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COLONEL BUELL'S EXPEDITION INTO MEXICO IN 1880

By COLONEL MARTIN L. CRIMMINS

THE disruption of our Indian policy caused by the Civil War left an aftermath of murders and misery in our Southwest.

The Mescalero Apaches had been rounded up by Colonel Kit Carson in 1863 and placed on the Bosque Redondo Reservation, near Fort Sumner in east central New Mexico. Then through the criminal stupidity of our State Department a more powerful, unfriendly tribe, the Navajoes, were put on the same reservation. It was like putting a bunch of cats in a cage and adding a pack of dogs. In 1864 the agent reported that sixty-four of the Navajos had been killed by the Apaches in two fights.

By 1867, all the Mescaleros had left the reservation to go on the warpath in New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico. We caused what we planned to prevent. General John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri, reported by name twenty-two people killed and three thousand head of livestock stolen by Indians.

In February 1871, La Paz and a small band of Mescaleros came to Fort Stanton, New Mexico, and sued for peace and were put on the Mescalero Reservation nearby.

In 1874, W. D. Crothers, their Indian agent, reported that white thieves were stealing Indian ponies. This was in the country soon to be made famous by Billy the Kid and his outlaws. A band of citizens attacked an Indian camp one night near the Pecos and killed the men, women, and children. The sale of bad liquor to the Indians by white traders kept trouble stirred up.

Victorio, with his Warm Spring Apaches, was on the Ojo Caliente Reservation about sixty-five miles south of San Marcial and Fort Craig, New Mexico. In March 1877, they

were disarmed and were being moved to San Carlos Reservation.¹ They soon broke loose and again went roaming. On March 15, 1879, S. A. Russell, the Indian agent on the Mescalero Reservation, found Victorio and his Warm Spring Apaches camped on his reservation.

Shortly afterwards they went on the warpath and this time they were joined by about two hundred and fifty Mescaleros. They left a trail of blood that, it is said, cost four hundred lives among the Americans and Mexicans. General Pope reported seventy-three citizens killed in this outbreak, with the name and date in most cases. W. W. Mills, in his *Forty Years at El Paso* wrote on September 24, 1880, as follows about Victorio: "Considering the number of his braves, he is the greatest commander, white or red, who ever roamed these plains. For more than a year he has outmaneuvered our officers with six times his number and all the appurtenances of war and when he has not outgeneraled them, he has whipped them."

During this period the Military Department of Texas was divided into five sub-districts, one of which, the district of the Pecos, lay in "West Texas" and included Forts Concho, Davis, Stockton, and Griffin. It was commanded by Colonel B. H. Grierson (mentioned below) who in the summer of 1880 successfully repelled Victorio and his band, driving them from the Big Bend country back into Mexico. The stage was then set for the closing scene in the drama of the Apache chief Victorio.²

1. See John P. Clum, "Geronimo," in *NEW MEX. HIST. REV.*, III, 1-40, for an account of this transfer.

2. Carl C. Rister gives an excellent account of the Texan phase in the operations of this summer in his chapter on "The Victorio War," in *The Southwestern Frontier, 1865-1881*, but he barely alludes to the New Mexico phase, which is here described. On the other hand, as will be seen, Colonel Buell correctly represents Grierson as cooperating in the Big Bend country by keeping the Apache fugitives out of that part of the frontier.

George Pearson Buell was a native of Indiana and served with distinction as a commissioned officer during the Civil War. In 1866 he was appointed lieutenant colonel of the 29th Infantry, and in 1869 was transferred to the 11th Infantry. In March, 1879, he was made colonel of the 15th Infantry, in which position he served until his death on May 31, 1883.

The following report of Colonel Buell shows what steps were taken by our troops in New Mexico to apprehend Victorio and his Indians. I have not seen it published before, and it was in manuscript when I saw it in the Old Files Section of the Adjutant General's Office.

