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Archæological Society  
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HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Douglas, Arizona 85607

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## THE STORY OF FORT BOWIE

The valley is almost quiet now. Only the quiet pleasant sounds of nature can be heard—the gentle, soft breezes caressing the desert shrubs and causing the lush, green grass and turpentine-brush to sway back and forth like tiny waves lapping at the edge of a lake. Off in the distance one can hear the call of the Gambel's Quail as he searches for his lost mate; the steady tap, tap, tap, rat-a-tat-tat of the woodpecker searching for his lunch in the bark of a tree; the melodious calls of the cardinal, mockingbird, house finch, brown twohee and black throated sparrow as they fly among the branches of the stubby evergreen oak.

Gone are the sounds of the bustling working day of an Army encampment; the whine of an arrow as it pierces the air and lands with a dull thud in a nearby tree trunk, the agonizing scream of pain as human flesh is torn by either a bullet or arrow.

For almost a half century these sounds were heard in an area known as APACHE PASS which is located in southern Cochise County, Arizona. Why this particular place you ask?

As early as 1851, this particular area was recognized for its value when the Bartlett Boundary Commission, enduring a rather trying climb through a pass (now known as Apache Pass) "to come upon a beautiful amphitheatre among the mountains".<sup>1</sup> After making camp, Bartlett recorded the following description concerning this particular area: "Discovered a spring and a fine pool of water . . . we gladly pitched our tents near a beautiful grove of oaks . . . the most eligible camping ground we had yet met with."<sup>2</sup>

Apache Pass and the spring located therein was to play yet another vital role in the westward expansion of the United States. The refreshing, cool spring water provided the badly needed water when a short cut was taken between two longer routes. Apache Pass was, however, noted as being the likely location for Indian attacks. This reputation was supported by the number of marked and unmarked graves as well as the number of bleached animal bones in the area.

In 1857, the Butterfield Overland Stageline established a stage line thru Apache Pass and set up a station near the spring. A 45 x 55 foot stone corral was built around the station which provided the necessary protection from Cochise and his band of Chiricahua Apaches which was believed to number approximately 1200 people.

1. Old Forts of the West p. 176

2. op cit p. 176



Despite the fact that the Indian raids on the stages that ran thru the area were quite frequent, the relationship between Cochise and those who operated the stage depot were friendly. The Indians soon found out that by remaining friendly and providing the needed firewood they were paid for their efforts. They would then use their money to purchase or trade for their favorite liquor—CASTOR OIL.

In 1861 the Bascom Incident brought to an end the friendly atmosphere and peace that existed between the Chiricahua Apaches and the white man. For a period of time, there existed a period of unrest and hostility against both the stage line and the wagon trains. When the Civil War broke out and the armies stationed in the West started leaving the area and heading eastward, Cochise mistakenly took their departure to mean he had won the war.

Now that the danger of reprisal from the U.S. Cavalry had lessened, the attacks against the stageline were not only becoming more and more frequent, but costly as well. Because of the seriousness and frequency of the Apache raids, President Butterfield asked the Federal Government to establish a fort at or near the spring located in Apache Pass.

In mid-June, 1862, a company of armed men, better known as the California Column of Volunteers and under the command of Brig. General James H. Carleton, stopped at the Pass on their way to New Mexico. In order to make sure they would have water and for the use of the spring on their return trip back to California, General Carleton left a company of men to protect the "Puerto del Dado" (the spring in the Pass).

The site chosen for the building of the first camp was along a winding defile located between the Dos Cabezas and Chiricahua Mountains.

The original trail that went thru the pass connected the San Simon Valley on the east and the Sulphur Springs Valley on the west. This trail ran alongside washes, through narrow rock formations, across broad rincons and hilly, rocky strewn slopes. This trail was known as "Apache Pass" so named to honor the band of Indians that had inhabited the area for so long a time. This trail had also followed an old Indian trail that started northeast of the pass and wound southward across the San Simon Valley.

Prior to 1851, this trail was known only to a few Spanish, Mexican and American traders, trappers and scouts. After 1851, the trail developed into a definite military route that went through Doubtful Canyon in the Peloncillo Mountains crossed the flat, open San Simon Valley to Apache Pass where it then followed the watering holes to Tucson and points west. By 1856, a military road



began at Fort Thorn, New Mexico went thru Apache Pass and ended at Fort Yuma, Arizona.

The first encampment, which was established as a temporary camp, was set up on July 28, 1862. The first commanding officer was Major Theodore A. Coult. Before leaving the temporary camp, General Carleton gave Major Coult the following responsibilities and duties:

1. He was to protect the command against Cochise and his Chiricahua Apache band.
2. He was to maintain a strong guard system at the precious water hole both day and night.
3. He was to attack any Indians whenever and wherever he found them near the fort.
4. He was to have men available to escort trains, expressmen and parties thru the pass and well into open country.

On paper these orders looked simple enough but, dear reader, remember all this had to be done with only one company of men. There was also the small matter of constructing a means of protection . . . all to be done with only 100 men.

The outworks of the first post was constructed on the four faces of a hill, all sufficiently near enough to allow, if one of them was under attack, to be readily and safely reinforced from the others.

The breastworks were constructed of first a layer of large boulders about three feet wide; then a layer of stones ranging from two feet across down to eighteen inches that make up the very top layer. The total length of the wall that surrounded the post was four hundred thirteen feet.

Captain Tidball, when he recorded his first observations of the camp, felt that the chosen site was extremely inconvenient because the camp seemed to have been constructed more with a view to command the spring than anything else.

The living quarters for those stationed here consisted of tents that were surrounded by a protective wall which was so constructed as to lack a system of construction as well as to any regards to health, defense or convenience. Those who did not have any tents lived in hovels that were nothing more than excavations cut in the side of the hill. These hovels were usually damp, poorly



ventilated and covered with decomposed granite that afforded little or no protection from the elements of nature.

When the men of this new encampment was assigned duties outside the walls of the compound, he was to make sure he was fully armed and that the weapon was in working order. Also, he was not to be alone.

It was on August 6, 1862, that the men learned a lesson about the order and what the consequence was when the order was disobeyed.

