

CHIVINGTON ?

The November issue of The Roundup published the masterfully written paper on Col. John Milton Chivington delivered by Dr. Nolie Mumey at the regular meeting of the Denver Posse. Needless to say it created a great deal of interest, pro and con, about this controversial personality. Recently the distinguished columnist of the Rocky Mountain News, Robert L. Perkin, wrote the other side of the story for the readers of his newspaper. Through the courtesy of the Rocky Mountain News, and Posse Member Perkin, we are privileged to bring it to those Westerners who may not have had opportunity to read it.

CHIVINGTON'S RAID—A BLACK DAY IN COLORADO

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Rocky Mountain News Writer

Corp. Lucius Markham shifted his quid into his cheek and spat out into the icy darkness.

A chaw, at least, was something a man could take a little comfort in. This soldiering was nothing like what he had expected when he signed up two months ago to fight the bloody redskins.

It was all riding and cold and eating bad grub. His stomach turned remembering the swarm of maggots he found in his ration of hardtack only a few mornings ago—after he had eaten half of it in the dark. It had seemed sweet and soft then.

A trooper's life was all long rides, cold camps and saluting. Not a single bold charge in the sunlight with the flag flying and the bugles blowing and many coups to count to pay the savages back for the Hungate kids.

Why, he hadn't fired at a single redskin. Hadn't even seen one. The Sharps carbine slapping along now at his horse's rawbones off shoulder was almost unused even for target prac-

tice, though Lieutenant McCannon made him oil it often enough. That was for sure.

Corporal Markham spat again in disgust. He'd be plenty glad when his 100-day enlistment was up. Let old Governor Evans—or, better still, the colonel himself—fight the invisible savages alone for all he cared.

And he wasn't the only one. Already, he heard, there had been seven desertions from Lt. J. L. Kennedy's Company C of the First since they set out less than 10 days ago.

Right now it was a long, cold trail. Horses stumbling and snorting in the dark, and the starlight picking up white scraps of snow out in the soapweed and buffalo grass. The men were all hunched down in their overcoats, stiff from the saddle and the cold, grimly waiting for sunup.

A long, cold trail and a fight at the end of it. The thought of a battle buoyed up Corporal Markham a little. After all, he had signed up to kill redskins. But he was too saddle weary to

get very excited. Just a little tremor of anticipation, and he reached down to feel the butt of his carbine.

They'd been riding since 8 o'clock last night, when the rag-tag blue column had set out from Fort Lyon. The officers hadn't even let the men go into the fort for a drop of something to warm the veins. Just cold grub and collee, squatting on your haunches beside a fire on the frozen ground at nightfall. Soldiering! the corporal snorted, and came down hard on his quid.

Jogging along all night in column of fours. Chasing a will-o'-the-wisp glory that would bloom somewhere to the northeast when the sun came up. Trot a little, walk your horses, stop every hour for a mount rest, stiffened men creaking down out of the saddle and barely able to get aboard again.

Forty miles, someone had said. Jim Melrose of Company G insisted he had heard an officer say they were headed for Black Kettle's camp on the bend of the Big Sandy. But that couldn't be right, of course.

All Corporal Markham and the rest had been told officially was that they were out after a band of hostiles and would surprise them at dawn. Melrose was full of wind, anyway. Everyone knew that Black Kettle and his Southern Cheyennes, and Left Hand and his Arapahoes camped with him. were friendly Indians.

The whole of Colorado Territory knew those friendlies were camped on Sand Creek, and had been since summer. Why, Black Kettle, Left Hand and the other chiefs had been up in Denver only in September to parley with Governor Evans. He had seen those chiefs with his own eyes and knew what they looked like. It was stupid to say this force of 700 men was going to attack that village. They were out after hostiles, everyone knew.

Corporal Markham had heard reports there were some of the real McCoy in the bloody savages up somewhere near the headwaters of the Smoky Hill. But that was more than 40 miles.

He shrugged, settling his sore shoulders into a more comfortable slump. Wouldn't be long now, at any rate. Stars were beginning to pale off in the east. The first light of Nov. 29, 1864, soon would be fanning out across the plains, and the rolling prairie already was starting to take grey-blue form out of the ocean of night.

And, for Chrisakes, here comes that damn colonel again!

Ever since midnight, it seemed to the corporal, the colonel had been riding up and down the column with his exhortations. And here he comes again. Col. John Milton Chivington, preacher and patriot and Indian-fighter! Commander of the Colorado military district himself! Big bag of wind, the corporal told himself.

"Remember, men, I want no prisoners taken," the colonel called up and down the plodding ranks. "Nits make lice."

