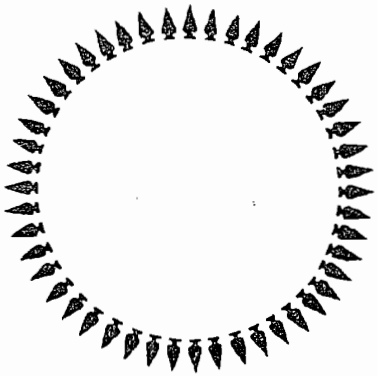

THROUGH WHITE MEN'S EYES
A CONTRIBUTION TO NAVAJO HISTORY

BY J. LEE CORRELL

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A CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF THE NAVAJC

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WHITE MEN'S EYES
JTRIBUTION TO NAVAJO HISTORY

) PEOPLE FROM EARLIEST TIMES TO THE TREATY OF JUNE 1, 1868

BY J. LEE CORRELL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JACK PHASTEEN

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NAVAJO HERITAGE CENTER
WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA

A PROJECT SPONSORED BY THE ARIZONA BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
VOLUME TWO OF NUMBER SIX/1979

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Through White Men's Eyes: A contribution to Navajo History.
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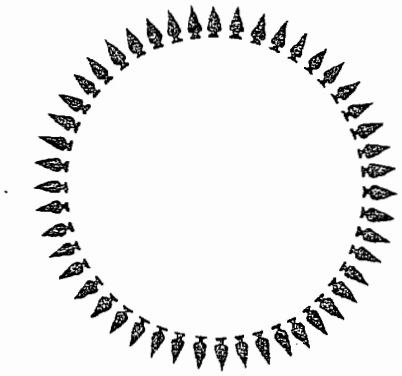

CONTENTS

Page

PROLOGUE 8

PART IV THE AMERICAN PERIOD 1855 – TREATY OF DECEMBER 25, 1858 21

PART V THE AMERICAN PERIOD 1859 – TO NAVAJO ATTACK ON FORT DEFIANCE, APRIL 30, 1860 235

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I Documents 397

II Government Publications Cited by Serial Number in Part I of Bibliography 419

III Newspapers 419

IV Other Sources 419

V Baptismal and Burial Books of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe Researched – 1694 through 1875 only 421

INDEX TO VOLUME II 425

HP3050

trifling articles have been stolen by them from the garden. The frequest discharges of men now are weakening the strength of the Garrison, . . . 26 discharged men will leave with the mail wagon tomorrow morning." (Shepherd to Wilkins, April 11, 1860)

1860 April 12

The Secretary of War directed: "The Department has had under consideration the recent difficulties with the Navajoes and the preparations that are being made by Colonel Fauntleroy for military operations against them this Summer. These preparations will conflict, somewhat, with the movements recently ordered, and particularly with the expedition against the Comanches and Kiowas. As it is indispensable that this expedition shall be carried out effectually, the plans with reference to the Navajoes must yield to it; so far, at least, as to be confined, principally, to the use of the Infantry. If these means should prove ineffectual, the tribe may be subjugated by a campaign next winter, principally with Infantry. In the meantime the available mounted force should be so disposed as to give all the protection possible to the settlements. No volunteers will be called into service. Orders will be given against the wanton destruction of flocks and herds by the troops." (Townsend to Fauntleroy, April 14, 1860)

April 13

Two men, one a Native of Jemez Pueblo, were given ecclesiastical burial by the Catholic Priest at the Pueblo. They had been killed by Navajos. A third citizen, killed by Navajos, was buried 5 days later by the Jemez Priest. (Jemez Burials, 1852-1907)

April 21

Major Shepherd informed headquarters in Santa Fe: "Until yesterday, since my report on the 11th instant, nothing of special importance has been done by the indians, except spying around the grazing herds, and the Post. Yesterday afternoon however, while Lieut. Whipple was alone in the canon and only a mile distant from the Post looking for grass to drive the Herds upon, he was ambushed by 6 or more indians who rode between him and the Post, just as a small knowl obstructed his view to his rear. On his return, he was shot at, with two Rifle shots, and some arrows. One arrow grazed his head, and one Rifle shot wounded his horse, which smarting from the pain, ran about a hundred yards, after which Lieut. Whipple came leisurely into the Garrison, with his horse which

