

The Apache Scout in Arizona's Indian Wars: Ally, Renegade or Pragmatist?

By Fred Veil

The American Indian has played an important role in the military history of North America. Beginning with the Spanish conquest of Mexico and continuing through America's Civil War, Indian tribes who were allied with Spanish, English, French, colonial, Union and Confederate forces provided an important combat resource in wars and rebellions.

In 1521, Hernan Cortes supplemented his Spanish army of 600 with 3,000 Indians hostile to Montezuma and the Aztec empire to facilitate his conquest of Mexico and establish a major Spanish presence in the New World. Two centuries later, both the French and the British formed alliances with several eastern Indian tribes during the conflict known in America as the French and Indian War. America's War of Independence against Great Britain found the Iroquois Nation and a confederacy of six Indian tribes, split in their support of the white combatants, although they fought mostly on the side of the British. In the War of 1812, the Shawnee, led by the noted American Indian Tecumseh, sided with the British against the forces of the United States. Finally, during America's Civil War, as many as eighteen Indian tribes formed military units and fought alongside the soldiers of both the Union and Confederate armies.

These alliances, mostly informal and adapted to the circumstances and exigencies of the time, also were applicable to the Indian country of the West—before, during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. As that war concluded and the nation turned its attention to the westward expansion that followed, the federal government began to transfer troops west to deal with the "Indian problem" now exacerbated by the ever-increasing encroachment of white settlers on traditional Indian land. Coincident with the build-up of

its military presence in the west, the government also took a different tack with respect to the utilization of Indians in its military effort to subdue and pacify the Western tribes. It "regularized" them.

In 1866 the U.S. Congress enacted a statute titled "An Act to Increase and Fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States." This legislation increased the size of the Army from its pre-War strength of 18,000 to 54,000 and, in obvious recognition of the mobility required to successfully prosecute a war against the Western tribes, increased the number of cavalry regiments in the army from six to ten. Importantly, the Act also authorized the President to enlist a force of Indians "not to exceed a thousand" to act as scouts for the Army. These Indian enlistees would receive the pay and allowances of cavalry soldiers and additionally would be subject to the Army's military justice system. Unlike their non-Indian counterparts, however, the term of their enlistments were at the discretion of department commanders, which meant they could be discharged whenever the commander determined their services were no longer required.

The Apaches in Arizona

The U. S. Army's mission to conquer, subdue and pacify the Western Indian tribes in the post-Civil War period encompassed a theater of operations that ranged throughout the entire trans-Mississippi west—the Northwest,

the far West, the Plains and the Southwest which, of course, included the territory of Arizona, where, ultimately, the Indian Wars evolved into an extended and bloody conflict with the Apaches, most notably those of the Chiricahua tribe.

The people who came to be generally known as Apaches in Arizona descended from a common background—the people of the Athapaskan language group. The exact dates of their migration into the area that ultimately became Arizona are unknown, but their presence there preceded that of the Spanish in the 1500s. In fact, it was from the Spanish that the Apaches first obtained horses and firearms and thereby began to develop their skills as the most formidable warriors of their time and place. The Arizona Apaches were comprised of two major tribes that have come to be called the Chiricahua Apaches and the Western Apaches. The former claimed the mountainous county of southeastern Arizona, western New Mexico and northern Mexico as their homeland, while the Western Apaches were situated principally in the White Mountains.

Despite their common language, it would be wrong to characterize the Apaches in Arizona as a unified society. In fact, the Apaches included various sub-tribal groups, divisions, bands, clans, and families, the social organizations of which were largely independent of the two major tribes. Further, with few exceptions, the Apache tribes had no formal leadership or mechanism of authority that would unite these sub-tribal groupings. To be sure, there were recognized chiefs such as Mangas Coloradas, Victorio and Cochise, and informal leaders like Geronimo, who had the stature and perceived “power” to influence and lead certain tribal groups, but, for the most part, despite the commonality of their language, the various Apache groups—either at the tribal or sub-tribal level—had little affinity with each other. Consequently, the bonds of loyalty between and among the Apache tribes and bands were not as strong as

one might otherwise imagine, and provides at least one explanation why an Apache was willing to scout or even fight against “his own people.”

