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United States Marine Corps
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**TITLE: IRREGULAR WARFARE IN THE AMERICAN WEST:
THE GERONIMO CAMPAIGN**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Irregular Warfare in the American West: The Geronimo Campaign

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Thesis: The Geronimo campaign bears similarities to current U.S. military operations in which a savvy enemy exploits porous borders and austere terrain to fight an asymmetrical war against American and coalition forces.

Discussion: During the height of his powers in the 1880s, Geronimo conducted an irregular warfare campaign against the U.S. Army. Geronimo's greatest adversary, General George Crook, developed a groundbreaking concept of operations to fight the Apaches. Crook employed Apache scouts and deployed small, mobile logistical units against his quarry, ideas initially dismissed by his senior officers. Crook's tactical innovations enabled his units to relentlessly harass the enemy until they could no longer sustain the fight. Crook's protégé, Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, located and convinced Geronimo to surrender in the summer of 1886, a task many other capable and experienced soldiers of the era could not accomplish. Gatewood's success resulted from a confluence of factors: his fluency in the Apache language and culture, his compassion for Geronimo and his people, and his adoption of Crook's method of fighting the Apaches. The Geronimo campaign bears similarities to current U.S. military operations, where a savvy enemy exploits porous borders and austere terrain to fight an asymmetrical war against American and coalition forces in Afghanistan. This paper will examine how the lessons of the Geronimo campaign apply in America's modern-day irregular warfare campaigns.

Conclusion: Lessons the Army learned fighting against Geronimo over a century ago still apply in modern irregular warfare campaigns.

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Table of Contents

	Page
DISCLAIMER.....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ii
PREFACE.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	3
THE GERONIMO CAMPAIGN.....	7
CONCLUSION.....	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29

Preface

I became interested in researching and writing about the Geronimo campaign after living in the West several years ago. Geronimo's warrior spirit still inspires awe over a century after his death; I fell under the story's spell. Geronimo was a master of irregular warfare, well before the term became a popular part of the martial lexicon. Modern commentators frequently describe irregular warfare as a "new way" of warfighting. Irregular warfare is not new, and I chose this topic to highlight the fact that, over one hundred years ago, the Army fought a campaign similar to the current war in Afghanistan against a foe just as intractable as our current enemy. Some of the lessons from the Geronimo campaign are still relevant today.

I would like to thank my MMS mentor and Operational Art professor Dr. Paul D. Gelpi for his assistance, patience, and guidance during the course of this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Eric Y. Shibuya, for focusing my thesis and providing guidance on how to become a better writer. Thanks also to Dr. Donald F. Bittner, for broadening my perspective on the American Indian Wars.

I owe a particular sense of gratitude to my family for so graciously allowing me time to focus on this project during the busy academic year. Alyssa, thank you for reading the various drafts of this paper, providing constructive criticism, and encouraging me to pursue this topic. I could not have completed the MMS without your support (and Andrew's too).

Introduction

Like a flash he leaped to his feet. There was a picture I shall never forget. He [Geronimo] stood erect as a mountain pine, while every outline of his symmetrical form indicated strength and endurance. His abundant ebony locks draped his ample shoulders, his stern features, his keen, piercing eye, and his proud and graceful posture combined to create in him the model of an Apache war chief....His eyes blazed fiercely under the excitement of the moment and his form quivered with suppressed rage. From his demeanor it was evident to all that he was hesitating between two purposes, whether to draw his knife...and die fighting - or to surrender.

-- Indian Agent John Philip Clum (1877)¹

The popular conception of the American way of war is that of large armies supported by massive firepower, maneuvering in great fields of battle.² The American experiences in the Civil War and World War II have helped cement this image in the national consciousness. In fact, the United States has waged irregular warfare with greater regularity than major combat operations in every century of its existence, across every continent except Antarctica, against pirates, insurgents, communists, and religious fanatics.³ The U.S. Army's campaign against Geronimo is one example of irregular warfare in American history. Like the lessons from other U.S. irregular warfare campaigns, some of the lessons from the Geronimo campaign are still applicable to today's warfighter conducting operations against enemies that employ asymmetrical tactics on distant battlefields.

From 1885 to 1886 the U.S. Army conducted a campaign to kill or capture Geronimo, the legendary Apache shaman, medicine man, and military leader. Geronimo refused to accept life on a reservation in the desert southwest and he resisted U.S. authority through attacks on western outposts, settlers, and infrastructure. Geronimo's remarkable ability to conduct devastating hit-and-run raids and evade capture frustrated the Army time and again throughout the 1880s. At the height of his powers in the late 1880s, Geronimo conducted an irregular warfare campaign against the Army.

In the 1870s, General George Crook, the greatest "Indian fighter" of his era, developed a groundbreaking concept of operations to fight the Apaches. An 1852 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Crook led an unremarkable military career for his first nine years as an officer. He quickly rose through the ranks during the Civil War and by 1865 assumed command of the Army of the Potomac with the rank of brevet Major General.⁴ Crook reverted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1865 when the Army assigned him to Idaho Territory to fight the Paiute Indians, which he did for six years. During that time, Crook earned three promotions, in recognition of his talents as a warfighter, whereupon he regained his wartime rank of Major General.

In 1871 the War Department gave Crook command of the Department of Arizona, and charged him with the task of "whipping into submission all the bands of the Apache nation living in Arizona."⁵ Crook employed Apache scouts to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance, and deployed small, mobile logistical units against his quarry, innovations that enabled his units to relentlessly harass the enemy and destroy his will to resist. Senior Army leaders dismissed these ideas as unworkable and relieved Crook from command when Geronimo escaped en route to the United States from Mexico in January 1886. Eight months later, Crook's protégé, Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, finally located and convinced Geronimo to surrender.⁶ Gatewood's success resulted from a confluence of factors: his fluency in the Apache language and culture, his compassion for Geronimo and his people, and his adoption of Crook's method of fighting the Apaches. Geronimo's surrender marked the end of an era in Apache and Western American history.