On this day Pvt. McFarland was assigned the task of stockherder. He was to take the stock into the nearby valley where they could graze. Before long, Pvt. McFarland noted that one of the cows had strayed away from the herd. Her tracks showed that she had wandered up a grassy gully. Unarmed and alone, he followed the tracks up the ravine until he reached a large pile of rocks. Here he lost the trail. As he turned around to leave the area, he found himself facing an armed Apache. In a split second the element of surprise wore off and Pvt. McFarland managed to scramble up some two hundred feet of a slippery, grassy rocky slope. A shot pierced the air and a screaming Pvt. McFarland fell to the ground, shot thru his right lung. The shot was heard at the camp and within minutes help arrived but it was too late for Pvt. McFarland.

A sincere effort was made to make peace with Cochise and his band. Early in 1862, Cochise made welcome the men of the new encampment. Cochise also promised Lt. Col. Edward E. Eyre, then Post Commander, that neither he nor his men would be molested by any member of his tribe. Cochise did request food and the white man's tobacco, both of which he received without question. A second meeting between the two men was to take place at sundown that same evening.

The meeting never took place because of the discovery of three mutilated and scalped bodies—soldiers stationed at the new encampment. Tracks were found leading away from the murder site and a pursuit followed but without success. The three men were returned to the campsite and buried with the entire command in attendance.

From time to time various reports of hostile Indian activities would reach the fort, especially when the activities involved large numbers of Indians. One such report, dated April 23, 1863, prompted Captain B.F. Harrover, Post Commander, to conduct a thorough investigation into the situation. So, along with twenty men and five cavalrymen, he started northward towards the spring in hopes of meeting the two hundred Indians reported to be headed in the direction of the fort. Upon reaching the spring, Captain Harrover discovered the rumor to be true—



approximately two hundred Indians were preparing to make camp. When the troops were within range, the command was given to "open fire". The attack was so sudden that the Indians were quickly driven into retreat leaving behind three dead. It was believed, however, that more of the enemy had been killed or wounded than those found. The only casualty that the military recorded was Pvt. M.B. Wilcox who received a severe shoulder wound.

The remainder of 1863 was spent making and keeping the camp secure. In August alone Camp Bowie was under siege three times with the end result being the loss of all the horses at the camp. Needless to say, the scouting expeditions were kept to a minimum.

Besides the serious Indian problem, an internal problem was developing that concerned the command and operation of Camp Bowie. Things at Camp Bowie had been allowed to fall into a state of despair and something had to be done and done now if the Camp was to function as planned. In March, 1863, Lt. Col. Joseph R. West took matters into his own hands and reported the situation to Major David Fergusson. As the result of the investigation that was conducted, Coult was relieved of his command. On April 23, 1863, Captain James H. Whitlock of the 5th Infantry California Volunteers took the command of Camp Bowie.

With the increase of activities and responsibilities, Camp Bowie ceased to be just a Camp and achieved the status of that of a Fort—the exact date is not known for sure.

Under the very capable leadership of the officers at Fort Bowie, the everyday tasks of protection for the travelers on wagon trains, stage coaches and even the pony express riders continued. From time to time, expeditions into various parts of the area took place. It seemed as if the hated Apaches were everywhere and all at the same time.

On a trip back to Tucson from Fort Bowie, Captain Tidball and a group of citizens from Tucson encountered a large group of Apaches in Arivaipa Canyon in which a number of the enemy lost their lives. Several days later, and a short distance from Fort Bowie, Captain B.F. Harrover and his men fought a three hour battle with the hostiles over the post herd.

On May 3, 1864, while on a scouting expedition from Fort Cummings to Fort Bowie, Lt. Henry H. Stevens and his command of 5th Infantry California Volunteers met a group of hostile Apaches in Doubtful Canyon and a battle soon developed.



From time to time, battle plans were altered in hopes of throwing the enemy off guard. On May 25th one such plan was put into effect. Two companies of California Volunteers, one under the command of Lt. Col. Nelson H. Davis and the second company under the command of Captain Thomas T. Tidball, went out on a scouting expedition, both heading for the San Carlos Valley. They were but a short distance from Fort Bowie when they met their enemy. When the battle was over, First Sgt. Christian Foster was treated for several wounds he received and Sgt. Charles Brown was commended for his outstanding service.

On May 29th, the two groups of men came upon an encampment belonging to the Gila Apache tribe. Two attack forces were formed which enabled the troops to destroy two rancherios, many cornfields, etc. With the destruction of the corn fields, this seriously crippled the food supply for this tribe. At the close of the battle, some forty-nine Apaches were known dead and sixteen more were taken captive.

On the 16th of July, Captain Tidball left Fort Bowie with thirty-two men and went on a scouting expedition into the Chiricahua Mountains. During the first skirmish that took place, the Apache Chief "Old Plume" was killed. The second skirmish took place on July 3rd at Cottonwood Creek which is located in Cavalry Canyon. When the Indians tried to escape, they were trailed thru Apache Pass towards the Dos Cabezas Mountains. Their final destination was a rancharia located near Fort Goodwin.

Before destroying the location near Fort Goodwin, the troops found several interesting items, a McClellan saddle and bridle, bits of government pattern and supplies, all of which had been taken from Fort Buchanan at the time when Wrightson and Hopkins were murdered.

Between June 26 and July 6, 1865, Col. Bennett led an expedition from Fort Bowie to the Gila River. While searching the many hidden ravines located along the banks of the river, the troops found a band of Apaches under the leadership of Francisco, a Coyotero Chief who had been with Cochise during the Bascom incident.

During 1865, the numerous conflicts that took place between Cochise and the Cavalry left lasting marks upon the great Indian Chief and his band.

On December 11, 1866, the once proud Chiricahua Apache had yet another bitter pill to swallow and one which the Indians did all they could to revenge this act by the white man. It was on this day that a Post Office was established with George Hand as Postmaster. This signified to the Indian that their enemy, the white man, was indeed here to stay.



As the mail carriers neared Apache Pass, they were often times subjected to much harassment by the Indians. This harassment occurred so often and was of such a nature that in order to keep men on this particular route a salary of \$200 a month was paid.

Throughout the years, Fort Bowie went through periods of growth and improvement. The outmoded and outgrown buildings were kept in somewhat repair. In order to make many of these repairs, pine timbers from the neighboring mountains had to be cut and hauled into camp, a distance of about thirty-five miles. Another improvement made was the establishment of a greater and more productive garden.

