

# SAND CREEK...

## A NOVELIST'S VIEW

*By Michael Straight*

MICHAEL STRAIGHT was born at Southampton, New York in 1916. He was educated at the London School of Economics and Trinity College, Cambridge. He returned to the United States in 1937 to join the political staff of President Roosevelt. After the war, in which he served as a B-17 pilot, he returned to Washington as editor of the "New Republic." In 1956 a summer spent on a ranch near the site of Fort Phil Kearny in northern Wyoming led to the writing of his first novel, "Carrington," a story of the Fetterman "massacre." He lives with his wife and five children in Fairfax County, Virginia. He has just returned from a trip to the British West Indies.

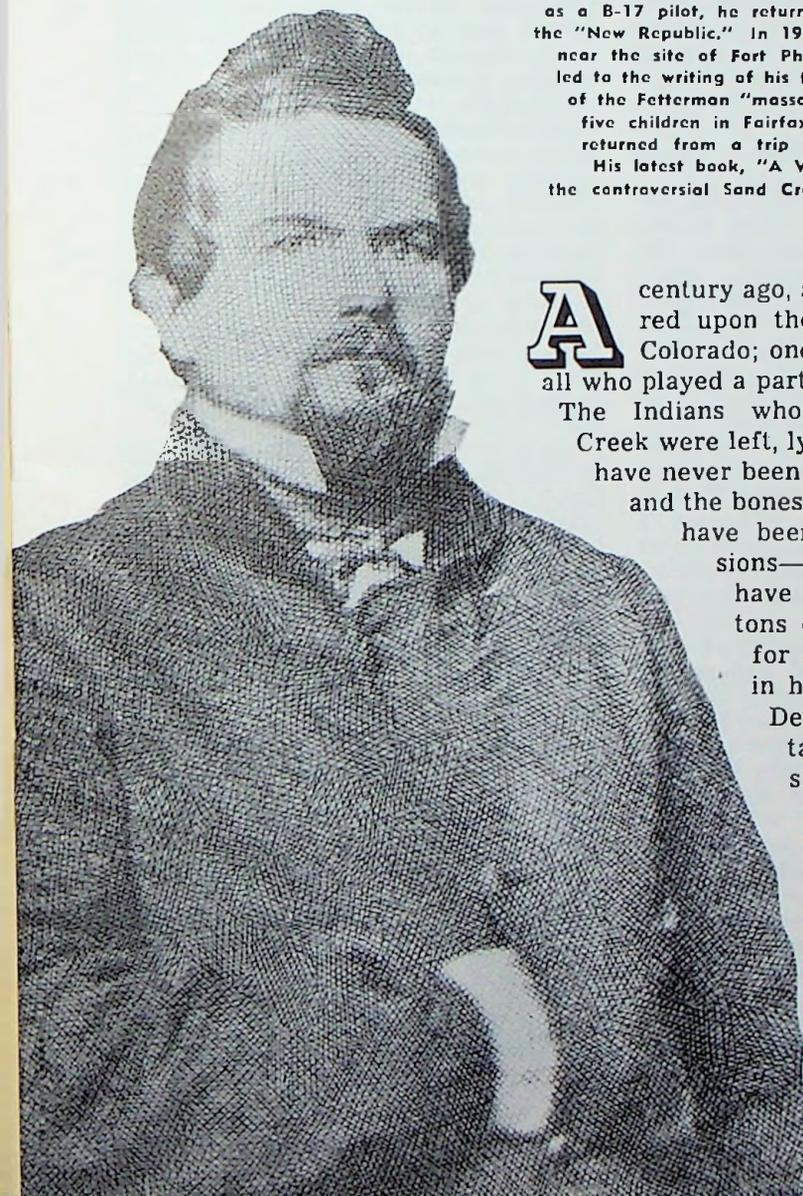
His latest book, "A Very Small Remnant," deals with the controversial Sand Creek "massacre." Its publication date was March 18, 1963.

**A** century ago, a memorable event occurred upon the plains of Southeastern Colorado; one that altered the lives of all who played a part in it.

The Indians who were killed at Sand Creek were left, lying where they fell. They have never been laid to rest. Their bones, and the bones of those who killed them, have been rattled on many occasions—so many that historians have sought to bury the skeletons of Sand Creek, once and for all time. Raymond Carey, in his paper, read before the Denver Westerners,<sup>1</sup> maintains that Sand Creek should have settled, long

Col. John M. Chivington posed in this rare photograph as the first Grand Master of Masons in Colorado, 1861. The "fighting parson" whose heroism in 1862 had helped rout the Confederates near Santa Fe, was a Colonel in the First Colorado Cavalry.

(photo from the collection of Fred and Jo Mazzulla)



ago, into the obscure niche in the national memory which it deserves. He asks why it continues, none-the-less to haunt us; to perplex and to divide us. The answer, he suggests, is that the fires of controversy which surround Sand Creek "appear," in his words "to be tended faithfully by some pernicious and anachronistic Vestal Virgins of the frontier, who bear an ancient grudge against dispassionate and trustworthy history."<sup>2</sup>

This sounds to me more like a charge than a hypothesis, and, since I have written one more book to keep the fires burning, I will, at once, enter a plea of **guilty**: or rather of **partial guilt**. I say **partial** for one obvious reason. I know that I am anachronistic; I suspect that I'm pernicious, but, much as I'd like to, I cannot in all honesty lay claim to being a Vestal Virgin.

"Dispassionate and trustworthy history" is a rare product, even among historians. The historian and the novelist are, none-the-less, poles apart. The historian, as Henry James noted, must say to his fancy: "thus far and no further." The novelist must let his fancy run. The historian must work within the boundaries of verifiable fact; the novelist must move on into the shadow world of character and motivation. It is as a novelist that I come to Sand Creek; so, at the risk of oversimplification, I want to suggest that the story of Sand Creek can be seen with some profit as a clash between the characters of two sharply contrasting men.

Let us go back then and pitch our tent in the debris of old campsites. Let us begin with the morning of September 4, 1864. On that morning, a sergeant and three troopers set out from Fort Lyon, the cavalry outpost whose ruins may still be seen near the town of Lamar.

The troopers' term of service had ended in the First Colorado Cavalry. They were on their way to Denver, to be mustered out. Then, five miles out of Lyons, they came upon three mounted Indians; an old man, a squaw and a boy.

As soldiers, the four whites were required to kill the Indians. As civi-

lians they were entitled to shoot them and to claim their ponies. The men felt perhaps that they were neither soldiers, nor civilians. In any case, they prepared to fire, and then lowered their rifles when the old man held up a piece of paper. He refused to give up the paper; so in violation of all regulations, the sergeant led the Indians back to Lyon, and into the headquarters of its Commanding Officer, Major Edward Wynkoop.

Wynkoop was twenty-eight years old at the time; he was six feet three in height. A photograph, now in the Colorado State Historical Society, shows him as he was: a bold, handsome man, in his blue cape, and long cavalry gloves.