Extracts from Report of Colonel George P. Buell, 15th Infantry, Commanding Post of Fort Stanton, New Mexico, Dated November 20, 1880:

About September 15th, arrangements had been completed with Colonel Terrazas and Chihuahua authorities for a movement into Mexico, as will be hereafter shown. Instructions were sent Captain Beyer,³ at El Paso, to hold himself and command in readiness to move west on his back trail to the Eastern Potrillo Mountains, near the line, and there take up the Indian trail, making a night march the night of the 23rd September—*notifying him that Maney*⁴ with his scouts would move south into Mexico from a point in the West Potrillo Mountains, and that the Cummings and Knight's Rancho commands would be concentrated at Palomas Lake⁵ early the morning of the 24th, and that General Carr's command⁶ would be in the vicinity of Bocco Grando [Boca Grande] Pass the same day. Each column was furnished a number of citizen scouts, for the

3. Charles D. Beyer was born in New York but enlisted from Louisiana in the regular army in 1858. He served with the 1st Infantry and at the close of the Civil War was 2nd lieutenant of the 81st U. S. colored Infantry. In June, 1867, he was commissioned captain in the 41st Infantry; was transferred in November 1869 to the 24th Infantry, and in January 1871 to the 9th Cavalry. He was dismissed from the service in 1884, and died in 1898.

4. James Allison Maney was a native of Tennessee and graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in July 1873. Assigned to the 16th Infantry as 2nd lieutenant in June 1877, he was soon transferred to the 15th Infantry. His promotion to a first lieutenantcy (23 Sept., 1885) was subsequent to the time of this expedition.

5. Palomas is 12 miles south of Columbus, N. M., where the punitive expedition under General Pershing camped on March 15, 1916—their first in Mexico.

6. Eugene Asa Carr was at this time colonel of the 6th Cavalry (commissioned 29 April, 1879) and was not promoted to the rank of brigadier general until 19 July 1892, but he was at this time a brevet brigadier general from his service in the Civil War. Born in New York, he graduated at West Point in September 1846. His first commission was as a 2nd lieutenant with the Mounted Rifles (1 July 1850) and his record until his retirement (15 Feb., 1893) was one of long and distinguished service. He received numerous citations for bravery during the Civil War. Somewhat after this expedition he was commanding officer of the Department of New Mexico (1888-1890) and his cavalry accoutrements are a prized possession of the Historical Society at Santa Fé.

purpose of communicating daily with me, and for the purpose of cutting any trails between the Rio Grande and the Bocco Grando Pass, should Victorio attempt to pass north by scattering his command while my whole command would be moving south.

It should be understood that the only fear I had in making the move into Old Mexico was that Victorio would *double on me*, and slip North with his whole command, and turn up probably in the Black Range,⁷ while my command would be in the Guzman⁸ or Santa María Mountains,⁹ in Old Mexico. This was the fear not only of the citizens, whose confidence I then had, but also of the officers of the 9th Cavalry, who had already had an experience of a year with Victorio. Consequently, to prevent this from occurring without my knowledge, I employed a number of the best posted citizen scouts, to advance with each column, by which means I not only kept in daily communication with the whole command, but could detect early any attempt of Victorio to move North, by cutting his trails.

An agreement was made, as I supposed, between Terrazas, Carr, and myself, that Carr's command should be at Bocco Grando Pass the morning of the 24th of September, that the Cummings and Knight's Ranch command should be at Palomas Lake early the morning of the 24th, or before, and that Maney's and Beyer's command should be on the line, ready to make night marches into Mexico, the night of the 23rd, communicating with me by courier at Palomas Lake the morning of the 24th, thence moving towards the lower end of Guzman Lake, Beyer following the trail which was supposed led in that direction.

The 19th of September, my supply-train was started from Cummings, under charge of Capt. Hartz,¹⁰ 15th Infantry, on the west side of the Florida Mountains,¹¹ *via* Cow and Curracilla Springs, to Lake Palomas, in Mexico—Captain Hartz having orders to report at Cow Springs to

7. The Black Range is 50 miles north of Deming, N. Mex.

8. Guzmán is 40 miles south of Columbus, N. Mex.

9. Santa María is 60 miles south of Columbus.

10. Wilson Tweed Hartz, a native of Pennsylvania, received several brevets for Civil War service. In 1866 he was assigned as a 2nd lieutenant to the 15th Infantry; was made a 1st lieutenant the next year, and captain from 23 August, 1877. He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel before his retirement, 31 May 1900.

11. The Florida Mountains are 10 miles southeast of Deming.

Captain Theaker,¹² whose command, about 70 strong, had been ordered to move by that route. The supply-train was sent by this route on account of the water supply. The 15th Infantry command at Cummings, about 80 strong, was started the 20th of September, via the east side of the Floridas, under the command of Major Osborne,¹³ 15th Infantry; this command carried with it a water-wagon I had had constructed, with a capacity of more than 400 gallons. About noon of the 21st, I left Cummings, via the east side of the Floridas, with the Cavalry command of Cummings, composed of 9th Cavalry Battalion, under Colonel Durley,¹⁴ numbering about 100, and the 4th Cavalry battalion, under Major Noyes,¹⁵ numbering about 109. The evening of the 23rd, I arrived with Cavalry command at lower end of the Floridas where it was supposed we would find tanks of water. Failing in this, it became necessary to make a night march, which brought me with the Cavalry to Polomas Lake about 6 o'clock the morning of the 23rd, ahead of time, finding Major Osborne already there with the Infantry command.

