

Battle Rock: Anatomy of a Massacre

In the early morning hours of June 9, 1851, the SS *Sea Gull* emerged from the darkness off Cape Blanco on the far southern coast of the Oregon Territory. Five days out of Portland, the small, 200-ton sidewheeler slowly pushed its way through the choppy waters around a rocky headland, and into the relative calm of a semi-sheltered, south-facing harbor. Dropping anchor a mile offshore, the captain of the vessel, a thirty-seven-year-old New Jersey native named William Tichenor, stepped out onto the ship's weather-beaten deck and peered through his spyglass at the heavily wooded coastline. Enormous stands of fir, alder, hemlock, and cedar, descended from a mountainous, fog-shrouded hinterland to the very edge of a sweeping coastal plain. A two-mile stretch of rock-strewn beach ran along the rugged, crescent-like contour of the roadstead to its northernmost point. There, a large basalt promontory sloped out a hundred yards into the surf like a high, "black wedge" dividing the landscape.¹ Scrub brush and wind-bent trees clung to its summit, some sixty feet above the sand. From around its base, several figures appeared and looked out at the *Sea Gull*.² These were the Quatomah, and they had lived on that beach for over a thousand years.

Tichenor lowered the spyglass and motioned at his first mate to prep the whaleboat. A moment later, he was joined on deck by J.M. Kirkpatrick, a brash, twenty-three-year-old drifter

¹ George Davidson and U.S. Coast Geodetic Survey, *Pacific Coast: Coast Pilot of California, Oregon, and Washington*, Fourth Edition, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 375.

² John M. Kirkpatrick and Orvil Dodge, *The Heroes of Battle Rock*, (Myrtle Point, Oregon: 1904), 2.

who at fifteen had fled the family farm in Ohio and made his way south to serve as a fifer in the Mexican War.³ Afterwards, he came west to the Oregon Country where until recently he had been working as a carpenter around Portland.⁴ Two weeks prior he had been recruited to assist Tichenor in establishing a permanent settlement on a remote stretch of the southern Oregon coast. Kirkpatrick, along with eight other men, were to be deployed at the proposed site where they would survey the area and erect a few preliminary structures. Tichenor, after depositing the men on the beach, would continue south to his base of operations in San Francisco. There he would gather more men and supplies before returning in two weeks to what he had decided to call “Port Orford.”

Not long after setting out from Portland tension had arisen onboard the *Sea Gull* between Tichenor and members of the landing party. Although he had promised the group that they would be furnished with arms and ammunition it was soon discovered that weapons were not included with their gear. When confronted, Tichenor had brushed off their concerns and assured them that there was “not a particle of danger from the Indians.”⁵ He claimed to have interacted with them numerous times and that they were “perfectly friendly.”⁶ The men were unconvinced, though, and when the *Sea Gull* arrived in Astoria on the following morning they refused to go any further unless they were sufficiently armed. Relenting, Tichenor went ashore and returned a little while later with “three old flint lock muskets, one old sword half eaten with rust and a few pounds of lead and three or four pounds of powder.”⁷ When the group commented on the pathetic looking arsenal, Tichenor reiterated that weapons would not be needed. Although Kirkpatrick had borrowed a couple of pistols from a friend back in Portland, he was still not convinced the group

³ “Far West Experiences,” *Eutaw Wig and Observer*, March 22, 1883, Page 1.

⁴ Kirkpatrick and Dodge, *The Heroes of Battle Rock*, 1.

⁵ Kirkpatrick and Dodge, *The Heroes of Battle Rock*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

had enough “to fight Indians with,” so before the *Sea Gull* set off into the Pacific he ran over to Fort George and found a soldier willing to sell him a rifle for \$20.⁸ This seems to have alleviated his concerns. Three days later, though, as he and Tichenor watched the Quatomah gathering onshore, Kirkpatrick’s uneasiness returned.

As the men loaded supplies onto the whaleboat, Kirkpatrick, who had been named “captain” of the landing party, informed Tichenor that he did not like the look of things on the beach, and that “those Indians meant mischief.”⁹ He then told him the group wanted to take the *Sea Gull*’s four-pound signal cannon as well.¹⁰ At first, Tichenor laughed at this.¹¹ Although, once Kirkpatrick told him that they would not stay without it he reluctantly agreed to give it to them. Later that morning, after the men, their provisions, and the cannon had all been transported to shore, Tichenor bade them farewell and promised to return in fourteen days. As the *Sea Gull* slowly pulled out of the harbor, Kirkpatrick and the other men waved at the steamer from the beach and then began carrying their gear up to the top of the large rock where they intended to make their camp.

Sixteen days later, on June 25, Tichenor returned to Port Orford, this time aboard the steamship *Columbia*, only to discover that Kirkpatrick and the others were nowhere to be found. A significant battle appeared to have taken place on top of the large rock and an investigation of the surrounding area led to the discovery of two discarded journals, both of which provided some insight into what might have happened. As a result, it was assumed that the men had most likely been abducted or killed by the Quatomah, and not long after an account of the grim discovery was

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

published in a Portland newspaper under the headline, “Probable Massacre.”¹² It had been written by the purser of the *Columbia*, a man named D.S. Roberts, who implied that Kirkpatrick and the other men had most likely abandoned their camp and were therefore at fault for whatever had befallen them.¹³

On July 2, exactly one week after Tichenor had returned to Port Orford, the nine missing men stumbled out of the wilderness and into a settlement on the Umpqua River, exhausted but relatively unharmed. The following day, as they recovered in the town of Scottsburg, Kirkpatrick saw Roberts’ account of their supposed demise in the newspaper and read how he and the other members of the landing party may have acted “foolishly and rashly.”¹⁴ Offended by this, he quickly made his way to Portland and presented his version of events in a letter to the *Oregon Statesman*.¹⁵ Not only did this provide an “official” narrative of what had supposedly occurred, it refuted aspects of Roberts’ story thereby calling into question his motives.

Through an examination of the two accounts provided by Roberts and Kirkpatrick a picture emerges of a public relations struggle that ultimately obscured what really happened between the Port Orford landing party and the Quatomah. As head of the enterprise, Tichenor got in front of any blowback that a massacre might generate by utilizing Roberts, who was actually a San Francisco attorney, to be an “impartial” witness whose testimony exculpated him of any wrongdoing.¹⁶ This inadvertently placed Kirkpatrick on the defensive, compelling him to respond with a heroic narrative that justified the actions of him and his men. However, not wanting to be alienated from the enterprise, Kirkpatrick’s narrative needed to fit within the parameters

¹² *The Weekly Times*, July 3, 1851, page 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹⁶ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 23, 1850, page 2; *The Buffalo Daily Republic*, August 13, 1851, page 2.

established by Roberts' account. In this way, the aftermath created the event. The price for this was historical truth, particularly as it related to the Quatomah. They not only endured a very *real* massacre at Port Orford but were then cast as villains in a highly-consequential story outside of their control.

