

Victorio's Military and Political Leadership of the Warm Springs Apaches

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Victorio's Military and Political Leadership of the Warm Springs Apaches

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Abstract

Victorio is widely acknowledged as being one of the best guerrilla leaders of the Apache Wars during the 1870s and 1880s. Yet previous accounts of Victorio make little or no effort to demonstrate why he was such an effective leader. This article combines a knowledge of Apache warfare techniques and primary sources to argue that not only did Victorio demonstrate a mastery of these principles of guerrilla warfare; he also displayed an ability to introduce new techniques to further confound his opponents. As a result Victorio, with a small number of warriors, was able to defeat the efforts of US and Mexican armed forces to destroy him for almost a year before being trapped and killed at Tres Castillos, Mexico, by Chihuahua state troops. The article will also show that Victorio's military skills were augmented by a keen awareness of the political weaknesses of his enemies. This analysis of Victorio's military and political skills concludes that his popular reputation as a great Apache leader is richly deserved and should be acknowledged.

Keywords

Apaches, guerrilla warfare, nineteenth century, US Army, US Indian Wars, Victorio

I. Introduction

Bi-du-ya, or Victorio, is acknowledged today as the key Apache leader in the warfare between Apaches and the USA and Mexico between 1877 and 1880. He was a leader of the Warm Springs Apaches, or Chihenne,¹ whom at that time the US Army regarded as

1 Eve Ball, *In the Days of Victorio: Recollections of a Warm Springs Apache* (Tucson, 1970), p. xiv; Eve Ball, *Indeh: An Apache Odyssey* (Norman, 1980), p. 11. There are various versions of this spelling, e.g. Teihene.

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being part of the Chiricahua Apaches.² The conflict was caused by efforts by the Department of the Interior, through the Office of Indian Affairs, to dissolve a number of Apache reservations in the territories of Arizona and New Mexico. The aim of this policy was to concentrate all the Apaches on one reservation at San Carlos in Arizona Territory. Victorio resisted this policy of concentration, and between May 1877 – after the Warm Springs Apache reservation at Ojo Caliente, NM, was first closed – and August 1879 he fled from and surrendered to the US authorities several times, always arguing for a return to Ojo Caliente. By August 1879 he appeared to have lost all confidence in the integrity of the US authorities and declared war. From September 1879 up until his death on 14/15 October 1880 at the hands of Mexican state troops at Tres Castillos, Victorio led a most successful guerrilla campaign against both the USA and the Republic of Mexico.

While many commentators argue that Victorio was one of the greatest guerrilla leaders,³ they do not give much detail as to why and how he was able to mount such an effective campaign. Accounts tend to give a summary of the US Army record.⁴ Interest in the role of the 'Buffalo Soldiers' in the post-Civil War Indian campaigns has, to some extent, focused upon the Apache campaigns of 1879–81 owing to the key roles played by the 9th and 10th cavalry regiments.⁵ More recently, Kendall D. Gott's booklet has concentrated

- 2 Warm Springs Apaches were regarded by the US Army as being 'Warm Springs Chiriguas': Hatch to AAG [Acting Adjutant General], Department of Missouri [hereafter DMO], Fort Leavenworth, 14 August 1879, in Letters Sent by the 9th Military Department, the Department of New Mexico, and the District of New Mexico [hereafter DoNM], 1849–90, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC [hereafter NA], RG393, M1072, roll 6, January–October 1879, letter no. 394, pp. 280–2. On 7 October 1881 it was noted that one Chiricahua and eight Warm Springs 'called Chiricahuas' had deserted from his company: Col. MacKenzie citing Major Biddle's Report, 7 October 1881, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 181, [p. 186]. For RG393, part 1, entries 181, 183, and 2546, and part 3, entry 439, I have photocopied all the material cited. I have numbered each photocopy in the order that I discovered them. They are cited as follows: sender to recipient with date, RG393, part, entry, [page number]. The page number refers to the number that I have assigned to the document held in my own files.
- 3 See Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, vol. II (Albuquerque, 1963), pp. 438–40; Dan L. Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches* (London, 1974), p. x; Dan L. Thrapp, *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, vols I–III (London & Spokane, 1988), p. 1484; Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (London, 1973), pp. 359–65; Frank C. Lockwood, *The Apache Indians* (London, 1987), p. 226; Joseph A. Stout, *Apache Lightning: The Last Great Battles of the Ojo Calientes* (New York, 1974), pp. 76–7.
- 4 Dan L. Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (London, 1967), pp. 182–210; Thrapp, *Victorio*, pp. 218–307; Donald E. Worcester, *The Apaches: Eagles of the Southwest* (Norman, 1979), pp. 208–33; James L. Haley, *Apaches: A History and Culture Portrait* (Norman, 1981), p. 321 in particular and pp. 318–34 in general; David Roberts, *Once They Moved Like The Wind: Cochise, Geronimo and the Apache Wars* (London, 1998), pp. 170–89.
- 5 See for example William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips, *The Black Regulars, 1866–1898* (Norman, 2001); William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman, 1967); William H. Leckie and Shirley A. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Black Cavalry in the West*, rev. edn (Norman, 2003); John M. Carroll, ed., *The Black Military Experience in the American West* (New York, 1971); Monroe Lee

upon the lessons that can be drawn from the Victorio campaign for those prosecuting the current war on terror.⁶ Kathleen P. Chamberlain's biography of Victorio⁷ attempts to give a more balanced account of the man by getting beyond the biased accounts from the Departments of War and the Interior through the use of a wider range of sources to construct a more detailed picture.⁸ Yet both authors fail to utilize the voluminous US Army records to their advantage. They also assume that the secondary sources relating to the Victorio campaign can be relied upon. The end result is a garbled and often inaccurate account which fails to show why Victorio was such a great man.⁹ By arguing for a direct parallel between Apache and Islamic guerrillas, Gott displays a complete misunderstanding of Apache warfare.¹⁰ Self-sacrificial tactics, unless no other option was available, were completely alien to the Apache guerrilla fighter. The lessons to be drawn from the Victorio campaign for the war on terror lie in how the US Army adapted its strategies and tactics in order to defeat the Apaches. They do not lie in the direct comparison of current and historic 'insurgents' or 'terrorists'.

Chamberlain, like other historians, does not show *why* Victorio was such an outstanding guerrilla in a culture which promoted such warfare as the principal means of survival. Victorio was special because he did not necessarily stick to tried and tested Apache warfare techniques. Indeed a good argument can be made that he was an innovator rather than mere practitioner of Apache tactics and strategies. It is this element combined with his political acumen that marks him as so unusual a leader among the Chiricahua Apaches.

Sherry Robinson perhaps provides the best summary of the reasons for Victorio's success:

Victorio knew where every water hole held a bit of moisture; women harvested mescal to bake and eat. They cached weapons and supplies in caves. Children went to sleep at night with food pouches tied to their belts in case they had to flee. When they needed horses, livestock, or ammunition, the warriors raided ranches, supply trains, and the U.S. and Mexican armies themselves.¹¹

Billington, *New Mexico's Buffalo Soldiers, 1866–1900* (Niwt, 1991); Charles L. Kenner, *Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry, 1867–1898* (Norman, 1999); Frank N. Schubert, *On the Trail of the Buffalo Soldier: Biographies of African Americans in the U.S. Army, 1866–1917* (Wilmington, DE, 1995); Frank N. Schubert, *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870–1898* (Wilmington, DE, 1997); Frank N. Schubert, *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Albuquerque, 2003).

6 Kendall D. Gott, *In Search of an Elusive Enemy: The Victorio Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2004).

7 Kathleen P. Chamberlain, *Victorio: Apache Warrior and Chief* (Norman, 2007).

8 Ibid., pp. xiii–xv and 166.

9 I have detailed the particular problems with both works and can provide these if required.

10 Gott, *In Search of an Elusive Enemy*, pp. 1, 14.

11 Sherry Robinson, *Apache Voices: Their Stories of Survival As Told to Eve Ball* (Albuquerque, 2000), p. 7.

Yet, this remains a broad generalization of Victorio's ability. A close study of the campaign shows that Victorio was, tactically, strategically, and politically, an outstanding Apache leader in an already expert guerrilla warfare culture. The Western Apache phrase 'Ízigo At'ée' translates as 'he is the greatest' and would aptly describe Victorio's standing among Apache leaders of the 1870s and 1880s.¹² The sources are available to provide the basis for an evaluation of Victorio's leadership qualities. They need to be interpreted in the light of what we know about the basic principles driving Apache warfare techniques, so allowing the historian to reconstruct and interpret the intention and effect of Victorio's chosen tactics and strategies between September 1879 and October 1880. A key element behind Victorio's success was that he could rely upon a very flexible, close-knit society whose members could act quickly and decisively even under the most critical of circumstances.

II. Apache Principles of War

The most basic Apache principle of war followed a general pattern common to most North American Indians. This was the rule of inflicting the maximum damage for the minimum of loss.¹³ Yet despite this common ground, the Apaches probably developed some of the most disciplined and effective warfare techniques seen among Native Americans. In fact, hunting and raiding were so vital to the Apaches that Morris Edward Opler discussed these topics in a chapter entitled 'Maintenance of the Household'.¹⁴ The Apaches also made a clear distinction between the terms 'raiding' and 'warfare'. To raid was to seize property from an enemy; to wage war was to seek deliberately to kill the foe.¹⁵ The Apache warrior used raiding and warfare to provide for his family and had to survive to continue this process. The discipline and flexibility essential to his success as a guerrilla were achieved through a combination of rigorous training, promotion to leadership by merit, an intimate knowledge of the environment, and an appreciation of the role women had to play in their culture. These factors are well documented in the existing literature. What is not documented is how Victorio built upon these foundations to lead such a successful guerrilla campaign in 1879–80.

12 D. Bray, ed., *Western Apache—English Dictionary: A Community-Generated Bilingual Dictionary* (Tempe, AZ, 1998), p. 360.

13 John Manchip White, *Everyday Life of the North American Indian* (London, 1979), p. 115; James W. Watson, 'Scouting in Arizona, 1890', in Peter Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865–1890*, vol. I: *The Struggle for Apacheria* (Mechanicsville, 2001), p. 646.

14 Morris Edward Opler, *An Apache Life-Way: The Economic, Social, and Religious Institutions of the Chiricahua Indians* (Lincoln, 1996), pp. 323–54; see also Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960* (Tucson, 1962), p. 243; Ana Maria Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson, 1997), p. 26; Mark Cocker, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples* (London, 1999), p. 213; L.Y. Loring, 'Report on [the] Coyotero Apaches', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 185.

15 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 334–5; Grenville Goodwin, *Western Apache Raiding and Warfare*, ed. Keith H. Basso (Tucson, 1998), p. 16.

Young Apaches were thoroughly instructed in all the skills required to survive in Apacheria,¹⁶ learning endurance, hunting, hiding, fighting, and respect for the wisdom of their seniors.¹⁷ Once the males were considered ready for their adult roles they still had to complete formal training as apprentice warriors on four raids before being considered adults.¹⁸ If the apprentice failed to display discipline, forbearance, respect, and obedience he was dismissed as unreliable and untrustworthy.¹⁹ Girls were also given a rigorous training regime in childcare, in the gathering, preparation, and preservation of food, and in the making of clothing and footwear.²⁰ The girls were also given hard physical training and were instructed in the use of weapons so that they could move swiftly over difficult terrain and defend themselves if attacked.²¹ 'Hunting, raiding and warring were the three central features of Apache life. In order for a band to survive, both males and females participated in these activities.'²²

This training gave Apache men and women an intimate knowledge of every hiding place, and of the sources of water and food. It allowed the Apaches to pollute obvious water sources when pursued, given their awareness of other water sources nearby.²³ The knowledge allowed the Apaches to develop phenomenal skills at concealment either to avoid detection altogether or from which to spring the deadliest of ambushes.²⁴ Fires

16 This can be said to encompass south-western New Mexico, south-eastern Arizona, northern Chihuahua, and Sonora.

17 Morris E. Opler and Harry Hoijer, 'The Raid and War-Path Language of the Chiricahua Apache', *American Anthropologist* XLII (1940), pp. 618–19; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 67–8; Edwin R. Sweeney, *Cochise: Chiricahua Apache Chief* (Norman, 1991), pp. 12–13; Edwin R. Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas: Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches* (Norman, 1998), pp. 19–20 and 23–5; William E. Shipp, 'Captain Crawford's Last Expedition', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 519; Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, pp. 29 and 159; Thrapp, *Victorio*, p. 10; Mark Cocker, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples* (London, 1999), p. 195; Robinson, *Apache Voices*, p. 5; Loring, 'Report on [the] Coyotero Apaches', p. 185.

18 See in particular Opler and Hoijer, 'Raid and War-Path Language', p. 620.

19 Ibid., p. 621; Sweeney, *Cochise*, pp. 10–12; Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, pp. 19–20.

20 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 354–72; H. Henrietta Stockel, 'Women of the Apache Nation', *Women of the Apache Nation: Voices of Truth* (Reno and Las Vegas, 1991), pp. 10, 14, 15 and 18; Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, pp. 21–2.

21 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 416; Robinson, *Apache Voices*, p. 5; Stockel, 'Women of the Apache Nation', p. 31; Kimberley Moore Buchanan, *Apache Women Warriors*, *Southwestern Studies* 79 (El Paso, TX, 1986), pp. 19 and 20.

22 Moore Buchanan, *Apache Women Warriors*, p. 18.

23 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 74; John J. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (1891; repr., Alexandria, VA, 1980), pp. 36–7; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 348; Karl W. Laumbach, *Hembrillo, an Apache Battlefield of the Victorio War: The Archaeology and History of the Hembrillo Battlefield* (prepared for the White Sands Missile Range, NM, 2001), p. 100; John C. Cremony, *Life among the Apaches* (London, 1983), pp. 296–7; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 185 and 348; Donald E. Worcester, 'The Apaches in the History of the Southwest', *New Mexico Historical Review* L (1975), p. 26; Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, pp. 21–2.

24 Howard, cited in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, by: U.S. Grant et al., 'Where Is Crook?', p. 390; George Crook, 'Apache Affairs: An Interview with General Crook', p. 402;

were often not lit during the night but were lit at mid-morning to minimize the chance of detection.²⁵ If given enough time, Apaches would improve defensive positions and favoured campsites with small rock emplacements or breastworks.²⁶ These works would sometimes be camouflaged by covering them with loose grass so that their enemies would approach to point-blank range. Captain John G. Bourke related an incident where these concealed breastworks were used to ambush some Sonoran militia from the front and both flanks. By the time the surviving militiamen had regrouped and been reinforced, the Apaches were long departed.²⁷

The Apaches used a system of signals using pebbles or twigs, which to the uninitiated would appear as normal wilderness detritus but would convey clear meaning to their compatriots.²⁸ They also used smoke and mirror signals during the day and signal fires at night.²⁹ Captured or traded telescopes and field glasses were also valued possessions.³⁰ Every effort was made to choose campsites which would be difficult to detect but if discovered would be difficult to carry by assault. In an attempt to forestall such an assault it was a matter of routine to station sentries on higher ground to allow the Apaches numerous escape routes should they be attacked.³¹ Individual family units within a larger following would also try to camp somewhat apart from each

George O. Eaton, 'A String for the Bow', p. 181; John F. Finerty, 'On Campaign after Cibecue Creek', p. 258; and Azor H. Nickerson, 'An Apache Raid, and a Long Distance Ride', p. 107; also Bourke, *On the Border*, p. 37; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 185. It is also worth noting Cremony's description of a demonstration given to him by Quick Killer, a Mescalero Apache, of the latter's ability to conceal himself: Cremony, *Life Among the Apaches*, pp. 290–1.

