



By Gerald Hawkins

When Chivington returned to Denver in mid-62, he received a hero's welcome, was promoted colonel of his regiment and made commander of the Military District of Colorado. However, his friend, Governor William Gilpin, was not there to congratulate him for his achievements at Glorieta Pass.¹ John Evans had replaced him. What had happened during his absence? In July 1861, fearing an imminent Confederate invasion of Colorado and eager to meet the pressing demands of Colonel Canby in New Mexico, W. Gilpin had requested Washington the permission to recruit Federal troops in Colorado Territory. The Government flatly refused, probably unaware of the gravity of the military situation in that remote part of the American West. Despite this, Gilpin took the initiative to raise a regiment of volunteers, the 1st Colorado. Unfortunately, as he did not have the necessary funds to organize this force, he resorted to extra-legal means. He issued drafts against the Government, in the hope that the Federal Treasury would later reimburse them. As a result, Gilpin gathered the tidy sum of \$375,000, which he immediately spent on arming and equipping his new regiment. In any event, he had acted unlawfully, which earned him the wrath of his fellow citizens and that of Washington. Gilpin tried to convince his superiors of the necessity and usefulness of this loan, but President Lincoln found his conduct unacceptable and sacked him after a

¹ During the battle of Glorieta Pass, New Mexico, in April 1862, while fighting was raging between the Confederate forces of General Henry Sibley and those of US General Slough, Major John Chivington of the 1st Colorado Volunteers accidentally discovered the location of the Confederate supply train near Johnson's Ranch. His forces descended the slope of Apache Canyon and then drove off or captured the small Confederate guard. Chivington ordered the supply wagons burned and the horses and mules slaughtered. He then returned to Slough's main force to find it rapidly falling back. The Confederates had militarily won the battle, but because of Chivington action, they had no supplies to sustain their advance. Chivington had completely reversed the outcome of the battle. Sibley's men reluctantly retreated to Texas and never again threatened New Mexico.

near unanimous vote of Congress. As to the debt incurred by the Governor, the Treasury eventually paid it to the great relief of the Coloradoans.

Who was John Milton Chivington? Born into a family of Ohio farmers in 1821, he assumed the responsibility of managing the family farm with his older brothers following the premature death of his father in 1826. His schooling was thus rudimentary. Burning with the desire to emerge socially, he left his family to operate a small sawmill in Ohio and married in 1844. Barely religious during his youth, he was attracted by the Methodist religion in the early 1840s, when he was about twenty years old. Ordained in 1844, he then began a long career as minister. The tasks that the diocese conferred on him required challenge. Totally committed, he moved with his family to Illinois in 1848, then to Missouri the next year. Frontier preacher, Chivington created congregations, taught the Gospel, oversaw the building of churches and even acted as a law enforcement officer.

Chivington's hatred of slavery and his inflamed abolitionist speeches earned him serious troubles in Missouri. In 1856, pro-slavery members of his congregation sent him a threatening letter, ordering him to suspend his Sunday sermons. When several of these signatories came to church on the following Sunday, Chivington ascended the pulpit with a bible and two pistols, then declared: "*By the grace of God and these two revolvers, I am going to preach here today,*" which earned him the sobriquet of "Fighting Parson".² Shortly after this incident, in order to break away from the turmoil that prevailed in Missouri and bloody Kansas, his superiors sent Chivington to Omaha, Nebraska, where he remained with his family until 1860. Named honorary president of the Methodist district of the Rocky Mountains, he moved to Denver to organize the First Methodist Sunday School. When the Civil War broke out, Governor Gilpin of Colorado Territory offered Fighting Parson a commission as a chaplain, but he declined this "praying" commission and requested a "fighting" position instead, explaining to his good friend that "*I feel compelled to strike a blow in person for the destruction of human slavery...*".³

Doctor John Evans was an ambitious man who had made his fortune in Illinois and then entered politics. President Lincoln appointed him second Governor of Colorado Territory on March 31, 1862. He and his friend, the Reverend John Chivington, founded the Territory's first college, the Colorado Seminary, which later became the University of Denver. Evans' dream was to have Colorado linked to the East by the transcontinental railway line to ensure the prosperity of its population and ultimately transform the Territory into a State. The Indians, however, stalled his plan by blocking the route proposed by the Union Pacific Railroad through the Great Plains. His efforts to eradicate them from these vast lands only managed to initiate a savage war along the trails used by the pioneers and settlers who migrated west.

Frictions with the Plains Indians originated in large part after the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851, by which the Cheyenne and Arapaho were granted about 44 million acres of land stretching from the North Platte River to the Arkansas River. In return for allowing the construction of roads and a free pass to travelers, federal representatives guaranteed the Native Americans supplies and protection from erratic settlement. Despite their signing of the treaty in good faith, these Indians found with time that the whites were no longer content to cross their land during their westward advance, as was the case of the gold miners in 1849. The intruders were now farmers and ranchers who

² Colonel John M. Chivington, Internet.

³ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

were appropriating their traditional hunting grounds, cultivating their land and letting their cattle graze on the prairies once reserved for the buffalo. The first outbreak of hostilities occurred in 1856 after an incident between some Cheyenne and soldiers at Fort Laramie. The matter was settled in 1857 when Colonel E. Sumner of the 1st Cavalry Regiment routed a large body of warriors on the Republican River and confiscated their annual allowance of supplies.

In November 1858, the discovery of gold in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, then part of Kansas Territory, brought on the Pikes Peak Gold Rush, generating a stampede of miners and migrants across Cheyenne and Arapaho lands. The pioneers competed for resources and this time, many decided to stay and build towns instead of moving on. Colorado officials pressured the federal authorities into redefining the extent of Indian lands in the Territory, and in the fall of 1860, A.B. Greenwood, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, reported that *“there is no alternative to providing for them in this manner but to exterminate them, which the dictates of justice and humanity alike forbid”*.⁴ He left his office for Bent’s New Fort along the Arkansas River to negotiate a new pact with the Indians. In the meantime, the War Department had built an army post on the site of this fort, where the negotiations between the parties took place.⁵ The Cheyenne chiefs included Black Kettle, White Antelope, Lean Bear, Little Wolf and Tall Bear; the main Arapaho chiefs were Little Raven, Storm, Shave-Head, Big Mouth and Left Hand. On February 18, 1861, six chiefs of the Southern Cheyenne and four of the Arapaho signed the Treaty of Fort Wise with the United States, which compelled them to cede most of their lands in return for an annual payment of \$30,000 during fifteen years as well as the building of a grist mill, saw mill, and schools. The treaty was ratified by Congress and proclaimed by President Lincoln on December 5, 1861. The white settlers of Colorado now legally owned the lands stolen from the Indians!

The new reserve, less than four million acres or one-thirteenth the size of the land defined by the Fort Laramie Treaty, was located in eastern Colorado, between the Arkansas River and Sand Creek. Some groups of Cheyenne, including the Dog Soldiers, one of their six military societies that had evolved in the early 1830s, were angry with the chiefs who had signed the deal. They disavowed the treaty and refused to abide by its constraints. Continuing to live and hunt in the rich buffalo lands of eastern Colorado and western Kansas, they nevertheless became increasingly belligerent as the tide of white migration crossed their lands. Tensions were high particularly in the Smoky Hill River country of Kansas, where the whites had opened a new trail to the gold fields. The Cheyenne who opposed the treaty felt that a small minority of the chiefs had signed it

⁴ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 8.