Geronimo's capitulation brought an end to the Apache wars.⁷ Known in his native tongue as Goyaałé, or "The One Who Yawns," Geronimo was a Bedonkohe Chiricuaaha Apache born in

No-doyohn Canyon, Arizona in June 1829.⁸ Geronimo waged his campaign in the untamed, inhospitable border areas of the American Southwest and northern Mexico. The Geronimo campaign bears similarities to current U.S. military operations in which the enemy exploits porous borders and austere terrain to fight an asymmetrical war against American and coalition forces. This paper will examine how lessons from the Geronimo campaign may apply to America's modern-day irregular warfare campaigns.

Historical Context

Here I took some food and talked with the other Indians who had lost in the massacre, but none had lost as I had, for I had lost all.

-- Geronimo (1905)⁹

The Apache Indians are a group of six indigenous peoples with a shared language and culture who lived in southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and northern Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico. The basic Apache social organization of the nineteenth century was the extended family. A cluster of families formed a group, which fulfilled ceremonial, economic, and military functions. A collective of groups was termed a band. Geronimo was a member of the Chiricuaa group of the Bedonkohe band. The Apaches, like so many other Indian nations being subject to the suzerainty of the U.S. government, forcefully resisted the American encroachment. Geronimo's bravery, cunning, and guile personified Native American resistance to the United States, but despite his future as a *de facto* chief, Geronimo could never lay claim to the hereditary title *nantan* (chief) because his parents were from different bands.¹⁰

Geronimo's entire band of Bedonkohe Apaches went south to Casa Grande in the current-day Mexican state of Sonora in the summer of 1858. His life would change forever because of events in Casa Grande. For several days, the Apaches traded with the Mexican residents of Casa

Grande, leaving a small guard detachment behind to protect the women, children, horses, arms, and supplies. One afternoon, the Apaches returned to find the guard force dead, the horses and arms stolen, supplies destroyed, and women and children murdered. Geronimo's wife, children, and mother were among the dead.¹¹ Bereft of weapons and supplies and surrounded by the enemy deep in a foreign land, Chief Mangus-Colorado ordered his people to return home silently, leaving the dead where they lay.¹² The Casa Grande incident aroused an intense, life-long hatred of Mexicans in Geronimo who "vowed vengeance upon the Mexican troopers who had wronged me, and whenever I came near [family] grave[s] or saw anything to remind me of former happy days my heart would ache for revenge upon Mexico."¹³

Upon returning home, Mangus-Colorado called a council, found that all of his warriors were willing to go on the warpath and avenge the murders, and appointed Geronimo to solicit the aid of other tribes in the fight.¹⁴ The war party assembled on the Mexican border in the summer of 1859 ready for revenge, one year after the massacre at Casa Grande, with Geronimo acting as guide. The warriors traveled light, carrying only weapons and three days' rations, and with great swiftness, marching fourteen hours and traveling forty to forty-five miles per day, *on foot*.¹⁵ The party concealed its movement by taking advantage of the mountainous and riverine terrain. The Apache way of offensive warfare - carrying only the barest of essentials, traveling with remarkable speed, and using the terrain to their advantage - made them an extremely difficult enemy to hunt.

When the Apaches camped near the city of Arispé, eight Mexican cavalymen challenged them. The Apaches captured, killed and scalped the Mexicans, which drew additional troops from the city. Although Mexican troops engaged the Apaches the next day, they did not fight a decisive engagement; however, the Apaches managed to capture the Mexican supply train,

adding "plenty of provisions and some more guns" to their stock.¹⁶ Four Mexican companies - two cavalry and two infantry - attacked in mid-morning on the Apaches' second full day near Arispe. When Geronimo told the chieftains that he recognized the cavalry as the soldiers who massacred his family, the leaders gave him the honor of leading the attack.

Geronimo arranged his men in circle near a copse, drawing in the Mexican infantry.¹⁷ When the Mexicans advanced to within rifle range of the Apaches, the soldiers halted to open fire. Geronimo responded by leading a head-on attack with the majority of his force, while attempting an envelopment by directing some of his force to attack the enemy's rear.¹⁸

Geronimo recalled that he thought of his "murdered mother, wife, and babies - of my father's grave and my vow of vengeance, and I fought with fury."¹⁹ The two-hour engagement ended with Geronimo and three other Apaches in the center of the battlefield,²⁰ out of arrows, with "spears broken off in the bodies of dead enemies," armed only with their knives.²¹

The fight surged briefly again when two Mexican soldiers rode toward Geronimo's quartet and shot down two of the Apache warriors, then put aside their empty guns and drew their sabers.²² One soldier rode up to the warrior standing next to Geronimo and killed him with his sword; Geronimo dodged the same fate, retrieved a spear from the body of a dead Mexican, and killed the soldier. Geronimo and the last Mexican soldier had a brief and violent struggle, during which Geronimo stabbed the Mexican to death. The Mexican force was finally broken, but at a steep price in Apache blood. Later in life, Geronimo remembered:

Over the bloody field, covered with the bodies of Mexicans, rang the fierce Apache war-whoop. Still covered with the blood of my enemies, still holding my conquering weapon, still hot with the joy of battle, victory, and vengeance, I was surrounded by the Apache braves and made war chief of all the Apaches. Then I gave orders for scalping the slain. I could not call back my loved ones, I could not bring back the dead Apaches, but I could rejoice in this revenge. The Apaches had avenged the massacre of "Kas-ki-yeh."²³