The morning of the 24th found every American command in place, except, perhaps, General Carr's column, which should have been at Bocco Grando Pass, as I understood. His advance scouts, under Lieut. Mills,¹⁶ of the 12th

12. Hugh Albert Theaker served in the Civil War from Ohio as an officer of the 16th Infantry. Promoted to a captaincy in 1864, he was transferred in 1866 to the 34th Infantry, and in 1869 he was again assigned to the 16th Infantry, with which he was at this time. Before his retirement (11 Aug., 1898) he had risen to a colonelcy.

13. Nathan Ward Osborne, native of Massachusetts, also served in the Civil War with distinction. He became a lieutenant colonel in 1882, and a colonel in 1888. His death occurred 30 Jan., 1895.

14. Nathan A. M. Dudley, native of Massachusetts, received several citations during the Civil War. He was later assigned to the Cavalry branch of the service and at this time was lieutenant colonel of the 9th Cavalry, stationed at Fort Cummings, N. Mex. He was retired on 20 August, 1889.

15. Henry Erastus Noyes, native of Maine, entered West Point from Massachusetts and graduated in 1857. He was a 2nd lieutenant of the 2nd Dragoons in 1861 and later served with the 2nd Cavalry, rising to the rank of captain (25 Jan., 1865). He was made major, 4th Cavalry 14 June, 1879—the commission which he held at this time. He later rose to the rank of colonel and was retired 16 Nov., 1901.

16. Stephen Crosby Mills, native of New York, entered West Point from Illinois, graduating in 1873. He was a 2nd lieutenant 12th Infantry from 30 June, 1877. He became a 1st lieutenant in 1884, and by subsequent promotions rose to a colonelcy in 1903. In 1890 he received a brevet for gallantry in action against Indians in the San Andrés Mountains, N. Mex. (7 Apr., 1880) and in the Las Animas Mountains, N. Mex. (28 Apr., 1882.)

Infantry, reported to me the night of the 24th, on Caralistas¹⁷ River, south of Polomas Lake. Lieut. Mills, however, could not tell me the whereabouts of Gen. Carr and Command. Scouts were sent, but failed to reach him, for reasons best known to himself. Gen. Carr failed to join me in Old Mexico. At Polomas Lake I received couriers from both Beyer and *Maney*, and found Capt. Theaker, of the Knight's Rancho command, and supply-train most prompt and on time. Through information received from my citizen scouts, it soon became evident that Victorio likewise had scouts watching our movements. It likewise became evident that he was surprised with the knowledge that we had entered Mexico, as was afterwards shown by his signs and trails. Instead of attempting to move north between my columns, he changed the course of the band pursued by Beyer into the Candelaria Mountains,¹⁸ and moved such portions of his band as were camped near Guzman into the Candelaria Mountains likewise. On approaching Guzman Lake, the 25th, my command was joined by *Maney's* scouts. I delayed my command part of a day at Guzman Springs, and one whole day at Santa Maria Springs, waiting for Carr.

Being fully satisfied, from information received by means of citizen scouts, that Victorio had fled with his whole command to the South and East, I started Captain Jack Crawford, chief of Scouts, from Santa Maria Springs, with three citizen scouts selected by himself, to proceed east-northeast, *via* Capt. Beyer's camp, far toward the Rio Grande, to cut any trails, fearing Victorio would attempt to turn Beyer's left flank, passing north near to and west of Paso del Norte. I also sent dispatches to El Paso, asking that the line of the Rio Grande might be watched closely, and likewise to Gen. Grierson,¹⁹ who was watching a portion of the Rio Grande line, and who was prepared to aid me all he could under his orders, and that any information of Victorio's attempt to move in that direction might be furnished me promptly. From this point I also sent dispatches to Terrazas, believing we would get a fight with Victorio in

17. Corralitos.

18. The Candelaria Mountains are 60 miles south of El Paso.

19. Benjamin H. Grierson, native of Pennsylvania, entered the Civil War from Illinois, receiving several citations for gallantry. On 23 July, 1866, he became colonel of the 10th Cavalry and so served until April, 1890. He was commanding officer for the Department of New Mexico 1886-1888, just prior to General Carr.

