

The Navajo Long Walk

Through the eyes of the canyon people may we learn the truth of the death march to Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

Long ago in 1846, before the death march the people gathered at Fort Canby, now known as Fort Defiance. The people gathered under the orders of the U.S. Cavalry and more than Ten Thousand Dineh came together to witness the peace treaty signing at a place called Bear Springs, near the Chuska mountains. The Dineh council of Twelve Headmen signed the treaty in a perfect balance of six Beauty Way teachers (Chiefs), and six Discipline Way teachers. This Treaty was recognized as binding to the people and they began to celebrate by dancing in ceremonies called Enemy Way, this ceremony was done to restore harmony to the people whom are out of balance. The dances intensified and after several warriors shot their rifles into the air as a sign of triumph. The soldiers panicked, and began to open fire on the people. Over one hundred Navajo lay dead after the massacre. Chief Manuelito (Man of sacred plants, leading out of canyon waters edge, Holy Boy or Little Messiah), stated to the people that we should not get together in large groups any more because the soldiers fear our power and misunderstand our purpose.

In 1849 Lieutenant Colonel John Washington entered into Canyon De Chelly from the east canyon known as Monument canyon, and was watched by the outlook warriors from overhead for about thirty five to forty miles, before being confronted by hostile enemy. The people hid in the caves and cliffs long before the soldiers' arrival. More than three hundred warriors attacked the contingent of four hundred men in the cavalry, and surrounded them near present day White House ruins. The Colonel was intimidated by the impressive display of warriors above him. The Colonel unleashed his fire power of canons into the canyon walls as a show of strength. The show of fire power did not slow the attacking Navajo and the colonel had to retreat to a safe place at the mouth of the canyon known as Chinle, there on a little hill, where the park service visitor center is located.

The Donavan Treaty was signed as quickly as possible by three peace chiefs, Mariano Martinez (The man who wears the black shirt), Chipitone (Horse giver's son), and Zarcarrillos Largos (Peace Chanter). Narbona (Man of war and Leader Man), a war chief from "Red running into water clan", refused to sign the treaty, stating that a balance of twelve leaders did not exist, and the Enemy Navajo chief Hastin A'na'i (Savayann Carvajal), from New Mexico had been named as the headchief on the treaty that day. The enemy Navajo scouted and fought against their own people. The enemy Navajo were the first ones put into Fort Sumner prison camps and could not understand the reason for the bad treatment they were receiving from people they trusted. As Narbona began to ride away on horseback, the enemy Navajo chief accused him of riding a stolen horse from his stable.

The Colonel ordered the warchief to dismount and surrender the horse, and Narbona refused and was shot in the back and wounded. Narbona's warriors attacked and six were killed in the battle. Manuelito was camped on his fort high atop the battle scene and witnessed the ambush of his father in-law. Manuelito came charging down from the hill and drove the cavalry out and over the canyons to the east, this allowed his father in-law to escape back into Canyon De Chelly. This treaty was never recognized as binding or peaceful by the people who still remember and

distrust signing their names to paper documents, unknowing the words and language in which the document was written.

In 1863 the U.S. Government sent an Indian fighter named Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson, a fur trapping man from New Mexico. The government sent soldiers into Navajoland to rid Dineh of the territory, for the prospect of mining the land for rich minerals. Through the settlements of the Christians, the government could open the land to mining the potential minerals under the sacred lands of the Navajo.

In a sacred sweatlodge a vision was seen by Dineh Medicine Man, named "The man with young Lambskins on his hat", from the "One who walks around you" Clan of Canyon Del Muerto. In this vision of prophecy, the bluecoats were seen attacking and burning the farms and homes of our people. Lambskins Hat began to prepare the residents inside the canyons, but some did not believe the vision. The people of Blackrock canyon and Del Muerto canyon began to stock pile dried foods inside storage bins built of stone and mud, at the top of Fortress Rock, which is located at the fork of the two canyons.