⁵ William Wells Bent (1809-1869) was a trader and rancher in the American West. He also acted as a mediator and translator among the Cheyenne and other Indian tribes. With his brothers, Bent established a trade business along the Santa Fe Trail. In the early 1830s, he built an adobe fort, called Bent’s Fort, along the Arkansas River in present-day Colorado, where furs, horses and other goods were traded for food and other household goods. Bent negotiated peace among the many Plains tribes north and south of the Arkansas River, as well as between the Indians and the United States government. In 1835, he married Owl Woman, the daughter of White Thunder, a Cheyenne chief and medicine man. Together they had four children: Mary, Robert, George and Julia. Bent was accepted into the Cheyenne tribe and became a sub-chief. In the 1840s, according to the Cheyenne custom for successful men, Bent took Owl Woman’s sisters, Yellow Woman and Island, as secondary wives. He had a fifth child, Charles, with Yellow Woman. As the demand for furs declined, business dropped at the fort. An 1849 cholera epidemic among the Cheyenne took the lives of half the tribe, including Bent’s mother-in-law. Bent then wanted to build a new fort closer to the winter grounds of many tribes. Unable to agree on a selling price for the old fort, he blew it up. In 1853, he established a stone fort in the Big Timbers area. Six years later, the US government purchased the new “Bent’s Fort”, renamed it Fort Wise and remodeled it for military use. The fort was later renamed Fort Lyon. Robert Bent was forced by Chivington to guide him to the Sand Creek reservation. Bent’s other children Charles, Julie and George were inside Black Kettle’s village during Chivington’s attack. All survived the massacre.

without the consent or approval of the rest of the tribe and that they had not understood what they had signed, having been bribed by a generous distribution of gifts. The whites, however, argued that the treaty was a “solemn obligation” and the Indians who refused to abide by it were considered hostile.

The Indian leaders quickly realized they had been duped and refused to settle in the designated reserve where starvation awaited their people. They continued to hunt buffalo as they pleased. Some Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes had also not signed the treaty and had no intention to do so. The Cheyenne were however restless and they rescinded their ancestral wars against the Ute and Pawnee tribes. The tranquility of the winter of 1862 coincided with a relative lull of activities of the Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors. Their ponies were exhausted and carrying out warfare in freezing weather was not their favorite pastime. The old settlers were familiar with the habits of the Indians: they always made peace in winter to obtain blankets and food from the U.S. Government. This serenity disappeared with the approach of spring. As early as of end-December 1862, the hungry Cheyenne repeatedly stole cattle and other supplies from ranches and farms and attacked stagecoaches and depots. Governor Evans ordered Colonel Chivington’s 1st Colorado Cavalry in their pursuit. However, the results of days or weeks of patrols to track the hostiles were usually frustrating since it proved difficult to find and distinguish the good from the bad Indians responsible for the depredations. The raids on the settlers’ properties and emigrant trains thus continued and steadily increased with time.

The first serious Indian troubles began to develop in early 1863. The Ute were once again raiding western Colorado. They had been at war with the Cheyenne for years and the warriors of both tribes periodically frightened white settlements during their expeditions. Upon their return, they terrified them even more, screaming and brandishing the bloody scalps of their victims. At the same time, small bands of warriors carried out raids along the Platte River, stealing cattle, supplies and horses. However, these remained mostly secluded acts. Chivington ordered five companies of the 1st Colorado under Major E. Wynkoop to saddle up and find them. After an extended search, Wynkoop returned empty-handed to Denver. Following another incursion, some citizens of Weld County near the mouth of the Cache la Poudre River complained that the Cheyenne had attacked their homes and stolen all their possessions. Lieutenant Hawkins and twenty men were sent in pursuit of the Indians. After riding for three days, Hawkins came across an Indian village headed by Red Horse. The chief claimed his innocence and referred the lieutenant to another band. Short of supplies, Hawkins was forced to return to camp without achieving anything.

Despite these isolated raids, the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes remained peaceful but the state of affairs remained tense. The Indians were in a destitute condition, hungry and disease-ridden. On March 27, 1863, a delegation of chiefs from the Cheyenne, Comanche, Arapaho, Kiowa and Caddo tribes visited Washington, D. C., where they met President Lincoln. Representing the Cheyenne were War Bonnet, Standing in the Water, and Lean Bear. Though the meeting apparently served to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the Union and the Indian chiefs,⁶ the situation on the plains was worsening daily, and by summer was threatening to degenerate into a full blown war.

⁶ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 25. According to the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, March 28, 1863, the primary purpose of this visit was to offset the overtures being made by the Confederates in attempts to stir up the Plains tribes into a general war against the settlements in Union-controlled Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado.

In May 1863, Governor Evans was informed that the Cheyenne and Arapaho were holding secret meetings with the aim of uniting their tribes to drive the white men from their lands. Believing that a general uprising of all the Indian tribes was imminent, many settlers harassed Evans, urging him to immediately isolate them and force them back to their reservation. Recalling the Sioux uprising in Minnesota in 1862, Evans was determined to forestall this Indian confederacy. He immediately sent emissaries throughout the Cheyenne and Arapaho territory, inviting their chiefs to participate in a new council of peace, on September 29, on the Arikaree River. Cautious and finding a multitude of excuses, the Indians refused the invitation while informing Evans that they considered all treaties with the whites as trickery. In addition, they were furious at the recent killing of a drunken Cheyenne by a sentinel of Fort Larned, Kansas.

Nine days later, Evans managed to meet with Chief Roman Nose and some minor chiefs of the Arapaho tribes who alleged their friendship but declared that the Cheyenne, Sioux and Kiowa were on the warpath. Roman Nose refused any pledge with the whites. Meanwhile, Major Scott J. Anthony, the commander of Fort Lyon, had reported in mid-September that the Kiowa and Comanche had raided settlements near Cimarron Crossing, on the Arkansas River. Three wagon trains had arrived at the fort without their loads of provisions and a trainmaster said they had been robbed by Indians, who had taken some white prisoners with them. Toward the end of September, Anthony led a detachment down the river as far as Fort Larned. He visited the camps of the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Caddo, and Arapaho, who all alleged their friendship but said that the Sioux were trying to unite the tribes for major raids along the Platte and Arkansas Rivers. They added that the Arapaho under Little Raven, Left Hand and Neva were destitute and hungry, and already moving toward Fort Lyon with two thousand warriors. But despite their irritation and intimidation, the majority of the Cheyenne and Arapaho spent the summer and autumn of 1863 hunting buffalo. With the exception of minor forays by local bands, the Indians seemed peaceful.

During the winter of 1863, Samuel E. Colley, the official agent for the Cheyenne and Arapaho, reported that there were neither buffalo nor game of any kind within two hundred miles of the reservation and that “*most of the depredations committed by them [the Indians] are from starvation. It is hard to make them understand that they have no right to take from them that have, when in a starving condition*”.⁷ Major Anthony was less compassionate about the welfare of the tribes. He wrote: “*The Indians are all very destitute this season, and the government will be compelled to subsist them to a great extent, or allow them to starve to death, which would probably be much the easier way of disposing of them*”.⁸

War with the Cheyenne erupted in the spring of 1864, but not as anticipated by Evans, nor as a concerted attack by an alliance of the Plains tribes. Hostilities began after cattle thefts by warriors were reported and Chivington ordered his cavalry out to capture the culprits. These punitive expeditions led to bitter conflicts with the Indians, which were fueled by a deadly course of action or “war of extermination” by the Colorado troops.⁹

On April 12, 1864, a first clash occurred between a company of mounted troops under Lieutenant Dunn, 1st Colorado Cavalry, and a small band of Cheyenne. This affair, which took place three miles from Fremont’s Orchard on the South Platte River,

⁷ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 35.

