



### Conscience and Courage



*Captain Silas Soule, circa 1864.*

Captain Silas S. Soule and Lieutenant Joseph A. Cramer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Colorado (U.S.) Volunteer Cavalry put their military careers - and lives – at risk by refusing to fire during the attack against a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho village at Sand Creek, November 29, 1864.

With their companies backing them up, they purposely took little or no part in the massacre of people they knew. Afterward, both men wrote letters to their former commander Major Edward “Ned” Wynkoop, describing the horrors they had witnessed and condemning the leadership of Colonel John M. Chivington, the expedition’s commander. These letters led to investigations by two congressional committees and an army commission, which changed history’s judgment of Sand Creek from a battle to a massacre of men, women, and children.

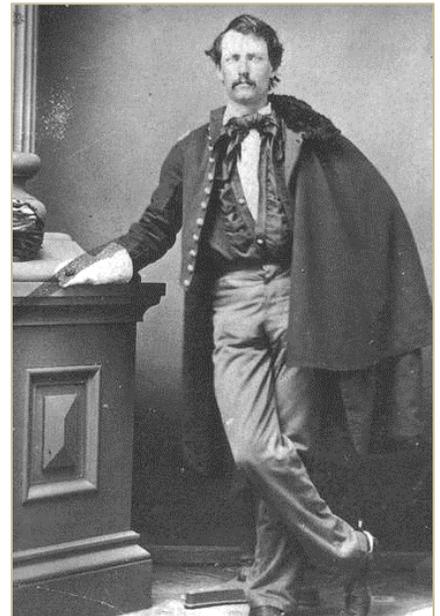
Several weeks after Soule testified before the commission, he was shot in the streets of Denver. His murderers,

although known, were never brought to justice.

These graphic and disturbing letters disappeared, only to resurface in 2000 in time to help convince the U.S. Congress to pass legislation establishing the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site.

The power of these letters, then and now, lies in their simple honesty, their moral courage and the determination of two soldiers who wanted to see justice done.

*\*No photo of Lt. Joseph Cramer is known to exist at this time*



*Major Edward “Ned” Wynkoop, recipient of the Soule and Cramer letters.*

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Fort Lyon, C.T.  
December 14, 1864

Dear Ned:

Two days after you left here the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reg. with a Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> arrived here, having moved so secretly that we were not aware of their approach until they had Pickets around the post, allowing no one to pass out! They arrested Capt. Bent and John Vogle and placed guards around their houses. Then they declared their intention to massacre the friendly Indians camped on Sand Creek. Major Anthony gave all information, and eagerly joined in with Chivington and Co. and ordered Lieut. Cramer with his whole Co. to join the command. As soon as I knew of their movement I was indignant as you would have been were you here, and were you here, and went to Cannon's room, where a number of officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were congregated and told them that any man who would take part in the murders, knowing the circumstances as we did, was a low lived cowardly son of a bitch. Capt. J.J. Johnson and Lieut. Harding went to camp and reported to Chiv, Downing and the whole outfit what I had said, and you can bet hell was to pay in camp. Chiv and all hands swore they would hang me before they moved camp, but I stuck it out, and all the officers of the post, except Anthony backed me.

We arrived at Black Kettle and Left Hand's Camp at day light. Lieut. Wilson with Co.s "C", "E" & "G" were ordered to in advance to cut off their herd. He made a circle to the rear and formed a line 200 yds from the village, and opened fire. Poor old John Smith and Louderbeck ran out with white flags but they paid no attention to them, and they ran back into the tents. Anthony (indecipherable) with Co's "D" "K" & "G", to within one hundred yards and commenced firing. I refused to fire and swore that none but a coward would. For by this time hundreds of women and children were coming towards us and getting on their knees for mercy. Anthony shouted, "kill the sons of bitches" Smith and Louderbeck came to our command, although I am confident there were 200 shots fired at them, for I heard an officers say that Old Smith and any one who sympathized with the Indians, ought to be killed and now was a good time to do it. The Battery then came up in our rear, and opened on them. I took my comp'y across the Creek, and by this time the whole of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Batteries were firing into them and you can form some idea of the slaughter. When the Indians found that there was no hope for them they went for the Creek, and buried themselves in the Sand and got under the banks and some of the Bucks got their bows and a few rifles and defended themselves as well as they could. By this time there was no organization among our troops, they were a perfect mob – every man on his own hook. My Co. was the only one that kept their formation, and we did not fire a shot.