Wynkoop has been described as a sentimentalist, a dreamer, an Indian lover, and—by George Armstrong Custer—as a plunderer, enriching himself at the taxpayers' expense. None of these terms seems to me to be accurate or even useful. Some historians have argued that a close correlation can be established between the attitudes of leading Westerners towards the Negro and toward the Indian. If such a rule can be established, then Wynkoop is an exception to the rule.

As a young man, Wynkoop moved to Kansas from his Pennsylvania home. Kansas, of course, was the great staging area for Colorado; it was in Kansas, Bleeding Kansas, that the five dominant figures of Sand Creek first became known. Four of the five were involved in the strife and violence that inflamed Kansas, and that carried over to Colorado. Wynkoop was not involved. He was not an Abolitionist or even an ardent Free State man. He kept clear of the skirmishes between the Border Ruffians and the Jayhawkers. He worked for the Land Office, and when word came that gold had been found in Cherry Creek, he joined a pioneer party and rode on West. He and his party found mica in the Arkansas River and, like every band of newcomers, supposed that it was gold. Wynkoop later recalled<sup>3</sup> the images that rose in his imagination: a palace on Fifth Avenue; a villa at Newport; a yacht riding

at anchor; a string of race horses—he was, in other words a representative young American.

Wynkoop built his cabin on Clear Creek—and lost it to claim jumpers. He listed his occupation as **prospector** when the 1861 census-taker came around. He was impulsive, chivalrous, carefree; his scrapbook, in the Museum of Anthropology in Santa Fe, is a chronicle of all the scrapes and adventures in which he found himself. He was an amateur actor, raising money for impoverished immigrants; a review in the **Rocky Mountain Daily News** describes his vivid performance as Edward Middleton in a play called **The Drunkard**. He leans on the bar in the climax of the play, trying to raise a glass of whiskey to his lips. His hand shakes so violently that he fails. He falls, sobbing on the bar. Then, as the audience looks on in deathly silence, he draws out a pocket handkerchief. He wraps one end around the glass, carries the other end around his neck, and so, with a supreme effort, hauls the glass up to his lips. He gulps down the whiskey; he gasps "My last!" The audience rises, cheering, to its feet.<sup>4</sup>

In the crisis of the Union, Wynkoop joins the First Colorado Cavalry. He leads a charge at Glorieta, wearing a shirt of scarlet flannel. His bravery is notorious. When Major Chivington takes over the regiment, Wynkoop moves up to Chivington's place.

Wynkoop was Chivington's choice to command the sensitive post of Fort Lyon. The threat seemed to be Confederate raiders; then, in 1864, Lyon became an important center of action against the Cheyennes. Chivington, as Military Commander of the Colorado District, pressed the doctrine of extermination. Wynkoop accepted it. "The Cheyennes," Chivington wrote to Wynkoop, "will have to be soundly whipped before they will be quiet. If any of them are caught in your vicinity, kill them as that is the only way."<sup>5</sup> "My intention," Wynkoop replied, "is to kill all Indians I come across."<sup>6</sup>

In time to come, Wynkoop was to hold that the Indian War of 1864 was

a war of oppression, instigated by Chivington. But, until September 4, Wynkoop held no such view. In his fragmentary autobiography written in 1876, and now in the Colorado State Historical Society, Wynkoop recounts his state of mind when the three Indians were shoved as captives into his office:

For over thirteen years, my lot was cast among the wildest Indian tribes that remain on our continent . . . for many years, as a Borderman and Pioneer in that wild country, where every man was supposed to carry his life in his hand, hearing at times of the outrages committed by the Red Man, I naturally . . . belonged to the Exterminators . . . I did not stop to inquire whether an Indian, when he killed a white man, or ran off cattle was justified or not. I thought that . . . the Red Man . . . was degraded, treacherous and cruel; that he had no rights that we were bound to respect; that in fact he had nothing but the instincts of a wild beast, and should be treated accordingly. . . .<sup>7</sup>

In this spirit, and loyal to his superior officer, Wynkoop began by berating the sergeant who had brought the three Indians into the Fort. The sergeant defended his action, and, in any case, was no longer subject to Wynkoop's command. Wynkoop, in turn, could not release the Indians, nor could he kill them in cold blood. He learned, or perhaps he knew, that the old Indian was One Eye, who had lost his eye defending William Bent against the Kiowas, and whose daughter was married to John Prowers, the most successful of the Arkansas Valley ranchers. He accepted the paper that One Eye had brought. It was a message from the Council of the Southern Cheyennes, in response to Governor Evans' Proclamation of June 27. The Governor had offered to protect and to support all friendly Indians if they would go to designated places of safety. In turn the Council had conditionally accepted the Governor's offer and had un-

dertaken to inform the other Indian nations of its decision. The Council offered as a first step to exchange the white captives it held for Indian prisoners. It asked for 'true news.'

Wynkoop presumably asked why the Cheyennes had allowed forty-five days to pass before replying to the Governor's Proclamation. One Eye replied that Wynkoop soldiers had attacked and driven off Cheyennes who had attempted to bring word of the Council's decision to the Fort. Wynkoop was aware of one such encounter; he continued to challenge the sincerity of the Cheyennes. One Eye in reply spoke eloquently of the past prosperity and present misery of his people. Wynkoop was shaken; he records, in his manuscript his sense of bewilderment; his feeling of being at a loss. Toward the end of the interview he said to One Eye, "Did you not fear you would be killed when you endeavored to get into the Fort?"

"I thought I would be killed," One Eye replied, "but I knew that the paper would be found on my dead body, that you would see it, and it might give peace to my people once more."

"And how about him?" Wynkoop said, pointing to the boy. One Eye answered that the boy was also ready to die on the off chance that the message might be read.

Wynkoop continues: "I was bewildered with an exhibition of such patriotism on the part of the two savages and felt myself in the presence of superior beings."<sup>8</sup>

This brief encounter was, clearly, a decisive moment in Wynkoop's life. The transformation which it brought about in him was profound—so profound that we can only conclude that he was unconsciously prepared for it. He was by nature generous, warm-hearted, tolerant. The policy of extermination which he outwardly accepted, was in fact contrary to his own deepest instincts. The War for the Union had hardened him to violence but it had also aroused his veneration of heroic action in the service of one's country. The chance encounter with One Eye brought to his consciousness, in place of faceless and despised