The Apache Warrior

The popular image of the Apache Indian is that of a warrior. Historian Thomas Dunlay, in *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers*, noted that the Apache of myth was “fierce, cruel, implacably war-like, and diabolically cunning” and likewise possessed powers of “endurance, elusiveness, mobility, and [a] mastery of guerilla tactics” far surpassing that of his white adversaries. General George Crook, who successfully employed Apaches in Arizona as scouts and combat soldiers, called them the “tigers of the human species.”

The Apaches in Arizona were indeed skilled fighters, and undoubtedly there were many who fit the description of the mythical warrior. But they were also human beings. They went to war with the whites or other Indians, but when the raid or conflict was over, they went home to their families and friends. The Apache warriors took wives, had children, and interacted socially with other members of their group or clan. They participated in religious ceremonies. They hunted for game to



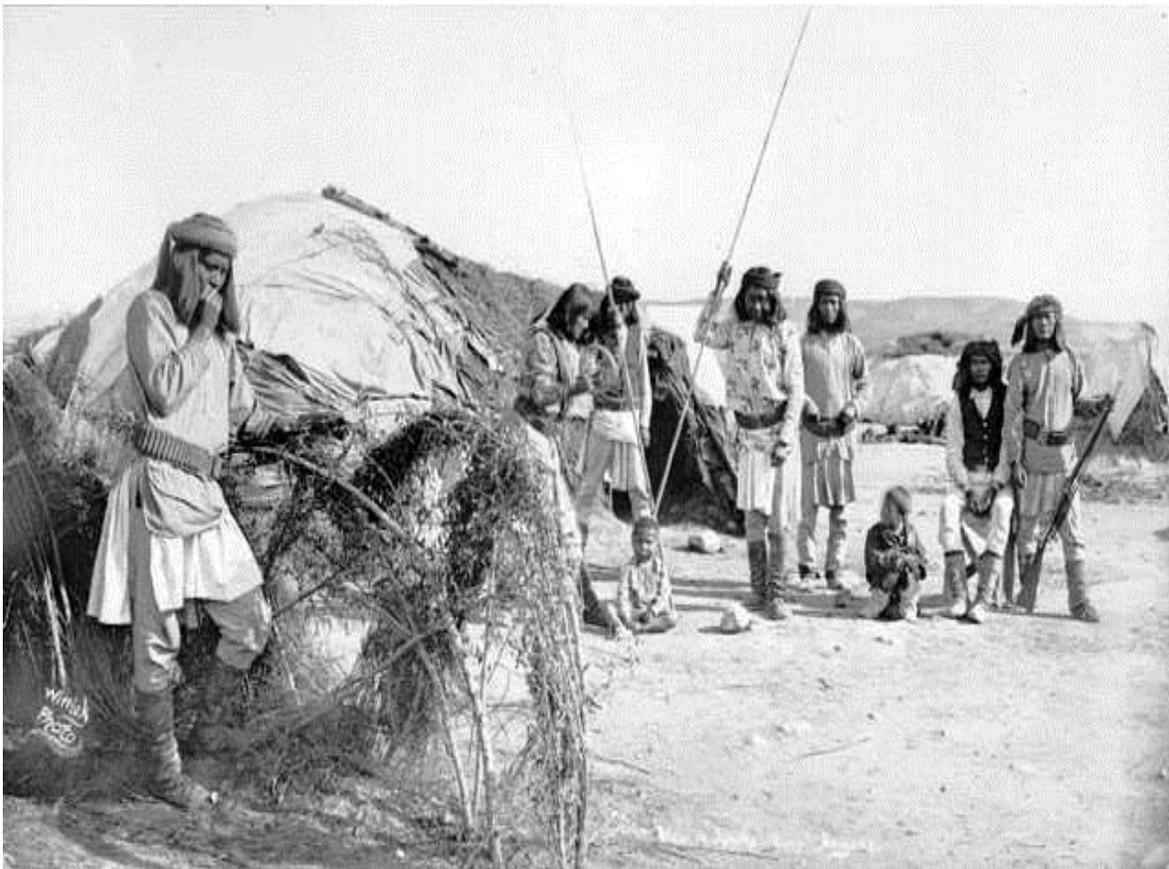
General George Crook and Medal of Honor-winning Apache Scout Alchesay.

provide for their families. Within their culture, their family and social lives were not unlike those of the white settlers who were occupying the traditional lands of the Apache. In fact, one could argue with justification, that the Apache warrior led a more normal life than his blue-coated adversary, as unlike the soldier posted to the Western frontier far removed from his home and family, the Apache warrior lived in his homeland with a family that he loved and cared for.

