

# Tracking Nana

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## Epilogue

"Nothing lives long except the earth and the mountains." – *Cheyenne death song*<sup>1</sup>

The miners took millions of dollars' worth of gold and silver out of the mountains of southwestern New Mexico over the next 20 years. While the early reports are tainted by local boosterism, aggressive stock jobbing and fraud, it's estimated the Mogollon District yielded \$5 million, Magdalena nearly \$9 million, and Silver City's Chloride Flats \$4 million by 1900. Just one property, the *Naiad Queen* north of Santa Rita, produced \$3 million by the end of the century and the *Bridal Chamber* at Lake Valley claimed \$8 million, while the placer deposits at nearby Gold Dust are said to have yielded more than \$2 million before they were worked out.

Although 19<sup>th</sup> Century miners rarely if ever paused to reckon the environmental cost, it was high. Cooney's *Silver Bar*, for example, required between 100,000 and 150,000 feet of timber to produce \$1.7 million worth of ore. Clear cutting the nearby slopes for this lumber led to flash floods that ultimately swept the little town away altogether – call it the revenge of the Mountain Gods. Mogollon, Silver City, Hillsboro and other mining camps suffered similar devastating floods.

And while the gold was real enough, the silver was a sort of Gilded Age fairy gold, the market price subsidized by the government. When that prop was knocked out in the 1890s, most of the mines closed down and the little towns emptied out almost as quickly as they had sprung up. Silver City still thrives today as a college town and retirement community and the hills around Lake Valley have been subdivided into 40-acre ranchettes. But Hillsboro, Magdalena, Winston and Mogollon just barely hang on, while Grafton, Cooley, Eureka and many other camps have disappeared altogether.

Mining was dirty and dangerous work, and no one but a romantic who hasn't tried it would mourn its passing. The miners left behind some colorful names that would delight the ear of Stephen Vincent Benét – the *Happy Jack* and *Last Chance*, the *Mountain King*, *Miner's Dream*, *Ready Pay*, *Golden Opportunity* and dozens of others -- now fading away on the yellowing paper of old stock certificates. The miners' enduring monument is Cooney's Tomb,<sup>2</sup> their legacy thousands of abandoned diggings in the back country. Of the 3,000 known hardrock mines in New Mexico, fewer than 100 have been inventoried or surveyed to date.

The Buffalo Soldiers are memorialized by a martial statue standing on the weed-grown parade ground of old Fort Bayard near Silver City. A bronze plaque recalls the nine black enlisted men and two white officers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry who were awarded the Medal of Honor for their service in a hard and dirty war. They were little appreciated in their day, either by the people of New Mexico or the Army.

The cows are still on the land, although not in the numbers that grazed the range in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Between 1882 and 1884 the number of cattle in Socorro County, which then included what's now Sierra County, exploded from 9,000 to more than 70,000 head. In recent years the government has been steadily reducing the herds on public lands, and the small ranchers who depend on those grazing permits are increasingly marginalized. But ranching today, like 19<sup>th</sup> Century silver mining, depends on a government subsidy. In 2014 the BLM spent \$34 million administering grazing leases but collected just \$12 million in fees, and political support for that imbalance is waning. The federal agencies that control the land are less responsive to the dwindling numbers of ranchers on the land than to urban environmentalists who have never seen a calf disemboweled by a wolf but value wildlife over hamburger on the hoof.

And in southwestern New Mexico the feds call the tune. The Gila National Forest encompasses 3.3 million acres, about a quarter of it protected wilderness, while Cibola NF covers another 1.6 million acres, 63,000 of it in the Apache Kid and Withington Wilderness. Catron County is the

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<sup>1</sup> Brandon, William. *The American Heritage Book of Indians*, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> An ex-cavalry sergeant who made the first big strike in the Mogollons, James Cooney was killed by Victorio's Apaches in 1880. His brother interred him in a crypt carved into a massive boulder in the canyon near his mine.

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largest in the state in area but one of the least populated; 80 percent of the land is owned by federal or state government. In neighboring Sierra County three-quarters of the land is controlled by various federal agencies.

After years of legal battles the descendants of the Chiricahuas exiled in 1886, now known as the Fort Sill Apaches, have won recognition as a New Mexico tribe, together with a tiny reservation that consists of nothing more than a smoke shop on Interstate 10 near Deming. Most of the tribe's 700 members live in Lawton, Oklahoma, or on the Mescalero Reservation.