During July of 1863, Kit Carson and seven hundred men return to Fort Defiance. Manuelito and Barboncito (Man with whiskers, Leader man, The Orator or the talker and One who runs with the young warriors), watched the American troops ride into the fort. Many Navajo people were already suffering from raids by all their enemies. Each day war parties raided the Navajo camps. Families were afraid to return to their homes. Utes had destroyed and burned the Navajo's hogans. Utes were the Navajos most dangerous enemy. Kit Carson had encouraged the Utes to raid the Navajos. He paid the Utes money for stolen livestock and allowed them to keep Navajo prisoners. Ute warriors attacked any Navajo that they saw. The headmen knew that the Bluecoats, would soon be coming to attack the Navajos.

At first, the troops didn't do much damage to the Navajo people and their property. Kit Carson's troops destroyed the abandoned Navajo homes in the valley, but only a few Navajo were killed or captured. Still, the Navajo warriors fought the American troops. They attacked a group of soldiers gathering Navajo horses and killed their officer. Navajo warriors raided the Fort Defiance corral and ran off a large herd of horses. Kit Carson could not be stopped.

In August of 1863, he led his men across Navajo country. He divided his soldiers into smaller and faster riding groups. These groups destroyed every Navajo camp they found. The soldiers were not able to capture many Navajos. So far, most of the Navajo families were able to hide from the enemy. By September, Carson's men had captured only fifty Navajos. General Carleton was mad. He ordered Kit Carson to attack Barboncito's people in Canyon de Chelly.

During the month of November, the sky of the Chuska Mountains was dark with rain clouds. The cold wind signaled that winter was coming early. Although winter was about to come, the Ute and American raiders continued their attacks on the Navajos. Some Navajo bands were running out of food, other bands had no food left. Their enemies had destroyed their crops and livestock. Barboncito's brother, Delgado or Delgadito (Tall Painful One), knew that his band would not survive the cold winter. Reluctantly, he decided to surrender to the soldiers at Fort Defiance. Kit

Carson moved them to Fort Sumner. Barboncito swore he would never surrender to the American troops.

When Carson's men were ready to attack Canyon de Chelly, Barboncito's warriors ran off all of the army mules. The mules were needed to carry the soldier's supplies. The American soldiers ran after the raiders and the mules. A heavy snowstorm started and the soldiers had to return to the fort. Barboncito's warriors butchered and ate the mules. Carson's attack was delayed.

On January 6, 1864, Kit Carson led almost four hundred soldiers into Canyon De Chelly. Deep snow covered the mesa and valley below. A sharp cold wind froze the finger and ears of Carson's men. However the Americans didn't stop their expedition. Most of the Navajos were starving and freezing. Carson hoped the Navajos would be easy to conquer. His army traveled through the canyon and destroyed every abandoned Navajo camp that they could find. For sixteen days, the soldiers burned the hogans, tore down the corrals, destroyed food supplies, and filled up water holes with rocks and dirt. Finally, the American troops reached the Chinle area. Kit Carson made camp and waited for the Navajos to surrender. Many people surrendered except for three hundred or more, who were on top of Fortress Rock. Barboncito and Manuelito were survivors on this island of a rock, and were led to war by Chief Lambskins Hat.

Many Navajos realized they would not survive the winter. They had no livestock. Their homes were in ashes, crops destroyed, the children wore rags, and there were so many enemies attacking them, the Navajos were afraid to light fires to keep warm. Most of the Navajos had no choice. They had to surrender to the American troops. Families began to surrender to Kit Carson. Other Navajos walked into Fort Defiance and Fort Wingate to surrender. The soldiers gave the Navajos food and blankets. The Navajos were surprised at the soldiers' charity. They thought the soldiers wanted to kill them. When the news of their good treatment reached other Navajos, more people started to surrender.

Delgadito returned from Fort Sumner. He told the Navajos at Fort Defiance that there were food, blankets, and safe homes there and there were many soldiers to protect them from their enemies. He advised the Navajos to surrender. One by one, Navajo bands trickled into Fort Defiance and Fort Wingate. Soon both forts were overcrowded with thousands of Navajo prisoners. The soldiers ran out of food and blankets for the Navajos. General Carleton was astounded. He did not know there were so many people.

