

## THE COMANCHE BRIDGE BETWEEN OKLAHOMA AND MEXICO, 1843-1844

*By Ralph A. Smith\**

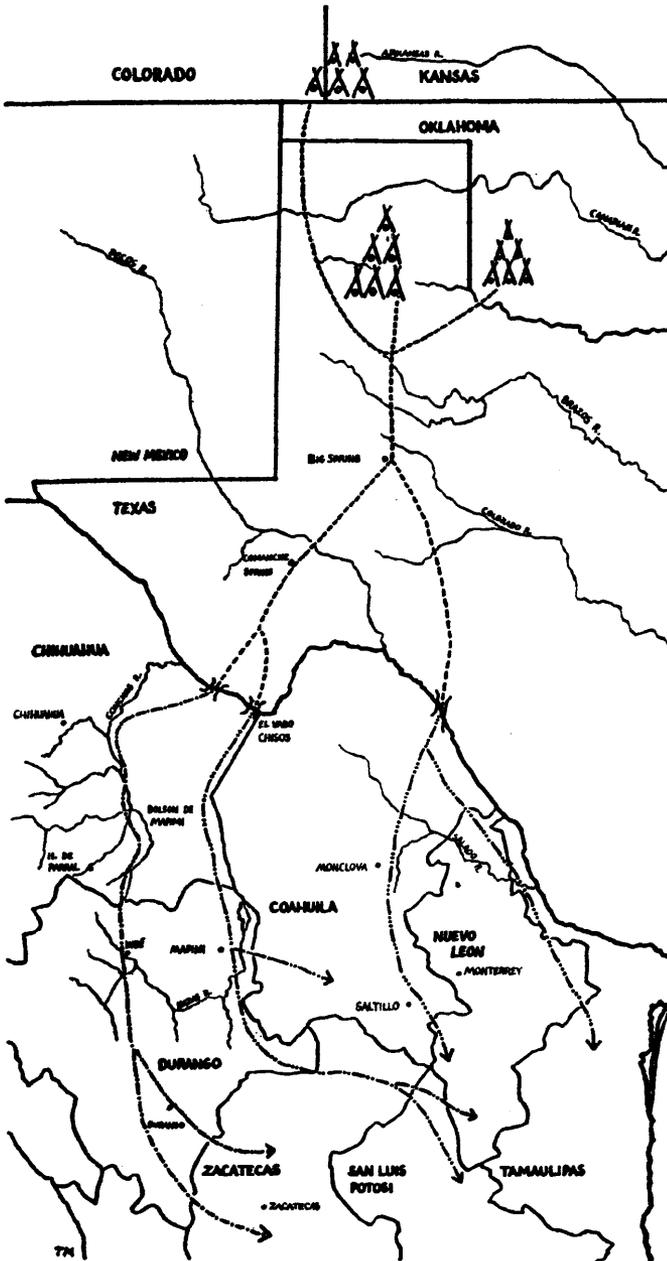
The demand for Mexican livestock, captives, and plunder increased after American commissioners made treaties of amity and trade with the Indians of the South Plains in the 1830's. The Comanche and Kiowa consequently stepped up their predatory raids below the Rio Grande.

These incursions extended beyond the Tropic of Cancer frequently. Their deepest penetrations of Mexico put the Indians at points a thousand miles straight south of their home range in Kansas and Oklahoma. The great Comanche plunder road made up along the Arkansas. In crossing West Texas it forked several times before reaching the Rio Grande. These prongs extended over the river at three separate points. They made as many big trunks in the Mexican country. One line can be referred to as the western. It entered Mexico opposite, Lajitas, Texas, and bore southwestward over the Chihuahuan desert to the Rio Conchos. This branch ran up the Conchos, then the Rio Florida through the heart of the Department. Along the way the raiders found many settlements and good farms for plundering. Descending into Durango this trunk entered the lowlands south of El Torreón de las Cañas. It continued through sierra gaps that let the invaders into the valley of the Rio del Oro and from there to the Ramos and on into the country west of the capital, Victoria de Durango. There they took hundreds of captives and thousands of head of livestock. The war trail penetrated Zacatecas and passed over the Tropic of Cancer before sprang out among mountain villages and ranches in central Mexico.

The second, or middle, trunk was probably the most used line. After crossing the Rio Grande at the Chisos Ford, it followed the present Chihuahua-Coahuila boundary over the Bolson de Mapimi. This trail traversed eastern Durango, hit Zacatecas, and reached through the Department of San Luis Potosi into the coastal Department of Tamaulipas. Evidence indicates that the Comanche stretched it on southward at times even into Queretaro.

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(R. A. S., 1961)  
Map showing the Comanche roads from the South Plains into Mexico, about 1840-1870.

