153 years ago...

The Bear River Massacre (Massacre at Boa Ogoi)
by Sydney Burek, American Indian / Alaska Native SEPM

The Northwest Band of Shoshone were camped at Boa Ogoi, their winter camp on the Bear River, near present day Preston, Idaho.

“Along the riverbanks on the icy morning of January 29, 1863, Chief Sagwitch rose early. A white friend of the Shoshone had come to tell them that Col. Connor was coming to the camp to “get the guilty parties.” Chief Sagwitch had expected a visit for just that purpose and on that January morning, as he realized the steam drifting from the mountains was getting lower, he realized too that the soldiers were at last there.

As he called to the others who were still asleep, men tumbled from their tepees and grabbed their weapons. In the frenzy, Sagwitch yelled for the men not to be the first to shoot. As his granddaughter Mae Parry recounts in her story *Massacre at Boa Ogoi*, "He thought that perhaps this military man was a wise and just man. He thought the Colonel would ask for the guilty men, whom he would immediately have handed over."

The encounter did not happen the way that Chief Sagwitch thought it would. The Colonel asked no questions. The regiment commenced firing, and the Indians were being “slaughtered like wild rabbits.” Seeing themselves vastly outnumbered, the Shoshone began jumping into the freezing river in an attempt to escape. No one was spared men, women, nor children.

One survivor was Anzee Chee. She was chased by soldiers, but was able to hide under a bank that overhung the river. She suffered wounds in the shoulder and chest and the loss of her baby, who was tossed into the icy water to be drowned.

Chief Bear Hunter was known as a leader by the soldiers. He was kicked and tortured, and finally, because he would not cry out, had a fire hot rifle bayonet run through his ears. It proved to be painfully true that arrows were no match for rifles...

Throughout the battle, the wounded urged their chief to escape. After surviving two of his horses in battle, Sagwitch finally escaped on a third. Another Shoshone escaped with him by grasping the horse’s tail as they rode across a frozen section of the river.

One incident tells of Yeager Timbimboo (or Da boo zee, meaning cottontail rabbit), who was the son of Chief Sagwitch. Only twelve years old, Yeager was caught up in the bloodshed, looking for shelter as bullets whizzed past him. He spied a grass teepee so full of people that it was actually moving. He entered the teepee and there he found his...
grandmother. She was afraid that soon the teepee would go up in flames, but she had a plan. She and the boy would go out among the dead and be very still, not making a sound or, as she instructed him, “not even open your eyes.”

Surrounded by the dead, they remained still on the intensely cold ground all day until Yeager, whose curiosity got the best of him, raised his head and looked down the gun barrel of a soldier who saw that he was still alive. Yeager told later that the soldier raised his gun and lowered it two times while looking into his eyes. The soldier finally lowered the gun and, perhaps weary from the blood spilled there, walked away.

Another of the Chief’s sons escaped with a girlfriend. She rode behind him on his horse as they raced for the surrounding hills. He made it, but she died from the bullets that found their mark.

Tale after tale of that day’s intimate sorrow, rage and courage became the saddest chapters of the Northwestern Shoshone history. Scenes of desperation, the courage to survive, and the loss of the dream that they would find justice at the hands of their perpetrators also fell upon them that day. ²

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**The Warm Dance of the Shoshone**

Many bands of the Shoshone would gather at Boa Ogoi, on the Bear River, each year during the winter solstice to perform the Warm Dance. “The dance takes the form of a line proceeding at a slow pace in a circle. It is performed for all living things, who have difficulty surviving the winter. It is a prayer for good health and food, a prayer that the melting snow might produce plants for the coming year.” ³ A rendition of the “Warm Dance Song” can be heard at the following site, https://soundcloud.com/toypurina/shoshone-warm-dance.

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**Site of Massacre Identified**

“Archeologists surveying acreage along the Bear River, just north of the town of Preston, say there are “compelling” signs that it’s the site of an event whose gruesomeness is matched only by its obscurity: the largest single massacre of

Native Americans in US history.”

“Traces of the destroyed Shoshone village have been all but obliterated by generations of infrastructure, from a narrow-gauge railroad laid down through the site in the late 1880s, to a canal dredged decades later, to a modern federal highway that runs nearby.” ⁴ To read the complete article go to: http://westerndigs.org/site-of-deadliest-native-american-massacre-identified-in-idaho/