

# Tracking Nana

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### Hot Pursuit

*“And so when man and horse go down  
Beneath a saber keen,  
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee  
You stop a bullet clean,  
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,  
Just empty your canteen,  
Put your pistol to your head  
And go to [Fiddler's Green](#).”*

Just eight of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry's 12 troops<sup>1</sup> were engaged in the hunt for Nana's raiders, together with two companies of Indian scouts (Lt. Guilfoyle's Co. B Apache Scouts and Co. A Navajo Scouts). Col. Hatch also had eight companies of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry available, but these foot soldiers were useful primarily for guarding waterholes and escorting stage coaches. At least five hastily-organized bands of civilian volunteers also took the field, but these posses generally proved useless if not positively detrimental to military operations.

The regimental rolls show the eight cavalry companies totaled between 406 and 423 men, but they were short of horses. During July and August of '81, the eight troops had only between 251 and 266 serviceable horses, leaving 155 to 157 troopers afoot.<sup>2</sup>

Assuming his eight infantry companies were the Army's average of 41 men per company, Hatch thus had about 740 soldiers, two-thirds of them on foot, to search more than 15,000 square miles of some of the roughest country in the Southwest. But the colonel did have two advantages in chasing Nana's band. The Chihenne homeland was covered by Forts Cummings and Bayard to the south, Craig and Selden to the east, and Wingate to the north, and the newly arrived railroads and accompanying telegraph lines enabled the Army to rapidly move troops to any point on that perimeter.

A courier brought the first report of the Rancho Cebolla attack to the telegraph at McCarty's on August 12, but by then Hatch already had fresher news of the raiders. On August 11, under the black heading “**Apache Atrocities**,” the *Journal* printed the latest dispatches:

*“The Apache hostiles this afternoon burned the town of Garcia, 20 miles from El Rita, on the A&P Road, killing 5 or 6 Mexicans...Apaches reported in force about fifteen miles south of Acomoe (sic). Five men reported killed; a number missing. Several ranches destroyed...Last night at 6 o'clock, a Mexican was driven in from Garcia's ranch (where) 50 Apaches murdered 5 herders and 2 boys...three scouts report the band camped at Salt Springs, 15 miles from El Rita.” (El Rito was a settlement on the Laguna Reservation south of Mesita and west of Garcia.)*

With the war party spotted west of Ladrone Peak, the colonel's challenge was to round them up before they could escape back to the south. Although Wright and Guilfoyle had been forced to abandon the chase at Cebolla Canyon, Laguna Pueblo was dispatching a force of 40 men from the north, while another force of 60 civilian volunteers rode west out of Socorro, led by Territorial Congressional Delegate Tranquilino Luna. From Albuquerque the superintendent of the A&P Railroad sent a crew of workmen armed with newly-purchased Winchesters west to McCarty's to guard the line of the railroad.

Nana's best route out of this tightening cordon lay along the Bear Mountains, a narrow and low but precipitous chain that runs south from the Rio Salado. His chief obstacles along that path were the mining camp of Kelly and the bustling little town of Magdalena immediately below it, astride the gap between the Bear and Magdalena Mountains.

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<sup>1</sup> In his report to Pope Hatch mentions Companies A, B, D, H, I, K, and L; the eighth might have been either C or F.

<sup>2</sup> Watt, Robert N., “*Horses Worn to Mere Shadows*,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, Spring 2011, p.200.

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Nana's most immediate threat was Captain Charles Parker, who was patrolling the Rio Salado with 19 men from his Co. K, 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Parker was ably supported in this mission by two excellent non-coms, First Sgt. Thomas Shaw and Sgt. George Jordan. Jordan had already proved himself a cool hand the previous year, when he led a handful of troopers in beating off an Apache attack on old Fort Tularosa. Now Shaw was about to show his own courage under fire.

Parker had a couple of Mexican scouts with him but they were scarcely necessary. The Salado is soft sand in the dry season and boggy quicksand in the wet, limiting the number of crossings and ensuring that any traffic is bound to leave clear tracks. On August 12, Parker cut the raiders' trail crossing the river. He left his supply mules behind and hurried south in pursuit. The patrol found Nana "just outside Carrizo Canyon,"<sup>3</sup> which Leckie places about 25 miles west of Sabinal, a village on the Rio Grande south of Belen.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary most accounts, I believe it unlikely Nana was "intercepted" or "forced" into this fight. Given the outcome, it's more likely that discovering Parker was on his trail, Nana chose his ground, deployed his men, and coolly waited for the buffalo soldiers to catch up rather than risk a running fight farther south.

