charley, Bamcho, Sloluck, as follows: of Charge One, "guilty"; of Charge Two, "guilty".

Sentence: These Modoc Indians shall be hanged by the neck until they be dead, at such time and place as the proper authority shall direct, two-thirds of the members of the commission concurring therein."

This sentence was approved by General Grant. He set the third day of October, 1873 as the day of the execution.² Therefore on that day, in the presence of troops and the Klamaths, the sentenced Indians expiated the killing of the peace commissioners and numerous other crimes.

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. p95

2. Ibid. Message of Pres. Grant. p97.

The remainder of the band, one hundred and fifty five in number, thirty nine men, fifty women, and sixty children, were sent to the Quapaw Agency in the Indian Territory, where they are today. Only a handful now survive.¹

Thus ended the most costly war in which the United States ever engaged, considering the number of opponents. The Modocs inflicted defeat after defeat, and were not captured until treachery had played its maleficent part. The cost of the war was over half a million dollars.

Captain Jack will not be forgotten, and the defence of which he was the central figure. Insignificant people as they were, in their brief hour, they managed to stamp themselves on the pages of history.

1. Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Cong. p 102.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

I. Secondary Accounts.

1. Bancroft's History of Oregon. This account was very long, but did not stick very closely to facts.
2. Northwestern Fights and Fighters, by Dr. Thomas Brady. A fragmentary account written by numerous participants in the war.
3. Johnson's Encyclopedia. Vol. III. A brief account.

II. Source Materials.

1. Ex. Doc. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Congress. No. 122. This is the best and most reliable source. In it are letters and reports of officials, also telegrams, and all the material received at Washington during the time of the struggle. See footnotes.
2. United Service Magazine. Account of Col; Jackson, U. S. A. Retired. Col. Jackson took an active part, and his account is very accurate, corresponding very closely with the Ex. Doc. No. 122. 1st. Sess. 43rd. Congress.