The third, or eastern, trunk of the Comanche's Great War Trail crossed the Rio Grande opposite Las Moras in Texas and entered Coahuila. Indians taking this route pushed across Coahuila into Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. All of these main lines had laterals that shot out in different directions and covered thousands of square miles like a net. They enabled the raiders to reach every inch of Mexico from a line west of the Rio Conchos eastward to the Gulf of Mexico.

Plains Indians made the Bolson de Mapimi their favorite rendezvous while in Mexico. This natural pocket of land covered eastern Chihuahua, western Coahuila, and northeastern Durango. It made an ideal camping area for these nomads. This wild plateau land had water springs and many sierras crossing it. These sustained and protected camp life and stolen livestock. The raiders brought their families and lived here from a few weeks to seven, or eight, months out of a year. From the Bolson they made raids over neighboring departments. These parties ranged from half a dozen to three, or four, hundred in size. They gathered in hundreds of women and children, much plunder, and thousands of head of horses and mules over the years. These items were the staples of their commerce. Their value ran into vast sums annually. Like cattle kings, the Comanche made up great droves for long drives up trail to northern markets. At Bent's Fort in Colorado, Coffee's post on Red River, and Torrey's trading house on the Brazos; in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, and among the Indian tribes of the Central Plains, they found a ready demand for Mexican commodities. Also they disposed of goods at Santa Fe and Taos to both Mexicans and Americans. They followed a policy of generally, friendly relations with the New Mexicans dating from a treaty with Governor don Juan Bautista Anza in the 1780's.

The story of Comancheros from New Mexico who bartered with the Plains Indians fits into this traffic. On the supply end the Indians knew the location of the big ranches, silver camps, pack train routes, and farming settlements scattered over many hundreds of thousands of square miles. Some of these ranches ran horse, mule, goat, sheep, and cattle herds that allegedly reached into the hundreds of thousands of head. With the livestock supply in the south great, and the demand in the north unlimited, the Comanche served as willing middle men. The journals of Southwestern explorers, traders, and travelers show that the market for Mexican captives was strong also.

While the stories of Mexican slaves on the South Plains are fairly familiar to American readers, the pitiful tales telling how these wretched women and children were whisked from

their homes remain largely overlooked by historians in the archives and gazettes of Mexican states. They give the explanation for the Spanish words, names, and descendants found to some extent in Western Oklahoma today. The story in this article concerns itself with the traffic on the lower end of the longest commercial line in North America for only a brief two years, 1843-1844, but it shows a picture of what went on for generations.

This period opened with small bands of Comanche putting on a mid-winter carnival in northeastern Durango. They had come from their camps in the Sierra Mojada, a Bolson chain on the Chihuahua-Coahuila border. At day break on January 2, seven got off with a mule herd less than a league from Mapimi. The fact that Mapimi was a mining town and military post did not deter the Lords of the South Plains. One might ask why Comanche stole mules? They were too proud to ride such plebian animals, and certainly they had no intention of plowing them. The answer is simple. They knew their market, and realized that Americans would buy "Spanish mules" in droves to sell to farmers farther east.

In this same vicinity they frightened pack mule trains and stole mule herds during the second week of the new year. For them to elude Captain don Antonio Zepeda and his company when they came out in pursuit was little more than sport. Like other companies that went out to chase Plains Indians his came back "without any fruits." Fortunately for don Antonio, history remembers him less for his poor picking among the Comanches than for his defeat of Maximillian's French army near Parras nearly a generation later. Finally the Comanche nest in the Sierra Mojada attracted the commander and 160 men from Mapimi. But his campaign came to naught for a reason that frequently produced windfalls for the Comanche horse rustlers. This was the "tenacious" refusal of Mexican ranchers 'to frank' their horses for expeditions against them.<sup>1</sup>

Comanche activities raised such concern for travelers and commercial and industrial welfare that Governor-General don José Mariano Monterde of Chihuahua sent monthly troop

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<sup>1</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, periodico del gobierno del departamento de Durango (Victoria de Durango, Durango), II núm. 107, febrero 19 de 1843.

Most of the footnote references in this paper are to gazettes of Mexican states: *El Registro Oficial*, Periodico del gobierno del departamento de Durango, means in Spanish that *El Registro Oficial* is the periodical of the government of the Department, or State, of Durango, or merely the weekly gazette, or newspaper. The same is true of *Revista Oficial* for Chihuahua, etc. These gazettes are found in various places. Some are in University of Texas, some in the Library of Congress, and some in libraries in Mexico, especially in Durango City.

escorts to protect trains from Chihuahua City going into Durango. One of these went to Cerro Gordo, or present Villa Hidalgo, in the lower Department. This was a military post that sent many expeditions from northern Durango against the Indians,<sup>2</sup> but could not protect travelers within its own shadow from them.