⁸ *Ibid* p. 35.

⁹ *Ibid* p. 36.

was later pinpointed by Black Kettle and White Antelope as the beginning of the war. On April 11, a rancher named Ripley came into Camp Sanborn, on the Platte trail, alleging that Indians were stealing stock along Bijou Creek, tearing down telegraph lines and forcing people to flee from their ranches along the creek. Early next day, Dunn and forty men galloped out of camp with orders to pursue the Indians, disarm them, and recover the stock. Ripley accompanied them as a guide. Dunn scouted the country along the Platte River to its junction with the Bijou River. Finding no sign of Indians, he turned toward Bijou Ranch where he picked up a trail. Following it until reaching the South Platte River, he sighted a column of smoke in the distance. Dunn halted some three miles above Fremont's Orchard and allowed the horses to water. During this break, his force spotted a party of fifteen to twenty Indians crossing the river about a mile upstream. Another smaller party of Indians was seen driving a herd of horses toward the bluffs north of the Platte River. Dunn sent Ripley and a soldier across the river to have a look at the stock. When they returned, Ripley claimed that they were indeed the stolen animals. He also informed the lieutenant that the main body of Cheyenne was preparing for a fight. Dunn immediately formed his command into a line and approached to within 500 yards of the Indians. He then dismounted and walked in front of his troops to talk to them. After a while, one of the warriors rode forward to shake hands with him and then the rest of the band advanced and began shaking hands with the dismounted soldiers. At this point Dunn demanded that they turn over the stolen stock and disarm. But to separate an Indian from his weapon was inconceivable. When Dunn reached out to take the gun of a warrior, his move was considered a violation of friendship and a signal for a fight. The Indians commenced running and firing at the soldiers who quickly returned fire. An engagement ensued, the soldiers pursuing the enemy some fifteen miles. The action lasted about one-half hour after which the Indians retreated into the bluffs. Four of Dunn's men were wounded while he claimed having killed eight or ten redskins and wounding twelve or fifteen other. Upon receiving Dunn's report on the clash, Chivington immediately wired orders to Lieutenant Hawkins at Camp Collins, on the banks of the Cache la Poudre River (near present-day Laporte), urging him to send out a strong detachment to intercept the Indians and instructing him to *"be sure you have the right ones, and then kill them"*.¹⁰

On April 26, Major Jacob Downing received information that a band of Cheyenne warriors had stolen horses from a ranch along the Platte River. The Colorado Cavalry tracked the Indians twenty-five miles toward the Republican River where they found eleven tepees recently abandoned. Scouts reported that the Indian trail led further south toward the river. In the early morning of the 27th, the 1st Colorado troopers came across a Cheyenne camp in a canyon near Cedar Bluffs, sixty miles from American Ranch (near the present-day town of Sterling). Downing immediately ordered three companies to dismount and they began fighting on foot. After an exchange of fire the Indian warriors retreated into a canyon. During about an hour, the soldiers apparently killed some twenty-five of them and wounded thirty or forty more. Since ammunition was running low, Downing withdrew his forces and headed back to camp with some hundred captured Indian ponies. One soldier was killed and one wounded during the action. Downing reported, *"Though I think we have punished them pretty severely in this affair, yet I believe now it is but the commencement of war with this tribe, which must result in exterminating them"*.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid p. 43.

¹¹ Ibid p. 46.

While Dunn and Downing were tracking the Indian bands along the South Platte River, another punitive operation was on its way against the Cheyenne marauding west of Denver. It was commanded by Lieutenant George S. Eayre of McLain's Independent Battery of Colorado Volunteer Artillery. On April 7, 1864, Chivington ordered Eayre to pursue the Indians who had reportedly stolen cattle from government contractors. Taking the field on April 8 with fifty-four men and two twelve-pounder howitzers, Eayre set out from Denver and moved south. On April 13, he reached Sand Creek where he camped. While exploring the creek on the next day, he hit an Indian trail that he followed till the Republican River. Here, one of his scouts reported an Indian village a mile ahead. Dispatching two men to inquire about the stolen cattle, one of them rode back informing the lieutenant that a large band of warriors was heading towards him. After a while, seeing nothing coming, Eayre cautiously proceeded to the village only to discover that the Indians had abandoned it. After putting the torch to the tepees, buffalo hides and food stocks, the column resumed its course northwestward. Two days later, Eayre came across another deserted village fifteen miles further, which he also destroyed. With no Indians to be found and low on supplies, he returned to Denver.

Resupplied with fresh provisions and new wagons, Eayre was in the field again on April 24, determined to chastise the Cheyenne raiding along the Republican River. On May 16, he was about 150 miles southeast of Denver with his command scattered near the Smoky Hills. The cavalry rode a mile ahead, the artillery following in the center and the wagons trailing behind with no rearguard. Seizing this unique opportunity, the Cheyenne attacked the column with apparently some 400 warriors. After a short encounter, the Colorado troops managed to drive the Indians from the field. The Cheyenne lost three chiefs, Lean Bear among them, and twenty-five warrior killed. Eayre reported four men killed and three wounded. He claimed that the Indians attacked first, and while it is unclear who actually started the fighting, Chivington had nevertheless ordered Eayre to kill Indians. Major Wynkoop stated in an affidavit that: "*Sergeant Fribbley was approached by Lean Bear, and accompanied by him into our column, leaving his warriors at some distance. A short time after Lean Bear reached our command he was killed, and fire opened upon his band*".¹² This report is in line with the account of Chief Wolf, a participant in the battle: "*A number of us mounted our horses and followed Lean Bear, the chief, out to meet the soldiers. We rode up on a hill and saw the soldiers coming in four groups with cannon drawn by horses. When we saw the soldiers all formed in line, we did not want to fight. Lean Bear, the chief, told us to stay behind him while he went forward to show his papers from Washington which would tell the soldiers we were friendly. The officer was in front of the foe. Lean Bear had a medal on his breast given him at the time the Cheyenne visited Washington in 1862 [1863]. He rode out to meet the officer, some of the Indians riding behind him. When they were twenty or thirty feet from the officer, he called out an order and the soldiers all fired together. Lean Bear and Star were shot, and fell from their ponies. As they lay on the ground the soldiers rode forward and shot them again*".¹³

In summary, during a month's campaigning in the spring of 1864, Chivington's troops had fought three encounters with the Cheyenne, destroyed their villages and killed some of their people, including peaceful Chief Lean Bear. It now became impossible for Black Kettle and other chiefs to control the Cheyenne warriors any longer. In retaliation, the Dog Soldiers carried out ferocious raids, most of them in Kansas and along the Platte River. In Colorado some people held Chivington

¹² Ibid p. 51.

¹³ Ibid p. 52.

responsible for stirring up an Indian war, but most sided with Evans, convinced that the Cheyenne were plotting to unite with other tribes to oust the whites from their lands.

