

7-1-1926

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F. S. Curtis Jr.

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### Recommended Citation

Curtis, F. S. Jr.. "The Influence of Weapons on New Mexico History." *New Mexico Historical Review* 1, 3 (1926). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol1/iss3/6>

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**THE INFLUENCE OF WEAPONS ON NEW MEXICO HISTORY**

F. S. Curtis, Jr.

Of the many factors which have brought about the events we call history, the influence of weapons has perhaps received the least attention. The history of New Mexico, as it happens, furnishes rather an interesting picture of both the development of weapons and certain very curious phases of the effect of that development upon human events.

The original inhabitants of New Mexico, of course, present a complete and perfect example of the weapons of prehistoric man, and here, longer than anywhere else, these primitive weapons continue to exist and be used in constant association with the latest products of the armorer's invention. The pre-Spanish period, moreover, presents an interesting historical problem which can be given, in the present state of our knowledge, nothing better than a hypothetical solution, but for which the factor of weapons can offer an interesting and reasonably probable hypothesis.

The problem itself is simple: if, as certain archaeologists assert, the Pueblo civilization was declining at the Spanish Conquest, what was the cause of the decline? There is little evidence of loss of energy or population through epidemics. The migrations of which we know were merely from one site to another within the Pueblo area. Religion made no demands for human sacrifice. Agriculture does not seem to have suffered any really formidable calamities, so that continued famine would not seem to be the cause. The architecture and arrangement of the towns seems to have been most appropriate for the defensive tactics which had for centuries protected the Pueblos from their marauding enemies. What, then, is a reasonable solution? The one which occurs most readily to a student of the mechani-

cal side of history is that one or more of the hostile tribes had developed a bow of greater range and accuracy than that of the Pueblos, and were thus enabled to overwhelm the weaker towns and to reduce the man-power of the stronger ones to a point where the production of food and the maintenance of security occupied so much of the population that there was not time for cultural development or even the preservation of the culture of former times.

The most obvious instance of the effect of weapons on the history of the state is, naturally, the Spanish Conquest. In the period between 1540 and 1599 we see small bodies of Spaniards roaming at will over the entire Southwest, and finally assuming mastery of an enormous empire, all in the face of an incredibly disproportionate native population, whose love of liberty and whose courage in battle were inferior to those of no race on earth. Superiority of weapons, and that alone, made such exploits a possibility. It was the Stone Age against the Age of Metal and of Gunpowder, and the Stone Age had no recourse but submission or flight. Against stone-tipped arrows and lances, obsidian daggers, stone-headed clubs, and the propelling force of the human arm alone, the Spaniards opposed steel-tipped arrows and lances, steel swords and daggers, and the propelling force of gunpowder. Against the buffalo-hide shield the Spaniard could match complete armor of steel, and the defensive powers of the two are comparable only in ridicule. It is true, of course, that the Spanish armor could be pierced at sufficiently short range - Villagr a's account of the death of Juan Zald var assures us of that much - and it is also true that it could be crushed if the wearer ventured to points where great rocks could be dropped upon him, but for every Spaniard so wounded, there were five hundred Indians struck down for lack of adequate defense against the Spanish weapons. It is also true that the Spanish fire-arms - wheellocks or matchlocks, as they were - were uncertain of operation, fearfully inaccurate,

and capable of no more than one or two shots per minute, while such cannon as were capable of transportation were of small size and little real use, but against such weapons as the Indians had they were enough, and the fact was only too clear to the Indians, so that in all the period of conquest we find but four important battles recorded. The first two of these, Coronado's battles at Zuñi and Tiguex, were sufficient proof of Spanish prowess to subdue all opposition for more than fifty years. The third, the first of the fights at Acoma, was an Indian triumph, but due far more to Spanish carelessness and mismanagement than to any other factor. The hopes it had raised, however, were quickly crushed in the terrific three-day battle in which Vicente Zaldívar, with no more than eighty men, not only avenged his brother, and restored the prestige of Spain, but reduced the population of Acoma to a bare six hundred, and from that time onward for eighty-three years the Pueblo Indian remained at peace. Courage he had, in abundance - the fight at Acoma was one of the most furious and most gallant of the whole history of America - but courage against superior machinery of war is of little use, and the Pueblo Indian was wise enough to face the fact.

