

Kintpuash (Captain Jack)

By Louis Heller

Kintpuash (also spelled Keintpoos, Keiintoposes), better known as Captain Jack, was a Modoc Indian chief during the 1860s and early 1870s. In a desperate attempt to maintain his people's independence, Kintpuash led several Modoc bands in an unsuccessful war of resistance known to whites as the Modoc War. He was hanged with three other Modoc leaders in 1873 after being found guilty of war crimes, the only Indian combatants to be convicted as war criminals in American history.

Kintpuash was born around 1837 in the Lost River village of Wa'Chamshwash. He signed the 1864 treaty between the Modocs and the United States, an agreement he later repudiated. He moved his band onto the Klamath Reservation as required by the treaty, but he soon returned to the Lost River when it became clear that the Klamath would not let the Modocs, their long time rivals, live in peace.

In the spring of 1872, federal troops arrived in southern Oregon to force the Modocs to return to the Klamath Reservation, a proposition the Modocs steadfastly refused, demanding instead a reservation along the Lost River. The conflict soon led to a five-month stand-off in the lava fields around Tule Lake and the deaths of General Edward R. Canby and another member of a peace commission at the hands of Modoc warriors.

Kintpuash was initially against the scheme to kill the peace commissioners, who were meeting with the Modocs to negotiate an end to the war, but consented when it became clear to him that the other warriors supported the action. When the time came, he was the first to open fire, shooting the stunned general in the face.

Upon Kintpuash's capture, a military tribunal found him and several other Modocs guilty of war crimes, sentencing them to death. Kintpuash and three other Modoc leaders were executed on October 3, 1873. Most of his people, including his widow and his sister, were forced to relocate to Oklahoma, where many of their descendants remain to this day.

To some, Kintpuash was a villain who deserved to hang for what one settler called the "foul butchery" of General Canby; to others, however, he was a hero who died defending his people and his homeland.

Further Reading: Foster, Doug. "Imperfect Justice: The Modoc War Crimes Trial of 1873." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 100, 1999: 246-287.

Murray, Keith. *The Modocs and Their War*. Norman, Okla., 1958.

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