- 25 John G. Bourke, 'With Crook in the Sierra Madre', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 361.
- 26 Thrapp, *Victorio*, pp. 264–5; Charles Collins, *The Great Escape: The Apache Outbreak of 1881* (Tucson, AZ, 1994), pp. 77–8, 84 and 86; James B. Gillett, *Six Years with the Texas Rangers, 1875 to 1881* (London, 1976), p. 187; Laumbach, *Hembrillo*, pp. 22, 53 and 192–7; Finerty, 'On Campaign', p. 259; Will C. Barnes, 'The Apaches' Last Stand in Arizona: The Battle of Big Dry Wash', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 275; Bourke, 'With Crook in the Sierra Madre', p. 369; Larry L. Ludwig and James L. Stute, *The Battle at K-H Butte: Apache Outbreak – 1881, Arizona Territory* (Tucson, AZ, 1993), figures 9, 16 and 17.
- 27 Bourke, 'With Crook in the Sierra Madre', p. 354.
- 28 Cremony, *Life among the Apaches*, pp. 179–80 and 233; see also Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 6; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 346–7; Worcester, 'Apaches in the History of the Southwest', p. 26; James A. McKenna, *Black Range Tales Chronicling Sixty Years of Life and Adventure in the Southwest* (Chicago, 1963), p. 57.
- 29 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 6; Ball, *Indeh*, p. 66; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 347–8. William W. Neifert, a US Army Signals Corpsman, recorded that he could see at least 50 miles and more from his heliograph station. See his 'Trailing Geronimo by Heliograph', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 559.
- 30 Britton Davis, 'The Difficulties of Indian Warfare', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 493; Lt Buck, 13th Infantry, Socorro, NM, 'A Talk with Na-na', 14 August 1881, *Army and Navy Journal* XIX, 10 September 1881, p. 125.
- 31 George Crook, 'Resume of Operations against Apache Indians, 1882 to 1886', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 579; Henry W. Daly, 'The Geronimo Campaign', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 466.

other to prevent the whole camp being surprised but close enough to provide mutual support should this happen.³²

The most successful practitioners of Apache principles of war,³³ i.e. those who consistently inflicted the greatest loss in either loot or lives taken with the minimum of lives lost in return, were selected to be leaders. A previously successful leader who was perceived to have lost his skills would rapidly lose his following. Successful leadership was 'a process in which birth and wealth have their place, but in which ability and personal magnetism are always the leavening factor'.³⁴ Such a process could see quite young men steadily rising to a position of influence, with some of them maintaining it until an advanced age. For example, Victorio was estimated as being approximately 55 years old when he was killed at Tres Castillos.³⁵ One of his lieutenants, known as Kas-tziden to the Apaches and Nana to the Anglo-Americans, was estimated to be at least 75 when he led the survivors of Victorio's following on what became known as Nana's Raid in July–August 1881.³⁶

Another important element in leadership was the concept of 'power',³⁷ a talent derived from what might be termed the 'supernatural' or the 'spirit world'. Nana was known to have power over ammunition and rattlesnakes.³⁸ Victorio's sister Lozen was ascribed the ability to locate unseen enemies.³⁹ The exact nature of Victorio's powers are a mystery, although they went far beyond mere association with success in war.

These leaders had a range of strategies and tactics to use against their enemies. The concepts of 'tactics' and 'strategy' need to be clearly defined in relation to the Apaches. The former refers to manoeuvring in sight of the enemy; the latter to manoeuvring out of sight of the enemy.⁴⁰ An examination of Victorio's application of Apache principles of war shows a clear conception of the distinction between these two concepts. Victorio targeted his opponents' horses both strategically (killing and crippling them by prolonged pursuits over rough terrain) and tactically (by targeting them directly in the opening volley of an ambush). Victorio also used decoy strategies and tactics to telling effect. Before we go into the detail of such techniques a review of the Victorio campaign of 1879–80 is necessary to help place these techniques into context.

32 Bourke, 'With Crook in the Sierra Madre', pp. 361, 362 and 364. See also Charles P. Elliott, 'The Geronimo Campaign of 1885–1886', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 433; Davis, 'Difficulties of Indian Warfare', p. 493.

33 Ball, *Indeh*, pp. 43–5; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 462–71.

34 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 470. See also comments by Sweeney, *Cochise*, pp. 12–13; Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, pp. 23–4; Laumbach, *Hembrillo*, p. 101–3.

35 See Thrapp, *Victorio*, p. 4.

36 Stephen H. Lekson, *Nana's Raid: Apache Warfare in Southern New Mexico 1881*, Southwestern Studies 81 (El Paso Texas, 1987), p. 3.

37 See Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 200–16; Ball, *Indeh*, pp. 61–5.

38 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 16.

39 Ibid., p. 15; Robinson, *Apache Voices*, p. 5.

40 See for example Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London, 1968), p. 173.

III. The Victorio Campaign, 1879–80

The fundamental cause of the Victorio War of 1879–80 was the drive to concentrate a number of different Apache tribes on to one reservation.⁴¹ This policy closed both the Chiricahua Apache reservation at Fort Bowie and the Warm Springs Apache reservation at Ojo Caliente in 1876 and 1877 respectively. Victorio claimed the latter as his homeland and from 1877 to 1879 he made several attempts either to negotiate or to fight for the return of Ojo Caliente. By August 1879 he appears to have lost all faith in a negotiated settlement with the USA and declared war.

Summary of Events

September 1879. On the 4th, the Apaches raided Ojo Caliente and stole the horse herd belonging to E Company, 9th Cavalry, killing five guards. They defeated at least two other 9th Cavalry detachments on the 18th and 29th/30th. They also caused heavy casualties in attacks upon citizens near Jaralosa and McEvers Ranch on the 10th/11th.⁴²

October 1879. Victorio and his followers kept ahead of the pursuing 9th Cavalry and Apache scout detachments. They inflicted heavy casualties upon citizens in the area around the Sierra Uvas on the 10th–13th. A mixed detachment of Apache scouts and 6th and 9th Cavalrymen finally caught up with the Apaches near the Guzman Mountains in Mexico. On the night of 27th/28th the Apaches fought them to a standstill and forced them to withdraw.

November 1879. Victorio remained in Mexico, camped in the Candelaria Mountains, where his men ambushed and virtually annihilated two groups of Mexican citizens from the town of Carrizal. The Apaches then moved deeper into Chihuahua, again causing heavy casualties during widespread raiding.

December 1879. In the middle of the month Mexican federal and state troops mounted an offensive which encouraged Victorio to lead his people back into New Mexico.

January 1880. Using a clever decoy strategy, Victorio with a large group of warriors distracted the US Army units that were poised ready to trap him when he returned. This allowed his dependents with the large amount of loot taken in Mexico to proceed unmolested across the border to the Mescalero reservation. The 9th Cavalry detachments were then exhausted in a futile pursuit of Victorio. During this period Victorio also made at least two unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a peace deal with the US Army.

41 For the background and course of the Victorio campaign, see Alonso, *Thread of Blood*; Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*; Ball, *Indeh*; Bruce J. Dinges, 'The Victorio Campaign of 1880: Cooperation and Conflict on the United States–Mexico Border', *New Mexico Historical Review* LXII (1987), pp. 81–94; Shelley Bowen Hatfield, *Chasing Shadows: Apache and Yaquis along the United States–Mexico Border, 1876–1911* (Albuquerque, 1999); C.B. Gatewood, 'Campaigning against Victorio in 1879', *Great Divide* (April 1894), pp. 102–4; Laumbach, *Hembrillo*; Lekson, *Nana's Raid*; Robinson, *Apache Voices*; Stout, *Apache Lightning*; Thrapp, *Conquest of Apacheria*; Thrapp, *Victorio*; Robert N. Watt, 'Raiders of a Lost Art? Apache War and Society', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* XIII (2002), pp. 1–28.

42 Summary is based on my ongoing research.

February 1880. By mid-month the last of the 9th Cavalry detachments had to give up the pursuit of Victorio. For the remainder of the month the Apaches evaded the US Army.

March 1880. Throughout the month the Apaches launched a series of raids along the Rio Grande Valley, while the US Army, trying to rest its stock for a projected offensive against the Apaches in April, proved rather ineffectual. The Apaches wreaked widespread economic damage and inflicted a number of citizen casualties.

April 1880. The US Army launched a three-pronged offensive in an attempt to catch Victorio in the San Andres Mountains. Owing to logistic and communication problems the operation failed to trap Victorio. Two detachments of 9th Cavalry were ambushed and outfought in the Hembrillo Canyon area. One of these detachments was trapped overnight and was lucky to be rescued by other troops the following morning. The US troops then moved on to the Mescalero reservation and interned as many Apaches as it could detain. This operation was botched and many Mescalero Apaches escaped to join Victorio or acted independently of him. However, the operation probably neutralized the reservation as a major, and relatively reliable, source of guns and ammunition.

May 1880. Having eluded the cavalry after the battles in Hembrillo Canyon, Victorio launched a number of raids towards Arizona in the Mogollon and San Francisco Mountains. A large number of shepherds, miners, and prospectors were killed. By the end of the month the 9th Cavalry, which had remained in the field since the beginning of April, found itself effectively rendered unfit for field service because of horse and mule casualties. However, on the 24th–25th a large company of Apache scouts managed to surprise Victorio's camp on the Palomas River, and inflicted the first serious defeat sustained by Victorio in this campaign.

June 1880. In the aftermath of his defeat in New Mexico, Victorio with as many of his followers as he could gather returned to Mexico. Their widespread raiding caused much economic damage.

July 1880. In response to this raiding Mexican federal and state troops took the field again, and Victorio moved his following towards western Texas. Here he was faced by the 10th Cavalry, which, through luck and information from both its own scouts and the Mexican commander, did not fall for Victorio's decoy strategy. The commander and a small detachment of men fought a hard skirmish with the Apaches at Tinaja de las Palmas before being relieved.

August 1880. Victorio made a second attempt to pass through the 10th Cavalry's picket posts. Again, thanks to some luck and hard marching the 10th Cavalry managed to prevent Victorio from reaching New Mexico through Texas. The Apaches returned to Mexico to recuperate.

September 1880. While the campaign in Texas was progressing, the US Troops in New Mexico were regrouped and a major operation to crush Victorio was hatched. This involved the unofficial cooperation between the US Army and Chihuahua state troops. This operation was in motion by mid-month when forces from the US moved in from the north while the Mexicans advanced from the south. The Apaches evaded this first attempt to trap them.

October 1880. Victorio, with his followers critically short of ammunition, could not adopt his usual decoy strategy to escape, and so attempted to avoid his foes altogether. This plan came within an ace of working, but his luck ran out when he was trapped and killed at Tres Castillos on the 14th–15th.

Effectively, Victorio engaged the US Army in five mini-campaigns during this period: 4 September to 28 October 1879; 4 January to 20 February 1880; 5 April to 5 June 1880; 29 July to 12 August 1880; and 6 September to 10 October 1880. He was active in Mexico between 24 October and 30 December 1879; between 5 June and 29 July 1880; and between 13 August and 15 October 1880. He suffered a number of setbacks from late May 1880 onwards but even in the month prior to his death, he and his followers proved that they were more than capable of defeating their opponents. From 4 September 1879 until his defeat by Apache scouts on 25 May 1880, he either outmanoeuvred or defeated his opponents in every campaign and engagement. His success was born of a ruthless, flexible, and sometimes original application of Apache principles of war.

IV. Apache Warfare Techniques

These can be divided into three broad categories: evasion, ambush and attack.

Evasion

If taken at all by surprise or it was realized that they were being pursued, the first option adopted by most Apaches was to scatter and regroup at a prearranged location. It was standard practice to choose this location whether the group felt threatened or not in order to give every member of the group the best chance of survival, particularly if the group were taken unawares.⁴³ To facilitate the ability to scatter and survive the Apaches had to know the terrain intimately, and they routinely cached surplus clothing, food, weapons, and ammunition across their territory. These could prove invaluable to their survival if they had to abandon their possessions if surprised.⁴⁴ If moving from one camp to another,

43 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 346; Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 4; C.L. Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 2nd edn (London, 1973), p. 134; Bourke, 'With Crook in the Sierra Madre', p. 350; Daly, 'Geronimo Campaign', p. 453; Davis, 'Difficulties of Indian Warfare', pp. 491, 492 and 493; Shipp, 'Captain Crawford's Last Expedition', p. 518; Crook, 'Resume of Operations', pp. 578–9; G. Gordon Adam, 'Resolution Adopted at Meeting of Residents of Cochise County, Arizona, regarding Outbreak of Indians from San Carlos Reservation', p. 420, James S. Pettit, 'Apache Campaign Notes, 1886', p. 533, and George Crook, 'The Apache Problem', pp. 597 and 599, all in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I; Crook to Assistant Adjutant General, HQ Division of the Pacific, Presidio of San Francisco, CA, 9 September 1885, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 187, Manuscript Reports, Dept of Arizona, 1880–85, p. 4.

44 Robinson, *Apache Voices*, p. 7.

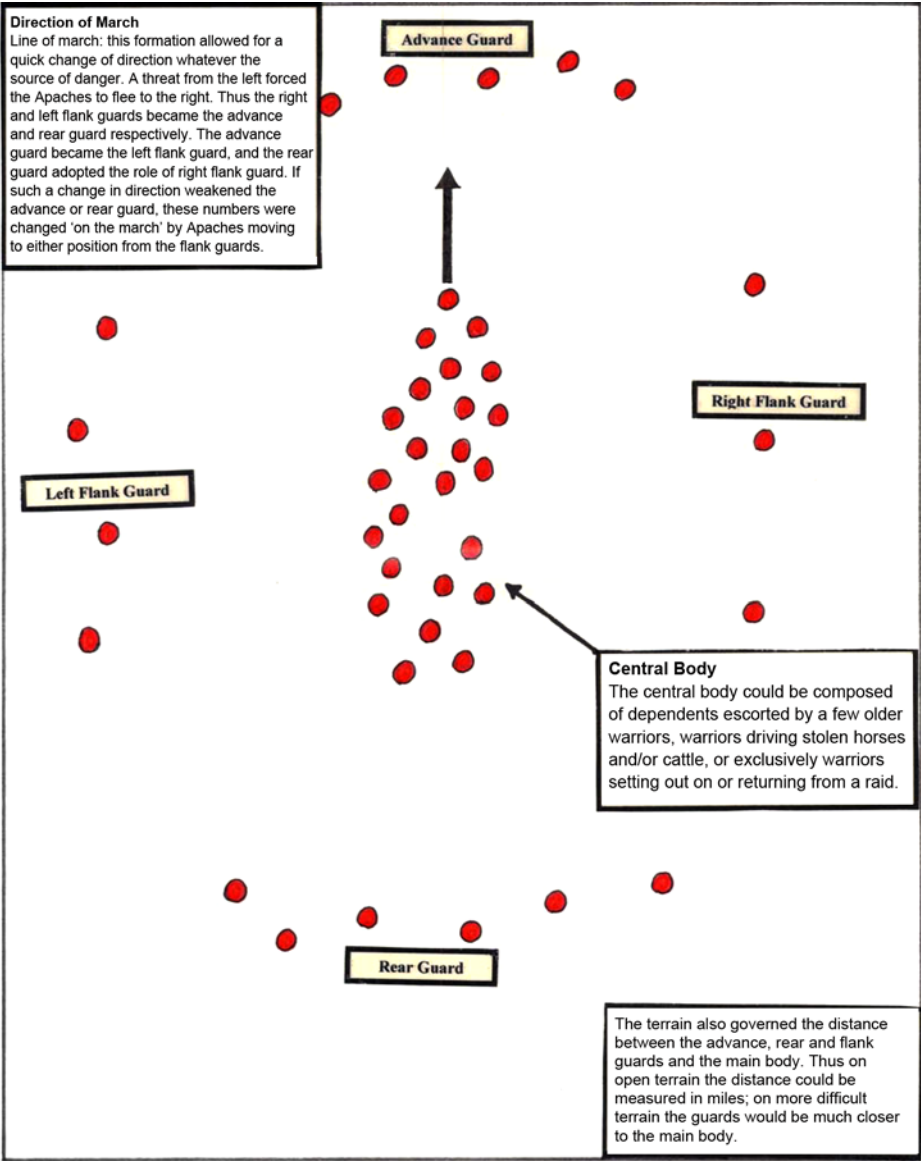


Figure 1. Apache order of march

the main group, whether warriors or family groups, would be surrounded by flank, advance, and rear guards (see Figure 1).⁴⁵ These would ideally be stationed some distance from the main body to give advance warning of any threat.

