

With a wide-angle picture of the Elk Falls area from Lion's Head to the Cathedrals, the front page of the September 18, 1949 Rocky Mountain News published the following article. The picture caption reads, "Somewhere in the saucer-like area shown in the dotted-line lies the Reynolds' illicit treasure -- \$63,000 in cash and gold dust."

Colorado Hills Hide Gold Paid for With Blood

Bandits' \$63,000 Hunted Above Conifer

By Bob Lee

Hopeful treasure hunters are still seeking a \$63,000 cache hidden above Conifer by an ambitious soldier of fortune who invaded Colorado in 1864 with a group of Texans intent on sacking Denver.

Elmer and Sally Berg, who operate the Elk Falls Resort Ranch near Shaffer's Crossing, report that during the tourist season just closed, the usual number of searchers went tramping out after the cash and gold dust buried in the vicinity by the notorious Jim Reynolds and his brother, John.

Mrs. Berg, whose father, John Jensen, owned the ranch at the turn of the century, has never sought the prize cache herself but she is just as convinced as anyone that the money is somewhere on the picturesque ranch.

The nefarious Reynolds brothers had been working in placer mines in Park County in 1861. They displayed their irascibility a bit later when they moved to Texas and joined the Confederate Army after Colorado went on record favoring the Union.

While in the army they told their buddies of the wealth and easy living that was "anybody's for the taking in Denver."

In April 1964 the Reynolds brothers rode at the head of a 50-man band of cut-throats who aimed to terrorize Denver residents into submission.

Robbed Wagon Train

En route over the Santa Fe Trail, they held-up a Mexican wagon train, escaping with \$40,000 in currency, \$6000 in drafts and about \$2000 in coin. Jim Reynolds,

however, insisted on keeping all the money because he wanted to use it to get arms and recruits for his proposed raid on Denver.

This sowed distrust among his followers, however, and 28 pulled out. Fourteen others had deserted the band by the time it reached Colorado, leaving eight.

When the small band of gunmen reached California Gulch, near where Leadville now stands, they planned the holdup which eventually spelled their doom. The bandits swept down on the Fairplay-Denver stagecoach which was driven by Abner Williamson and carried William McClellan, line superintendent, as its only passenger.

The gunmen pried open the treasure box and took the \$40,000 in currency and three cans of gold dust valued at \$23,000 it contained. Jim Reynolds then turned to the driver, Williamson, and violated the ethics of brigandage by taking 15 cents from him. It appeared to be a cardinal rule in those early days that road gangs would not rob a stage driver.

Posse in Pursuit

Williamson swore revenge at this breach of the highwaymen's code. Before riding off the bandits also stole \$400 and a valuable watch from McClellan and rifled the mail bags, getting \$10 and \$20 bills which Fairplay miners were sending home to their families. Psychologically, this was a bad move because it inflamed the miners against the gang.

Taking part in the robbery besides the Reynolds were Jack Robinson, Tom Knight, Owen Singletary, John Andrews, Jack Stowe and Tom Holiman.

The bandits, moved eastward along the Platte, robbing everybody they met and over-running all ranches in the vicinity. Hot on their path was a posse organized among Summit County miners by Gen. David Cook, chief of government detectives in Colorado.

The pursued gunmen left the main Old South Park stage road and camped on Deer Creek above Conifer. The posse was closing in on them so the two Reynolds brothers parted from the rest of the gang and hid the stolen money and gold in a hole near the head of Deer and Elk Creeks.

A short time later, while the gang was eating the posse crept up on them and opened fire.

Cut Off Outlaw's Head

Singletary was killed instantly and Jim Reynolds was wounded in the arm. The angered miners, however, apparently were over-excited at ambushing the gang and all the other bandits escaped in the heavy underbrush. The posse cut off Singletary's head and took it with them to Fairplay.

The next day, Holiman was captured and confessed. John Reynolds and Jack Stowe were chased across the Arkansas River, but escaped although Stowe was seriously wounded. A detachment of the First Colorado Cavalry found the horseless remaining gunmen easy prey and captured them in a thicket of underbrush east of Canon City.