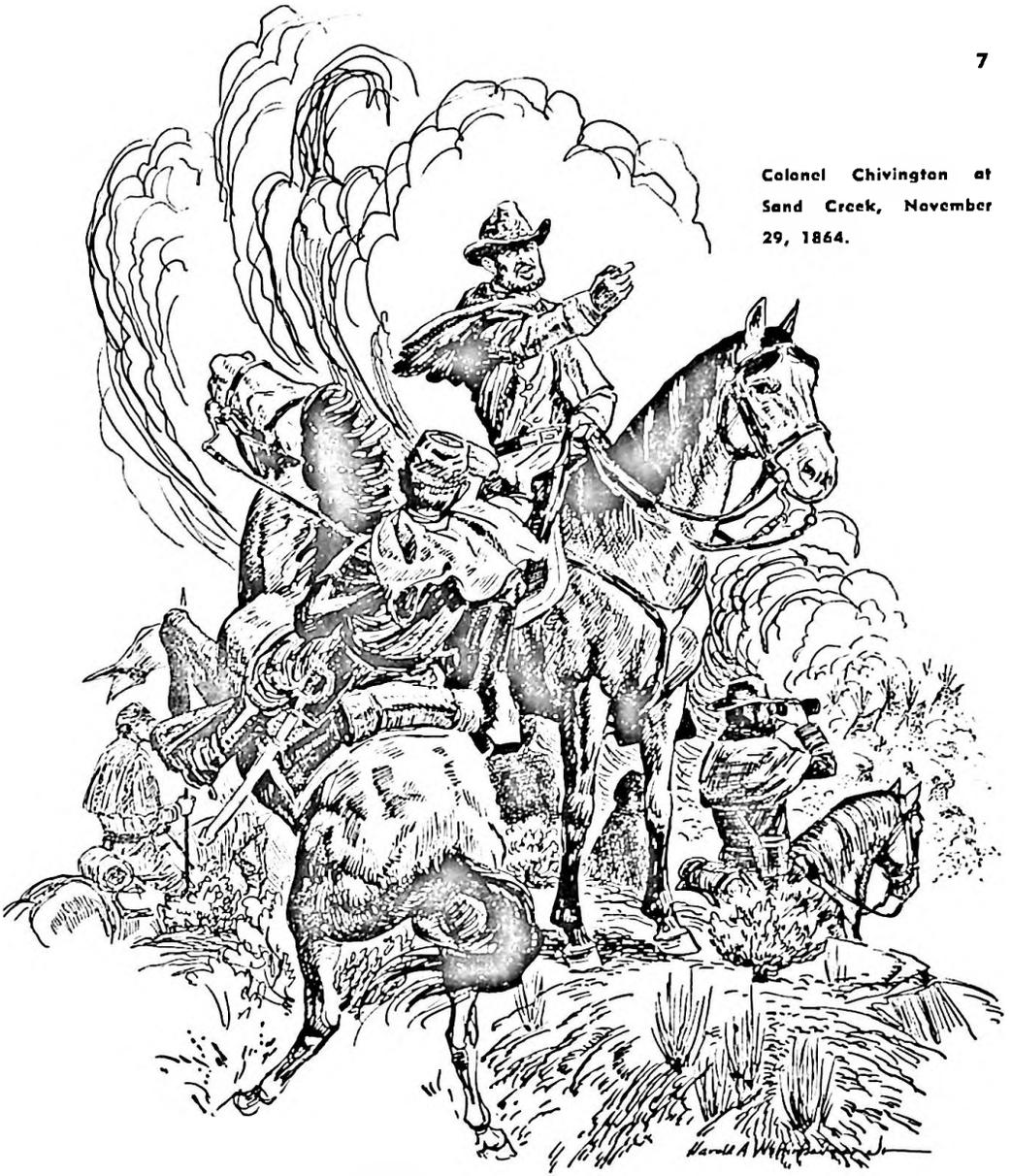
enemy, a fellow human being. He saw in that human being the quality he admired above all others—courage. So One Eye brought Wynkoop back to himself.

Wynkoop decided at once to take advantage of the Indians' offer. He questioned One Eye and learned that five white captives were being held in the camp of the Cheyennes. One Eye, going beyond the terms proposed by his Council, assured Wynkoop that if he would journey to the camp, those captives would be delivered to him without any exchange. Wynkoop left for the camp on the following morning, taking with him a small detachment of volunteers. He records in his manuscript that not only his officers but the whole garrison considered the expedition "a foolhardy and perilous one." "Yet," he adds, "my confidence was so great that the Indians intended to act in good faith, I would not have required a single trooper had I not been informed by One Eye that there were still roving war parties out with whom I might have trouble were I to run across them."

Wynkoop in fact had to quell a mutiny among his own troops. He had also to overcome the intense hostility and suspicion of the Cheyennes. He succeeded because he and Black Kettle were wholly honest with each other. Black Kettle had conceded in his message that three war parties were absent when his Council voted for peace. Wynkoop in turn told the Council that he was not authorized to negotiate terms. He promised only that if the Council would return the captives he would take the Chiefs to Denver where they could meet the Governor.

If Wynkoop demanded much of the territory of Colorado in this proposal, he demanded much more of the Cheyennes. In recalling their response, it is worth remembering for a moment the assumption which governed our official attitude towards the Indians throughout the period of hostilities. We took it for granted that, although the Indians were savages, incapable of loyalty or obedience, their nations were more tightly governed than our own. Thus, our state and federal gov-

Colonel Chivington at  
Sand Creek, November  
29, 1864.



ernments made few and feeble attempts to police the boundaries of the Indian reservations; they conceded their inability to prevent their citizens from committing trespass, theft, and other crimes against the Indians, and from corrupting them by carrying on illegal trade in liquor and in arms. Yet General Curtis, commanding the Department of Kansas, to cite one example that bears directly upon Sand Creek, thought nothing of holding the Council of the Cheyennes responsible

for the transgressions of every Cheyenne. He demanded that the Council make full restitution for all alleged thefts of white men's property, and that it turn over Cheyennes accused of crimes to courts in which they were not even permitted to testify. He required the Council to deliver to him Indians who could be held as hostages—a demand which we would have rejected as barbarous, had it been imposed upon us.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, as the conference in the Big

Timbers shows, the Cheyenne nation was not as tightly governed as our own. Its members were torn between many conflicting loyalties; its Council was limited in power and had no means of enforcing its will.

The position of the Cheyennes was in itself, sensitive, equivocal, difficult. They were caught between their hereditary enemies and the whites, who were invading their lands and destroying their sustenance. They were, like most primitive peoples, past masters of the art of politics; yet their tradition was of little use to them in a wholly new situation. The buffalo hunters were forcing them into a position of dependence upon the white man's charity; yet, to the best of them dependence was repugnant. Three months before the meeting in the Big Timbers, Starving Bear, the leading warrior of the Cheyennes, had been killed in cold blood as he attempted to negotiate with the troops of Lieutenant Layre. His brother Bull Bear, was the leader of the principal war party, and he was bound, by the ancient law of his people, to exact revenge. The Cheyennes, in shaping their response to Wynkoop's proposal, followed an essentially democratic procedure. The leaders of the war party were permitted to harangue the crowd; the members of the Council spoke in turn, and Black Kettle was the last to speak. The Council debated through the night before accepting Wynkoop's proposal. In accepting it, the Council chose a course that placed the Chiefs in personal peril and exposed the entire nation to reprisals by the Sioux. Yet, when the decision was taken, the minority which favored war accepted it. Bull Bear climbed onto the cart with the Chiefs and was taken by Wynkoop to Denver.

