



FORT BOWIE

Geronimo

Importance

Goyahkla, known as Geronimo, led the last armed Native American resistance against the United States' conquest of western North America. Geronimo was a Bedonkohe Apache, a sub-group of the Chiricahua Apaches who lived in southern Arizona. Following the 1854 Gadsden Purchase, when southern Arizona became a U.S. territory, U.S. and Apache relations swiftly became hostile as the Apaches resisted U.S. territorial acquisition. Fort Bowie, now a national historic site, was an integral part of the network of forts constructed to gain control over the Apaches' land. Geronimo resisted being confined to the San Carlos reservation and, along with other Apache leaders, led a series of revolts in the 1880s before surrendering in 1886.

First Battles

Geronimo was born around 1823. As a young boy, he learned the skills of an Apache warrior. The Apaches had a long history of conflict with northern Mexico—Apaches raided Mexican settlements, and the Mexican army retaliated with punitive expeditions against Apache rancherias. According to tradition, Goyahkla received the sobriquet “Geronimo” during a fight with Mexican soldiers. Although Geronimo was never a chief, he was a respected war leader and medicine-man.

In 1872 the U.S. government created a reservation for the Chiricahua. The reservation was situated in their homeland in the Chiricahua Mountains, and its boundaries encompassed Fort Bowie. The reservation also lay on the U.S.-Mexico border, and the Apaches continued raiding into Mexico even as they maintained peace with the U.S. In 1876 the government dissolved the Chiricahua reservation and ordered all the Apaches to move to the San Carlos reservation further to the north. Grudgingly, Geronimo settled at San Carlos, but he did not stay there for long. In 1878 Geronimo and another leader of the Apache, Juh, fled the reservation for the Sierra Madres. Although Geronimo returned to San Carlos in 1879, over the following years, he led a series of outbreaks from the reservation.

1885-1886

Fort Bowie figured prominently in the last campaign against Geronimo, which lasted from 1885 to 1886. First General Crook and then General Nelson A. Miles made the fort their



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Geronimo

headquarters while they pursued Geronimo through the mountains. The Apaches, with their intimate knowledge of the terrain, easily eluded the troopers. Miles, who arrived at Fort Bowie in April of 1886, sent several detachments out after Geronimo, and the soldiers tracked him into Mexico. They finally located Geronimo, who agreed to talk with Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, one of the commanders. Gatewood informed Geronimo that all of the recalcitrant Chiricahuas had been transported away from San Carlos to Florida—all of the warriors' families were gone, and Geronimo and his band would also be sent to Florida. If he did not surrender, the army would continue its relentless pursuit until he was killed. On September 4, 1886, Geronimo surrendered to Miles. He was taken to Fort Bowie and then boarded a train that would eventually take him to Florida, thousands of miles from the home he had fought so hard to protect. Geronimo never returned to Arizona—he died in 1909 at Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

References

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