The captured desperadoes now included Jim Reynolds, Jack Robinson, Tom Knight, John Andrews and Tom Holiman, they were brought to a military prison in Denver, tried by a military commission for highway robbery and ordered to Fort Leavenworth for punishment. Strangely enough, there is no record anywhere of the trial or sentence.

In August, 1964, Co. A, Third Regiment of Colorado Volunteers, was ordered to take the prisoners to Fort Lyon where Regular Army troops would take charge and escort the bandits to Fort Leavenworth. Capt. T. S. Cree was in command.

Ironically, the ambulance in which the prisoners were to be taken to Fort Lyon was driven by Abner Williamson, the state driver from whom the unmannerly Reynolds had stolen the 15 cents. Alston K. Shaw was head guard.

Shot by Firing Squad

On the third morning of the trip, Captain Cree called Shaw aside and told him: "They were tried and sentenced to be shot. We dared not carry out the sentence in Denver, and sending them to Fort Leavenworth was just a bluff. We are to dispose of them on the road somewhere unknown to anyone."

Williamson drove the Squirrel Creek road until the ambulance came behind a well-hidden bluff. The prisoners were ordered out, manacled together,

blindfolded and placed in a row, Reynolds in the center. Reynolds, who had pledged before leaving Texas that the band would stay together "until our bones bleach out on the prairie," gruffly refused to make any last statement concerning the hidden treasure.

The guns of the firing squad shattered the stillness of the forest and the bandits toppled to the ground. Williamson's bullet killed Reynolds; he had his revenge.

Several hours after the escort turned away, John Andrews regained consciousness. Although shot through the breast, he managed to crawl to an abandoned cabin and dress his wounds. A week later, he reached the main road and he sent a note to a friend in Denver by a passing horseman. The friend showed up three days later and brought Andrews concealed in a wagon to Denver where he regained his health.

He then went to Santa Fe to join John Reynolds and Stowe -- the only remaining members of the notorious gang. In subsequent skullduggery Andrews and Stowe were killed.

Starts for Denver

Reynolds lived in Santa Fe as "Will Wallace." He became friendly with a fellow named Albert Brown and the two of them held up strangers on the outskirts of town. In October, 1971, the pair hit Denver.

Near Taos, they raided a Mexican ranch and Reynolds was mortally wounded. But before he died he told Brown about the treasure he and Jim had hidden at the head spring of Deer Creek and drew a map of the vicinity for Brown and gave him these directions: "You go above Geneva Gulch a little ways and you'll find where one of our horses mired down and we had to leave it here. At the head of the gulch, you turn to the right and follow a mountain around a little farther. And just above the head of Deer Creek, you'll find an old prospector's shaft running back into the mountain at about timberline. It's back there in the hole, pard. We walled the hole up with stones and stuck a butcher knife into a tree about four feet from the ground, broke the handle off and left it pointing to the mouth of the hole."

Brown buried Reynolds and made two unsuccessful trips to Geneva Gulch. But a forest fire had destroyed all timber in that area. He did find a skeleton of a man minus the head, evidently Singletary, and a skeleton of a horse that was mired

and left to die. History fails to record what happened to Brown when he gave up the treasure hunt.

The map Reynolds had drawn for Brown eventually came into General Cook's possession and he permitted many persons to copy it.

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The strangest fact of the fabulous Reynolds' treasure story is that the hidden money may have already been found.

A story in The Rocky Mountain News issue of April 27, 1906, tells of this mysterious find near Fairplay: "A buried plunder aggregating in value \$18,000 was uncovered by two prospectors, Sullivan Davis and Holmes Robbins, in an abandoned shaft about three miles from town on the Horseshoe Road. The treasure is for the most part in gold dust, although some is in paper money.

"The two prospectors had been employed in a mine at Horseshoe, but obtained a map purporting to show where the treasure was hidden. Six weeks of ceaseless work was finally rewarded with success. The treasure was undoubtedly buried by the Reynolds gang of outlaws, a gang of bushwhacking Confederates that infested this section in the fall of 1864."

The shaft in which the two lucky prospectors found the money fits the description Reynolds gave to Brown -- but the location does not.

Mrs. Berg and her husband take a philosophical viewpoint of the whole treasure hunting activities. They watched the gold seekers give up the search for the year when they closed the resort last week.

"But they'll be back," Mrs. Berg ways, knowingly.