

# THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



**JOHN M.  
CHIVINGTON**



"In action he became the incarnation of war." - William Whitford

After the campaign in New Mexico, John M. Chivington choose not to return to his pulpit. Instead, he remained in the army, becoming commander of the Military district of Colorado. In late November, 1864, leading the recently formed 3rd Regiment Colorado Cavalry and a battalion of the 1st, he attacked a band of Indians encamped along Sand Creek. The Indians, mostly Cheyenne and a few Arapahoe, numbered about 500. Two thirds were women and children. The 1,000 or so government troops, supported by a four gun battery of mountain howitzers, arrived at first light and struck without warning. The Indians, who considered themselves friendly to whites, were taken completely by surprise. Only recently, the band had encamped near Fort Lyon, where the government issued them provisions. They had even moved to the banks of Sand Creek at the suggestion of the Fort's commander. Black Kettle, leader of the Cheyenne, assumed a terrible mistake was being made, and at the sound bugles and firing, placed an American flag and a white flag on a pole atop his lodge. There was no mistake. Colonel Chivington had full knowledge of the Indians friendly character and was to some extent instrumental in placing them in their position of fancied security. The slaughter was terrible. Men, women, and children were slain indiscriminately. Chivington, who gave an inflammatory speech before the attack, watched with indifference as his men horribly mutilated the bodies of their victims. Before the killing stopped, some 400 of the Indians lay dead or dying. (1)

Members of Congress, investigating the raid in 1865, wrote, that they could "hardly find fitting terms to describe" Colonel Chivington's "conduct." "He deliberately planned and executed a foul and dastardly massacre which would have disgraced the veriest savage among those who were the victims of his cruelty." While Colonel Chivington's true motives for promulgating the attack may

never be clear, the investigating committee felt, he did it out of a desire for political gain. It was suggested, the Colonel believed that "by pandering to the inflamed passions of an excited population he could recommend himself to their regard and consideration." (2)

Ironically, the most damning testimony against Colonel Chivington came from New Mexico Volunteers and former subordinates. Forced to accompany the raid, the New Mexicans described in graphic detail the atrocities committed. Major Edward Wynkoop, who as a captain helped Chivington to destroy the Confederate wagon train at Johnson's Ranch, in sworn testimony described his former superior as an "inhuman monster." After listening to all the testimony, the committee denounced Chivington's actions and wrote; "It is to be hoped that the authority of this government will never again be disgraced by acts such as he and those acting with him have been guilty of committing." (3)

Because of his actions at Apache Canyon and Glorieta pass, John Chivington should have won a place of lasting respect in the annals of American history. Instead, the onetime church elder and missionary to the Wyandotte Indians, found lasting infamy for his despicable conduct at Sand Creek. As recently as 1996 the wound was still raw and controversial. Feeling tainted by their association with the massacre, the U.S. Methodist Church issued the Cheyenne and Arapahoe nations a formal apology for Colonel Chivington's actions.

**Footnotes** (See *The Road To Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Carroll, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, pp.1-84.
2. *Ibid*, p.7, *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 38th Congress 2nd session, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War.
3. One of the members of the investigating commission was another ex-subordinate, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel F. Tappan. Chivington vehemently opposed Tappan's presence and requested his removal saying: "Lieutenant Colonel Tappan has repeatedly expressed himself very much prejudiced against the killing of the Indians." He "is, and for a long time past has been, my open and avowed enemy." Carroll, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, p.89, *Testimony of E.W. Wynkoop, Major Commanding 1st Colorado Cavalry and Fort Lyon*; *Ibid*, p.195; *Ibid*, p.7, *Massacre of Cheyenne Indians*, 38th Congress 2nd session, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War.



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