Although they had previously interacted with traders and explorers, the Quatomah were relatively isolated compared to some of the inland groups living along the Oregon-California trail.¹⁷ One of their first appearances in the historical record occurred on the afternoon of April 24, 1792, when George Vancouver's "Voyage of Discovery" entered a small harbor just south of Cape Blanco, which he promptly renamed "Cape Orford" in honor of his friend George Walpole—the 3rd Earl of Orford.¹⁸ Archibald Menzies, the expedition's surgeon and naturalist, wrote in his journal that several Indians in a dugout canoe paddled out to greet them without showing "any kind of dread or apprehension."¹⁹ After eagerly climbing aboard the vessel he writes that they "kept repeating the word *Slaghshee* the meaning of which we did not comprehend."²⁰ An Athabaskan language scholar would later identify that the Quatomah had been saying "My friends, my friends..." over and over.²¹

During the next few decades, however, the Quatomahs' desire to interact with Euro-Americans appears to have diminished. Alexander McLeod of the Hudson's Bay Company passed

¹⁷ Mark Axel Tveskov, *The Coos and Coquille: A Northwest Coast Historical Anthropology*, (University of Oregon, 2000), 24-25.

¹⁸ George Vancouver and Kaye W. Lamb, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and round the World, 1791-1795: With an Introduction and Appendices*, Vol. II, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society; 2nd Series, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984), 491; The toponym fell into disuse by the early nineteenth century and the U.S. Board on Geographic Names has since reinstated "Cape Blanco."

¹⁹ Archibald Menzies, *Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage, 1790-1794*, British Museum Additional MS 32,641, Manuscript Division, (London, England: British Museum), 108-110.

²⁰ Menzies, *Journal*, 108-110.

²¹ Stephen Dow Beckham, *Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries*, (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 2006), 29.

through the area in 1827 and reported that they had fled from his party in fear. Although a few were encouraged to come out of hiding when offered “trinkets.”²² Historian E.A. Schwartz speculates that this “shyness” may have been due to a smallpox epidemic two years prior, which the Quatomah may associated with the presence of Euro-Americans.²³ It is also possible they may have had a negative encounter with outsiders that altered their thinking. Nathan Douthit points out that after Vancouver’s voyage many fur-trading vessels passed through the area, and because the majority of these went unreported there is no way to know about their interactions with Indigenous peoples.²⁴

With the California Gold Rush activity along the southern Oregon coast increased considerably, and the Quatomah would have begun to see ships passing by on a fairly regular basis.²⁵ One of these vessels was the *Sea Gull*, captained by Tichenor.²⁶ Like thousands of others, he had been drawn westward in 1849 by the glittering possibility of instant wealth. Leaving a wife and two young children on a farm in Illinois, he made his way to Happy Valley, California, where he found nothing at first but “terrible difficulties.”²⁷ Undaunted, he moved northward and continued to prospect until one day, on the middle fork of the American River, he and his pack animals tumbled down into a deep ravine. It was there, as he lay injured at the bottom of what

²² Nathan Douthit, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Indians of Southern Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (1992): 34.

²³ E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 22.

²⁴ Nathan Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon, 1820s – 1860s*, (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 2002), 9.

²⁵ Orvil Dodge, *Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties, Oregon: Heroic Deeds and Thrilling Adventures of the Early Settlers*, (Salem, Oregon: Capital Print., 1898), 21.

²⁶ Tichenor, *Among the Oregon Indians*, 1.

²⁷ William Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, CB T435, Special Collections & University Archives, (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Libraries), 2.

came to be known as Tichenor's Gulch, that a certain glint appeared amidst the dust and the dirt.²⁸ One month later, he limped into San Francisco and bought a schooner for forty-two pounds of gold.²⁹

Although he had spent the majority of his youth working aboard various merchant vessels, first on the Atlantic and later on the Mississippi River, when Tichenor was twenty he had decided to "quit the sea and settle down."³⁰ In his highly-romanticized memoirs, written just prior to his death in 1887, he depicts the seventeen years following this decision, when he lived a "life of little action," as a prolonged attempt to suppress his true calling—that of the quintessential mariner.³¹ Newfound wealth in an adventurous new land, free from familial obligations, had finally allowed him to live out his fantasy, and with the help of an experienced seaman named Bill Dennison, Tichenor quickly established himself as a reliable captain.³² Over the next year and a half he commanded several different vessels before taking over the *Sea Gull* and plying the waters between San Francisco and Portland.

In early 1850, gold was discovered on the Trinity River in northwestern California, and prospectors were moving closer and closer toward the Oregon Territory in search of the precious metal.³³ Settlers from the north who had passed through southern Oregon on their way to the gold fields in California were also reporting, now that they knew what to look for, that the geological

²⁸ Erwin Gudde, and Elisabeth Gudde, *California Gold Camps: A Geographical and Historical Dictionary of Camps, Towns, and Localities Where Gold Was Found and Mined, Wayside Stations and Trading Centers*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975), 349.

²⁹ Tichenor, *Among the Oregon Indians*, 2.

³⁰ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Bill Dennison, John Goodman, and Oscar Wegelin, *The Letter of a '49er: Now First Printed from the Original*, (Private Print, 1919); "Remarkable Ichthyological Information," *Daily Alta California*, March 15, 1850, page 2.

³³ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 4; Owen Coy, "The Last Expedition of Josiah Gregg," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1916): 43.

conditions around the Umpqua, Rogue, and Klamath rivers looked promising.³⁴ Later that year, a group of San Francisco businessmen formed a joint-stock company and dispatched the schooner *Samuel Roberts* to explore the southern Oregon coast.³⁵ The purpose of the “Klamath Expedition” was to search for gold along inland waterways and lay out town sites in favorable locations.³⁶

In July, the *Samuel Roberts* arrived at the mouth of the Rogue River where the ship’s captain, Albert Lyman, dispatched a six-man whaleboat crew to sound the river’s entrance. The treacherous, churning waters of the bar quickly overturned the smaller vessel and two sailors were drowned while the others were rescued by the Yashute, who had been watching from the shore. They had close kinship ties with the Quatomah. In fact, both groups, along with several other bands, were later classified by Euro-Americans as being part of the same “Tututni” tribe, and it is quite possible that Yashute warriors traveled up the coast to lend assistance to the Quatomah at Battle Rock.³⁷

In a *History of Oregon*, ghostwriter Frances Fuller Victor states that the sailors from the *Samuel Roberts* had been pulled from the water simply to strip them of their clothing, and that the bank was “populous with excited savages running hither and thither...”³⁸ Capt. Lyman was eventually able to maneuver the schooner safely over the bar, and once the ship had anchored a number of the Yashute paddled out to greet them. Although Fuller Victor’s account, which was drawn from a magazine article written by a member of the expedition, paints a disparaging picture of the Yashute as unruly thieves whose ingenuity “would have done credit to a London pickpocket,”

³⁴ Hubert Howe Bancroft, and Frances Fuller Victor, *History of Oregon*, Works, Vol. 30, (San Francisco: History Company, 1886), 184.

³⁵ Tveskov, *Coos and Coquille*, 385.

³⁶ Stephen Dow Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua: A History of Douglas County, Oregon*, (Roseburg, Oregon: Douglas County Commissioners, 1986), 72. Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 115.