Geronimo led at least fifteen other raiding expeditions into Mexico over the years, some of which were successful, some of which failed to achieve his objectives. The Mexicans located and attacked Geronimo's people at least seven times in the United States or northern Mexico during the same period. Neither the Apaches nor the Mexicans showed any mercy during these fights, wantonly killing women, children, and the elderly, as well as destroying homes and leaving a path of indiscriminate destruction in their respective wakes. Geronimo bore personal responsibility and animosity from his tribe for failed raids into Mexico, and wore the scars of battle on his body:

During my many wars with the Mexicans I received eight wounds as follows: shot in the right leg above the knee, and still carry the bullet; shot through the left forearm; wounded in the right leg below the knee with a saber; wounded on top of the head with the butt of a musket; shot just below the outer corner of the left eye; shot in the left side; shot in the back.²⁴

Nineteen years after his surrender, his animosity still burned:

I have killed many Mexicans; I do not know how many, for frequently I did not count them. Some of them were not worth counting. It has been a long time since then, but still I have no love for the Mexicans. With me they were always treacherous and malicious. I am old now and shall never go on the warpath again, but if I were young, and followed the warpath, it would lead into Old Mexico.²⁵

Geronimo applied the warfighting and leadership lessons he learned fighting the Mexicans against the U.S. Army when it became clear that the Army threatened his peoples' culture and way of life.

The Geronimo Campaign

They carry nothing but arms and ammunition; they can live on the cactus; they can go more than forty-eight hours without water; they know every water-hole and every foot of ground in this vast extent of country; they have incredible powers of endurance; they run in small bands, scattering at the first indications of pursuit. What can the United States soldier, mounted on his heavy horse, with the necessary forage, rations, and camp equipment, do as against this supple, untiring foe? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It is no exaggeration to say that these fiends can travel, week in and week out, at the rate of seventy miles a day, and this over the most barren and desolate country imaginable. One week of such work will kill the average soldier and his horse; the Apache thrive on it.

-- Anonymous U.S. Army Officer²⁶

Just as against the Mexicans, the Apaches fervently resisted American encroachment on their culture, land, and way of life when it became apparent that the growth of the United States was a grave threat to their existence. Crook described them as "the tigers of the human species."²⁷ Despite the Apaches' martial skill, Crook succeeded in forcing the tribe onto reservations by 1872, bringing peace to Arizona. The Army next assigned Crook to command the Department of the Platte, where he served from 1875 to 1882, and fought in the Great Sioux War of 1876-1877.²⁸ Crook returned to command in Arizona when the United States went to war against the Apaches in the 1880s.²⁹ He cornered the Apaches on several occasions, but could never capture the enemy. Crook finally negotiated Geronimo's surrender in Mexico in March 1886, but the Apaches once again escaped before reaching the United States while under the escort of Apache scouts.

Crook's biographer and fellow Indian Wars veteran Captain John G. Bourke described Crook as a conscientious leader who paid meticulous detail to his mission and sought to extract all the information he could:

about the country, the lines of travel, the trails across the various mountains, the fords where any were required for streams, the nature of the soil, especially its products, such as grasses, character of the climate, the condition of the pack-mules, and all pertaining to them, and every other item of interest a commander could possibly want to have determined.³⁰

In addition to his focus on the physical terrain in his area of responsibility, Crook was also an expert on the human terrain, gained through his experiences "with [the Indians'] culture, their terrain, and the form of warfare that they were best at."³¹ The Apaches considered Crook "to be more of an Indian than the Indian himself;" he learned their customs by spending years amid the tribes of the American West. Crook's knowledge of his enemy's physical and human terrain shaped his tactical approach to fighting the Apaches.³²

The Army forced the Chiricuaaha from their ancestral lands to the San Carlos Indian reservation in eastern Arizona to accommodate the growing American nation. San Carlos was a constrictive, unwelcoming, disease-ridden place with arid land. Geronimo fled with a group of followers to Mexico soon after the resettlement, but the Army quickly arrested the Apaches and returned them to San Carlos. For the remainder of the 1870s, Geronimo and the Chiricuaahas remained at San Carlos where they dug an irrigation network and cultivated a variety of crops including wheat, barley and corn.³³ The hot, barren San Carlos Reservation, like so many others like it, was not an easy place to live, and the difficulties of dealing with corrupt Indian agents compounded the harshness of the physical terrain.

On 30 September 1881, Geronimo and seventy-three other Chiricuaahas fled the reservation and headed for Mexico. The Army mobilized troops from nearby Fort Bowie to prevent Chiricuaaha raiding parties from harassing American settlements, but the war party reentered the United States in March 1883 and killed about a dozen Americans before slipping back into Mexico. The failure to apprehend the Apaches convinced the War Department to replace General Orlando Bolivar Willcox, as commander of the Department of the Arizona, with Crook.³⁴ The choice of Crook would have far-reaching implications for the U.S. effort against the Apaches, but the conflict would last another three years.

Crook thought the Army relied too heavily on its experience fighting the Civil War, so he disregarded standard procedure and adopted two tactical innovations to fight the Apaches.

