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BISHOP TAMARÓN'S VISITATION OF
NEW MEXICO, 1760

Edited by ELEANOR B. ADAMS

(Concluded)

*Comments on Military Affairs*¹¹⁶.

... During this war the Seris were held down and could do no harm, but the Apaches, on the north where they live, took advantage of the occasion to commit robberies and murders, and as soon as our force withdrew, the Seris repeated and are repeating their destructive acts with new fury and ferocity, with the impetus of a dammed river when it gets loose.

This last campaign shows what experience has shown before (this is the reason why I have stopped to give some report of it), that these campaigns are not sufficient to reduce the enemy tribes who surround Sonora unless the proposal I have made to the King our lord and to his Viceroy of this New Spain since I returned from my general visitation is heeded. In this I stated that the method which remained to be tried in order to restrain so many pagans and apostates was to introduce a regular troop of infantry. Three thousand men, distributed as follows, would be sufficient to attack them on the neediest frontiers of this diocese. Half of them should be stationed in Chihuahua, and detachments sent from there to San Buenaventura and to clean up those sierras and their environs. And from there they should keep going in toward the Gila River, fifty leagues from the Presidio of Janos, and keep on penetrating as far as Zuñi, the last pueblo of New Mexico. From this point they would decide which of the following undertakings would be most useful: whether to go on to the Moquis, who are in the interior sixty leagues to the north, or turn west to the Navahos, in order to approach the Río Grande de Navaho, which is said to be the head-

116. Tamarón (1937), pp. 268-273. This passage occurs in a general commentary on the state of affairs in Sonora and the terrible ravages by the hostile Indian tribes. The campaign against the Seris to which he refers was that of Don Gabriel Vildósola, whose expedition left San Miguel de Horcasitas on November 7, 1761, by order of the interim governor, Lieutenant Colonel José Tienda de Cuerdo.

water of the Colorado River, which enters California, and there wait for the other body of the troop, who would have begun their expedition in Sonora. Half of these 1500 infantry should pursue the Seris and would finish them off quickly if they pursued them inflexibly, taking advantage of the suitable seasons. And the rest of the force should wheel to the north in search of the Apaches and others allied with them. And the five presidios, with their cavalry, should support the operations of these detachments. In this way these 1500 foot soldiers would penetrate the two Pimerias, and, after pacifying them, go up to the headwaters of the Colorado River where the three thousand men would be reunited. And once they were there, time and circumstances would show them the direction to take. And many settlers would come from this troop, which is the second necessary means of preservation [of the frontier provinces], after the completion of two or three campaigns in as many years, lasting from March to the end of October; that is, in the cold lands, for in the hot country the whole year would be utilized in this final experiment which I have proposed as the most useful and efficacious one.

I stated that as a result of the last campaign I described, which Governor don José Tienda de Cuerdo undertook, it became obvious that campaigns of this kind were inadequate for the subjection of the enemy Indians. And this is true, because the aforesaid most recent campaign was conducted in an extraordinary manner, that is, with a rather large army of 426 men and with the intention of continuing it for four months. This was the longest campaign since I have resided in this diocese, and although it did not last the full four months, it did go on for more than three, and this is still the longest one of these times. Ordinary campaigns last a month at most, with a small force.

Another example, although a rather old one, might also be used: the campaign usually called Father Menchero's. This took place in the year 1747. Nearly seven hundred mounted men assembled, and, setting out from El Paso, they went up the Río del Norte. From the Jornada del Muerto they turned west in search of the Gila River. They