HP3051

was growing very weak. After half an hour afterwards the horse died. Had the indians known that the horse was so badly wounded Lieut. Whipple would undoubtedly have perished, as he had imprudently ventured out alone without proper arms for his defence. Last night at 11 o'clock also a dog belonging to the Post was shot with an arrow. Lieut. Walker, with his company . . . leaves this morning, detached from the Post, for the site of the new Post, ordered to be established at the Ojo del Gallo. A Surgeon ought to be sent with the Company, as it will in all probability have fights with the indians about Bear Springs. It was my intention as the escorts of one Company on the road with the trains had ceased, to have visited some of the favorite haunts of the indians, not over 50 miles from the Post, but such designs are now frustrated by detaching this Company—thus leaving the Garrison too weak for any offensive operations. Besides owing to the great number of discharges, the force now left here is but half as strong as when open hostilities began on the 17th January last. The indians evidently think now, and will be confirmed in their belief, that the force here is afraid to campaign against them. Had I been asked, I should not have advised the permanent detaching a Company at the Bear Springs, only for sufficient time to indicate the position of the new post, and to keep off squatters. Whatever force may be located at the Bear Springs, this Post ought never to be abandoned till a reasonable prospect of peace is forced from the indians, by campaigns, against them. The duties of the Garrison I shall continue as if the Post is to be kept occupied during the next winter." (Shepherd to Wilkins, April 21, 1860)

The Santa Fe *Gazette* also reported the incident: "A few days before the attack of Fort Defiance, an account of which is given in another article, Lieut. Whipple was surprised and fired upon by some Indians, within 400 yards of the post. He had ridden out a short distance to view some lands which were to be used as pastures for the government stock and when returning some Indians, who were concealed in the canon, fired upon him . . . wounding the horse upon which he was mounted, he himself narrowly escaping with his life. The horse survived to carry the Lieut. within the protection of the Sentinels. Verily the audacity of the Navajos is rapidly approaching a climax." (Article on Lt. Whipple, May 22, 1860)

In reporting the incident to the Commissioner, Collins added: "The Navajos have never been more hostile than they are now." (Collins to Greenwood, May 5, 1860)

HP3052

1860 April 26

The New Mexico Legislature enacted "An Act Amendatory of the Militia Law of the Territory of New Mexico. Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico. Section 1st. That any man of experience and good character who shall raise and organize a force of not less than 200 men nor more than 225 is hereby authorised to apply to the Governor of this Territory to make a volunteer campaign against any tribe or tribes of Indians at war with this Territory under the same conditions and restrictions as specified in the 38th Section of the Militia Law of this Territory . . . it shall be the duty of the Governor to commission such person, he being commander of and by the same force, he shall also commission all other officers of the command on a list of them being delivered and certified to by the commander . . . Section 2d . . . the Governor shall furnish the necessary arms for said force . . . " The Act further defined the division of spoils between officers and men and also the relationship between the volunteer companies and the military authority. (An Act Amendatory of the Militia Law . . . , April 26, 1860)

April 30

Navajos attacked Fort Defiance early in the morning. A week later, Major Shepherd submitted his report of the attack: " . . . the Navajoe Indians made an attack upon the post on the 30th April. The attack was begun soon after the moon went down and about 4 o'clock in the morning, fully half an hour before the break of day, and it was executed with considerable sagacity and skill, being on 3 sides. The enemy got possession of the hill on the east side of the post which rises like a wall overlooking the post and is within short firing distance. They also took possession of the ravine on the southwest corner of the garrison, where are the corrals and Magazine, and the third and most important point of attack was on the west side and North-west corner of the post where they took possession of the garden fences and the wood piles, and the rear of the Sutler's store—In all 3 of these points of attack the enemy were enabled to approach in the night undiscovered, and the peculiar and extraordinary location of the post offers these facilities. Notwithstanding this, it was never deemed probable that they would ever have the hardihood to attack the post, although such has been threatened by them, ever since the post has been established. The attack was begun by firing at the Sentinel No. 2 over the Corrals and near the ravine. Immediately after, war whoops and yells of 100 and more savages resounded on all sides. Upon this the sentinel retreated with the other 2 men belonging to that post, who were acting as a picket. These 3 men on reaching the end of the