The Indian War in Arizona, particularly in its early post-Civil War phase (1866-1871), was a source of continual frustration to the cavalry and infantry units posted to the territory by the Army. The guerilla war tactics employed by the Indians were unlike anything the Army had been trained or prepared for. Moreover, the Apaches had a huge advantage over the Army regulars. They knew the territory and

the Army did not. Further, they had the advantage of mobility, even as compared with the Army's cavalry units. Small bands of Apaches would strike at defenseless civilians, steal their horses, cattle and anything else of value and simply vanish into the nearby mountains. Army units would mobilize and pursue but generally to no avail, as the Apaches would engage the Army only when they had a numerical or tactical advantage, or when they were put in a position of having to defend their women and children, such as those rare occasions when the Army was able to mount a surprise attack on an Apache rancheria.

It was this form of warfare, and the Army's inability to find and engage the hostiles, that led to the utilization of Indians, as authorized by the Act of 1866, as scouts and, eventually, as combat troops on the side of the blue-



Apache Rancheria in Arizona Territory, circa 1880s.

coated soldiers.

Indians as Scouts and Combat Forces

The role of the Indian scout, as it was perceived by Congress, was reconnaissance; that is, the gathering of intelligence respecting the location of hostile Indian tribes. Given the fact that the only effective means of engaging the Apache hostiles in Arizona was to conduct surprise attacks on their rancherias, it was imperative for the Army to employ Indian scouts who were familiar with the territory in which the Army sought to operate, and who could read and follow signs, identify the potential target as a hostile group, and stealthily lead troops to a position from which they could lodge an attack at the first light of dawn. It was a task that required considerable skill, but one that Arizona Indians, particularly Apaches, were trained from childhood to perform.

During the early phase of the post-Civil War campaign against the Indians, the scouts employed by the Army were mostly Mexicans, Mexican Americans, half-breeds and Indians

from friendly tribes—the Papago, Maricopa and Pima—all with limited success.

Much credit is given to General Crook for his use of Apaches as scouts and combat forces in Arizona, and deservedly so, as he was an early and strong advocate for the utilization of Apaches in that manner after he took command of the territory in 1871. He was not the originator of the practice, however. This distinction belongs to Major John Green, 1st Cavalry, who had assumed command of Camp Grant in February 1869. In the spring of that year Green led a large and successful expedition against the Apaches, in the course of which his chief scout, Manuel, a full-blooded Apache, proved invaluable in leading the troops to a rancheria situated in Mt. Turnbull. Later that year, Green struck a bargain with Miguel, chief of the White Mountain Apaches, a sub-tribe of the Western Apaches, by which the latter agreed to provide warriors to scout against other Apache bands within the territory. This arrangement led to the establishment of Ft. Apache in the White Mountains as a base of operations against those



Peace-breaking Apache raider Geronimo, far right, and three of his followers.

Apache tribes that remained hostile to the white populace of the territory.

The transition to Apache scouts was not seamless as evidenced by a situation that occurred during Green's Mt. Turnbull expedition. While Green's force was temporarily encamped at Camp Goodwin to rest the troops and horses, and replenish their supplies, two Apaches—who were ostensibly friendly and known to the regulars at Goodwin—offered to guide Green's troops to a place where some hostiles were located. Green accepted their offer over the strong objections of Lt. Charles Veil, who had reservations about the Indians' loyalty. On this occasion the junior officer was right and the commanding officer was wrong. The two Apaches left during the night, presumably to warn their kinsmen of the Army's plans. Several days later, after Green's expedition had departed Camp Goodwin, one of them was spotted near a place on the Gila River where the troops were encamped. He was captured by Manuel's scouts, and shot while trying to escape. Veil's troopers from Company "C," finished the job by hanging him by the neck to a nearby tree with a picket rope.

