

Prologue

The Adventure Begins

What follows is a typescript entitled “My Experiences among the Apaches”¹ by Lt. Charles B. Gatewood, Sixth U.S. Cavalry. It appears that Gatewood had plans to enlarge the scope of his project.

Gatewood mentions two classmates from West Point whose careers soon carried them in different directions and out of his life. Cunliffe Hall Murray, of New York, graduated twenty-fifth in their class. He joined the Fourth U.S. Cavalry, which was then stationed in the Southwest, but quickly dropped from sight. Richard Hulbert Wilson (June 10, 1853–Mar. 21, 1937) graduated twenty-sixth in their class. Although Wilson initially reported for duty at Fort Wingate, Arizona, with Gatewood, before reporting to Camp Apache on February 5, 1878, he did not join the Sixth U.S. Cavalry with Gatewood. Instead, Wilson had been assigned to the Eighth U.S. Infantry. On July 20, 1878, he left for Camp Gaston, California. Wilson remained on duty in California until 1889, missing the last Apache wars.²

Upon graduation in June, the U.S. Military Academy Class of 1877, of which I was a member, were all given leaves of six months before reporting for their new duties as officers of the Army. The majority of available vacancies were in organizations serving in the far West, so we knew that most of us would be sent to distant frontier stations, but just which of us, or to which posts, we would not know until December when our orders came out.

I spent most of my leave with my widowed mother [Emily], a sister, and a brother at our home in [Harrisonburg], Virginia, for no one could tell how long it might be until I saw them again. As it turned out, I saw my sister again many years later, but [returned home] too late to see the others.

Murray, a classmate [at West Point] and close chum, came with me as our guest for a few weeks. Before he left, we had a bit of fun together, and we all saw to it that he was at least entertained. I remember we rode out one morning a few miles in the country to call upon two young ladies I had known since childhood. For Murray, who was very short in

stature, I had the livery stable send up the largest horse they could find, and they succeeded in finding a Percheron weighing a ton or more; for me, who was tall and slender, there was a plump little pony with legs so short that I could almost mount him without taking my feet off the ground.³ Murray's feet stuck out on each side of his vast steed like fancy trimmings on the edges of his saddle. As we rode along, I had to look upward and shout, as to someone on a rooftop, in order to talk to him, while he had to lean far over the side of his horse to see me below. I was careful to route our expedition through the main street of town so that [everyone] could see us and marvel, which they did.

My orders [arrived] on December 8th, and said to report for duty at Camp Apache, Arizona [Territory].⁴ It wasn't difficult to find out exactly where Arizona was, but the best Atlas in town utterly failed to show any trace of Camp Apache. It was not until after reaching Santa Fe, [New Mexico Territory], that I found out where it was. The orders were very liberal in point of time, so I spent a few more pleasant days in Virginia. At last [I] tore myself away and hit the iron trail for Chicago, where several of us had made a tentative agreement to meet and have a few more days of holiday together before dispersing to our remote stations. There was no especial hurry, and we would get enough of our posts and frontier service before ever again we saw the civilization of the East and our home.

But at Chicago, I found they had all been there and gone, having received their orders several days earlier than I had—all except Murray. [He] had missed his train the day before by taking too long trying to climb a ten-foot iron gate with spikes on the top, instead of opening it and walking through, which he could readily have done if, in his haste, he had seen and lifted the latch on the gate instead of trying to open it by shoving. We were both late, so we only [stayed] that day in Chicago, and [leaving] that wonder city unexplored, [we] journeyed on to St. Louis together.

At Emporia, Kansas, I overtook Wilson, another classmate, bound also for Camp Apache, and we banded together for mutual protection and support. We remained at Pueblo, Colorado, a day, partly to admire Pike's Peak at a distance of fifty miles, but principally to await the next train on the narrow gauge railroad to El Moro. At this latter place, and at Trinidad, we learned that smallpox was "cleaning out" the Mexican

sections, probably in lieu of any cleaning that might otherwise have been done with the use of soap [&] water [or] disinfectants.⁵

[The] stage ride from Trinidad to Santa Fe [was] two hundred and sixteen miles; a sort of preliminary breaking in for the longer and rougher and more daring ride from there to Camp Apache. There were nine of us passengers, and the stage, about the size of a small dry-goods box, would allow four to squeeze inside and one up alongside the driver. How to get all nine in was a knotty problem solved only by taking up a collection of a dollar apiece for the agent who thereupon granted us the use of a larger coach. So we set out and made the trip in less than thirty-eight hours, stopping only for meals and change of horses. Our unusually swift progress was mainly due to the doses of “cheer” with which our driver continually plied himself from a good-sized demijohn kept handy under his seat. Being thus continually in a cheerful and expansive state of mind, he did not at all seem to care if the coach frequently ran on only two wheels, with considerable danger to our bones.

