



This 1863 Massacre Was the Deadliest Slaughter of Native Americans in U.S. History. Now, the Shoshone Are Restoring the Site of the Attack

Amid mounting tensions between white settlers and the Shoshone, Union soldiers killed an estimated 250 to 500 Shoshone. Today, the Indigenous nation is working to bring “nature back into balance”

Richard Schiffman, Smithsonian Magazine, July 28, 2026



The site of the Bear River Massacre, which claimed the lives of an estimated 250 to 500 Shoshone on January 29, 1863 NB / TRAN via Alamy

The Bear River Massacre, which took place in a valley in what is now southeast Idaho on January 29, 1863, is often described as the worst attack on Native Americans in United States history.

Troops from a Union Army regiment slaughtered an estimated 250 to 500 men, women and children in a matter of hours. The death toll is believed to be higher than better-known massacres like Sand Creek in

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1864 and Wounded Knee in 1890. Yet the attack on the Shoshone community is little remembered today.

Violence against Native Americans began soon after European settlers first landed on North American shores. Initially, it was the settlers themselves who clashed with Native people in disputes over land, but later, it was the U.S. government that directly attacked Indigenous tribes and forcibly removed people from their ancestral homelands.



An early 20th-century depiction of the Battle of Little Bighorn Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

The best-known battle of the American Indian Wars took place on June 25-26, 1876, when Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and some 750 soldiers from the Seventh Cavalry Regiment faced off against 2,000 Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne warriors on the high plains near Montana's Little Bighorn River. Within an hour, Custer and all 210 of the men fighting directly alongside him were dead. Fourteen years later, the Seventh Cavalry massacred more than 250 Lakota at Wounded Knee in South



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Dakota, possibly in retribution for the losses incurred during Custer's Last Stand.

The 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre has become indelibly etched in America's historical memory. Comparatively, few have heard of the Bear River Massacre, which took place 27 years prior. That may be in part because the attack happened in 1863, when public attention was focused on the Civil War. Bear River attracted limited press coverage; later historians paid scant attention to the massacre, showing little interest in examining the event from the Native American point of view.

That pattern of neglect began to change in the late 20th century, when a new crop of books about the American West presented a more even-handed treatment of Native history. In 1985, for example, Utah historian Brigham D.

Madsen published *Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre*. More recently, *The Bear River Massacre: A Shoshone History*, a 2019 book by Darren Parry, former chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, provided an Indigenous perspective on the massacre.



Northern Shoshone gathered at Fort Washakie in Wyoming in 1892 Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

The nomadic Shoshone people once roamed lands spanning modern-day Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, Nevada and California. The Eastern Shoshone developed more of a Plains horse culture, following vast herds of American bison that they depended on for food and clothing. The Western Shoshone, who lived in the desert basin and rangelands of Nevada and California, survived by gathering wild plants, hunting and fishing.

The tribe's name is derived from the Shoshone word *sosoni*, meaning high-growing grasses. Some neighboring Native groups called the Shoshone the "Grass House People," after their traditional grass thatch dwellings. The Shoshone themselves prefer the name Newe, or "People."

"The Bear River Massacre does not define us today," Darren tells *Smithsonian* magazine. "The loss has made us stronger, more resilient. It's a horrific thing. I can't even imagine what my ancestors suffered. But playing the victim here and becoming bitter is not the way to



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honor our ancestors. We honor them by telling their story.”

Darren initially heard about the massacre from his grandmother, Mae Timbimboo Parry, who’d received a firsthand account of it from her grandfather. As a child, he survived the attack by playing dead.



A plaque honoring the victims of the Bear River Massacre NB / TRAN via Alamy

Mae was a product of the Indian boarding school system, whose guiding philosophy was “kill the Indian to save the child.” Separated from their families at such institutions, Indigenous children were punished if they spoke their Native language or even referred to their people and culture. But Mae quietly resisted. She became fluent in Shoshone and wrote down the stories she’d heard from tribal elders at any early age. Her account is one of the main sources cited in her grandson’s book.