In the meantime, Chivington had requested permission from the War Department to send the 1st Colorado on a raid into Texas. General Samuel Curtis, his superior, was seduced by the idea and proposed that the colonel take his troops farther down the Arkansas River for a summer campaign against the Confederate forces there. So far the Indians had been rather quiet in Kansas and Colorado and no one anticipated real trouble from them. Governor Evans took the opposite view. He had been warned by an agent that the Cheyenne were angry over their recent encounters with the whites and had formed an alliance with the Kiowa and Comanche. On May 28, he wrote to General Curtis: *“That they are in strong force on the plains I have no doubt and if the U. S. troops are withdrawn I feel confident that they will wipe out our sparse settlements in spite of any home force we could muster against them ... Unless a force can be sent out to chastise this combination severely and at once the delay will cost us a long and bloody war and the loss of a great many lives, with untold amounts of property. Our lines of communication, our main dependence for subsistence out here, will be plundered and the trains will be driven off the route in consequence of these dangers”*.¹⁴ In response Curtis changed his mind and ordered Chivington to remain in Colorado.

However, General Curtis, an experienced soldier, suspected Evans of dramatizing the situation. He sent his inspector-general, Major T.I. McKenny, to see for himself. After investigations, the latter first found that no general Indian uprising had taken place and secondly, if there was a brewing storm, *“it was the fault of the white scouting parties that are roaming over the country, who do not know one tribe from another and who kill anything in the shape of an Indian”*.¹⁵ The war was nevertheless to break out sooner than McKenny anticipated. Several days before the transmission of his report to Curtis, on June 11, a group of Arapaho had massacred a rancher by the name of Nathan Hungate, his wife and their two daughters. Settlers brought their mutilated bodies back to Denver and displayed them before an outraged and panicking crowd. Evans decided that the time was ripe to declare war on the Indian tribes. On June 17, he issued a proclamation to the “Friendly Indians of the Plains”: *“Agents, interpreters, and traders will inform the friendly Indians of the plains that some members of their tribes have gone to war with the white people. They steal stock and run it off, hoping to escape detection and punishment. In some instances they have attacked and killed soldiers and murdered peaceable citizens. For this the Great Father is angry, and will certainly hunt them out and punish them, but he does not want to injure those who remain friendly to the whites. He desires to protect and take care of them. For this purpose I direct that all friendly Indians keep away from those who are at war, and go to places of safety ... [where] provisions will be given them ... The object of this is to prevent friendly Indians from being killed through mistake ... The war on hostile Indians will be continued until they are all effectually subdued”*.¹⁶ His scheme was however too little too late since there were virtually no peaceful Indians left on the plains.

In late July, 1864, an incident involved Captain J. W. Parmetar, the commander of Fort Larned, Kansas. The fort was a favorite place for the Indians because supplies were often issued there and it was near the buffalo hunting grounds. In addition, the fort’s sutler kept a good supply of whisky on hand, which the Indians either purchased

¹⁴ Ibid p. 57.

¹⁵ Joseph A. Jr., *War on the Frontier* p. 124.

¹⁶ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* pp. 62-63.

with hides or through prostitution of their women to soldiers and settlers. One evening, the Kiowa under Chief Satanta sent some of their women into the fort to hold a dance and distract the attention of the soldiers. While this was going on, warriors stampeded the post's horses while the women disappeared into the night. During the confusion, Satanta let off an arrow in the arm of a sentry. Later, a group of Southern Arapaho led by Chief Left Hand, a long time friend of the whites, appeared before the fort raising a white flag. The enraged soldiers welcomed them with canon fire, forcing the Indians to flee. General Robert B. Mitchell, commanding the district of Nebraska, was at the origin of another hitch with the Indians. Calling upon Spotted Tail and Bad Wound, two peaceful Sioux chiefs, he required them to stay away from the Platte Valley hunting grounds, whereas these lands had always been theirs. The Indians nevertheless ignored these orders and continued to hunt as they saw fit. Mitchell then sent his troops to dislodge them.

Like a powder train, the Indian tribes began to break loose with the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sioux, Kiowa, and Comanche smoking the war pipe. The confrontation that Governor Evans had artfully encouraged had now erupted and could no longer be controlled. Toward the end of July and during August, wild Indian bands raided the Santa Fe Trail, the communities along the Arkansas River and several places in Kansas, in particular those along the Saline, Solomon and Republican Rivers. Near the Platte River and its tributary leading to Denver, the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho attacked stagecoaches and wagon convoys. They burned ranches and relays and murdered many whites, forcing hundreds of panicked settlers to find relative safety in military forts. In mid-August, Evans informed the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton that "*hordes of Indians are at the gates of Denver and their attacks commit us to destruction and famine.*"¹⁷ His fears materialized when the Indians interrupted the traffic on the Overland Trail, along the South Platte River. For many weeks, they isolated Denver from the rest of Colorado Territory, depriving its population of vital necessities.

As terror gripped the white settlements, a near-hysterical Evans continued to pressurize Washington for permission to organize a regiment of hundred-day volunteers. On August 10, he wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington: "*I am now satisfied that the tribes of the plains are nearly all combined in this terrible war, as apprehended last winter. It will be the largest Indian war this country ever had, extending from Texas to the British lines, involving nearly all the wild tribes of the plains. Please bring all the force of your department to bear in favor of speedy reinforcement of our troops, and get me authority to raise a regiment of 100-days mounted men. Our militia is inoperative, and unless this authority is given we will be destroyed.*"¹⁸ On the same day he wired Stanton: "*The alliance of Indians on the plains reported last winter in my communication is now undoubted. A large force, say 10,000 troops, will be necessary to defend the lines and put down hostilities. Unless they can be sent at once we will be cut off and destroyed.*"¹⁹

Evans had barely issued his first proclamation that on August 11, he decreed a second one, addressed this time to the people of Colorado Territory, without bothering to notify the Indians that his previous declaration promising safety to friendly Indians had been nullified: "*... I, John Evans, governor of Colorado Territory, do issue this my proclamation, authorizing all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such parties as they may organize, to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains, scrupulously*

¹⁷ *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

¹⁸ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ *Ibid* p. 68.

avoiding those who have responded to my said call to rendezvous at the points indicated; also, to kill and destroy, as enemies of the country, wherever they may be found, all such hostile Indians. And further, as the only reward I am authorized to offer for such services, I hereby empower such citizens, or parties of citizens, to take captive, and hold to their own private use and benefit, all the property of said hostile Indians that they may capture, and to receive for all stolen property recovered from said Indians such reward as may be deemed proper ...".²⁰ On the same day, Evans received dispatches from General Curtis and the War Department authorizing him to raise a hundred-day volunteer regiment. He immediately transferred the Denver militia to the new 3d Volunteer Regiment of Colorado and, on August 13, he wired Stanton, "*Have 200 100-days men offered if they can be mounted and go at once ... Please order quartermaster in Denver to mount and equip as fast as men enlist*".²¹

On August 18, a scout reported that a man and a boy had been killed by Indians on Running Creek, south of Denver. Evans immediately telegraphed Stanton: "*Extensive Indian depredations with murder of families, occurred yesterday thirty miles south of Denver. Our lines of communication are cut, and our crops, our sole dependence, are all in exposed localities, and cannot be gathered by our scattered population. Large bodies of Indians are undoubtedly near to Denver, and we are in danger of destruction both from attacks of Indians and starvation. I earnestly request that Colonel Ford's regiment, Second Colorado Volunteers, be immediately sent to our relief. It is impossible to exaggerate our danger. We are doing all we can for our defense*".²² As a result of Evans' supplications, Stanton ordered General Rosecrans, commanding the Department of Missouri, to return the 2d Colorado to the Territory if possible. Rosecrans, however, could not comply right away, since this regiment under General Pleasanton was needed to defend Kansas from the invading Confederate army of General Sterling Price.