The year of 1867 marked the deaths of a mail carrier and also the only Commandant in the history of Fort Bowie ever to be lost in action. It was on November 5, 1867. A mail carrier was approximately three and one-half miles west of the fort and heading west towards Tucson. Along the route he passed the herd of cattle that was owned by the Fort. As he glanced over the herd he took note of something else—the herd was being trailed very closely by a band of Indians. About the time the mail carrier saw the Indians the Indians saw the mail carrier . . . shots were exchanged. Realizing the value of the cattle for those stationed at the Fort, the mail carrier turned around and headed back towards the fort to warn them of a pending attack.

The alert was sounded and as his men prepared to ride out in pursuit of the enemy, Lt. John C. Carroll and the mail carrier returned to where the herd was located. Within a few minutes, several infantry men reached the site but found only the cattle and nothing more. When the rest of the men arrived, a detailed search was made of the area. At sunset, they found the mutilated body of the mail carrier. A half-mile away, the search party found the mutilated body of their commanding officer being guarded over by his faithful but frightened barking dog.

Numerous expeditions were made into the Chiricahua Mountains and the Sulphur Springs Valley searching, capturing and killing the dreaded enemy and with each expedition, hoping to bring this most hated enemy under control once and for all. This hope and dream, however, was many months in the future.

Orders reached Fort Bowie in February, 1868 to relocate the Fort on a plateau located southeast of the present campsite. Construction began on the adobe fort that would eventually include some three dozen structures.

Attractive frame buildings sprang up, including a sumptuous thirteen-room Commanding Officer's house and a hospital. The wood, used either for construction or for fuel, was furnished by



contract at a cost of \$9.50 per cord. At times, however, the troops were detailed to gather wood from the "Pinery" located some eighteen miles south of the fort.

The water was now being piped from Bear Spring, coming in over the ridge to the east then being pumped uphill to the reservoirs located above the fort. A steam engine was used to power the water pump and also an ice machine.

The most important building in the fort was the Trading Store. This store was the forerunner or equivalent of the modern day PX. When these businesses first began, they had a monopoly on the business. Many of the owners and-or managers were not honest and believed in taking full advantage of a person if he could without getting caught. In 1867, however, a military reform brought in a new breed of post traders that were more responsible and respected within the fort and the community.

The interior of the trader's store was divided into three rooms. One room was where business was conducted. Another room was where the officers met to relax by playing a game of billiards or cards, where they could drink and talk.

The third room was where the enlisted man could take a brief refuge from the day's military regimen and also enjoy a draught of beer while doing so. The trader at Fort Bowie was a gentleman by the name of Sidney De Long.

Military regulations required that each post have a school that was to be taught by either a qualified enlisted man or by a civilian. If a military man filled this position, he would get an additional 35 cents per day extra duty pay. He was expected, however, to fulfill his regular duties which included guard duty. The School Building also served as a court-martial room and, on Sundays, as the Chapel.

The Adjutant's home at Fort Bowie was a handsome frame building that functioned as the command center of the post. For it was here that the officers issued their orders and kept all the necessary records and files. It was here that the clerks compiled the necessary reports and answered the correspondence. During the war with Geronimo, this building was the nerve center of a 500 mile heliograph system. What is a heliograph system you ask? It is a system that used the Morse Code by flashing or bouncing sun rays along a chain of tripod-mounted "talking" mirrors that was usually located on high peaks. Bowie Peak was used to send and receive messages.

The Infantry Barracks at Fort Bowie was a large wooden barracks that housed the enlisted infantryman. The privates and corporals bunked together in the main room while the sergeants



occupied the small adjoining rooms. The bed sacks were rolled back on the cot's wooden slats during the day. The personal belongings and military gear was stored on a wooden shelf above the cot and in a wooden foot locker located at the foot of the cot. When not being used or cleaned, the rifles were kept in a special rack located in the center of the room. At first, these rooms were heated by large fireplaces and were soon replaced by cast iron stoves. The rooms were lit up by kerosene lamps or candles that were hung at either end of the room.

The Officer's Row contained the homes of the officers of Fort Bowie and their families. The quarters were assigned according to regulations. In other words, the number of rooms, stoves and amount of firewood was determined by the rank and seniority of the officers. Each of the quarters was equipped with a sink, washroom, and kitchen. The family of the married officer shared his allowance.

Often times the wives of the officers would compete with one another in trying to make the dreary and barren frontier quarters into "comfortable eastern homes"<sup>3</sup> similar to those they fondly remembered from yesteryears. When a new high ranking officer and his family moved to the fort, this spelled heartbreak, anguish, even bitterness for the wives as the families were shifted from house to house in order to locate everyone according to rank and seniority.

The Commanding Officer's Quarters of Fort Bowie was the most striking and pretentious structure at the fort. This structure was a thirteen-room, two story house that was built in 1884-85 at a cost of \$4,000. The house contained a drawing room, a sewing room with a skylight, a dining room and seven bedrooms. The exterior portion included two verandas and two wings that were covered with fancy shingles in alternate colored bands. One Commanding Officer was heard to remark that such a fancy house belonged in the east and not in the southwest as it did not fit into things here.

The new hospital and Steward's Quarters, built in 1889, was more spacious and attractive than the inadequate little hospital of 1868. The new hospital was located far enough away from the noisy clamor of the daily routine to allow the post surgeon to adequately care for the sick and injured.

A post that was a post of any sorts had a Tailor Shop within the walls of the post, and Fort Bowie was no exception. It seems that the Army Quartermaster Department had the frustrating habit of issuing uniforms of inconsistent size, cut and cloth quality. In order to have uniforms of proper fit, each company was permitted

3. Trail Guide to Fort Bowie, p. 21



to enlist a tailor. Like his counterparts, the farrier and blacksmith, the tailor was exempt from routine duty. Unlike his counterparts, however, the tailor charged for his services. The cost of tailoring was often times equal to the original government cost. Because of this, the opinions about tailors varied: some considered them to be necessary evils while others labeled them as "pests" of the service who were more likely to mutilate the uniforms than to improve them.

The Cavalry Barracks, the massive adobe barracks, was among the first structures to be built at the fort. By the mid 1880's the barracks had a shingled, pitched roof, also attractive porches and landscaping. The kitchen was located behind the barracks and the mess hall was located next door, down the slope.