What exactly precipitated the 1863 massacre? Clashes between Mormon settlers and Native Americans were not infrequent at the time, and tensions only increased as new arrivals drove the Shoshone from their lands in greater numbers.

At first, Mormon leader Brigham Young encouraged peaceful relations with the local Indigenous population. He directed his followers to “feed them rather than fight them.” But settler appropriation of Shoshone lands soon destroyed tribal hunting and fishing grounds. The Shoshone began poaching cattle and stealing food to survive, leading the once-sympathetic Young and his fellow Mormons to view them as beggars and thieves.

On one occasion, a skirmish between the two groups resulted in the deaths of two white men and two Native Americans, angering white authorities and settlers. None of the individuals involved belonged to the Northwestern Shoshone, “but all were tarred with the same brush,” according to a website created by tribal historians.



Interpretive signs at the Bear River Massacre Site Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

The U.S. Army tasked the Third Regiment California Volunteer Infantry, under the leadership of Colonel Patrick Edward Connor, with stopping the Shoshone. An



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immigrant from Ireland's County Kerry, Connor had served in the Mexican-American War and would later lead a punitive campaign against the Sioux, the Cheyenne and the Arapaho.

The colonel viewed the Shoshone's actions as "treasonous," the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum notes on its website. He carried warrants for the arrests of three tribal leaders and announced that he had no intention of taking prisoners.



*Shoshone Chief Sagwitch and spouse
Beawoachee Public domain via Wikimedia
Commons*

On January 28, 1863—the day before the massacre—the *Deseret News*, a publication founded by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spoke for many Mormons when it published an editorial stating that “with ordinary good luck, the volunteers will ‘wipe them out.’” The newspaper added, “If Col. Connor be successful in reaching that bastard class of humans who play with



the lives of the peaceable and law-abiding citizens in this way, we shall be pleased to acknowledge our obligations.”

It wasn't long before these grim wishes were fulfilled. On January 29, the Shoshone waited for the soldiers in a protected valley with natural hot springs, where the tribal bands would gather to rejuvenate themselves in the winter. They “knew that Colonel Connor was coming; they did not know that the colonel was coming to kill them all,” Darren writes in his book.

The day of the massacre was bitterly cold, with the land covered in several feet of snow. The American soldiers arrived early in the morning, when some of the Shoshone were still sleeping. Tribal members had hoped that Connor would ask them to peacefully surrender their leaders before resorting to violence, but the soldiers started firing without saying a word. The Shoshone possessed few rifles and soon ran out of the limited ammunition they had. Although they continued to fight with tomahawks, spears, and bows and arrows, they could do little to stop the carnage that ensued.

People jumped into the freezing river in a desperate attempt to escape. According to Mae's writings, survivor Anzee Chee hid with several other women under a riverbank. Fearing that her crying baby would give away their location, she felt that she had no choice but to drown the child in the icy water. Some, like Mae's grandfather, Yeager Timbimboo, the 12-year-old son of



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Shoshone Chief Sagwitch, saved themselves by playing dead.

By the early afternoon, hundreds of bodies were strewn across the snowy landscape. The worst slaughter of noncombatants on U.S. soil was over. Far from facing consequences for the massacre, Connor instead received a promotion to brigadier general for his actions.

The Bear River Battleground was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1990, only to be renamed the Bear River Massacre Site in 1993, after tribal members objected to the original nomenclature.

“When you attack a sleeping village of Indian men, women and children, you can’t call that a battle,” Brad Parry, Darren’s cousin and the vice chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, tells *Smithsonian*.

In 2018, Brad, with backing from the tribe, purchased 350 acres of the massacre site, making it the largest area owned by the Northwestern Shoshone. He was put in charge of an ambitious restoration project on the land, for which he won the inaugural Schnitzer Prize of the West this year.

The team removed invasive species, like the water-hogging Russian olive tree, and planted native species, including willows, milkweed, cedar, Indian tobacco and chokecherries. The Bear River, which had been channelized and dammed for



agriculture, was released from its enclosures and allowed to flow freely. Beavers are being brought back to the land to recreate wetlands.

