

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Primary Source Document Collection

### MISSION 3: "A Cheyenne Odyssey"

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#### **Eyewitness Accounts of the Sand Creek Massacre**

*After a series Southern Cheyenne raids on ranches, Chief Black Kettle met with army officers at Fort Weld outside Denver. He agreed to lead his people back to their reservation and to maintain peace in the area. While camped peaceably a short distance from Fort Lyon on the Sand Creek, a large military unit led by John M. Chivington, attacked the Cheyenne encampment at dawn. The soldiers killed over two hundred men, women and children. Later Congressional and military investigations condemned the massacre.*

#### **Congressional Testimony of Mr. John S. Smith Witness to Sand Creek Massacre Washington, March 14, 1865**

Question. What is your occupation?

Answer. United States Indian interpreter and special Indian agent.

Question. Will you state to the committee all that you know in relation to the attack of Colonel Chivington upon the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians in November last?

Answer. Major Anthony was in command at Fort Lyon at the time. Those Indians had been induced to remain in the vicinity of Fort Lyon, and were promised protection by the commanding officer at Fort Lyon. The commanding officer saw proper to keep them some thirty or forty miles distant from the fort, for fear of some conflict between them and the soldiers or the traveling population, for Fort Lyon is on a great thoroughfare. He advised them to go out on what is called Sand creek, about forty miles, a little east of north from Fort Lyon. Some days after they had left Fort Lyon when I had just recovered from a long spell of sickness, I was called on by Major S.G. Colley, who asked me if I was able and willing to go out and pay a visit to these Indians, ascertain their numbers, their general disposition toward the whites, and the points where other bands might be located in the interior.

Question. What was the necessity for obtaining that information?

Answer. Because there were different bands which were supposed to be at war; in fact, we knew at the time that they were at war with the white population in that country; but this band had been in and left the post perfectly satisfied. I left to go to this village of Indians on the 26th of November last. I arrived there on the 27th and remained there the 28th. On the morning of the 29th, between daylight and sunrise - nearer sunrise than daybreak - a large number of troops were discovered from three-quarters of a mile to a mile below the village. The Indians,

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who discovered them, ran to my camp, called me out, and wanted to me to go and see what troops they were, and what they wanted. The head chief of the nation, Black Kettle, and head chief of the Cheyennes, was encamped there with us. Some years previous he had been presented with a fine American flag by Colonel Greenwood, a commissioner, who had been sent out there. Black Kettle ran this American flag up to the top of his lodge, with a small white flag tied right under it, as he had been advised to do in case he should meet with any troops out on the prairies. I then left my own camp and started for that portion of the troops that was nearest the village, supposing I could go up to the m. I did not know but they might be strange troops, and thought my presence and explanations could reconcile matters. Lieutenant Wilson was in command of the detachment to which I tried to make my approach; but they fired several volleys at me, and I returned back to my camp and entered my lodge.

Question. Did these troops know you to be a white man?

Answer. Yes, sir; and the troops that went there knew I was in the village. . . . After I had left my lodge to go out and see what was going on, Colonel Chivington rode up to within fifty or sixty yards of where I was camped; he recognized me at once. They all call me Uncle John in that country. He said, "Run here, Uncle John; you are all right." I went to him as fast as I could. He told me to get in between him and his troops, who were then coming up very fast; I did so . . .

By this time the Indians had fled; had scattered in every direction. The troops were some on one side of the river and some on the other, following up the Indians. We had been encamped on the north side of the river; I followed along, holding on the caisson, sometimes running, sometimes walking. Finally, about a mile above the village, the troops had got a parcel of the Indians hemmed in under the bank of the river; as soon as the troops overtook them, they commenced firing on them; some troops had got above them, so that they were completely surrounded. There were probably a hundred Indians hemmed in there, men, women, and children; the most of the men in the village escaped.

By the time I got up with the battery to the place where these Indians were surrounded there had been some considerable firing. Four or five soldiers had been killed, some with arrows and some with bullets. The soldiers continued firing on these Indians, who numbered about a hundred, until they had almost completely destroyed them. I think I saw altogether some seventy dead bodies lying there; the greater portion women and children. There may have been thirty warriors, old and young; the rest were women and small children of different ages and sizes.



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The troops at that time were very much scattered. There were not over two hundred troops in the main fight, engaged in killing this body of Indians under the bank. The balance of the troops were scattered in different directions, running after small parties of Indians who were trying to make their escape. I did not go so see how many they might have killed outside of this party under the bank of the river. Being still quite weak from my last sickness, I returned with the first body of troops that went back to the camp.

The Indians had left their lodges and property; everything they owned. I do not think more than one-half of the Indians left their lodges with their arms. I think there were between 800 and 1,000 men in this command of United States troops. There was a part of three companies of the 1st Colorado, and the balance were what were called 100 days men of the 3rd regiment. I am not able to say which party did the most execution on the Indians, because it was very much mixed up at the time.

We remained there that day after the fight. By 11 o'clock, I think, the entire number of soldiers had returned back to the camp where Colonel Chivington had returned. On their return, he ordered the soldiers to destroy all the Indian property there, which they did, with the exception of what plunder they took away with them, which was considerable.

Question. How many Indians were there there?

Answer. There were 100 families of Cheyennes, and some six or eight lodges of Arapahoes.

Question. How many persons in all, should you say?

Answer. About 500 we estimate them at five to a lodge.

Question. 500 men, women and children?

Answer. Yes, sir.

Question. Do you know the reason for that attack on the Indians?

Answer. I do not know any exact reason.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/four/sandcrk.htm>

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#### Excerpts from Soldiers' Letters

From Lt. Joseph Cramer to Maj. Edward Wynkoop, Dec. 19, 1864:

"This is the first opportunity I have had of writing you since the great Indian Massacre, and for a start, I will acknowledge I am ashamed to own I was in it...It is no use for me to tell you how the fight was managed, only I think the Officer in command should be hung...After the fight there was a sight I hope I may never see again...Bucks, woman and children, were scalped, fingers cut off to get the rings on them...little children shot, while begging for their lives...I told the Col. I thought it was murder to jump them friendly Indians. He says in reply; Damn any man or men who are in sympathy with them."

From Lt. Silas Soule to Maj. Edward Wynkoop, Dec. 14, 1864:

"The massacre lasted six or eight hours...I tell you Ned it was hard to see little children on their knees have their brains beat out by men professing to be civilized....They were all scalped, and as high as a half a dozen [scalps] taken from one head. They were all horribly mutilated...You could think it impossible for white men to butcher and mutilate human beings as they did there, but every word I have told you is the truth, which they do not deny...I expect we will have a hell of a time with Indians this winter."

Source: <http://www.colorado.edu/csilw/sandcreekltrs.htm>