reached it and made some forays in those vast lands. They discovered several Indian encampments and made some captives. They returned toward the north and reached the direct way to and the latitude of New Mexico. By that time they did not know where they were. They found a trail; they sent people to explore it, and they came out at the pueblo of Acoma. The missionary of Acoma told me this story, and he informed me that when Father Menchero came there, he was with the soldiers and a captain, Don Santiago Ruiz, who also told me about it. From there they went to Zuñi, and, because it was late in the season, they did not go on to the Moquis. They did, indeed, leave orders for the founding of pueblos. The Navahos were supplied with all they needed at the expense of the royal treasury, and these Indians lost it. The same ones came to me at the pueblo of Laguna with the same petition for pueblos, saying that they desired to become Christians. The Franciscan fathers informed me about the inconstancy of the Navahos and that they always said the same thing, but that there was no way of subjecting them to catechism. I observed that they did not come as they should. I treated them kindly, I exhorted them, I left orders with the missionaries to keep on trying to draw them in as best they could. No other special fruit of that celebrated campaign was known.

I asked for Spanish infantry, for the military who are known here in these presidios are all cavalry. According to the ordinance each one must have at least six horses. Others have more, and the reserve captains maintain large herds of horses. It is a continual nagging embarrassment to care for so many horses, which are greatly coveted by the enemy Indians. As a result, during campaigns half the force is diverted from the business at hand and kept busy guarding the herd of remounts which is always taken. The horses cannot climb the crags where the Indians assemble. Infantry can. The mounted man uses a short-barreled shotgun and a lance for arms. The former is more frequently used. Its range is short, and, impeded by the shield, reins, and the movements of the horse, most of the shots

fail to find their mark. The foot soldier would carry a musket. It has a much greater range than arrows; with the bayonet, it serves as a lance. Instead of the uniform jacket, they would wear the leather jackets used here, which arrows do not penetrate. And in this way, taking their time, marching in two or three campaigns of nine or ten months each, their progress will be obvious. It is understood that each division of infantry would need some cavalry from the presidios to reconnoitre the stopping and watering places. In the report I cited, I gave as an example the infantry consisting of more than a thousand men who were sent to the province of Caracas in the year 1749 and who traveled throughout the province, which is very extensive, and entered the province of Cumaná. They also reached the Kingdom of Santa Fe, over harsher and more wooded regions and mountains than those in this part of the world, for here only the Sierra Madre is more difficult. As a result that land was pacified and subdued by the said infantry, who were the means whereby the end for which it was sent was accomplished.

The King maintains three foot soldiers for the amount one mounted soldier costs him. Pasturage and watering places for a large herd of horses are usually rare. In an operation taking more than two months, the six horses apiece required by ordinance would not be sufficient for each soldier of the cavalry of this land, because of the effect galloping has on them. Just lassoing and bridling every day is a task that only he who has traveled a long distance will believe. What races this first daily task costs; for since there is no manger, straw, or barley, they have to turn the horses loose to look for grass, or *zacate*, as it is called here, to eat. Most mornings they find that some are missing. They make mad dashes to look for them. Some of the other less tame horses take off suddenly. Three or four men ride as fast as they can to intercept them. I used to have these spectacles before my eyes for many days when we spent the night in unpopulated areas. Infantry is free from this tiring diversion.

According to the description they have given me, the confusion which a dawn attack, when they want to take

their enemy by surprise, in these wars creates among these mounted soldiers is inexpressible. They make the assault at break of day, which is why they call it a dawn attack. They are horseless and unprepared. Their fright and fear, because they do not know what to do, have no equal. The foot soldier arms himself with greater facility. On several occasions people have emphasized to me how easily these mounted soldiers are put out of action, whether they are killed or fall, or if the engagement begins before they are mounted. They use spurs with disks as large as the palm of the hand, with long points, and this impediment is enough to entangle them.