Several Navajo bands refused to surrender. Manuelito and his people moved into the Hopi country. After Carson's attack on Canyon de Chelly was over, Manuelito's people returned to the Chuska Mountains. The Navajo warrior remained ready to fight the American troops. If the enemy attacked again, the Chuska Navajos would give them a battle their enemies would remember. Barboncito and his people did not surrender too. Three hundred of his men, women, and children were hidden safely on top of Fortress Rock in Canyon Del Muerto.

Fortress Rock was a giant butte with tall, steep sides. Barboncito's people used ladder poles to climb to the top. Then they pulled the ladders up behind them so their enemies could not follow them up Fortress Rock.

Carson's soldiers could not find a way up the butte. There was no water on top of the rock, but there was a water hole at the bottom of Fortress Rock. The soldiers guarded the water hole day and night. The American troops thought the Navajos would surrender or die of thirst. But when night came, the people took empty water jugs and quietly climbed down the cliffs. They formed a human chain of more than seventy people, holding hands off the side of the one hundred foot sloping cliff, they tied long yucca ropes to the jugs, lowered the pots into the water hole, filled them, and pulled them back up again. The people were so quiet that the American guards did not even know the Navajos were there for the water.

The soldiers finally left the Fortress Rock area when Lambskins Hat resorted to the evil way or witchcraft. In the dead of the night Lambskins hat unleashed the evil wind spirits that guided the fateful arrow which killed an officer in the U.S. Cavalry. The Ute scouts whom witnessed the event began to pack up and leave as quickly as possible stating that all would die in this canyon if they did not leave at once, the soldiers were left there till the next day and began to tear down the stone fort headquarters they had built, thinking of starving the people off of the rock. The elders tell the story of a lone body wrapped in a blanket, preceded by bluecoats escorted out of the Canyon Del Muerto after their defeat at the hands of the Dineh warriors.

Barboncito's people came down from Fortress Rock and traveled towards the Little Colorado River. The Navajos hoped the soldiers would not follow them. By March of 1864, more than five thousand Navajos were prisoners of the American soldiers. Groups of Navajo captives began the long trek to Fort Sumner, which was several hundred miles away. The American cavalry only had a few wagons and the Navajo people only had a few horses. Almost all the people had to walk to Fort Sumner.

Soon the Navajo's moccasins fell apart and their clothes and blankets turned to rags. During the walk, snow fell on the people marching. Many people became sick and died. They also became sick from the different foods that the soldiers gave them. The Navajos did not know how to use white flour and coffee beans. They mixed the flour with water and drank it. Then they tried boiling the hard coffee beans in stew. This combination gave the people severe stomach cramps. Old people and young people fell along the trail. If they did not get up the soldiers either shot them or left them to freeze to death.

Half way through the march the people had to cross the Rio Grande river. Many were forced into the river by soldiers on horseback and were seen as they washed away and drowned. Many women did not want to cross the river and sacrificed themselves and their babies and disappeared into the river. The surviving Navajo's pleaded with the soldiers and the Navajo's were allowed to cut down tall trees of cottonwood. With the branches of the trees cut the people began to swim across the fast moving river, again many people drowned and were washed away.

The tired and ragged people struggled to get to Fort Sumner. Coyotes began to follow the Navajos and crows circled over their heads. They were waiting for somebody to die. The line of weary prisoners became so long the Army could not protect all the people from enemy attacks. New Mexican raiders attacked the Navajos and took their children. The soldiers made the people continue their march to the fort. The people were then forced to march to Santa Fe, N.M. into the streets, to be made an example to the Pueblo people who were having an uprising, and revolting

against the government. Many people were stoned to death by revenge seekers while young women and children were captured for slave trade.

The headmen began to wonder if they should have listened to Delgadito's promises. They were suffering more on the Long Walk than they had suffered on their own land. The Navajo people were hungry, cold, ill, and sore. Over three thousand Navajos had died and the prisoners were a long way from Fort Sumner. Conditions might have been better for the Navajo people if they had not surrendered. But now it was too late. The headman hoped and prayed there would be food, clothes, homes, and safety at Fort Sumner.

Before the arrival of the people, the Enemy Navajo were imprisoned along with four hundred Mescalero Apache. These first prisoners built the pueblo's that the Navajo would live in, as first thought by the soldiers, but all Navajo began to dig pit homes and spread out as far as the eye could see. The soldiers had put the Navajo between themselves and the Comanche from Texas. This tactic allowed Navajo's to be attacked and killed, without the protection of the soldier's afforded to other tribes that cooperate with the government soldier's.

