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NAVAHO WARFARE

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Editors

NAVAHO WARFARE

TYPES OF WARFARE

WARFARE as a living branch of Navaho culture existed until about 1870. Though few Navaho are alive today who have engaged in this activity, some of the older men are familiar with its various phases. This paper is concerned with a description of the formalized pattern of warfare and its relation to the Squaw or War Dance and the natc'it.[1]

A traditional emnity existed between the Navaho and the Pueblos and Apache; in later times the Ute and Comanche, Mexicans and Americans came to supplant these two groups. Tradition also accounts for the causes of these hostilities. The most popular tale concerns the peoples of Canyons del Muerto and de Chelly.

Long before [we were taken to] Fort Sumner,[2] the people on both sides of the Lukachukai Mountains were very prosperous, while those in del Muerto and de Chelly were poor. However, the people of the Canyons were noted for their beautiful women. The men who had horses would sneak into the Canyons and steal one or two wives from these people. The reason for this stealing was that the people of del Muerto and de Chelly were originally of Pueblo stock while those in the mountains were of the old Navaho stock and the Canyon girls were much prettier than those of the mountains. For revenge, the Canyon people would raid. First they raided the Pueblos, then the Ute, and finally the Mexicans. This drew attention to the Navaho, and raids in retaliation were sent into the Navaho country. As the Canyon people were safe in their protected location, the Navaho on the outside were forced to suffer under these attacks.

This belief that the people of del Muerto and de Chelly were responsible for bringing enemies into the country is widespread among the Navaho. They are popularly designated as "the thieves" and during large social gatherings, if something is stolen, it is a standing joke to say, "There must be some people from the Canyon here."

Another current story explains the beginning of hostilities between the Navaho and Hopi.

When the Navaho were hungry they went to the Hopi country. The Hopi would treat them well and feed them. When the Navaho had been fed the Hopi would throw them off the mesa. In revenge the Navaho would organize a war party. After the attack they would go home, and the Hopi would prepare a return attack in the Navaho country. Then each people would consider themselves satisfied and a treaty would be made which would last until some one was thrown over the mesa, or until a Navaho killed a Hopi in the cornfields. The Navaho were usually the ones who broke the treaties.

The Navaho say that about 1840 real hostilities first began with the Mexicans of the upper Rio Grande valley.

[1] The material here presented was gathered during the summer of 1933, on a field trip under the auspices of Yale University. The informants from whom the information was obtained were Curley of Chin Lee, Arizona; Roan Horse of Crystal, Arizona; and The Son of the Late Smith of Fort Defiance, Arizona.

[2] The Navaho were held prisoners at Fort Sumner, New Mexico from 1863 to 1868.

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In the old days the Mexicans possessed a great number of things which the Navaho desired, such as hoes, dyes, blankets, and dry goods. The Navaho exchanged horses for these at San Fidel. They were friendly until some of the Navaho learned Spanish and prevailed on the Mexicans to raid the Navaho for horses. The Mexicans were defeated in the raid and that began the trouble. When treaties were made, the people of de Chelly and del Muerto would attack and that would cause more trouble.

The Navaho appear to have been the military superiors of the Mexicans until the latter allied themselves with the Ute. The Ute were generally successful against the Navaho and with the aid of the Mexicans and later the Americans, during the campaign of Kit Carson, made life so uncomfortable for the Navaho that just prior to 1865 a large body of Navaho moved westward and for the first time came in contact with the Havasupai.[3]

During their sojourn at Fort Sumner, the Navaho first came into military contact with the Comanche. Although under United States surveillance the Navaho raided the Comanche country. In retaliation the Comanche attacked the Navaho twice at Fort Sumner and once after their return to the reservation.

In general, the Navaho attitude toward warfare appears to have been one of disapproval. In spite of the rationalizations given to justify an attack, it was clearly understood that the desire for plunder was the motivating force. The majority were opposed to these expeditions and the local headmen did all in their power to suppress them. "These warriors thought they had the ritual power to defeat anyone and would not listen to the older men; that is why the Navaho were ruined at the time of Fort Sumner."

Two types of offensive warfare were engaged in, the raid and the reprisal. In the raid, the objective was not to fight but to steal livestock and to plunder. A war party of this type usually consisted of four to ten men. The revenge type of engagement represented a more concerted effort and included a force of from thirty to two hundred men. Neither constituted warfare in a tribal sense. The people involved were always members of a single locality or at most of a district. While the ritual background of both types of warfare were the same, the actual practical procedure differed somewhat. The two following accounts, one of a raid on the Comanche about 1866, the other a description of an attack on Oraibi about 1850, will serve to show this difference.