³⁷ Charles F. Wilkinson, *The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 21.

³⁸ Bancroft and Fuller Victor, *History of Oregon*, 177.

Capt. Lyman found them to be friendly and largely unfamiliar with Euro-Americans.³⁹ In his journal, he writes that he saw “only two old muskets among them,” and his description of their possessions and attire implied that they had limited contact with outsiders.⁴⁰

Over the next week, the expedition sent out several parties to explore the area. However, they were unable to find satisfactory locations for settlements and instead decided to sail up the coast to the Umpqua River, which they found to be “one of the loveliest of streams.”⁴¹ Not long after their arrival they encountered several “Oregon pioneers” including Levi Scott, who had recently established the town of Scottsburg 26 miles upriver.⁴² Scott and his companions eagerly joined forces with the well-connected San Franciscans, forming the Umpqua Townsite and Colonization Company. In short order, they laid out the towns of Umpqua City and West Umpqua near the river’s mouth, along with Elkton and Winchester in the interior.⁴³ Of these, Scottsburg became a major waystation and departure point, not only for pack-trains plodding their way south to the gold fields, but also for mail going into and out of the region.⁴⁴

In an effort to avoid having to regularly traverse the hazardous Umpqua bar, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company reached out to Tichenor, one of their contractors, to establish a settlement on the coast that would act as a postal hub for southern Oregon.⁴⁵ In his memoirs, he portrays the Port Orford enterprise in the romantic light of Manifest Destiny, as an individual effort

³⁹ Ibid., 177; C.T.H., “Explorations in Oregon,” *The Pioneer*, Vol. 1, (San Francisco, California: W.H. Brooks and Company, 1854), 350.

⁴⁰ Albert Lyman, “The Journal of Captain Albert Lyman, 1850-1851,” *Transcript from Microfilm of the Original Journal Prepared by the Douglas County Museum*, (Roseburg, Oregon: Douglas County Museum); Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 177.

⁴¹ Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 179.

⁴² Harold Avery Minter, *Umpqua Valley, Oregon, and Its Pioneers*, (Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, 1967), 55; Verne Bright, “The Lost County, Umpqua, Oregon, and Its Early Settlements,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Jun., 1950), 114.

⁴³ Bright, “The Lost County, Umpqua, Oregon, and Its Early Settlements,” 115.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 193; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 33.

to carve out a “permanent residence” for him and his family.⁴⁶ Although he was taking advantage of the recently enacted Donation Land Claim Act, which granted each white male emigrant to the Oregon Territory 320 acres of land, in reality it was a collective, commercial endeavor involving several high-profile individuals, including T. Butler King, chief tax collector for the Port of San Francisco, and William T’Vault, Oregon’s first postmaster-general.⁴⁷ Although mail delivery may have been the impetus behind the project, a primary incentive for Tichenor and his partners was establishing a route to the interior that would connect the town to the gold diggings in southern Oregon. This was the pitch that was made to Kirkpatrick and the other members of the landing party, and each had been promised “a share in the town” if they spent two weeks on site, laying the groundwork.⁴⁸

It is unclear if Tichenor had his eye on Port Orford prior to being approached by Pacific Mail. In his memoirs he claims that he first spotted it after he was blown off course by a violent gale in the spring of 1850. When the winds finally subsided he found himself drifting, like Aeneas, off the mysterious, fog-shrouded coast around Cape Blanco.⁴⁹ This providential theme runs throughout Tichenor’s personal narrative as evidenced by his tumble into wealth, making it difficult to discern what should be taken at face value and what should not.⁵⁰ With that said, it is quite possible that he discovered the site of Port Orford independent of the Pacific Mail SS Co. and then approached *them* about the endeavor. As they were contracted by the federal government this would have provided Tichenor and his partners with a certain amount of legitimacy. Either way their interests were aligned, and in late-May of 1851 it was decided that on his next trip to

⁴⁶ Tichenor, *Among the Oregon Indians*, 2; Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 2.

⁴⁷ Dodge, *Pioneer History*, 33; Bancroft, *Oregon History*, 29; besides King and T’Vault, the other known partners were James Gamble, Fred Smith, and M. Hubbard.

⁴⁸ Webber and Kirkpatrick, *Battle Rock*, 23.

⁴⁹ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 4.

⁵⁰ See page 6

Portland he would gather the necessary men and supplies and deposit them at Port Orford on his way back down the coast.

Once this had been completed, Tichenor said farewell to the landing party and assured them that he would return in exactly two weeks' time. Then, blowing its whistle, the *Sea Gull* began the journey south toward San Francisco. Inside the pilot house, Tichenor could see Kirkpatrick and some of the men trudging up the large rock while two remained at the bottom to guard over the supplies.⁵¹ The Quatomah, who at first had wanted to trade, now simply stood watching from several yards away.⁵² A few minutes later, as the steamer slowly pushed its way down the coast, Tichenor pulled the whistle one final time and looking back saw that all of the figures on the beach, both Indian and white, had become dark and indiscernible.

Not long after the *Sea Gull* had arrived back in San Francisco it was seized by creditors, which ultimately prevented Tichenor from returning to Port Orford on time.⁵³ The details of this incident are unclear. He never mentions it in his memoirs, instead claiming he “found it necessary to repair and paint the ship.”⁵⁴ This clumsy explanation does not mesh logistically with his obligation to the landing party, and the fact that he wrote it thirty-five years later reveals much about his sense of pride.⁵⁵ In *Among the Oregon Indians*, he briefly mentions that the *Sea Gull* “belonged to Austens & Spicer,” prominent commission merchants out of New York.⁵⁶ In March, three months prior to the *Sea Gull* being seized, Austens & Spicer went under with over a million

⁵¹ Ibid., 25; Webber and Kirkpatrick, *Battle Rock*, 53-54.

⁵² *The Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2

⁵³ Dorothy Sutton, Jack Sutton, and Frances Fuller Victor, *Indian Wars of the Rogue River*, (Grants Pass, Oregon: Josephine County Historical Society, 1969), 30; “Arrived,” *Daily Alta California*, Volume 2, Number 186, June 14, 1851.

⁵⁴ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 16.

⁵⁵ Tichenor wrote his “Reminiscences” in 1886, one year before his death.

⁵⁶ Tichenor, *Among the Oregon Indians*, 4; *The Evening Post*, February 26, 1851, page 1.

dollars in liabilities.⁵⁷ It is possible that these two incidents are related. However, at the same time, if Tichenor was simply the victim of another party's poor business practices, he would have stated this in his memoirs. Whatever the case may be, he was suddenly unable to get back to Port Orford, and so the Pacific Mail SS Co. arranged for his passage aboard the *Columbia*. Whether it was due to his financial difficulties or simply a lack of interest Tichenor only brought two other men with him to augment the landing party.⁵⁸

On June 21, the *Columbia* left San Francisco and began its journey north up the coast stopping twice at Humboldt and Trinidad before arriving at Port Orford.⁵⁹ A detailed account of the subsequent landing and investigation of the area by Tichenor and others was provided to an Oregon newspaper by an attorney named D.S. Roberts, who identifies himself as the "purser of the steamship Columbia."⁶⁰ Outside of a few remarks made by Tichenor in his memoirs, Roberts' account of what was discovered that day is the only one known to exist. It is an interesting document, rife with inconsistencies, as well as a noticeable bias in its tone. It certainly does not read as if it were the observations of an impartial witness. Instead, it seems to have been constructed to absolve Tichenor, and perhaps more importantly the Pacific Mail SS Co., of any negligence or wrongdoing.

