

U.S. MEMORIALIZES MASSACRE OF NATIVE AMERICANS

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SAND CREEK MASSACRE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, Colorado (AP) -- More than 142 years after a band of state militia volunteers massacred 150 sleeping Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians in a misdirected act of vengeance, a memorial to the tragic event was officially dedicated Saturday.

The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic site, 160 miles southeast of Denver on Big Sandy Creek in Kiowa County, pays tribute to those killed in the November 29, 1864, attack.

Seeking revenge for the killings of several settlers by Indians, 700 militia members slaughtered nearly everyone in the village. Most were women or children.

Descendants of some of the victims were among several hundred people at Saturday's dedication on the rolling hills of the southeastern Colorado plains. A mock village of a dozen tepees was set up in a grove of cottonwood trees along the creek that historians believe marks the site of the killings.

After a prayer and a blessing for the troops in Iraq, members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes chanted and played drums.

"It's a site of shame, but it's finally being memorialized properly," said David Halaas, a former state historian.

Eyewitness accounts of the attack include a letter from Lt. Joseph Cranmer: "A squaw ripped open and a child taken from her. Little children shot while begging for their lives."

Tribe descendants claim they can still hear the children cry when they visit the site. "If there were any savages that day, it was not the Indian people," said former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-



Colorado, a member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe.

Campbell, who sponsored the legislation making the spot a national historic site, said he slept beside the creek Friday night "to get a picture" of what the people saw before the attack.

"I think it is the greatest testimony of the strength of a nation -- that you are big enough and strong enough to acknowledge the cruelties and injuries of the past," said Patricia Limerick, chairwoman of the University of Colorado's Center of the American West and author of "Legacy of Conquest."

Attack condemned almost immediately

The attack was recognized almost immediately as criminal. Congress condemned it and President Lincoln fired territorial Gov. John Evans. Witnesses told a congressional hearing that the victims were not hostile.

Indian trader John S. Smith testified that the militia's leader, Col. John Chivington, knew the band at Sand Creek was

Steve Brady, headman of the Crazy Dog Society of the Northern Cheyenne tribe holds a "coup stick" during the ceremony at Sand Creek. Mr. Brady, from Lame Deer, Montana, had relatives that survived the 1864 attack.

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peaceful and was not involved in the attacks on settlers.

But Chivington, a Methodist minister known as "the fighting parson," was feted by Denver residents as a hero after the raid. They were terrified that the Confederacy would use Indians as surrogates to wage war on them.

"Among the brilliant feats of arms in Indian warfare, the recent campaign of our Colorado volunteers will stand in history with few rivals, and none to exceed it in final results," read an editorial in the Rocky Mountain News at the time.

A Civil War memorial installed at the Colorado Capitol in 1909 listed Sand Creek as a great Union victory. But a plaque was added in 2002 giving details of the massacre to set the record straight.

The Indians were camped at a site assigned to them by the Army. When the attack started, Southern Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle hurriedly hoisted a U.S. flag above his lodge, but to no avail. Black Kettle survived but was killed in an attack at Washita, Oklahoma, in 1868 by soldiers led by Col. George Armstrong Custer.

Since some of the victims of the attack were of mixed blood -- the descendants of Indians and white fur traders -- whites today also have a reason to revere the memorial, Limerick said. "There may be stories of equal anguish in our history, but this is right up at the top. In a strange way, it is a basis for national pride," she said.