Crook's study of the terrain and the enemy convinced him that his men should operate in small, highly mobile units; therefore, he replaced the unwieldy supply columns common in the Army with small-unit mule trains.³⁵ Crook was the first to incorporate Apache scouts into his force, a result of his belief that the best Apache trackers were fellow Apaches. He used the scouts in intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance roles, and was the first commander to use scouts from the same band as his quarry.³⁶

Contemporary thinking on the inclusion of native scouts scorned utilizing Indians from the same band because of fears that they would have divided loyalties at best and be traitors at worst. Bourke observed, however, that the psychological impact of being tracked by their own tribesmen, who were backed by highly mobile soldiers, proved devastating to the Apaches:

They had never been afraid of the Americans alone, but now that their own people were fighting against them they did not know what to do; they could not go to sleep at night, because they feared to be surrounded before daybreak; they could not hunt - the noise of their guns would attract the troops; they could not cook mescal or anything else, because the flame and smoke would draw down the soldiers; they could not live in the valley - there were too many soldiers; they had retreated to the mountain tops, thinking to hide in the snow until the soldiers went home, but the scouts found them out and the soldiers followed them. They wanted to make peace, and to be at terms of good-will with the whites.³⁷

Crook's relentless harassment kept the Apaches constantly on the defensive; his use of Apache scouts was his greatest tactical achievement. Only the rarest individual or unit chooses "to discard its heavy baggage, wagon trains, trucks, planes, or artillery and to regroup in order to fight guerillas [because] this would mean a true, if only temporary, conversion from soldier to guerilla."³⁸ Crook and Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, whose presence would be a major

factor in Geronimo's final surrender, were two of the rare breed of warrior who made the conversion.

Upon assuming command, Crook dispatched a company-sized expedition, led by Apache Indian scouts, under the command of Captain Crawford into Mexico, where they located and surprised Geronimo and his followers on 15 May 1883.³⁹ Most of the Apaches escaped; nevertheless, over the next three days many surrendered and declared their willingness to return to the reservation. Geronimo was among the few that chose to continue fighting. Geronimo's refusal to yield to the Army prompted Crook to order Lieutenant Britton Davis and a company of scouts to locate and return the remaining Apaches. Finally, in March 1884, Davis located Geronimo and escorted him and his followers back to San Carlos. Peace between the Apaches and the United States lasted until May 1885 when Geronimo, along with approximately 150 Chiricuaaha and Warm Springs Apaches, escaped again from the San Carlos reservation. Geronimo and his followers headed south for the sanctuary afforded by the Mexican Sierra Madre, where they resumed their life of raiding Mexican towns and ranches.⁴⁰

On 11 June, Crook ordered two columns, one under Captain Emmet Crawford, the other under Davis, into Mexico with orders to kill or capture Geronimo and his followers.⁴¹ Crawford's command consisted of Troop A of the Sixth Cavalry and ninety-two Apache scouts. Within a month, Crook ordered Captain Wirt Davis into Mexico to supplement Crawford and Britton Davis' effort. A recent treaty with Mexico aided Crook in his campaign because it allowed the Army to cross into Mexico - the first step in denying the Apaches their traditional safe haven south of the border. In his description of his campaign, Crook observed that:

...the whole country is of indescribable roughness. The Indians act differently and are split up in small bands and are constantly on the watch. Their trails are so scattered that it is almost impossible to follow them...It should be understood that the Indians are so split up in small parties and are so constantly on the watch that

our scouts are practically compelled to cover the entire region, and cannot even venture to follow trails where they pass over prominent points for fear of their pursuit being discovered....⁴²

Although outnumbered by a considerable margin, Apache field craft allowed Geronimo to evade the units in pursuit, rescue his wife and child, along with another woman near Fort Apache, and do so despite great measures emplaced to prevent such incidents.⁴³ As Geronimo's Apaches and Crook's units crisscrossed the U.S.-Mexico border, Crook's units stayed close on Geronimo's trail but the Apaches managed to stay one step ahead. Crook lamented that "the country is so indescribably rough that any pursuit is almost a farce."⁴⁴

At the end of 1885, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Phillip Sheridan arrived at Fort Bowie, where he and Crook made plans for a new campaign across the border.⁴⁵ Native Americans now formed the majority of Crook's force: Wirt Davis with one troop of cavalry and several companies of scouts and Crawford with a contingent that consisted almost exclusively of Apache scouts.⁴⁶

Sheridan was skeptical of using Apache scouts but did not change Crook's force composition. In January 1886, Crawford's scouts located and assaulted Geronimo's camp. A lookout sounded the alarm as Crawford's men began the attack, which allowed the warriors to escape. In the process of fleeing, the warriors left behind all of their horses, as well as several women and children.⁴⁷ The Apaches who escaped realized they could not survive with such losses and, under a white flag of truce, informed Crawford they would negotiate for their surrender.

At dawn, a detachment of Mexican soldiers who were also pursuing the Apaches attacked the Army camp and shot Crawford in the head. The reasons for the raid are unclear. Eyewitness and media accounts indicate the Mexicans likely knew they were attacking a U.S. Army

encampment.⁴⁸ Mexican hatred of Apaches ran deep; their motivation may have been to target Apache scouts in Crawford's command. The following day, the Apache leadership, including Geronimo, Naiche, and Nana, appeared. Nana surrendered, and Geronimo and Naiche entrusted their families to the Army. Geronimo stated that he would need time to gather the rest of his followers and convince them to end their resistance but promised he would "bring all their followers north 'in two moons' for a peace conference with Crook."⁴⁹ Geronimo insisted on surrendering only to Crook. Geronimo chose the Canyon de los Embudos, just south of the border, as the meeting site for the surrender.

Crook thought the American Indian was "struggling under the disadvantage of an inherited ignorance" but, unlike some of his contemporaries, he also thought the Indian was "a human being, gifted with the same god-like apprehension as the white man, and like him inspired by noble impulses, ambition for progress and advancement...."⁵⁰ He advocated treating the Indians with fairness, giving them land, and teaching the skills to farm and raise cattle - with the goal of breaking dependence on the tribe.⁵¹ Crook also made significant changes to daily life on the San Carlos Reservation, ending frequent roll calls and allowing the Indians to settle anywhere they chose on the reservation.⁵² He also assigned military agents to share accountability for the Indians with civilian agents. Crook assigned Gatewood to Fort Apache as one of the military agents.

