

Battle of Cibicue Creek

Noch-ay-del-klinne, hereafter known as The Prophet, was an unusual White Mountain Apache. He was only five feet, six inches tall and weighed only 125 pounds. But he was to have quite an impact on the White Mountain Apache reservation. His complexion was so pale he could almost pass as a white man. He was, at one time, an Indian Scout for General Crook. In 1871, at the age of 26, he was a "kindly White Mountain herb doctor" and a member of a small delegation of Apaches sent to Washington to meet with the president. When he came home he not only had a large silver medal given him by the president, but a supply of amazing stories and a powerful gift to tell them.

The Prophet was sent to school in Santa Fe where he absorbed, but hardly understood, the elements of the Christian religion. One of his favorite stories was that of the Resurrection, and he would come to incorporate it into his own message to the Apache people. Within ten years of his return to the reservation he would become widely known as a healer and a mystic, though not yet as a dangerous one.

By August, 1881, the Prophet's teachings were becoming of great concern to the Army leaders and the Indian agents. He began to talk of resurrection of the dead and return to better times. He began to predict the elimination of the white man. At the same time, a dance known as the ghost-dance was sweeping through all the northern tribes and was leading to uprisings. The Prophet was teaching this dance to the White Mountain Apaches and predicting the resurrection of their recently dead chiefs.

A noted scout, Sam Brown was sent to take a look at the situation. He returned and notified his officer that he quit. He told a friend that "that kind of dance always meant trouble, and he didn't want to get mixed up in it."

The Prophet was sent an invitation to come and talk with the Indian agent about the situation. When he declined to come in, an Army detachment under Colonel Eugene Carr was sent to arrest him. The detachment, made up of 117 men including officers, enlisted, 23 Indian scouts and some civilian assistants left the Fort Apache on August 29, 1881.

In the afternoon of the 30th, Colonel Carr and his detachment reached the lodge of the Prophet and explained that he was under arrest. This time the Prophet said that he was ready to go with them. Carr placed him in charge of Sergeant John F. McDonald and a small detachment that was to bring the prophet to the Army's camp. Carr explained the Prophet would be killed if he attempted to escape or in the event of a rescue attempt. The prophet assured that neither event would occur.

Carr, going ahead of the others, found a camp for the night. The Army detachment was followed by the Indians, but nothing happened until they were all in camp. One of the Indian scouts gave a war whoop and all the Indians commenced firing into the camp. One of the Apache chiefs ran off the Army horses. Private John Sonderegger was the first to fall followed by Captain Hentig,

shot by two Indian scouts. At the same time Hentig's orderly, Private Edward D. Livingstone, took eight shots in the body. The army troops immediately returned fire as the Indians dove into the brush. At that point Privates William Miller and John Sullivan were killed and Privates Henry C. Bird, Thomas F. Foran, and Ludwig Baege were wounded. Bird and Foran died shortly afterward. As the shooting began, the Prophet started crawling away, but McDonald and Trumpeter William O. Benites each fired at him and ended his career as a prophet. It is believed that about 18 Indians were killed, including six mutinous scouts. But Indians always carry away their dead, so it is impossible to be exact.

A broad grave was buried under the tent and all the dead were carefully marked and buried. The grave was then raked over so as not to be found by the Indians who would have mutilated the bodies. They returned to fort about 2:30 the next afternoon. Some of the Apaches scoured the country side for victims and killed and burned four Mormons almost in sight of the fort. They killed three troopers about eight miles from the fort. They lay siege to the fort, set some buildings on fire, but were driven away and gone by daylight.

Soldiers from other post soon joined the Fort Apache soldiers and there were so many soldiers on the reservation, the wanted Indians soon began to turn themselves in in droves. Five of the mutinous scouts turned themselves in and were court-martialed. Two were sentenced to long terms at Alcatraz and three were hanged.

About a month after the battle, the army returned to the camp and brought the dead soldiers to Fort Apache. They were all buried in the Fort Apache Cemetery, about 600 yards east of the post. In 1922, the army abandoned Fort Apache and all the soldiers that were buried there were reinterred in Santa Fe National Cemetery along with their families. Today, only the headstones for Privates Bird and Sullivan remain, though their bodies rest in Santa Fe. The fort and the cemetery are National Historic Sites and are open to the public.



Source: *The Conquest of Apacheria*, by Dan L. Thrapp