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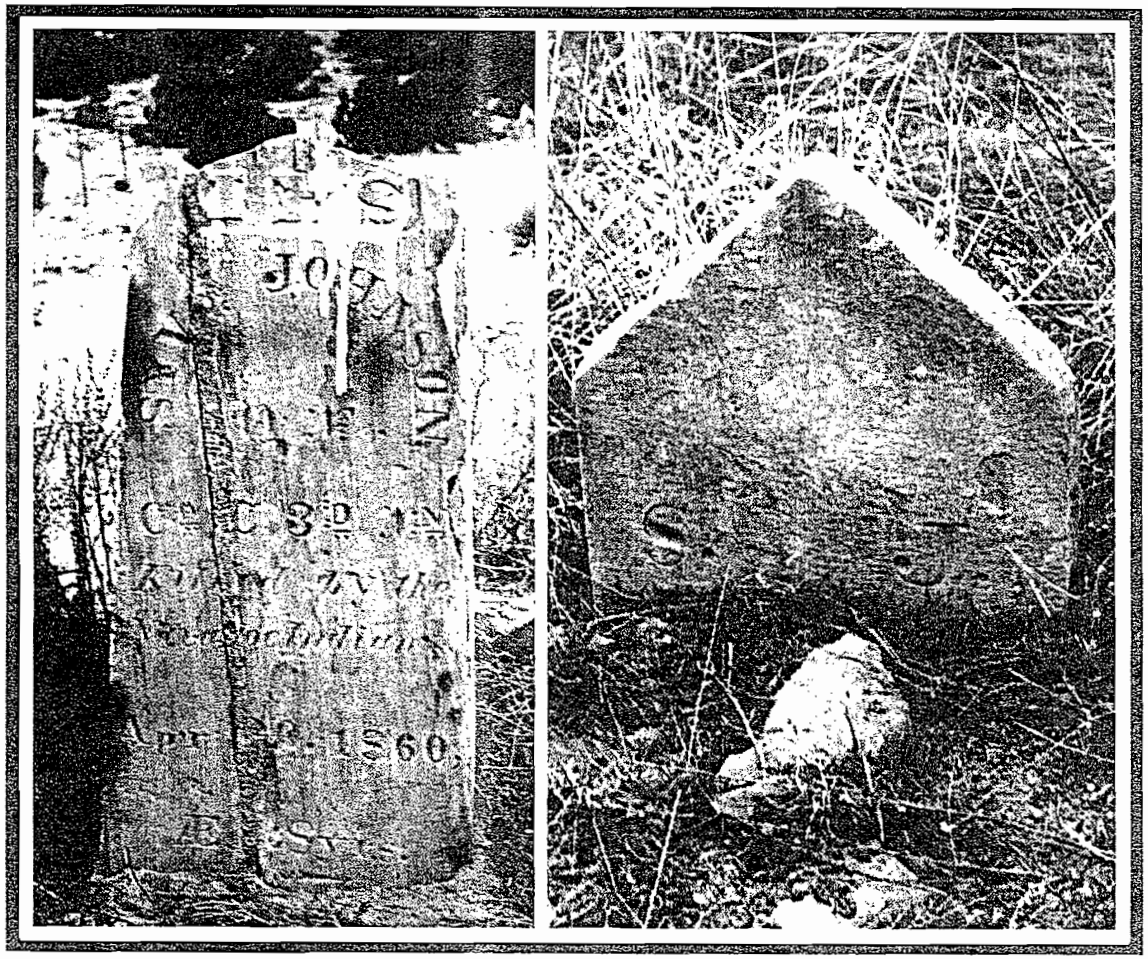

Johnson, Sylvanius Head and Foot Grave Markers at Fort Defiance
Photo 1967 by David M. Brugge

HP3054

Commissary Store house, 40 yards distant, commenced firing in return, raking the gateway of the corrals and by doing so, prevented the enemy from possessing the corrals. The 3 companies composing the garrison turned out promptly and took their positions for defence as indicated in the Post Orders No. 17, February 7, 1860, without confusion, although the enemy's fire appeared to be pouring in from all directions. As soon as formed Lieut. Hildt with part of Company C, 3d Infantry attempted to get into the garden on the west side of the post but was driven back to the corners of the enemy who were screened behind the fences and wood piles. From the corners of these buildings the fire was returned to the enemy. On my arriving here where there appeared to be the heaviest fire, I without knowing of the presence of Lt. Hildt, took the men of this company and proceeded with despatch to station them at the Sutler's store. The enemy were found in force at the North-west corners of the Sutler's store and outhouse and had actually entered through the window and were robbing the sleeping apartment in the rear; first having driven out one of the clerks and attempted to cut into one of the store rooms. About 4 of the party were sent through the front door into the back yard of the store, and the remainder of the party, 6 in number were directed to fire from the north corner at the enemy. Immediately after discharging their pieces at the enemy, so heavy a fire was poured into the party that 3 of them were wounded, viz: Private Sylvanius Johnson, mortally; and Corporal McCourt & Private Gibson slightly. The party then stepped inside the ante-room of the store to reload—Johnson on being wounded said he was shot, and stepped into the room along with the others, but never spoke again, being wounded by an arrow through the heart. He died in about 3 minutes. As soon as the party had reloaded they sallied forth and by the assistance of others who were ordered hither, the premises were cleared of the enemy as far as observable in the darkness. At this moment seeing Lieut. Hildt who had come to this point of fire, he was ordered to occupy with a part of the company the log house 20 yards off used as Co. E. Bakery, and from which the enemy had killed and wounded our men. This was promptly executed seeing which I hastened on a run to the south west corner of the post where was kept up a brisk fire by Company E, under Lieut. Whipple, and finding that he had secured the Magazine, the Corrals and stables containing the animals and was with the company inside the hay Corrals, dislodging the enemy from the ravine—I next proceeded to the east side of the post and found Company B in place between the post and the front of the abrupt hill on the east—Lieut. Dickinson was directed in command of the company to maintain his position, but not to scale the hill till further orders, fearing their being shot by our own men, on being seen as must [ne] cessarily happen in a line of sight up