In late March 1886, Crook located the Apaches at the rendezvous point:

We found them on a rocky hill...in such a position that a thousand men could not have surrounded them with any possibility of capturing them...They were armed to the teeth, having the most improved guns and all the ammunition they could carry...Even if I had been disposed to betray the confidence placed in me, it would have been simply an impossibility to get white troops to that point either by day or by night without their knowledge, and had I attempted to do this the whole band would have stampeded back to the mountains.⁵³

Crook's superiors specifically ordered him to make no promises "unless necessary to secure the surrender" of Geronimo and his followers.⁵⁴ When he met the Apache leaders the Indians agreed to surrender and go to Florida only if, after two years, they could return to the Apache Reservation.⁵⁵ Crook agreed and informed Washington of the results of the negotiations. Sheridan was not pleased with the results:

The President cannot assent to the surrender of the hostiles on the terms that their imprisonment last for two years, with the understanding of their return to the reservation. He instructs you to enter into negotiations on the terms of their unconditional surrender, only sparing their lives; in the meantime, and on the receipt of this order, you are directed to take every precaution against the escape of the hostiles, which must not be allowed under any circumstances. You must make at once such disposition of your troops as will insure against further hostilities by completing the destruction of the hostiles unless these terms are accepted.⁵⁶

Crook refused to obey the order to renegotiate, but the issue soon became irrelevant. Within two days of agreeing to surrender, and one day from reaching the border of the United States, Geronimo, Naiche, and nearly 40 followers disappeared again into the mountains of Mexico.

Sheridan was understandably not pleased with the latest escape, and stung Crook with the accusation that the Apache scouts were somehow responsible for the escape of Geronimo: "Your dispatch of yesterday [30 March 1886] received. It has occasioned great disappointment. It seems strange that Geronimo and party could have escaped without the knowledge of the scouts."⁵⁷ Sheridan's hint of disloyalty on the part of the scouts was an indictment of Crook's leadership because the scouts were Crook's brainchild; nevertheless, the historical record indicates the Apache scouts were loyal to Crook.⁵⁸ On 1 April 1886, Crook asked to be relieved from command for his failure to deliver Geronimo, to which Sheridan quickly agreed.

Sheridan chose Miles to replace Crook in the aftermath of Geronimo's escape. Miles was an experienced Indian campaigner, but "he lacked Crook's brilliance, thorough knowledge of the

Apaches, [and] originality..."⁵⁹ Miles, who despised Crook personally and professionally, disagreed with Crook's way of fighting,⁶⁰ especially his reliance on Indian scouts:

Previous to my taking command of the department a large number of Apache scouts had been employed for the purpose of hunting the hostile Apaches. I had no confidence in their integrity and did not believe they could be trusted. I believed that they were naturally more friendly to their own blood relatives than they could be to our service, and took measures to have nearly all of them discharged.⁶¹

Miles removed the remaining Apaches from scouting duty, placing the Indians in lower-profile jobs throughout his command. Furthermore, in lieu of the mobile, small units favored by Crook, Miles put 5,000 soldiers in the field to hunt Geronimo and his tiny band of followers. Miles stationed the infantry and cavalry in places he thought Geronimo might frequent, including mountain passes, waterholes, and trails.⁶² Predictably, infantry and cavalry concentrations failed to capture the Apaches, and Miles' thinking about the use of Indian scouts soon began to change.

In May 1886, Miles assigned Captain Henry W. Lawton a force of 35 cavalrymen, 20 infantrymen, 100 pack mules, and 20 White Mountain and San Carlos Apache Indian scouts (despite his earlier doubts about their use) to hunt Geronimo in Mexico. For four months, Lawton chased the Apaches through the austere Mexican terrain. The mules broke down in the first week of the campaign, only one-third of the enlisted men lasted for the duration. Three sets of officers rotated through the command during the search, and Geronimo was never cornered.⁶³ Ironically, while Miles made "a great show of employing regular soldiers against the Apaches" at the beginning of his time in charge of the Geronimo campaign, "in the end he quietly adopted Crook's methods" of using Apache scouts.

On 13 July 1886, after failing to capture Geronimo, and with Lawton still in the field, Miles tasked Gatewood with locating the elusive Apache leader and convincing him to surrender. Gatewood was a logical choice because he was fluent in the Apache language, knew the culture,

and was one of the few Army officers known to every Apache in Geronimo's band. The lieutenant was a protégé of Crook with a special aptitude for dealing with Indians; he first served under Crook in Arizona Territory in 1882.⁶⁴ Gatewood, known by the Apaches in their language as Bay-chen-daysen (Long Nose), developed a kinship with the Indians when he ran the Fort Apache Agency for three years earlier in the 1880s, and felt compassion for the hardships they suffered on the reservation.

Gatewood departed with two Chiricuaa Apaches named Ka-teah and Martin, both blood relatives of Geronimo, a mule packer and three mules. His task was to find Geronimo, demand his surrender, promise his removal to Florida, and to wait with the rest of his people for the President's decision on his "disposition."⁶⁵ Miles made Gatewood his main effort, and provided the lieutenant with written authority "to call upon any officer commanding U.S. troops, except those of several small columns operating in Mexico, for whatever aid we needed."⁶⁶ Miles' selection of Gatewood would prove to be the critical ingredient for the success the mission.

