



by Serge Noirsain

(Adapted into English by Gerald Hawkins)

While Cochise's Chiricahuas and Francisco's White Mountain Lipans were ransacking the Sonoita valley in southern Arizona (September-October 1861), Apaches were plundering the country several hundreds miles away from Tucson. But who were the Lipans ?

The Apache Lipans can be divided into several tribal groups : Navaho, Western Apache, Chiricahua, Mescalero, Jicarilla and Kiowa-Apache. Circa AD 1400, before the beginnings of influence from the Pueblos of the South-West, several Apache tribes travelled through the intermountain region west of the Rocky Mountains. Some reached present day Colorado while par of them edged into south-western Kansas and central-west Texas. These tribes are known as Kiowa-Apaches. Other bands continued toward south-western Texas as the Lipan Apaches. The Kiowa-Apaches were the least integrated into Apache society because they severed political connections with the other Apache groups. The Lipan Apaches were the tribes the most closely related to the Kiowa-Apaches, and like them, they adopted a Plain-oriented culture. In early 19th century, their principal bands lived in the Lower Rio Grande valley in New Mexico and Mexico, and ranged toward the Texas border. Like the tribes of the Plains, the Lipans hunted buffalo. The buffalo hide could be sewn into moccasins, robes, blankets and could be used too for shields, lariats and cords.¹

Fort Inge was built in 1849 on the western bank on the Leona River, Uvalde County. The post was part of a network of forts erected in central and western Texas to check

¹ *American Indians of the Southwest*, B.P. Dutton, Albuquerque (NM) 1903, pp. 64, 69-70, 111 ; *The Apache*, M.E. Melody, New York, pp. 20, 23, 26, 38, 63 ; *The Apaches*, J. Hook, Oxford (Great Britain), 1987, p. 4.

the Indians and keep them away from white settlements. After the secession of Texas, the Federal Secretary of War gave the commanders of these forts the order to evacuate them either by concentrating their forces at San Antonio or moving by way of Fort Laramie. The Texas State Militia occupied Fort Inge on March 19, 1861, until regular Confederate units replaced them.

When Major General Earl Van Dorn took command of Texas, he ordered Lieutenant-colonel John R. Baylor and his six companies of 2d Texas Mounted Rifles to proceed to Fort Bliss. En route, Baylor had to dispatch some men of his command to garrison the forts evacuated by the Yankees. So, in June 1861, Colonel Baylor assigned Lieutenant John Brady and a detachment to Fort Inge.

On October 11, 1861, Lieutenant Brady instructed sergeant N. Barrett to take two corporals and fifteen cavalrymen to locate a party of reputed hostile Indians that were roaming the country. At the beginning of the war and especially at the end of 1861, most Confederate cavalrymen were poorly armed. In Brady's platoon, shotguns and double-barrelled hunting guns were to be found next to old percussion rifles. Contrary to what is shown in Hollywood movies, none had Colt revolvers or even single shot pistols but all had received long or crude cavalry swords.

During three days, under a lashing rain, the patrol cautiously followed the Indian trail. The evidence that the continuous downpours had not yet removed revealed that what they were tracking was a war party and not a tribe on the move. The bad weather had perhaps weakened the alertness of the Texans but not the vigilance of the Apaches.

Cold and miserable in their drenched overcoats with faces hidden under their trickling felt hats, the soldiers were longing for a halt to dry their clothes around a warm fire. Suddenly a large number of Lipan Apaches sprang out of cover and surrounded the Confederate detachment. Sergeant Barrett barked orders at his men to spread out and open fire. At their dismay, only sharp snaps answered the triggers of their rifles: their powder was wet and useless.

As the Lipans were on foot, the sergeant ordered that sabres be drawn to try and break the encircling. Hand-to-hand fighting followed during which Confederate cold steel crossed the spears and tomahawks of the Indians. All were wading in the mud: those trying to unhorse the white riders, the others cutting their way through the warriors on foot. Barrett and his platoon finally succeeded to flee but three of his men were killed and a fourth, severely wounded, was cut to pieces by the Apaches.

According to sergeant Barrett's report, his men killed about ten Lipans and wounded a few others. This skirmish was probably the sole engagement of the Civil war to be fought without firearms.²



Ill-armed Texas cavalrymen early in 1861(collection David. C. Williams)

² *Texas in the War 1861-65, Simpson, p. 144.*