The Bear River is the Great Salt Lake’s largest tributary. By restoring the river, the group hopes to return 13,000 acre-feet of water to the Great Salt Lake annually, helping the dwindling lake recover some of its former size.

The project’s broader goal isn’t restoring the desert lake but reviving a culture.

“We want this to be a place where our kids grow up and learn about our history, the plants and medicines that we used, how to grow Indian tobacco, the chokecherry jam we used to make, how we used sagebrush and cedar for ceremony, our ancient way of life,” Brad says. “The settlers honored their ancestors by building monuments and putting up statues. Our way of honoring them is in the dirt, by bringing nature back into balance. The massacre site is now a place of healing. It is a living statement that we’re still here.”

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Sean of the South Concert



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Sean of the South

NPS News Release Date: July 29, 2026

HODGENVILLE, Ky. — As the nation commemorates America's 250th anniversary, Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park invites visitors to explore the enduring ideals of liberty, equality and self-government through its Freedom 250 Connections event series. On Saturday, Sept. 26, nationally acclaimed writer and performer Sean Dietrich, better known as "Sean of the South," will bring those themes to life through an evening of music, storytelling and humor. The program begins at 5:30 p.m. EDT at the park's Birthplace Unit.

"As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary, we have an opportunity to reflect on the ideals of liberty, equality and self-government that shaped America's founding and that Abraham Lincoln worked to preserve," said **Superintendent Joshua Manley**. "Sean Dietrich's performance brings those enduring ideals to life through music and storytelling, offering visitors a

meaningful way to connect with America's story."

Sean Dietrich is a nationally recognized columnist, humorist, musician and storyteller whose work celebrates the people and traditions of the American South. His writing has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Southern Living*, *Garden & Gun* and *Reader's Digest*, and has been featured on *The Today Show*. He is the author of 18 books, has written more than 4,000 newspaper columns, hosts the popular *Sean of the South* podcast and regularly performs his one-man show for audiences across the country.

Through music, humor and heartfelt storytelling, Dietrich celebrates the traditions and experiences that have shaped generations of Americans. Many of the songs featured during the performance are songs Abraham Lincoln would have known during his lifetime, offering visitors a window into the cultural world that influenced one of the nation's most significant leaders and the ideals he carried forward.

Accessible parking for the event will be at the Birthplace Visitor Center Parking Lot. All other attendees will park at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, where complimentary shuttle service will transport visitors to the Birthplace Unit. Shuttle services will begin from the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School parking lot the day of the concert at 3:00 p.m. EDT.

Visitors are encouraged to bring lawn chairs,



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blankets and hand-carried coolers. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited within the park.

The event is free and open to the public; however, advance registration is required. Reserve tickets through Eventbrite at: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/connections-an-evening-with-sean-of-the-south-tickets-1992848002020?aff=oddtcreator&keep_tld=true

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park's Freedom 250 Connections series is part of the park's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. Throughout 2026, the park is offering programs and events that explore the connections between Abraham Lincoln's life and the enduring ideals of the American Revolution, including liberty, equality, self-government and democratic participation. Visitors are invited to discover how Lincoln helped preserve and advance those founding principles for future generations.

The National Park Service is helping lead the nation's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of American independence. Across the country, national parks are hosting hundreds of programs, events and exhibits in support of Executive Order 14189, which calls for a celebration worthy of this historic milestone. These experiences invite the public to reflect on our country's remarkable journey and connect with the people, places and stories that shaped the nation.

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From Slavery to Soldier: The Story Behind Two Iconic Civil War Photographs

Robert S. Davis | August 3, 2026 |
Blue and Gray Education Society



Hubbard D. Pryor, before and during the Civil War | NPS

Two of the most frequently reproduced images from the American Civil War depict Hubbard D. Pryor first seated in the rags he wore as an enslaved man, then dressed in the uniform of a private in the 44th United States Colored Infantry (USCI). He shoulders a musket, ready to help end the old order.