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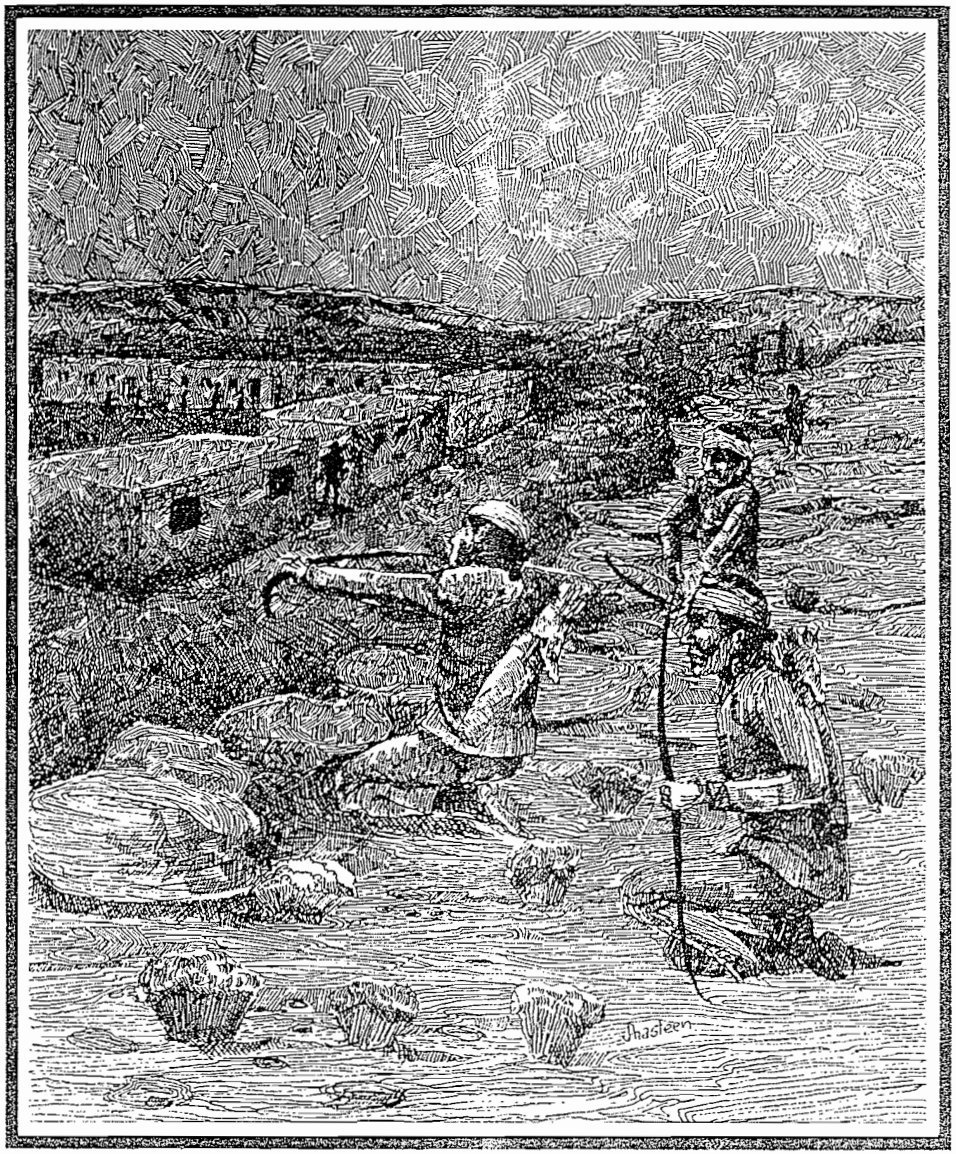