Under the headline, "Probable Massacre," Roberts begins by stating that he is providing details of the "sad transaction," to place residents of the Oregon Territory on their guard as to the "nature and disposition of the Indians..."⁶¹ After giving background information on the Port

⁵⁷ Oliver Lorenzo Barbour, *Reports of Cases in Law and Equity in the Supreme Court of the State of New York*, Vol. 35, (New York: Banks & Gould, 1862), 345; *New York Tribune*, March 6, 1851, page 8.

⁵⁸ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

⁵⁹ "Sailed," *Daily Alta California*, Volume 2, Number 194, June 22, 1851; *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

⁶⁰ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 23, 1850, page 2; *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

⁶¹ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

Orford enterprise, he says that it was selected as the location for a settlement because it has “a better harbor than either Trinidad or Humboldt.”⁶² This not-so-subtle endorsement is followed by a description of the “well-armed and provisioned” landing party, as well as the orders they were given to “deal carefully with the Indians.”⁶³ Of course, this directly contradicts Kirkpatrick’s account of the trip down from Portland, when he and the other men raised concerns about their lack of arms and ammunition, and Tichenor had insisted they need not worry about the Quatomah.⁶⁴

Roberts then explains how the Pacific Mail SS Co. had offered Tichenor and “two others who were with him” passage aboard the *Columbia* as it made its way up the coast.⁶⁵ This statement is framed in such a way as to distance the company from the Port Orford enterprise by implying they were simply providing transportation. Roberts also stresses that the *Columbia* arrived at Port Orford on June 23, “the very day set by Capt. Tichenor for his return.”⁶⁶ This emphasis on establishing punctuality is suspiciously forced in Roberts’ account. Kirkpatrick later refutes this by stating that the landing party did not abandon the rocky promontory until the evening of June 24.⁶⁷ Since Roberts says that they “came in sight of Port Orford at 9’oclock in the morning,” this would place the *Columbia*’s earliest possible arrival at June 25, four days after beginning its journey north.⁶⁸ This timeframe is corroborated by the *Daily Alta California*, which indicated that it had taken the *Sea Gull* four days to travel south from Port Orford to San Francisco.⁶⁹

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See page 2.

⁶⁵ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid; June 23 was exactly fourteen days after Tichenor had left the landing party at Port Orford.

⁶⁷ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

⁶⁸ “Sailed,” *Daily Alta California*, Volume 2, Number 194, June 22, 1851;

⁶⁹ “Arrived,” *Daily Alta California*, Volume 2, Number 186, June 14, 1851; Tichenor deposited the men at Port Orford on June 9 and arrived back in San Francisco on June 13.

According to Roberts, when the *Columbia* arrived at Port Orford they spotted smoke from a campfire at the base of the rocky promontory and had concluded from this “that the men were all safe and waiting for the arrival of the steamer.”⁷⁰ After the ship dropped anchor a mile offshore, however, someone noticed three Indians running away from the promontory and down the beach to the south. A moment later, three more were spotted in a canoe, “pulling with all speed in the same direction.”⁷¹ The men onboard the *Columbia* decided to fire one of the ship’s six-pound cannons to announce their arrival and see “what effect the sound of it would produce on the Indians in the canoe.”⁷² Roberts writes that the blast caused them to fall flat, “as if through fear,” before they hurriedly paddled to shore, jumped out, and ran into the woods.⁷³

After waiting several minutes without any sign of the landing party it was decided that a group would go ashore to investigate, and a whale boat containing “Capt. LeRoy, Capt. Tichenor, Mr. Catherwood, and six or eight others” set out for the beach.⁷⁴ Interestingly, Roberts does not include himself in the list of people going as one would normally do. It could simply be an oversight as he does say “we” quite frequently. At the same time, though, not once does he use first person singular in his letter which is odd considering that it is supposedly an account of his own observations. This suggests that he may not have actually gone ashore with the search party, and instead the letter was composed later in collaboration with someone who did—most likely Tichenor.

After the group landed on the beach, Roberts says that the first thing they noticed was a large amount of pilot bread scattered along the shore. Nearby, several books as well as carpenter

⁷⁰ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

tools were strewn about the sand. They quickly made their way up to the top of the rocky promontory where the landing party had made their camp. Here they found “nothing but destruction,” Roberts writes, “which seemed to tell plainly the fate of those who had been left.”⁷⁵ A large amount of potatoes lay scattered about and he speculates that the Quatomah, not knowing what they were, had simply left them behind. He also says that the group noticed signs of a “severe struggle,” but does not elaborate on what those signs were.⁷⁶ This comment is interesting because the battle between the Quatomah and the landing party, according to Kirkpatrick, took place on June 10, a full fifteen days prior to Roberts and the others arriving on the scene.

At this point, the search party found a discarded journal written by Kirkpatrick, which “gave some clue as to what had taken place.”⁷⁷ Roberts quotes directly from it and almost immediately inconsistencies appear. For example, the first line states, “We arrived at our post on the 8th of June.”⁷⁸ This is incorrect. The men were deposited at Port Orford on June 9. This might normally be dismissed as a simple error. However, Kirkpatrick and the other men were all well aware of what day it was when they landed, particularly in light of their agreement with Tichenor, who had promised to return in fourteen days. It is possible that Roberts fabricated this date as that one day difference becomes highly significant if it led the landing party to abandon the site early, which is what he implies by stating that Tichenor arrived at Port Orford on time.

Kirkpatrick’s journal, as recounted by Roberts, goes on to say that thirty-three Quatomah warriors staged an attack one day after their arrival and during the battle he and his men had discharged the cannon. Fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued until the Quatomah finally gave up

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and retreated, leaving “18 or 20 dead on the field.”⁷⁹ According to Roberts, Kirkpatrick wrote that three of their group had suffered significant arrow wounds during the fighting including himself, who had one “through the neck.”⁸⁰ This is likely another fabrication as Kirkpatrick never mentions having a neck wound in his account to the *Statesman*, or any wound for that matter. He simply says, “There were four of our men wounded,” but does not give any specifics as to whom and in what way. As they were all well enough to travel close to seventy miles through the wilderness, though, it is likely their injuries were not that significant.