There is a photograph in the State Historical Society of the citizens of Denver who rode to the outskirts of the city in their carriages to greet the Chiefs. There are thirty-three carriages, filled with well dressed ladies and gentlemen. Who are they, and why have they come? One answer is given by Wynkoop, in his unfinished manuscript. Denver, he tells us, was "in a state of considerable excite-

ment" and it was divided into two parties. One was led by Chivington and Evans, and supported by the contractors. Its spokesmen criticised Wynkoop, and its extremists undertook to attack him, and to kill the Chiefs. The second party, according to Wynkoop, consisted of the "respectable" portion of the community, and constituted the majority. It applauded Wynkoop, believing his action in rescuing the captives to be "more important than the prolongation of an unjust war."<sup>11</sup>

It is this second group that has come to greet the Chiefs. And whether or not they still command the majority in Denver, they are without doubt the aristocracy of the frontier. They are the Quakers and the ministers; the federal judges and the leaders of the anti-statehood movement which, three weeks earlier, trounced the party of Evans and Chivington at the polls. They have come out to demonstrate their belief in the possibility of reconciliation with the Indians; their opposition to the frenzied preparations under way in Denver for a full scale Indian war.

It is with these ladies and gentlemen that Governor Evans belongs, by upbringing, by association, and by conviction. It is their outlook which he expressed in his Proclamation of June 27. His second Proclamation,<sup>12</sup> licensing the citizens of the Territory to kill and to rob any Indian whom they judge to be hostile, is in contrast an incitement to lawlessness. Thus, as Wynkoop is led to be true to himself by the Indians, Evans is perhaps false to himself.<sup>13</sup> As Evans is no longer master of himself from August on, so he is no longer master of events in the Territory.<sup>14</sup> Events are shaped by the mob, and by the one man powerful enough to control the mob—John Milton Chivington.

Chivington is certainly one of the most arresting figures in the history of the frontier. He was, to begin with, a giant; a man of immense energy and ambition. The greatest moment of his life was undoubtedly the Battle of Glorieta. There, under fire, he performed heroic feats on behalf of the United States. He was acclaimed, and

made Military Commander of the Colorado District on his return to Denver. The year that followed was inevitably, an anti-climax. In the East, tremendous battles were shaking the continent, and men were rising to heights of national power and prestige that no man in the West could attain. Colorado was a backwater in contrast, a quiet region, save for a few minor raids. Chivington applied for a transfer to the Eastern battlefronts, where, he was certain, he could perform great feats for the Union. His application was denied.

The wisdom of hindsight is superfluous in judging what military policy was appropriate for Colorado in 1863 and 1864. The Union, of which Colorado was a part, was in danger of military defeat by the massed armies of the Confederacy. In the vast area that reached from Denver to Larned, and from the Arkansas to the Platte, less than three hundred soldiers were scattered in four posts. These three hundred men were charged with protecting not only the settlers of the region, but the immigrants who flooded through it. They could succeed only if all possible measures were taken to avoid an Indian war.

The war was avoided in 1863. Governor Evans in his report of October 16<sup>th</sup> noted that the Indians were quiet and that the leaders of the bands located on the Republican and the Smoky Hill rivers were doing their best to quell the malcontents who advocated war. He predicted that no troubles would develop with the Cheyennes, the Arapahoes and the Sioux.

Then, in November, Evans reversed himself, after a meeting with Robert North, a strange, illiterate man, white by birth and Arapahoe by adoption, whom some believed to be insane.

Despite the warning that North conveyed to Evans, there is no evidence that the plains Indians chose war in place of peace in the autumn of 1863. We know, from the reports of H. T. Ketcham, that the Indians of the Arkansas Valley were ravaged by smallpox; we know that many were kept alive by eating cattle of the immigrants that had died of disease. We

know that buffalo were scarce, due to the unfettered activities of the buffalo hunters, and that white traders were taking the few hides the Indians had treated in exchange for whiskey. But the Indians, Ketcham reported, were still friendly. When, in the spring the first fighting occurred between Chivington's troopers and the Cheyennes, the response of the Chiefs was to seek out William Bent in an effort to prevent the spread of war. Bent in turn tried to impress upon Chivington the desire of the plains Indians for peace, and their capacity, once provoked, to lay waste the settlements of Kansas and Colorado. Chivington answered that he was "on the warpath" and that the settlers would have to fend for themselves.

Chivington sent three detachments of troopers out to chastise the Cheyennes in the spring of 1864. Whether or not they acted upon false rumor or proven fact, they were sent in violation of an elementary rule of military policy: they infuriated the Indians without appreciably reducing their fighting capacity. Major T. I. McKenney, Inspector of the Department of Kansas, saw the danger. "It should be our policy," he wrote to General Curtis, "to . . . stop these scouting parties that are roaming over the country; who do not know one tribe from another and who will kill anything in the shape of an Indian. It will require but few murders on the part of our troops to unite all these warlike tribes."<sup>10</sup>

Did Evans and Chivington suppose that Curtis would come to their aid, once the Indians were aroused? Curtis was wholly occupied with the threat presented by the Confederate armies of General Price. It was not until October 28 that these armies were met and turned back in a battle in which two Confederate generals and five colonels were captured by the Union.

Did Evans and Chivington believe that they would be given massive aid from Washington for what Evans called "this gigantic Indian war"? The Confederate stragglers who failed to turn up in time at the Battle of Gettys-

burg outnumbered all the citizens of the Territory of Colorado. The capital of the Union was in greater peril than the outpost of Denver in the summer of 1864. Throughout that summer, the armies of the Union and the Confederacy were locked in the Wilderness. Grant tried to advance there, and lost seven thousand men in thirty minutes. It was not until September 3, the day before One Eye appeared at Lyon, that the earthworks around Atlanta fell to Sherman. Even then, the outcome of the struggle in which the Union was fighting for its life, was far from certain. Evans and Chivington then, are asking for too much, if they ask the President of the United States and his Secretary of War, to set aside the desperate problems which confront them, in order to give serious consideration to a border skirmish with wild Indians.

The One Hundred Days Regiment is none-the-less authorized by the War Department. And, in response to the frantic appeals of Governor Evans, supplies of a sort are obtained. Recruiting begins. "I am at work day and night filling the One Hundred Days Regiment," Chivington reports on August 19.<sup>17</sup> It is very much his child. He goes over the head of General Curtis in attempting to commandeer stores for the regiment. He goes over the heads of senior officers in Denver to pick a young lieutenant, George Shoup, for the colonelcy. The reason is surely that Chivington intends to take over the regiment before it moves into battle.