It's hard to understand why an experienced soldier would have led his men into the narrow neck of the canyon south of Carrizozo Spring without first clearing the heights above. Looking at the broad trail left by Nana's horses leading up into Carrizo Canyon, Parker may well have scented trouble. As a captain in the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry he had chased rebel "bushwhackers" like Bloody Bill Anderson in Missouri in the last years of the Civil War, and he had served with the 9<sup>th</sup> through the Victorio campaign, so he knew something of irregular warfare.

But he was in a hurry. Nana had slipped past him at the Rio Salado and was riding hard for the Magdalenas, and the captain knew he would never catch the hostiles once they reached those mountains. True, Nana was encumbered by his captives and a herd of loose stock, but that also meant he had fresh remounts available for his men, while Parker's weary troopers were on the same tired horses they had been riding for a week. If he was to catch the old man, Parker needed to push his men and horses – and his luck – to the limit of endurance.

In his after-action report, the captain estimated he was facing 40 guns, which may indicate that Nana had not yet parted company with most of his Navajo and Mescalero allies, or Parker may have been attempting to excuse the outcome of the engagement. And although Leckie makes it sound as though Parker knew he was engaging Nana's full force when he boldly "attacked at once," the hostiles would scarcely have lined up on the heights to be counted while the captain paused to survey the terrain ahead through his field glasses. Instead, they would have lain carefully concealed until the soldiers were well advanced into the trap. Looking up the canyon, the captain may have calculated he might be facing no more than a few stay-behinds Nana had dropped off to delay pursuit. If that was the case, playing a dangerous game of hide and seek to flush a couple of snipers out of the rocks above was a waste of valuable daylight.

Based on the terse wording of the subsequent Medal of Honor citations, it seems the captain may have detached Sgt. Jordan with a few men to scramble up the more gradual slope on the right and lay down a suppressing fire on the opposite cliffs while Parker and Shaw led the rest on a rush through the narrows up to Barrel Spring. That would place them in the rear of any riflemen on the cliffs, and once those were mopped up Parker could regroup and push on after the main body of the war party.

That was a highly risky tactical disposition, however. If the volume of fire was heavier than expected or better aimed, a couple of downed horses or a man shot from the saddle might have disrupted the advance and driven the troopers to ground. While the men might find concealment in the underbrush, horses were notoriously poor at seeking cover and made the largest and most exposed targets. With Parker and Shaw pinned down, some of the hostiles who had been posted on the other side of the crest to the right could slip around to isolate Jordan's flankers and trap the soldiers in the canyon below. Only the desperate courage of the two sergeants, who stood their ground to hold off the advancing Indians prevented disaster.

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<sup>3</sup> Lekson, p.22.

<sup>4</sup> Leckie, p. 232.

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All this is speculation. What's incontestable is that Parker was badly defeated. The *Journal* tallied his losses at one man killed, three wounded, and one unaccounted for.<sup>5</sup> Kenner lists Privates Charles Perry and Guy Temple killed and Privates John Shidell, Wash Pennington and Jerry Stone wounded (the last two so severely that neither ever returned to active duty), but makes no mention of any MIA.<sup>6</sup>

Parker was left in command of the field and claimed his men killed four hostiles, but an objective observer would have awarded battle honors to Nana, who discontinued the action only after he had killed nine cavalry horses and inflicted enough casualties to ensure Parker would be forced to abandon the chase.

"My command dismounted within 100 yards of the enemy, and was vigorously engaged for more than two hours – without shelter or protection, until their whole force retreated to their rear southwest," Parker reported in his "official account of the battle," according to Kenner.

Dismounting for action on foot was a complicated evolution in which one trooper collected and held four horses while his three comrades deployed in a skirmish line. It would scarcely have been attempted under fire within 100 yards of the enemy unless it was simply unavoidable, with men and horses already down and an organized withdrawal impossible. Two of the wounded were hit in the side, which may imply flanking fire (from an opponent above aiming at center mass) as they rode into the canyon, while the third man suffered a fractured skull and internal injuries from his horse falling on him, and so was likely mounted at the time. The two fatalities were both head wounds, possibly sustained by men sheltering behind rocks or downed horses once the company was pinned down in the kill zone.

The fact that Parker lost half his 19 horses would seem to indicate that the troopers were mounted when the action opened, unless the Indians had succeeded in sneaking around their flanks to target the horseholders in the rear.