The nomadic Indians, on the other hand, furnished a problem which the Spaniard never solved in full, and one which took the American many years of the very most strenuous effort to settle permanently. Faced with the problem of surrender or flight, he chose flight, for unlike the Pueblo, he had nothing to lose, no home to defend, and not even the desire for a fixed place of residence. War was his industry and his diversion, and the Spaniard meant no more than a new enemy who had to be dealt with more cautiously than the old. To the Spaniard this type of enemy was a really serious problem. To subdue him was impossible, for the heavily-armed Spaniard could not, either afoot or on horseback, come to grips with an enemy who would not wait for him, and who could escape him nine times out of ten, because of superior speed. To settle over

wide areas in the face of such an enemy was equally impossible, for his sudden raids, delivered without the slightest warning and always against the least protected, gave no chance for defense or for battle. The only solution, and that which the Spanish adopted, was much the same as the Pueblos had chosen centuries before, the concentration of population around a few strong and well-defended towns where the superiority of their weapons could be used for defense at least. Here, then, we find the reason why New Mexico remained so long a region of towns instead of farms, a region where the gap between rich and poor was so wide, where peonage and illiteracy flourished, and where feudalism outlived its time because the necessity which created feudalism in Europe was still alive in America.

A further (and a very wise) measure of the Spanish government was a law, couched in stringent terms, and carried out with the utmost care, forbidding the sale of weapons to the Indians. That this law was really effective may be seen from two instances where it did not apply, one the massacre at Tomé by Comanches who had secured firearms, the other, the terrible defeat of Don Pedro de Villasúr in the battle on the Platte River in 1719, where the opposing forces - Indians and a few Frenchmen - were fully equipped with firearms, and from which only six men returned, a force representing over half the garrison of Santa Fé having been left dead on the field of battle.

The Pueblo Revolution is a further and an impressive exhibit in the case of the weapon in history for several reasons. The last great effort of the Pueblo Indian against the domination of the Spaniard, there can be little doubt that a large part of the determination to revolt came from the gradual acquisition, piece by piece, of such small store of weapons as gave ground for the feeling that the advantage held by the Spaniard was at least reduced to the point where a favorable outcome could reasonably be expected. The early results, moreover, were quite in accordance with first expectations, and the hearts of the Pueblos, as well as

their hands, must have been greatly strengthened by the first tide of success, which had overwhelmed every settlement in New Mexico except Ysleta and Santa Fé as well as placing in the hands of the Indians a supply of nearly three hundred hackbusses, not to mention swords, lances, and other steel weapons. That the Spaniard should have been so stricken is due to no fault of the weapons they possessed, but rather to that wise planning of the Indians which gave no opportunity for resistance. No time was given for the Spaniards to arm; no chance offered for one town to assist another - save for the expedition of García from Ysleta to Jemez - and only the strong points of Santa Fé and Ysleta withstood the storm.

That these two should have been able to survive the first shock, and later to remove to a place of safety through a country swarming with the enemy, is due partly to their weapons and partly to the reputation which the Spaniard, armed and prepared for battle, had made in the past. At the Siege of Santa Fé Governor Otermín with a bare 155 men fit for service (and of these, to quote his own records, "only thirty-six having complete armor, and the most part afoot, and with bad or broken hackbusses, and without even leathern jackets for their protection"), defended a total population of 2500 souls against the attack of more than three thousand fighting men, the figures themselves giving a clear picture of the great weight that armament cast into the Spanish side of the scale.

Between the Revolution and the Reconquest we find an interesting division of mind taking place among the victorious Indians. With some the victories of the Revolution seem to have had such influence that they felt themselves invincible. Others, however, saw most clearly the failure to destroy the Spaniards under Otermín and García, and realized that armed opposition to the Spaniards in arms was as hopeless as ever. Those of the first opinion, regardless of their shortage of ammunition and lack of skill with the arms they had acquired, remained in their

towns before the expedition of Otermín and Cruzate, and the result was exactly what might have been expected. Otermín took Ysleta and Cruzate took Zía, each with little loss, but with terrible slaughter of the enemy. For either governor to proceed further in the work of Reconquest, however, was impossible because of a number of factors of which not the least was the course followed by those wiser Pueblos, who, realizing the futility of open combat, borrowed the tactics of their enemies of the Apachería, left their towns for the recesses of the mountains, and harassed the Spaniards by sudden raids upon small foraging parties, by stampeding their horse-herds, and by a thousand other stratagems each insignificant in itself, but helping to swell a total that barred out the Spaniards as effectively as an actual defeat.