It was incidents of this kind that caused many officers and men operating in the Arizona Territory to be skeptical of the use of Apache scouts against Apache hostiles. Notwithstanding, the Apaches were considered to be more effective than Indians of other tribes whose loyalty was more readily accepted. Operating on the premise that it took an Apache to track and successfully engage an Apache in combat, Crook ultimately came to rely almost exclusively on Apache scouts in the war of attrition against the Chiricahuas. In fact, their service contributed significantly to the prosecution and successful conclusion of those hostilities. According to Crook, the surrender of the Chiricahua in 1883 and Geronimo and his band of hostiles in 1886 would not have been possible without the service of the Apache scouts. No one who

has studied the Apache war in Arizona can seriously dispute that statement.

Motivations of Apache Scouts

The U.S. government's campaign against the Apache tribes in Arizona was a war of attrition. As the Army's noose tightened around the hostiles, depriving them of familiar hunting grounds, access to water, and destruction of their provisions through attacks on their rancherias, individuals and groups of Apaches, large and small, began to seek accommodation with the Army. Accommodation generally came on the Army's terms, which meant relocation to reservations such as San Carlos, an arid, practically uninhabitable place originally situated on the salt flats at the juncture of the Gila and San Carlos Rivers. Author David Roberts uses the words of Daklugie, a Chiricahua Apache, to describe the conditions at San Carlos:

San Carlos . . . was the worst place in all the great territory stolen from the Apaches. If anybody ever lived there permanently, no Apache knew of it. Where there is no grass, there is no game. Nearly all of the vegetation was cacti; and though in season a little cactus fruit was produced, the rest of the year the food was lacking. The heat was terrible. The insects were terrible. The water was terrible. What there was in the sluggish river was brackish and warm.

In fact, the brackish waters of the rivers spawned millions of mosquitoes, which led to outbreaks of malaria, causing many deaths among the inhabitants of the reservation. The Indians located there were provided government rations, and seed and farming implements, along with instructions as to how to use the latter, futile as those efforts may have been in an environment unsuitable for raising crops. It was a terrible existence for a people who, in Geronimo's words, once "moved about like the wind," and was the cause of

many defections by those who then resumed hostilities in Arizona and south of the border in Mexico.

Initially, the Chiricahua Apaches were not subject to the degrading conditions that existed at San Carlos. In 1872, Cochise, a Chiricahua chief and leader of a large segment of that tribe, recognized the futility of continued resistance and the inevitability of defeat, and negotiated an arrangement with the government by which the Chiricahua would cease hostilities in exchange for a reservation on their homeland in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona. That arrangement lasted only until shortly after Cochise's death in 1874, when the government reneged on its promises to the Chiricahuas and shut down their reservation with the intention of relocating its inhabitants to San Carlos. This precipitous and ill-advised action by Washington caused many Chiricahuas, including leaders such as Juh and Geronimo, to refuse to go to San Carlos. They, along with the vast majority of those who had been peacefully settled on the Chiricahua Reservation, fled to Mexico and ultimately resumed their hostilities on both sides of the border, thereby prolonging the Apache War for another decade.

The continued hostilities provided an opportunity for the Apache warriors who had been settled at San Carlos. Given the choice between farming in an inhospitable environment or scouting and fighting for the army, even against other Apaches, many such warriors opted for the latter alternative. Their choice was not surprising. These were, after all, men who were raised in a warrior culture, who, according to Dunlay, "regarded war as their proper occupation and horses and weapons as the attributes of manhood." Apache scouts were enlisted into the Army and provided rations and pay equivalent to regular soldiers. They were furnished horses—or an allowance if they used their own—as well as firearms and ammunition. They obtained status within

their community, as compared with "squaw men," as the Chiricahuas derisively referred to those who chose to toil on the reservation. Moreover, and importantly, the Apache scouts had the opportunity to associate and interact with other warriors—the regular soldiers—and were subject to military rather than civilian supervision and control.

