



## Reynolds Gang Capture

Jim Reynolds and his bandits were captured near Canon City, Colorado, after a series of supply train and homestead robberies along the Arkansas River during the summer of 1864.

The gang had been operating under the guise of Confederate recruiters, but they were hardly slave-state loyalists. Reynolds and the boys were nothing more than criminals more interested in cleaning out Coloradoans of supplies, weapons and gold. Major Edward Wynkoop first caught the scent of Reynolds south of Fort Lyon at Cimarron Crossing, Kansas, but was unable to catch up with him. The gang had moved up the Arkansas, heading for the mountain gold fields and bushwhacking citizens along the way. A general alert was issued, and troops from both Denver and the Arkansas trail joined local citizen search parties in the hunt for Reynolds. Near South Park, a party caught up with the gang and killed one bandit, but the rest of the gang split up and escaped. A short time later, Lt. George Shoup, with a detachment of troops from Lyon, captured two gang members in a wild chase along the Arkansas, which nearly swallowed the soggy thieves before Shoup's men fished them from the raging spring currents. Three more bandits were soon corralled by ranchers south of Canon City.

Shoup took the five prisoners to Denver, where they were turned over to U. S. Marshals and locked up in the United States prison. Colonel Chivington then sent a wire to Major S. S. Curtis, Adjutant to General Samuel Curtis, requesting permission to execute Reynolds. Although the gang's crimes in Colorado were no more than robbery, Chivington considered their allegiance to the Confederate Army as justification for such rash punishment. The Adjutant understandably deferred such a decision to General Curtis, whose presence at the time was unknown, for he was leading a scouting party in Kansas Indian country.

Undaunted, the ever-aggressive Chivington demanded that Denver's U. S. Marshal Alexander C. Hunt turn the Reynolds Gang over to the military as prisoners of war. Because Denver was now under martial law due to the threat of Indian attacks on the city, Hunt agreed, and Chivington ordered Captain Theodore Cree to mount a large guard from the newly forming Colorado Third Volunteer Regiment, and take the prisoners to Fort Lyon to stand trial. Just 30 miles into the trip, Cree reported that the five shackled prisoners attempted to escape and all were shot dead.

The incident soon spawned rumors that Chivington never intended for Reynolds to reach Fort Lyon (Lt. Joseph Cramer would later testify that Cree personally admitted to him that Chivington ordered the executions). The killing of the Reynolds Gang added fuel to the growing political fire surrounding the issue of Colorado statehood and the threat of an impending Indian war in the territory. Governor John Evans and Chivington, both likely candidates for positions in the potential new state, were under fire from their political rivals for the mismanagement of relations with the Indian tribes in the region. Among the most vocal critics was Colorado's U. S. Attorney S. E. Browne, who was absent during the Reynolds incident. Browne was enraged by Chivington's actions, and he

immediately filed a formal protest to General Curtis. Apparently aware of Browne's ulterior motives, Curtis replied in full support of Chivington. (Read Browne's letter and testimony of Lt. Joseph A. Cramer.)

Although the killing of a motley gang of criminal misfits by Colorado troops sworn to protect Colorado's citizens might have otherwise been viewed as just and righteous, the Reynolds incident became part and parcel of a larger controversy to follow. Attorney Browne and others would use this example of Chivington's heavy-handed rule over Colorado's military troops in later accusations of misdeeds committed by both Chivington and Shoup when they attacked Black Kettle's Cheyenne at Sand Creek. Read Rocky Mountain News editorial regarding the Reynolds incident.

<http://www.kclonewolf.com/History/SandCreek/sc-reports/012time-chiv-reynolds.html>

Sources:

Hoig, Stan The Sand Creek Massacre - see bibliography for citation

Browne: The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XLI, Part III, pp 596,597

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