After the search party had finished reading through Kirkpatrick’s journal they descended the rocky promontory back down to the beach. At the bottom they noticed an odd-looking patch of sand with several large stones upon it. “It struck us that someone was buried there,” Roberts writes, and grabbing the oars from the whale boat to use as shovels the men began digging until “The dead body of an Indian was found.”⁸¹ The identity of this unfortunate individual is one of the most intriguing aspects of the narrative surrounding Battle Rock. Although Roberts describes him as an Indian it is unclear why he was buried in such an odd location, alone and separate from his fallen comrades. Kirkpatrick never even mentions the man in his account. Decades later, however, he would tell historian Orvil Dodge that he was a shipwrecked Russian sailor, “who had been among the Indians for many years.”⁸²

This leads to the question of whether or not the search party could tell that it was a white man, and if so why Roberts had reported that the body belonged to an Indian. In his account to Dodge, Kirkpatrick describes the man as having “yellow hair and a freckled face.”⁸³ Although he

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Orvil Dodge, *Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties*, 38.

⁸³ Ibid.

had been dead and buried in the sand for two weeks it is likely these distinct, non-Indian characteristics would have still been noticeable. The man also stood out, according to Kirkpatrick, because he was not dressed in Quatomah garb.⁸⁴ If the man did not have black hair or dark skin and was not dressed like an Indian it is unclear why the search party would think that he was one. After all, they were apparently able to discern that the body was not a member of the landing party, which would have been the logical assumption considering his appearance and the nature of the burial.⁸⁵ It is possible that Tichenor and Roberts, believing white on white violence would expose them to more scrutiny, decided it would be better to report that the man was an Indian, and the fact that Kirkpatrick does not reveal this interesting detail until years later suggests that he too may have felt the same way.

After reburying the mysterious body, Roberts says that Tichenor, along with two other men, climbed a nearby hill to search for more clues about what might have happened to the landing party. Although Roberts does not provide the names of the men, it is likely they were the “two others” who had boarded the *Columbia* with Tichenor back in San Francisco.⁸⁶ While the three men were investigating on the hill they supposedly discovered yet another journal that had been discarded, this one providing more details about what had happened. The anonymous author of this journal, according to Roberts, wrote that the landing party “entertained some fears of the Indians, who began to gather along the beach in considerable numbers.”⁸⁷ In response, Kirkpatrick and the others had set up the cannon so as to “rake the passage” up to their camp.⁸⁸ The anonymous author goes on to say that the Quatomah “appeared friendly at first,” and even wanted to trade.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2; see page 12.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

However, when they saw that the *Sea Gull* was leaving the harbor their attitude changed considerably and they became quite “saucy.”⁹⁰ After demanding, unsuccessfully, that the landing party leave the area, the Quatomah walked off into the woods in anger.

According to Roberts, the author of the anonymous journal went on to write that the following morning the men were awoken by the sound of Indians gathering on the beach below. Coming up from the area around the mouth of the Rogue River there were “about 40 of them on the ground at sunup.”⁹¹ This is a different figure than the very specific “thirty-three” Indians given by Kirkpatrick in his journal, and the number increases even more as the anonymous author then states that twelve more Indians “came up the coast in a large canoe” to join the others around a bonfire.⁹² What is interesting is that Kirkpatrick, in his subsequent account to the *Statesman*, gives the exact same numbers as the anonymous author, as opposed to the “thirty-three” he had written in his journal.⁹³ This indicates that he was influenced by Roberts’ account and modified his numbers so they would match.

The anonymous journal then states, again via Roberts, that the Quatomah “held a kind of council of war” while two or three others danced around the fire at a “furious rate, snapping their bowstrings at every turn they made.”⁹⁴ This went on for half an hour during which time even more Quatomah arrived. Soon, they began approaching the rocky promontory and the author claims that “two or three of us went part of the way down the hill and motioned them to keep off, but they were bent for a fight.”⁹⁵ Ignoring the warnings, the Quatomah advanced up the rock, forcing the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

⁹⁴ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

⁹⁵ Ibid.

men to retreat. As they got closer one of the Quatomah, “who appeared to be a leader among them,” grabbed the barrel of one of the men’s rifles and tried to “wrest it from him; they—”⁹⁶ It is here that Roberts says the journal suddenly ended, “the remaining leaves having been without doubt scattered about by the Indians.”⁹⁷ That it supposedly stopped at that exact point seems like a heavy-handed attempt at suspense building. It should also be noted that Kirkpatrick, in his account to Orvil Dodge, revealed that the one who grabbed the rifle barrel was none other than the shipwrecked Russian sailor! This means the highly significant detail of a white man leading the Quatomah was either not mentioned in the anonymous journal—which is unlikely—or Roberts intentionally left it out of his account.

After relating the contents of the anonymous journal, Roberts writes that Tichenor and the rest of the search party found it “useless to remain on shore any longer” and decided to head back to the *Columbia*.⁹⁸ When they were roughly halfway to the ship, a man suddenly appeared back on the beach, “dressed in the clothing of a white man, wearing a California hat, and having a rifle on his back.”⁹⁹ Thinking it was a member of Kirkpatrick’s party they immediately turned the whaleboat around. However, as soon as they did, Roberts writes that the man “started for the woods.”¹⁰⁰ Surprised, the group fired a rifle shot in the man’s direction causing him to fall down on his face, “just as the Indians in the canoe had done.”¹⁰¹ After a few moments, though, he got up and ran into the woods. Roberts writes that this convinced the group that Kirkpatrick’s party must have been “wholly or partially destroyed.”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

At the end of his letter to the newspaper Roberts speculates on what may have happened to the men, and says that they “acted very foolishly and rashly” by abandoning their post. Obviously, this is something that he could not have known, and it is clear that he is building an argument that Tichenor and the Pacific Mail SS Co. are not to blame for whatever may have happened. The question we are left with is how much of Roberts’ account is truth and how much of it is a fabrication? The two discarded journals that the search party supposedly discovered provided Roberts with the perfect narrative device through which he could construct essentially whatever he wanted. The anonymous journal, in particular, seems highly suspicious as it is conveniently free from any association to a specific individual. Even its discovery by Tichenor and his two associates, separate from the rest of the search party, seems to have been designed to insulate it from any scrutiny.

After the *Columbia* had delivered the mail in Oregon, along with Roberts’ account to the newspaper, the steamship traveled back down the coast, arriving in San Francisco on July 1. In his memoirs, Tichenor says that when he related the news of the supposed massacre of the landing party it “caused much feeling” in the city. Capitalizing on this, he quickly printed handbills that not only decried the Port Orford “tragedy,” but simultaneously promoted the gold mining prospects in the region.¹⁰³ Within a few short days, the propaganda campaign had mustered sixty-seven, “desperate bad men,” and under the command of one of his partners, James S. Gamble, the heavily-armed force, bent on retribution, returned to Port Orford—this time to stay.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, on July 9, word reached Portland that the Port Orford landing party, or “Gallant Nine” as they were now being called, were not the victims of an Indian massacre after all.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ Patrick Masterson, *Port Orford, a History*, (Wilsonville, Oregon: Book Partners, 1994), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Oregon Spectator, July 10, 1851, page 3

group had stumbled out of the wilderness alive and well on July 2, and were recovering in the friendly confines of Scottsburg.¹⁰⁶ A few days after their safe return, Kirkpatrick read Roberts account in the newspaper and became upset at what he felt was a poor portrayal of him and the other men.¹⁰⁷ Determined to correct the record, he parted ways with the rest of the group and continued north to Portland, arriving there on July 14.¹⁰⁸ The following day, the *Oregon Statesman* published a letter written by Kirkpatrick in which he stated that since he was the leader of the Port Orford landing party it was his duty to “make a plain statement of our transactions while at that point, and also give the reasons why we left.”¹⁰⁹

A fundamental element of Kirkpatrick’s letter to the *Statesman*—one that cannot be overlooked—is his desire to remain involved in the Port Orford enterprise. He and the other members of the landing party had not been paid for their service. Instead, as was stated earlier, they had been promised “a share in the town.”¹¹⁰ If he diverged too far from the established narrative then he risked alienating himself. This essentially forced him to operate *within* the confines of Roberts’ account. This is evident within the first few lines as Kirkpatrick appears to copy, almost word for word, the anonymous journal that Roberts had said was discovered by Tichenor.