⁴⁵ See Davis, 'Difficulties of Indian Warfare', p. 493.

Despite a reluctance to fight at night, be it due to fear of rattlesnakes,⁴⁶ ghosts,⁴⁷ or a desire to preserve valuable ammunition,⁴⁸ raiding parties often travelled during the hours of darkness and tried to reach high ground in which to hide during the day and be able to keep an eye upon the surrounding countryside for enemy activity.⁴⁹ Only exceptional leaders could persuade their followers to engage in night fighting and, in Victorio's case, on the two occasions in which he did engage the US Army in such actions (27–8 October 1879 and 6–7 April 1880) the odds appeared to be heavily in favour of the Apaches.

If danger threatened, the usual response was to scatter and reform. However, the formation shown in Figure 2 could be used by the Apaches to draw their foes into an ambush if the terrain was suitable.

Victorio and his followers routinely scattered to evade their foes.⁵⁰ Yet he also employed decoys to allow his followers to escape their opponents. The Apaches split into two groups. The first would be made up of warriors, largely unencumbered with dependents or loot and well supplied with remounts, guns, and ammunition, while the second party would consist of dependents and/or plunder escorted by a group of older warriors. The first group would draw the attention of their enemies to a specific area by raiding and leaving an easily followed trail. Once the enemy took up the pursuit of the first group, the second group would pass through the area vacated by their enemies to reach their destination undetected. The clearest example of this strategy being utilized by Victorio occurred in January 1880 when he was attempting to evade the forces commanded by Major Albert Payson Morrow, 9th Cavalry, and successfully pass his plunder and families across the border to safety in either the San Andres Mountains or the Mescalero reservation (Figure 3).

The first group crossed the border and managed to remain undetected until they encountered a supply train at Mule Springs.⁵¹ They cut the telegraph wire between Fort

46 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 16; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 196–7. See also Ball, *Indeh*, pp. 23 and 93; Haley, *Apaches*, p. 279. Rattlesnakes were not the only dangerous fauna at large: there were, and are, venomous (though not necessarily fatally so) spiders, scorpions, lizards, and centipedes. For example, 'Jose Valdez, of Santa Fe, was bitten by a spider no larger than a fly last week and died in an hour and a half' (*Thirty Four*, 30 July 1879).

47 Collins, *Great Escape*, p. 86. See also Dan L. Thrapp, *Juh: An Incredible Indian*, Southwestern Studies 39 (El Paso, TX, 1973), pp. 15 and 24; Dan L. Thrapp, *General Crook and the Sierra Madre Adventure* (London, 1972), p. 55; Loring, 'Report on [the] Coyotero Apaches', p. 187; Michael M. Rice, 'Across Apache Land', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 504.

48 Robinson, *Apache Voices*, p. 192.

49 Crook, 'Apache Problem', p. 599; Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, p. 348.

50 Pope's Annual Report Year Ending September 22, 1880, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2546, [p. 613]; Report of General John Pope, 22 September 1880, in Annual Reports of the War Department, NA, RG94, M997, roll 35, 1880, vol. I, pp. 88–9.

51 'Town and Country', *Grant County Herald*, 17 January 1880.

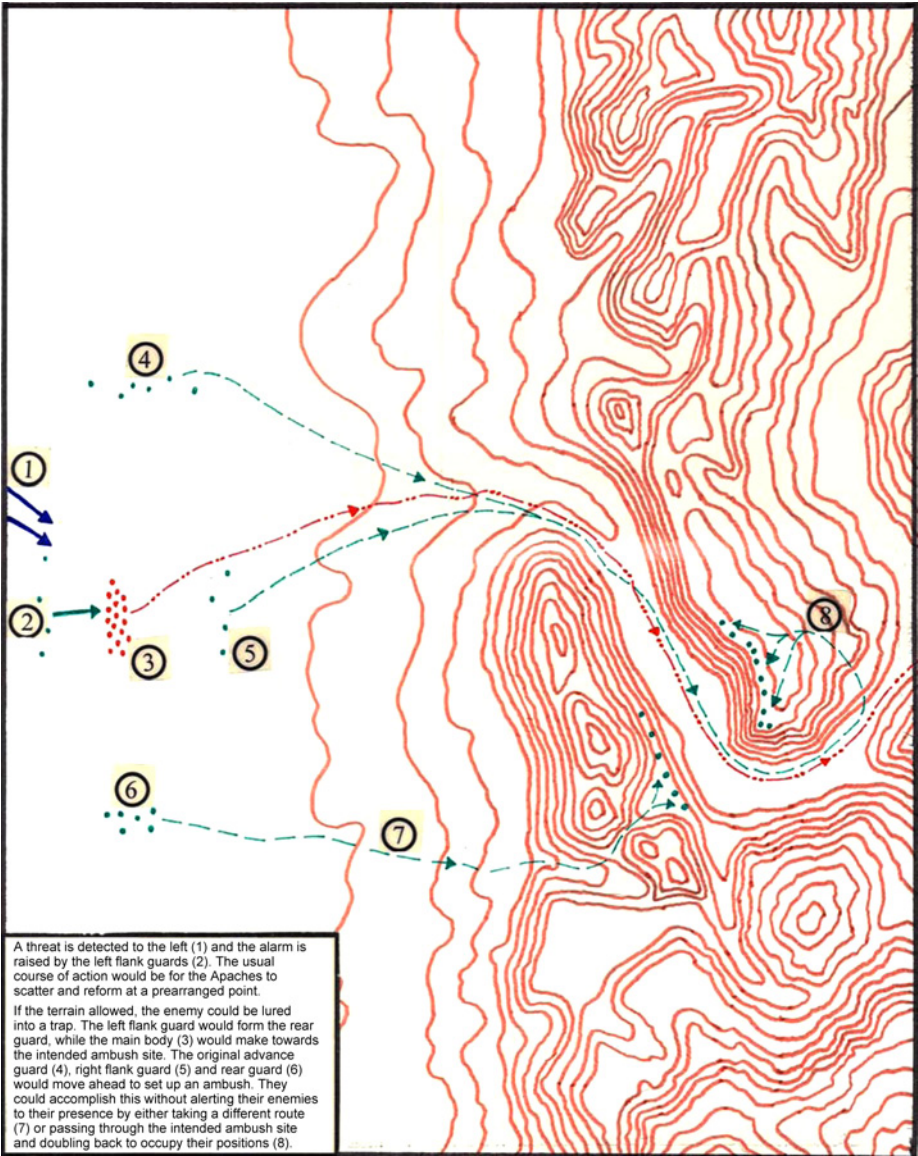


Figure 2. Apache evasion and ambush tactics

Cummings and La Mesilla near the Goodstight Mountains, and left an obvious trail for the 9th Cavalry and its Apache scouts to follow.⁵² Reports received from a Mexican

⁵² Lt Allen Silver City to Loud SF, 8 January 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [p. 481]; Carr to AG Dept Arizona, 8 January 1880, Troops in Southeastern Arizona, Dept of Arizona, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 232, vol. 5, 13 December 1879 – May 7 1880, letter no. 20, pp. 29–30.

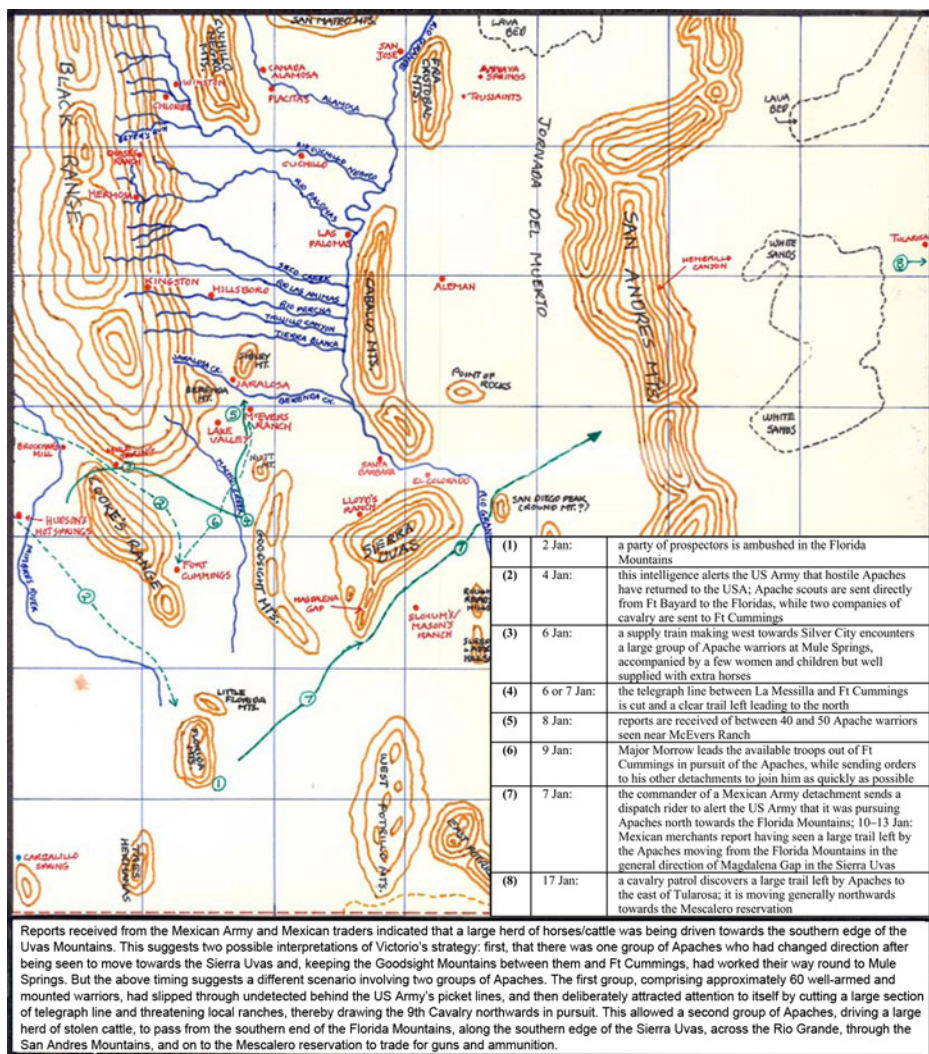


Figure 3. Victorio's decoy strategy, January 1880

Army detachment,⁵³ some Mexican merchants,⁵⁴ and a US Army officer stationed near the Mescalero reservation⁵⁵ combine to suggest that once Major Morrow had set his

53 Cisneros to Col. in Chief SF, rec'd 9 January 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [pp. 496-8]; see also Loud (citing letter from Cisneros from Stony Ford on the Guzman River, 7 January 1880) to CO Fort Bayard to forward to Major Morrow, 9 January 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January-November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [pp. 28-9].

54 *Thirty Four*, 14 January 1880.

55 Russell to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 22 January 1880, in Papers relating to military operations against Chief Victorio's band of Mescalero Apache in southern New Mexico,

forces in pursuit of the first group, the second group, which was much more vulnerable to attack should it be detected, was able to slip through unchallenged.

However, there was a second, enormously valuable dividend to be derived from this strategy through the killing and crippling of US Army horses and mules. When Victorio was able to muster a well-mounted and heavily armed group of warriors, he not only used them to distract the enemy away from the second group but he then actively encouraged his pursuers to remain on his trail. He would occasionally fight what appeared to be rearguard actions allowing his opponents to assume that he was giving his dependents time to get away, when in fact his dependents were far away from the area where he was operating. Yet his enemies, thinking that they had almost caught up with the Apaches' dependents, were encouraged to continue their pursuit of a foe unencumbered with dependents or plunder who could easily keep ahead of them. All that resulted from these pursuits were dead and crippled horses and mules. The clearest example of this strategy can be seen in Major Morrow's campaign against Victorio in January and February 1880 (Figure 4).

The horse casualties recorded in the bi-monthly company and monthly regimental returns from the 9th Cavalry Regiment, the US Cavalry unit which bore the brunt of the campaign against Victorio in 1879–80, clearly show the effect of Victorio's strategy (see Figures 5–7). Each time the 9th Cavalry took the field against Victorio, in September/October 1879, January/February 1880, April/May 1880, and, to a lesser extent, September/October 1880, there were clear increases in the horses lost.

Between July 1879 and June 1880 the regiment sustained 395⁵⁶ or 34.4% of the 1,181⁵⁷ horses lost by the US Army in the same period.⁵⁸ Yet, the numbers of horses lost does not reveal the full effect of Victorio's strategy. Figure 6 and 7 show that the numbers of serviceable horses, i.e. those horses fit for field duty, tended towards an inverse relationship with the numbers of unserviceable horses. The ultimate effect of the long pursuits undertaken by the 9th Cavalry in January/February and April/May 1880 was that by May/June 1880 unserviceable horses outnumbered serviceable horses, and that the strategy of drawing the 9th Cavalry into prolonged pursuits of Apache guerrillas had temporarily rendered that regiment unfit for field service.

Colonel Edward Hatch, commander of both the District of New Mexico and the 9th Cavalry Regiment, requested replacement horses and mules in May 1880, but was informed by General William Tecumseh Sherman that until Congress approved the next

1879–81, in Letters Rec'd by the Office of the Adjutant General (main series), 1871–80, NA, RG94, M666, roll 527 [hereafter 'Victorio File', referring to rolls 526–8].