Against whom will it battle? The only clue that we have to Chivington's initial plans is his telegram of September 19, 1864 to Secretary Stanton. In this telegram he identifies his target as "Indian warriors congregated eighty miles from Lyon, three thousand strong."<sup>18</sup>

The camp in the Big Timbers is just eighty miles from Lyon; the Cheyennes and Arapahoes camped there, under Black Kettle, are three thousand in all. It is more than probable then, that this is the band that Chivington intends to attack as of September 19.

Three days later, when thirty-four

days of the hundred days have passed, Chivington receives word from Wynkoop that he is bringing Black Kettle and his fellow chieftains to Denver to negotiate peace.

Chivington wires at once to General Curtis in Leavenworth:

I have been informed by E. W. Wynkoop commanding Fort Lyon, that he is on his way here with Cheyenne and Arapahoe chiefs. Winter approaches; Third Regiment is full and they know they will be chastised for their outrages and now want peace. I hope that the Major General will direct that they make full restitution and then go on their reservation and stay there.<sup>19</sup>

. . . They will be chastised. . . they must make full restitution. . . they must wait, on their reservation. . . Chivington is apparently attempting to preserve his own freedom of action and at the same time to deny freedom of action to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.

Curtis interprets the telegram as a request to block peace negotiations to the extent that he can; he complies with the request. The Governor also does his best to avoid any peace negotiations. He is no longer authorized to meet with the Chiefs he tells Wynkoop; he has no power; in any case, he is leaving town. Wynkoop with his Dutch stubbornness, refuses to accept these arguments. So Evans is forced to confront the central dilemma that haunts his conscience. Three or four times, according to Wynkoop,<sup>20</sup> the Governor repeats the question to which he can find no answer: "Wynkoop, what am I to do with the Third Regiment if I make peace?"

To Wynkoop, the answer is obvious: "Disband it."

"I cannot," Evans replies: "The Third Regiment was raised to kill Indians, and kill Indians it must."

Still, Evans gives in and meets the Chiefs at Camp Weld. He warns them that he cannot conclude a peace treaty, but he is led, by their obvious friendliness to revert to his initial plan of segregating the hostile and the friendly Indians, and of offering the

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## SAND CREEK

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friendly Indians protection. The Chiefs, he wrote in his report upon the conference "were earnest in their desire for peace and offered to secure the assent of their bands to lay down their arms or to join the whites in the war against the other tribes of the plains."

"I advised them." Evans continued, "to make immediate application to the military authorities for, and to accept the terms of peace they might be able to obtain."<sup>21</sup>

Evans referred the chiefs to Chivington; Chivington in turn laid down the terms by which they would be exempted from the fighting to come. They should surrender their arms he said, and submit to the authority of Major Wynkoop at Fort Lyon. The Chiefs at once accepted these terms. Ordering them to Lyon, while Wynkoop was there, was a little like throwing Brer Rabbit into the old briar patch.

That night the word spreads through Denver that an agreement has been reached at Weld. The troopers of the Third Regiment stage a riot in protest; the freighters hitch up their wagons; the settlers head back for their ranches. The Indians move close to Lyon. Many of the young warriors are released to go hunting; others are put to work by Wynkoop, in the work they can do best. They ride over the plains as scouts under Wynkoop's direction; they report back to him. Traders who attempt to smuggle whiskey onto the reservation are caught and turned back; malcontents who ride off to join hostile tribes are pursued and brought home; stock that has wandered off is found and returned before trouble can occur. In the three months that follow the conference in the Big Timbers, no outbreaks between whites and Indians are recorded on the plains of Southern Colorado. Whites and Indians live side by side, according to a statement signed by every officer at Lyon, "as if the bloody scenes of the past summer had never been enacted."<sup>22</sup>

There are, none-the-less, many bands of hostile Indians on the plains. Kiowas, Comanches and Apaches are raiding south of the Arkansas River. More important, the Sioux are gathering in large numbers on the Republican and the Smoky Hill. "About one half of all the Missouri River Sioux and Yanktons who were driven from Minnesota" have crossed the Platte, so Bull Bear tells Evans and Chivington at Camp Weld. "What are the Sioux going to do?" the Governor asks. And Bull Bear answers: "Their plan is to clean out this country; they are angry and will do all the damage to the whites they can."<sup>23</sup>

Thus Chivington's military task is defined: to surround and to disarm the Sioux. It would be a difficult assignment for a commander of trained troops. It was a far more difficult assignment for the commander of the Third Regiment, hastily trained and poorly equipped; sluggish in movement and rebellious in spirit. The prospects for victory over the Sioux are dim, but Chivington must score a victory. He has been defeated in the statehood election. His term of service in the army is running out. General Connor is encroaching upon his territory, as Dr. Carey has noted.

On September 22, Ovando Hollister, an old campaigner, declares in the Black Hawk Register that the Third Regiment can accomplish nothing in the time that it has left. Three weeks later the last days are passing in which Chivington can set out with any hope of surrounding the Sioux and returning before the one hundred days are up. What are the alternatives to this campaign that must be difficult and may well end in disaster? To reconnoitre as far east as the Smoky Hill and then return to Denver? To place the Third Regiment in reserve? To disband it? "The Third Regiment was raised to kill Indians, and kill Indians it must." To protect the settlers of the Territory, or to vindicate its leaders? The pressures mount upon Chivington as the hundred days draw to an end; they are pressures of Chivington's own creation; pressures not of a military, but of a political and a psychological kind.

How would you and I react to these pressures? The question is bound to occur to us, but it is not enlightening; for we think of ourselves as normal, and Chivington was not a normal man.

We need at this point to bring into sharper focus our image of Chivington; not of the massive shoulders, the fierce eyes, the defiant chin, but of the spirit that stirred within his immense frame.

It is no easy task, for the testimony is lacking. The reason why it is lacking is, in itself of interest. Chivington had enemies rather than opponents and followers rather than friends. Both lived in fear of him. When a man who holds great power is greatly feared, other men do not reveal their thoughts about him. They forego their criticisms; they keep their suspicions to themselves. I say this with some knowledge, because I have seen it happen in Washington. I am certain that it is one reason why our image of Chivington is a blurred image today.

From this blurred image, certain traits emerge. I've mentioned Chivington's ambition; his energy; his physical courage; his physical strength. I see in him four other traits which, to me, stand in sharp contrast to the personality of Ned Wynkoop and which bear directly upon the course of events after the conference at Camp Weld.

**First, Chivington was a man of violence.** Clarence Lyman writes of his "great size and known ferocity."<sup>24</sup> "In action," according to Dr. William Whitford, "he becomes the incarnation of war." Chivington's daughter is quoted by Lyman as speaking of her father as "a street angel and a house devil."<sup>25</sup> He lays his revolvers out beside him on the pulpit; he tears the hats off men who listen, in his crowds; he smashes barrels of whiskey that he comes upon in Denver; he promises, in a speech on the Indians to "kill and scalp all, little and big."<sup>27</sup> Almost inadvertently, in his biography of Chivington,<sup>28</sup> Reginald Craig makes it clear that in Kansas and Colorado, from the pulpit and the army saddle, Chivington is a storm

center, around whose monumental figure, violence eddies and swirls.