Nor is there any sense of mystery as to why an Apache warrior would choose to scout and, in some cases fight, against members of his own tribe; that is, Chiricahua against Chiricahua. As earlier discussed, the Apaches were not a unified society and their relationships and therefore loyalties were generally with and to groups considerably smaller than the tribe with whom they affiliated, such as a band or family unit or clan. This was particularly so as a leadership void evolved following the deaths of the great Apache chiefs. Even when Apaches went against those with whom they had some level of affinity, as Chato did when he helped track down Geronimo in 1885, the need to support their families—to whom they owed their first duty of loyalty—and maintain their dignity as warriors, overrode any feelings of kinship they may have had toward the hostiles. A scout's decision to ally with the U.S. Army, even against "his own," while considered by some to be an act of disloyalty, was, in fact, the result of a very pragmatic decision made on a very human level.

The Cibeqe Mutiny

The Apache scouts in Arizona rendered very valuable service to the U.S. Army, as evidenced by the ten Medals of Honor awarded to them during Crook's winter campaign of 1872-73. Unquestionably, but for their service, the war in the Arizona Territory would have been extended for years if not decades. Their reputation, however, will be forever besmirched by the events on Cibeqe Creek in August, 1881.

Nochedelklinne, an Apache medicine man at the White Mountain Reservation, began preaching a vision and teaching a “ghost dance,” the essence of which was that the whites would soon vanish from the land of the Apaches and the great chiefs—Mangas Coloradas, Victorio and Cochise—would arise from the dead. Nochedelklinne’s activities caused the white authorities on the reservation to become alarmed, and ultimately, Col. Eugene Carr, commanding Ft. Apache, was ordered to arrest the troublesome prophet. At the time, the scout company at Ft. Apache was comprised of White Mountain Apaches who were kin to those residing on the reservation. Carr had concerns about using these scouts on this mission and sought direction from his department commander, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Orlando Willcox, but was unable to communicate because of downed telegraph wires. Ultimately, Carr moved out with two companies of infantry and his Apache scouts. Nochedelklinne’s arrest was made without incident; however, a large body of his followers, apparently distrustful of the Army’s intentions respecting their spiritual leader, trailed closely behind the column as it returned to the fort. As the soldiers made camp on Cibique Creek, the Apaches crowded in, a shot was fired—its origin very much in dispute—and a general firefight erupted. Eight soldiers were killed, several of them allegedly by Carr’s Apache scouts, some of whom had joined the fight on the side of their kinsmen. Nochedelklinne was shot and killed by a soldier on Carr’s orders. The soldiers eventually were able to withdraw under cover of darkness and make their way back to the fort without further incident.

The affair was the catalyst for a resumption of hostilities in Arizona. Retaliatory raids resulted in the deaths of six or more civilians and an attack even was launched on Ft. Apache, prompting Gen. Willcox to order reinforcements to the fort. Moreover, fear of a general uprising of the Apaches caused con-

siderable alarm among the civilian population of the territory.

The so-called Cibique Mutiny is one of the few recorded instances in history in which Indian scouts turned on their white comrades on the field of battle. Five of the scouts involved eventually were brought to trial in a general court martial proceeding, all were convicted, three of which—Sgt. Dead Shot, Dandy Jim and Skippy—were sentenced to be executed. The sentence was carried out on March 3, 1882 at Camp Grant, thus ending a sorry chapter in the otherwise glorious history of Apache scouting in the Arizona Territory.

Conclusion

The Apache war in Arizona ended in August 1886, when Geronimo and his band of thirty-odd Chiricahuas were taken into custody by General Nelson Miles, who had replaced General Crook in April of that year. Meanwhile, on orders from Washington, all of the Chiricahuas on the reservation at San Carlos—men, women and children—were in the process of being relocated to Florida where they would be treated as prisoners of war. Geronimo and his followers likewise were sent to Ft. Marion, Florida. He was, however, promised that within two years the Chiricahuas would be returned to Arizona and settled on a reservation—yet another commitment to which the federal government would later renege.

The Chiricahua Apache scouts—65 in number, who so ably served the U.S. Army in Arizona and whose service hastened the end of the Apache war—were not excluded from Washington’s removal orders. They, too, were sent to Florida and forced to live among those whose defeat they had helped to assure.

The Chiricahua Apache scouts deserved much better. They had served valiantly. Their subsequent treatment by the federal government was an injustice to them and their service to the United States.



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Chiracahua Apache prisoners and their army escort pictured en route to imprisonment at Fort Marion, Florida, following Geronimo's surrender in 1886.