

# White river massacre



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White River Massacre White River Massacre US government deputed Nathan Meeker at White River Agency with a mission to transform the Indians into farmers. Nathan Meeker was an experienced officer while working on the eastern plains of Colorado. Meeker chose a place to build a town there. During 1878, Meeker was appointed at White River where Utes were rehabilitated with promises of food and supplies. Meeker had some other plan and wanted that Utes move further 15 mile south where he believed had better farming opportunities. That was the beginning of his first conflict with Utes

(Utley, Robert; p 333-337).

Meeker continued to force Utes into farming and give up hunting. At the same time, White settlers were complaining about Utes for their excessive hunting activities. Meeker got frustrated when Utes refused to follow his order asking them to plow their race track into a farm land. Meeker sought military help from Colorado Governor Frederick Pitkin so as to protect him and his men from the Utes. His request was soon complied with and Major Thornburgh marched with 200 soldiers toward the White River Agency at the distance of 150 miles; however, the troops were first noticed by Utes during their hunting trip. Utes considered this march an invasion on them and asked Meeker to stop their arrival immediately. Meeker agreed and requested Thornburgh that better he keep his battalion outside the Ute reservation territory and only five of them accompany him for a dialogue with Utes representatives (Peters, Mike).

Though Thornburgh agreed on this initially but for some reason began entering into Milk Creek. Thornburgh made a grave mistake of crossing Milk Creek and entering into Ute territory, maybe he perhaps assumed that his

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path would not get blocked. Thornburgh's entry into Utes territory ignited the conflict between Utes and Whites that finally culminated into a full-fledged war. The battle began in the morning of September 29 1879 and escalated soon that triggered infamous White River Massacre (Peters, Mike). After finishing the dinner of the day Arvilla, the wife of Meeker, was washing dishes when she heard the gun shots. Perhaps Utes heard about the battle at Milk Creek and assumed that troops were marching ahead to kill or push them off the reservation area. Meeker and nine other white men were massacred methodically. Nathan Meeker was fired on the head. Utes hatred against whites was on high pitch on those days and that was evident from the heinous incident of a metal piece pierced into Meeker's mouth (Peters, Mike).

Arvilla, her daughter and one of her companion fled from the place to arrive at the adobe milk house. Utes were shooting on the other buildings setting them ablaze. Agency building was burned to ashes and Utes were looting all supplies. Later on Arvilla Meeker and other women were captured and taken hostage by the Utes. Major Thornburgh was killed along with 15 other soldiers. His troop fought for three days until another troop called ' Buffalo Soldiers' came to their rescue. The battle continued for several days until another troop of 600 soldiers arrived. All in all, 15 soldiers were killed and 43 got injured (Peters, Mike).

Following this incident, hatred against the Utes intensified so much so that the Federal troops marched deeper into the regions, into the Utah badlands, pushing Utes out of Colorado.

#### Works-Cited

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