A raid on the Comanche. From Fort Sumner my stepfather went to the region of the "Red Water" [Red River?] to raid the Comanche, who were living in tipis along the river. These raiders sneaked around the camp and all they could hear was the barking of the little puppies. They investigated and saw that the Comanche had watchers among the horses. Then some of the Navaho went back toward the tipis and saw a great number of horses tied to a line. They hid until almost daylight. Then the watchmen left and the Navaho roped the loose horses, mounted them, and started driving horses across the river. Just as everyone was mounted, the Comanche discovered the Navaho and gave a signal by tapping on a drum. You should have heard the noise in the Comanche's camp: coyotes, screech owls, and every other kind of noise was made! The Comanche chased the Navaho all that day and night. You could heard the bullets whistling overhead. One man rode ahead to lead the horses; the rest drove the horses after him. After a while half the horses turned back and the Navaho let them go. One man had roped a horse, around whose neck were tied eagle, mountain lion, bear, and owl claws. This horse had some bundles with plumes stuck in them tied in the hair of its tail. This horse must have been a warrior's horse. (They gave these bundles to some old warrior at home.) Finally the Comanche gave up the chase. When the horses became exhausted they were shot. Every so often, until after the third day, some one would be sent back to spy, and he would report that the enemy was still following. They rode and drove the horses for three days and two nights without food. The Navaho were so exhausted that they sent some of the party ahead to build a fire and when the herd arrived one of the horses was shot and eaten. By the fourth day some of the men were so sleepy that they fell off their horses; others slept on the saddle. By this time the enemy had given up the pursuit, so the Navaho slept in shifts; one section of the party driving the horses while the rest slept. On the fifth day they arrived at Fort Sumner. By that time only a few of the strongest horses were left. They took a zigzag route home. That is why it took so long. It was a very risky thing they practiced. They went on foot, only taking what food they could carry. Their food might have run out, and there they would have been—lost in a strange country. They did not even know where to find water and had to consult "stargazers" and "hand tremblers." When they ran out of food they simply tightened their belts. Another thing that happened to raiding parties was that when driving livestock across big flats they saw mirages and were frightened. They would run off and leave great numbers of livestock behind. Sometimes they saw mirages on both sides and did not know what to do.

An attack on Oraibi. Some Navaho were killed by the Oraibi people in an underhanded way. This news spread into the Navaho country, and the Navaho said, "Let us get up a war party and lick those Oraibi." This party had several hundred men in it. They came from the district of the Lukachukai Mountains. They moved up to within a day's trip of Oraibi. That night they were forbidden to build a fire. One of the men in the party could talk Ute fairly well. He walked back and forth all night. The Oraibi were great friends of the Ute and when their spies heard this man talking Ute they went back and said, "It is just the Ute who are coming to trade." However, during the night the Oraibi became suspicious and prepared themselves. The next morning when the Navaho got within two or three miles of the village, they could see a party of men coming down the mesa; all were dressed in white. Every Oraibi warrior had a buckskin tied over his left and under his right shoulder. The Navaho vanguard rode up, made a circle and led the Oraibi away from the village. The Oraibi followed these men back to the main body of Navaho. One Oraibi had an arrow feathered with the feathers of the "Monster Eagle." He attempted to shoot this arrow over the whole group of Navaho but failed. If he had succeeded the Oraibi would have been victorious.

There was a young woman among the Navaho. She was on a very fast horse and rode right into the center of the Oraibi. She called to the Navaho to come on and give all they had. The Navaho encircled the Oraibi and started to slaughter them. They chased those who broke through up to the base of the mesa. There were dead Hopi lying about for over two miles. What was left of the Oraibi ran for their houses. Then the Navaho turned the stock loose and started to drive them off. Next, they went into the village and took everything they could find. One of the Navaho warriors was named Buffalo Tooth. He began to climb a ladder and an Oraibi took aim at him. Just then Buffalo Tooth looked up and had one of his teeth shot out. Another Navaho was wounded in the

[3] This agrees with Spier's information; see Leslie Spier. *Havasupai Ethnography* (Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History, vol. 29, pt. 3, 1928), 95.

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arm; another in the finger. Both were hurt as they were crawling through windows. The leader then called off the Navaho party. He said that they had done enough damage and that they had better leave. They gathered up the plunder, took the buckskins off the dead Oraibi, and scalped them. They took some of the pottery and broke the remainder. When they were leaving, the few surviving Oraibi came out on their house tops, and you should have heard them wail. The buckskins which were taken from the Oraibi were the ones which were made into the fringed shoulder straps which are worn by the patients in the War Dance. These are still in use today. When the Navaho were six miles from the village they drew a line back of them. That was a mark over which no enemy could pass.

