

“Capture These Devils”



“The Indian warfare as far as Victorio’s band is concerned is ended, but we must not forget one principle of evolution, the survival of the fittest, the few that are left will be more treacherous, more ugly than ever before known.” -- *Grant County Herald*, Oct. 1880¹

Tres Castillos should have been so traumatic as to drive even the strongest man into a head-clutching, nearly catatonic fetal position, overwhelmed by the scope of the disaster. Instead, Nana acted quickly to gather the handful of survivors. According to Kaywaykla, a very young boy at the time, Nana led them west and then north across the border somewhere near the Arizona line, evading cavalry patrols to bring the little band back into their familiar New Mexico mountains.

It was cold in the high country that winter but safe enough, at least for the time being. The Texas cowboys and Hispanic *pastores* had driven their herds and flocks back down into the valleys, and the miners, prospectors and loggers were huddled in the bustling little camps that now fringed the mountains, waiting impatiently for the spring thaw to open up the canyons. In the meantime the hunting was good, and the women made new moccasins and restocked the secret caches with food, spare blankets and – most important – ammunition. These hidden stockpiles were needed for the campaign Nana had probably begun planning even as he was shepherding the grieving survivors away from Tres Castillos.

Around the campfire at night, the old man told Kaywaykla tales out of the Apache mythic past, of Child of Waters and White Cloud Woman, heroes who dared fearsome perils and overcame great difficulties to save their People. “Grandfather impressed upon me that every struggle, whether won or lost, strengthens us for the next to come,” Kaywaykla recalled many years later. “It is not good for people to have an easy life. They become weak and inefficient when they cease to struggle. Some need a series of defeats before developing the strength and courage to win a victory.”²

As they traveled farther north through the ranch country near Horse Springs, Nana’s impulsive young subordinate Kaytenna scooped up a little boy and a slightly older girl who were

¹ Billington, Monroe Lee. *New Mexico’s Buffalo Soldiers*, p. 97.

² Ball, *Days of Victorio*, p.104.

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out herding cattle, riding double on one horse. Nana rebuked Kaytennae, telling him the two white children were useless and their loss was sure to put the cavalry on their trail. He told the younger man to get rid of them, and Kaytennae put them back on their horse and let them go after the band moved on, according to what Kaywaykla's mother told him later.

Nana wanted to maintain a low profile not just because he was encumbered with women and children, but because he had things to accomplish that winter. He was headed into the Mangas Mountains to make contact with kindred spirits.

There was trouble on the Navajo Reservation that year, where the *Diné* were so angry with their agent that he had found it prudent to move to Albuquerque and leave the military to deal with his unhappy charges. Some of the most restless of these were roaming the mountains south of the Zuni and Acoma reservations, and it was to them that Nana looked for allies. He also probably sent word east across the Rio Grande to where he still had friends among the Mescalero

His preparations complete, Nana turned back south as the sun began its annual journey north. Late in the afternoon of Jan. 14, 1881, a band of Apaches attacked a wagon on the road 12 miles east of Fort Cummings, killing two men and perhaps abducting a woman whose shoes were found nearby. Two hours later, around sunset, the raiders ambushed a coach as it approached the stage station in the Good Sight Mountains, killing the driver, James Sweeney, and his passenger, Thomas White. The raiders cut open the mail sacks and scattered the contents, stole a shipment of musical instruments intended for the 12th Infantry band, and left their victims lying in the road, "their heads mutilated in a shocking manner."³



Lt. Col. Nathan Dudley

Lt. Col. Nathan Dudley, commanding at Fort Cummings and second in command of the 9th Cavalry, was so offended by these attacks that virtually the entire regiment was turned out "to capture these devils."⁴

Just who "these devils" were is something of a puzzle, however. There were said to be 40 or 50 of them, and their trail led north into the Black Range. A few days later, Indians jumped 9th Cavalry Lt. John F. McBlain, who was traveling in an Army ambulance on the wagon road that ran along the Rio Grande. The lieutenant and his driver escaped into the brush, but the Indians burned the wagon, killed one mule and wounded another, and stole the other two mules. Sometime after this, six Indians ambushed a stagecoach near Santa Barbara (today's Hatch), but were driven off by two soldiers riding the stage as guards.⁵