Despite the bloody events of summer, Chivington and Evans found time for politics, zealously lobbying to convince Colorado politicians and local elected officials of the urgency to join the Union, a maneuver that was highly profitable to both. Indeed, the statehood movement ran Chivington as a potential congressman and Evans for the position of senator. Their ambitions were suddenly thwarted when, with the approach of autumn, the various Indian tribes renounced warfare for buffalo hunting, since they needed meat for the winter. Taking advantage of the lull, the peaceful Cheyenne Black Kettle and other chiefs opposed to the summer violence suddenly regained influence. Following a council, these leaders gave interpreter William Bent a message to be handed over to Major Edward Wynkoop, the commander of Fort Lyon, proposing an end to hostilities. On September 6, Wynkoop and 127 men from the 1st Colorado left the fort and on the 10th, they met with Black Kettle, Left Hand and all other Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders in their camp near the Smoky Hill River. After convincing Wynkoop of their sincerity and handing over four white captives to show their good faith, Black Kettle and six other chiefs persuaded the major to go to Denver to meet the Great Father and talk peace. Wynkoop agreed. He returned to Fort Lyon with the captives, and then pushed on to Denver, accompanied by all the Cheyenne and Arapaho principal chiefs. Meanwhile, General Curtis had telegraphed explicit instructions to Colonel Chivington: "*I shall require the bad Indians delivered up,*

²⁰ Ibid pp. 68-69.

²¹ Ibid pp. 69-70.

²² Ibid p. 70.

*restoration of stock; also hostages to secure. I want no peace until the Indians suffer more ... I fear the agent of the Indian Department will be ready to make presents too soon ... No peace must be made without my direction".*²³

The arrival of the Indian chiefs put Evans and Chivington in an embarrassing position. According to them, peace would frustrate the majority of the population that cried revenge. In addition, the new 3rd Colorado Cavalry hastily mustered for a period of one hundred days remained idle and would be demobilized shortly. Finally, a provisional truce would give the Indians the latitude to resume fighting as early as next spring. The interview with Black Kettle's delegation took place at Camp Weld near Denver, on September 28, 1864. A witness reported that Black Kettle acknowledged having sent the previous year a message to Evans in which he refused to dialogue with him and with the Great Father in Washington. Although he had declined Evans' invitation in the summer of 1863, the governor should understand that, now, he wanted peace. Evans responded in an ambiguous way. He explained to the Indians that from now on peace lay in the hands of the military. He then turned to Chivington who spoke to the leaders in these terms: *"I am not a big war chief but all the soldiers in this country are at my command. My rules of fighting white men or Indians is fight them until they lay down their arms and submit to military authority. You are nearer Major Wynkoop than anyone else, and you can go to him when you are ready to do that".*²⁴ Though no treaty was signed, the Indians left the meeting reassured, believing that by reporting and camping near army posts, they would be declaring peace. However, on the same day, General Curtis wired Chivington, reiterating his previous orders: *"Pursue everywhere and chastise the Cheyenne and Arapaho; pay no attention to district lines. No presents must be made and no peace concluded without my consent".*²⁵ Days later, Chivington received a dispatch from Samuel E. Colley, the agent for Indian Affairs, informing him that his mediation efforts with the tribes had produced no tangible results in the past six months. *"In my opinion"*, he said, *"They should be punished for their hostile acts"*²⁶ since the Cheyenne and the Arapaho could not be permitted to continue playing their game of war in summer and peace in winter.

Blinded by his political ambitions, Chivington did not burden himself with any moral or legal constraint. Behaving as if he was accountable to no one, his appetite for power rivaled his religious fervor worthy of a Pharisee. Assuring the people of Colorado that no state of peace existed with the Indians, he opted for a more aggressive attitude toward the hostile Arapaho and Cheyenne and immediately prepared to go to war with them. During the month of October, Chief Left Hand had gone to Fort Lyon to remit forty Arapaho warriors and a part of the spoils from the summer raids. On November 2, General Curtis replaced Major Wynkoop by Major Scott Anthony, considering the latter less flexible with the Indians than his predecessor. Arapaho Chief Little Raven arrived at Fort Lyon with 652 members of his tribe. Then in turn, Black Kettle, Left Hand and War Bonnet reported peacefully to Major Anthony. Since the officer did not have the means to feed them, he persuaded the Indians to hunt buffalo in an area thirty miles north of the fort. He added that the army would not molest them since the 1861 Treaty of Fort Wise had assigned that land to the Cheyenne. On November 16, Anthony wrote to Curtis: *"I told them that I was not authorized as yet to*

²³ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

²⁴ Ibid; Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 120.

²⁵ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

²⁶ Ibid.

say that any permanent peace could be established, but that no war would be waged against them until your pleasure was heard ... I have been trying to let the Indians that I have talked with think that I have no desire for trouble with them, but that I could not agree upon a permanent peace until I was authorized by you ... It would be easy for us to fight the few Indian warriors that have come into the post, but as soon as we assume a hostile attitude the travel upon the road will be cut off, and the settlements above and upon the different streams will be completely broken up, as we are not strong enough to follow them and fight them upon their own ground. Some of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians can be made useful to us ... My intention, however, is to let matters remain dormant until troops can be sent out to take the field against all the tribes".²⁷ A few days later, he telegraphed his superior, informing him that many Indians were camping near Sand Creek.²⁸

Upon learning that large bands of Indian warriors were in the vicinity of Fort Lyon, some settled near Sand Creek and others busy hunting, Chivington prepared for action. On November 24, in a secret maneuver, he sent south the 3d Colorado Cavalry commanded by Colonel George L. Shoup, an ambitious politician from Denver. The troop's progress was difficult because of the deep snow and freezing cold along the Arkansas River. In addition, the men were inexperienced, inadequately clothed, poorly equipped and barely held in their saddle. Leaving camp Weld at the head of three companies of his own 1st Cavalry, Chivington joined the expedition at the agreed meeting point near Booneville. Exhausted, the troops finally arrived at Fort Lyon in the afternoon of November 28. When Chivington met Major Anthony, the latter did not mention the recent visit of Black Kettle and other Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs. He simply informed him of the place where camped those Indians who, according to him, numbered about 1,000 at Sand Creek and 2,000 in the Smokey Hills country. Chivington promptly announced that his men would attack these arrogant bands, starting with those at Sand Creek. Several officers such as Captain S. Soule, Lieutenant J. Cramer and Lieutenant Baldwin disagreed, arguing that this act would violate the commitments made to the peaceful Indians during the Camp Weld council. Chivington furiously replied that "... he believed it was right or honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians that would kill women and children and damn any man who was in sympathy with the Indians, and such men as Major Wynkoop and myself [Lieutenant Cramer] had better get out of the U.S. service".²⁹ The same evening, Chivington left the fort with about 700 men: 100 to 125 of the 1st Colorado Cavalry, 450 of the 3d Colorado Cavalry, 125 soldiers from the garrison under Major Anthony and a battery of four twelve-pounder howitzers. On the night of November 28, the soldiers drank heavily to celebrate their anticipated victory.

At dawn of November 29, guided by the half-breed Robert Bent who he had forced to serve him as a guide, Chivington reached a ridge overlooking Black Kettle's village on Sand Creek, where were sleeping some 500 Southern Cheyenne, as well as Left Hand and about 150 of his Arapaho. He immediately deployed his men for the attack. His plan was to encircle the camp and then immobilize the warriors by capturing their ponies divided into two herds near the tepees. He also ordered to load the artillery guns with canister and shrapnel and point them at the camp. Moments later, the Colorado troopers advanced towards the village. Anthony's cavalry accelerated and then veered left to seize the ponies located south of the river. A few animals nevertheless managed

²⁷ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 126-127.

