

From Geronimo's Autobiography

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The Massacre

In the summer of 1858, being at peace with the Mexican towns as well as with all the neighboring Indian tribes, we went south into Old Mexico to trade. Our whole tribe (Bedonkohe Apaches) went through Sonora toward Casa Grande, our destination, but just before reaching that place we stopped at another Mexican town called by the Indians *Kas-ki-yeh*. Here we stayed for several days, camping outside the city. Every day we would go into town to trade, leaving our camp under the protection of a small guard so that our arms, supplies, and women and children would not be disturbed during our absence.

Late one afternoon when returning from town we were met by a few women and children who told us that Mexican troops from some other town had attacked our camp, killed all the warriors of the guard, captured all our ponies, secured our arms, destroyed our supplies, and killed many of our women and children. Quickly we separated, concealing ourselves as best we could until nightfall, when we assembled at our appointed place of rendezvous--a thicket by the river. Silently we stole in one by one: sentinels were placed, and, when all were counted, I found that my aged mother, my young wife, and my three small children were among the slain. There were no lights in camp, so without being noticed I silently turned away and stood by the river. How long I stood there I do not know, but when I saw the warriors arranging for a council I took my place.

That night I did not give my vote for or against any measure; but it was decided that as there were only eighty warriors left, and as we were without arms or supplies, and were furthermore surrounded by the Mexicans far inside their own territory, we could not hope to fight successfully. So our chief, Mangus-Colorado, gave the order to start at once in perfect silence for our homes in Arizona, leaving the dead upon the field.



I stood until all had passed, hardly knowing what I would do. I had no weapon, nor did I hardly wish to fight, neither did I contemplate recovering the bodies of my loved ones, for that was forbidden. I did not pray, nor did I resolve to do anything in particular, for I had no purpose left. I finally followed the tribe silently, keeping just within hearing distance of the soft noise of the feet of the retreating Apaches.

The next morning some of the Indians killed a small amount of game and we halted long enough for the tribe to cook and eat, when the march was resumed. I had killed no game, and did not eat. During the first march as well as while we were camped at this place I spoke to no one and no one spoke to me--there was nothing to say.

For two days and three nights we were on forced marches, stopping only for meals, then we made a camp near the Mexican border, where we rested two days. Here I took some food and talked with the

other Indians who had lost in the massacre, but none had lost as I had, for I had lost all.

Within a few days we arrived at our own settlement. There were the decorations that Alope had made--and there were the playthings of our little ones. I burned them all, even our tepee. I also burned my mother's tepee and destroyed all her property.

I was never again contented in our quiet home. True, I could visit my father's grave, but I had vowed vengeance upon the Mexican troopers who had wronged me, and whenever I came near his grave or saw anything to remind me of former happy days my heart would ache for revenge upon Mexico.

Revenge

As soon as we had again collected some arms and supplies Mangus-Colorado, our chief, called a council and found that all our warriors were willing to take the war path against Mexico. I was appointed to solicit the aid of other tribes in this war.

When I went to the Chokonen (Chiricahua) Apaches, Cochise, their chief, called a council at early dawn. Silently the warriors assembled at an open place in a mountain dell and took their seats on the ground, arranged in rows according to their ranks. Silently they sat smoking. At a signal from the chief I arose and presented my cause as follows:

Kinsman, you have heard what the Mexicans have recently done without cause. You are my relatives--uncles, cousins, brothers. We are men the same as the Mexicans are--we can do to them what they have done to us. Let us go forward and trail them--I will lead you to their city--we will attack them in their homes. I will fight in the front of the battle--I only ask you to follow me to avenge this wrong done by these Mexicans--will you come? It is well--you will all come.

Remember the rule in war--men may return or they may be killed. If any of these young men are killed I want no blame from their kinsmen, for they themselves have chosen to go. If I am killed no one need mourn for me. My people have all been killed in that country, and I, too, will die if need be.

I returned to my own settlement, reported this success to my chieftain, and immediately departed to the southward into the land of the Nedni Apaches. Their chief, Whoa, heard me without comment, but he immediately issued orders for a council, and when all were ready gave a sign that I might speak. I addressed them as I had addressed the Chokonen tribe, and they also promised to help us.

It was in the summer of 1859, almost a year from the date of the massacre of Kaskiyeh, that these three tribes were assembled on the Mexican border to go upon the war path. Their faces were painted, the war bands fastened upon their brows their long scalp-locks ready for the hand and knife of the warrior who would overcome them. Their families had been hidden away in a mountain rendezvous near the Mexican border. With these families a guard was posted, and a number of places of rendezvous designated in case the camp should be disturbed.