The massacre lasted six or eight hours, and a good many Indians escaped. 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. One squaw was wounded and a fellow took a hatchet to finish her, she held her arms up to defend her, and he cut one arm off, and held the other with one hand and dashed the hatchet through her brain. One squaw with her two children, were on their knees begging for their lives of a dozen soldiers, within ten feet of them all, firing – when one succeeded in hitting the squaw in the thigh, when she took a knife and cut the throats of both children, and then killed herself. One old squaw hung herself in the lodge – there was not enough room for her to hang and she held up her knees and choked herself to death. Some tried to escape on the Prairie, but most of them were run down by horsemen. I saw two Indians hold one of another's hands, chased until they were exhausted, when they kneeled down, and clasped each other around the neck and were both shot together. They were all scalped, and as high as half a dozen taken from one head. They were all horribly mutilated. One woman was cut open and a child taken out of her, and scalped.

White Antelope, War Bonnet and a number of others had Ears and Privates cut off. Squaw's snatches were cut out for trophies. You would 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. It was almost impossible to save any of them. Charly Autobee save John Smith and Winsers squaw. I saved little Charlie Bent. Geo. Bent was killed [George Bent was wounded but survived} Jack Smith was taken prisoner, and murdered the next day in his tent by one of Dunn's Co. "E". I understand the man received a horse for doing the job. They were going to murder Charlie Bent, but I run him into the Fort. They were going to kill Old Uncle John Smith, but Lt. Cannon and the boys of Ft. Lyon, interfered, and saved him. They would have murdered Old Bents family if Col. Tappan had not taken the matter in hand. Cramer went up with twenty (20) men, and they did not like to buck against so many of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Chivington has gone to Washington to be made General, I suppose, and get authority to raise a nine months Reg't to hunt Indians. He said Downing will have me cashiered if possible. If they do I want you to help me. I think they will try the same for Cramer for he has shot his mouth off a good deal, and did not shoot his pistol off in the Massacre. Joe has behaved first rate during this whole affair. Chivington reports five or six hundred killed, but there were not more than two hundred, about 140 women and children and 60 Bucks. A good many were out hunting buffalo. Our best Indians were killed. Black Kettle, One Eye, Minnemic and Left Hand. Geo. Pierce of Co. "F" was killed trying to save John Smith. There was one other of the 1<sup>st</sup> killed and nine of the 3<sup>rd</sup> all through their own fault. They would get up to the edge of the bank and look over, to get a shot at an Indian under them. When the women were killed the Bucks did not seem to try and get away, but fought desperately. Charly Autobee wished me to write all about it to you. He says he would have given anything if you could have been there. I suppose [Joe] Cramer has written to you, all the particulars, so I will write half. Your family is well. Billy Walker, Co. Tappan, Wilson (who was wounded in the arm) start for Denver in the morning. There is not news I can think of. I expect we will have a hell of a time with Indians this winter. We have (200) men at the post – Anthony in command. I think he will be dismissed when the facts are known in Washington. Give my regards to any friends you come across, and write as soon as possible.

Yours, SS  
(signed) S.S. Soule

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Ft. Lyon, C. T.  
December 19, 1864

Dear Major:

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 with my Co. Col. Chivington came down here with the gallant third known as Chivington Brigade, like a thief in the dark throwing his Scouts around the Post, with instructions to let no one out, without his orders, not even the Commander of the Post, and for the shame, our Commanding Officer submitted. Col. Chivington expected to find the Indians in camp below the Com---- (commissary) but the Major Comd'g told him all about where the Indians were, and volunteered to take a Battalion from the Post and Join the Expedition.