**Second, Chivington was a fanatic.** The revealed truth of religion offered, perhaps, a starting point for him. But he moved far beyond the rough rules of frontier Methodism. He was not restrained by humility. He found his inspiration in the Old Testament with its jealous and vengeful Deity, not in the New Testament with its doctrine of forgiveness and love. The Methodist bishops, so Lyman says, deplored Chivington's lack of spirituality and urged him to wrestle with God in prayer. Chivington probably felt no such need. He was certain that he was the instrument of the Almighty. He felt himself subject to no human restraint as he strode through Denver and the mining camps, "battling for the Lord." He lacks all restraint in speaking of men who stand in his way. The critics of Sand Creek he tells the people of Colorado, "are more to be feared than the crawling viper"—they are "venomous as reptiles and cowardly as curs." They are "agents of His Satanic Majesty, the Devil." *Sois mon frere ou je te tue*; if the Indians resembled infidels, then the battler for the Lord felt little compunction in wiping them from the face of the earth.

**Third, Chivington had little moral scruple.** Several examples could be cited to document this statement; two will do.

When Chivington left the army and Denver he became a freighter, working out of Fort Laramie. From there, in the winter of 1867, a series of anonymous and scurrilous articles were mailed to newspapers around the country. The articles were investigated by General Palmer, the Commanding Officer of the Fort. The anonymous author proved to be Chivington. "Chivington has been here nearly all winter," Palmer reported to the Department of the Platte; "he enjoyed the protection of the place for himself and train and he was always politely treated. He has however been writing shamefully abusive and slanderous articles . . . in one of which he stated that the officers of

this Post were living openly with squaws. There is not a shallow of truth in his statement and I cannot permit him to return to this Military Reservation."<sup>29</sup>

A second example of Chivington's lack of moral scruple is his second marriage. He married the young widow of his own son, Thomas, and without the knowledge or consent of her parents. She fled to them within a few weeks of her marriage. Her parents denounced Chivington for this "criminal act" and "vile outrage" in a notice published in *The Nebraska City News*. *The Rocky Mountain News*, edited by Chivington's one-time champion, W. N. Byers, concluded on June 10, 1868, "It seems to be true that John M. Chivington has married his son's widow. What he will do next to outrage the moral sense and feeling of his day and generation, remains to be seen; but be sure it will be something, if there is anything left for him to do."

**Fourth, Chivington did not hesitate to use any means that served his ends.**

One example of this trait is the execution without trial of the five members of the Reynolds gang who passed under Chivington's care. No one can be certain who ordered their execution, but the official report of the United States attorney is surely weighty evidence. "...there is no doubt in the minds of our people that a most foul murder has been committed, and that by the express order of Chivington . . ."<sup>30</sup>

A second example is Chivington's action at the meeting called by the veterans of the Third Regiment to protest the Military Inquiry into Sand Creek. Speaker after speaker denounced the Inquiry as they had every right to do. Chivington's contribution was to shift the protest from verbal denunciation to physical assassination. To the veterans who were down and out in that winter, he offered five hundred dollars "to be used in killing Indians and those who sympathize with them."<sup>31</sup>

A third and less familiar instance of Chivington's methods may be found in an occurrence in the Raton Moun-

tains in March 1862. It was there that Colonel John Slough gave up the command of the First Colorado Regiment. In April, Chivington was raised to the colonelcy; in the interim, Samuel Tappan, the second in command, served as acting-colonel. In that capacity, Tappan investigated the circumstances which led Slough to resign. He discovered, so he wrote in his diary, that on the night before Slough surrendered his command, sentinels were withdrawn from around his tent on the orders of a high ranking officer, and men were posted around the tent in the darkness for the purpose of assassinating Slough. Tappan forwarded his finding to Slough and received in reply a letter dated February 6, 1863, from Alexandria, Virginia, where Slough was stationed. "I have no doubt," Slough wrote, "that your statement is true. There were men in the Regiment so ambitious and so malignant towards me that I believe the statement. . . I resigned the colonelcy because I was satisfied that a further connection would result in my assassination. I am satisfied that men now high in rank and command were at the bottom of the thing. I am now satisfied that today, if a chance offered, I would be murdered. I say this to you in confidence that you will keep it secret."<sup>32</sup>

There is no mention here of Chivington's name; nor would we expect his name to be mentioned in mails which we know were opened and read on more than one occasion. We must, of course, be careful in accusing men who cannot rise to defend themselves. But we cannot evade the issue by repeating the old injunction: say nothing but good of the dead. Tappan's diary makes it plain that he regarded Chivington as the source of the conspiracy against Slough.<sup>33</sup> And while many men disliked Slough, it is difficult to identify the "men now high in rank and command" with any save Chivington and his immediate circle.

These then are four characteristics which I see in Chivington. I have singled them out and dwelt upon them because they seem to me to bear directly upon all that follows the conference at Camp Weld.

In early October, the scattered units of the Third Regiment are ordered to gather in the Bijou Basin. From there, they may move south, or else east, to the Smoky Hill and the Republican. Chivington reveals his plans to no one, yet, on October 16 he sends a message to Wynkoop at Fort Lyon. "I have the best of evidence that there are a large number of Indians on the Republican and design to go after them. . . . send as quick as possible those Starr carbines. . . . I have moved the Third out sixty miles and will be after the Indians as soon as we get those carbines. . . ." <sup>34</sup>

There are indeed large numbers of Sioux Indians on the Republican. Does Chivington still intend in mid-October, to go after them? Why, if secrecy is the key to success, does he confide in Wynkoop whose conduct he has criticized so sharply? Does he fear that Wynkoop will delay the shipment of the carbines if he suspects they will be used against the Cheyennes? Is he misleading the one man who can and will stand in his way?

On October 17, Major Scott Anthony is relieved from the command of Fort Larned and ordered to proceed to Fort Lyon. On November 2 he arrives there. He hands Wynkoop his orders, transferring him to Kansas; he takes over the command of Lyon in Wynkoop's place. On the same day, Shoup sends word to Major Sayr in the Bijou Basin: full rations are to be fed to the horses; there is work ahead. Shoup rides out to recall the companies still stationed on the Platte. On November 15 the Third Regiment breaks camp and heads south. Five days later Chivington mounts his black mule to ride off after the Regiment. General Connor watches him. Connor has learned that the Sioux are camped in large numbers on the Republican. It is the Sioux to whom he presumably refers when he tells Chivington that he will not catch the Indians on the plains. "I think I will catch them," Chivington replies. <sup>35</sup> Connor wonders, perhaps, if they are speaking of the same Indians. "Colonel," he says, "where are those Indians?" "General," Chivington answers, "that is the trick that wins in this game." The trick.