When all were ready the chieftains gave command to go forward. None of us were mounted and each warrior wore moccasins and also a cloth wrapped about his loins. This cloth could be spread over him when he slept, and when on the march would be ample protection as clothing. In battle, if the fight was hard, we did not wish much clothing. Each warrior carried three days' rations, but as we often killed game while on the march, we seldom were without food.

We traveled in three divisions: the Bedonheko Apaches led by Mangus-Colorado, the Chokonon Apaches by Cochise, and the Nedni Apaches by Whoa; however, there was no regular order inside the separate tribes. We usually marched about fourteen hours per day, making three stops for meals, and traveling forty to forty-five miles a day.

I acted as guide into Mexico, and we followed the river courses and mountain ranges because we could better thereby keep our movements concealed. We entered Sonora and went southward past Quitaro, Nacozari, and many smaller settlements.

When we were almost at Arispe we camped, and eight men rode out from the city to parley with us. These we captured, killed, and scalped. This was to draw the troops from the city, and the next day they came. The skirmishing lasted all day without a general engagement, but just at night we captured their supply train, so we had plenty of provisions and some more guns.

That night we posted sentinels and did not move our camp, but rested quietly all night, for we expected heavy work the next day. Early the next morning the warriors were assembled to pray--not for help, but that they might have health and avoid ambush or deceptions by the enemy.

As we had anticipated, about ten o'clock in the morning the whole Mexican force came out. There were two companies of cavalry and two of infantry. I recognized the cavalry as the soldiers who had killed my people at Kaskiyeh. This I told to the chieftains, and they said that I might direct the battle.

I was no chief and never had been, but because I had been more deeply wronged than others, this honor was conferred upon me, and I resolved to prove worthy of the trust. I arranged the Indians in a hollow circle near the river, and the Mexicans drew their infantry up in two lines, with the cavalry in reserve. We were in the timber, and they advanced until within about four hundred yards, when they halted and opened fire. Soon I led a charge against them, at the same time sending some braves to attack the rear. In all the battle I thought of my murdered mother, wife, and babies--of my father's grave and my vow of vengeance, and I fought with fury. Many fell by my hand, and constantly I led the advance. Many braves were killed. The battle lasted about two hours.

At the last four Indians were alone in the center of the field--myself and three other warriors. Our arrows were all gone, our spears broken off in the bodies of dead enemies. We had only our hands and knives with which to fight, but all who had stood against us were dead. Then two armed soldiers came upon us from another part of the field. They shot down two of our men and we, the remaining two, fled toward our own warriors. My companion was struck down by a saber, but I reached our warriors, seized a spear, and turned. The one who pursued me missed his aim and fell by my spear. With his saber I met the trooper who had killed my companion and we grappled and fell. I killed him with my knife and quickly rose over his body, brandishing his saber, seeking for other troopers to kill. There were none. But the Apaches had seen. Over the bloody field, covered with the bodies of Mexicans, rang the fierce Apache war-whoop.

Still covered with the blood of my enemies, still holding my conquering weapon, still hot with the joy of battle, victory, and vengeance, I was surrounded by the Apache braves and made war chief of all the Apaches. Then I gave orders for scalping the slain.

I could not call back my loved ones, I could not bring back the dead Apaches, but I could rejoice in this revenge. The Apaches had avenged the massacre of *Kas-ki-yeh*.

The Family

My grandfather, Maco, had been our chief. I never saw him, but my father often told me of the great size, strength, and sagacity of this old warrior. Their principal wars had been with the Mexicans. They had some wars with other tribes of Indians also, but were seldom at peace for any great length of time with the Mexican towns.

Mangas-Colorado, chief of the Bedonkohe Apaches Maco died when my father was but a young warrior, and Mangas-Colorado became chief of the Bedonkohe Apaches. When I was but a small boy my father died, after having been sick for some time. When he passed away, carefully the watchers closed his eyes, then they arrayed him in his best clothes, painted his face afresh, wrapped a rich blanket around him, saddled his favorite horse, bore his arms in front of him, and led his horse behind, repeating in wailing tones his deeds of valor as they carried his body to a cave in the mountain. Then they slew his horses, and we gave away all of his other property, as was customary in our tribe, after which his body was deposited in the cave, his arms beside him. His grave is hidden by piles of stone. Wrapped in splendor he lies in seclusion, and the winds in the pines sing a low requiem over the dead warrior.