²⁸ It is estimated that between 650 and 700 Indians lived near Sand Creek in mid-November 1864.

²⁹ Joseph A. Jr., *War on the Frontier* p. 127; Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 142-143.

to escape and reach the outskirts of the camp. Some early-rising women immediately sounded the alert. Now fully awake, Black Kettle could not believe his eyes. He had however attached an American flag and a piece of white cloth at the end of a pole outside his tent, which according to him ensured the protection of his followers from attacks by American soldiers. White Antelope, one of the bravest and greatest of the Cheyenne warriors ran out from the village toward the troops, holding his hands high in the air and shouting at the soldiers not to fire. A volley from the troopers nonetheless cut him down in the middle of the creek. Yelling like animals, Shoup's 3d Colorado cavalymen then crossed the watercourse to fall directly on the Indian encampment while those of the 1st Colorado bypassed it to prevent any escape. Captain Soule and Lieutenant Cramer, respectively commanding companies D and K of the 1st Colorado, flatly refused to follow Chivington's order and urged their men to hold their fire.

"All was noise and confusion" reported the half-breed George Bent, Robert's brother, who was in the village at the time of the attack. *"The Indians began to run, but they didn't seem to know either what to do or where to go. Women and children wept and screamed, men ran to their tepee to seize their weapons while mutually advising on the direction to take"*.³⁰ A group of warriors briefly attempted to resist in front of the tepees before being hacked to death and dispersed by raking artillery fire. Everywhere, the Coloradoans slaughtered men, women and children, riddling them with bullets and chasing those who tried to flee. Dozens of Indians, however, managed to take refuge along the riverbed, west of the village, leaving behind them a trail of dead and wounded. Approximately two miles from the camp, survivors including half-breed traders John Smith, Edmond Guerrier, George Bent and his children, fled upstream and dug holes in the sand beneath the banks of the stream. Surrounded by soldiers who were reluctant to venture into these makeshift fortifications, the Indians resisted all day. Among them were Chiefs Black Kettle unscathed, and War Bonnet and Left Hand, both fatally wounded. Cheyenne warrior Morning Star said that cannon fire killed most of the Indians, especially the guns firing from the south bank of the creek at the people trying to retreat upstream.

Elsewhere, the carnage continued ruthlessly. In the confusion, many Indians escaped to the hills, but more than 150 perished. Reportedly, two-thirds of them were women and children. For hours, the troopers engaged in an orgy of atrocities, finishing off the wounded and then mutilating the bodies of their victims. Witnesses who were in the village during the attack, reported seeing soldiers slashing babies and children, dismembering the body of women who were crying for mercy, skinning dead corpses to make tobacco pouches, and cutting the nose, ears and genitals of an Arapaho chief. At about 4 P.M., Chivington sounded the retreat and ordered his scattered troops to regroup. The soldiers who were still trying to reduce the warriors trapped in the bed of the creek abandoned their attempt and returned to the village. Taking advantage of this unexpected respite and with the cover of approaching nightfall, the surviving Indians, some wounded, managed to escape. Moving upstream, they spent the cold night on the prairie without shelter. The soldiers did not pursue them. The next morning, the survivors set out toward the Cheyenne camp in the Smoky Hills. They soon met with other survivors who had escaped with part of the horse herd, some returning from the Hills where they had fled during the attack. All then proceeded to the Cheyenne camp, where they received food and assistance.

The troops camped on the battlefield, the men sleeping near their weapons and

³⁰ Josephy A. Jr., *War on the Frontier* p. 127.

remaining on the alert in case the savages returned to seek revenge. Twice during the night an alarm sounded and sporadic firing broke out among the jittery soldiers. The same evening Chivington exultingly wrote a dispatch to General Curtis: *“In the last ten days my command has marched 300 miles, 100 of which the snow was two feet deep. After a march of forty miles last night I, at daylight this morning, attacked Cheyenne village of 130 lodges, from 900 to 1,000 warriors strong; killed Chiefs Black Kettle, White Antelope, Knock Knee, and Little Robe [Little Raven], and between 400 and 500 other Indians, and captured as many ponies and mules. Our loss [was] 9 killed, 38 wounded. All did nobly. Think I will catch some more of them eighty miles, on Smoky Hill”*.³¹ In reality, there were probably fewer victims, maybe 150 or 200, and Black Kettle and Little Raven were not among them. At the same time, he sent off a letter to the editor of the *Rocky Mountain News* of Denver, describing his victory as *“one of the most bloody Indian battles ever fought on these plains”*.³²

On the next day, November 30, 1864, a few skirmishes occurred during which two soldiers and perhaps a dozen Indians were killed. Chivington, whose losses were now estimated at 14 dead and 40 wounded according to the most credible sources, ordered to plunder the tepees and put the camp to the torch. After the smoke had cleared, his men came back and killed the remaining wounded before moving to a nearby Arapaho village, where Little Raven and his warriors were reportedly camping. The Indians had however deserted the site and fled south of the Arkansas River during the night. Chivington ordered their pursuit but the chase proved futile. During the next days, more patrols were sent out but all returned empty handed, reporting that the Indians had fled.

On December 7, their saddlebags filled with sinister booty, the Colorado Volunteers returned to Fort Lyon. They arrived in Denver on the 22nd, where the residents welcomed them jubilantly. The men proudly displayed their trophies of war to a cheering crowd that hailed them as heroes. Their loot consisted of jewelry, rings and earrings from Indian women, some still attached to fingers or shreds of flesh, as well as a large number of bloody scalps that the Apollo theatre and other saloons of the town proudly displayed to their customers. The next day, the *Rocky Mountain News* published an edifying editorial dedicated to these “heroes”: *“Among all the brilliant feats of arms in the war against the Indians, the recent campaign of our Colorado Volunteers will remain in history with some rivals but nothing can surpass it. [...] The Colorado soldiers once again covered themselves with glory”*.³³

Chivington reported to General Curtis from Denver on December 16: *“It may perhaps be unnecessary for me to state that I captured no prisoners ... I cannot conclude this report without saying that the conduct of Capt. Silas S. Soule, Company D, First Cavalry of Colorado, was at least ill-advised, he saying that he thanked God he had killed no Indians, and like expressions, proving him more in sympathy with those Indians than with the whites”*. He then tried to defend his actions by claiming having found *“several scalps of white men and women in the Indian lodges; also various articles of clothing belonging to white persons”*. He finally added that *“on every hand the evidence was clear that no lick was struck amiss”*.³⁴

The Third Regiment of Colorado Volunteers or the “Bloody Thirdsters” as it was now called was disbanded on December 29, 1864. As to Colonel Chivington, his commission expired on January 6, 1865.

³¹ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 154.

³² J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

³³ Documents on the Sand Creek Massacre: *“Rocky Mountain News”*. Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 162.

³⁴ Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* p. 161-162.