Well Col. Chiv. got in about 10 a.m., Nov. 28th and at 8 p.m. we started with all of the 3rd parts of "H" "O" and "E" of the First, in command of Lt. Wilson Co. "K" "D" and "G" in commanding of Major Anthony. Marched all night up Sand, to the big bend in Sandy, about 15 or 20 miles, above where we crossed on our trip to Smoky Hill and came on to Black Kettles village of 103 lodges, containing not over 500 all told, 350 of which were women and children. Three days previous to our going out, Major Anthony gave John Smith, Lowderbuck of Co. "G" and a government driver, permission to go out there and trade with them, and they were in the village when the fight came off. John Smith came out holding up his hands and running towards us, when he was shot at by several, and the word was passed along to shoot him. He then turned back, and went to his tent and got behind some Robes, and escaped unhurt. Lowderbuck came out with a white flag, and was served the same as John Smith, the driver the same. Well I got so mad I swore I would not burn powder, and I did not. Capt. Soule the same. It is no use for me to try to tell you how the fight was managed, only that I think the Officer in Command should be hung, and I know when the truth is known it will cashier him.

We lost 40 men wounded, and 10 killed. Not over 250 Indians mostly women and children, and I think not over 200 were killed, and not over 75 bucks. With proper management they could all have been killed and not lost over 10 men. After the fight there was a sight I hope I may never see again.

Bucks, women, and children were scalped, fingers cut off to get the rings on them, and this as much with Officers as men, and one of those Officers a Major, and a Lt. Col. cut off Ears, of all he came across, a squaw ripped open and a child taken from her, little children shot, while begging for their lives (and all the indignities shown their bodies that was ever heard of) (women shot while on their knees, with their arms around soldiers a begging for their lives.) things that Indians would be ashamed to do. To give you some little idea, squaws were known to kill their own children, and then themselves, rather than to have them taken prisoners. Most of the Indians yielded 4 or 5 scalps. But enough! for I know you are disgusted already. Black Kettle, White Antelope, War Bonnet, Left Hand, Little Robe and several other chiefs were killed. Black Kettle said when he saw us coming, that he was glad, for it was Major Wynkoop coming to make peace. Left Hand stood with his hands folded across his breast, until he was shot saying, "Soldiers no hurt me - soldiers my friends." One Eye was killed; was in the employ of Gov't as spy; came into the Post a few days before, and reported about the Sioux, were going to break out at Learned, which proved true.

After all the pledges made my Major A- to these Indians and then take the course he did. I think as comments are necessary from me; only I will say he has a face for every man he talks. The action taken by Capt. Soule and myself were under protest. Col. A- was going to have Soule hung for saying there were all cowardly Sons of B----s; if Soule did not take it back, but nary take a back with Soule. I told the Col. that I thought it murder to jump them friendly Indians. He says in reply; Damn any man or men who are in sympathy with them. Such men as you and Major Wynkoop better leave the U. S. Service, so you can judge what a nice time we had on the trip. I expect Col. C- and Downing will do all in their power to have Soule, Cossitt and I dismissed. Well, let them work for what they damn please, I ask no favors of them. If you are in Washington, for God's sake, Major, keep Chivington from being a Bri'g Genl. which he expects. I will send you the Denver Papers with this. Excuse this for I have been in much of a hurry.

Very Respectfully,  
Your Well Wisher  
(signed) Joe A. Cramer

(postscript)

John (Jack) Smith was taken prisoner and then murdered. One little child 3 months old was thrown in the feed box of a wagon and brought one days march, and there was left on the ground to perish. Col. Tappan is after them for all that is out. I am making out a report of all from beginning to end, to send to Gen'l Slough, in hopes that he will have the thing investigated, and if you should see him, please speak to him about it, for fear that he has forgotten me. I shall write him nothing but what can be proven.

Major I am ashamed of this. I have it gloriously mixed up, but in hopes I can explain it all to you before long. I would have given my right arm had you been here, when they arrived.

Your family are all well.  
(signed) Joe A. Cramer