The landing, establishing the camp on top of the rock, positioning the cannon, the fears about the Quatomah—all of the details that were in the journal are exactly the same in Kirkpatrick’s account to the *Statesman*. Even the number of Quatomah, which had been a very

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Webber and Kirkpatrick, *Battle Rock*, 52.

¹⁰⁸ Coincidentally, this is the same day that Tichenor arrived back in Port Orford with the heavily-armed force; see page 19.

¹⁰⁹ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹¹⁰ Webber and Kirkpatrick, *Battle Rock*, 23; see page 9.

specific “thirty-three” in his *own* journal, now matched the much higher figure given in the anonymous one.¹¹¹ And whereas the latter had ended in the dubious cliffhanger of the “Indian” grabbing the barrel of a rifle and trying to pull it away from one of the men, Kirkpatrick now seamlessly picks up the story by saying that another member of the group came to the rescue and struck the man over the hands until he let the rifle go. Enraged at this, Kirkpatrick claims that the Quatomah shot a “volley of arrows” at the landing party before continuing their hostile advance up the narrow ridge.¹¹²

The furious war party was roughly six feet from the mouth of the cannon when Kirkpatrick decided to set it off with a firebrand, instantly “killing some six or eight dead.”¹¹³ It had been packed with two handfuls of one-inch bar lead, creating what must have been a horrifically gruesome scene. In the stunned, blood-splattered aftermath, chaos and confusion ensued, and Kirkpatrick’s men mercilessly took advantage of this with a “discharge from our rifles and pistols.”¹¹⁴ Only three warriors made it through the barrage and into the men’s camp. However, they were quickly knocked down and beaten with rifle butts. When the survivors finally broke and ran, many having hurled themselves off of the rock into the ocean, Kirkpatrick says that they left behind “thirteen dead on the ground.”¹¹⁵ It should be noted that this figure differs from the “18 or 20” written in his journal.¹¹⁶ Although, he then matches Roberts’ account by saying that he later learned from an Indian at the mouth of the Umpqua River that there were “20 killed and 15

¹¹¹ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

¹¹² *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

wounded” in the battle.¹¹⁷ As was stated earlier, Kirkpatrick simply says that “four of our men were wounded,” and he mentions nothing about an arrow wound through his neck.¹¹⁸

Later that afternoon, “a chief came up the beach and made signs that he wanted to come into camp.”¹¹⁹ Once the landing party allowed him to do so, he slowly carried away his dead comrades. Kirkpatrick made signs with the man letting him know “in fourteen days from the time that we arrived there, we would go away again.”¹²⁰ Meaning on June 23, when Tichenor had promised to return, he and his men would leave the area. Of course, this was a lie and Kirkpatrick was simply buying time until reinforcements arrived. He adds that they were not “troubled by them [the Quatomah] any more until the morning of the 15th day.”¹²¹ This means the landing party was still at Port Orford on June 24—one day *after* Roberts claims the *Columbia* arrived on the scene. This is the point where Kirkpatrick, unwilling to be depicted in the press as someone who acted “foolishly and rashly,” breaks from Roberts’ account by claiming he and the others had *not* abandoned their post early.¹²²

While little is known about Kirkpatrick’s life, it is clear he was someone who was very concerned about establishing a particular persona. Years later, a member of the landing party told an interviewer they had appointed him as the leader of the expedition, despite the fact he was only twenty-three years old, because he had repeatedly told them he was a close friend and protégé of Kit Carson, and had extensive “knowledge and experience of Indian cunning and fighting...”¹²³ In an interview of his own, three decades after the Port Orford incident, Kirkpatrick romantically

¹¹⁷ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

¹²³ “Bloody Baptism of Battle Rock,” *The Sunday Oregonian*, January 11, 1903, page 1.

depicts himself as a grand old Indian-fighter who wandered the West and “made it safe for the soldiers to go there.”¹²⁴ Not only does he reference his close friendship with Carson, he also places himself alongside some of the central figures of early Oregon history. Ultimately, it was this fierce attentiveness to his own image that compelled him, perhaps against his better judgement, to refute the timeframe that Roberts had established.

Kirkpatrick continues his account by stating that the Quatomah, having been led to believe the men were leaving on June 23, angrily prepared for another attack on the morning of the 24th. He claims there were “a great many more at the second fight than at the first,” and that roughly 150 warriors had amassed at the base of the rocky promontory.¹²⁵ The threat of the cannon seems to have held them at bay, though, and Kirkpatrick says their chief “could not prevail on them to make a second rush on us.”¹²⁶ Instead, they shot arrows from a distance of three hundred yards, and although many fell into the camp none of men in the landing party “received the slightest injury.”¹²⁷

Despite the unwillingness of the Quatomah to attack again, Kirkpatrick says the men had to make a decision. “We had not more than eight or nine rounds of shot left, and we were surrounded by at least 150 Indians.”¹²⁸ In his view, the only viable option was to “take to the woods and make our way to the habitation of white men.”¹²⁹ Fortune appeared to favor this plan when the majority of the Quatomah suddenly moved off down the beach and built several bonfires at the mouth of a small creek, leaving only a few warriors behind to keep watch. Kirkpatrick and the

¹²⁴ “Far West Experiences,” *The Eutaw Whig and Observer*, March 22, 1883, page 1

¹²⁵ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

other men pretended as if they were preparing for battle and eventually “this movement had the desired effect.”¹³⁰ The few remaining warriors all left and ran down the beach to join the others. Seeing their chance, the landing party quickly descended the rocky promontory and ran off through the woods, “for about five miles,” before heading back out onto the beach.¹³¹ They then, “traveled up the beach,” which implies they were going north, until they ran into a group of thirty warriors, “all armed with bows and arrows and long knives.”¹³² Kirkpatrick claims that he and the other eight men heroically charged at the Indians “and when they saw that we would attack them, they broke for the timber.”¹³³ This somewhat dubious story is suspiciously reminiscent of the *Anabasis*, Xenophon’s famous account of Greek hoplites escaping to safety from behind enemy lines.¹³⁴ The work was extremely popular in antebellum America, particularly during the Mexican War.¹³⁵

After their encounter with the warriors, Kirkpatrick and his men “continued up the coast” for the next two days, alternating between the woods and the beach.¹³⁶ Eventually, they came across a fresh path, “where a great many Indians had trailed up the coast.”¹³⁷ The men followed it for five miles until they reached the mouth of a small creek where it suddenly stopped and turned back again. Kirkpatrick speculates that the Indians “followed us thus far the first night,” and this was where they had given up and gone back home.¹³⁸ Needless to say, this statement is confusing. If the landing party had been travelling for two days how could they have just reached the point where the Indians who were chasing them on the first night had given up and turned around?