To meet the menace of the Plains Indians by another approach Monterde borrowed an old stratagem that English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Mexican, and American authorities had used in the scalp traffic for generations. This was the expediency of hiring tribes to deliver the hair of troublesome Indians. The Governor entered treaties with chiefs of the Gila River, Mogollon, and Mescalero Apaches to lift the scalping knife against Comanche and Kiowa when they met them.<sup>3</sup>

After this the Comanche peril mounted, but the Apache threat subsided for more than a year. Monterde's divide-and-conquer policy brought no flood of hair into the state scalp market. In fact it produced little of significance beyond illustrating Mexican versatility in trying to escape annihilation by Plains and Mountain, or Apache, Indians. This became even more obvious when another administration a few years later declared the Apache to be Chihuahua's worst enemy and made a deal with Chief Bajo el Sol to take Apache scalps. At this, he and his Comanches acquitted themselves well.<sup>4</sup>

In October Plains Indians got glimpses of a familiar antagonist in the Bolson. He was Captain don Juan N. Armendariz with 130 troops from Cerro Gordo. Led by Chihuahua's colorful Scalp Lord, don Santiago Kirker, this company could have bankrupt Durango, for her bounty law of July 27, 1840, would pay ten dollars for each Comanche pelt delivered. But the warriors lost neither hair nor hide to don Juan here. However, few Mexicans deserve the brand of scalp hunter more than him. At mid-century he was still after Comanche hair, and in 1849 received one of the first contracts under Chihuahua's new Fourth Law of May 25 to bring in their scalps at two hundred dollars each.<sup>5</sup> His 1843 campaign report, however, does allow its reader to see into the recesses of the

<sup>2</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, II, núm. 99 enero 22 de 1843.

<sup>3</sup> *Revista Oficial*, periódico del gobierno del departamento de chihuahua (Ciudad Chihuahua, Chihauhau), I, núm. 18, abril 18, y núm. 29, junio 4 de 1843; Francisco R. Almada *Diccionario de historia, geografía y biografías sonorenses*, 809-810, y "Gobernadores del estado: XIX.—General J. Mariano Monterde," *Boletín de la sociedad chihuahuenses de estudios históricos*, III, núm. 7, abril de 1941, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Julius Fröbel, *Aus Amerika*, II, (Leipzig; J. J. Weber, 1857-1858), p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> *El Faro*, periódico del gobierno del estado libre de Chihuahua (Ciudad Chihuahua, Chihuahua), III, núm. 29, junio 26, y núm. 55, septiembre 25 de 1849.

Comanche pale, its ruggedness, its cacti jungles, scattered springs, rendezvous camps, and slave dens, and to feel the cool climate of the Bolson as the Plains Indian did. This was the spot from whence the warriors launched their attacks, gathered to their plunder, captives, and stolen livestock, and dispersed themselves between raids.

The Comanches were elusive. They stayed out of sight and reach of Armendariz and his scouts. The invaders abandoned their huts, parapets, and rock entrenchments at the Laguna de las Palomas in southeastern Chihuahua before his men arrived. Defenses, tepee sites, and animal skulls and bones greeted the soldiers at seven, or eight, springs in the sierras where they had kept camp. Their broad trail leading from the spring of Sombretillo in eastern Chihuahua reminded don Juan of a busy road connecting populated places. Hoofs of hundreds of animals headed for the northern markets had cut this commercial artery deep into the face of the Bolson. At the spring of Espiritu Santo Comanches had left evidences that they had brought their families south with them, and that these had attended to the stolen animals and had made arrows from canes for the warriors. Armendariz also observed that after a raid the nomads travelled forty to fifty leagues within twenty-four hours, while Mexican troops could barely cover that distance in twice as long.<sup>6</sup> If the soldiers did overtake a raiding party it spelled disaster for the Mexicans more often than for the Indians. An incident in the second week of December illustrates this.

One band crossed the Bolson into the District of Santa Rosalia along the Conchos River. A company from Ciudad Camargo pursued it to the Laguna de los Pastores. The Comanche turned upon it and killed thirty-one men.<sup>7</sup> When the Indians left their rendezvous in small parties, they ran greater risks. Such a group encountered fifty-two Coahuilan troops on the Arroyo del Jaralito in the eastern Bolson in December. Without putting up a stubborn fight they left seven killed and fled to rejoin the horde.<sup>8</sup>

Plains Indians might spend an entire winter in the Bolson, enjoying the climate, rounding out herds for long drives, and giving grass time to grow out along the trail northward. In 1844 they gave those departments bordering the Bolson little rest. In the first week their raiders made San Juan Bautista, about forty miles south of Chihuahua, the center of their attention. They moved like the wind, dodged Armendariz

<sup>6</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, II, núm. 192, diciembre 14 de 1843.

