

Quanah Parker

Quanah is often referred to as the last Chief of the Comanches, but the truth of the matter is that the Comanche people never elected him as a chief and in fact, there was no such thing as Chief of the Comanches. Each band of Comanches had their own chief. After the surrender of the Comanche people and their placement on the reservation, Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie appointed him Chief of Comanches. Before he became an advocate for peace he was probably the fiercest warrior in what is believed to have been the most powerful tribe of Indians in all America.

He was the son of Peta Nacona, a noted fierce Comanche chief, and Cynthia Ann Parker, a white woman captured by the Comanches on May 19, 1836. The date of his birth has been lost in history but was probably in the year 1848.

Quanah refused to sign the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 and went on a savage eight year war against the whites. It has been said that he never lost a battle with the white man during those years. In 1874, he had his closest brush with death when he was shot twice by buffalo hunters in the Second Battle at Adobe Walls. This battle pitched about 300 Comanche warriors against 28 defenders, including a young Bat Masterson and one woman. The Indians became discouraged when a defender by the name of William Dixon fired a Sharps buffalo rifle and killed a warrior on a hill 1500 yards away. In the year 1875 it became very clear to Quanah that the white people were far too numerous and too well armed to be defeated.



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Mackenzie sent Jacob J. Sturm, a physician and interpreter, to solicit Quanah's surrender. Sturm found Quanah, whom he called "a young man of much influence with his people," and pleaded his case. Quanah rode to a mesa, where he saw a wolf come toward him, howl and trot away to the northeast. Overhead, an eagle "glided lazily and then whipped his wings in the direction of Fort Sill." This was a sign, Quanah thought, and on June 2, 1875, he and his band surrendered at Fort Sill in present-day Oklahoma.

The Comanches were placed on a reservation in southwestern Oklahoma. The reservation agents saw it as their duty to eliminate all Native American cultures and replace them with the ways of the white man. Quanah refused to give up his multiple wives and to cease the use of peyote. He also negotiated grazing rights with Texas cattlemen, and he invested in railroads. After his appointment as chief, the older chiefs resented his youth and particularly resented his white blood. When he signed the Jerome Agreement in 1892, the tribe was split into two factions; those who thought all that could be done had been done; and those who blamed Quanah for selling their country.

Quanah invested wisely, owned a large, beautiful home in Cache, Oklahoma known as the Star House. He had five wives and twenty-five children. He was the wealthiest Indian in the United States. He was highly respected by white people and hunted with Theodore Roosevelt. When he died in 1911, he was buried next to his mother and sister in the Post Oak Cemetery in Oklahoma. In 1957, all three bodies were relocated to the Chief's Knoll in the Fort Sill Post Cemetery, in Lawton, Oklahoma.



Source: *Empire of the Summer Moon* by S. C. Gwynne.