A few never left. There were bronco Apaches high in the Sierra Madre as late as the 1930s, and at least one renegade roamed the New Mexico and Arizona mountains until 1906, when a posse killed Massai deep in the San Mateos.

The sacred spring still flows, not many miles from Massai's grave. I've been told there are rattlers up there active all winter long, perhaps because the water warms the ground around the spring. I'd like to believe they remember Nana's Power, and have been set there as sentinels to warn away trespassers.

Nana was a brilliant tactician who took full advantage of two of the Apaches' great strengths in irregular warfare: their incredible stamina and their ability to travel rapidly over rough country on foot and horseback. By splitting up, moving fast and striking at widely separated points in quick succession, the raiders mitigated their disadvantage in numbers. Unsure where his opponents were and confused by conflicting reports, Hatch was forced to divide his cavalry into small detachments in order to cover all his possible options. As a result, the Apaches enjoyed a parity or even superiority of numbers in every engagement.

Nana had several objectives in the raid. The first was to avenge the death of Victorio and the others killed at Tres Castillos, and he succeeded in this. Other raids followed, led by Chatto, Ulzana, Chihuahua and Geronimo, but none matched Nana's body count.

His second objective was in the nature of a religious pilgrimage. Nana was determined to visit the Chihenne holy places and in this he was less successful. After pausing at Salinas Peak he made three attempts to reach Ojo Caliente – once when he crossed the river near Elephant Butte but diverted up into the San Mateos instead, again when he challenged the cavalry at Cuchillo Negro, and finally when he encountered Lt. Taylor in Whitehorse Canyon. Thwarted on each occasion, he may have slipped back across the border during Ulzana's raid in the fall of 1885 to make one last try.

At one time I thought of this element of the raid as an old man's farewell tour, made in the expectation he would never again see the sacred mountain or soak his aching bones in the healing water of the warm spring before he died. Now I believe I underestimated the old man's stubborn determination. Nana was not surrendering to fate but gathering his strength for the struggle to come. Far from giving up, he was determined to fight on.

His third objective on the raid was to gather arms and ammunition to continue the war, and with the capture of the cavalry's pack mules in Gavilan Canyon, he once again displayed his Power over ammunition.

Whether his raid was also part of a broader strategic plan is a tantalizing question.

"From the white point of view, the wild ride seemed senseless – a fusillade of destruction wrought by Indians who had no strategic aim save terror, no land or rights to win," according to Roberts.<sup>3</sup> But Nana did have one conversation with a white man in which he clearly stated his goal and how he hoped to achieve it. When he talked with Robert Stapleton in the San Mateos after the ambush in Red Canyon, Stapleton asked what he wanted to end his war. Nana replied that if the Ojo Caliente Reservation were re-established and all the Chihenne allowed to return there, he would be willing to surrender. If not, he would fight on to the end. And he even told Stapleton how he intended to do that: he was going north to the Navajo country

Nana's Raid, like Lee's Gettysburg Campaign, may have been a final throw of the dice against steadily worsening odds.

Before he embarked on his raid, Nana surreptitiously visited the San Carlos reservation to attend Noche-del-klinne's "ghost dance" ceremonies and he apparently came away convinced

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<sup>3</sup> Roberts, *Once They Moved Like the Wind*, p.195.

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that the White Mountain prophet's Power was genuine. Juh, Geronimo and Kaytenna were also persuaded.<sup>4</sup>

Although later chroniclers concur that the Cibecue attack was a spontaneous explosion ignited by Col. Carr's mishandling of a delicate situation, some at the time believed the uprising was planned well in advance. Army officers at Fort Apache and civilians at the Agency all heard disquieting rumors circulating on the reservation that summer. Weeks before Nana's raiders reached the southern borders of the Navajo Reservation, San Carlos Agent Tiffany heard that a Navajo had visited the White Mountain camps, urging them to take the warpath. At about the same time, Noche-del-kinne began telling his followers that he would not be able to raise their dead chiefs and relatives until after the white men left the country. The implication was clear: the Apaches must do more than pray, they must act.