Miles ordered Gatewood to approach hostiles with an escort of at least twenty-five soldiers.⁶⁷ Gatewood crossed the U.S.-Mexico border five days after departing Camp Bowie and made contact with Lawton, who was encamped on the Arros River in the Sierra Madre Mountains, approximately 250 miles south of the border.⁶⁸ In the middle of August, Gatewood received news indicating that Geronimo's party was in the vicinity of Fronteras, Mexico negotiating for his surrender with Mexican authorities. Gatewood departed Lawton's command and travelled to Fronteras in one day, a distance of seventy miles.

Upon his arrival in Fronteras, Gatewood discovered that Mexican authorities and U.S. Army Lieutenant W. E. Wilder were already negotiating for the surrender and had provided several emissaries with three ponies laden with food and mescal - an intoxicant - to Geronimo's

party.⁶⁹ During the night the Mexican district prefect assembled two hundred *soldados*, with plans to use this force to attack and kill what the Mexicans hoped would be drunken Apaches in an ambush.⁷⁰ The Mexican authorities were upset with Gatewood's presence and expressed concern that he would interfere with their plans. At dark, Gatewood surreptitiously departed with his original contingent, plus a small detachment of Wilder's soldiers and a Mexican interpreter, and slipped into the mountains to track the Apaches himself.

The next morning, Gatewood's party spotted the trail, notified Lawton via runner of his discovery, and followed the Indians for three days through austere and dangerous terrain. On the third day, Ka-teah and Martin halted at the head of an "uninviting, as one might say, severely unattractive [canyon leading into the Bavispe valley] with a pair of faded canvas pants hanging on a bush nearby."⁷¹ Gatewood was certain the pants at the head of this imposing terrain feature were a signal of the Indians' presence, but the area was empty of inhabitants, and the party camped for the night on a cane brake on high ground near the Bavispe River. The chase was beginning to chafe Gatewood, despite his proximity to Geronimo:

With a picket on the peak & the Indians [Ka-teah and Martin] following the trail for several miles beyond, together with the hiding places the cane brake offered in case of emergency, we felt pretty safe, though this peace commission business was getting decidedly tiresome. The white flag was high up on a century plant pole all the time, but that don't make a man bullet proof. As it turned out, Geronimo saw us all the time, but never noticed the flag, although he had good field glasses, & he wondered what fool small party was dogging his footsteps.⁷²

At sundown on 23 August, Ka-teah and Martin returned with news that they had contacted Geronimo's party approximately four miles from Gatewood's encampment and delivered Miles' surrender demands. Geronimo delivered his own message through Ka-teah and Martin saying he would negotiate but with Gatewood alone. By this time the myth of Geronimo had taken on epic proportions, but Chief Naiche, son of Cochise, was the actual *nantan* guiding

Geronimo and the Chiricuaaha, and Naiche was the decision maker. Naiche guaranteed Gatewood would be "perfectly safe so long as [he and his men] behaved themselves."⁷³

Gatewood decided to wait until the next morning to visit Geronimo. During the evening, thirty additional scouts from Lawton's command arrived in the vicinity of Gatewood's camp.

On the morning of 24 August, Gatewood and his men struck out to Geronimo's camp and met four of Naiche's scouts on the trail. Naiche requested to meet Gatewood's peace commission in a shaded area near the Bavispe, to which Gatewood complied. Naiche's men slowly filtered into the meeting place, unsaddled, and let out their ponies to graze.⁷⁴ At last, Geronimo arrived, shook hands with Gatewood, and Geronimo sat "as close as he could get."⁷⁵ Twenty-four armed Chiricuaaha warriors surrounded Gatewood. As he sat face to face with the legendary Geronimo he was uncomfortable, "feeling chilly twitching movements."⁷⁶

Gatewood delivered Miles' message. Geronimo responded by saying they would "leave the war path only on condition that they be allowed to return to the reservation, occupy the farms held by them when they left the last time, be furnished with the usual rations, clothing, farming implements, etc., with guaranteed exemption from punishment for what they had done."⁷⁷

Gatewood explained that he could not modify Miles' surrender proposal, and that the terms would be less lenient upon capture or surrender at a later time. Geronimo spoke for over an hour with Gatewood about the various injustices committed against the Indians by white people then withdrew for a private conference.⁷⁸ Geronimo returned to the negotiations by emphasizing that his people would not give up all of the Southwest and were willing to cede everything but their reservation.⁷⁹ Geronimo implored: "Take us to the reservation or fight."⁸⁰ Gatewood reemphasized that he could not alter Miles' surrender proposal.

The apparent impasse generated another private meeting among the Apaches, after which Geronimo announced that they would continue the war, but "they wanted to 'talk' all night if they could find a beef to kill to furnish the necessary meat."⁸¹ Finding no animal to slaughter, the two parties smoked and continued the conversation. Finally, Geronimo asked about Miles, and expressed the possibility that the Apaches would consider surrendering to Crook, a man whom they knew. After asking myriad questions about Miles, Geronimo, who obviously trusted Gatewood by that point, asked for Gatewood's advice as "one of us & not a white man."⁸² Gatewood answered, "I would trust Gen. Miles & take him at his word."⁸³ The discussion about surrender ended, and shortly thereafter Gatewood departed for Lawton's camp for the night.

The next morning Geronimo and his party called for Gatewood outside Lawton's camp. Geronimo informed the lieutenant that all thirty-eight Apaches would meet Miles and surrender to him in person in exchange for safe passage back to the United States.⁸⁴ Gatewood relayed word of the breakthrough to Lawton, who approved the plan and notified Miles. All parties then broke camp and headed for Skeleton Canyon, the appointed place for the formal surrender. After an eight-day journey across dangerous physical terrain, coupled with the possibility of attack by Mexican troops or American soldiers unaware of the surrender terms, Geronimo, Naiche, and their people arrived at Skeleton Canyon. Two days later, on 4 September 1886, General Miles arrived and accepted the surrender, and told his foe that he and his people would go to Florida to await the decision of the President on their fate.⁸⁵ The symbolic end of this chapter of Geronimo's life ended with the surrender of his Winchester Model 1876 .45 caliber carbine. Geronimo's Winchester rifle is now part of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian collection.