the Candelaria Mountains, some sixty miles south of east, I also sent orders to Captain Beyer to send scouts forward, if possible, into the Candelaria Mountains by night, on the trail he was pursuing, and notifying him that I would enter the Candelaria Mountains the night of the 29th, with Cavalry command and scouts, pursuing the Indian trail from Guzman and Santa Maria through the Santa Maria Mountains and across San Blas Plain. When Captain Beyer was about preparing to comply with these orders, his whole herd was stampeded by the carelessness of an inexperienced sentinel firing his gun in the night at an imaginary Indian, while the animals were all sleeping. This, of course, left his command afoot. He was at once ordered to cache his property, to send a sufficient number of men and scouts after the stampeded stock, and to carry out his original orders with the remainder of his command, on foot. The stock thus stampeded was afterwards recovered, with the exception of a few animals, and so likewise was the cached property. This accident, of course, broke down Captain Beyer's command as an effective force, and it became necessary to send Lieut. Goodwin²⁰ back with a few men and scouts to gather up the scattered property, etc.

The 28th, at Santa Maria Springs, I cut loose with the Cavalry and 30 Infantry volunteers, under Lieut. Cornish,²¹ and Thurston,²² of the 15th and 16th Infantry, and the pack-train, with as many days' rations as it was possible to carry. Sending the Infantry column and supply-train, under the command of Major Osborne, up the Santa Maria River, via Ojo Caliente,²³ Carazal,²⁴ San Jose,²⁵, to El Lucero,²⁶ I

20. Millard Fillmore Goodwin, native of New York, was appointed to West Point from Arizona and graduated in 1867. He was 2nd lieutenant 9th Cavalry, from 14 June, 1872; 1st lieutenant from 4 Apr., 1879; and regimental quartermaster from 1 Jan., 1881 to 1 May, 1888. He resigned from the service the following August.

21. George Anthony Cornish, native of Alabama, graduated from West Point in 1869. He was 2nd lieutenant, 15th Infantry, from 13 June, 1873, and 1st lieutenant from 25 Jan., 1876—the commission held at this time.

22. Walter Alonzo Thurston, native of Alabama, was in the class of 1875 at West Point and became a 2nd lieutenant, 16th Infantry, on 18 June, 1879, only a few months before this campaign.

23. Ojo Caliente, 90 miles south of El Paso.

24. Carrizal, where on June 21, 1916, Capt. Charles T. Boyd, 1st Lieut. Henry R. Adair, and six men of Troop C, 10 Cavalry, were killed, four were wounded and eight taken prisoners. Troop K lost four killed, one officer and six men wounded, fifteen prisoners.

25. San José de Patos.

26. El Lucero, 50 miles southeast of Lake Santa María.

marched with the Cavalry command east on the Indian trail, bivouacing toward morning on the eastern slope of the Santa Maria Mountains. During most of the day of the 29th, my Cavalry Command bivouaced, and was hidden behind some small buttes in San Blas Plain, as shown in map. The night of the 29th, we marched into the north end of the Candelaria Mountains, expecting to meet the enemy, not yet having learned of his departure to the South and east. The day of the 30th, my command moved through the Candelaria Mountains to the south end, expecting to find sufficient water for the command. In this I was disappointed. From advance scouts sent into the mountains by Captain Beyer, I learned that the enemy's rear-guard had left a few nights previous. I found the Candelaria Mountains very sparsely provided with water, and very vulnerable had the enemy chosen to make fight there. Captain Beyer's command entered the Candelaria Mountains the morning of the 30th, and joined my command October 1st, at El Lucero, whence I was forced to move to obtain water for the command, which we had had very little of since leaving Santa Maria Springs, the 28th. At this point I received a communication from Terrazas that Victorio had gone toward the Pino Mountains southeast, and that his command would be at the Boraccho, (which is a pass in the mountains) where there was a good spring of water, about the 5th or 6th of October—Victorio having gotten out of the Candelaria Mountains before Terrazas got his troops in position, as was contemplated, we both, the Mexican and American troops, became the pursuers.

At El Lucero, I learned through my citizen and Indian scouts the exact course of Victorio's trail, which was very distinct. The supply-train, under command of Major Osborne, reported to me the 2nd of October at El Lucero. Not being able to get a good knowledge of the country south and east of Chihuahua road, and having such limited pack transportation, my best and only course was to move on the Chihuahua road to Santa Recia, thus keeping my command to the north of Victorio.