At Santa Fe we had a rest of a week, and after that journey we needed it. When I first saw the towns’ squat little one-story adobe houses it seemed as though Pike’s Peak, in some playful mood, must have sat on them and driven them into the ground. And then the burros! They interested me, and I studied them in order to send home an adequate description: nice little brutes, no bigger than a yearling calf, heads no larger than their bodies, ears no longer than their heads, and legs shorter than their ears. Even at work they seem to be in deep meditation, possibly on the subject of emancipation from slavery, for their owners do maltreat them shamefully; in lieu of a rein to guide them, [they give them] a blow on the side of the head to make them change direction.

Chapter One

Mismanagement and the Last Outbreak

This chapter is probably the earliest of Gatewood's attempts at recording his Indian experience.¹ Actually, he does not speak of his experiences here; instead, he delivers a discourse on Apache treatment by the U.S. government. Undoubtedly his disgust and frustration at yet another Apache outbreak—an outbreak he felt should not have occurred—prompted him to vent his feelings on the mismanagement and mistreatment of the Apache people.

It is easy to date this draft, as Gatewood gives two references that cannot be mistaken: he refers to Crook's 1883 invasion of Mexico as "since my return from Mexico with the hostile Apaches two years ago," and the Chiricahua outbreak of 1885 as "the present outbreak." Immediately following Geronimo and Naiche's break for freedom on May 17, 1885, Gatewood spent the next month and a half either in the field or recruiting Indian scouts. It is reasonable to assume that the frenzied activity at the beginning of what would become the last Apache war demanded all his waking hours, making it safe to state that Gatewood did not start to write until sometime after July 1, 1885.

As the summer of 1885 wore on, two things became very obvious in Gatewood's life: both his relationship with the White Mountain Apaches and his relationship with Gen. George Crook were nearing an end. He had been military commandant of the White Mountain Indian Reservation since the fall of 1882, and he had reported directly to Crook and worked closely with his wards since his appointment. By this time, Gatewood had become an expert on the subject of Apaches and their management. He had played a major role in their lives, seen all the ills heaped upon them by the white man, and not only known of their discontent but also sympathized with it. The problems he discusses at the beginning of this chapter he saw firsthand as military agent on the reservation. He immersed himself in what follows during his tenure at White Mountain. The Indians saw this and knew that in Gatewood they had a real friend—someone who would risk everything for them. This is not a small feat. Nor is it one that can be ignored, for it is the key to Gatewood's relationship with Geronimo. They did not have much

contact prior to their historic meeting in Mexico in 1886, and yet the old warrior knew that he could trust Gatewood. Why? Because he had heard from the White Mountains and the Chiricahuas, who were lucky enough to come under his control, that here was a man who did not lie. When Gatewood's two native scouts announced that he wanted to meet to discuss ending the war, Geronimo knew that when Gatewood said something, he meant it.

Although Gatewood probably did not intend to write a book about his experiences at the time he drafted these words, his words present a good introduction to one.

The control of the Indians and the management of their affairs are fields so fruitful of discussion, that it may be thought little new can be advanced in regard to the subjects. It would seem, however, that the theories presented are more pronounced, the further their authors are removed from their application and from acquaintance with the character of their subjects. Of those who are in proximity to Indian reservations, some who are moved by apprehensions of danger from their depredations, and most who are influenced by greed for what is invaluable of their possessions are convinced that confinement to the most remote and barren localities, with capital punishment for every discontent, is the only means of safety, while that far distant theorist presents a prompt and happy solution in acts of Congress and the donation of a one hundred and sixty acre farm. From some considerable experience with them, I am convinced that Indians are no different from other persons in that they are governed, actuated, and influenced by self-interest—self-interest as *they* see it, not as their covetous neighbor or their far distant adviser may see it for them, but as it presents itself to the instincts, tastes, and habits with which they are endowed.

It should be remembered that these people discontinued labor at the building of the tower of Babel, and they still maintain most of their aboriginal customs and loyalty to their nomadic habits. Nothing can be more mistaken than to endeavor to crowd upon them in quick succession the customs of civilization and coerce them to their observance. It is as unreasonable to expect them to realize all at once the benefits of law and order and industrial pursuits, as to be satisfied with the absorption by an alien of whatever is valuable of their bands, and the best fruits of such industries as they may be induced to engage in.