Conclusion

[Geronimo] was unwilling to give up, and he offered to die fighting for what was his by right - his country. I don't blame him for it. The white people came to this country, pouring out like popcorn. To locate themselves in our country, they treated the Indians bad - tie them together and shoot them, robbed them of everything, take everything they got, shot them, showed them no mercy, killed them like animals, tried to exterminate them. Geronimo was fighting for his own. He tried to win back his country for his people and he died a prisoner.

-- Asa Deklugie (Geronimo's successor)⁸⁶

The Geronimo campaign offers important lessons on how to fight an intractable enemy who conducts asymmetrical warfare, has the advantage of great mobility and intimate knowledge of the physical terrain, and a sanctuary in which to hide, rest, and refit. Current operations in Afghanistan targeting al-Qaeda remnants, the Taliban, and other transnational terrorist organizations bear resemblances to the Army's struggle against Geronimo in the 1880s. Insurgents conduct asymmetrical warfare against coalition forces in Afghanistan. Fighting predominantly in small cells offers Afghan insurgents the advantage of mobility; tribal affiliation provides a guarantee of safe havens. A rugged, ungoverned border region offers the promise of further safety. However, like the Apaches, whom the Mexicans regarded with great disdain, today's Afghan insurgents face an increasingly inhospitable neighbor in Pakistan. The Mexicans' constant hounding of Geronimo and his followers eventually helped wear down the Apaches. Likewise, with fewer places to turn, insurgents in Afghanistan are increasingly subject to attack by remotely-piloted drones, Special Forces, and conventional units.

Crook overcame the Apaches' advantage of mobility by utilizing small strike forces that modeled their operations on the Apache way of war. Gatewood's fluency in the Apache language and culture were decisive factors in Geronimo's decision to surrender. The U.S. faces a critical vulnerability in today's struggle in Afghanistan because of the lack of uniformed service members who are fluent in languages, such as Pashto and Dari, and tribal codes, such as

Pashtunwali. Strong, visionary leaders, who are fluent in the language and culture of today's enemies, like Crook and Gatewood, will provide the cornerstone for conducting successful campaigns against modern enemies that employ irregular warfare tactics.

Other lessons from the Geronimo campaign include the importance of negotiating with the enemy. Gatewood ultimately broke Geronimo's legendary will to resist not through force of arms, but through force of persuasion. Speaking with Gatewood face-to-face convinced Geronimo that surrendering was his best recourse. The combination of military operations and negotiations succeeded against Geronimo, where pure military operations had repeatedly failed. Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and other transnational terrorist organizations operating in and around Afghanistan are qualitatively different enemies than the Apaches, in the sense that they have the capability and a proven record of executing major operations inside America. However, negotiating with the various insurgent organizations in Afghanistan may be the only way to achieve the President's objective of drawing down American forces in Afghanistan beginning in 2011 and transferring responsibility for military operations to a sovereign Afghan government. Indeed, Taliban leader Mullah Muhammed Omar recently expressed his interest in opening a dialogue with the ultimate goal of ending the war in Afghanistan.⁸⁷

The Army found a way to break Apache loyalty and convinced Apache Indians to work as scouts against their own people in the Geronimo campaign. The coalition in Afghanistan has recently demonstrated success in convincing large numbers of Afghans to break tribal ties and join the military and national police. Continuous pressure in Afghanistan in the form of drone strikes, Special Forces raids, and conventional operations, coupled with ever-growing numbers of Afghans in the national security forces, may bring the current enemy to its knees.

Miles was extremely successful fighting the Kiowa, Comanche, and Southern Cheyenne in the Great Plains during the 1870s, but he failed against the Apaches, at least before he adopted Crook's tactics. Miles succeeded in the Great Plains because the terrain was far more amenable to large-scale unit operations than the terrain in the Southwest, where Geronimo operated. Miles favored major unit operations against the Apaches until he realized the futility of their application in mountainous terrain. Similarly, the American commanders in Afghanistan from 2003 until 2009 failed to understand the best techniques to combat the Afghan insurgency. The war in Iraq certainly drew resources and attention away from the struggle in Afghanistan, but commanders relied too heavily on airstrikes (although successful in eliminating enemy targets) that generated massive civilian casualties and threatened to undermine the entire coalition effort. Generals David Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal rejuvenated the military effort in Afghanistan by adjusting the rules of engagement and minimizing the use of airstrikes, thereby sharply curbing civilian casualties. Dynamic leaders like Petraeus and McChrystal who understood how to tailor counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan earned rapid success, as Crook and Gatewood did against the Apaches.

The major difference between the Geronimo and the Afghanistan campaigns is that the U.S. had every intention of taking Apache territory in the relentless pursuit of national expansion and would not, under any circumstances, leave Arizona. The day will come sooner or later, however, when American forces leave Afghanistan. Despite this difference, the lessons from the Geronimo campaign offer the modern military professional examples of successful techniques for countering the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Notes

¹ As quoted in John Upton Terrell, *Apache Chronicle* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 326.

² See Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Policy and Strategy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), for the standard text concerning the evolution of U.S. military strategy.

³ Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: CJCS, May 2007), x. Joint Publication 1 defines irregular warfare as a conflict in which "a less powerful adversary seeks to disrupt or negate the military capabilities and advantages of a more powerful, conventionally armed military force, which often represents the nation's established regime."