When Lt. Cruse, the commander of the Indian scout company at Fort Apache, sent Sam Bowman, his chief of scouts, to Cibecue, he "was shocked when the man came back offering his resignation, full of dire predictions of a mass outbreak."<sup>5</sup>

On August 7 a party of about 30 Navajo arrived at San Carlos with blankets they wanted to trade with the reservation Indians, and Agent Tiffany heard they were bartering for cartridges.<sup>6</sup>

Although the Apaches were a frustrating problem, it was the far more numerous Navajo who really worried General Pope. In his 1881 report, he nervously estimated the Navajo could field 3,000 warriors, "a most formidable force in those mountains, and one which would require a very heavy force of troops to deal with," and warned that they were seriously discontented. "Whilst things may drift on for a time at the Navajo Agency without open trouble, I am entirely satisfied that there is danger all the time of serious difficulty."<sup>7</sup>

And neighboring the Navajo to the north were the Ute. Their uprising was less than two years past, and only the presence of Mackenzie's 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry persuaded them to move to their new, smaller reservation in southwestern Colorado in the summer of 1881. Unrest among the Ute and Navajo could have prevented Pope from shifting troops from Colorado and Fort Wingate west to relieve Fort Apache, leaving Willcox to cope with the uprising there with no more than the troops he had on hand.

While Sherman might vow to send "every available man" to Arizona to suppress the Apaches, the truth is he did not have a lot of soldiers to command. With just 23,596 men in the ranks, the Army was stretched very thin in 1881. Worse, that force included just 6,882 cavalry troopers in 10 regiments spread all over the West. One of those regiments was stationed in the Pacific Northwest, two were in the north watching the Sioux, where Sitting Bull had just crossed the border from Canada and finally surrendered at the end of June, and two regiments were on the Mexican border in Texas. In Arizona, Willcox had just the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry plus two infantry regiments. As commander of the Department of the Missouri, Pope had two cavalry regiments to cover four states and Indian Territory as well as New Mexico Territory.

Nana certainly met with Geronimo and Juh when he visited the reservation in June, and possibly with Naiche, Chatto and Loco as well. It's perhaps significant that none of these or their followers, including the inveterate insurgent Geronimo, volunteered to join the raid. For the Apache, revenge was not just a family duty but a sacred communal obligation. Chatto and Loco had been Victorio's men in the days before the Chihenne were removed to Arizona; Naiche was the son of Victorio's old friend Cochise; Mangas the son of the great Mangas Coloradas. Geronimo was not a Chihenne, but Victorio had allowed him to use Ojo Caliente as a base for his raiding into Mexico in the 1870s, an important factor in the Indian Bureau's decision to close that agency and move everybody to San Carlos. That in turn ultimately led to Victorio's death in Mexico. So Geronimo owed a debt to Victorio's memory. Plus, Nana was his brother-in-law.

Perhaps he remained in Arizona to fan the smoldering fires of discontent on the reservation while Nana attempted to incite unrest among the Mescalero and Navajo.

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<sup>4</sup> Ball, *Indeh*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, p. 197

<sup>6</sup> Collins, Charles. *Apache Nightmare*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Lincoln, *Annual Report 1881*, p. 119.

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“Geronimo was a frequent visitor to the agency that summer, loafing around and not doing much of anything,” according to Charles Connell, an American who worked at San Carlos.<sup>8</sup> More than boredom and simple curiosity, it could be Geronimo was covertly observing the white men’s routine, estimating their readiness, and noting who came and went.

Although years later Jun’s son Asa Daklugie was quite definite that his father, Geronimo, Naiche, Chihuahua and Lozen were all involved in the fighting at Cibecue,<sup>9</sup> the military’s investigation at the time found no evidence of Chiricahua participation. After personally interviewing two of the White Mountain leaders, Gen. Crook concluded that the outbreak was a spontaneous reaction to Carr’s heavy-handed mishandling of the situation. But Crook was a new broom with no responsibility for these past events, and he needed Apache scouts to penetrate the Sierra Madre. Finding that these potential recruits were disposed to mutinous conspiracy might well have derailed his plans. For their part, the White Mountain leaders were anxious to pin the blame for the Cibecue affray on Carr’s provocation. Admitting Chiricahua involvement in the outbreak would have been to confess there had in fact been a widespread conspiracy underway before Carr’s military expedition left Fort Apache.

Meanwhile, Willcox and Carr were engaged in a bitter feud over responsibility for the failure to prevent the Chiricahua escape to Mexico. With their careers on the line, neither they nor Agent Tiffany had anything to gain by discovering evidence their charges had been engaged in a plot they should have thwarted before it resulted in bloodshed.