None other than the slowest, most patient, fair, and open processes can succeed in creating them desirable citizens. As promoting to this result some incentives other than legislation and advice are necessary. Grist mills where they can procure flour & the grain they raise themselves in place of its purchase from the sole trader permitted upon the reservation, whose prices are limited only by his conscience; the licensing of more traders, that competition may secure them better prices for their products and less prices for their purchases; the exclusion of intruders from their lands and no special permits to speculators of any description; supplies furnished them to be in quantities as agreed upon and of wholesome quality; the employers furnished to be qualified for their employment and required to engage for the interest of the Indians and not for themselves; schools with intelligent and competent teachers; agents of character who will reside with their constituency and interest themselves faithfully in their welfare. No people more fully understand what belongs to them than Indians, and being equally prompt to resent trespass, trifling matters often lead to most important results. Suspicious, secretive, and averse to experiments, they form conclusions from their own standpoint in every regard to motives and results of varying regulations affecting them, and are quick to retaliate, equally against what is objectionable to them and what they do not comprehend.

The present outbreak [1885] of a small party of Chiricahuas illustrates their aversion to changed methods of administration.² By an act of Congress approved the 3rd of March last, the jurisdiction of certain crimes committed by Indians upon their reservations was transferred to the civil courts. Heretofore among these Apaches, this jurisdiction had been exercised by the Indians themselves according to their tribal customs. About the latter part of March or first of April—before it was known to me or to anyone at my headquarters that such an act had passed—I was informed in a private letter from their reservation that the Chiricahuas had learned and were discussing it, and that it was likely to occasion trouble. On April 18th the officer in charge of the police control of the reservation wrote me, inquiring the scope of the act and how it applied to his charge. A newspaper copy had just been received and from it he was informed April 30th—his letter having been delayed by the mail—that the law was operative according to its tenor, from date of approval, and that the Indians should be “thoroughly ad-

vised of the law, its operation and its consequences, and that it would be complied with to the letter: that they should be carefully instructed what offences subjected them to arrest and delivery to civil authority for trial, and that for all offences not specified in the law, they would be subject to trial and punishment as heretofore.”³

These instructions were mailed to the officer on the day of their date, and were communicated to the Indians as directed, and on May 17th, Geronimo and his band left the reservation. There is [no] doubt in my mind that this act of Congress was the moving cause of their doing so.

Simplicity of administration is quite as important as uniformity and fairness. The authority to administer at once upon any matter which may arise, and their confidence in the power and the justice of the one exercising that authority, are the prime elements of their control, and it is the conflicts of authority, delays of redress and the accumulation of small things, undetermined and unsatisfactory, which leads to outbreaks and ultimate disaster. They cannot understand the transfer of their matters from one tribunal to another, the distribution of their affairs into various departments of government, or their reference to higher authority than that charged with their immediate direction. To still further extend this by giving their criminal jurisdiction to the local authorities cannot but occasion such vague ideas of where and to whom they are responsible and how many agencies have a hand in their management. [This] lead[s] to restlessness and disturbance. With them, as with all other people, the possession of property is a potent restraint against disorder; not so much the possession of land, in which they do not as yet realize proprietorship, but movable property, something tangible, stock and goods for comfort and convenience, and everything which will encourage them in its acquirement and afford them opportunity to accumulate, is more than anything else in the direction of their civilization.

Since my return from Mexico with the hostile Apaches two years ago, every effort has been made to procure the erection of mills upon their reservation, to dispossess old intruders [from the reservation] and to exclude new ones, to have more traders licensed among them and discontinue the monopoly by one, to see that healthy and suitable stock was furnished, and to give them a ready cash market for all their surplus produce.⁴ Except in the last respect, which was immediately within my own control, my efforts have not been attended with [a desired] success.

It may be claimed with confidence, as showing the effect of even one adjunct to the accumulation of property, that the encouragement of having a ready market for their products restrained those who had planted from engaging in the recent outbreak, and that a chief so noted among them as Geronimo was able to muster less than fifty men to leave their occupations and engage in their native employment of marauding and pillage.⁵ Should the other facilities to their self-support be furnished them and they be permitted to manage their internal affairs their own way, under proper restrictions as to the rights of others, I am satisfied that the Apaches in this territory will be in the future as peaceable and progressive as any other Indians in the country.