There was never the chance of not having anything to do—in fact, more often than not, there was more to do in a day than hours in the day to get the jobs done.

The work in the corrals and stables became the responsibility of the outfit assigned to them. The "Afternoon Stable Call" became part of the daily post routine. Wearing white frocks, the men cared for their mounts, polished the saddle gear and cleaned the stables.

One of the most important men on the grounds was the Blacksmith. This position was filled by either an extra-duty man or by a civilian. Civilian Blacksmiths were preferred by the Post Commanders because they could devote the entire day to their appointed tasks and not just an hour or so.

The Saddler positions were filled by daily duty men. It was their duty to maintain the leather equipment such as saddles, bridles, harnesses, packs and gun slings.

Another important man to the cavalry was the Farrier, considered to be an early day veterinarian. This man treated the horses and mules for bruises and illnesses; nursed back to health those animals that had broken down on the long Indian campaigns. This position was again filled by either an extra-duty man or by a civilian employee.

Perhaps the most popular, but least liked, position on the Post ground was the Quartermaster and his staff. The staff, consisting of a sergeant and a clerk, were considered to be not only the busiest but the most harassed men at the Fort. Everything concerning the operation and supplies for the Fort went thru this office. The Quartermaster was responsible for the supplies, the construction and maintenance of the buildings that make up the Fort complex, making contracts for the forage and firewood to be used by the Fort, for all forms of transportation to and from the



Fort. Civilian employees, such as teamsters, carpenters, blacksmiths and masons, were hired by the Quartermaster. It was from the Quartermaster's storehouse that the soldier drew his army equipment and clothing.

A garden was kept at the Fort which, if everything went well, produced in season the various vegetables that were used at the Fort. But to secure palatable food for those stationed at the Fort was an eternal problem.

Because there was no special training or occupational specialty for "cooks," they were picked from the ranks. Most of the food prepared by the "cooks" was prepared as stews or boiled soup that was made from such basics as sun-dried pressed cakes called "deseccated vegetables." Only one of these seven pound tasteless cakes produced forty-two gallons of soup. For variety, canned food was heavily relied upon.

In the Mess Hall, the enlisted men ate by-the-company. They sat on long, wooden benches and ate off long bare, wooden tables that were presided over by a non-commissioned officer. Tin and iron utensils were used by all. By the late 1880's, however, these utensils were replaced by white ironstone tableware.

Because of the location of Fort Bowie, the leaders of the Fort had to deal with very few cases of desertion. There was very little outside influences that would offer the incentive for desertion, unless one cared to court death at the hand of the Apache.

With the coming of more and more white men and the taking over of more and more land by these intruders, the Indian became more and more hostile. Nothing and no one was really safe from attack and possible death from the hands of the Indian, especially the Chiricahua Apache.

During the summer of 1869, Messrs. Anderson and Stone, owners of the Apache Pass Quartz Mine, not only had personal property stolen and destroyed by the Apaches, but had a party of miners attacked as well. These miners worked for them in their mine.

The mails and those who delivered the precious cargo were also favorite targets of the cunning and crafty Apache. During the early part of the fall of 1869, the courier delivering the eastern mail from Tucson to Fort Bowie was captured some twenty-five miles from Apache Pass, tortured and eventually put to death. Shortly thereafter, the Apaches struck again only this time it was a stage coach that was carrying Colonel J.F. Stone, President of the Apache Pass Mine, and his party. All those aboard the stage were killed along with the driver, a Mr. Kaber. Also killed were



four privates—W.H. Bates, M. Blake, J.W. Slocum and D.B. Shellaburger—all of Company D 21st Infantry who were on escort duty for the ill-fated stage.

The large herd of cattle, that just happened to be owned by the men of Fort Bowie, was driven off by the Indians towards their camp in the nearby mountains. When word of the disaster reached Fort Bowie, Lt. Winters went in pursuit of the Indians, overtaking them in the Chiricahua Pass. A running battle broke out and after a chase of several miles, the soldiers succeeded in recapturing the entire herd of stolen cattle. The fatalities amounted to twelve hostiles being killed as well as two men and horses from Fort Bowie.

Despite the numerous successes of the Cavalry against the marauding Indian enemy, the residents of Southern Arizona enjoyed little relief from the savage and brutal attacks. Because of this fact, the United States Government decided to make some changes and placed General George Crook in command of Fort Bowie. It was now his task to bring peace and tranquility to the troubled area.

In order to find out just where the exact hideout of the Chiricahua Apache Indians was, the campaign against them was stepped up. Scouting expeditions were made on March 14, 1870, into the Dragoon Mountains and the Chiricahua Mountains. On the 20th of March, yet another expedition was sent out, this time to the Green Oak region and into the Sulphur Springs Valley. On each of the expeditions, the Cavalrymen were on the lookout for stolen mules and horses, private property and captives.

From time to time down thru the years, efforts to make a lasting peace with the now extremely hostile Chiricahua Apaches was attempted. In 1872, General O.O. Howard and the Indian Agent Tom Jeffords met with Cochise and reached an agreement that was honored by the Chiricahua Apache Chief until the time of his death in 1876.

In January, 1873, Surgeon Samuel I. Orr left Fort Bowie and headed for the Dragoon Mountains in hopes of meeting with Cochise. He not only met with the Indian Chief but treated members of his tribe for numerous illnesses and injuries. One of the many things discussed was the move of the tribe to a reservation located at San Carlos. Before this move was made, however, Cochise died and his son Taza became Chief.

On June 4, 1876 Fort Bowie was the site of a meeting between Indian Agent John Clum and Taza. Taza and his younger brother favored the move to the reservation and for a peaceful way of life that their father so long looked and prayed for but never saw. Not all members of the band were in agreement with their new leader



and bolted away from the tribe and followed Geronimo in their way of life. They were joined by other bands of Apaches under the leadership of Juh, Skimya and Pionsenay.

Numerous skirmishes between the renegades and the troops at Fort Bowie took place and often times the chase involved going into other states after the marauding hostiles. On January 9, 1877, Lt. Rucker along with fifty-two men and thirty-four Indian Scouts set out from Fort Bowie and chased the renegades into the Liedendorf Mountains of western New Mexico. In the battle that followed, ten renegades were killed and several others wounded. They also found a large amount of supplies from the old Chiricahua Reservation and an entire herd of mules and ponies, about forty-eight in number.