The inherent nature of the Pueblo, however, coupled with his native enemies, soon brought matters back to their former status. As a roving nomad, even though his roving was confined within very small limits, the Pueblo was not a success, for he was neither able to make himself comfortable, nor to repel the attacks of the truly nomadic tribes, without the assistance of his adobe village; and it was but a short time before he returned to his accustomed dwelling, prepared, for the most part, to submit peaceably when the Spaniard returned, exchanging a precarious liberty for a certain safety and relative comfort. At the coming of De Vargas some few made one last effort at resistance, but Santa Fé and the pueblo on the Potrero Viejo were soon taken, with the usual terrific losses on the part of the Indians, and only the kindness of De Vargas - perhaps supplemented by a shortage of ammunition - saved the refugees on the Mesa of San Ildefonso from a similar fate. So, then, the Reconquest ended, and the problem of Spanish settlement had been finally solved, with superiority of weapons aiding in no small degree to the solution.

The problem of expansion in the face of roving tribes was, as already stated, one which the Spaniards never en-

tirely settled, and in the hundred and fifty-odd years between the Reconquest and the Civil War the failure to settle it kept New Mexico in virtually a feudal state of civilization, the feudal parallel being carried to its fullest extent by the great land-grants made to men and families whose reputation as Indian fighters stood highest.

In this same area at least two great occasions arose on which superiority of weapons might have played a great part, but in both cases a recourse to arms was avoided by purely diplomatic means, one instance being the Texas-Santa Fé Expedition, in which the astute conduct of Governor Armijo avoided a clash where Texas rifles might have altered New Mexico history to a remarkable extent, and the other the capture of New Mexico by General Kearney, in which the same Armijo was - well, persuaded - that resistance to the well-armed troops of the United States was profitless. A view in miniature of what might have happened on the two occasions is offered by a number of minor incidents in which the rifle contended against the smooth-bore, and among these Lobato's defeat at the hands of "Snively's Avengers" and the fight at Turley's Mill during the Taos Rebellion are worthy of mention. Lobato's battle was of short duration, but of some effect, his small force, though nearly equal to Snively's, being gobbled up with such celerity that General Armijo, who had intended to destroy Snively with the main body of his troops, suddenly decided that Santa Fé was a far better military position than the one he then occupied, and translated his decision into action with commendable promptness. In the Turley's Mill fight eight men armed with rifles and well supplied with ammunition held out for two days and a night against a force of rebels amounting to well over five hundred, and at the end of that period, their ammunition being exhausted, three of the eight fought their way out.

The Taos Rebellion as a whole furnishes further proof, if such is needed, of the wisdom of Armijo in refusing to meet the forces of Kearney, and illustrates the ability of



the American forces to compel submission through superiority of armament. In the three battles of La Cañada de Santa Cruz, Embudo, and the Pueblo de Taos the enemy invariably occupied a superior position, and probably outnumbered the Americans actually engaged yet in all the enemy was defeated completely and remarkably quickly, since the actual time consumed by all three seems to have been very little more than four hours, most of which was consumed at the battle at the Pueblo.

By no means to be forgotten is the fact that the commerce of the Santa Fé Trail, which not only aided greatly in the financial support of the state at a time when such support was a vital necessity, but also called the attention of the United States most strongly to the Southwest, was maintained and made possible by the rifle. Here was the beginning of the solution of the problem of the roving Indian, for despite his invariable willingness to try to capture some part of the immense wealth that rolled across the plains under his very nose, the rifles of the waggons and their escort rendered his efforts useless in all but a minimum of cases, and these cases in which the number of travellers - and consequently the booty obtained - was so small as to make the cost quite disproportionate to the returns.