"There are but two persons who know their exact location," Chivington continues: "and they are myself and Colonel George L. Shoup." No one else will know.

On November 23, Chivington joins the Third Regiment and takes over its command. "Which gives pretty general dissatisfaction," according to Major Sayr. <sup>36</sup> Why? Dr. Carey tells us that the troopers wanted only to perform the bloody work for which they had enlisted. Maybe so. But they had endured a blizzard in the Basin; two men had died there, and thirteen had gone over the hill. Were these thirteen deserters so unlike the rest? My own hunch is that the one hundred and fourteen men whom Sayr recruited in Central City were not burning to fight the Indians. Nor, I would guess, were they deeply stirred by the oratory of Mr. H. M. Teller who addressed the mobilization rally. My hunch is they signed up because the floods and the other natural disasters of 1864 had left them broke. The army pay looked good to them in August; in November, after the blizzard, no pay seemed enough. My hunch is that the troopers were dissatisfied because they guessed that Chivington would lead them off on a long and a hard campaign. They were, I suspect, sick and tired of soldiering; like almost all soldiers, they wanted to go home.

Chivington was the master, not the slave of the Third Regiment. He leads it down the valley of the Arkansas River. The column advances like a giant amoeba, incorporating into itself all the life that it overtakes so as to ensure complete secrecy. It comes to Lyon and envelops it; sentries are posted around the Fort so that no man may escape. The officers of the garrison discern Chivington's purpose and protest against it. The Cheyennes are prisoners of war; the army is sworn to protect them. Then the violence and the fanaticism that Chivington bears within himself, burst out. He damns all Indians, and all white men who sympathize with Indians. Against Captain Soule he utters repeated threats.

At daybreak, on the following morning, the column stands on the bluffs that encircle the Big Bend at Sand Creek. Not one sentinel is posted in the village that lies sleeping below. Chivington orders the horse herds driven off so that none can escape. Then he shouts his order. It is something like this: "I am not telling you to kill all ages and sexes, but men, remember the women and children murdered on the Platte." The words are an incitement to massacre, and the massacre follows. Officers as well as troopers tear the scalps from living women. Men compete to see who can kill naked children barely old enough to walk. Chivington sees all this; he makes no move to halt it. If the atrocities mount in the heat of the moment, they continue in cold blood on the following day. A boy of ten is found unharmed, and executed. A prisoner is murdered with Chivington's consent. The troops spend the morning robbing and mutilating the dead.

The engagement is described by Chivington as "one of the most bloody Indian battles ever fought on these plains." "The Indians, numbering from nine hundred to one thousand," he informs the War Department, "formed a line of battle. . . stubbornly contesting every inch of ground. . . Between five and six hundred Indians were left dead on the field."<sup>37</sup>

Scott Anthony sends a contrasting story to his brother. "The Indians lost in all 168 persons," he writes on December 30. "Thirty-two of these were young warriors, forty-six were old men, the balance squaws and children."<sup>38</sup> George Bent who was in the village when it was attacked reported that 163 Indians in all were killed, of whom 110 were women and children.<sup>39</sup> These totals tally closely with the estimates of James Beckworth, John Smith and six officers of the Lyon Battalion.

Chivington in turn lost eight men; four of these were killed by Indians including George Pierce who rode into the village to rescue John Smith, the interpreter who was living there, from the concentrated fire of the

Third Regiment.

There were, according to Anthony, about forty armed Indians in all, at Sand Creek. Not far from Sand Creek, he added, 2000 warriors were gathered in three camps. Chivington, he concluded, "has whipped the only peaceable Indians in the country, which I wanted him to do . . ."<sup>40</sup>

So I see Sand Creek as a clash between two sharply contrasting personalities. The interview with One Eye leads to the meeting in the Big Timbers; that meeting leads in turn to the conference at Camp Weld. Each of these incidents reflects deepseated traits in the American character, but the thread that leads from one to the others, and makes all three possible, is the personality of Ned Wynkoop. Had another man, Scott Anthony say, or Jacob Downing, been the Commanding Officer of Fort Lyon in September, 1864, I suspect that One Eye's desperate mission would have failed.

In the same way, the decision to attack the Cheyennes, and the manner of the attack, are to me expressive of the personality of John Milton Chivington. Chivington himself affirms that this is so. "White men of the frontiers," he cries in his message To The People of Colorado, of June 1865, "White men of the frontiers, do you desire to become the servile dogs of a brutal savage? If you do, this policy (of criticizing Sand Creek) will suit you, though I thought differently, and acted accordingly."<sup>41</sup>

Granted then that fear, intolerance, frustration and the desire for revenge were loose elements in the Territory in 1864; it was due to the extraordinary personality of Chivington that these elements fused and found expression in the savagery of Sand Creek.

The paradox follows: Wynkoop by seeking to save the Cheyennes and by winning their trust, made it possible for Chivington to accomplish what he described as "almost an annihilation of the entire tribe."<sup>42</sup>

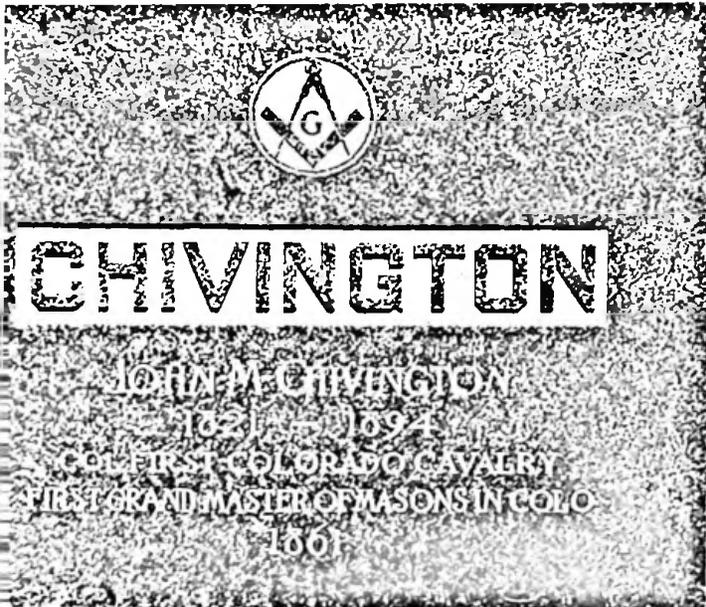
The paradox is an ancient one; it was defined by Heraclitus, twenty-three hundred years before Sand Creek. Good and evil, justice and in-

justice, fire and ice, said Heraclitus, cannot exist without each other; the conflict between these mighty opposites is the logos that binds all things.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FOOTNOTES