In December, 1877, Lt. Rucker and his troops came upon a band of renegades at Talston, New Mexico. In this skirmish, some sixteen renegades were killed and one brave captured. They also secured a small herd of horses, fifty saddles and a small amount of private property.

The spring and summer of 1878 brought new problems for the men of Fort Bowie and Camp Supply . . . sudden, severe thunderstorms with heavy rains that caused much flooding, strong gusty winds, bright, sharp, streaked lightning that bounced from the dark, low, heavy rain-laden clouds to the earth.

In May, 1878, a most unusual accident took place at Fort Bowie. Low, black, heavy rain clouds hung over the area. From time to time, the air was split with sharp cracks of streaked lightning and the ground shook with each clap of thunder that followed. Pvt. Nicolas Maringer was walking up a hill to his quarters when he was struck and killed instantly by a bolt of lightning. Some children playing not more than five feet away from where Pvt. Maringer was walking escaped injury.

An official investigation was conducted into the matter and in the report the statement was made that there were three sets of quarters within twenty feet of Pvt. Maringer and that all had projecting points located above the plane of his head. It was also noted that none of the buildings were touched by the streaks of lightning. "The clouds in which the electrical disturbance occurred and from which no doubt this particular current emanated was in a southwest direction from him so that the current must have passed within a few feet of the mentioned buildings."<sup>4</sup>

"The man was a blacksmith by trade and no doubt his clothes contained particles of dust and iron."<sup>5</sup>

4. Frontier Military Posts by Ray Brandes p. 20

5. op cit



On July 11, 1878, the elements of nature again struck in the vicinity and again the end result was tragedy—the untimely deaths of Lt. John A. “Tony” Rucker and his friend and fellow officer Lt. Austin Henely. Both men drowned in the flood waters that swept down the mountainside and thru Camp Supply. In the fall of 1878, the name of the canyon in which Camp Supply was located was changed to Rucker Canyon to honor the late Lt. Rucker.

In 1879, the Chiricahua Apaches were moved from their beloved stronghold in the Dragoon Mountains to the San Carlos Reservation. At the first attempt in getting the entire tribe on the reservation, the whole tribe, including Geronimo, Skimya, and Pionsenay, was involved. They had been on the reservation but a short time when some of the braves became restless and yearned for freedom. Before a compromise could be reached, a gun battle erupted in which Skubya and six other braves lost their lives. Several other braves were wounded. The troops of Fort Bowie were called in to help restore order and peace.

The first order of business, once order had been restored, was to take a head count of the occupants of the reservation. It was discovered that a small band, including Geronimo and Juh, had escaped. A search was made of the immediate area and the renegades located . . . both Juh and Geronimo agreed to surrender to Lt. Haskell at Camp John A. Rucker. The renegades were first taken to Fort Bowie and then on back to their hated reservation.

Peace prevailed until September 29 and 30, 1879 when, in a series of breakouts, some seventy-four unhappy, frustrated Apaches escaped from the reservation and made their way, successfully, to their old haunts in old Mexico where they joined forces with Nana and his band.

Reports of sighting renegade Indians here and there poured into the Commander's office at Fort Bowie. Scouting campaigns, all of which were originated from Fort Bowie, were launched into such areas as the Burros Mountains, the Las Animas Mountains, the Pyramid Mountains, south along the Mexican border, throughout Eastern Arizona and western New Mexico, looking for the marauding Indians.

By June 25, 1883, some of the renegade Chiricahua Apaches, including Chiefs Nana, Loco, and Bonit, had surrendered themselves to the soldiers at Fort Bowie. They agreed to have one of their braves lead General Crook to Geronimo's encampment in the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico. General Crook was able to take full advantage of this offer because of a treaty between the



United States and Mexico allowing the pursuit of hostile Indians across the border. General Crook took with him on this expedition, a Captain Adna Chaffee and his I Troop 6th Cavalry as well as one hundred ninety three Apache Scouts.

A month and a half later, General Crook and his army surprised an Indian encampment and killed nine warriors. He was also fortunate enough to meet with those he was searching so long and hard for—Geronimo and some minor chiefs of his tribe. After several days of verbal sparring, General Crook bluntly told Geronimo to either accompany him back to the reservation or await certain slaughter by the Mexican Army that was fast closing in on the encampment. Needless to say, Geronimo elected to go back with General Crook and led some three hundred twenty-five Apaches back to Arizona and to the hated San Carlos Reservation. All remained peaceful until May 15, 1885 when Geronimo and some of his followers again escaped to freedom.

Once again General Crook took up the chase of the runaways and their crafty leader. The second campaign, however, seemed nothing more than chasing the Apaches back into the United States and to the hated reservation. Geronimo, however, had other ideas on the subject and led his braves on several bloody raids in an area protected by eighty-three companies of troops.

Governmental officials in Washington D.C. became alarmed at the sudden increase of Indian raids and the amount of lives lost in them or as a direct result of them. General Phil Sheridan was sent to investigate the matter and found that General Crook was doing everything that could be done.

Many times it seemed that all the men did at Fort Bowie was to hunt up renegade Indians and return them to their reservation. Actually, this activity only took a part of his time. He spent another part of his time tracking down train robbers, murderers, etc. that were also causing trouble for the residents of the territory. One such venture took place on a November 25 (year not known) when the troops were ordered to search for the robbers that had held up and robbed the Southern Pacific train near Gage, New Mexico the day before. Because of inadequate records, we are not certain of the outcome of the search.

It wasn't long before the Apaches began to realize that just maybe living on the reservation would be better than the one they were now trying to live. At least there would be food for everyone and shelter to keep them warm and dry. Besides that, they were almost certain of seeing the sun and feeling the warm rays on their backs the next day. As it was now, they lived in fear and were constantly on the alert for the Mexican armies and the "Bluecoats" expecting death at every turn.



In late October, 1883, a small band of Apaches turned themselves in to the officials at Fort Bowie and asked to be sent to the reservation. They also gave indications that before long, Nachez and another small band would also be turning themselves in as well.

From March, 1885 until the end of the Apache Campaign, in the fall of 1886, Fort Bowie became the center of all military operations.