Except for questions of mere probability the Civil War in New Mexico offers little from the viewpoint of this paper. That the Southern forces operating in New Mexico must have been better armed than the majority of the Confederate Army we know, because the surrender of General Twiggs in Texas, and the capture of Forts Fillmore and Stanton, of Major Isaac Lynde's command, and of the Depot at Albuquerque necessarily placed in their hands large quantities of the small arms and artillery of the Regular Army, so that the troops under Canby, including the New Mexico Militia, could have had very little superiority in regard to weapons, if, indeed, they possessed any. The Colorado Volunteers, however, may well have had some of

the newer type of rifle which the Federal Government had adopted in '61 and '62, as they were equipped at Fort Union, a point in relatively direct communication with the centers of manufacture, and one which the government was making every effort to supply in expectation of an impending attack. Further plausibility is gained for such an idea from the fact that when the Colorado troops met Sibley's forces in the battles near Apache Cañon the triumphant advance of the Confederates not only met its first serious check, but was turned back into a retreat that very soon took on the aspects of a rout, ending all possibility of a conquest of New Mexico by the Confederacy.

Another question, however, immediately took the place of this one, and continued to occupy the energies of both State and Federal governments for nearly twenty-five years of practically continuous effort. Even before the defeat of Sibley the concentration of Federal troops had left many outlying points undefended, and the hostile tribes had been quick to take advantage of the situation. After the menace of the Confederate invasion had been removed the National forces in New Mexico were reduced to a minimum, and the hostiles became even bolder, with the result that the New Mexico troops and such units as the War Department had left in the state were almost constantly occupied by punitive expeditions to all points of the compass. Nor did the surrender at Appomatox mean peace for New Mexico, for though the end of the Civil War enabled the government to send aid with a liberal hand, and though that aid was continued until the necessity was over and was sent at an expenditure that seems incredible, the fighting continued sporadically until the very threshold of the 20th century. The causes for so prolonged a struggle are naturally many and varied, among them the isolation of the field of action, the extreme difficulty of the terrain, and the extraordinary military abilities of the enemy (the Apaches in particular having proved themselves perhaps the most efficient body of fighters the world has ever seen) but the

factor which most concerns us at present is that of fire-arms, and in this particular situation the firearms factor functioned largely as both a cause and a solution.

In the years following the American occupation the hostile tribes first began to get a supply of modern weapons, and from that time until the end this supply was constantly on the increase. The Government itself, at various times, issued guns to Indians on Reservations, troubling itself very little over the fact that the Reservation Indian of today was only too likely to be the hostile of tomorrow, and that the possession of a practical firearm was of itself a strong temptation to the warpath. The gun-runner flourished like the green bay-tree, and both his mode of life and his occasional death at the hands of his customers were regarded as uproariously funny by the average settler. That the arms furnished the Indians, whether by Government or gun-runner, were obsolete is quite true; the Indian got most of his really good weapons by capture; but after two hundred and fifty-odd years of fighting the white man and studying the tactics best adapted for his ruin the Indian did not need any advantage in weapons to make trouble. Any gun that would go off with reasonable regularity was quite sufficient for Indian purposes, and was more than good enough from the point of view of settler and soldier.

With the Indian possessed of modern arms, then, in addition to his other military equipment, the white man was really hard pressed, and for his defense he called upon every resource he could use, both military and mechanical. Of the military men we hear much. The names of Carson, Chavez, Crook, Howard, Eugene A. Carr, and a dozen others, are familiar to every student of the Indian Wars, and almost everyone has some idea as to the identity of the men named. The inventors, however, are far different. The Kawpens, Christian Sharp, Tyler Henry, Winchester, Hotchkiss, Colt, Remington, Spencer and Lee - some few of these names, perhaps, suggest great corporations and the making of money, none the making of history, yet had it not been for the inventive genius of these

men and many more in the making of ever better weapons of ever greater range, accuracy and rapidity of fire, our state might still be struggling to attain domestic peace and security with the goal not yet in sight. The hours spent in the workshop by a few men have shortened a hundred for one the hours spent on the battlefield by thousands of their fellow-citizens, and throughout the whole of New Mexico's history there has been standing, far off in the background, unseen and unheeded, the grimy figure of a man with the clever fingers of the mechanic and the dreamy eyes of the inventor, watching that history work out its course, its tools the weapons he has fashioned.