**Sgt. George Jordan**



**Sgt. Thomas Shaw**

Jordan and Shaw were each awarded the Medal of

Honor for the action. According to his citation, Shaw "forced the enemy back after stubbornly holding his ground in an extremely exposed position and prevented the enemy's superior numbers from surrounding his command." Jordan's citation was almost identical: "At Carrizo Canyon, N. Mex., while commanding the right of a detachment of 19 men, on 12 August 1881, he stubbornly held his ground in an extremely exposed position and gallantly forced back a much superior number of the enemy, preventing them from surrounding the command."

Parker and his men limped back to the nearby La Cienega Ranch,<sup>7</sup> half of them carrying their saddles, while Nana resumed his flight south. There are no good routes out of Carrizozo Canyon to the east or south, so it's likely (as Parker reported)

Nana crossed over southwest from Barrel Spring into Abbe Spring Canyon and down what is today Cibola NF Road 123 before turning east through the gap between the Bear Mountains and Granite Mountain just

<sup>5</sup> *Albuquerque Journal*, August 16, 1881.

<sup>6</sup> Kenner, p. 149. In his report to Gen. Pope, Col. Hatch gives the casualty count as two dead and four wounded, while Sheridan's tally agrees with the *Journal*. Lekson identifies Temple as a "civilian farrier."

<sup>7</sup> Citing Parker's initial after-action report from that ranch, Roland concludes the fight actually occurred not in Carrizo Canyon but in Cienega Canyon, which is north of the Rio Salado. A 1982 archeological survey placed the battle at the west end of the Salado Box, another canyon farther down the river, based on the presence of three military (?) graves at that site. Since only two soldiers were reported killed that evidence seems inconclusive.

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north of Magdalena. As they passed through that night the hostiles killed one man and stole a horse from a ranch in the Bear Mountains.<sup>8</sup> By the next morning they were within a few miles of Socorro after a ride of more than 40 miles.

“Horses move long distances at a fast walk or a slow trot, not at a gallop,” Kaywaykla later explained. “They can maintain a pace of five or six miles an hour half the night. When ours became exhausted we changed mounts, preferably to ranch horses roped out as we went. Our tired ones were loose-herded with us, or if we had them long, they followed.”<sup>9</sup>

Early August 13 the hostiles struck a three-wagon supply train camped along the Magdalena road and killed Lee L. Van Epps, the owner of the goods, one of his teamsters, William English, and a traveler named John Herman who was camped with them. Further along the road the raiders killed Juan de Dios Baca and his son, and that night they struck Werner’s ranch, killing him and capturing his wife, according to the August 15 *Journal*. Kühn gives the victim’s name as Andres Warner and places his ranch at Cienega de la Magdalena, 15 miles from San Marcial, but makes no mention of his wife.<sup>10</sup>

There is no further mention of the unfortunate Mrs. Werner (or Warner) in the various accounts of the raid, although on August 17 the *Albuquerque Journal* reprinted a dispatch from the *Socorro Sun* that, “A Mexican boy arrived in Poloodera, (*Polvadera*, or “*Dusty*,”) a small Mexican town ten miles north of this city, on Saturday morning, and reported that he had been a prisoner of the Indians six days, that during that time they killed two Americans and ten Mexicans. The Indians had a white woman and two children as prisoners.” That woman may have been Mrs. Werner.

Apache war parties frequently rode at night across open country to escape observation and rested by day high up in the mountain canyons, where they could usually find water, graze their stock and watch their backtrail during the daylight hours.

The war party likely split up somewhere along the Socorro road, with some bolder spirits continuing southeast toward Fort Craig while the rest, with captives, horses and plunder, rode south into the Magdalenas. Apaches were capable of moving in a disciplined mass like a European force, with a vanguard, flanking outriders and a rear guard protecting the main body. But a war party more typically passed through the countryside like a flock of desert quail moving through the underbrush, or – more appropriately – like a pack of hunting wolves.

Kit Carson vented his frustration in pursuit of another such war party: “the rascally Apaches, on breaking up their camps, would divide into parties of two and three and then scatter over the vast expanse of the prairies to meet again at some preconcerted place, where they knew water could be had.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kühn, *Chronicles of War*, p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p.73.

<sup>10</sup> Kühn, *Chronicles*, p. 246.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn, Alvin R. *Kit Carson and the First Battle of Adobe Walls*, p.21.