

Colonel Albert Hinrich "Henry" Pfeiffer

Albert Pfeiffer, a native of Germany, immigrated to America in 1844 at the age of 22. Two years later in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he joined the United States Army and rose to the rank of Colonel. He served as an assistant and aide to Kit Carson for several years. The United States Government decided that the Navajos should be moved onto a reservation. In 1864, under the command of Kit Carson, Pfeiffer was one of the leaders that drove the Navajo nation from their home in Canyon de Chelly and forced them into the "long walk" to their new home in Basque Redondo near Fort Sumner in New Mexico, a march that cost many Navajo lives. The living conditions there cost even more lives before the Navajos were finally allowed to return to their homeland.

In 1856, Pfeiffer met Maria Antonia (Salinas) Lujan, a young widow with a small boy named Jose. Pfeiffer took to the young child as well as Maria Lujan and the happy trio was seen all around Santa Fe. After a brief courtship they were married in a civil ceremony as he would not give up his Lutheran religion and embrace her Catholic beliefs. Henry, Jr. was born on October 7, 1857. On July 28, 1860, they were married again. This time in the Catholic church where Pfeiffer had accepted his new religion. The census of August 21, 1860, showed the Pfeiffers had adopted three additions, and the household had grown to 17 people, including servants.



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Pfeiffer was so highly regarded by the Ute Indians that the United States Government appointed him as Indian Agent at the Abiquiu Indian Agency on July 17, 1858. He resigned that post, went to Fort Union and enlisted in July 6, 1861.

While serving at Fort McRae, near present Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, in 1863, he and his wife, along with a party of 10, were bathing in the hot springs near Taos, New Mexico. They were suddenly attacked by a band of Apache Indians. He was seriously wounded by arrows with one arrow going completely through his body just below the heart and a bullet through his left hand. His wife was carried away by the Apaches and later killed. Five others in the party were killed, three wounded and two escaped uninjured. Pfeiffer, with the arrow sticking out the front and back of his body had to walk naked and barefooted through brush and cactus until he was finally rescued. Thereafter, he hunted and killed Apaches with a vengeance. It was reported that at one time he said, "They paid for it, yes they have paid well for it, in blood. I fight `em night and day – everywhere in all seasons!" After risking his life in many battles, the battle he is most remembered for occurred after retirement to his homestead near Pagosa Springs, Colorado. A war was breaking out between the Utes and the Navajos over the hot springs that the Utes had possessed for many years. After several days of fighting, the Utes sought assistance from Pfeiffer. He traveled over the mountains to Pagosa Springs and worked out a deal with the Navajos. It was agreed that each tribe would put up one man to battle each other to death with the winner taking possession of the springs and the other leaving peacefully. The Navajos sent out their largest, seasoned young warrior. Pfeiffer hated the Navajos and volunteered to do the battle. By this time he was in his middle forties and stood about 5 feet, 5 inches. The Utes accepted his offer, and then Pfeiffer required the fight be done in the nude. The young warrior took one look at the grizzled body covered with many battle scars and was so intimidated that he was easily defeated. The Utes continued their possession of the hot springs, but not for long. In 1873, the Brunot Treaty forced the Utes to cede all their land in the region to the United States Government. Noted author and historian, Jim Perkins, noted that Pfeiffer's death in 1881, occurring in bed and not among the cactus and rocks in some lonely place, was a miracle in itself.

Colonel Pfeiffer is buried in a lonely gravesite near Del Norte, Colorado, which he shares with a great grandson. At one time it was approved to move Pfeiffer and Carson to the Santa Fe National Cemetery and bury them side-by-side. But it was not to be. Carson remains in his grave in the Kit Carson Memorial Cemetery in Taos, NM, and Pfeiffer on his old homestead.



Pfeiffer's Tombstone



Pfeiffer's Gravesite



Sign on the highway near Del Norte, Colorado.

Grave is just up the hill above the sign.

Source: *Albert H. Pfeiffer: Indian Agent, Soldier and Mountain Man* by Ann Oldham