

## Papooses

In the mountains of southern Arizona, a rope is tied between two pine trees about 8 feet apart and 5 feet above the ground. It's late afternoon in the Summer of 1869 and hanging on the rope are 5 cradleboards with 5 little papooses in them. The cradleboards have fancy leather and colorful bead work on them. Sometimes when the wind blows two of the cradleboards turn toward one another and the papooses see each other and laugh. It's like a living clothes line with laughing babies playing peekaboo on it.

Tom Gore did not think that States Rights were an issue he was willing to die for so when the Civil War started he like many other young men headed out for the western territories.

Nine years later, he has a ranch and vegetable farm a few miles East of Tucson, but he has to fight the Apache to keep it all going. Tom has learned the hard way to keep a hired hand, usually a Mexican, on the roof of his hacienda with a rifle and binoculars. The roof-mounted guard walks around or sits in a chair under an umbrella keeping watch. The men who work his fields are always armed and still the Apache are a constant threat. In their raids down into Mexico they often pause long enough to take a few shots at Tom's workers, or to run off a few head of cattle.

The Apache don't think of Tom's land as belonging to them or to anyone else. They don't attack people for trespassing on *their* land they attack anyone and everyone they come into contact with. They attacked Cortez, and Franciscan Missionaries, and they continue to attack and kill Mexicans, Americans, other Indians, and anyone they come across. That's what they do, that is their way of life, to attack anyone who is not of their tribe and steal their horses, weapons, food, women, whatever they have, and they have lived like this for hundreds of years.

Tom Gore's seven-year-old son Tommy has constructed a fort made of rocks behind the hacienda where he plays at fighting off the Apache; he calls it Fort Tommy. There was no shortage of rocks for him to pile up and create an irregular circle of rocks 3 to 4 feet high with a diameter of about 8 feet, and an opening

facing the hacienda. He can often be found crouched behind the rock walls taking aim at imagined savages. Tommy is the youngest of Tom's three children, his sisters usually play and work in the home with their mother, Consuela.

One reason thousands of White people were killed by Indians in the American West is because the government did not implement a plan to develop the West in an orderly way by establishing outposts, colonies, that could protect the westering pioneers. The government could have established forts and then opened the area around the forts for settlement. People who claimed parcels of land around the forts would have gotten protection from the Army, and from other people who were establishing adjoining farms and ranches.

Tom is well-respected around Tucson, he sells peaches, vegetables, beef and pork in town, and is also known as a rough and ready Indian fighter who comes to the aid of his neighbors whenever needed. He's the kind of man who goes out alone at night and patrols the perimeter of his property especially around the time of the New Moon when it's darkest out and the Apache are most likely to steal livestock. He goes out alone at night looking for Indians to kill.

While defending his ranch and in other skirmishes he is known to have killed over 40 Apache, a feat for which he is often praised; "If we had a few more like Tom Gore we wouldn't have an Indian problem in Arizona."

If someone back East heard about Tom's record for killing Indians, they would be appalled. Most Easterners are full of misimpressions and misguided love for what they call the "Nobel Savage", and they don't want to hear the truth because then their illusions will be shattered. Most White people living in the West, where most of the Indians live, are quoted in newspapers, military records, and diaries, as saying the Indians should be exterminated. That's the term they use, exterminated.

The Apache have a growing hatred for Tom because they can't run him off. They have killed a few of his workers and stolen some of his animals, but he has killed more of them, and he demonstrates that White men are here to stay.

Tommy pops up from the rock wall of his fort with his stick rifle and fires "bang bang" at imaginary heathens. Suddenly he hears a real rifle shot and looks up just as the guard on the roof falls to the ground. Tommy looks in shock toward where

the shot came from and sees an Apache behind a boulder 30 yards away taking aim at him. On hearing the shot Consuela looks out the back door just as Tommy ducks behind the rock wall. Tom is already running from a nearby ramada toward Fort Tommy while firing his Spencer in the direction of the Apache. Tom is thinking that an attack like this in the middle of the day probably means that the hired hand who is watching the cattle has been quietly killed and the herd is at this moment being driven off.

Tom dives into the Fort beside Tommy and asks if he is okay while he starts reloading his Spencer. He can see that Tommy is shaken but fine, he looks at the door of the hacienda where Consuela stands, then he tells Tommy to run to his mother as fast as he can. Tommy runs, and Tom stands up and fires at the Apache as fast as he can crank rounds into the chamber.

When the rifle is empty Tom ducks below the rock wall and looks back while drawing his revolver. He sees little Tommy lying on the ground with half his head blown away, and Consuela running to the boy screaming. Tom steps over the rock wall and walks toward the Indian. The Indian fires and the bullet nips Tom's upper left arm, knocking him off balance for a second but he continues walking toward the Indian with his revolver hanging at his side. The Indian fires again and the bullet grazes the outside of Tom's right thigh. Tom continues his grim march toward the Indian. The Indian fires again and misses, then stands up in wide-eyed panic and turns to run. Tom stops, aims, and shoots him in the back. Then he walks up beside the Indian who is trying to crawl away and puts five more bullets in him.