Upon the arrival at the fort the Navajo's were forced to dig irrigation ditches for the coming corn planting season. This occurred in the winter when the ground is frozen and hard as rock. The crops that the people planted in the spring did not grow due to the salty land and poor water quality of the Pecos river.

In the summer of 1866, it is decided by the remaining people whom were never captured. A leader should be sent to bring back the people to there homeland, thus Chief Barboncito was sent with Chief Manuelito as his bodyguard. One of Manuelito's wives named Juanita (One who walks around you woman), made the trip to Fort Sumner to organize and serve as leader of the Navajo Women. Barboncito and the warriors, began there trek across hostile enemy territory from present day Running Antelope House ruins site inside Canyon Del Muerto.

The chiefs from Navajoland arrived and see the suffering of the people, and begin to think of a way to win the release of the people. Barboncito would exploit the greed and gambling nature of the commanders in charge. The great chief would gamble that his warrior would outshoot the best Ute warrior in an archery contest. The chief guaranteed the delivery of the rest of the Navajo still left on Navajoland. The soldier's placed a small six inch target made of leather upon the cottonwood tree branches. Sticks were drawn and the Ute warrior had to shoot first and missed the center of the target by an inch. The chief chooses Inoetenito (K'aa K'ehi - Man like shooting arrow) form the Folded arm people clan, also known as "Under his clover or cover clan", and the skilled warrior hit the center of the leather target and won the freedom of the Navajo people.

As the documents of the treaty were being drawn up through negotiations, the people celebrated and began sacred ceremony known as "Put the white beads into coyote's mouth" and the coyote showed the way home to the west toward the four sacred mountains. This was done to ensure that the Navajo people would never suffer in this barren land of the Bosque Redondo. When the treaty was signed by a council of twelve headmen and fourteen witnesses the people were released to march home. When the people saw the south sacred mountain, they knelt down and cried. The Acoma pueblo came out of their homes and villages to feed and help the suffering

Navajo, the Acome had also provided help to the people during the march to the fort. Barboncito sent back a band of warriors with "Man like shooting arrow"(Inoetenito), to shoot the flaming arrow into the cottonwood tree where the target was placed, as a symbol of victory to the Navajo.

During this time in the suffering place more than five hundred people still lived inside Canyon De Chelly and Canyon Del Muerto combined. Lambskins Hat had drawn the four sacred antelope on the sandstone walls of Running Antelope House as a vision had come to him in a sweatlodge ceremony. In this vision he saw the people returning to the canyons to thrive again like the once extinct antelope and mountain goats. The four antelope were drawn in 1867 during the people's imprisonment. The goat represents the reestablishment of harmony through the Enemy way ceremony, the zig-zag line represents the Lighting way to protect our sacred traditions, and last the double circle with the cross in the center represents the peace treaty, which the people made with the Christians promising never to choose sides, but to blend the two beliefs to be in balance with one's self.

The people at home during the imprisonment had to battle two hundred Ute warriors at "Ute raid canyon, and Ute raid pictograph cave". The people knew through a series of lookout people, the Ute's were coming and prepared twelve decoys to run the raiders into the box canyon and ambush them. The Navajo warriors appeared above the raiders and began to assault from above with rocks, large wood beams, and sharpshooters with rifles and bow and arrows. The Ute raiders were trapped when more than two hundred of Barboncito and Manuelito's warrior's attacked from the rear, closing off the escape of the enemy and the takeover of the canyon's was brought to a halt by the fierce and brave stand by the Navajo inside Canyon Del Muerto.

To this day the Navajo have never returned to Fort Sumner as prisoners or as a large group. The Dineh people now do Enemy Way (Nai' Daa') to restore the harmony into the people disrupted by the violence and corruption of the outside world. Through the balance of traditional Dineh teachings and the acceptance of Christianity, the Dineh find healing and harmony in this world.

By Adam J. Teller - stories of my Grandma May Thompson and Grandpa Chee Draper.