

# The Chilcotin War

## A war, or a series of murders?

On March 13, 1862, a gold miner brought smallpox to BC. It quickly spread through Indigenous communities around BC, including the T̓silhqot'in. A British aristocrat named Alfred Waddington planned to build a path to the Chilcotins, his team carrying the virus with them. Challenged with the threat of another wave of smallpox the T̓silhqot'in people made a choice to start war. A T̓silhqot'in Chief named Klatsassin (Lhat̓'a̓ʔin), led 24 warriors in a surprise attack, killing 12 of the road crew who were asleep in their tents. Two other attacks against road builders took place, fuelling outrage throughout the colonies. In the fall of 1864, the T̓silhqot'in were invited to Quesnel, for what their chief, Klatsassin, thought to be peace talks. Upon the 8 of 24 involved men's arrival, they were arrested, tried for murder, and 6 of them were hanged. Before his death, Klatsassin famously said, "We meant war, not murder." However controversial this statement may be, the T̓silhqot'in did start and win their war in a few ways. Waddington's road was never built, the T̓silhqot'in land remained mostly unsettled by non-Indigenous people, and in 2018, prime minister Justin Trudeau offered an official exoneration for the six T̓silhqot'in men hanged in 1864.