Navajos' Attack on Fort Defiance

HP3056

against the sky. Thence hastening back to the position of Company C. it was found that the enemy were in retreat up the mountain side leaving one nearly dead behind. The day commencing to dawn, Lieut. Hildt was ordered to pursue with Company C.—On ascending the mountain the men with him were fired at by the men in the garrison whereupon he halted and his orders were countermanded. Soon after there being a little light, the enemy were seen in force on the hills on the north and near the post, Company C. was ordered to be formed for the purpose of attacking them. As soon as formed it was fired at from the crest of the hill on the east side. This caused Lieut. Hildt to deploy the company immediately. Both Capt. Johns and Lieut. Hildt were then ordered to clear the heights to the north. Lieut. Dickinson was thereafter immediately ordered with Company B. to scale the rocky hill on the east side, and after a short but brisk fire, the enemy were dispersed from this position, whence they had hitherto fired with impunity owing to the protection afforded by the rocks. On ascending the crest of this hill on the east side, I observed a cloud of dust rising from a hollow just behind the hills to the north and in which direction Capt. Johns and Lieut. Hildt had been sent with Company C—therefore about 20 men with 1st Sergeant Sheets of Company B were ordered to join Captain Johns command. Not being quite light enough yet to see well, some of Capt. Johns command began to fire at those directly on the right and under Lieut. Hildt, consequently this command had to halt. This unavoidable delay enabled the enemy to get away with their horses much better than they otherwise could have done. A few minutes after judging it to be sufficiently light, Capt. Johns command thus strengthened and numbering about 100 men, was ordered to advance, and in a little while after, the enemy was got within fire, which caused them all in that direction to flee away in confusion, leaving one of their number, a chief, dead on the ground, with his pony standing at his side. This command pursued the enemy nearly a mile further, and then returned bringing into the post the dead Chief, but the pony had to be killed on account of his wildness and the difficulty of securing him. On the return of this party, Company B. was withdrawn from its position on the east side. Lieut. Whipple with company C. could have pursued the enemy after dawn, as they retreated west up the mountain side south of the Canon, but he wisely refrained, considering that it would leave the post too much exposed. The conflict from the beginning at 4 o'clock till the return of pursuing parties was about 2 hours—our loss proved to be only those before stated—Although there was a brisk fire with fire arms by the enemy, yet it is somewhat singular that all the injury done was by arrows. The enemy succeeded in robbing the sleeping apartment of every thing, by which both clerks Mr. Kennon and Mr. McBride lost about $100.00 worth of

HP3057

clothing each. The dead chief is known to have lived about the great Canon de Chelle, and had several wives and was a large property holder, of both horses and sheep. The Indian left dying on the ground behind the Sutler's store was young and robust looking, and although shot through the neck with part of the spine torn away, lived for some minutes. One Indian either dead or badly wounded must have been dragged up the mountain under cover of darkness as the marks of his draggling feet were readily traced—One Indian was shot and seen to be carried away, as Company B. scaled the crest of the rocks on the east side of the garrison. Blood was discoverable in several places not in the same line, about Co. C. wood pile, and which was traceable up the side of the mountain. Blood was also discovered on the crest of the rocks on the east side of the post—and there is reason to believe that the pursuing party under Captain Johns, wounded one or more in the pursuit besides killing the Chief—The loss of the enemy must have been heavy, judging from the fact of their leaving 2 of their number on the ground which it is well known is never done if it can possibly be avoided. What injury that portion of the attacking force suffered who began the attack and were stationed in the ravine through which flows the rivulet of the post could not be ascertained—It was evident however that a large force was there and was driven away by Lieut. Whipple. In fact the attacking force on all sides could not be reckoned at less than 100 warriors consisting probably of the whole available force of the tribe, and may therefore have been 2000. A captive Navajo woman brought here to day by a party of Mexicans, reports that the Indian dragged up the mountain side before spoken of, was killed and that he was a Nephew of Zarcillos Largos, that besides the 2 left dead on the ground here, 6 have already died, and that more are so badly wounded as to be unable to survive. It should be born[e] in mind that all the attacks have been, from the beginning, growing bolder, better planned, and executed, and this too in the face of the whole command being on the alert and prepared. The Navajoes are perfectly aware that this garrison is now not more than half as strong as when the war began on the 17th January last—63 men have been discharged and died since that date and Company G, 3d Infantry, withdrawn to the Ojo del Oso, and every mail wagon takes down about 25 more discharged men. The men while in the service are cheerful and prompt in their courage but appear glad to get away when their terms expire—The duty is harrassing and danger is imminent, and both are every day increasing. There has not been the slightest exaggerated coloring in my reports of the condition of things here with these Indians; in fact they might possibly be accused of being understated. I shall not fail to have at all times a better system of defence than was thought necessary before this attack, but yet any one who has ever been here must know how diffi-