⁴ Odie B. Faulk, *The Geronimo Campaign* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 32. The term brevet refers to a temporary warrant authorizing a commissioned officer to hold a temporary higher rank. Brevet ranks disappeared from the U.S. military at the end of the nineteenth century.

⁵ Captain John G. Bourke, *An Apache Campaign in the Sierra Madre: An Account of the Expedition in Pursuit of the Hostile Chiricuaaha Apaches in the Spring of 1883* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 19.

⁶ Most accounts give credit to Gatewood for negotiating Geronimo's surrender. Geronimo unofficially surrendered to Gatewood on 25 August 1886. The official surrender to General Nelson A. Miles occurred on 4 September 1886 at Skeleton Canyon, Arizona.

⁷ Robert M. Utley, *A Clash of Cultures: Fort Bowie and the Chiricuaaha Apaches* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1977), 83.

⁸ Geronimo, *Geronimo's Story of His Life*, ed. S. M. Barrett (Bowie: Heritage Books, Inc., 1990), 17.

⁹ Geronimo, 46.

¹⁰ The Bedonkohe Apaches served under their tribal chief when they fought as a whole tribe. However, because of his legendary escapades in the Mexican campaigns, the Apache leadership gave Geronimo the honor of command if more than one tribe took the warpath. Geronimo, 114.

¹¹ Geronimo, 44.

¹² Variations exist as to the spelling of his name: with or without the hyphen and Mangas Coloradas.

¹³ Geronimo, 46.

¹⁴ Geronimo, 47.

¹⁵ Geronimo, 50. None of the warriors were mounted.

¹⁶ Geronimo, 52.

¹⁷ Geronimo, 52.

¹⁸ Geronimo, 52.

¹⁹ Geronimo, 52.

²⁰ Other Apache warriors were fighting on the outlying parts of the battlefield.

²¹ Geronimo, 53.

²² Peter Aleshire, *The Fox and the Whirlwind: General George Crook and Geronimo, A Paired Biography* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000), 38.

²³ Geronimo, 53. Ka-ki-yeh is Casa Grande in Apache.

²⁴ Geronimo, 109-110.

²⁵ Geronimo, 110.

²⁶ As quoted in Captain John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 46.

²⁷ As quoted in Dan L. Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1967), 256.

²⁸ Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 245, 268.

²⁹ Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 382-386.

³⁰ Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, 108-109.

³¹ John J. Tierney, Jr., *Chasing Ghosts: Unconventional Warfare in American History* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006), 92.

³² Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, 112.

³³ Utley, *A Clash of Cultures*, 44.

³⁴ Utley, *A Clash of Cultures*, 48.

³⁵ Tierney, Jr., 92.

³⁶ Faulk, 32.

³⁷ Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, 212-213.

³⁸ Tierney, 262.

³⁹ Utley, *A Clash of Cultures*, 50.

⁴⁰ Lisle E. Reedstrom, *Apache Wars: An Illustrated Battle History* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1990), 68.

⁴¹ Thrapp, 328.

⁴² As quoted in Thrapp, 331-332.

⁴³ Thrapp, 332.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Terrell, 375.

⁴⁵ Terrell, 376.

⁴⁶ Terrell, 376.

⁴⁷ Terrell, 376.

⁴⁸ The Nation. "Summary of the Week's News Wednesday, January 26 [sic] to Tuesday February 2, 1886, inclusive" February 4, 1886.

⁴⁹ Terrell, 377.

⁵⁰ Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, 225.

⁵¹ Aleshire, 222.

⁵² Utley, *A Clash of Cultures*, 48.

⁵³ Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles* (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1896), 474.

⁵⁴ As quoted in Terrell, 378.

⁵⁵ Terrell, 378.

⁵⁶ http://www.discoverseaz.com/History/Crook_Miles.html (accessed 10 March 2010).

⁵⁷ Faulk, 93.

⁵⁸ Faulk, 93.

⁵⁹ Thrapp, 350.

⁶⁰ Bruce Vandervort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada and the United States, 1812-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 208.

⁶¹ Miles, 495.

⁶² Thrapp, 351.

⁶³ Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 388.

⁶⁴ Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 377.

⁶⁵ Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, "The Surrender of Geronimo," in *Geronimo and the End of the Apache Wars*, ed. C. L. Sonnichsen, 53-70 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 53, 61.

⁶⁶ Gatewood, 53-54.

⁶⁷ Gatewood did not take his twenty-five soldier escort from Fort Bowie for two reasons. First, as a "peace-commissioner," Gatewood feared a large fighting force would impede his mission to convince Geronimo to surrender. Second, according to Gatewood, taking troops from Fort Bowie would "spoil the appearance of the battalion at drills & parade." Gatewood, 54.

⁶⁸ Gatewood, 56.

⁶⁹ Gatewood, 56.

⁷⁰ The tactic of plying alcohol, along with other staples including food and blankets, as part of negotiations was not uncommon during the Indian Wars. The recipients of the supplies would frequently get drunk from the intoxicants, leaving themselves open to surprise attack.

⁷¹ Gatewood 58.

⁷² Gatewood, 58.

⁷³ Gatewood, 60.

⁷⁴ Gatewood, 60.

⁷⁵ Gatewood, 61.

⁷⁶ Gatewood, 61.

⁷⁷ Gatewood, 61-62.

⁷⁸ Gatewood, 62.

⁷⁹ Gatewood, 62.

⁸⁰ Gatewood, 62.

⁸¹ Gatewood, 62-63.

⁸² Gatewood, 63.

⁸³ Gatewood, 63.

⁸⁴ Gatewood, 66.

⁸⁵ Gatewood, 69.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Sherry Robinson, *Apache Voices: Their Stories of Survival as told to Eve Ball* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 56.

⁸⁷ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5908498.ece> (accessed 4 May 2010).

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