Up to this point and date, we had been unable to locate the enemy after his departure from the Candelaria Mountains, and it was feared he had scattered and was trying to slip north between the Baraccho Mountains and Grierson's

right, which was near Quitman,²⁷ although Terrazas assured me that he would try and drive him into Grierson's lines. I therefore sent *Lieut. Maney*, who had a good pack-train, with his own scouts and such of Goodwin's scouts as were not with Goodwin hunting stampeded stock, and one company of Cavalry under *Lieut. Schaeffer*,²⁸ to join Terrazas at the Baraccho, whilst I moved with the main command to the east of the Baraccho and down the Rio Grande Valley, keeping in daily communication with *Lieut. Maney* and Terrazas. From Santa Recia I also sent a supply-train to Fort Bliss for more supplies. In the meantime, Captain Jack Crawford had rejoined me, and I sent him, with two good scouts of his own selection, to proceed not less than 100 miles down the Rio Grande, on the Old Mexican side, below Quitman, in order that I might gain early information should Victorio attempt to turn Grierson's left and cross the Rio Grande, with a view of proceeding north into New Mexico. In the meantime, Terrazas and *Maney* had moved south into the Pino Mountains, but still could not locate Victorio, notwithstanding his works of defence could be found. The morning of October 9th, I ordered Colonel Dudley back toward Quitman with the 9th Cavalry battalion and one Hotchkis gun, whilst I proceeded myself from the camp on the Rio Grande to the Baraccho with the 4th Cavalry battalion (about 90 strong) and nine days' rations on pack-mules and one Hotchkis gun. At this time everyone seemed to be at a loss as to where Victorio had gone: in other words, he had scattered on us, and I sent Colonel Dudley to the rear, with orders to await my orders, so that, should I learn Victorio had gone north, he would be more nearly in position to operate against him than I, and with this understanding Colonel Dudley went to the rear, and made camp near Quitman.

The night of the 9th, about 10 or 11 o'clock, while encamped in the Baraccho, I received information from Terrazas, *through Lieut. Maney*, that it would be objectionable on the part of his Government for American troops to advance farther into the interior.

27. Quitman, 80 miles below El Paso on the Rio Grande. Fort Quitman had been reoccupied after the Civil War but it had been abandoned in 1877. As here used, it was simply a place-name.

28. Charles Melanethon Schaeffer, native of Pennsylvania, entered West Point from Illinois and graduated in 1874. He was a 2nd lieutenant, 15 Infantry, from 14 June, 1878, and of the 9th Cavalry from 12 June, 1879. He resigned his commission 31 July, 1883. but later he served with the Minnesota Volunteers in the Spanish-American War. He died 24 June, 1900.

Much as I regretted to give up the chase, I felt that I was in Mexico by the invitation of the Chihuahua or state authorities more than by any legal or proper right. I felt satisfied that Terrazas had received an intimation or order to forbid my advancing farther toward Chihuahua, and that he had sent this message to me in the most gentlemanly manner. I therefore commenced the withdrawal of my advance the 10th day of October, and started back myself the 10th, en route to the American side of the Rio Grande. . . .

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

(Signed) GEO. P. BUELL,

Colonel 15th Infantry,
Commanding

Official extract copy.

E. R. PLATT,

A. A. General.

It will be noted that in this official transcript from our War Department records there are two deletions. Perhaps Colonel Buell expressed himself too frankly for publication as to our troops being practically ordered out of Mexico at the very moment when Victorio had been run to earth. The facts are that on the very day (October 9) on which the "request" was transmitted by Terrazas to Buell, the Mexican troops fought the Apaches in the Tres Costillos Mountains. Victorio and eighty-six of his warriors were killed and eighty-nine squaws and children were captured. These prisoners were later exhibited in Mexico City, where most of them died. The chief Nané and fifty warriors got away and joined Geronimo—but that is another story.

As for Colonel Buell, within twenty-four hours after the withdrawal of our troops began, a courier overtook him with news of the Mexican success and the death of Victorio. While directing his warriors from an elevated position on the battlefield he had been shot by a Tarahumara Indian soldier at long rifle range. Thus died one of the greatest scourges of the Southwestern frontier.²⁹

29. Rather curiously Richardson and Rister, *The Greater Southwest*, 824, say that Victorio was killed in 1883. Yet Rister, *The Southwestern Frontier*, 216, gives part of the above facts with citation to Raht, *Romance of the Davis Mountains and the Big Bend Country*.