

FORT APACHE • • • THE STORY OF A FRONTIER



MILITARY POST

by Frank A. Schilling

DURING THE TWENTY-SIX YEAR PERIOD prior to the surrender of Geronimo to General Nelson A. Miles in Skeleton Canyon, in southeastern Arizona, on September 4th, 1886, eighteen more or less permanent military posts were established in the Apache country—fourteen in Arizona and four in New Mexico—in an endeavor to conquer and civilize the warlike Apache. Not included are temporary camps that were occupied less than twelve months.

Perhaps not more than five hundred Apaches were on the warpath at any one time, but it required some five thousand, more or less, American troops nearly three decades to conquer the untamed Apache. The Apache was not hampered by cumbersome supply trains that required wagon roads; he was satisfied with the most primitive trail, or none at all; bedding and equipage were no problem, a "G" string was sufficient for his needs; his rations, if any, were carried in a small sack or bundle, and, like a desert burro he foraged off the land, and he knew his land and plants thoroughly. When his fighting instinct was satisfied he scattered to the four winds like a covey of quail—he simply vanished.

The white man, on the other hand, had his pack train, his water and canteen; his food; his camp equipment, though light; his clothing, etc., all of which bogged him down making travel difficult; furthermore the white soldiers' feet did not take kindly to a light moccasin, such as the Apache wore. Tents were unknown to the Apache.

The soldiers were on patrol or scout duty a large part of their time and many battles and skirmishes were fought with the Apaches during these troublesome years and an unknown number of people—probably thousands—Red Men and White—lie under unmarked and scarcely noticeable mounds of soil—killed in a warfare that apparently could not be settled short of the complete annihilation of the Indian—the Apache—who had earned, and undoubtedly merited, the reputation of being the most cunning, the most savage, and the most ruthless warrior in America. It was the feeling generally among the early settlers that the only good Apache was a dead Apache, but Father Time has dispelled this belief. The Red Man was fighting for his life and his ancestral home.