HP3058

cult the place is for defence except by a considerable force. The post ought never to be abandoned till a lasting peace, is beaten into these Indians, who already believe that we are afraid of them, judging doubtless of our inaction in not assuming the offensive. At each return of planting and Green Corn season they will appear peaceable, but then peace will end, unless they be well chastised. It has been my opinion all along, and it was so expressed in my report of the 23d of January last, that if 2 more Infantry companies had been sent here in February last, that an area of 150 miles in diameter, the post being at the center, could have been freed from Indians, and most probably marauding parties could have thus kept away from the river settlements. At all events the enemy could have been met darefully. This report is made long, in order that the Colonel Commanding, may form some idea of the attack, and the manner of its repulse." (Shepherd to Wilkins, May 7, 1860; Correll, 1966B; Sylvanius Johnson Grave Marker, Fort Defiance Cemetery, April 30, 1860; Nichols to Fauntleroy, July 14 & 21, 1860)

In forwarding Shepherd's report to army headquarters, Fauntleroy commented that the report showed " . . . the hostile attitude of these Indians, and the absolute necessity of some decided steps towards their punishment. (Fauntleroy to Thomas, May 20, 1860)

In reporting the attack to the Commissioner, Collins wrote: "An express arrived to day from Fort Defiance with Dispatches to the army headquarters in this city, giving the information that the Navajos had attacked Fort Defiance. They made the attack about 4 o'clock in the morning and kept it up until day light. At one time during the fight they had possession of the sutler's store and the magazine but were driven back before they done much damage. Majr Shepherd estimates the number of Indians at 1000, but thinks there may have been more. Only one soldier was killed and 2 wounded. Two Indians were found dead on the ground, though the number killed is supposed to be 8 or 10, with a good many wounded. The night was dark which will account for the small number killed. These Indians have never been so completely roused and emboldened as they are at this time and unless some active steps are taken they will doubtless do much mischief." (Collins to Greenwood, May 20 & 27, 1860)

On May 22, the Santa Fe *Weekly Gazette* also published an account of the attack, no doubt written by Collins, as he was publisher of the newspaper; the new account read: "This bold movement on

HP3059

the part of these Indians only indicates the spirit of defiance which the course persued by the military towards them has been for months strengthening. In December last they were recognized as being in a state of war. Since that time no peaceful communication has been had with them. Neither any hostile demonstration worthy of notice been made against them although their depredations upon the settlements have been frequent and the quantities of property carried off enormous. The inactivity and want of energy on the part of the military have unquestionably had much to do in bringing about this daring foray. . . . " ("Navajos Attack Fort Defiance," *Gazette,* May 22, 1860)

On August 3, 1860, Shepherd reported from Fort Defiance that a Peon held captive by Zarcillos Largos surrendered at the post on August 2 and that " . . . All the statements of this boy, confirm what has been before reported about the losses of the Navajoes, in their attack upon the post on the 30th April last, but as his may be more reliable than those of others, it may be not amiss to repeat them. He says that besides the 2 dead, whose bodies were left on the ground, 8 died in the mountain near the post the same day, that 2 more died soon after reaching their homes, that 5 of these were very rich men owning many horses, and sheep, and that several Peons besides had died. By his discription, Juan Lucero was the principal Captain, leading all the attack, &c. He says also that the head man Herrera, assembled a short time since a large number of Navajoes at Chelle Canon, and they all declared that they did not want peace any longer. Herrera has always been considered by us heretofore as very peaceably disposed, and possessing much influence. The Indians are seldom seen nowadays lurking around. They are probably at their corn fields, as it is green corn season. The weather is now pleasant from the almost daily rains, and the grass is springing finely. . . . " (Shepherd to Maury, Aug. 3, 1860)

HP3060