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Xen. *Anab.* 1.8.14

¹³⁵ Tim Rood, *American Anabasis: Xenophon and the Idea of America from the Mexican War to Iraq*, (New York: Overlook Press, 2010), 53-72.

¹³⁶ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Kirkpatrick's account gets even more perplexing when he says the group continued "up the beach" for about fifteen miles before they came to "the mouth of the Rogue River."¹³⁹ How is it possible for them to have just arrived at a river that was twenty miles *south* of Port Orford? The logical explanation is that they mistook another river, such as the Coquille, for the Rogue. This is exactly what E.A. Schwartz surmises in his history of the Rogue River War.¹⁴⁰ Stephen Dow Beckham, in his study of the war, does not even speculate he simply changes it to the Coquille.¹⁴¹ The problem with this is that in Roberts' account he quotes the anonymous journal as saying that the Quatomah had come north "from towards the mouth of the Rogue River," which means the men knew exactly where it was located.¹⁴² While this may have simply been a mistake, another intriguing possibility is that the anonymous journal was fabricated by someone who was *not* a member of the landing party.

Assuming it was simply a mistake, Kirkpatrick and the other men arrived at the Coquille River and found two large Indian villages on the opposite bank. "As soon as they saw us," he writes, "they prepared for a fight."¹⁴³ The Indians supposedly lit a bonfire on top of a bluff in preparation for battle, and with "nothing but the river between us," Kirkpatrick says that he and the other men fled back into the woods.¹⁴⁴ They traveled upriver for roughly eight miles, eventually lashing together some old logs to cross to the other side, before quickly making their way up into the mountains. It seems odd that none of the supposedly battle-hungry Indians from the villages had followed the group, but Kirkpatrick never mentions them again.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 34.

¹⁴¹ Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 56.

¹⁴² *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

¹⁴³ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Kirkpatrick continues his account by stating that it had been four days since he and the others had eaten anything other than salmonberries. Why they had not taken any food with them when they left the promontory is another puzzling aspect of his account. According to Roberts, at the very least there was pilot bread and potatoes, and that seems to have been just what was left untouched by the Quatomah.¹⁴⁵ That none of the men thought to throw some food into a sack before running off into the wilderness seems unlikely. Although, it is possible they believed they were closer to a white settlement than they actually were, or perhaps they simply ate everything on their first night in the woods. Regardless, the group was in desperate need of food.

Moving tentatively back down to the beach, they were able to find some mussels, “which revived us some.”¹⁴⁶ Not long after, they arrived at the mouth of a river, thought to be the Coos, and “got among some friendly Indians” who gave the men something to eat.¹⁴⁷ Kirkpatrick writes that they then “struck out across the sand hills” and waded through a swamp before arriving on the following morning at the mouth of the Umpqua River—eight days after abandoning the rocky promontory.¹⁴⁸ When they stumbled into Umpqua City, the settlers apparently greeted the men with cheers and a “hearty shake of the hand.”¹⁴⁹ Not long after, they traveled upriver to the town of Scottsburg, where they then rested for a few days. It was here that Kirkpatrick read Roberts’ account in the newspaper and then left the group for Portland.

Toward the end of his letter to the *Statesman*, Kirkpatrick directly addresses the account given by Roberts. “I submit these facts to the decision of our fellow citizens,” he writes, “to know whether we acted foolishly and rashly, as has been stated by a certain gentleman [Roberts] in a

¹⁴⁵ *The Weekly Times*, Portland, July 3, 1851, page 2

¹⁴⁶ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹⁴⁷ Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 34

¹⁴⁸ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

letter to the *Oregonian*, or not.”¹⁵⁰ He then refutes the claim that Tichenor returned on time and says, quite remarkably, “As dead men make no contradictions, this gentleman had smoothed the matter over by making an incorrect statement of the time so as to lay all blame upon us.”¹⁵¹ He quickly follows this up by writing that he is the “last man to lay any blame on Captain Tichenor,” and that he is aware of the circumstances that detained him in San Francisco.¹⁵² It is possible that Kirkpatrick was unaware of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company’s involvement in the enterprise, instead believing that Tichenor was the only one needing appeasement. Perhaps his youthful sense of bravado would not allow him to see that Roberts was much more than an impartial witness, or perhaps he was simply naïve. Perhaps he knew exactly who Roberts was and what he was doing, but decided that protecting his honor was worth the risk of being ousted from Port Orford.

Whatever the case may be, after praising Tichenor one final time, Kirkpatrick gives a lengthy and somewhat awkward sales pitch of Port Orford, painting it as a veritable Eden just waiting to be settled. Not only did it have the “richest soil” and “finest timber” he had ever seen, he makes sure to add that he and his men saw traces of both coal and gold in the hills.¹⁵³ “It will in all probability become an important point,” he writes.¹⁵⁴ This last section of the letter is clearly meant to ingratiate himself to Tichenor and promote his continued involvement in the endeavor, despite his public refutation of Roberts’ timeframe. Whether he was successful or not is unclear. Only one member of the landing party, Cyrus Hedden, appears in later reports surrounding the enterprise.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Kirkpatrick's belief that Port Orford would become an "important point" was accurate. Although, probably not in the way he had imagined. It never became the next San Francisco, as Tichenor and his partners had hoped. Instead, it became a nexus point in the conquest and subjugation of indigenous groups in southwestern Oregon. Over the next several years, the "desperate bad men" that Tichenor had recruited in San Francisco continued to flow into the region—many operating out of Port Orford—and this contingent played a fundamental role in the outbreak of the so-called Rogue River War.¹⁵⁵ In June of 1856, after five years of immense heartache and bloodshed, the steamship *Columbia* returned once again to Port Orford, this time to transport the 1,500 surviving southern Oregon Indians to the Siletz Reservation.¹⁵⁶

During this turbulent period, the rocky promontory upon which the Port Orford landing party had camped was transformed into a kind of sacred space known as "Battle Rock"—a name it still possesses today. In the spring of 1857, a mixed-blood leader of the "Rogue River Indians" named Enos Thomas was taken down to the beach and "hanged on historical Battle Rock, where his body was buried."¹⁵⁷ This was something that was apparently done at least twice throughout the war, indicating the rock's symbolic importance.¹⁵⁸ In articles and early histories, writers frequently refer to the rock as having undergone a "bloody baptism," which along with the executions implies that it had an altar-like status to Euro-Americans in the region.¹⁵⁹ In the 1920's the body of Erastus Summers, one of the members of the Port Orford landing party, was disinterred

¹⁵⁵ Tichenor, *Reminiscences*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Wilkinson, *The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 159.