War Department General Order No. 143, issued on May 22, 1863, authorized the recruitment of Black soldiers. During the



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war, the Union Army enlisted, drafted, impressed, or otherwise acquired 178,975 African American soldiers, who ultimately comprised approximately 9 to 12 percent of the Federal Army. They served under 7,773 white officers, nearly all of whom came from existing regiments.

The 44th United States Colored Troops Regiment was formed at Chattanooga, Tennessee, on April 7, 1864. Pryor had escaped in late 1863 from the plantation of Haden Prior near Cedartown, Georgia, and reached Union lines by March 7, 1864. One month later, he enlisted in Company A.

The regiment was commanded by Prussian-born Colonel Lewis Johnson, formerly a captain in the Tenth Indiana Volunteer Infantry. A veteran of Rich Mountain, Mill Springs, Corinth, Perryville, Chickamauga, and Missionary Ridge, Johnson had been wounded twice before assuming command of the 44th.



"Come and Join Us Brothers" recruitment broadside encouraging African American men to enlist in the United States Colored Troops after



the Union authorized Black military service in 1863. | public domain

The regiment arrived at Dalton, Georgia, on September 14, 1864, to help defend the Western & Atlantic Railroad. During the fighting there, the men repelled a Confederate cavalry charge on October 15, 1864, then pursued the retreating horsemen as nearby white Union soldiers waved their hats and cheered.

Later that month, General John Bell Hood's Confederate army surrounded Dalton as it began its campaign into Tennessee.

Johnson and his 751 men, supported by two heavy guns, faced an overwhelming Confederate force of some 25,000 soldiers with two battalions of 30 guns each. Fearing a massacre, Johnson surrendered. It was the largest surrender of African American soldiers during the Civil War. As promised, the Confederates released the regiment's white officers but stripped the Black enlisted men of their shoes, overcoats, hats, and other possessions. Approximately 250 members of the 44th were eventually returned to their enslavers, while another 350—including Pryor—were forced into labor rebuilding Confederate railroads.

Some men not in Dalton when it fell joined the released Colonel Johnson and some new recruits, in time for the Battle of Nashville on December 15-16, 1864. Of the 227 men of the 44th engaged in the battle, 9 were killed and 43 were wounded, while two officers and 37 enlisted men were reported



missing. The 44th mustered out on April 30, 1866.

After the war, Pryor returned to Cedartown, where he married, became a widower, remarried, and fathered four children. He later moved to Robertson County, Texas, where he died on August 16, 1890.

Colonel Lewis Johnson received a brevet promotion to brigadier general on March 13, 1865, for meritorious service. He remained in the Regular Army, later commanding “Buffalo soldiers” until he retired as a major in 1895.

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Trust Testifies in Support of American Battlefield Protection Program Amendments Act

news@battlefields.org, July 30, 2026

(Washington, D.C.) — Last week, American Battlefield Trust President David Duncan provided testimony to the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on National Parks to testify in favor of the American Battlefield Protection Program Amendments Act of 2025 (S. 3524).

Soon thereafter, Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) met with Trust President David Duncan and Trustee Barbara Stewart to discuss the bill – and the urgent need to protect historic landscapes against ever-increasing development pressures.

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The bipartisan legislation was introduced last December by Senators Dave McCormick (R-PA) and Tim Kaine (D-VA). The House companion bill, sponsored by U.S. Representatives Jen Kiggans (R-VA) and Seth Magaziner (D-RI), co-chairs of the Congressional Battlefields Caucus, passed the House by a 404-14 margin in June.

Senator Bill Cassidy with David Duncan and Barbara Stewart



Trust President David Duncan and Trustee Barbara Stewart meet with Senator Bill Cassidy. American Battlefield Trust

The bill seeks to reauthorize the hugely successful American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) which includes the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants (BLAG) initiative, administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Since FY1999, this public-private partnership program has been the primary mechanism for saving historic battlefields outside National Park Service boundaries.