Two of Tom's workers from the fields come running up to him. Diego doesn't speak any English, he takes Tom's revolver from his hand, reloads it and puts it in Tom's holster. Rodrigo speaks a border patois with a little English, Spanish, and Apache mixed, he says, "Oh Dios Mio, Senior Tom what can we do?"

Diego takes the bandana from around his neck and ties it around Tom's wounded arm.

Tom looks at Diego, then looks at Consuela, looks back at Diego and nods his head toward Consuela. Diego runs toward Consuela who is kneeling beside Tommy.

Rodrigo asks, "Senior, do you want me to go after them?"

“Yeah, but just get a count and their direction, then come back.”

The next morning in Tucson, Tom and Rodrigo go in Wheat’s Saloon where Rodrigo relates what has happened while Tom stands at the bar drinking beer. Tom still has bloody rags tied around his arm and leg. A young man runs over to the Pioneer Brewery and spreads the word. Within minutes there is a rowdy crowd of men ready to go after the Apaches, and just waiting for Tom to give them the word.

Finally, Tom speaks up, “Rodrigo followed them a ways and saw that there are 16 braves and about half that many squaws heading South, driving about 20 head of my cattle, so we only need a few men to join us. Me and Rodrigo were gonna go after them by ourselves, but Consuelo made me promise to get some help so here we are. But whoever goes with us needs to know that we won’t be bringing back any prisoners. They killed my only boy and they’re gonna pay for it.”

This is met with cheers, and a few, “Hell yeah”s. Tom chooses six tough hombres that he knows and trusts to go with them, then says, “Eight of us against sixteen of them, that sounds ‘bout right.”

Everyone follows the eight men outside where they find that a pack horse has been loaded and is waiting.

“Go get ‘em, Tom.”

“Give ‘em Hell.”

“Watch your backs, Boys”

“Bring back some scalps.”

The trail is easy to follow, the Indians are driving the cattle too hard, and there are a few strays that have gotten away and are seen up side canyons. Tom tells two of the men to stay back and search for stray cows and hold them on the main trail until they get back. That leaves Tom, Rodrigo, and four other men to continue closing in on the Indians.

Rodrigo has been scouting ahead since they left. The afternoon of the second day he comes back and tells Tom that the Indians are setting up camp and butchering one of the cows. He points out where two braves are hanging back and keeping watch. Tom tells his men to take a quiet break and to picket the horses while he and Rodrigo go take care of the two guards.

The Indians have stopped in a beautiful tight little canyon a few miles south of the border with tall pines and big boulders. When Tom and Rodrigo return a few minutes later Tom cleans his knife and sends two men up each flank of the canyon with instructions not to fire until they hear him start shooting. All six men move with stealth and caution taking up positions behind boulders and trees above the Indian camp.

Tom waits until he is sure all the men have had enough time to position themselves then he opens fire and an Indian falls every time he pulls the trigger. It is over in less than a minute, one of the braves and the squaws make a run for it and get away. Tom and his men work their way cautiously down into the camp. Rodrigo sends two of the men to start rounding up the cattle, and the Indian ponies, while Tom walks around and finishes off the wounded braves with a bullet to the head, and a bullet to the head for some who are already dead.

The squaws, in their panic to flee, leave behind five papooses on cradle boards. One of the men gathers them up and suspends them from a rope tied between two trees. Later, Tom, Rodrigo, and the other two men stand looking at the babies, then one of the men says, "Well, we could draw straws."

Tom got the shortest straw, "Who says life's not fair? Did you guys fix it so I'd get the short straw?"

They laugh and say, "No. Just your lucky day."

Tom says, "If you did fix it... thank you. If anybody deserves the honor of blowing these little savages away it's me."

One of the men walks off a few steps, turns his back, and pretends to load his revolver. The other man steps away, turns, but looks back at Tom from the corner of his eye. Rodrigo stands beside Tom toeing the dirt.

Tom draws his revolver and aims at one of the babies. He cocks his piece, and when he does the baby looks at him and smiles. Tom lets his gun hand fall to his side. It's a pretty little baby although Tom can't tell if it's a boy or a girl. Then he takes aim again and the baby looks at Tom and laughs.

Tom uncocks his piece, looks helplessly at Rodrigo, then slams the gun into his holster, and says, "Y'all can do what you want to, I guess I've had enough killing for one day."

He starts toward where they left the horses while mumbling in a choked-up voice to himself, "Damn Indians anyway, killing my only boy, stealing my beeves..."

Rodrigo looks at the two men standing there, one of them looks relieved, and the other has a slight smile on his face.

Rodrigo says, "Let's vamoose, the squaws will come back after we leave."

There is a beautiful red and gold sunset when the squaws come back and get their babies. The sky emits a soft glow that illuminates the blood red slaughter field. The squaws step quietly and carefully around the dead, mangled, bloody bodies of their husbands, brothers, uncles, and friends. The squaws are heartbroken over the loss of their loved ones, and at the same time relieved that their babies are okay.

After that day the Apache cut a wide path around Tom Gore's place.

End