¹⁵⁷ Dodge, *Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties*, 367.

¹⁵⁸ Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters*, 166.

¹⁵⁹ J.M. Kirkpatrick, and Orvil Dodge, *The Heroes of Battle Rock: Or, The Miners' Reward*, (Privately Printed, 1904), 4; "Bloody Baptism of Battle Rock," *The Sunday Oregonian*, January 11, 1903, page 1;

by his descendants and reburied on top of the rock where it remains today, presumably near the bodies of Enos and the others who were executed.

Despite the rock's cultural importance, for decades the only narrative surrounding its celebrated "bloody baptism," were the two letters provided by Roberts and Kirkpatrick. Then, in 1871, Anson Dart, a former Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon, sent a letter to the chairman of the Bureau of Indian Commissioners in which he provided "some curious revelations" about the Battle Rock incident.¹⁶⁰ Dart, who was sent to the area in the immediate aftermath, claimed that the so-called "battle" had actually been "an atrocious massacre of peaceable and friendly Indians."¹⁶¹ He goes on to say that the Quatomah had helped Kirkpatrick and the other men carry supplies to the top of the rock, after which they were told to come back just before dark "to get their pay."¹⁶² When the Quatomah returned they climbed up the promontory's narrow passage and into a brutal ambush.

Dart's account is filled with inconsistencies, and he conflates specific details from different events. For example, he writes that "some sixty or more" men were in the landing party, which is obviously incorrect. However, that *is* the number of men that Tichenor returned with on August 14.¹⁶³ Still, despite its flaws, Dart's account is intriguing, and two years later it was published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* under the headline "Early White Treachery."¹⁶⁴ One week after it appeared in the newspaper, a mysterious letter was sent to the editor by someone who referred to themselves simply as "Pioneer."¹⁶⁵ This individual claimed they had been at the landing, "and

¹⁶⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1873, page 7.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ See page 19.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 26, 1873, page 3.

assisted in carrying things from the boat.”¹⁶⁶ Although he may have been a crew member aboard the *Sea Gull*, the author later refers to “our party,” which implies that he was one of the nine who stayed.¹⁶⁷ Angrily refuting the details of Dart’s letter, the man scoffs at the idea that “a party of only nine men would go to such a remote and unknown place as early as 1851 and commence war with a tribe of Indians...”¹⁶⁸ The argument he makes is valid, and it seems unlikely that Kirkpatrick and the other men would have purposefully instigated an attack on the Quatomah knowing that they would be alone and without reinforcements for two weeks.

Twenty five years after these two letters were printed in the *Chronicle*, Kirkpatrick reappeared and wrote a second, much more detailed account of the Port Orford landing for historian Orvil Dodge. Entitled *The Heroes of Battle Rock*, this glossy, streamlined narrative “corrected” the inconsistencies in the two original accounts, synthesizing them into a cohesive whole.¹⁶⁹ This version became the “official” story of Battle Rock and has been used by historians up to the present day.¹⁷⁰ One interesting aspect of the text is its somewhat negative depiction of Tichenor. The claims that the men were not provided with sufficient weaponry and his insistence that the Quatomah were “perfectly friendly” first appear in this later version. It seems that Kirkpatrick, now around 70 years old, was no longer concerned about Port Orford. Despite this added color, the story is the exact same byproduct of the Roberts’ account. Whatever truth may have been lurking beneath the lines of the original letters is buried even deeper in this second, highly romanticized version.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Dodge, *Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties*, 33-50.

¹⁷⁰ Schwartz, Beckham, and Douthit all use Kirkpatrick’s second account in their works.

While we will never know exactly what happened on top of the rocky promontory, there are two lesser-known accounts that may provide a glimpse. In 1886, one of the members of the Port Orford landing party, John Egan, made an appearance at a meeting of Indian war veterans and spoke briefly about Battle Rock. According to him, on the day of the “battle” a large group of Quatomah had angrily climbed the rocky promontory wanting to get into the camp. Egan says that he and a few others had tried to stop them but “the pressure from behind was too strong...”¹⁷¹ This implies they had their hands on the Quatomah in the front, something they would not have done if they had truly been hostile. Egan goes on to say that they were “snatching at our clothes, provisions, and other property” until another member of the landing party “came forward with an armful of clothes, from the tents, and threw them among the Indians.”¹⁷² Again, this is not something that someone would do if a hostile war party was shooting arrows at them. This action of throwing the shirts caused the scrambling Quatomah to come at the men “with a rush,” and they responded by firing the cannon.¹⁷³

Finally, there is a statement delivered by a controversial figure named Elwood Alfred Towner, “Attorney for Oregon Indians.”¹⁷⁴ Towner was a fervent anti-Semite and supporter of Adolf Hitler who traveled around the Pacific Northwest in the 1930s delivering lectures as “Chief Red Cloud.” Wearing a full headdress and white deerskin outfit decorated with thunderbirds and swastikas, Towner warned audiences about the Jewish threat to America. He had grown up on the Siletz Reservation and conducted a small law practice in Portland representing various Native American causes.¹⁷⁵ In 1932, Towner wrote a letter to the Myrtle Point Herald providing the

¹⁷¹ *The Oregonian*, February 21, 1886, page 5.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Myrtle Point Herald*, May 26, 1932, page 1

¹⁷⁵ Eckard V. Toy, Jr., “Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies, and Personalities in the 1930s,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Oct., 1989, Vol. 80, No. 4 (Oct., 1989), 144.

“Indian point of view” regarding Battle Rock. He states that he was “raised among the Indian people whose ancestors lived on Rogue River...” and the story was part of their oral tradition.¹⁷⁶ Towner claims that when the Quatomah had learned that the *Sea Gull* was in the harbor at Port Orford, they formed a “welcoming or reception committee,” as they had done in the past when Tichenor had come to visit them. When they arrived on the beach, however, the *Sea Gull* had already departed and the nine men left behind were unfamiliar with “Indians, their language or customs.”¹⁷⁷ The Quatomah, according to Towner, lit a large bonfire and performed a welcoming ceremony for the men, which may have been the so-called “war dance” described in Kirkpatrick’s account.¹⁷⁸ Afterwards, they went up the rocky promontory to exchange gifts, “and through fear and the excitement of the occasion,” were attacked by the men.¹⁷⁹

When these two accounts are taken together, a more plausible picture emerges of a horrific massacre brought about by fear and misunderstanding. This was *not* an accident, however. Kirkpatrick and the other members of the landing party came to Port Orford expecting trouble—and they found it. While it was not his intention, Egan’s description of what happened that day humanizes the Quatomah, and is bolstered by the later statement from Towner. Unlike the traditional narrative, which has clouded the truth for over 150 years, these final details are compatible with earlier, documented depictions of the Quatomah. When Towner mentions the “welcoming committee” going down to the beach to greet Kirkpatrick and the others one is

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¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ *Oregon Statesman*, July 15, 1851, page 2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid; Emphasis mine.

reminded of that bright spring day in 1792, when they paddled out to Vancouver's ship and excitedly climbed aboard saying "my friends, my friends..."¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Menzies, *Journal*, 108-110.

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