On Jan. 18, Apaches raided a little tent camp of 18 miners in Chloride Gulch, killed two men and drove off horses and mules. On Jan. 22, under the black headline "Another Outrage," the *Albuquerque Journal* printed a telegraphic dispatch from Magdalena reporting that, "25 Indians have cleaned out Stapleton's Mill, 15 miles from this camp, committing murders, etc. Traveling northwest to Navajo Reservation." Three days later, headlined "Apaches Again," the *Journal* reported a Hispanic family – a man with two women and a boy – were "brutally murdered" by 26 Apaches on the road 15 miles southwest of San Marcial, near where Alamosa creek flows into the Rio Grande. The story went on to attribute to Captain Jack Crawford, (a noted Indian scout then working as post sutler at Fort Craig), news that, "Mr. Robinson, mining engineer of the A.T.&S.F. was surrounded by the Indians and two of his men had been killed."

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* offered a slightly different and more detailed version of this event, reporting that mining engineer J.M. Robinson was traveling on a buckboard about five miles west of San Jose (on the Rio Grande where Elephant Butte Reservoir is now) at two o'clock in the afternoon of Jan. 23 when attacked. Robinson's driver and one horse were killed before the Indians drew off.

³ *Albuquerque Daily Journal*, Jan. 18, 1881.

⁴ Billington, pp. 101-2.

⁵ *ibid*

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“The Indians surrounded a party consisting of three men and one woman, two miles west of the same point, on the same day. Robinson and seven Mexicans arrived on the scene in time to save the party. A fight took place, and Robinson and party were in danger of getting the worst of the affair, when five soldiers of Co. D, 9th Cavalry, who were escorting a contractor’s train, came up and opened fire, driving off the Indians,” the story continued.

Sgt. Madison Ingoman and six 9th Cavalry troopers were escorting a supply train along the Cañada Alamosa from Fort Craig to Ojo Caliente when they heard distant gunfire. Leaving the wagons corralled under protection of the teamsters, the sergeant took his little command to investigate. Finding seven civilians desperately defending themselves against 25 Indians, the soldiers charged to the rescue and drove the hostiles off. Two days later “still eight miles from Ojo Caliente,” Pvt. William Jones was fatally wounded when Ingoman’s train “was fired on by some fifteen Apaches positioned atop the canyon walls.”⁶

Another, un-named source was cited for news that a band reported to number 54 Indians rode through the town of Hillsboro, firing into the houses as they passed, and on up into the Black Range, closely pursued by the soldiers.⁷

The scout Crawford was wounded on Jan. 31 when he and two civilian companions were attacked by five Apaches in the box canyon leading up to Ojo Caliente.⁸ According to other reports, the Indians stole two horses near Hillsboro and a buckboard near the little village of Cuchillo Negro, east of Chloride on the road to the Rio Grande.⁹

If all this violent activity seems confusing, that’s perhaps because it was meant to be. Note too that all these incidents were east and south of Ojo Caliente toward the Rio Grande. The one exception, the report from Magdalena, proved to be inaccurate; the man said to be murdered at Stapleton’s mill later turned up safe and sound, and Stapleton himself would later prove to be on friendly terms with the Apaches.

“After we turned south, Nana took half the warriors with him and put Blanco in command of the others who were to take the noncombatants to Sonora,” Kaywaykla recalled many years later. “Our group went by Ojo Caliente, deserted by the soldiers. Blanco stationed guards to warn us of the approach of an enemy and for two days we stayed near the warm spring...We lay in the cleansing pool and enjoyed its beneficent effect for hours.”¹⁰

After the Chihenne were rounded up and marched west to San Carlos in 1877, the abandoned Ojo Caliente agency intermittently served as a patrol base for the troops hunting Victorio from 1878-’80. That Sgt. Ingoman was delivering supplies there suggests the place was still occupied by troops that winter. If so, the choleric Col. Dudley’s general alarm sent them riding south in pursuit of the 12th Infantry’s stolen band instruments.

It was likely Blanco and his sentries who killed Pvt. Jones and drove Sgt. Ingoman back out of the canyon that guards the eastern approach to the spring, while Nana himself led the earlier attacks farther toward the river.

But it’s also possible Nana and his men were not responsible for all the depredation in the last weeks of January. Juh and Geronimo were both absent from their sub-agency in Arizona during this time period.¹¹ Although the agent claimed they remained someplace on the reservation, it could be they were the raiders who struck first in the Good Sight Mountains and then along the Rio Grande and up toward Hillsboro.