The BLAG Program has been utilized in 20 states to preserve nearly 40,000 acres of



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hallowed ground from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War, acquiring properties from willing sellers on the private sector real estate market. Its matching-grants formula, which encourages private sector and state investment in battlefield preservation, is the key to its success. In fact, it is often referenced as a model for cooperative conservation partnerships between the federal government and the private sector

S. 3524 is bipartisan legislation that would reauthorize ABPP at its current level of \$20 million per year through 2035, plus create efficiencies in two smaller grant programs for interpretation and restoration of America's battlefields.

It also directs NPS to investigate the feasibility of expanding eligibility for BLAG grants to battlefields associated with the French and Indian War and the Mexican-American War. The process is aided because a Battlefield Preservation Planning Grant awarded Michigan State University and the American Battlefield Trust completed a landmark preservation and mapping study in 2020. All that would be necessary is internal NPS review of the results, determination that these battlefields meet NPS criteria for preservation of nationally and regionally significant historic landscapes, and formal department approval of the expansion.

This is a modest, natural continuation of the program's growth from its origins as a Civil War-specific effort. It would add just 29 battlefields (17 from the Mexican-American



War and 12 from the French and Indian War, several of which overlap with each other or with Revolutionary War battlefield footprints.) to the 626 battlefields currently eligible for BLAG awards.

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Inside John Brown's Secret Headquarters in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania



John Brown's headquarters Chambersburg, Pennsylvania | courtesy of Franklin County Historical Society

Douglas R. Cubbison | July 31, 2026 | Blue and Gray Education Society

John Brown was an insurgent and abolitionist famous for his raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), on October 16–18, 1859. However, John Brown's preparation for that raid—including its financing, planning, assistance, equipment, and training—was organized not from Harpers Ferry but from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, only 11 miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line.



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The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania passed the landmark Gradual Abolition Act in 1780, becoming the first U.S. state to legislate the gradual end of slavery. As a result, over time, numerous Black families, neighborhoods, and communities developed throughout Pennsylvania. Cities such as Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Pittsburgh became vital hubs of the Underground Railroad and the radical abolitionist movement. John Brown recognized the difficulties of preparing for his raid in Maryland and Virginia, but he also could obtain relatively easy assistance in Pennsylvania—specifically in Chambersburg.



*John Brown's bedroom in Chambersburg |
courtesy of Franklin County Historical Society*

A newcomer calling himself Isaac Smith, a businessman with a brand-new white beard, and his associate, John Henri Kagi, arrived in Chambersburg in June 1859 seeking a boarding house. Widow Mary Ritner, whose home at 225 East King Street was only two blocks from the Cumberland Valley Railroad station, rented them two small bedrooms and a meeting space.

In 1859, the Cumberland Valley Railroad was a strategic transportation hub, providing a crucial rail connection between the North and the South. During the summer, Isaac Smith used his new base of operations to receive, distribute, and transport heavy shipments of weapons disguised as mining equipment.

Everyone in Chambersburg believed the two men were simple businessmen. Isaac Smith also even taught Sunday School. In reality, he and his companion had fought in Kansas, where Brown had vowed to “consecrate his life to the destruction of slavery.” Isaac Smith was actually John Brown—better known as “Osawatimie Brown”—who used the Cumberland Valley Railroad to import arms and meet with abolitionist supporters and financial backers.

Among those Brown met was Frederick Douglass, one of the most influential African Americans of the 19th century. A formerly enslaved man, Douglass was a gifted orator, writer, abolitionist, and social reformer. He stayed with Henry Watson, a Black barber in Chambersburg, who arranged a meeting in a quarry west of town where the participants could remain concealed. There, Brown and Kagi



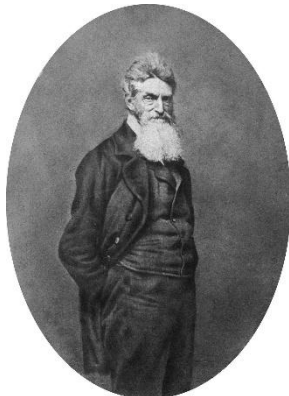
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explained their planned raid on Harpers Ferry, but Douglass declined to support it.