AFTERMATH

News of the Sand Creek disaster reached Washington D.C. in mid-December and at the end of the month, the *Rocky Mountain News* published a dispatch from the Capitol: “*The affair at Fort Lyon, Colorado, in which Colonel Chivington destroyed a large Indian village, and all its inhabitants, is to be made the subject of a congressional investigation. Letters received from high officials in Colorado say that the Indians were killed after surrendering, and that a large proportion of them were women and children*”.³⁵ After New Year 1865, rumors of drunken soldiers who allegedly committed atrocities at Sand Creek began to circulate. Within weeks, eyewitnesses came forward offering conflicting testimonies. The press captured these astonishing revelations and published them immediately. Matters moved quickly after. Wynkoop, now at Fort Riley, was fuming upon hearing of the massacre. On December 31, 1864, he was ordered back to Fort Lyon to once again take command of the post, carry out a thorough investigation of the recent operations against the Indians and prepare a comprehensive report. Upon his arrival on January 14, 1865, he immediately began taking testimonies and affidavits from witnesses there. On the 15th, he minced no words in his report to district headquarters, which was further forwarded to Washington, in which he called Chivington an “inhuman monster”. He added the affidavits he had collected, which denounced the attack on the Indian camp. Fearing for his reputation, Chivington arrested six of his men, accusing them of cowardice in front of the enemy. Among them was Captain Silas Soule, who had refused to participate in the carnage. All had been talking openly about the atrocious scenes they had witnessed. Informed of their arbitrary arrest, Secretary Stanton ordered their immediate release.

On January 10, 1865, the House of Representatives passed the motion “*that the Committee on the Conduct of the War be required to inquire into and report all the facts connected with the late attack of the third regiment of Colorado volunteers, under Colonel Chivington, on a village of the Cheyenne tribe of Indians, near Fort Lyon*”.³⁶ During the month of March, the committee gathered a large number of testimonials from individuals actually present at the scene of the massacre, including those of Major Wynkoop and other officers and men of the 1st and 3d Colorado. Governor Evans, in Washington, D. C. at the time, was also requested to testify. The committee compiled affidavits, correspondence and official reports relative to what they named “Massacre of Cheyenne Indians”. The last to testify was Chivington. He claimed that he was told by Major Anthony and agent Colley that the Indians at Sand Creek were hostile, that although Wynkoop had offered them protection, Anthony had driven them from the fort. He stated that when he arrived at Fort Lyon he “*heard nothing of the recent statement that the Indians were under the protection of the government*”.³⁷

While this investigation was taking place, another congressional inquiry was under way, this one by a joint Special Committee of the two Houses of Congress. The committee took testimony from participants, witnesses and others concerned with the Sand Creek affair. It travelled from Washington to Fort Riley, Fort Larned, Fort Leavenworth, Fort Lyon, Santa Fe and Denver. The most thorough investigation, though, took place in Colorado under the direction of a military commission for the purpose of investigating the conduct of the late Colonel J. M. Chivington in his recent campaign against the Indians. However, the military argued that a martial court was not

³⁵ Ibid p. 163.

³⁶ Ibid p. 165.

³⁷ Ibid p. 165-166.

necessary because Chivington had meanwhile resigned his commission and was no longer part of the regular army. Despite this, the committee started work on March 7. On the 11th, Captain Silas Soule was called in to give evidence but his testimonial was to remain incomplete. Indeed, less than a week later, on April 23, a soldier by the name of Charles Squires fired a bullet in his head on a street of Denver. The ensuing investigation concluded that Chivington had probably ordered this murder but it had no proof. One of Soule's men, Lieutenant James Cannon, hunted Squires as far as New Mexico and brought him back to Denver to be trialed. Somehow, Squires managed to escape; as to Cannon, he died of poisoning shortly after. Once Soule's funeral over, the committee reconvened and Chivington was allowed to call forth his witnesses and build his defense. The proceedings continued until May 30, 1865, and after Chivington declared that he had no more witnesses to present, the commission adjourned. This military inquiry had been a mere fact-finding affair. Chivington no longer belonging to the army, the court drew no conclusions since it had no power to make recommendations and consequently, no action was taken against the ex-colonel.

In the meantime, the other inquiries on the Sand Creek tragedy had also come to an end. On May 30, 1865, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of War published its report describing Sand Creek as a "scene of murder and barbarity". *"As to Colonel Chivington, the committee can hardly find fitting terms to describe his conduct ... Whatever influence this may have had upon Colonel Chivington, the truth is that he surprised and murdered, in cold blood, the unsuspecting men, women, and children on Sand creek, who had every reason to believe they were under the protection of the United States authorities, and then returned to Denver and boasted of the brave deed he and the men under his command had performed"*.³⁸ Regarding Evans' testimony, it was full of "prevarication and malice". Finally, the Committee was of the opinion that *"for the purpose of vindicating the cause of justice and upholding the honor of the nation, prompt and energetic measures should be at once taken to remove from office those who have thus disgraced the government by whom they are employed, and to punish, as their crimes deserve, those who have been guilty of these brutal and cowardly acts"*.³⁹

The "Massacre of Cheyenne Indians" was thus condemned by Congress, but no one was ever held accountable, Chivington refusing to apologize to the end of his life. Despite the Committee's recommendation, the closest thing to a punishment that Chivington suffered was the effective end of his political ambitions. As to Governor Evans, President Johnson sacked him for his odious role in the Sand Creek matter.

Regarding the official boards of inquiry ordered by Congress and the military, historians have carefully scrutinized their content as well as the archives related to this case in an attempt to shed more light on what really happened at Sand Creek. Their reflections do not question the responsibilities of the various actors, but they are interesting insofar as they show how collective memory fades with time and how a number of statements made by the witnesses were contradictory, vague or subjective.

Eyewitnesses claimed that Black Kettle raised the US flag and a piece of white cloth on a pole in front of his tepee. Lieutenant Joseph Cramer of the 1st Colorado, who had no sympathy for Chivington, claimed he saw no flag and other soldiers confirmed his allegation. There is no consensus on the number of Indians killed at Sand Creek. In his second report to General Curtis, dated December 16, 1864, Colonel Chivington

³⁸ *United States Congress Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 1865* (testimonies and report). University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service.

³⁹ *Ibid*

mentioned that *“between 500 and 600 dead Indians were recorded on the battlefield”*.⁴⁰ Captain Booth of the 1st Colorado counted 69 dead while Corporal Miksch reported 123. Others came up with figures such as 150, 200, 300, 400 and more. An accurate inventory of the victims thus remains impossible all the more since, according to their custom, the Cheyenne took away many of their dead and wounded from the battlefield.

Similarly, no one can precisely establish the proportion of women and children among the victims. John Smith, an honest trader and interpreter who hated Chivington, declared that half of the victims were men. The half-breed Edmond Guerrier testified that two thirds of the victims were women and children. George Bent, the son of William Bent, who was wounded by the soldiers during the attack, gave two different accounts of the Indian losses. On March 15, 1889, he wrote that 137 people were killed: 28 men and 109 women and children. However, fourteen years later, on April 30, 1913, he stated that *“about 53 men”* and *“110 women and children”* were murdered and many people wounded.

The figures of the military prove hardly more convincing. According to Corporal Maxwell of the 1st Colorado, only twenty-five of the victims were adult men. Major Downing reported that, at most, only a few children and a dozen women were massacred. Lieutenant Cramer stated that women and children constituted two-thirds of the victims. Major Decatur, temporarily assigned to the 3d Colorado, declared that slaughtered women and children were isolated cases. As to colonel Chivington, he testified on April 26, 1865, that *“I saw but one woman who had been killed; I saw no dead children”*.⁴¹

Some of these testimonies, although very different, were however not totally incompatible. Indeed, the camps of the Plains Indians stretched over several miles, sometimes more than ten. Therefore, some of the witnesses remembered only the scenes limited to their immediate surroundings.