Whoever led the different parties, all these attacks were likely orchestrated by Nana to draw attention away from Blanco, who was escorting the women and children south. “Nana made a feint at attack to lure the cavalry toward the Floridas so that Blanco could take the emigrant wagon road west from the fort,” Kaywaykla recalled. “He rode close enough to Fort Cummings to be sighted; then dashed toward the Floridas with the cavalry in pursuit.”¹²

⁶ Kenner, Charles L. Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry, 1867-1898, pp. 278-79.

⁷ Albuquerque Journal, Jan. 25, 1881.

⁸ Kühn, Berndt. Chronicles of War, p.242.

⁹ Billington, p. 101.

¹⁰ Ball, Days of Victorio, p.108.

¹¹ Sweeney, From Cochise to Geronimo, p. 168

¹² Ball, Days of Victorio, pp. 109-10.

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Pinched between sheer cliffs and barely wide enough to admit a wagon, the narrow gorge that guards the eastern approach to Ojo Caliente is nearly impregnable. Even supported by artillery, a regiment would take heavy casualties trying to force passage against a handful of determined men on the cliffs above.

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This ploy was only partially successful. Blanco stopped to water his horses at the spring virtually under the walls of the fort, then led the way west through Cooke's Canyon. But according to Kaywaykla, Blanco discovered a force of cavalry following them down the trail; whether these troops were in pursuit of the Apaches or simply following the same road is unclear. Blanco ambushed the soldiers at a spring and killed several of their horses before they withdrew toward the fort, leaving two men behind on foot, and Blanco himself was killed before the Indians succeeded in killing those two troopers. Farther on, they discovered the western end of the main canyon was guarded and were forced to turn up a side canyon, where Blanco's brother Sudeen was killed in a skirmish that left three miners dead.

I've seen no other account of these events, and Kaywaykla's description doesn't match the terrain in Cooke's Canyon. He was a little boy clinging to his mother at the time, and in recounting these memories 70 years later he may have conflated Cooke's with another canyon farther south. One [compilation](#) of 9th Cavalry actions lists a detachment of Co. K engaged in the "Candelaria Mountains, New Mexico" on Feb. 5, but the Candelarias are in Mexico southwest of Juarez, and I haven't seen any report of 9th Cavalry fatalities around this time.

Whatever the exact circumstances, the loss of two brave men was a severe blow to Nana. While the Army could count on a steady flow of recruits from the cities and farms back east, it took the Apaches 20 years to raise and train a warrior; his death was more than a personal and family tragedy, it represented a further diminution of strength for the band's dwindling numbers.

A week or so later, "Sgt. Stewart Albert and a detachment of Company D did see evidence of another massacre about forty-five miles from Fort Craig, where they found a burned wagon, a dead horse, burned articles (including pieces of women's clothing) and a bloody gray hat with a bullet hole near the crown. ... He reasoned that the massacred family came from Monica in the San Mateo Mountains, because recent white inhabitants of that place apparently had left in a great hurry. There he saw many signs of both mounted and dismounted Indians."¹³

It's not clear how recent this incident was at the northern end of the San Mateos when Sgt. Albert reported his find. By that time Nana and his people were deep in the fastness of the Sierra Madre far to the south. The foray was less a raid than what we today would call a "reconnaissance in force" to allow Nana to survey the current state of white penetration of the Chihenne homeland. What he saw must have depressed and angered him. New Mexico was becoming "The New Eldorado," the *Albuquerque Journal* boasted. "The reports from our mining districts are so encouraging as to lead thousands of prospectors into the mountains from North, South, East and West. New towns are springing up almost every month, new mills are being erected on improved plans, and in every direction we can only see enterprise and development for the better."¹⁴

Since Nana and his people had been driven into exile their beloved mountains were filling up with miners and prospectors. Loggers were clear-cutting the virgin stands of ponderosa pine for railroad ties, shoring timbers for the mines and rough lumber for the raw new towns. Texas drovers were moving huge herds of longhorns up into the grassy highlands, competing with Hispanic shepherds bringing their flocks in from the Rio Grande Valley. In all that bustle and activity, there was no place for the Apache.

¹³ Billington, p. 102

¹⁴ *Albuquerque Journal*, Dec. 8, 1880.