Again, the governmental officials in Washington D.C. became dissatisfied with the way things were going in the Apache Campaign and once again General Phil Sheridan was sent to Fort Bowie to check into the matter. When he reached the Fort, General Sheridan found that the search for the remaining renegade Apaches was intensified and more territory was being searched including the northern part of Mexico.

The search in northern Mexico proved fruitful when on January 10, 1886 Captain Crawford succeeded in locating and attacking the main camp of the hostile Apaches that was located some sixty miles below the Mexican community of Nacori.

During the ensuing battle that followed, the soldiers captured all of the Indians' supplies and so demoralized the Indian leaders that within a very short time they were asking for a peace talk. Before he was able to talk with the Indians, Captain Crawford was killed by a member of the Mexican Military group who mistook him to be an Apache.

When the peace talks did take place, the hostiles agreed to surrender but only under the terms offered them two years previous. On the night before they crossed the International border into the United States, Geronimo and some of his leaders got a hold of some of the white man's Mescal. During the night Geronimo and thirty five men, women and children broke out of camp and once again headed for their beloved stronghold in the Sierra Madre Mountains. The remaining members of the band returned to Fort Bowie with General Crook.

Geronimo's escape led to words between General Crook and General Sheridan and because of this disagreement, General Crook resigned his post and on April 12, 1886 General Nelson A. Miles took command.

General Miles' plan was to strengthen the outpost system and organize another expedition into Mexico which would be headed by Captain Leonard Wood, Surgeon; a Company of Infantrymen; thirty-five Cavalry soldiers; twenty Indian scouts.



At first the expedition experienced little contact between themselves and their enemy. After a 1400 miles close pursuit, the tiny band began to slow down and again they were asking for peace talks. Several of these peace talk councils did take place between Geronimo and Lt. Charles B. Gatewood, a man for whom the Indians had much respect. Geronimo agreed to finally give up and surrender but only if they could talk with General Miles first. General Miles agreed to meet Geronimo at a desolate, lonely canyon now known as Skeleton Canyon, located some 65 miles from Fort Bowie. It was here on September 4th that Geronimo officially surrendered to General Miles.

"Eventually through the heroic and still unheralded efforts of Lt. Gatewood, Geronimo, Nachez and the remaining Chiricahuas surrendered and were brought to Fort Bowie under escort."<sup>6</sup> On April 7th the remaining members of the once proud Chiricahua Apache tribe was escorted from Fort Bowie thru the town of Bowie and placed on a train which would take them to yet another reservation located, this time, in Florida. As the train pulled out of the station, the Fourth Cavalry Band struck up "Auld Lang Syne" which was the soldiers farewell to the Apaches whom they had been hunting, fighting, and dealing with for so long. This event also marked the closing of a role that the army and colorful Cavalry would no longer play in this part of the country.

Now that the Apache Indian situation in the Southeastern part of the Arizona-New Mexico territory was settled, Fort Bowie had little military value although it did continue to have an economic significance for the local citizenry.

When word was received that the government would soon close down the Fort, much opposition was expressed by the local residents in and around the area. In May, 1889 a band of local citizens went so far as to rob a paymaster's train between Fort Grant and Fort Thomas. Major Joseph W. Wham and eleven soldiers were ambushed and \$29,000 taken. The robbers were soon captured and held for trial. They were found innocent of the crime even though they all were positively identified.

On the morning of October 17, 1894, the troops of B and I Companies Second Cavalry marched out of Apache Pass on their way to Fort Logan. With this act, Fort Bowie and the remaining property was left in the hands of a civilian hired to dispose of the Fort. Within a few weeks, the Fort passed into the hands of the Department of Interior.

Now that the fort was abandoned, the local citizenry started

6. Apache Pass and Old Fort Bowie, p. 22



removing everything and anything that could be used in private homes or renovating other pieces of property.

In March, 1895, those who were buried in the Fort Cemetery were removed to the San Francisco National Cemetery.

On June 20, 1911 what was left of the buildings and grounds that made up the Fort Bowie Military Reservation was sold at public auction. The squatters living on the reservation were able to buy the land they were living on and working for \$1.25 to \$2.50 an acre. Some fifty nine tracts of land were sold.

On August 31, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a bill authorizing the creation of the Fort Bowie National Historic Site.

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## THE WILLCOX DRY LAKE—THE MIRAGE MAKER

by Ervin Bond \*  
Larry D. Christiansen

In northern Cochise County near the communities of Cochise and Willcox and ringed between the Little Dragoon Mountains on the northwest, the Dos Cabezas Mountains on the northeast and the Dragoon Mountains on the south, there stretches a dry lake bed of approximately fifty square miles. Once an ancient lake graced this portion of the Sulphur Spring Valley and perhaps exceeded four times the present size of the dry lake bed and was up to forty-five feet deep. Fed by waters from the surrounding mountains and with no outlet, the lake existed until a climatic change produced a greater volume of evaporation than entering fresh water. With outgo exceeding incoming, the waters receded and became brackish until only a dry lake bed remained. This remnant is barren of vegetation, and is white, flat, dead and forbidding. Nothing lives there and few persons or things move thereupon except an occasional curious soul, the periodic trains that have traveled there since the railroad came in the summer of 1880, and mirages. The dry lake has manifested a myriad of optical phenomenon with great variety in their appearance.

During World War II bombers from Bisbee-Douglas Air Base and bases in Tucson used this desolate area as a bombing range. Some have suggested that this has been the most productive and beneficial use of the dry lake. Most Arizona maps refer to it as the Willcox Dry Lake Bombing Range. The playa, or dry lake, has plagued several of its uninvited visitors; such as the World War II Navy plane which landed on the dry lake after developing engine trouble. It became stuck in the sticky, clay-like substance which lies a foot or so below the surface. It took more than forty days to remove the plane from the dry lake. It had to be raised and put on large runners to remove it from the playa.

In the early 1960s the United States Government hired a construction company to build a radar station on the dry lake. They sank pedestals more than forty-five feet before obtaining solid footing, and this was only the beginning of their problems. Some claim the project was abandoned when the contractor could not level the pedestals because of the "mirage effect" during the day. The contractor decided to do it at night but, likewise, failed. Whatever the reasons the radar station found the dry lake an

\* Much of this story came from an interview by Mr. Bond with the late Harry Parks who was born in 1886 four miles northeast of Willcox. Additional information came from W.L. "Tay" Cook, a Willcox native born in 1894 and Mr. Billie Whelan who moved to the Willcox area in 1876.



inhospitable host and was located elsewhere; some of the pedestals can be seen today.