It is also impossible to determine with precision the number of mutilated Indian bodies. During the investigations, many eyewitnesses came forward with damning testimonies, almost all of which were corroborated by other witnesses. Robert Bent, the half-breed present at Sand Creek, testified without ambiguity on this point and described with many details the atrocities he had seen. The interpreter and scout John Smith made the same statement. Captain L. Wilson recounted that he picked up a child, and then handed it over to a squaw. Major Downing testified that *“I saw no soldier scalping anybody, but saw one or two bodies that had been scalped”*.⁴² Lieutenant James D. Cannon described the mutilation carried out by the soldiers: *“Men, women, and children’s privates were cut out. I heard one man say that he had cut a woman’s private parts out and had them for exhibition on a stick. I heard of one instance of a child, a few months old, being thrown into the feed-box of a wagon, and after being carried some distance, left on the ground to perish; I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females and stretched them over their saddle-bows, and some of them over their hats”*.⁴³ To try to find out who told the truth during the commissions of inquiry is a nightmare. There were probably many scalped bodies. The whites as the Indians commonly used this practice at the time. In addition, the Cheyenne and many other Indians often mutilated their victims, believing

⁴⁰ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

⁴¹ *Sand Creel Massacre, a Closer Look*, Internet.

⁴² *Sand Creek Massacre: Jacob Downing Biography*, Internet.

⁴³ *United States Congress Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 1865* (testimonies and report). University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service.

superstitiously that their body would wonder eternally with their wounds in afterlife. Colonel Chivington commanded mostly undisciplined troops during the action at Sand Creek. The 3d Colorado Volunteers consisted largely of men without education, miners, brawlers and drunks. Most of them had been hastily recruited in saloons, gambling dens and jails of Denver and elsewhere. Although they were no choirboys, there is, however, no evidence that Chivington ordered or encouraged his men to commit atrocities.

Some merchants and traders who trafficked with the Indians were also invited to give evidence before the commissions. The honest ones were angry while others were furious since the events of Sand Creek had deprived them from their regular customers, that is to say, the Cheyenne and Arapaho. The meanest were those who testified against Chivington, such as the agent of Indian Affairs D. Colley and his son Samuel, two unscrupulous scoundrels who cheated the government and defrauded the Indians. The objectivity of their testimony is questionable.

During the congressional hearings, Dr. Caleb Birdsall [or Birdsell], assistant surgeon of the 1st Colorado Volunteers, recounted that on the evening of Sand Creek, "*a soldier stopped in front of a tepee and attracted my attention to five or six scalps hanging on the end of a rope ... My impression was that one or two of them were not older than ten days.*"⁴⁴ Another doctor said he saw a large number of white men's scalps, some freshly cut and a few others five to eight days old. These allegations would imply that some chiefs had been at war since the September Camp Weld council and that not all Black Kettle's warriors were peaceful in November 1864. The Cheyenne chief admitted during his interview with Governor Evans that some of his people did not abide by his peace efforts. In addition, they had likely grouped in the camps of the Smoky Hills, which harbored nests of Dog Soldiers and Arapaho Indians known to be on the warpath. This could explain why Chivington's men encountered fewer warriors than expected.

Considering the above, it is comforting to note that the commissions of inquiry remained impartial in shedding light in a maze of mixed credible and fiction evidence. Although they established beyond any doubt the responsibilities of Chivington, Evans and other individuals, many questions remain unanswered today, especially those concerning the number of victims and mutilated bodies. Whatever the outcome of the debate that still animates historians, it is undeniable that the tragic events of Sand Creek ultimately resulted from white incursions in Indian tribal lands, unfulfilled treaties, poor or corrupt management of local agencies as well as ineffective federal administration.

EPILOGUE

Following the massacre, the news of the atrocities committed on the people of Black Kettle quickly reached all the Indian tribes of the Northern and Central Plains. The survivors joined the camps of the Dog Soldiers in the Smokey Hills and along the Republican River. There, the war pipe was smoked and passed from camp to camp among the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho. In January 1865, more than 1,000 warriors carried out an attack on present day Julesburg, Colorado. The Indians destroyed stagecoaches and convoys carrying freight and mail. They tore up miles of telegraph lines, severing the communications between Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Denver and the Eastern United States. Numerous isolated raids followed along the Platte River, both east and west of Julesburg. A second raid on Julesburg occurred in early February, where the furious bands ransacked the town, killing many whites,

⁴⁴ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

including women and children. Their ire and revenge finally over, the Indians moved into Nebraska Territory, on their way to the Black Hills and Powder River country.

Once the details of the Sand Creek massacre became widely known, the US Government sent a blue ribbon commission whose members managed to regain the confidence of the Indians. This led to the signing of the Treaty of Little Arkansas in 1865. It guaranteed the Cheyenne and Arapaho free access to the lands south of the Arkansas River but excluded them from the area between the Arkansas and Platte Rivers. It also assured financial reparations to the surviving descendents of Sand Creek. Less than two years later, the Government disregarded all these provisions and abrogated the accord. At the great Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, many participants in the Sand Creek disaster met again: Edward Wynkoop, now Indian agent for the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, mediators George and son Charlie Bent, trader and interpreter John Smith, Chiefs Black Kettle, Little Raven, Bull Bear and others. The Kiowa and Comanche were compelled to give up more than 60,000 square miles of their traditional tribal lands in exchange for a three-million-acre reservation in the southwest corner of Indian Territory⁴⁵. Despite the treaty, the path of peace with the whites still led to tragedy. On November 27, 1868, almost exactly four years after Sand Creek., the Cheyenne camp on the Washita River in Indian Territory was attacked at dawn, this time by George Custer and his 7th Cavalry. Trying to flee, Chief Black Kettle, one of the great peacemakers of his time was cut down by bullets.

Chivington was never chastised nor troubled for his role in the Sand Creek massacre, but he morally paid the price, spending his old age aside from society. Under popular pressure, he resigned from the Colorado Militia and retired from political life. Toward the end of 1865, he went to Nebraska, where he invested in a freight company. He then moved to California for a while and then returned to his native Ohio, where he bought a farm and edited a small newspaper. He once more tried his luck at local politics but his past caught up with him and destroyed his candidacy during an election campaign.

Some twenty years after Sand Creek, the Pike's Peak Pioneers celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Territory and invited Chivington to participate in the festivities. Chivington suddenly became once again the hero of the day and when he shouted: "*I stand by Sand Creek,*"⁴⁶ the crowd gathered around him responded with enthusiastic applause. The Coloradoans then asked him to return and live among them, offering him the job of deputy sheriff of Denver. In 1887, they honored the memory of the old colonel by giving his name to a newly established settlement along the Missouri Pacific Railroad ... some 10 miles from the Sand Creek site. The small town of Chivington prospered as a railroad transit station but the Great Depression of the 1930s hastened its decline and morphed it into a ghost town.

John Chivington died of cancer on October 4, 1894, at the age of 73. He was buried in Fairmount Cemetery, Denver, Colorado.

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution apologizing "*for the atrocities committed at Sand Creek, Colorado, by one of their own clergy members*". It also offered to "*extend to all Cheyenne and Arapaho a hand of reconciliation, and ask forgiveness for the death of over 200 mostly women and children*".⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Present-day Oklahoma.

⁴⁶ J. Jay Myers, *Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

⁴⁷ *Methodist Apology for Sand Creek Massacre*, Internet.

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