56 Derived from 9th Cavalry, 1873–80, Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833–1916, NA, RG94, roll 88.

57 Derived from Annual Reports of the War Department, NA, RG94, 1877, p. 290; 1878, p. 348; 1879, p. 307; 1880, p. 421.

58 The reason for choosing the time period July–June is that the US Army's Annual Report follows this accounting period, probably to coincide with its annual appropriation or budget approved annually by Congress. It is also useful as the three mini-campaigns (September/October 1879 and January/February and April/May 1880) where Victorio was able to use this strategy to deadly effect fall within this time-frame.

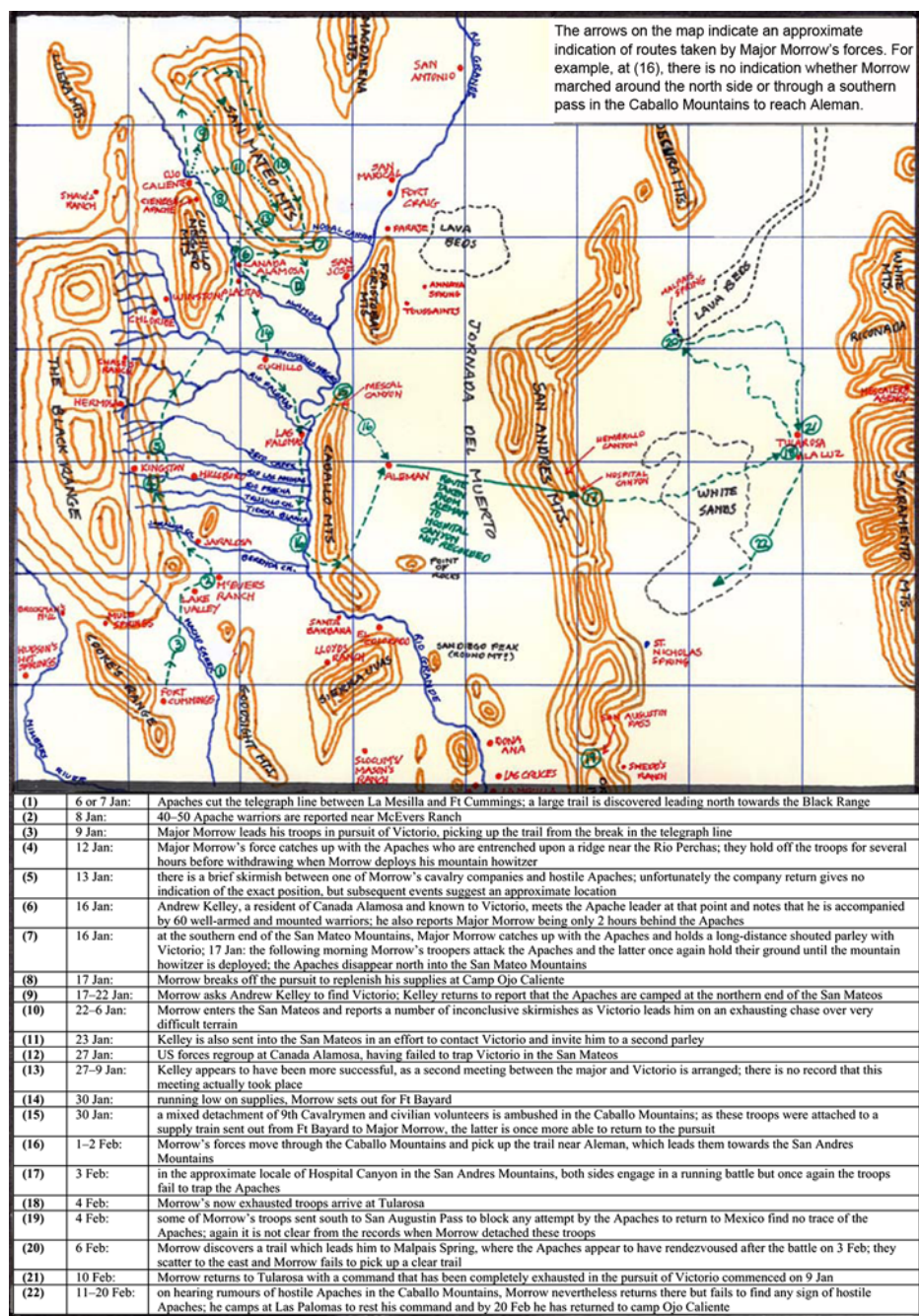


Figure 4. Morrow's campaign, January–February 1880

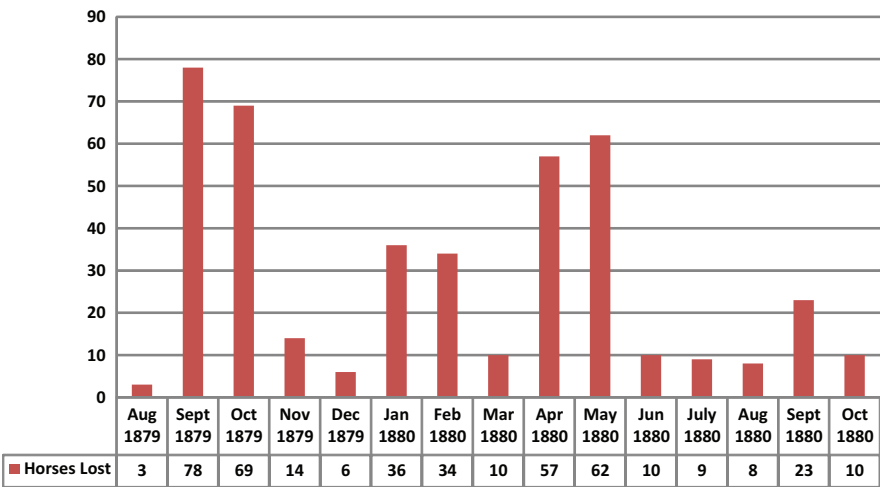


Figure 5. Ninth Cavalry monthly returns: horses lost, July 1879 to October 1880
Source: derived from 9th Cavalry, 1873 -80, Returns from Regular Army Cavalry Regiments, 1833 -1916, National Archives, Washington, DC, RG94, roll 88.

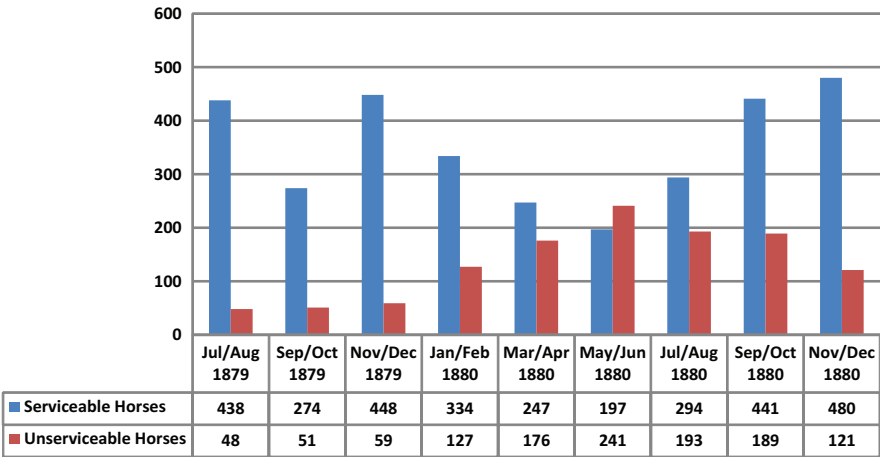


Figure 6. Ninth Cavalry, bi-monthly summary of serviceable and unserviceable horses, 1879-80
Source: derived from 9th Cavalry Bi-Monthly Muster Rolls, 1879-81, National Archives, Washington, DC, RG94.

US Army budget, there was no more money for fresh horses and mules.⁵⁹ In effect, Victorio’s strategy had, probably unknown to its author, successfully struck at the war economy of his opponent in much the same manner that Sherman had crippled the Confederacy and sought also to apply to the post-Civil War Indian campaigns.

59 Sherman to Pope via Sheridan, 29 May 1880, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2539, Press Copies of Letters and Endorsements Sent, Military Division of the Missouri [hereafter MDMo], vol. 13, pp. 290-1; Loud quoting Sherman’s letter to Hatch, Fort Craig, 31 May 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January-November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, pp. 452-3;

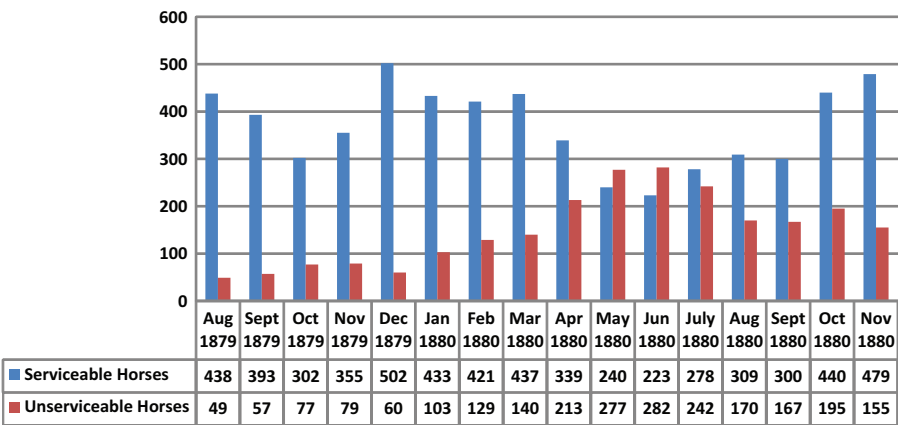


Figure 7. Ninth Cavalry, regimental monthly summary of serviceable and unserviceable horses, July 1879 to October 1880
Source: as Figure 5.

It should be noted that, while Victorio deployed this decoy strategy to devastating effect against the 9th Cavalry in New Mexico, he failed to outmanoeuvre the 10th Cavalry in western Texas in July and August 1880 using the same strategy (Figure 8). Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson⁶⁰ had been informed of the general location of the second group of Apaches by the Mexican Army. His own scouting detachments independently confirmed this intelligence. This information negated the various efforts by the first group of Apaches to distract the attention of the 10th Cavalry deployments away from the second group.

Ambush

The Apaches also deployed decoys and targeted horses tactically. This allows us to examine the second element within Apache warfare, that of ambush. In many ways the various techniques utilized by the Apaches to waylay their enemies underline their principles of war. The sudden ambush, taking their opponents completely by surprise, was designed to inflict the maximum damage for the minimum loss.

The use of decoys to lure their foes into an ambush was more subtle than the decoy tactics utilized by the Plains Indians. Apache decoys would often pretend that they were not aware of the presence of danger, thereby lulling their intended targets into a false sense of security.⁶¹ Plains Indian decoys tended to deploy in small numbers to confront their foes and tempt them into an unwise pursuit into a much larger force. When

Sherman to Sheridan, 28 May 1880, ‘Victorio Campaign, Feb. 1879–Nov. 1880’, in ‘Special Files’ Created by the MDMo, Records of US Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920, NA, RG393, M1495, roll 14 [hereafter ‘Victorio Campaign Special Files’].

60 Grierson was both the commanding officer of the Tenth Cavalry Regiment and commander of the District of the Pecos.

61 Opler, *Apache Life-Way*, pp. 345–6.

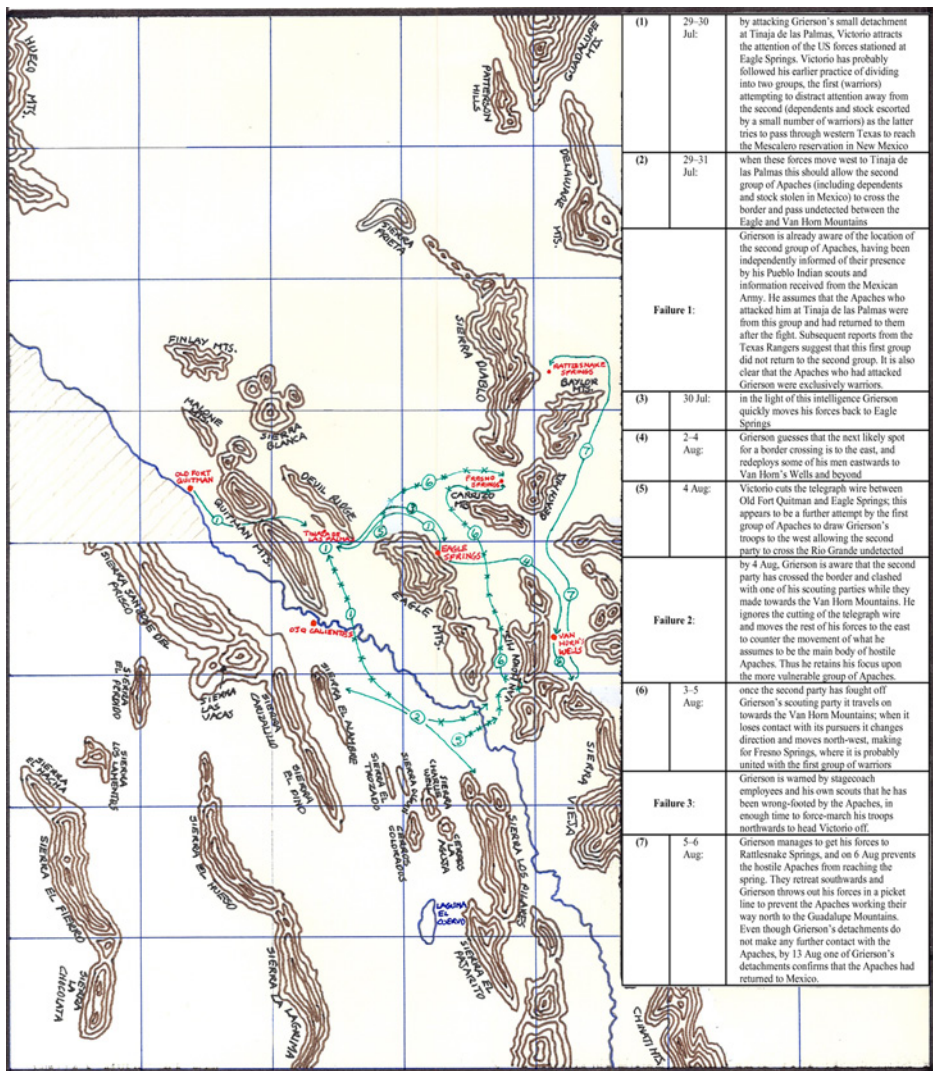


Figure 8. Victorio's failed decoy strategy: western Texas, July–August 1880

Lieutenant Howard Bass Cushing was ambushed and killed in 1871, the decoy deployed by the Apaches was a woman wandering up a canyon giving the impression of not having a care in the world.⁶²

The use of women as decoys was used on at least one occasion during Victorio's war. On 30 January 1880, Captain Louis H. Rucker with Company M, 9th Cavalry,

62 Thrapp and Barney outline a classic example of the attempt to trap a small US detachment commanded by Lieutenant Cushing in 1871. While the trap was detected, Cushing was killed leading his detachment to safety. Thrapp, *Conquest of Apacheria*, pp. 72–7; J.M. Barney,

accompanied by some Hispanic civilians, was pursuing a trail up a canyon from the Rio Grande into the Caballo Mountains. Approximately one mile from the river they were confronted with the sight of three or four women frantically trying to drive off a herd of stolen stock.⁶³ Rucker's men charged the herd, and as they closed in they were suddenly fired upon from all sides of the canyon. Three of Rucker's men were wounded and the captain had to fight a rearguard action with ten to twelve men to cover the precipitous flight of the remainder. The Apache warriors pursued his rearguard all the way back down to the Rio Grande.⁶⁴ The US Army was somewhat less than candid about the details of this skirmish but at least one junior officer in the field admitted that the detachment had 'got the worst of it'.⁶⁵ Rucker acknowledged the loss of one horse killed during the ambush, which is an unusually low horse-casualty rate for an Apache ambush. However, he also gave a detailed account of the number of horses he had ordered to be shot as a result of exhaustion due to Victorio's strategy of drawing the 9th Cavalry into long-distance pursuits over rough terrain:

Jany 24 one horse shot – Jan 26 One horse shot – Jan 27 two horses shot - Feb 1st two horses shot – Feb 5 four horses shot Feb 6 One horse shot These horses were killed on the trail on account of being totally exhausted Jany 30 one horse killed in action. Capt LH Rucker 9th cavly being the responsible Officer. Distance marched during the two months 1001 miles.⁶⁶

Apaches might set up an ambush for three reasons: to drive the enemy off and take plunder, to end a pursuit, or to kill as many of their opponents as possible. Ambuscade, whatever the intent, would ideally be sited, if time allowed, as a result of careful scouting of the target. It would be delivered without any warning at very close range, and in difficult terrain which would allow the Apaches to fade away unharmed should the enemy recover from the shock. If the Apaches were pressed for time, had spotted a target and reached an immediate conclusion that the conditions were ideal, or had been taken by surprise, their intimate knowledge of, and ability to conceal themselves in, the most innocuous-looking terrain allowed them to set up ad hoc versions of the first two categories of ambush. The third category, in which from the outset the intention had been to kill as many of the enemy as possible, was a much rarer occurrence, but was still governed by the basic need to sustain minimum damage. Such an ambush would rarely be arranged on an ad hoc basis but would be a carefully planned affair. In practice, an ambush designed to cripple a pursuit or take loot could be turned into a situation in which the ambush had been so perfectly delivered that the pursuit was stopped and/or plunder taken by their targets being wiped out.