After my father's death I assumed the care of my mother. She never married again, although according to the customs of our tribe she might have done so immediately after his death. Usually, however, the widow who has children remains single after her husband's death for two or three years; but the widow without children marries again immediately. After a warrior's death his widow returns to her people and may be given away or sold by her father or brothers. My mother chose to live with me, and she never desired to marry again. We lived near our old home and I supported her.

In 1846, being seventeen years of age, I was admitted to the council of the warriors. Then I was very happy, for I could go wherever I wanted and do whatever I liked. I had not been under the control of any individual, but the customs of our tribe prohibited me from sharing the glories of the war path until the council admitted me. When opportunity offered, after this, I could go on the war path with my tribe. This would be glorious. I hoped soon to serve my people in battle. I had long desired to fight with our warriors.

Perhaps the greatest joy to me was that now I could marry the fair Alope, daughter of No-po-so. She was a slender, delicate girl, but we had been lovers for a long time. So, as soon as the council granted me these privileges I went to see her father concerning our marriage. Perhaps our love was of no interest to him; perhaps he wanted to keep Alope with him, for she was a dutiful daughter; at any rate he asked many ponies for her. I made no reply, but in a few days appeared before his wigwam with the herd of ponies and took with me Alope. This was all the marriage ceremony necessary in our tribe.

Not far from my mother's tepee I had made for us a new home. The tepee was made of buffalo hides and in it were many bear robes, lion hides, and other trophies of the chase, as well as my spears, bows, and arrows. Alope had made many little decorations of beads and drawn work on buckskin, which she placed in our tepee. She also drew many pictures on the walls of our home. She was a good wife, but she was never strong. We followed the traditions of our fathers and were happy. Three children came to us-- children that played, loitered, and worked as I had done.

Customs of the Apache

Trials

When an Indian has been wronged by a member of his tribe he may, if he does not wish to settle the difficulty personally, make complaint to the Chieftain. If he is unable to meet the offending parties in a personal encounter, and disdains to make complaint, anyone may in his stead inform the chief of this conduct, and then it becomes necessary to have an investigation or trial. Both the accused and the accuser are entitled to witnesses, and their witnesses are not interrupted in any way by questions, but simply say what they wish to say in regard to the matter. The witnesses are not placed under oath, because it is not believed that they will give false testimony in a matter relating to their own people.

The chief of the tribe presides during these trials, but if it is a serious offense he asks two or three leaders to sit with him. These simply determine whether or not the man is guilty. If he is not guilty the matter is ended, and the complaining party has forfeited his right to take personal vengeance, for if he wishes to take vengeance himself, he must object to the trial which would prevent it. If the accused is found guilty the injured party fixes the penalty, which is generally confirmed by the chief and his associates. Naiche aka Natchez, youngest son of Cochise and last hereditary chief of the Chiricahua Apaches

Adoption of children

If any children are left orphans by the usage of war or otherwise, that is, if both parents are dead, the chief of the tribe may adopt them or give them away as he desires. In the case of outlawed Indians, they may, if they wish, take their children with them, but if they leave the children with the tribe, the chief decides what will be done with them, but no disgrace attaches to the children.

"Salt Lake"

We obtained our salt from a little lake in the Gila Mountains. This is a very small lake of clear, shallow water, and in the center a small mound arises above the surface of the water. The water is too salty to drink, and the bottom of the lake is covered with a brown crust. When this crust is broken cakes of salt adhere to it. These cakes of salt may be washed clear in the water of this lake, but if washed in other water will dissolve.

When visiting this lake our people were not allowed to even kill game or attack an enemy. All creatures were free to go and come without molestation.

Preparation of a Warrior

To be admitted as a warrior a youth must have gone with the warriors of his tribe four separate times on the war path.

On the first trip he will be given only very inferior food. With this he must be contented without murmuring. On none of the four trips is he allowed to select his food as the warriors do, but must eat such food as he is permitted to have.

On each of these expeditions he acts as servant, cares for the horses, cooks the food, and does whatever duties he should do without being told. He knows what things are to be done, and without waiting to be told is to do them. He is not allowed to speak to any warrior except in answer to questions or when told

to speak.

During these four wars he is expected to learn the sacred names of everything used in war, for after the tribe enters upon the war path no common names are used in referring to anything appertaining to war in any way. War is a solemn religious matter.

If, after four expeditions, all the warriors are satisfied that the youth has been industrious, has not spoken out of order, has been discreet in all things, has shown courage in battle, has borne all hardships uncomplainingly, and has exhibited no color of cowardice, or weakness of any kind, he may by vote of the council be admitted as a warrior; but if any warrior objects to him upon any account he will be subjected to further tests, and if he meets these courageously, his name may again be proposed. When he has proven beyond question that he can bear hardships without complaint, and that he is a stranger to fear, he is admitted to the council of the warriors in the lowest rank. After this there is no formal test for promotions, but by common consent he assumes a station on the battlefield, and if that position is maintained with honor, he is allowed to keep it, and may be asked, or may volunteer, to take a higher station, but no warrior would presume to take a higher station unless he had assurance from the leaders of the tribe that his conduct in the first position was worthy of commendation.