As one example among many, in the month of November, 1759, it happened that the captain of the El Paso presidio, Don Manuel de San Juan, was returning to his presidio from Chihuahua. Halfway there, when they had already made camp rather early at a place which was a little far from water, he thought it best to go a league farther to a better site. This was possible because there was more than enough time to do so by daylight. Since they had already unloaded, they saddled and the captain set out with most of the escort. He left behind three muleteers to attend to the loading and four soldiers to guard them. The captain departed with his force; they reached the appointed place, and, seeing how late in the afternoon it was now and that there had been more than enough time for the loads to arrive, he sent some soldiers to find out whether they were coming. They went; there was no sign of them; they went on to where they had left them. They saw all of them stretched out, the locks of the chests and trunks removed, and part of the clothing strewed about. Terrified, they hastened to advise the captain, who came immediately and found six men, four already dead and two living, but so badly wounded that one died on the road and the other when they reached El Paso. They had all been pierced through by many arrows. They collected the clothing which they had left behind [and found that the enemy] had carried off the best, as well as the mules and horses and one of the muleteers to help transport the booty. Later they decided to leave him behind and gave him a heavy

thrust with a lance. He managed to bind or tie up his wound well and stop the blood. He recovered and he was the one who told me about everything that happened and that the Indian attackers numbered five, and that this number had wreaked such havoc against seven men. Seven months later I passed by the place where so lamentable an event had occurred. It is quite open, with no wood or thicket, completely flat. They say that the enemy came from some hills to the west and must not have been seen at once, and the soldiers had not even taken their shotguns out of their cases. This has given rise to discussion, with varying opinions about the reason for their failure to act.

Although the case which I am about to relate, like the one I have just told, belongs to the New Mexico branch, because those wars resemble the ones in Sonora they are recorded here to illustrate my point. I left New Mexico in July of the year 1760. In December of the same year the cordon, for they so designate the annual departure to Vizcaya for purposes of trade which the settlers make at that season, left. Usually five or six hundred men go. That year there were about two hundred and no more because of fear that the Comanches might invade the kingdom. In the region halfway between El Paso and Chihuahua the Indian enemies attacked them at midnight. Their numbers were not equal to those of the cordon, but the latter took it for granted that they were at the mercy of the Indians, and their tribulation, fright, and confusion was as great as possible. It was their good fortune that the Indians only shot to frighten them, in order to make sure of their booty from the herd of horses, which was what they were after. They carried off most of it. When the members of the cordon recovered from their terror, they undertook to saddle the remaining horses in order to pursue the thieves. They found them after dawn. When the Indians saw that they were being overtaken, they took refuge in some crags where the horses could not go. The Spaniards did, indeed, succeed in recovering most of the booty, but from on high on the rocks the Indians cried to those who followed them and threatened to see them when they returned. If there were infantry, they would not think themselves so safe

on their rocks. These reasons seem to lead to the conclusion that said infantry should be tried, for its success will give complete proof. This is true of every war, for one does not sing victory until it is over.

My reasoning on this point has been castigated in Mexico with the specious pretext of the conservation of the royal exchequer, although one of my chief reasons is its increase by safeguarding the wealth of Sonora alone. To gain, it is necessary to spend. This is my aim, and my chief one is the exaltation of the Holy Faith, which is the same motive that impels our very religious Catholic monarchs to such enterprises, as their most just laws and royal cédulas testify and state with extraordinary piety and holy zeal.

The other difficulties which are contemplated will be conquered as time goes on in the same way as in other reductions. One of them is: What should be done with so many Indians as there are in the places to be traversed by the soldiers? Of these, those who are subdued should be established in a pueblo with missionaries to teach them, and in order to make these permanent, settlers are necessary to help to hold them in check. It would be advisable to remove the rebels from their native soil and take them elsewhere by sea, in order to avoid what happened with the Seris and many other captives who were sent to Mexico in collars and who have returned more haughty and violent than they went. The other difficulty is that because the regions are so vast, there would always be many Indians in the mountains who would escape. This is very true, for who ever succeeded in putting doors on the field? In time they would diminish. Wolves and other wild beasts ravage the herds, but they do not cease to establish these haciendas for this reason. The owners employ hunters to pursue them, but in spite of such precautions they attack the lambs, the cattle, and the horses. I am ready to answer the many other recriminations of the opposition whenever the occasion may offer, and I would try to satisfy them, with the sole desire of facilitating this matter, the extreme importance of which I have learned. This is the reason why I have deliberated it at such length.