Tales of Apache Warfare: True Stories of Massacres, Fights and Raids in Arizona and New Mexico (Tucson, 1996), pp. 25–7.

63 The newspaper report does not make it clear if this was cattle or horses or both.

64 S.M. Ashenfelter, 'Maj. Morrow's Campaign', *Grant County Herald*, 21 February 1880.

65 Letter dated Tularosa, 11 February 1880, in the Walter Lowry Finley collection, Fray Anjelico Chavez History Library, Museum of New Mexico, Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe.

66 Record of Events, Company M, Jan/Feb 1880, 9th Cavalry Bi-Monthly Muster Rolls, 1879–81, NA, RG94.

The waylaying of Captain Rucker's detachment falls into the second category. The intention was to surprise the enemy and prevent the loss of the Apaches' herd. When Rucker's force failed to stand its ground the Apaches followed up, harassing the rear-guard all the way to the Rio Grande, so allowing those Apaches driving the herd even more time to get clear.

The first blow struck against the US Army by Victorio, after he fled from the Mescalero reservation on 21 August 1879, provides an excellent example of an ambush designed to take the maximum plunder for the minimum loss. This was the stealing of the horse herd belonging to E Company, 9th Cavalry, based at Ojo Caliente, on 4 September 1879. In the aftermath of the attack, in which 46 horses and 18 mules were stolen and their 5 guards were killed, it was acknowledged that the loss had been as a result of a carefully planned ambush. The investigation concluded that the Apaches had watched the horse guards when they left the post to graze the horses for some days. This surveillance had shown that the routine was not varied. An ambush spot was carefully chosen to give the guards no chance of retaliation, out of sight and sound of the garrison quarters at Ojo Caliente, and at a time that would allow the Apaches at least two hours' start before any alarm was raised at the herd's failure to return to Ojo Caliente.⁶⁷ About 15 Apaches were involved in the undetected stalking to positions across the predicted line of march adopted by the horse herders. These men then waited for the guards to move to within easy striking distance before springing the ambush. Other Apaches used the ample cover to surround the herd as it moved into the chosen killing field to prevent any guards from escaping. A final group of mounted Apaches had hidden at the bottom of the canyon and turned back those horses and mules which had attempted to stampede back to Ojo Caliente.⁶⁸

Exactly two weeks later, on 18 September, Victorio's warriors ambushed two companies of the 9th Cavalry, accompanied by four Navajo scouts, somewhere in one of the canyons encompassing the headwaters of the Rio Las Animas in the Black Range Mountains. Two further companies of 9th Cavalrymen and a group of citizen volunteers tried to come to the rescue but got trapped as well. The ambush was sprung in the mid-morning and the trapped men could not free themselves until dusk as a result of the way the Apaches had chosen their positions, which allowed them to pin down their enemies for

67 Captain Charles Steelhammer, Ojo Caliente, to AAAG [Acting Assistant Adjutant General] DoNM, Santa Fe, 11 December 1879, in Letters Received by Headquarters, DoNM, September 1865 – August 1890, NA, RG393, M1088, roll 38, file 1664–2491, July–September 1879. This is a voluminous report covering a number of issues relating to the relationship between the post commander and his men. Yet Steelhammer's report also looks into the circumstances surrounding the loss of the horse herd and reveals in some detail a classic in Apache ambush techniques.

68 Testimony by Lieut. F.B. Taylor, and Captain Steelhammer's concluding statement in Captain Charles Steelhammer, Ojo Caliente, to AAAG DoNM, Santa Fe, 11 December 1879, in Letters Received by Headquarters, DoNM, September 1865 – August 1890, NA, RG393, M1088, roll 38, file 1664–2491, July–September 1879.

as long as daylight lasted.⁶⁹ Despite being trapped for so long, only three 9th Cavalrymen were killed, alongside two Navajo scouts and one civilian volunteer. There was no indication of any casualties among the Apaches.⁷⁰ The real dividend of this action for Victorio was the loss of horses and mules and the abandoning of most of the supplies carried by the cavalrymen and citizens. The 9th Cavalry acknowledged the loss of 53 horses and mules in this engagement,⁷¹ and also reported that all the civilian volunteers had lost their horses.⁷² In the space of one ambush, Victorio had, with no loss to his own followers, crippled all of the detachments from the 9th Cavalry sent in search of him after his flight from the Mescalero reservation. The only other 9th Cavalry detachment stationed in the area had already been neutralized by his raid upon Ojo Caliente on 4 September.

We have already seen the effects upon the 9th Cavalry of the strategic targeting of horses; the ambush on 18 September illustrates the effect of the tactical targeting of horses and mules during an ambush. Horses would often be the chosen targets in the opening volley of an ambush. As in the above instance, once the Apaches had pinned down their opponents, they had hours in which to pick off horses and mules trapped in the canyon. Once the soldiers and citizens had worked their way free of the trap, the Apaches could take all the time they needed to loot the abandoned equipment on the slain horses and mules.

Finally, Victorio managed to spring one of the most devastating ambushes inflicted during the Apache Wars of the 1870s and 1880s when he virtually wiped out two parties of men from the town of Carrizal, Chihuahua, Mexico, in November 1879 (Figure 9). This incident is also unusual in that we have three different sources for this ambush. There are the reports sent in by the Mexican authorities to the US State Department and passed on to the US Army;⁷³ the recollections of George W. Baylor and James B. Gillett, Texas Rangers, who were part of a large Mexican citizen force sent in search of the

69 Morrow to Loud AAAG, 23 September 1879, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [pp. 344–7]; Loud to Hatch, 23 September 1879, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 2, January–December 1879, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [p. 241]. See also McDowell to Commanding General, MDMo, 25 September 1879, ‘Victorio Campaign, Feb. 1879–Nov. 1880’ in ‘Victorio Campaign Special Files’; Loud AAA General to AA General Fort Leavenworth, 23 September 1879, in ‘Victorio File’, roll 526; Pope to AAG MDMo, 24 September 1879, ‘Victorio Campaign, Feb. 1879–Nov. 1880’, in ‘Victorio Campaign Special Files’; Report of Acting Assist. Surgeon Lewis Kennon, in Annual Reports of the War Department, 1880, M997, roll 35, 1880, vol. 1, p. 519; ‘An Account of the Las Animas Fight’, *Thirty Four*, 31 September 1879.

70 Return for September 1879 in Returns from US Military Posts, 1800–1916, Fort Bayard, New Mexico, 1866–December 1879, NA, RG393, M617, roll 87.

71 Loud to Hooker, 29 September 1879, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 2, January–December 1879, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [pp. 255–6]; ‘The Fight on the Animas’, *Weekly New Mexican*, 11 October 1879, in the Walter Lowry Finley collection, Fray Anjelico Chavez History Library. See also Hatch to AAG DMO, Fort Leavenworth, 14 February 1880, in Letters Sent by the 9th Military Department, the Department of New Mexico, and the DoNM, 1849–90, M1072, NA, RG393, roll 6, January 1880–August 1881, letter no. 82, pp. 58–65.

72 *Thirty Four*, 31 September 1879.

73 Scott to Hunter, Second Assistant Sec of State, Washington, DC, 14 November 1879, in Consular Despatches, Chihuahua, Mexico, 1830–1906, NA, M289, roll 1, 30 November 1830–13 May

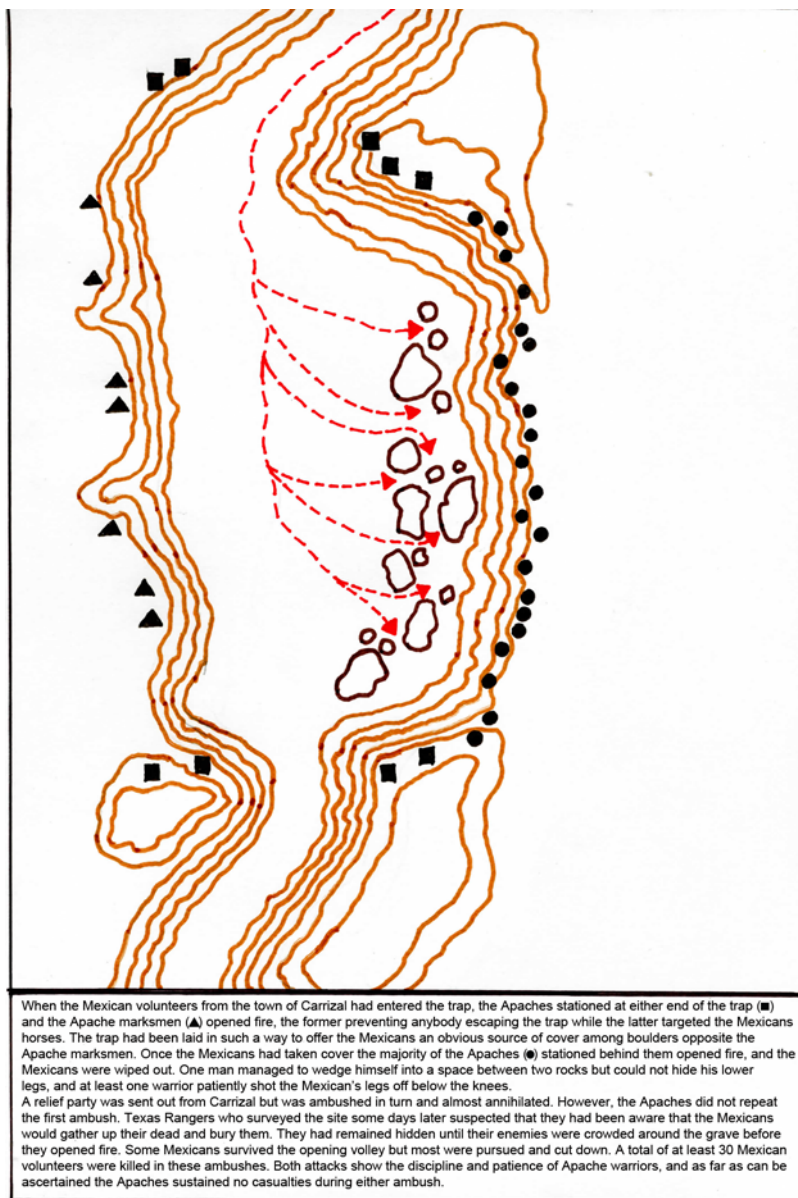


Figure 9. Candelaria Mountains ambush, November 1879

1901; Letters Received by Headquarters, DoNM, September 1865 – August 1890, NA, RG393, M1088, roll 37 (October–December 1879). See also papers relating to the Frelinghuysen-Romero Agreement of 29 July 1882, providing for reciprocal crossings of the international boundary by troops of the United States and Mexico in pursuit of hostile Indians, February 1862 – June 1867; Letters Rec'd by the Office of the Adjutant General (main series), 1881–9, M689, roll 81.

Carrizal men and found their remains;⁷⁴ and the vivid recollection of James Kaywaykla, who as a young boy in Victorio's following witnessed the first of the two ambushes.⁷⁵

The Mexican reports state that the first party of 18 men were killed, though they also state that one man of this first group was wounded. Some 15 men of the second party were also killed before the rest managed to escape. Kaywaykla's account of the ambush mentioned 12 men in the first party. He noted that the horses were shot first and then the men were picked off one by one. The Texas Ranger accounts attest to the patience and minimal-risk approach utilized by the Apaches. The Texas Rangers also thought that the Apaches had remained concealed while the second party prepared the dead for burial, only opening fire when they were presented with a compact group of men around the grave. It is also clear from Kaywaykla's account that, while Victorio directed the ambush, he could rely upon a number of leading men, such as Nana, Sancho, and Kaytennae, to direct individual elements to ensure success. One of the most interesting comments made by Kaywaykla is that, even though the Apaches were confident of success, their horses were hidden and ready to be mounted should anything go wrong. Moreover, during the ambush sentinels had been posted to watch the surrounding country to prevent any other as yet undetected Mexicans from surprising the ambushers.

Attack

If the circumstances were right, usually if an ambush had gone particularly well, the Apaches were capable of launching attacks to drive away or finish off the survivors. If the terrain suited, an infiltration attack could collapse their enemies' morale. Should this collapse fail to materialize, the attack could also be aborted without sustaining casualties by retreating back through the same cover. Such attacks were intended to panic their enemies but not place the Apache attackers in a situation where they could sustain casualties if their opponents remained steady. Infiltration attacks were facilitated by the widespread use of modern breech-loading weapons during the 1870s. Such attacks could be particularly effective as even single-shot rifles could be easily reloaded on the move, allowing the Apaches to maintain a high rate of fire. This could also be used to give the impression of the presence of more Apaches than were actually there and demonstrated a clear appreciation of the role of psychological warfare as a key element of Apache warfare.

The most detailed example of Victorio pressing home an attack can be seen in the fight between Apaches directed by Victorio and Lieutenant John Conline with Company A, 9th Cavalry, in Hembrillo Canyon on 5 April 1880. Conline left a detailed account of the skirmish,⁷⁶ but more importantly the site has been thoroughly surveyed by archaeologists,

74 Lt George W. Baylor to General J.B. Jones, Adjutant General, Austin, Texas, 3 December 1879, 'Victorio Campaign, Feb. 1879–Nov. 1880', in 'Victorio Campaign Special Files'. See also George W. Baylor, *Into the Far Wild Country: True Tales of the Old Southwest* (El Paso, 1996), pp. 287–8; Gillett, *Six Years*, pp. 162–4.