- 1 "Colonel Chivington, Brigadier General Connor and Sand Creek;" Denver Westerners Brand Book, Vol XVI 1960.  
 2 Ibid.  
 3 Wynkoop's Unfinished Colorado History, 29. State Historical Society of Colorado.  
 4 E. W. Wynkoop Scrapbook, South West Museum of Anthropology Santa Fe. The performance was given on March 4, 1860, by the Amateur Dramatic Association. Mrs. Langrishe was the doting wife of the Drunkard, C. B. Cook was the lecherous Squire Cribb. The full title of the play was *The Moral Drama of The Drunkard or The Fallen Saved*. It originated in England and was revived in 1926 by W. C. Fields, Boris Karloff and others.  
 5 *Rebellion Records*. Series I, Vol. XXXIV Part IV 151.  
 6 Ibid. Vol. XLI Part I 237-38.  
 7 Wynkoop's Unfinished Colorado History 83-84.  
 8 Ibid, 85-89.  
 9 Ibid, 89.  
 10 Telegram from General S. R. Curtis to Colonel J. M. Chivington, September 28, 1864. *Rebellion Records* Series I Vol XLI Part III 462.  
 11 Wynkoop's Unfinished Colorado History, 107-108  
 12 Proclamation of August 11, 1864; cited in *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*; Report of Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War; Part III 47.  
 13 Members of the Joint Committee could not understand why Evans did not follow up the Conference at Camp Weld, "with affirmative action to secure peace." "I will simply say" Evans replied, "that . . . the people were terribly excited and making a great cry that I did not do anything for

- them." *Condition of the Indian Tribes*, Report No. 156. 39th Congress 2nd Session, 48.  
 14 Representative Ross asked: "Had you nothing to do with directing the troops when this attack (at Sand Creek) was made?" Evans replied; "Nothing. I had no more command of those troops than I had of the Army of the Potomac. I did not advise it in any way." Ibid. 48. The Committee regarded this as an abrogation of authority on the part of the Governor.  
 15 *Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, (1863) 121.  
 16 Report of June 15, 1864. *Rebellion Records* Series I Vol. XXXIV Part IV, 402-404.  
 17 *Records of the War Department, United States Army Commands*, District of Colorado, Letters Sent, Jan. 1864-May 1865, Vol. 323 Department of Kansas; National Archives.  
 18 *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 68.  
 19 *Rebellion Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI Part III 399.  
 20 *Condition of the Indian Tribes*, 77.  
 21 E. W. Wynkoop's Unfinished Colorado History, 110-111.  
 Evans spoke of the Cheyennes thereafter as prisoners. Samuel Tappan in his notebook, defined their status a little more precisely. "I do not hesitate to declare that the Indians encamped on Sand Creek on the morning of the 29th of November were, to all intents and purposes in law and in equity, prisoners of war on parole."  
 22 *Sand Creek Massacre*, Senate Executive Document, No. 26, 93. In defending himself against the sharp criticism of the Committee on The Conduct of the War, Anthony maintained that the Arapahoos were truly prisoners of war, but that the Cheyennes camped at Sand Creek were not. It is true that the Arapahoos surrendered their arms to Anthony and were issued prisoners' rations. The Cheyennes in contrast divided: Six hundred followed Black Kettle to Lyon; 2000 remained on the Smoky Hill. This second group asked permission to come in as prisoners; permission was refused by Anthony on the ground that he lacked the sup-



"John M. Chivington, 1821-1894, Col. First Colorado Cavalry, First Grand Master of Masons in Colorado, 1861," reads the tombstone of the commanding officer of the Third Regiment, perpetrators of the "Sand Creek massacre." John Milton Chivington is buried in Denver's Fairmont Cemetery. His actions at the engagement at Sand Creek, November 29, 1864 are still argued in historical circles . . . the basis for his actions lies with him below this granite monument just a stone's throw from the grave of another notorious Denverite . . . Mattie Silks. (photo from the collection of Fred and Jo Mazzulla)

April, 1963

plies to feed the entire band. Anthony stated his belief (*Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians*, 71) that the larger band held stolen stock and might not surrender it. It was the smaller band that went to Sand Creek on Anthony's orders and undertook to remain there until word was received from Curtis, confirming or withdrawing their provisional status as prisoners of war. "I told them," Anthony reported to Curtis on November 16, "that no war would be waged against them until your pleasure was heard." It was this band that was attacked by Chivington.

<sup>23</sup> *Condition of the Indian Tribes*, 90. Evans cites Bull Bear in his own defense in a letter to The New York Tribune.

<sup>24</sup> Clarence A. Lyman, *The Truth about Colonel J. M. Chivington*, Mss. in the State Historical Society of Colorado.

<sup>25</sup> William Clark Whitford; *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Swarn testimony of S. E. Browne; *Condition of The Indian Tribes*, p 71.

<sup>28</sup> Reginald S. Craig, *The Fighting Parson*; West-ernlore Press.

<sup>29</sup> Records of the War Department, United States Army Commands, Fort Laramie, Dakota Territory, Letters Sent, Sept. 29, 1865—August 15, 1867, Vol. 12, National Archives. See also the Omaha Weekly Herald, April 12, 1867. This newspaper, to which Chivington sent his anonymous articles, reveals him as the author and denounces him as a "rotten clerical hypocrite."

<sup>30</sup> *Rebellion Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI, Part III 596-97.

<sup>31</sup> *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 8, 1865.

<sup>32</sup> Diary and Notebook of Samuel F. Tappan, State Historical Society of Colorado. Tappan states in his letter to Slough that he intends "to have the guilty parties punished, however high in rank they may be." His letter is dated December 28, 1862. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that word reaches Tappan within a month that Chivington has threatened to put him "in irons."

<sup>33</sup> *Records of the War Department*, United States Army Commands, District of Colorado, Letters Sent, Jan. 1864—May 1865—Vol. 323 Department of Kansas, 223.

<sup>34</sup> *Diary and Notebook of Samuel F. Tappan*, p. 34. "Chivington commenced his military career by conspiring against the Colonel of his Regiment and ended in perfidy and disgrace, a fit conclusion to such a commencement." Also, ". . . murder, assassination and perfidy he (Chivington) would make his instruments to secure the possession of his object." pp 62-63.

<sup>35</sup> John M. Chivington, *The Pet Lambs*, XXIV, Denver Republican, May 18, 1890.

<sup>36</sup> *Major Hal Sayer's Diary of the Sand Creek Campaign*, The Colorado Magazine, Vol. XV, March 1938.

<sup>37</sup> *Second Report of Colonel Chivington*; cited in *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> State Historical Society of Colorado.

<sup>39</sup> Letters of George Bent, Item 22; Western Americana Dept., Yale University Library.

<sup>40</sup> Letter of December 23rd 1865, State Historical Society of Colorado.

<sup>41</sup> John M. Chivington, To the People of Colorado, Denver, June 1865.

<sup>42</sup> *First Report of Colonel Chivington*, November 29, 1864; cited, *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 48.