The Southern Pacific Railroad laid tracks across the dry lake in 1880. It graded a roadbed several feet above the dry lake bed. The elevated track normally prevented run-off waters from interfering with the trains. In 1905 some of southern Arizona's heaviest rains caused water to form on the old lake bed, and in the lowest places, it rose about five feet. The water caused the railroad track to sink almost a foot and forced the railroad to expedite between 150 to 200 men to haul in rock, gravel and cinders to restore the railroad bed.

The most notable thing about this vast dry lake is its mirages. In layman's terms a mirage is an atmospheric optical illusion in which the observer normally sees nonexistent bodies of water and-or reflections of distant objects. It is formed by the refraction or change in the direction of travel, of light on its passage through an atmosphere having an unusual distribution of air density. Of course, the mirage produces a curious body of water or other images which can never be caught up with. It always ebbs as far and fast as the observer approaches it and, likewise, follows him if he should move away from it. Perhaps the Willcox Dry Lake has the distinction of being the only place where an observer caught up with his mirage and had a ride on it.

The normal Willcox Dry Lake illusion is of water—miles and miles of it. There are countless known stories of people having seen a vast lake south of Willcox. People crossing the dry lake via the train have looked out the window and marveled at so large a body of water existing in the desert. More witnesses have observed the same spectacle from their automobiles on adjacent roads. One man driving his car on the nearby highway saw a giant lake and more. When he arrived in Willcox, he told of his sighting not only a lake but also a ship sailing on it from south to north. He was so sure of what he had observed that he would not believe the mirage explanation of local citizens. To prove his point, he returned to the area of his observation only to discover ship and water had disappeared. Some have claimed they have seen flocks of geese land on the water of the dry lake mirage. One can speculate as to whether the geese are an appendage of the mirage, such as the ship, or they were fooled by the optical phenomenon.

The strangest observation on the Willcox Dry Lake, however, was that of an old time train which occasionally appeared. Those who observed the train claimed it moved across the lake without disturbing the water. They also saw smoke coming from the engine's bell stack, plus, heard the steam engine and the wheel flanges clattering on the track. The first known observation of what became known as the "ghost train" came in the 1870s, years before the Southern Pacific Railroad laid track through the area.



Stranger still was the story of a man who claimed not only to have seen and heard the "ghost train" but rode it as well. Johnny Cowden, a young man with prospecting experience in New Mexico and Arizona, arrived in Tombstone, Arizona Territory in either 1878 or 1879. He soon became convinced that he was too late. He realized that the lone prospector with no capital had little chance in this established mining district. Shortly he heard of a new strike in the Dos Cabezas Mountains. He felt he had a better chance in the new area, so he outfitted himself to move. It was probably during the summer of 1879 when he left Tombstone on his journey of approximately fifty miles. He put his possessions on his faithful burro and set off on foot up along the west side of the Dragoon Mountains to Dragoon Springs. At this halfway point he camped and refreshed himself for the rougher second half of his journey. The next day he replenished his canteen and a homemade canvas waterbag to help him cross the waterless stretch ahead.

Leaving the springs, Johnny walked to the lower slopes of the foothills near a vast dry lake and found a rock formation which offered a little shade from the hot sun. Here he planned to rest until sundown for the dry lake bed was much too hot to cross on a hot summer day. If he waited until sundown, he expected to reach the opposite side of the dry lake sometime the next day where he would strike the road leading to the new mining camp in the Dos Cabezas Mountains. Not a foolish greenhorn, Johnny believed his preparation and plan sufficient to justify his taking the short cut across the dry lake. He hoped the time saved would put him at the new strike before all the prized claims were taken.

Johnny took his possessions off his burro and allowed it to go unpicketed as usual. He found himself a little shade and lay down to rest. He went to sleep and only awoke when a loud scream rent the night air. The startled man quickly realized two important things—the noise came from a mountain lion probably after his burro and the darkness meant he had overslept. He grabbed his rifle and went looking for his burro and the cat's second scream helped him find the burro's dead carcass. Returning to camp, Johnny found his troubles growing for the burro had trampled his supplies in an attempt to escape the cat. His food supplies had spilled in the dirt, and worst of all, his canvas waterbag had been ripped open and all the water lost. He had been too late to save his burro; was he too late to cross the waterless terrain ahead? He had to make a quick decision to either return to Tombstone and get a new grubstake or press on immediately before any more of the night passed.

He hastily reclaimed some bacon and a few biscuits and picked up his half-filled canteen. He would continue on. He walked down to the dry lake and moved out using the moon to help him determine his directions. The smooth surface made for easy walking.



Daylight found him still pursuing his course, but as the day got warm and then hot, he slowed down and drank frequently from his canteen. The temperature on the dry lake bed probably rose to 110 degrees or higher and made Johnny long for some shade. He told himself he had never experienced so much heat. He trudged on not being able to see the other side, and the hot haze that came up around him made it hard to see distant landmarks. At what he estimated as four o'clock in the afternoon, he drank his last swallow of water and disposed of his canteen. Then for a few minutes he pressed on with a faster gait, hoping to be able to last until the sun went down. Already his tongue had begun to swell, his lips had parched and his senses had dulled. He felt as if he were passing through a fiery furnace.

Suddenly, he had a ray of hope as he spotted a fresh set of footprints. He stopped and wondered, could it be that someone else was out there with him? Maybe they had some water. He hastened to follow the tracks but only went a short distance when a sickening suspicion brought him to a wavering halt. He steadied himself and forced his mind and eyes to clear. Then to prove his apprehension, he lifted his foot and put it in one of the tracks. The footprint was his. He had been traveling in a circle. He had lost his bearings and had failed to check the sun to keep from making such a serious mistake. He did not know how long he had been doing this, or worse, he now did not know which way to go.

Johnny sat down exhausted, frustrated and cried. Soon the despair left him. He forced himself to think out his situation. He would wait for night before moving on. More steps in the wrong direction in the merciless heat would probably cause the sun to strike him down. He had not given up; there was still a chance he could make it, if only he could hold on until dark and then use the moon to guide him.