75 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, pp. 12–13 and 15.

76 Record of Events, Company A, 9th Cavalry, March/April 1880, Bi-Monthly Muster Rolls, 1879–81, NA, RG94; Conline, cited in Karl W. Laumbach, Douglas D. Scott and Jim Wakeman, *Conline's Skirmish: An Episode of the Victorio War. Archaeological and Historical Documentation of an*

whose findings indicate that, though detailed, Conline's account fails to show how closely Victorio pressed home the attack (Figures 10 and 11).⁷⁷

The unusual feature of this skirmish is that it did not commence with an ambush but with a direct assault on Conline's company of 29 men and 2 civilian scouts.⁷⁸ It would appear that Victorio and between 35 and 50 Apaches had set an ambush further up the canyon.⁷⁹ Seeing that Conline had halted and sent out a small scouting party, the Apaches weighed the odds and decided to press home an attack. The reasons for doing so were probably threefold: first, Conline was outnumbered by the Apaches; second, he had not, as he claimed in his report, occupied the strongest position; and finally he had failed to secure both flanks to either side of the canyon walls. These factors probably combined to convince Victorio, who was positively identified as directing the Apaches by José Carillo, one of Conline's guides, to launch an attack. Conline's deployment along a low ridge allowed the Apaches to occupy a higher ridge which dominated his left and centre. It also allowed the Apaches to infiltrate to close range using some excellent cover to Conline's front. Most importantly, the failure to cover the dry arroyo to his right allowed some of the Apaches to infiltrate round his flank to threaten his rear and horse herd.⁸⁰

Conline was effectively trapped and was only saved from disaster by a combination of darkness falling and the fact that he and his men showed no signs of breaking. In other words, the Apaches pressed home the attack only to the extent where they would not sustain casualties. When the soldiers did not panic, they did not press home the attack, as this would lead to unnecessary fatalities. The Apaches, having stopped Company A, 9th Cavalry, in its tracks, used the gathering darkness to withdraw up the canyon.

V. Tactical Flexibility

The battle fought over the two days following Conline's skirmish also illustrates the ease with which Apaches led by Victorio could rapidly switch tactics between evasion, ambush, and attack. Captain Henry Carroll, Conline's immediate superior in command of a battalion of four companies of 9th Cavalrymen, led two of his companies (D and F) into the upper reaches of Hembrillo Canyon via an adjacent canyon to the north, while the other two companies (A and G) scouted for another route into Hembrillo Canyon. This allowed Carroll to avoid the route taken by Lieutenant Conline, and his appearance in the upper reaches of the canyon probably caught the Apaches off guard.⁸¹ From the Apache point of view this battle started in the late afternoon of 6 April with an ambush

1880s Skirmish Site on White Sands Missile Range, White Sands Missile Range Environmental Document Archaeology Report no. 481 (prepared for White Sands Missile Range, NM, 2005), pp. 170–2. See also NA, RG94, entry 297, personal file, John Conline, box 279.

77 See Laumbach et al., *Conline's Skirmish*.

78 Ibid., p. 50.

79 On the basis of a visit to Hembrillo Canyon on 23 September 2006, there are a couple of potential ambush positions further up the canyon where Conline's detachment could have been waylaid.

80 Laumbach et al., *Conline's Skirmish*, pp. 50–68.

81 For a detailed survey, see Laumbach, *Hembrillo*.

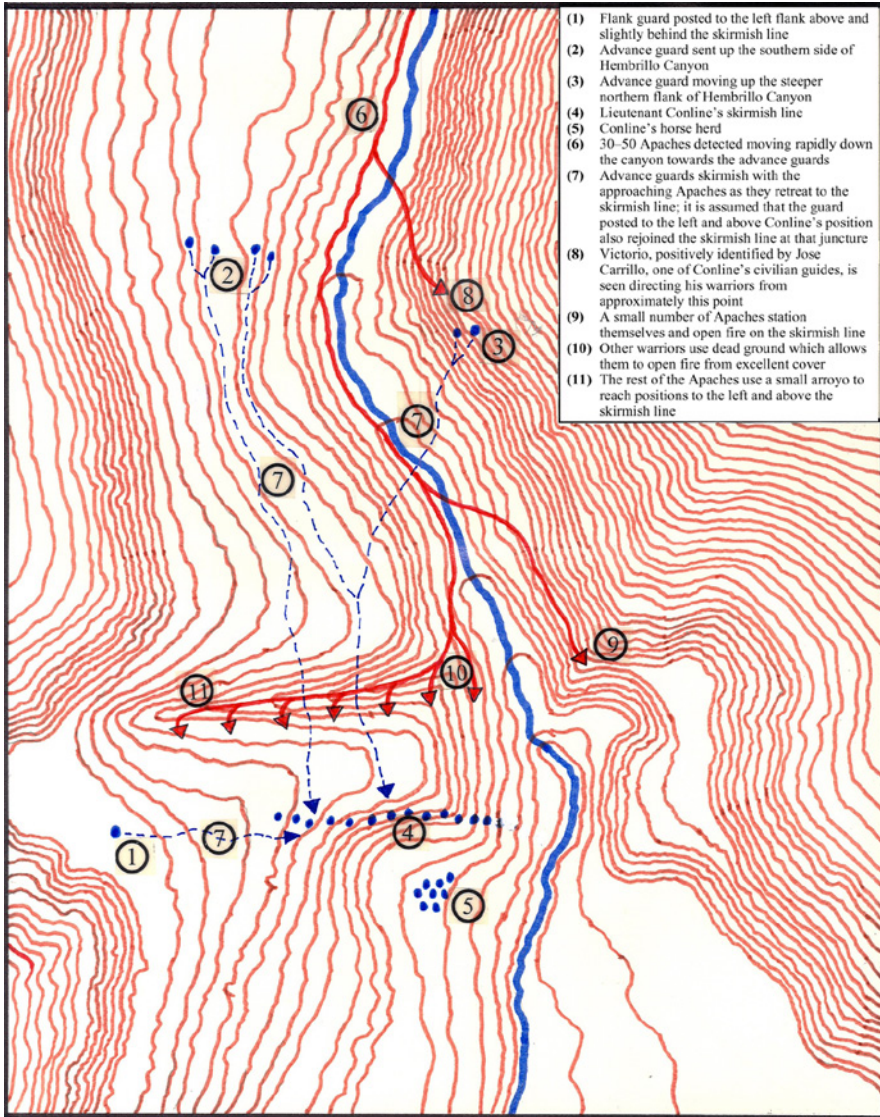


Figure 10. Conline's skirmish, I

Source: derived from a personal visit to the Conline skirmish site, 23 September 2006, and from Karl W. Laumbach, Douglas D. Scott and Jim Wakeman, *Conline's Skirmish: An Episode of the Victorio War. Archaeological and Historical Documentation of an 1880s Skirmish Site on White Sands Missile Range, White Sands Missile Range Environmental Document Archaeology Report no. 481* (prepared for White Sands Missile Range, NM, 2005). Diagram derived from a personal visit to the Conline skirmish site 23 September, 2006 and Laumbach, Scott & Wakeman, 2005.

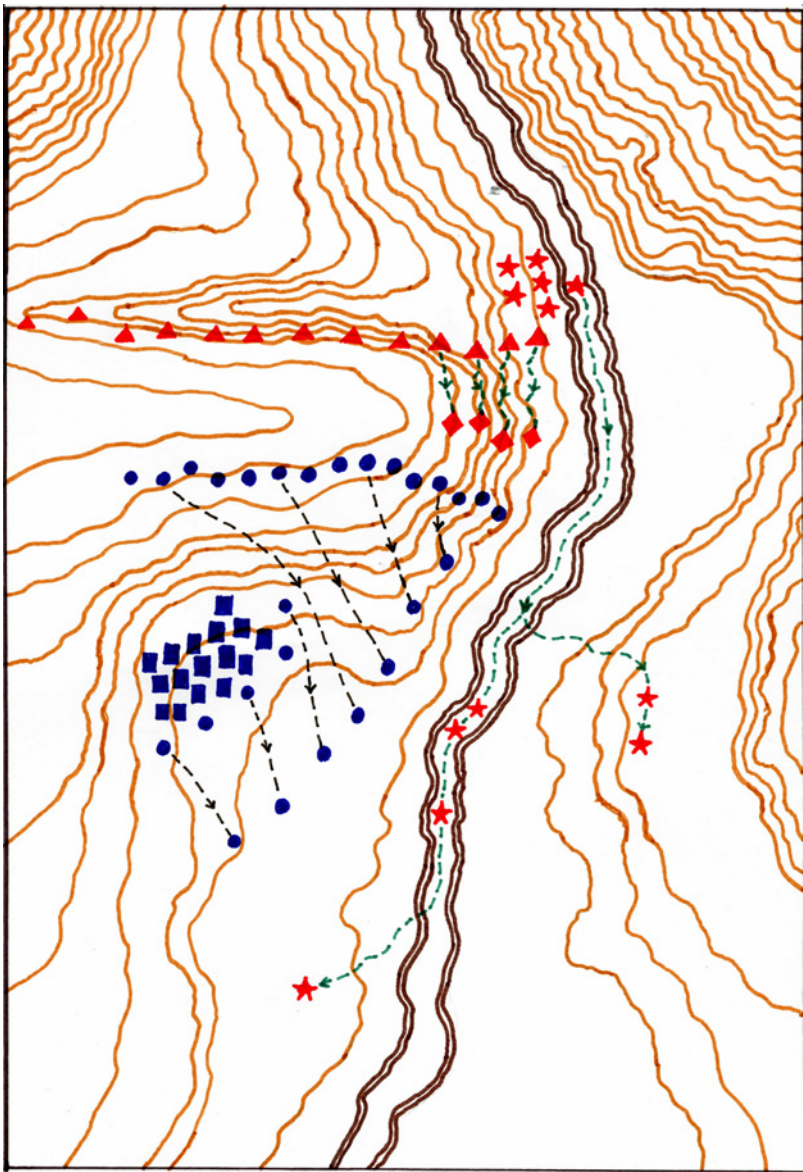


Figure 11. Conline's skirmish, II

Source: as Figure 10.

The 9th Cavalrymen (●) engage the Apaches to their front and left (▲) – at this point the approximate distance between the two groups is 200 yards. Some of these Apaches (◆) infiltrate forward and get to within 30 yards of the skirmish line while still protected by hard cover. This distracts attention from other Apaches (★) who use the dry arroyo bed to work their way round Conline's right flank and into his rear. They bring Conline's horses (■) under fire and force him to weaken his skirmish line to counter this threat. With the cavalrymen trapped, a combination of gathering darkness and the excellent morale of the 9th Cavalrymen persuades the Apaches to break off the engagement and withdraw up Hembrillo Canyon.

in which Carroll's two companies were caught in crossfire from two converging ridges. The cavalymen took possession of the lower end of one ridge but found themselves under fire from Apaches who occupied several higher positions surrounding Carroll's command. Carroll remained trapped overnight and at first light the Apaches went over to the attack, infiltrating towards the trapped 9th Cavalymen. The unexpected arrival of Apache scouts accompanied by a strong detachment of 6th Cavalymen and the remaining two companies of Carroll's command forced the Apaches to regroup quickly and fight a holding action to allow their families and then themselves to evade the newly arrived US troops (see Figure 12).

The fact that the Apaches were able to switch between their three basic elements of warfare, particularly when they had quickly to abort their attack and go on the defensive, suggests that there were a number of Apaches present who knew exactly what they were doing. By the time the relief arrived the Apaches were closing in on Carroll's command. Yet, the Apaches quickly abandoned most of their positions and rallied to their defences on a ridge to the south of Carroll's positions. Here they delayed the US Army's counter-attack for long enough to allow most of the hostile Apaches to escape. As Victorio could not be everywhere while the attack on Carroll developed, the immediate redeployment of the Apaches away from a new threat strongly suggests that Victorio could rely upon a number of leading men who, in this case, recognized a new threat and reacted accordingly. Exceptional Apache leaders, such as Victorio, were able to appeal not only to the loyalty of their own immediate kin but gain the allegiance of other family groups within their tribe owing to their perceived talent. At the same time as Victorio was entrusted with the overall direction of tactics and strategy, this position of authority and high reputation was reinforced by the presence of a number of leading men who had been trained in the same system and could be trusted to act independently when required. The flexibility displayed by the Warm Springs and Mescalero Apaches at Hembrillo Canyon is a testament to this system of leadership, as was the continued resistance maintained by the Warm Springs Apaches after Victorio's death.

VI. Apache Adaptation to 'Alien' Technology

The battle in Hembrillo Canyon also illustrates how the Apaches rapidly and effectively adopted 'alien' knowledge and technology if it enhanced their warfare techniques. Archaeological evidence strongly suggests that Victorio and his men were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual types of breech-loading weapons adopted from their Anglo-American enemies. The distribution of discarded single-shot and repeating rifle cartridge cases supports the argument that the Apaches knew that repeating rifles and carbines, for example Henrys or Winchesters, were more effective at shorter ranges, whereas single-shot rifles and carbines, for example Springfields or Remingtons, were more effective at longer ranges. The archaeological survey of the Hembrillo battlefield showed that Apaches armed with rapid-fire repeating rifles were stationed around a nearby spring to prevent Carroll's men from reaching the water.⁸² There is also evidence that

82 Ibid., pp. 211–12.

some of the Apache warriors who crept towards Carroll's position from Apache Ridge (see Figure 12) carried repeating rifles. These would be ideal for Apaches moving swiftly from cover to cover using them to 'spook' Carroll's men by giving an exaggerated

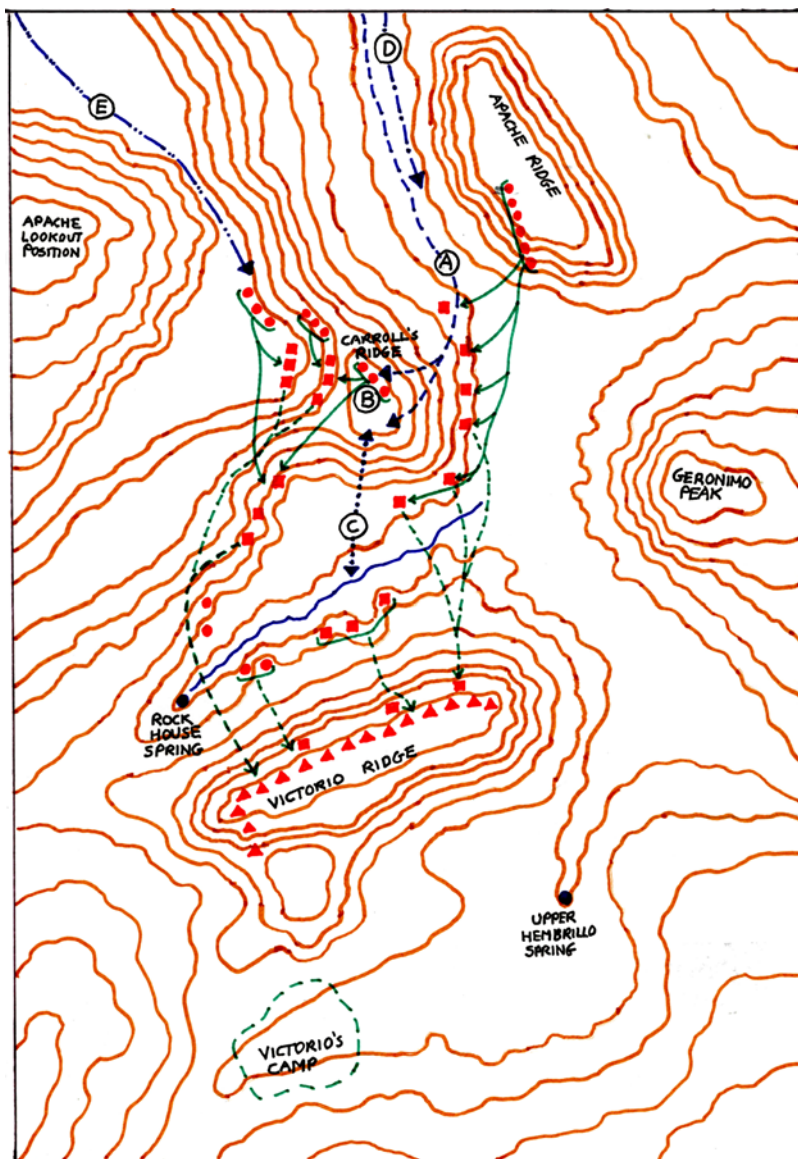


Figure 12. Hembrillo Canyon, 6–7 April, 1880

Source: derived from a personal visit to the Hembrillo site, 23 September 2006, and Karl. W. Laumbach, *Hembrillo, an Apache Battlefield of the Victorio War: The Archaeology and History of the Hembrillo Battlefield* (prepared for the White Sands Missile Range, NM, 2001), maps 24–7, pp. 178–89.