Using Chambersburg as their base of operations, Brown and Kagi shipped 198 breech-loading .52-caliber Sharps carbines, .52-caliber lead bullets propelled by 50 grains of black powder with nitrated linen or skin cartridges, and 950 pikes—intended for enslaved people who had not been trained to use firearms—from Chambersburg to the Kennedy Farm, approximately 45 miles away and 4 miles from Harpers Ferry.

Brown left Chambersburg on October 9, and Kagi followed on October 10. Both joined the remainder of the group at the Kennedy Farm before launching the raid on Harpers Ferry.

Brown's boarding house survived the Confederate burning of Chambersburg on July 30, 1864. In 1973, the Franklin County Redevelopment Authority sold the property to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, which declined to preserve it. Fortunately, the Franklin County Historical Society acquired the building, assuring its preservation.



John Brown in 1859 | public domain

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Confederate Colonel Robert Beckham: The Artillery Officer Missing at Nashville

Colonel Robert Beckham was mortally wounded two weeks before the Battle of Nashville, depriving Hood's army of one of its most capable and experienced artillery commanders on the eve of the campaign's climactic battle. Here's how it happened.

Alex Norikane | July 17, 2026 | Blue and Gray Education Society



Colonel Robert F. Beckham | public domain

Robert Franklin Beckham was born at Auburn, a large plantation in Culpeper



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County, Virginia, on May 6, 1837. After graduating from West Point on July 1, 1859, in the same class as future Confederate cavalry general Joseph Wheeler, he joined the Corps of Engineers and helped survey the Great Lakes. As sectional tensions mounted, however, Beckham resigned his U.S. commission on May 3, 1861, returned to Virginia, and accepted a commission as a lieutenant in the Confederate artillery.

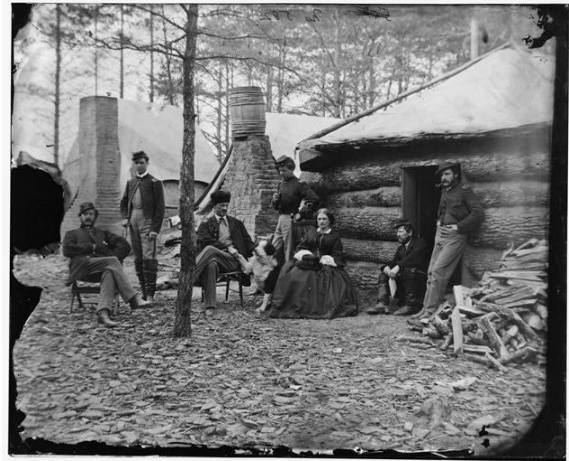
Beckham saw his first combat that July when his battery fought at First Bull Run. Then-Colonel J.E.B. Stuart personally observed Beckham in action and later praised him, writing that his guns “made great havoc in the enemy’s ranks and finally put them in full retreat.”

Beckham was soon promoted to captain and joined the staff of Major General Gustavus W. Smith, serving throughout the Peninsula Campaign. On August 16, 1862, he was promoted to major and placed in charge of Richmond’s ordnance bureau, serving as its chief for the next seven long months. That assignment ended abruptly after Major John Pelham, Stuart’s celebrated chief of horse artillery, was mortally wounded near Culpeper on March 17, 1863. Remembering the young officer he had admired at First Bull Run, Stuart personally requested Beckham to succeed Pelham, which he did on April 8.

After blunting a Union attack at Kelly’s Ford, Virginia, on April 14, Beckham and his four new batteries joined the Army of Northern Virginia near Chancellorsville,



where they joined Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s famous and successful flank march on May 2, 1863. Beckham’s batteries participated in the surprise attack in the late afternoon of the same day, bombarding Union positions near Chancellorsville until 8 p.m., when his battalion was withdrawn.



Headquarters officers of Stuart's Horse Artillery at Brandy Station, Virginia, in February 1864. Beckham commanded the battalion before joining Hood's Army of Tennessee. | LOC

June found Beckham home again, as Stuart’s cavalry camped in Culpeper County. Following a grand review over the fields of Auburn the day before, Beckham and his men were resting on June 9 when Federal horsemen appeared mere minutes from their cannon. The cavalry had nearly reached Beckham’s startled cannoneers before Confederate reinforcements arrived, beginning the Battle of Brandy Station. Stuart later wrote:

“The conduct of the Horse Artillery, under that daring and efficient officer, Maj. R. F. Beckham, deserves the highest praise. Not



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one piece was ever in the hands of the enemy, though at times the cannoneers had to fight pistol and sword in hand in its defense.”

