

Merejildo Grijalva

Merejildo Grijalva was probably the most capable and efficient scout the U.S. Army ever used against the Apache Indians. He was born around 1840 to Opata Indian parents in the small village of Bacachi, Sonora, Mexico, about 100 miles below the Arizona border. This area of Mexico was under constant attack from the notorious Apache war chief Miguel Narbona. Somewhere around 1850 (the historians differ in their estimate from 1848 to 1852) Grijalva, at the age of ten, his mother and brother were captured by Narbona. Grijalva was taken into the lower Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. Grijalva's brother was raised by White Mountain Apaches and the fate of his mother is unknown.

Grijalva, the other children and the adult female prisoners were adopted by Apache families. Mature males were a potential danger and were tortured and killed by the women of the tribe. Grijalva would become known as "El Chivero," the shepherd, and was adopted by Cochise, second in command to Narbona. Until the time came when he could be trusted, he was treated as a slave or a servant, performing menial tasks for the women, such as carrying wood and water.

Within a year he could speak Apache fluently and as he matured and grew stronger he began training as a warrior. By around the age of fifteen he was accompanying the warriors on raids into Mexico, but performing such acts as holding the horses and doing guard duty.

Around 1856 or 1857, Narbona died and Cochise became the leader of the band. Grijalva's ability to speak fluent Spanish and Apache was a great value to Cochise. His abductors thought that he had "turned Apache for good." About this time Americans began to move into Arizona. Grijalva was gaining stature among the Apaches as a warrior raiding Mexico, their bitter enemy. Cochise was at peace with the Americans and was frequently meeting with them accompanied by Grijalva. He met some influential Americans, and in particular the Apache Indian Agent Michael Steck. Steck offered Grijalva a job with the agency. Grijalva was interested but he knew that he would have to wait until Cochise was absent to consider an escape.

Around the middle of 1859 a small party of Apache warriors led by Parte stole some stock from a mining company. Grijalva reported that Cochise drove a spear through the heart of Parte. Cochise sent Grijalva and another brave to Fort Buchanan to return eleven head of stock and to explain what happened. Grijalva, who had become disillusioned with his life as a Chiricahua, seized the opportunity and was placed on a stage to Mesilla, New Mexico, where he was met by Steck. What the reaction of Cochise was when he heard the news is not known, but it is reasonable to believe that he was furious.

Grijalva was given a salary of \$500 per year for odd jobs around the agency and to act as an interpreter when his Apache or Spanish language skills were needed. He was soon fluent in English as well. In 1861, two critical events occurred that led to the Indian wars that were to last until September 6, 1886, when Geronimo surrendered to General Nelson A. Miles and Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood in Skeleton Canyon. The first event was known as the Bascom Affair and time and space prevents the details, but Lieutenant George Nicholas Bascom falsely accused and arrested Cochise for kidnapping a young, white boy. A small fight broke out and Cochise escaped with a slight leg wound, but it was anger that sent him on the warpath. The second occurrence was the beginning of the Civil War and the withdrawal of Army troops from the forts of the west. This gave Cochise and the other Apache leaders the opportunity to depredate against the whites with almost no opposition. This was true until the summer of 1862 when Brigadier General James Henry Carleton and the California Volunteers retook the Arizona from the Confederacy. These events also created a demand for scouts of Grijalva's experience as few, if any, white men were familiar with the ways of the Apache.

Grijalva had spent eight years learning their camping places, and Apache habits when on the warpath. And with his knowledge of their ways it is little wonder that he was the most important scout that the U. S. Army had at the time. It would be several years before General George Crook assumed command in Arizona on June 19, 1871, and began the practice of using Apache scouts to fight Apache Indians.

On August 24, 1867, a detachment of troops left Fort Wallen, but Grijalva was in Tucson getting married to Rosa Cortez. His story and Rosa's were almost a parallel. She was a native of Chinapa, Sonora and was captured in 1853. She was with the Apaches for twelve years and escaped in 1865. While accompanying her captors on a visit to Fort Goodwin the wife of Lieutenant Joseph Felmer gave her shelter until the Apaches departed. She then went to Fort Bowie where she met her future husband for the first time. She was taken in by the Tucson family of Leopoldo Carillo who saw to it that she received an education. The marriage was a good one and they had one child that died in infancy but they adopted two Apache children.

Grijalva spent a great deal of time in the field chasing Cochise and his band. Whenever there were any Apache warriors close enough to be seen they would all recognize him and show their hatred for his betrayal by shouting insults that cannot be repeated and telling him of the gross things that would be done to defile his body if ever captured. The Army troops took great care to protect their valuable scout, and he would always save one last bullet for himself.

Grijalva's superior knowledge of the Apache ways was one of the chief reasons that the U.S. Army finally forced Cochise to sign a lasting peace agreement. Grijalva and Cochise had not met face to face since his escape, even though there had been some fairly close encounters on the battlefield. On March 27, 1873, Cochise went into Fort Bowie for the first peaceful meeting since the Bascom Affair and Grijalva was there. Captain Joseph Haskell described the meeting between the two old friends and current adversaries: "On his arrival he (Cochise) met our post guide Mary Hilda (Merejildo) who used to be a captive with Cochise. Mary Hilda offered him his hand before he dismounted, but Cochise told him he would not shake hands with him until he whipped him; so he got down off from his horse, and struck him two or three times with his whip and then they had a friendly embrace, and commenced to talk over old times." They probably never met again as Cochise died of natural causes on June 8, 1874.

In the spring of 1876, the Chiricahua reservation was disbanded and all the Apaches of that band were moved to the San Carlos reservation. Grijalva assisted in moving the Indians who were now under the leadership of Cochise's sons Taza and Naiche to their new quarters. During the summer of 1876, he joined Indian agent John Clum, Taza and a delegation on a trip to Washington. D. C. Unfortunately, Taza died from pneumonia and fortunately, Grijalva was able to explain to the Apaches that the white people had done everything in their power to save his life. In 1878, he decided to try his hand at ranching, and did so for the rest of his life. Occasionally he would be called upon to assist the Army. In 1881, he was called back to duty for the White Mountain Apache uprising at Cibicue. Throughout the 80s and 90s he alternated between his ranch and the San Carlos Reservation. The Apaches continued to call upon him as an interpreter and in 1893, he was named Chief of Scouts at San Carlos.

He spent the last few years of his life at his ranch near Solomonville (now Solomon) where he died of tuberculosis on April 5, 1912. John Bourke, longtime aide to Crook, said it best in his book *On the Border With Crook*, writing that Grijalva "had seen about as much hard work as a man cares to see in a lifetime." He is buried in the Solomon Cemetery next to his beloved wife who lived until 1931.

Sources: *Merejildo Grijalva* by Edwin R. Sweeney and *Once They Rode Like the Wind* by David Roberts.