(Continued)

(Continued)

US Army perspective

(A) Two Companies, 9th Cavalry, commanded by Capt. Carroll are caught in an ambush by Apache warriors stationed parallel to and above his intended line of march

(B) The captain directs an attack which drives the Apaches off what is now known as Carroll's Ridge, and they form as best a defensive position as the terrain allows

(C) That night several troopers are wounded while running a gauntlet of fire from Apache warriors picketing the small stream running down from Rock House Spring

(D) At dawn the remaining two companies of Carroll's battalion commanded by Lt Cusack approach from the north

(E) At the same time a combined force of Apache scouts and 6th Cavalry arrives from the north-west. Fresh troops commanded by McLellan and Cusack launch a frontal attack upon the Apache positions on Victorio Ridge while their Apache scouts turn the hostile Apaches' left flank. By late afternoon all hostile Apaches have withdrawn from the battlefield.

Apache perspective

Ambush: the Apaches (●) catch Carroll's command between two positions and station warriors to prevent access to Rock House Spring.

Attack: when the Apaches (■) realise that Carroll's counter-attack has left him in a vulnerable position, they carefully close in upon the trapped cavalymen and reinforce the warriors guarding the water; other warriors occupy the ridges surrounding Carroll's position and harass the troopers with long-range fire.

Evasion: when the Apaches (▲) become aware of the approach of reinforcements from the north and north-west, they retreat from around Carroll's position and form a defensive position along Victorio Ridge before withdrawing when Apache scouts turn their left flank.

impression of their numbers.⁸³ Other Apaches armed with the longer-range single-shot weapons stayed on the higher ridges that dominated Carroll's position, while others took up positions to support those warriors armed with repeaters who were covering the rivulet.⁸⁴

We have already seen how the appreciation of the role of the telegraph lines was part of Victorio's decoy strategy, where a long section of the line was destroyed, leaving an obvious trail to follow from that point (see Figure 3). However, a far more subtle use of the telegraph by Apache guerrillas prevented the rapid transmission of information about their movements. Apaches would cut the line but then tie it together again with rawhide, so necessitating a time-consuming search along the line to identify the break. This tactic was certainly used by the Apaches during the Geronimo campaign of 1885–6.⁸⁵ Yet there is some indication that it may have been deployed by Victorio during 1880. In March 1880, Apaches cut the telegraph line somewhere between Fort Craig and La Mesilla. The military correspondence relating to this incident noted that two soldiers had to be sent from the fort to repair the telegraph. Other troops were sent from Fort Cummings to support this effort. However, a letter from Colonel Hatch to the operator at La Mesilla contains the following: 'your last dispatch shows indications that Repairman is frightened he

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 219 and 224.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 212–13.

⁸⁵ Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 177; Will C. Barnes, 'In the Apache Country', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 620; Odie B. Faulk, *The Geronimo Campaign* (Oxford, 1969), p. 47.

don't know where line is down'.⁸⁶ This could simply mean that the repairman was frightened of Apaches and had refused to look for the break. However, Hatch's choice of words seems an odd way of phrasing this and hinges on the meaning of 'frightened'. It could have been used to indicate that the repairman had already checked the line and had reported that he could not find where the line had been cut.

Finally, both Victorio and his close associate Nana used field glasses or telescopes to enhance their already efficient strategies and tactics. Kaywaykla noted Victorio's use of field glasses to evaluate their foes immediately before the ambush in the Candelaria Mountains.⁸⁷ Nana was seen to carry a first-class telescope less than a year after Victorio's death.⁸⁸

The point was made at the beginning of this article that historians have tended to accept the idea that Victorio was a great leader and have then, in varying degrees of detail, given an uncritical description of the Apache war of 1879–80. Yet what did his contemporary opponents make of Victorio?

US Army officers were keenly aware of the terrible effects on their horses and mules an Apache campaign could inflict.⁸⁹ What is not clear is whether officers such as Hatch and Morrow appreciated that this was a key strategy in Victorio's planning. With limited military resources to hand, Hatch and Morrow may not have had very much option but to engage the Apaches in these long pursuits. Hatch came under some quite poisonous criticism from the territorial press for inaction when he tried to set up a network of supply camps and dumps to allow his troops to remain in the field for longer periods in pursuit of the Apaches.⁹⁰ The result of such pressure was the adoption of dogged pursuit that simply played into Victorio's hands. Colonel Grierson, when confronted with the possibility of facing Victorio in the summer of 1880, lobbied vigorously for a strategy of picketing passes and known waterholes⁹¹ rather than wasting his 10th Cavalrymen in such fruitless pursuits as those undertaken between September 1879 and May 1880 by

86 Letter from Hatch, 20 March 1880, found between pages 29 and 30 in DoNM, General and Special Field Orders, Letters and Telegrams, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 475, vol. 5. See also Loud to AAG, Fort Leavenworth, and to Hatch, Fort Bayard, both 23 March 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January–November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [pp. 237–8].

87 Ball, *In the Days of Victorio*, p. 13.

88 Buck, 'A Talk with Na-na', p. 125.

89 Hatch to AAG DMO, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 25 February 1880, in DoNM, General and Special Field Orders, Letters and Telegrams, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 475, vol. 5. See also slightly edited version in NA, RG94, entry 297, personal file, Albert P. Morrow, boxes 71 and 72; Hatch to AAG DMO, 25 February 1880, in 'Victorio Campaign Special Files'; Hatch to AAG DMO, 25 February 1880, in 'Victorio File', roll 526.

90 'Hatch vs Breech Clouts [Veni Vidi Vici]', *Grant County Herald*, 20 March 1880. See also 'In the Name of the Prophet!', *Grant County Herald*, 27 March 1880.

91 Grierson to Col. Hatch, 19 July 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [pp. 551–3]; Grierson to AAG, San Antonio, 24 June 1880, in Telegrams Sent, 23 June – 30 November 1880, HQ Records of the District of the Pecos, 1878–81, M1381, roll 1, pp. 18–19, letter no. 249; Grierson's Report of the Campaign in Western Texas, July–August 1880, submitted 22 September 1880, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2546, [pp. 639–44]; Dinges, 'Victorio Campaign',

the 9th Cavalry.⁹² However, Grierson's troops had already thoroughly surveyed the country west of Fort Concho, and this area was much smaller than that being covered by the 9th Cavalry in New Mexico.

That Victorio was pursuing such a strategy was certainly appreciated by at least one local news correspondent: 'Victorio pursued a Fabian⁹³ policy. He kills people, loses few men himself, is fierce in battle, cautious in retreat, wears his opponents out, keeps them chasing through the mountains on fruitless errands until their horses become useless, and out generals their generals.'⁹⁴ Victorio's one tactic which could be predicted with a great deal of certainty and was therefore identified at the time as his trademark was the manner in which he quickly fortified his camping sites. During 1879 and 1880 both the US Army⁹⁵ and the Texas Rangers⁹⁶ noted that Victorio selected campsites in the most difficult terrain and that these sites were usually strengthened by the addition of stone breastworks. These were simple affairs where, by stacking a few large rocks on top of one another, Apaches could quickly build secure firing positions often referred to in US Army reports as 'rifle pits'.⁹⁷ As early as 1863 a camp believed to be that of Victorio was assaulted by Union cavalry, and the detachment's commander noted that its location was on 'the most rugged, high and difficult mountains to ascend and pass I ever saw'.⁹⁸

p. 87; Jim Matthews, 'Squarely Fought: Fort Concho and the Campaign against Victorio, 1880', *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* LXIX (1993), p. 37; Frank M. Temple, 'Colonel Grierson in the Southwest', *Panhandle Plains Historical Review* XXX (1957), pp. 49–50; Frank M. Temple, 'Colonel B. H. Grierson's Victorio Campaign', *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* XXXV (1959), pp. 99–100; Douglas D. McChristian, 'Grierson's Fight at Tinaja de las Palmas: An Episode in the Victoria [sic] Campaign', *Red River Valley Historical Review* VII (1982), p. 50.

92 Grierson to AAG, San Antonio, Texas, 28 May 1880, in Telegrams Sent 24 April 1879 – 22 June 1880, HQ Records of the District of the Pecos 1878–81, NA, M1381, roll 1, pp. 267–8, letter no. 173.

93 'Employing a cautiously persistent and dilatory strategy to wear out an enemy': R.E. Allen, ed., *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 8th edn (London, 1991).

94 *Las Vegas Gazette*, cited in 'By Telegraph', *Grant County Herald*, 15 May 1880.

95 Morrow to AAAG DoNM, 5 November 1879, in 'Victorio File', roll 526.

96 Gillett, *Six Years*, pp. 186–7. See also Thrapp, *Victorio*, pp. 264–5 and 312–13; Laumbach, *Hembrillo*, p. 53.

97 Hatch to AAG, Fort Leavenworth, 25 January 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January–November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [p. 77]; Hatch to AAG DMO, Ft Leavenworth, Ks, 23 February 1880, and Hatch to AAG DMO, Ft Leavenworth, Ks, 25 February 1880, DoNM, General and Special Field Orders, Letters and Telegrams, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 475, vol. 5. See also slightly edited version in NA, RG94, entry 297, personal file, Albert P. Morrow, boxes 71 and 72; Hatch to AAG DMO, 25 February 1880, and Hatch to AAG DMO, 16 March 1880, in 'Victorio Campaign Special Files'; Hatch to AAG DMO, 25 February 1880, in 'Victorio File', roll 526; Hatch to AAG DMO, Fort Leavenworth, 5 August 1880, in Letters Sent by the 9th Military Department, the Department of New Mexico, and the DoNM, 1849–90, NA, RG393, M1072, roll 6, January 1880 – August 1881, letter no. 407, pp. 260–8.

98 Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, p. 460.

On balance, while many of his opponents saw Victorio as a dangerous adversary, they do not appear to have seen the need to probe further into his strategies and tactics. This lack of interest was probably born of a combination of lack of time (the under-resourced US Army did not have the personnel available to produce in-depth analysis of Apache warfare) and an often unconscious disbelief that the Apaches' thought processes could be compared with those of US citizens.

The latter phenomenon was later investigated by Grenville Goodwin: 'All too often, "the Apache" has been portrayed as a figure barren of ideology, devoid of values, and somehow – miraculously – exempt from the inevitable constraints imposed by membership in a society. He is a man without culture and therefore he is an impossible man.'⁹⁹ Contemporary opponents usually portrayed the Apaches as expert guerrilla fighters but only as the result of inherent traits.¹⁰⁰ Thus, while they acknowledged the effectiveness of Apache principles of warfare, they simultaneously ignored the thought processes driving these techniques. For example, when reporting a battle between Chiricahua Apaches and the US Cavalry in October 1881, John F. Finerty dismissed the marksmanship of the Apaches but failed to see the significance of the high losses in cavalry mounts.¹⁰¹ It simply did not occur to him that the Apaches could be fighting to a different set of principles from those of the US Army, and that these guidelines were in fact more effective.

Military reports of engagements with Victorio's Apaches, particularly those from Colonel Hatch, claimed regular victories over the Apaches, frequently using words such as 'whipped',¹⁰² 'punished',¹⁰³ or 'routed'.¹⁰⁴ If these reports had been accurate, Victorio's

⁹⁹ Goodwin, *Western Apache Raiding*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Charles P. Elliott, 'An Indian Reservation under General George Crook', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 412; Loring, 'Report on [the] Coyotero Apaches', p. 195; Shipp, 'Captain Crawford's Last Expedition', p. 519; Finerty, 'On Campaign', pp. 242–3; Frederick Lloyd, 'A Profile of the San Carlos Agency', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 326; Clarence Chrisman, 'The Apache Campaign of 1885–1886', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, p. 542.

¹⁰¹ Finerty, 'On Campaign', pp. 257–9.

¹⁰² See for example Hatch to Major J.J. Coppinger, 10th Infantry, Acting Assistant Inspector General, DMO, 26 June 1880, in Letters Sent by the 9th Military Department, the Department of New Mexico, and the DoNM, 1849–90, NA, RG393, M1072, roll 6, Jan 1880 – August 1881, letter no. 310, pp. 201–4; Grierson's Report of the Campaign in Western Texas, July–August 1880, submitted 20 September 1880, Letters Received, 1879–81, MDMo, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2546, [pp. 639–44]; Letter dated Tularosa, NM, 18 April 1880, in the Walter Lowry Finley collection, Fray Anjelico Chavez History Library.

¹⁰³ Hatch to Willcox, 7 October 1879, in 'Victorio File', roll 526; Morrow to Hatch SF, 23 January 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [pp. 532–8]; Hatch to General Willcox, 5 February 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January–November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [pp. 105–6]; Hatch to AAAG, Santa Fe, 8 April 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [pp. 16–17]. See also Hatch to Asst. Adjt Genl, Hdqrs, MDMo, Chicago, 13 April 1880, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2546, [p. 394].