Beckham’s gallantry did not go unnoticed. In February 1864, he transferred west with Lieutenant General John Bell Hood to the Army of Tennessee, where he was promoted to colonel on March 1. Beckham ably led the artillery of Hood’s new corps into the Atlanta Campaign, earning further praise at New Hope Church, where his artillery “did great execution in the enemy’s ranks.” When Hood assumed command of the Army of Tennessee on July 25, Beckham joined him, becoming chief of the army’s artillery, overseeing 47 batteries.



Colonel Robert F. Beckham's headstone | courtesy of Hal Litchford



Following the fall of Atlanta, Beckham was relieved as chief of the army's artillery and returned to Hood’s former corps, now commanded by Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee. In November 1864, while directing the corps's 36 cannon during operations around Columbia, Tennessee, Beckham was mortally wounded when flying rock splinters pierced his forehead. After being evacuated from the field, he “lingered in great agony” before dying on December 5, 1864, at Ashwood. He was only 27 years old.

Lee eulogized Beckham in his post-campaign report:

“The gallant and accomplished soldier, Col. R. F. Beckham, commanding the artillery regiment of my corps, was mortally wounded while industriously and fearlessly directing the artillery firing against the enemy. He was one of the truest and best officers in the service.”

Beckham was buried in St. John’s Cemetery in Columbia, a long way from his native Virginia—not unlike his horse artillery predecessor, John Pelham, who suffered a similarly fatal head wound and died in Virginia, far from his native Alabama.

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TSA stops Alabama traveler for Civil War-era cannonballs in luggage

By J.D. Simkins, Military Times
Aug 3, 2026, 01:49 PM



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One of the cannonballs TSA officers discovered in a checked bag at Alabama's Gulf Shores International Airport. (TSA)

A bag belonging to a traveler tripped TSA alarms on July 18 after officers discovered Civil War-era cannonballs in the individual's luggage, the first cannon-related mishap since JPMorgan's polarizing legal proceedings.

Roll Tide.

The inert cannonballs, which were — naturally — wrapped in paper towels, were discovered during the baggage screening process at Alabama's Gulf Shores International Airport and later determined by police to have been stolen from the nearby coastal stronghold Fort Morgan.

"My first thought was, 'I couldn't see a fuse and need to get some help quick,'" TSA officer Justin Dupree recalled in a release. "I couldn't see the entire item but was scared I might have been holding a live explosive."

Dupree noted the antique artillery projectiles ranged in size, with the largest comparable to a grapefruit.

"I had never seen anything quite this unique," Dupree said. "I've seen inert grenades and training munitions but never an Indiana Jones-esque stolen artifact-type situation."

A TSA explosives specialist and the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office were subsequently notified and determined that the cannonballs posed no threat.

Law enforcement investigating the incident stated the passenger claimed to be unaware of how the projectiles were acquired. The cannonballs were later returned to Fort Morgan, the release added.

Passenger attempts to transport illegal items, including outlandish weaponry, through the screening process are, of course, nothing new.

In a more glaring example from 2019, a Florida man traveling through Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley International Airport set off alarms after his bag was found to contain a disassembled rocket-propelled grenade.

The individual was subsequently taken into an inspection area, where he told airport security he was under the impression he could bring the checked RPG on the plane, CBS Philadelphia reported.



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Inspection of the weapon itself revealed that the launcher was not in working order, and the grenade was a realistic replica.

The items were confiscated by security, and, miraculously, the individual boarded his flight on time.

Observation Post is the Military Times one-stop shop for all things off-duty. Stories may reflect author observations.

About J.D. Simkins

J.D. Simkins is Editor-in-Chief of Military Times and Defense News, and a Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq War.

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