

fore the Modocs got them. Hasbrouck was cursing his men into good order.

All the while the Modocs were advancing rapidly, confident of a massacre. Now they were within a few hundred yards, firing at will into the American camp. Some soldiers panicked, and three more fell. There was nowhere to run. The Americans finally formed a skirmish line and fired at the Modocs, who were still two hundred yards away from the camp. Then the Modocs took cover, intending to pick off one after another of the Americans during the rest of a long day.

Suddenly a sergeant from G Troop jumped up—Thomas Kelley, let his name be recorded—and shouted, "God damn it, let's charge." So the Americans did. The surprised Modocs then began to retreat until the Americans were shooting at them from the cover they had just left.

Hardin, the same teenaged private who had joshed with the doomed Sherwood, was in the middle of this charge. A friend next to him fell. He stooped to help, only to be told, "Go on Charley, I'm done for." He did.

Hardin thought he was finished a few moments later when he was making his way up a ridge only to be confronted by a Modoc just above him with a rifle. Hardin sprawled backward, dropping his rifle and stunned by what he thought was a bullet to his head, then realizing that he had been hit by the muzzle. The Modoc, out of ammunition, was using the rifle as a club. Hardin now grabbed the muzzle and pulled the Modoc down the incline. The Modoc quickly recovered his feet and pulled out a knife, but by then Hardin had his rifle back and shot him dead.

Largerel, who had been watching the charge from cover, now got carried away. He jumped up, waived his hat, and yelled, "Give 'em hell, boys. Don't let them get away this time."

At that moment, as if on cue, the Warm Springs scouts opened up. They had gotten behind the Modocs. Now in danger of being surrounded and massacred, the Modocs retreated through the line the scouts had set up, killing two and wounding one. But as they were retreating Ellen's Man was mortally wounded, the first Modoc leader to die during the war.

Although they suffered no other significant casualties, the Modoc retreat became a rout. The advancing soldiers captured dozens of Modoc horses and pack animals as well as Modoc powder and ammuni-



tion. All this was subsequently given to the Warm Springs scouts as a reward for their role. The scouts also took possession of a Modoc corpse, presumably the one for which Hardin was responsible. They amused themselves with it by dragging it behind a horse until it was unidentifiable.

When word got back to Davis of the battle at Sorass Lake, he was delighted. It had been, he thought, "a very square fight, and [we] whipped the Modocs for the first time."

Davis, of course, was wrong by any ordinary measure. The Modocs had suffered only two deaths—and the Americans had suffered ten casualties, five of them dead or dying. The chief Modoc losses were in their supplies. A more judicious assessment of the battle came from Lieutenant Boyle, who considered it a draw.

Nonetheless, Davis was right and Boyle was wrong because a normal assessment of victory and defeat did not apply to this war. The Modocs had, in fact, suffered a decisive defeat at Sorass Lake. They would never recover.

The Modocs could not survive without victories to resupply themselves. At Sorass Lake, instead of securing new supplies, they lost much of their own. This loss was far more important than the casualties they inflicted. In the Modoc camp, it was obvious that they would not be an effective fighting force much longer. The Battle of Sorass Lake achieved what the Battle of Lost River had been intended to achieve. It broke the Modocs.

This was admitted in a bitter debate that now occurred over who was to blame for the death of Ellen's Man. First, however, the fallen warrior had to be given a traditional Modoc cremation. Normally a corpse would be taken to the regular family cremation site, but that was not practical in time of war.

The morning after his death Ellen's Man was laid out, head to the west, in his best clothes. The body was washed, eyes closed, hands unclenched, arms folded on chest. All this was done by a woman not of his family, and for this she was compensated.

They wanted to build up a large pyre, but did not because they were afraid to give away their location. Much of the traditional ritual had to