Then he saw it! At first it was only water flooding over the flat surface of the dry lake. Instinctively he got up and moved toward the wonderful water, but soon dropped back to his sitting position. His wavering senses had not abandoned him, and he told himself that the water was only a mirage. The image grew closer and closer and more real. Johnny blinked his eyes a couple of times and when he refocused them, he saw a train in the midst of the water. He had heard stories of this "ghost train" of the dry lake back in Tombstone and had laughed at them. It was different now, especially since it was coming toward him and becoming more and more clear. He could make out the details of the engine, smoke coming from the stack and blowing back over two yellow cars, the churning driver wheels, the big cowcatcher, and even the brass headlamp. He could hear the chugging of the steam engine, the noise of the wheels on the track, the clang of a bell and a whistle.



Johnny's feelings vacillated. At first he felt that this train, with no track but moving through the water, was a weird mirage mocking him in his plight. His mood changed as the train moved closer and seemed more real each minute. Yes, he thought, it must be real and it would save him. He rose to his feet, waved his arms, jumped up and down with joy and shouted or tried to as his parched throat produced little sound. Every second the train loomed larger and was coming directly at him. He could see the engineer lean out of the engine cab. He couldn't move and his joy faded into terror as the big engine bore down on him. Would it run over him and do what the heat and lack of water had not been able to do? At the last second the vision refracted to the side and the engine passed within a few feet of him. Then screaming brakes brought the train to a sudden halt.

He stood wide eyed, breathless and still rooted in his tracks. He could have reached out and touched the train if he dared or cared to, but he just looked and listened. Soon his attention was diverted to one of the passenger coaches. A door opened and a uniformed conductor stepped to the ground and routinely called: "Board! All aboard!" The amazed spectator heard it, words that amounted to an invitation to save him from his predicament, but he still could not move. Yet he wanted to board this train in the worst way, notwithstanding his fear. The conductor became impatient and spoke directly to Johnny, "Come on, come on, we are late!" The conductor looked at his watch and mumbled something about the number of minutes the train was late and that this was an unscheduled stop. The conductor signaled the engineer to move on. A shrill whistle pierced the still air and the train jerked slightly forward. The conductor hastily took Johnny's arm and uprooted him and helped him up the steps and into the moving car.

The conductor steered him into a seat in the well filled coach. For the first time since he had seen the strange manifestation, Johnny's view was blurred. The faces of the passengers were fuzzy, but his sense of smell detected coal smoke and tobacco. Johnny always believed that he held on to his senses and did not go to sleep or lose consciousness. He heard voices, mostly sympathetic to the new passenger, but he continued to see only dim figures in a haze. After one voice expressed an assessment of his condition, he began to mouth the words "Water, water," over and over. Someone noticed this and brought him a cup of water which was given to him a little at a time. He opened his eyes and beheld a room full of strangers and not the kindly conductor and the train passengers. As he sipped the water he repeatedly closed and opened his eyes trying to decipher the real from the imagined.

When he finally came around and could speak, he immediately asked where he was. The men in the room informed him he was in



the town of Maley (renamed Willcox after the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad the following year). The strangers surprisingly knew his name and said that a man had found him wandering in circles a few miles outside town. They asked him where he came from and how he got to where he was found. He told them of his experiences in trying to go to Dos Cabezas and running into trouble crossing the dry lake and then being rescued by the train. Johnny knew by their smiles and nods that they didn't believe him. He asked what day it was and the time he was found. Learning he was found just after sundown of the day he ventured onto the dry lake, he again told in detail with time and dates his leaving Tombstone, the death of his burro, starting across the dry lake and being picked up by the train. He emphasized that it would have been impossible for him to have walked to the spot where the man found him for he would have had to do it between four o'clock when he ran out of water and sundown. He insisted that he had maintained his bearings and course until his water ran out.

The strangers were not as gentle in their disbelief this time. They told him he was mixed up in his dates and the sun and thirst had addled his brain. He repeated his story of the train giving him a ride. He was sure of his dates and he had not only seen the train, heard it and smelled it, he had ridden it. Johnny Cowden insisted he knew what he knew and swore he saw more than a mirage and rode in something very real. His determined stand behind his story caused the townfolk to call him "Crazy Johnny," a nickname that stuck with him.

Manifestations of the "ghost train" of the Willcox Dry Lake have apparently ceased since the coming of the Southern Pacific Railroad to the dry lake in 1880. Perhaps this made for one too many trains on the dry lake bed. Or, possibly, there have been unreported sightings by observers who did not want a "Crazy Johnny" label and, therefore, suppressed their experiences.

A visit to the dry lake today can be, if sensible precautions are taken, a rewarding if not an impressive experience. However, don't be surprised if it's accompanied by an eerie sensation far different than observing the dry lake bed or even a mirage on it from an automobile on an adjacent road. Venturing out onto the dry lake bed does make a difference which is readily apparent to all the senses. One of the authors, Mr. Bond, wrote the following shortly after visiting the dry lake.

I decided to take a trip to the dry lake in May 1970 for some pictures and do some research. I first followed a road to the edge and walked out on the cracked up crust for some two to three hundred yards. After taking some snapshots a wind started stirring up the fine dust. I looked around and all of a



sudden I felt that I was being swallowed in a way that it is impossible to explain. I could see my car but could not make up my mind if that was the right direction I should take to shake off the feeling. I finally made it back to my car, drove a short ways at which I ran into a fellow and asked if there was a road that one could drive out on the lake and he said there was one along side of the railroad that I could take a little further to the north. I took the narrow dirt road which was about five foot in height and started driving. The road was so narrow that there was no place to turn around until I had driven about one and one-half miles. I looked to the north and a large storm was developing and I knew I must get off that place before it started raining. I took time to climb up on the railroad and got my picture, returned to my car and was truly glad to get back to Highway 666.

The Willcox Dry Lake, as it has come to be called, is a strange world whether haunted by unusual mirages, stirred by winds and storms or engulfed by the scorching heat of the summer sun. Amidst such forces will the "ghost train" make another run and give some unexpected visitor the ride of his life and thus join "Crazy Johnny" in catching up with his mirage?