Sure. Sure, colonel, Corporal Markham muttered into the turned-up collar of his coat. "Nits make lice." How many times had he heard that phrase. The colonel had coined it in one of his sermons, and pretty soon the whole of Denver City was repeating it. Especially after the mutilated remains of the Hungate family was put on exhibition.

Sure, colonel. No prisoners.

The corporal had to concede that the colonel was a fine figger of a fighting man there in the first light as he stide-stepped and whirled his jumpy horse down along the line. He looked ten times life size, forking that big black horse like it was part of him.

His deep voice rumbled confidently with a tense excitement. His beard pointed straight out over his horse's head, as if the animal's ears were a gunsight.

Up ahead, Lieutenant McCannon's arm went up in the signal to halt. The column began piling up on itself like the body of a caterpillar catching up with the head. Horses snorted a little, but they were too tired to stomp about much. Men slumped in their saddles with the glum resignation of all soldiers back to the Roman legions.

By now it was quite light. The eastern sky was a greenish grey, streaked with yellow along the horizon. No clouds. It would be a fine November day. Corporal Markham dug under his overcoat and fished out his gold watch on its chain. Six-fifty. Sun would be up in another 10 minutes or so.

And now the word came filtering down the ranks in a muscular ripple of tenseness. The Indian camp was just over that rise ahead. Keep your mouth shut. Avoid all unnecessary sounds.

Maj. Scott J. Anthony, the red-eyed commander of the First Colorado Cavalry from Fort Lyon, would swing off to the left with 125 of his men. Lieutenant Wilson would take an equal number of the First Colorados off to the right toward the rising sun and would open the shooting-match.

Col. George L. Shoup's "Bloodless Third" of 100-day men—450 of them—would carry the brunt of the fight in the center, straight ahead. Maj. Hal Sayre's Second Battalion—Corporal Markham's outfit—would be expected, since it was strongest with 178 men, to give a good account of itself on the imminent field of honor.

The corporal watched Lieutenant Wilson's flanking party peel off from

the rear and move off toward the east. He twisted in the saddle and saw Major Anthony wheel out far toward the west.

And here came the colonel again, sabre drawn, pistols on both hips.

"Off with your overcoats, men," Chivington ordered. "You can work better without 'em."

Obedient and eager now, as the excitement mounted, the men peeled off their coats and lashed them to bed-rolls behind their cantles. Carbines came out of scabbards.

There was a hush over the ranks now, but the little spurts of frost vapor in front of grey faces showed that men were breathing fast. Eyes were alert, all the sleepiness, trail-tiredness and muscle cramps gone. Corporal Markham cocked his carbine, again, and lightly fingered the trigger.

CORP. MARKHAM ONLY BIT OF FICTION IN NARRATIVE

Corp. Lucius Markham is an invention.

The other characters in this narrative of the Sand Creek Massacre of Nov. 29, 1864—Markham's officers, Capt. McCannon and Lt. Davis, and the rest—were actual persons.

The facts of the narrative are drawn from the two official investigations of the Sand Creek Affair, one by order of Congress, one by the War Department (and neither unprejudiced against Chivington), and from sworn testimony or affidavits presented to those hearings.

Aside from obvious embroideries used to make a tale, the incidents, blunders and brutalities reported all have documentation in the voluminous proceedings of the two investigating boards.

A spear of orange light stabbed out across the plains from the eastern horizon. Strangely, Markham thought, his first reaction was that the sun would bring warmth. Momentarily, he had forgotten that it also would bring battle.

"Ready, men" Lt. Davis called quietly back over his shoulder.

"Ready, sir."

Captain McCannon rose in his stirrups. His sabre was out, glinting in the first sun.

"All right, boys," he shouted. "Here we go! Follow me!"

Spurs dug into flanks. Horses broke into a run. At long last, Markham thought, Company I is in action.

As the company broke over the crest of the hill, Markham looked down on the wide, flat, sandy creek, a trickle of half-frozen water meandering down a snake-like course from the northeast. Beyond the creek, on its north bank, was a clustered village of possibly 150 lodges. Thin threads of smoke curled out of the tipi flaps, still dampered down to hold warmth against the November night.

A few Indians, unarmed, stood by their lodge doorways staring at the troopers so suddenly thundering up from three directions.

Corporal Markham shot a glance to the east. Far off, he could see Wilson's detachment cutting between the village and a milling herd of Indian ponies which had been picketed off to the southeast.

Up on the low hill to the west, he saw Major Anthony's men wheel about from a northward course and head for the village.

All about him, he felt the drumming hooves of the Third as it surged forward. A great sensation of invincible strength and speed shot through him, and he found himself whooping at the top of his lungs.