From this point upward the only election by the council in formal assembly is the election of the chief.

Old men are not allowed to lead in battle, but their advice is always respected. Old age means loss of physical power and is fatal to active leadership.

Dances

All dances are considered religious ceremonies and are presided over by a chief and medicine men. They are of a social or military nature, but never without some sacred characteristic.

A dance of thanksgiving

Every summer we would gather the fruit of the yucca, grind and pulverize it and mold it into cakes; then the tribe would be assembled to feast, to sing, and to give praises to Usen. Prayers of Thanksgiving were said by all. When the dance began the leaders bore these cakes and added words of praise occasionally to the usual tone sounds of the music.

The war dance

After a council of the warriors had deliberated, and had prepared for the war path, the dance would be started. In this dance there is the usual singing led by the warriors and accompanied with the beating of the "esadadene," but the dancing is more violent, and yells and war whoops sometimes almost drown the music. Only warriors participated in this dance.

Scalp dance

After a war party has returned, a modification of the war dance is held. The warriors who have brought scalps from the battles exhibit them to the tribe, and when the dance begins these scalps, elevated on poles or spears, are carried around the camp fires while the dance is in progress. During this dance there is still some of the solemnity of the war dance. There are yells and war-whoops, frequently accompanied by discharge of firearms, but there is always more levity than would be permitted at a war dance. After the scalp dance is over the scalps are thrown away. No Apache would keep them, for they are considered defiling.

A social dance

In the early part of September, 1905, I announced among the Apaches that my daughter, Eva, having attained womanhood, should now put away childish things and assume her station as a young lady. At a dance of the tribe she would make her debut, and then, or thereafter, it would be proper for a warrior to seek her hand in marriage. Accordingly, invitations were issued to all Apaches, and many Comanches and Kiowas, to assemble for a grand dance on the green by the south bank of Medicine Creek, near the village of Naiche, former chief of the Chokonen Apaches, on the first night of full moon in September. The festivities were to continue for two days and nights. Nothing was omitted in the preparation that would contribute to the enjoyment of the guests or the perfection of the observance of the religious rite.

To make ready for the dancing the grass on a large circular space was closely mowed.

The singing was led by Chief Naiche, and I, assisted by our medicine men, directed the dance.

First Eva advanced from among the women and danced once around the camp fire; then, accompanied by another young woman, she again advanced and both danced twice around the camp fire; then she and two other young ladies advanced and danced three times around the camp fire; the next time she and three other young ladies advanced and danced four times around the camp fire; this ceremony lasted about one hour. Next the medicine men entered, stripped to the waist, their bodies painted fantastically, and danced the sacred dances. They were followed by clown dancers who amused the audience greatly.

Then the members of the tribe joined hands and danced in a circle around the camp fire for a long time. All the friends of the tribe were asked to take part in this dance, and when it was ended many of the old people retired, and the "lovers' dance" began.

The warriors stood in the middle of the circle and the ladies, two-and-two, danced forward and designated some warrior to dance with them. The dancing was back and forth on a line from the center to the outer edge of the circle. The warrior faced the two ladies, and when they danced forward to the center he danced backward: then they danced backward to the outer edge and he followed facing them. This lasted two or three hours and then the music changed. Immediately the warriors assembled again in the center of the circle, and this time each lady selected a warrior as a partner. The manner of dancing was as before, only two instead of three danced together. During this dance, which continued until daylight, the warrior (if dancing with a maiden) could propose marriage, and if the maiden agreed, he would consult her father soon afterward and make a bargain for her.

Upon all such occasions as this, when the dance is finished, each warrior gives a present to the lady who selected him for a partner and danced with him. If she is satisfied with the present he says good-by, if not, the matter is referred to someone in authority (medicine man or chief), who determines the question of what is a proper gift.

For a married lady the value of the present should be two or three dollars; for a maiden the present should have a value of not less than five dollars. Often, however, the maiden receives a very valuable present.

During the "lovers' dance" the medicine men mingle with the dancers to keep out evil spirits.

Perhaps I shall never again have cause to assemble our people to dance, but these social dances in the moonlight have been a large part of our enjoyment in the past, and I think they will not soon be discontinued, at least I hope not.