Far better all around to write off the Cibecue mutiny and the subsequent flight of the Chiricahua as an unfortunate misunderstanding.<sup>10</sup>

Why did Nana lead his revenge raid into New Mexico? Certainly it was the Americans who drove Victorio over the border, but it was the Mexicans who finally killed him. Visiting fire and death on the people of Chihuahua and Sonora would certainly have more impact on the Mexicans than killing a few ranchers hundreds of miles to the north, and hostages seized locally would have been more valuable than American captives in negotiating for the release of those Chihenne survivors held in Ciudad Chihuahua.

But a raid through New Mexico, reaching to the Mescalero and Navajo reservations, made sense as part of a larger plan. In the summer of 1881, neither Nana nor Geronimo had any intention of fleeing to Mexico. They wanted their own country back, and they still believed they could get it.

If that seems wildly unrealistic in retrospect, it’s important to remember that at this point the Apaches had only a dim understanding of the overwhelming power of their American opponents. The railroads had only just arrived in the Southwest, the influx of thousands of settlers was an inexplicable new phenomenon, and the accounts of those few who had actually seen the enormous, bustling cities to the east were generally met with skepticism by their fellow tribesmen. From the Apache point of view, they had forced the Americans to draw back once (at the onset of the Civil War), and they had maintained an unstable but survivable stasis with first the Pueblos and then the Spanish and the Mexicans for more than 200 years. In 1881 it would not have seemed impossible to intransigents like Nana and Geronimo that they could yet achieve a similar balance of power with the white eyes.

By their stubborn resistance to relocation, the Mescalero had won for themselves a reservation around their sacred mountain in their own home country. Perhaps a victory over the soldiers at Fort Apache could return the Chiricahua to their own sacred spring.

Nana visited first the Mescalero and then the Navajo to recruit volunteers for his own war party. Was he also attempting to incite wider unrest? Perhaps he believed that by his own example, demonstrating that it was possible to fight the whites and win, he could encourage

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<sup>8</sup> Sweeney, p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> Ball, *Indeh*, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> *There are unhappy parallels between the Cibecue affair and the 1993 assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. In both cases the feds were dealing with a shadowy religious leader they knew little about beyond hearsay and rumor, and in both cases the heavy-handed military response to the perceived threat led to tragedy.*

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other tribes to resistance. A number of Mescalero and Navajo braves were already off the reservation in the summer of 1881; if more could be induced to take to the mountains they would tie down more of the soldiers.

If there was such an ambitious plot, it collapsed from the outset. Although Carr mishandled his force tactically, the colonel did succeed in fulfilling Tiffany's directive to have the Dreamer "arrested or killed, or both." The loss of their prophet completely demoralized the White Mountain rebels. Without his Power, the white men would not disappear and the dead could not be resurrected – least of all the Dreamer himself.<sup>11</sup> After their attempt on Fort Apache failed, the discouraged insurgents faded into the mountains and depredations around the reservation ended.

Other than the handful who joined Nana in New Mexico, the majority of Mescalero and Navajo warriors refused to be drawn into a wider uprising. The memory of recent defeat was too bitter, and their chiefs reckoned the odds and calculated they had too much to lose in yet another confrontation with the whites.

Finally, Geronimo failed even to unite all the Chiricahua in resistance. Loco and his followers, who constituted a substantial portion if not a majority of the Chihenne at San Carlos, declined to join in the uprising.

Their involvement in the fighting at Cibecue might explain why Geronimo and Juh were so quick to gather their followers and flee to Mexico in the wake of the failed uprising. As the Bible has it, "the wicked flee when no one is pursuing."<sup>12</sup>

The scout mutiny and the subsequent flight of the Chiricahua into the Sierra Madre did have one positive result in that it brought Crook back to the Southwest to replace Willcox. Both pragmatic and sympathetic to his Apache opponents, George Crook was probably the one man in the Army who might have averted the disaster overtaking the Chiricahua. Unfortunately he was just one man, and in the end he was powerless to sway the inexorable course of events.

In 1897, a year after Nana's death in Oklahoma, Geronimo dictated a letter to President McKinley that might have served as Nana's last words as well:

*It is my land, my home, my father's land, to which I now ask to be allowed to return. I want to spend my last days there, and be buried among those mountains. If this could be I might die in peace, feeling that my people, placed in their native homes, would increase in numbers, rather than diminish as at present, and that our name would not become extinct.*

The President never replied, and Geronimo, like Nana, lies buried at Fort Sill.

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<sup>11</sup> *It's significant that a white scout finished off the badly wounded shaman by smashing his head with an ax. Since the Apache believed a man entered the afterlife in the shape he left this plane of existence, this mutilation would have convinced them he could never return.*

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs, 28:1.