Then he was conscious of the first shot. It came from somewhere off to his right. Wilson's men.

The bullet kicked up sand near the feet of a man who had run out from among the lodges into the bed of the creek. But—Markham brushed his sleeve across his eyes—that was a white man! Why, it was Uncle John Smith! Everyone knew Uncle John; he had built the first cabin, back in '58, on the site of Denver.

More shots ripped into the sand. They're shooting at Uncle John! Something's gone wrong. The thought flashed into Markham's mind. Someone has made a mistake.

He saw Major Anthony waving his hat and calling Smith by name. The old mountain man was scuttling back toward the lodges. He hesitated, but more shots whistled past him.

At closer distance, Markham saw Col. Chivington himself on his black horse move out from the mass of troops and ride to within 60 yards of the confused old man in the creek bed.

"Run here, Uncle John," Chivington called. "You are all right."

Smith cast a glance at the lodges, turned and scampered toward the troops.

By now there was a steady rattle of gunfire from all sides. Shot was pouring into the cluster of lodges, and there were buckskin bundles crumpled on the ground. More of them every minute.

Some of the Indians—Markham was to learn later that there had been fewer than 100 braves over 18 in the village—had armed themselves and were returning the fire. It was not very effective fire; most of the Indian rifles were old, not worth confiscating when Major Anthony had examined them at Fort Lyon less than three weeks earlier.

But they drew some blood. Markham watched one of Anthony's men circle out around Smith as though to herd the old man into shelter among the advancing troopers. An Indian rifle cracked. The man's horse plunged into the sand. Markham couldn't see whether the trooper was down too.

Meanwhile, Captain McCannon had led his company down to the bank of the creek, swinging between the village and a bunch of Indian ponies which had been grazing on the south bank.

"Our orders," Lt. Davis shouted, the wind of his charge and the plunging of his mount cutting off his words. "Our orders . . . drive off . . . horses."

The Indian ponies had pulled their picket pins and were plunging and milling. Company I circled to the task of herding, pausing to fire at the few half-clad Indians bold enough to run into the herd and vault onto the backs of ponies to flee.

The company scarcely had moved the herd a hundred yards when a messenger from up the creek pounded to Captain McCannon's side.

"Major Sayre says you're s'posed to be up west of the crick," he shouted. "Orders."

McCannon and Lt. Davis looked at each other in confusion. This wasn't what they had been told last night, but the captain recovered quickly.

"Jackson . . . Tommy . . . Martin . . . Steinburg . . . Move these critters south," he ordered. "The rest of you, follow me."

Company I turned from its herding task and dashed up the south bank of the creek to the northwest.

Officers, Markham spat. What do they use for brains? Always getting their orders mixed up.

Back in the main operation again,

the corporal could see what was going on.

He saw that some of the crumpled bundles on the ground between the lodges had been women. And some were just little bundles. Kids. Chivington's nits.

One Indian warrior strode out onto the creek sands. Chest bare except for a medal hanging around his neck, the warrior held up both arms, palms forward, in the traditional gesture of peace.

A rifle barked. The medal on the bared chest bounced, and the Indian pitched forward, face down in the sand.

Markham stared, uncomprehending. He had recognized the Indian.

It was White Antelope, known as one of the most peace-loving chiefs on the plains, lying there in the sand. That prized medal of his, it had come from Abraham Lincoln himself.

The corporal's dazed eyes looked on beyond the chief's still body, up into the middle of the village. He saw Black Kettle hoisting a pole beside his tipi. On the pole was the American flag the Indian commissioner had given the chief, instructing him to fly it as a sign of friendliness.

Beneath the flag fluttered another. White. All white. The flag of surrender, of truce.

Black Kettle! Corporal Markham swung around sharply, reigning in his galloping horse as if he were riding into a stone wall. Suddenly, he began to understand what was going on.

This was Black Kettle's band. The same band that had tried to surrender and make peace at Fort Lyon last month. The same band that had been instructed to go to this very spot, camp and hunt and keep the peace.

These were not hostiles he and his fellows were slaughtering. Chivington deliberately had led these 700

troopers against an almost defenseless encampment of Indians who wanted peace.

The realization hit Markham like a blow between the eyes. He had been as eager as the next fellow in Denver to go out and fight Indians. But not this way. And not women and children.

His glazed eyes watched a 3-year-old Indian child, naked and whimpering, toddle up the creek bed 75 yards away.

Three troopers dismounted nearby and took the position shown in the cavalry manual for kneeling fire. A shot. Sand kicked up at the Indian child's heels.

"Let me try the son of a bitch," another of the trio growled. "I can hit him."