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Morrow to AAAG DoNM, 5 November 1879, in 'Victorio File', roll 526; Letters Received by Headquarters, DoNM, September 1865 – August 1890, NA, RG393, M1088, roll 37, October–December 1879. See also Pope to AAG HQ MDMo, 4 November 1879, in 'Victorio Campaign Special Files'; Hatch to AAAG, Santa Fe, 8 April 1880, NA,

position as leader would have been quickly undermined. Dan L. Thrapp argued that these and other terms were clear misinterpretations of what had actually transpired: 'The word "routed" was the customary euphemism meaning the soldiers had lost contact';¹⁰⁵ 'The Indians "carried off their dead and wounded", which as most Army men know was a euphemism for, "We don't know whether we hit any of them, but at least we hold the field"'.¹⁰⁶

What is far less clear from reading these reports is whether their authors believed that such defeats had been inflicted or were writing with the intention of diverting their superior's attention from less than successful battles and skirmishes. Therefore, the reports in themselves cannot be assumed to be clear examples of failure to understand Apache warfare.

What the records do reveal is that Victorio's leadership skills were not confined to warfare, and that he deployed political skill to great effect while he was living on a US reservation. He minimized contact with the US authorities, and those Anglo-Americans who did have contact with him were few; and those who left accounts of these encounters were even fewer.

VII. Reservation Politics

The key to Apache reservation politics is akin to the patience sometimes employed in their ambush tactics. The Apaches, whether at peace or war, would quietly observe their target and then strike at the most opportune moment. In July 1871, Julian Chavez, a rancher on the Rio Mimbres, tracked some stolen stock to the Warm Springs Apache reservation. He spotted an Apache with a horse that belonged to him and demanded that it be returned. When the Apache refused to return the horse, Victorio and Loco were approached by the reservation agent, Orlanda F. Piper,¹⁰⁷ who asked them to intervene. They soon returned, stating that the Apaches concerned in the raid were threatening armed resistance. The two leaders then stated that, if Piper could furnish 20 soldiers, the stock would be returned. Piper refused, arguing that inviting soldiers on to the reservation would cause all the Apaches to depart.¹⁰⁸

However, the idea that Victorio and Loco could not deal with the threat of resistance on their own territory is unlikely. When disputes between Apaches could not be resolved

RG393, part 3, entry 439, [p. 16]; Loud to AAG, Fort Leavenworth, 9 April 1880, Telegrams Sent, DoNM, vol. 3, January–November 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 431, [p. 294]; McLellan to Post Adjutant, Fort Bowie, 16 May 1880, in 'Victorio File', roll 527; Hatch, General Order no. 9, 7 October 1880, General Orders, Circulars and Court Martial Orders, 1870–81, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 183. See also General Orders no. 9, 7 October 1880, Printed Special Orders, 1869–88, DoNM, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 446.

105 Thrapp, *Victorio*, p. 263.

106 Thrapp, *Conquest of Apacheria*, p. 206.

107 Thrapp, *Victorio*, p. 346 n. 55.

108 Affidavit of Julian Chavez, submitted 4 October 1871, in Correspondence relating to the selection by Vincent Colyer of the Board of Indian Commissioners of sites for Apache Indian reservations at Tularosa Valley and White Mountain, New Mexico Territory, and at Camp Grant and Camp Verde, Arizona Territory, 1871–2; Letters Rec'd by the Office of the Adjutant General (main series), 1871–80, M666, roll 24.

peacefully, particularly over leadership issues, violence was often the solution. Victorio was quite capable of dealing with rivals to his leadership by killing them. He is reported as having done so on at least two occasions: the first was reported in 1876,¹⁰⁹ and the second was the killing of a Mescalero Apache leader in 1880.¹¹⁰ The more likely explanation was that the Apaches, always alert for any weaknesses among potential enemies, had tumbled to the fact that the last thing their agent would do is call on assistance from the US Army. The response of the two Apache leaders placed Piper in a position where, no matter what option he chose, his political authority was undermined. If Piper had chosen to request military aid he would have attracted severe censure from his superiors in the Office of Indian Affairs, part of the Department of the Interior, for giving the US Army grounds to argue that the War Department should be given responsibility for running Indian reservations. His decision not to call in troops undermined any standing with the Apaches, who respected strong leadership, and also undermined the faith local settlers and soldiers had in the reservation system. The immediate political gain for Victorio was the playing off of one enemy against another and the increase of his own political capital among his followers.

Benjamin Morris Thomas, an employee of the Department of the Interior, was the reservation agent on the Warm Springs Apache reservation when it was based at Old Fort Tularosa from 1873 to 1874. His papers provide a dramatic picture of his life as a reservation agent and probably give the most detailed account of an Anglo-American's dealings with Victorio as a reservation leader. Thomas also reported that during this period the older leaders, such as Victorio, Loco, and Nana, were facing a leadership challenge from a faction headed by an Apache known as Pajarito, who was supported by his three brothers.¹¹¹

Thomas started his tenure as agent of the Warm Springs Apache agency when the Apaches had just been moved from their desired Canada Alamosa reservation to Old Fort Tularosa. The agent reported that the Apaches were not happy with this new location.¹¹² The Apaches also resisted efforts to turn them into American citizens and, when drinking tiswin, made the agency almost ungovernable.¹¹³ Thomas further antagonized the Apache leaders by challenging their effective monopolization of the issuing of beef to the Warm Springs Apaches. He also alienated them by trying to reduce the corn ration to prevent the brewing of tiswin.¹¹⁴ In response, the established leaders obviously used the

109 See E.C. Kemble, 'Victorio and His Young Men', in Cozzens, *Eyewitnesses*, vol. I, pp. 203–10.

110 Conrad, South Fork to Post Adjutant, Fort Stanton, 14 November 1880, in Letters Received by Headquarters, DoNM, September 1865 – August 1890, M1088, NA, RG393, roll 41, July–December 1880. See also Buell to AAAG, Santa Fe, 3 December 1880, NA, RG393, part 3, entry 439, [p. 4]; Buell to A.A.A. General, DoNM, 3 December 1880, NA, RG393, part 1, entry 2546, [p. 698]; *Evening Review*, 17 June 1882; Thrapp, *Victorio*, p. 291; Haley, *Apaches*, p. 330.

111 The Pajarito brothers were Pajarito, Pajarito Chiquito, Turevia, and a fourth, unnamed brother. See Benjamin Thomas papers, AC221, box 1, folders 3 and 7, Fray Anjelico Chavez History Library.

112 Thomas, US Indian Agent, Southern Apache Indian Agency, to Dudley, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, New Mexico, 13 January 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

113 Thomas to Dudley, 22 and 31 January and 23 June 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

114 Thomas to Dudley, 8 March 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

increasing hostility between themselves and the Pajarito brothers to test the authority of the agent. The matter was further complicated, at least for Victorio, in that Pajarito was his son-in-law. In an echo of the earlier incident involving Piper, they confronted Thomas and requested that he summon the US Army to deal with the Pajaritos. Thomas refused, arguing that the Apaches were sufficiently armed to deal with this problem themselves.¹¹⁵ His refusal to adopt a leading role was seen as weakness. Within two weeks of his refusal to intervene, intimidation of the agent and his employees by the Apaches forced Thomas to call on the US Army for help.¹¹⁶ Just before this help arrived, two Apaches were killed and two more were wounded by a US Cavalry patrol as they left the reservation.¹¹⁷ Unknown to Thomas, one of the wounded Apaches was a nephew of Victorio. Thomas, on the basis of previous statements made by Victorio concerning his willingness to punish or even kill Apaches who persisted in raiding, was confident that he could order the arrest of the surviving raiders. He summoned Loco and Victorio and demanded that the survivors be arrested. Victorio refused, and on his signal the women and children left the agency while the warriors armed themselves. He then told the agent that if he wanted a fight the Apaches were ready.¹¹⁸ Thomas, having earlier refused to exercise leadership over the Pajarito brothers, now found that, as far as the Apaches were concerned, he had lost all his authority to intervene in their affairs.

What Victorio had not expected was the sudden arrival of 100 8th Cavalrymen and 25 Navajo scouts commanded by Colonel William Redwood Price. After a hostile discussion with Colonel Price, Victorio agreed to hold a further conference the next day but used the time to allow the Apaches to scatter into the hills near the agency.¹¹⁹ Price had the fugitives pursued, and eventually the Apaches were persuaded to return to the reservation. Nana, who had been absent from the reservation, allegedly visiting the Chiricahua reservation around Fort Bowie, returned and offered to help to calm the situation. Thomas blamed Victorio for this trouble and replaced him with Loco as the leading chief on the reservation.¹²⁰ However, subsequent events suggest that Nana and Loco still regarded Victorio as the leading man among the Warm Springs Apaches. Yet Victorio, Nana, and Loco also appreciated that, if Thomas gained the impression that Victorio had lost his prestige among the Apaches, Victorio's position would be eased. The feud with Pajarito, who, as far as Thomas was concerned, was part of Victorio's following, presented Victorio, Loco, and

115 Thomas to Dudley, 14 June 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

116 Thomas to Dudley, 26 June 1873; Thomas to Dudley, 11 July 1873; Thomas to Dudley, 25 July 1873; Thomas's Monthly Report for July 1873, submitted 7 August 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

117 Thomas's Monthly Report for July 1873, 7 August 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

118 Thomas to Price, 24 July 1873; Thomas to Dudley, 25 July 1873; Thomas's Monthly Report for July 1873, submitted 7 August 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers; Price to Act. Asst. Adjt. General, DoNM, 25 July 1873, in Letters Received, DoNM, RG393, M1088, R19 (hard copy of document kindly supplied by Berndt Kuhn, Stockholm, Sweden).

119 Thomas to Dudley, 25 July 1873; Thomas's Monthly Report for July 1873, submitted 7 August 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers; Price to Act. Asst. Adjt. General, DoNM, 25 July 1873, in Letters Received, DoNM, RG393, M1088, R19 (hard copy of document kindly supplied by Berndt Kuhn, Stockholm, Sweden).

120 Thomas's Monthly Report for July 1873, submitted 7 August 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

Nana with the perfect opportunity to remove a rival while simultaneously distracting Thomas's attention away from Victorio. Shortly after Thomas had deposed Victorio, the agent reported that Loco, Nana, and their followers had finally confronted Pajarito. The latter had stated his intention to leave the reservation to raid and was opposed by Loco. In the close-range battle which followed, Pajarito and his brother Pajarito Chiquito were killed. A third brother, Turevia, was critically wounded, and the fourth unnamed brother was slightly wounded. Several other Apaches were also wounded, including Victorio, who received an arrow wound in the face. Thomas reported that the defeat of the Pajarito brothers had further undermined Victorio's position among the Warm Springs Apaches and that Loco was proving to be a much better leader than Victorio.¹²¹ He also noted that after this fight the rest of the Warm Springs Apaches appeared to be settling their differences amicably.¹²² Thomas clearly thought that Loco and Nana, in dealing with the Pajarito brothers, had also been settling a dispute over the leadership with Victorio.

Thomas's interpretation of these events is inaccurate. The challenge over leadership was almost certainly between, Victorio, Nana, and Loco, on the one hand, and the Pajarito brothers, on the other. Later events which make clear that Victorio, Nana, and Loco had a good working relationship suggest that the aftermath of this fight was, in modern political parlance, 'spun' in such a manner as to fool Thomas completely. If Thomas had been correct in his assumptions, Victorio would have been the prime target in any fighting that erupted. Pajarito had mounted a leadership challenge and had lost out to the established leadership. However, Victorio may have been politically reluctant to take the lead against a member of his own immediate family, and thus Loco and Nana initiated hostilities. This leadership issue also allowed the Apaches to test Thomas's own leadership, and, when he was found wanting, his loss of respect led to the confrontation between the agent and Victorio over the arrest of some raiders. It must have been clear to Victorio, Nana, and Loco that, after the surprise arrival of Colonel Price's detachment, Victorio was being blamed for the unrest. The killing of Pajarito was simultaneously presented to the agent as reinforcing Thomas's earlier formal demotion of Victorio.

By his own admission, within nine months Thomas was once more consulting Victorio over issues which concerned the Warm Springs Apaches as a whole.¹²³ Joseph H. Ware, a member of the garrison at Fort Tularosa at the time, strongly implied that, while Loco occupied the official position as headman, the position was actually held by another man. Unfortunately Ware fails to identify this man by name.¹²⁴

VIII. Conclusion

While Victorio was clearly an outstanding practitioner and innovator of Apache principles of war, he could only aspire to such heights by dint of the training and discipline instilled

121 Thomas to Dudley, 30 August 1873; Thomas to Dudley, 3 September 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

122 Thomas to Dudley, 3 September 1873, Benjamin Thomas papers.

123 Thomas to Dudley, 18 April 1874, Benjamin Thomas papers.

124 Joseph H. Ware vs. the U.S. & Apache Indians, Depredation Claim no. 4584, 16E3/3/6/5, box 375.

in those Apaches who accepted his leadership. He also had a number of very competent lieutenants who, after his death, were able to continue the fight for a reservation at Ojo Caliente. Thus, while Victorio could direct his brilliant guerrilla campaign, he could do so only because Apache culture had produced in his followers people he could rely upon to carry out his strategic and tactical plans without having to be constantly supervised. They did not always make the right decisions, but the close-knit nature of Victorio's following made them formidable opponents. The successful leader was the focal point for a group of people who knew exactly what they had to do in order to survive.

The ideas of psychologist Jean Piaget concerning the development of abstract reasoning or formal operational thinking from childhood to adulthood may facilitate our understanding of the Apache guerrilla in general and of Victorio in particular.¹²⁵ A study of the thinking processes behind hunting practices of Bushmen in Africa showed that activities essential to a society's survival provide the focus for the development of Piaget's highest levels of abstract reasoning.¹²⁶ The key endeavour of Chiricahua Apache society was survival through the arts of hunting, gathering, raiding, and warfare. Thus, where warfare was concerned, the Apaches focused their formal operational thought into achieving success through guerrilla warfare. This encouraged the rise of particularly talented practitioners of these arts to positions of authority.

The mere fact that Victorio reached a position of such high leadership marks him out as outstanding. Moreover, if the archive material produced by employees of and correspondents to the Departments of the Interior, War, and State, the memories recorded by participants from all sides, the reportage produced in the territorial press, and recent archaeological evidence are all combined with an understanding of the basic principles of Apache warfare techniques, a very detailed picture of how and why Victorio was one of the greatest leaders produced by the Chiricahua Apaches emerges. His development of tactics and strategies designed to exploit to the maximum key weaknesses of his opponents helped him to maintain his resistance for so long. His strategic and tactical use of both decoys and the targeting of his opponents' horses were particularly effective in crippling the US Army's attempts to defeat him. Yet Victorio was more than just a specialist in guerrilla warfare. Even at the height of hostilities, he was willing to consider peace, as two attempted parleys between him and Major Morrow in January 1880 illustrate. During his years as a reservation leader he was a proficient politician who was more than willing to exploit the evident divisions between the Departments of the Interior and War for the benefit of his people. He was also supported by a network of leading men, such as Loco and Nana, who, when events did work against Victorio, could quickly step in to retrieve the situation. All this combines to present a clearer picture of the talents which produced such an extraordinary leader, whose influence on the history of the Apache Wars is, even today, not given the credit he richly deserves.

125 David R. Shaffer, *Developmental Psychology: Childhood and Adolescence*, 5th edn (London, 1999), pp. 251–5.

126 S.R. Tulkin and M.J. Konner, 'Alternative Conceptions of Intellectual Functioning', *Human Development* XVI (1973), pp. 35–6, cited in *ibid.*, p. 255.