When they returned home with the plunder, they were serenaded in front of the hogans. The warriors threw out to the serenaders the sheep and the plunder they had secured. The singers never bothered to skin these sheep; they simply cut them up and roasted them. If any Navaho warrior was killed in battle this serenade was not permitted.

Defensive warfare was poorly developed. If an attack was made on the Navaho, every one fought for himself. In some instances the men ran for the brush and allowed their families to perish. However, quite often two friends, or two relatives (usually uncle and nephew), would fight together. If one was killed the other would refuse to leave and if necessary, would die fighting. No ceremony held these pairs together.

No type of fortification was employed. However, watchers were commonly placed at advantageous points. These men lit signal fires and warned the people in the valleys of the approach of the enemy.

The foregoing accounts give some idea of the difference in the practical procedure of war. There remains to be described the war ritual, which to the native mind was the most important part of any military undertaking.

The Navaho believed that the enemy and the country of the enemy was potentially maleficent. In order to protect themselves from this and in order to insure the success of the party, a great amount of ritual was performed during the course of any offensive movement. These war rituals were similar in pattern to those used in hunting, on trading expeditions, and on trips to the lakes south of Zuñi to procure salt. Like the Ways of hunting, there were several Ways of going to war. The three most important of these were the Monster Slayer Way, the Enemy Way, and the Yei Hastin Way. These three Ways necessitated a large body of men in the attacking party, and while differing very little from other Ways of going to war, were used almost entirely in the reprisal type of offensive warfare. According to mythology the Monster Slayer Way originated first. The Enemy Way then came into being, and finally a number of Ways patterned after these first two. The ritual Ways used in raiding were the Blessing Way, the Bear Way, the Big Snake Way, the Turtle Way, and the Frog Way. Aside from the size of the parties, the primary differences lay in the songs and prayers which the party sang and said.

WAR PARTIES

Formation and personnel. The formation of a war party was in the hands of a shaman-leader, who knew the songs, prayers and observances of one of the several Ways of going to

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war. In payment for his ritual service such a man received a larger share of the plunder. Before going into the fight, the leader was privileged to describe a particular piece of property or the color of a horse, etc., and if such an article or animal was found in the loot it belonged to the leader no matter who had captured it. This did not apply in the case of prisoners who always belonged to the one who captured them.

Such an individual who had confidence in the power of his ritual to defeat the enemy, would go among his able-bodied friends and relatives (growing boys and girls were excluded) and ask for volunteers to accompany him to war. For a raid, four to ten men were needed; for a reprisal thirty to two hundred. Generally the leader was the only man of the party who knew the complete ritual of the Way of war under which they would fight. However, men who knew other Ways were not excluded and were allowed to sing the songs and say the prayers of their Ways. The man who organized the party was in complete command of all its members.

All of the able-bodied population were potential warriors. The training of children for war and for the general hardships of life began at the age of seven or eight. Boys were awakened early in the morning by their fathers or maternal uncles who said, "Wake up, be lively. If you are not up early, the enemy will come and kill you while you sleep." They were forced to take long runs, roll in the snow, and dive into icy water. As they grew older they took runs at noon when the sun was hot. At a still later age they were given purgatives and emetics, followed by sweat baths. Boys were told that if they did not do this "the first thing that came along would kill them because their systems were filled with ugly things that they should have gotten rid of: they would be quick tempered, have weak minds, be unable to stand life's hardships and therefore disgrace their families." Apart from this ordinary discipline, at irregular intervals the old men gathered the boys together and instructed them in shooting, the use of the shield, how to give the least possible target to the enemy, how to take advantage of natural cover, etc. The old men said to the boys, "If you train right you will be killed by an arrow in the chest and die like a man. It is not a disgrace to die defending yourself. Otherwise some weak enemy will kill you with an arrow in the back and you will disgrace your people."[4] If a boy trained properly, by the time he was seventeen to twenty he was allowed to join a war party.

A boy joining a war party for the first time was under special restrictions. He was not allowed to eat anything hot because it was thought that if he did, it would ruin his teeth. He was forbidden to sleep on his stomach or back. He must not look at things that were in the distance—only things that were close about him—or he would be killed in the fight. When the evening camp was made, his place was back of it in the direction of his own home. After he had been in a battle these restrictions were removed.

On the first evening of the journey a pipe was lit and passed clockwise. Everyone smoked, including the boy. It was on this occasion that a boy first smoked and the act symbolized his status as a warrior.

[4] Cowards were called crows "because the crow is afraid of every little thing." A man who was cowardly would be ridiculed in public.