He, too, fired and missed.

"Hell," the third trooper commented. "You boys couldn't hit the side of a mountain." He took aim and squeezed.

The baby dropped.

Markham looked from the still little body to the three soldiers, pausing now to shake hands, with total incomprehension. The world had gone mad.

His carbine slipped from his fingers to the ground. His reins fell forward on his mount's neck, and the horse, feeling no control but too weary to gallop more, began an aimless wandering which took the young corporal on his back through fields of fantasy.

The main body of Chivington's troops had charged the village, driving men, women and children before them. The four howitzers had opened up and were coughing grape shot into the lodges.

There were now troops on the far side of the village to the east, shooting west. The soldiers on the south bank of the creek were firing east. Markham watched in amazement as a third

group of troopers galloped up the creek and was caught in the crossfire from their own fellows. Several of them went down.

The confusion was enough to split a man's mind. All attempt at orderly cavalry maneuvers had been abandoned. Officers shouted conflicting orders to men who were not their own. Companies and battalions had been scrambled by bewildering commands such as those which had sent Company I to the wrong—or was it the right?—place as the battle began.

But Chivington watched the confusion from his hillside with grim satisfaction. Most of the troopers were getting the idea, anyway. Kill redskins. And take no prisoners.

A few of the armed Indians had dug in by scooping out the sand at the edge of the 3-foot cutbank which formed the south perimeter of the stream's course. From points of protection, they fired into the milling troops until ammunition ran out or they were ridden down.

One band of the savages had fled a mile upstream and dug themselves into pits for a final stand. Somehow, the bulk of the troops followed them, even though the authority of command had passed long ago.

"Fighting became general," the field grade officers were to report in almost duplicating words to their superiors next day.

The pits in the sand were indeed the final stand for Black Kettle's band. The flood of troopers and the howitzers made short work of the Indians in the pits, warriors, squaws, papooses alike.

Markham's unguided mount carried him back to the village, following the other horses. Here, an even grimmer nightmare was being played out.

The troopers were scalping Indians,

some of them not quite dead yet. One woman became the object of a quarrel between three soldiers, a quarrel which was settled by all three counting coup and wrenching loose a portion of her scalp. A warrior's fingers were cut off to get at his rings.

Markham saw one fellow weaving about with something on the end of a stick. As he moved closer, he saw that it was an Indian man's genitals.

He watched in dazed revulsion as several wild-eyed troopers profaned the body of a comely young squaw, very dead.

Then someone got the idea of cutting off the breasts of the woman. One man stretched a severed breast over his saddle horn. Another stretched one over his cap and danced a ghoul-ish caper to guffaws of the blood-intoxicated men.

This is insane, Markham told himself as his horse plodded aimlessly over the field of horror. This can't be. I'm dreaming.

We are white men, not savages. But this is almost as bad as the mutilation of the Hungate family. No, it's worse, he told himself.

Up on the hillside Chivington was receiving his reports. He had lost eight men killed and 40 wounded, two of whom would die later. He would claim 500 to 600 Indians slain, even though a count two days later by the army's district inspector would find only 70 bodies.

Three-quarters of the bodies were women and children.

The huge colonel also would claim that his force of 700 had met and conquered a hostile force of 900 to 1000 Indians, rather than 500. And he would talk about—but never show—a fresh white scalp found in one of the lodges.

The one scalp, in the weeks ahead, would multiply into scores, would grow beautiful auburn curls and would become a blanket with a braid of woven blond hair from white women's heads. No one ever saw these trophies, but everyone in Denver would become sure they existed.

Denver would see, on the stage of the Apollo Theatre, a string of 100 Indian scalps taken by the 100-day troopers.

Corporal Markham knew nothing of what was to come, the controversy, the investigations, the political repercussions, the long and bloody war with the plains Indians which had its origin here at Sand Creek.

His horse carried him, limp in the saddle, seeing but unseeing, on a wide circuit of the battlefield, from which Indians, singly and in small groups had been fleeing in all directions, since dawn.

Chivington would claim Black Hawk, but the chief had got away to carry a war pipe to all the Cheyennes and Sioux of the plains.

At nightfall, Markham's horse brought him near to a fire where a squad of exhausted soldiers were brewing up a mulligan. One of the band about the fire recognized the man sagging senseless in his saddle.

"Come on, Lu," he called. "Have some stew."

Markham stared at the fire as if he had not heard, but the men pulled him from his saddle and shoved a cup into his hands.

The young corporal, as though by reflex alone, put the cup to his lips and sipped. Then he stumbled to his feet and tottered to the fringe of the firelight. He fell to his knees in the buffalo grass and retched.