<sup>7</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 195, diciembre 34 de 1843, y núm. 198, enero 4 de 1844; *Revista Oficial*, I, diciembre 12 de 1843.

<sup>8</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 198, enero 4 de 1844.

when he took the field, and got back to the Bolson with their loot.<sup>9</sup>

Twenty Indians rode down the central trunk on January 20, looking for livestock and people like brokers with a market to meet. They killed a soldier and got three hundred mules within a quarter of a mile of Mapimi, while Captain Nabor de la O and fifty-two soldiers were chasing about north of the place looking for them. Their net caught up four hundred more mules before they beat it for the Bolson. They reached the Loma Prieta fourteen leagues north of Mapimi at dawn the next morning. Suddenly a small single shot cannon fired into them. De la O had sprung an ambush. They pressed their animals on with great fury and broke through with all of their men and stock except eighty-two mules. Since the Plains Lords always rode the best animals that the Mexican ranchers raised, they enjoyed a decided advantage on their raids. On this occasion de la O made a rather frayed plea for not pursuing them. His horses were in an "extremely bad condition."<sup>10</sup> The superior horsemanship of the Indians was another factor that favored them over the Mexicans.

A party of Comanche entered northwestern Durango in the third week of February by the western trail. This area around Santa Maria del Oro and Indé was one of their favorite hunting grounds. It had populated villages, ranches with livestock, and roads for pack trains loaded with ore and goods. The invaders found families abandoning settlements over a wide territory. They avoided militias from Indé and other points and carried on their raid successfully. Their experiences here with Captain José Maria Patiño show something of the opponants and arms that they confronted in Mexico. He had regular soldiers from the post at Santiago Papasquiario armed with guns, horsemen with lances recruited in the villages, and Tepehaune, or domestic, Indians armed with bows, arrows and quivers. The ancestors of his Tepehaunes during a rebellion in 1618-1621 had been the first objects of Spanish head bounties. From this had come the scalp bounties of later years. Patiño used his Tepehaunes as scouts to scan the country for Comanche, but the outcome followed an old pattern. The Mexicans found neither Comanches, their tracks, nor signs of them. When the soldiers settled down at home again, the red men reappeared and were flying over the District of Santiago Papasuiario in the last week of February.<sup>11</sup>

The Comanche carried good rifles. They had gotten them in trade with Americans, or with reservation Indians. Guns

<sup>9</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 201, enero 25 de 1844.

<sup>10</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 206, febrero 1 de 1844.

<sup>11</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 218, marzo de 1844.

supplied to resettled eastern tribes under treaty terms by the United States Government had passed into their hands. Creeks in particular had sold many to them for five dollars each. Seventy-eight Mexicans took up the chase in the last week of February behind the Justice of the Peace of San Gregorio. Most of them had only machetes, slings, and similar "weapons." Others had a few old guns and four fuses of powder each. As sometimes happened in battle the Mexicans did well against the better armed Comanche. In a fight at La Tinaja the nomads left three dead and fled with "blood flowing from their bodies."<sup>12</sup>

During these same hours bands of raiders struck on the central trunk line south of Mapimi. They made early morning sweeps of horses and mules around the Sierra del Rosario, left dead cowboys, and headed back for the Bolson. One party brushed with Captain de la O and lost eighty-four animals.<sup>13</sup> Again most of the stolen stock was mules, which seems to stress the importance of the American market for plow and wagon animals.

In the first week of March, the Comanche continued their work in northern Durango. They ran off six hundred head of horses at La Zarca ranch alone. Lieutenant Colonel J. Miguel Velasco from Cerro Gordo following them night and day but saw only their smoke. They marked the way with dead freighters and destroyed cargo. While he was out they headed for Cerro Gordo itself. Passing it, they barely missed swooping off the post cavalry. However, they got a hundred riding horses belonging to civilians.<sup>14</sup>

When the month ended, the Comanche were still rampaging over wide areas on both sides of the Chihuahua-Durango line paying farewell calls to round out their droves and pick up captives before taking their long trail northward. At Balesquillo in the District of Balleza along the San Juan tributary of the Conchos they killed Francisco Montoya and carried off his son. The raiders played April Fool tricks in several places. At one they killed four and carried off two young captives also in the Balleza district. While slaughtering still others, they managed all of the time to avoid soldier and citizen companies rushing here and there from Balleza, Parral, Jiménez, and Allende.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-five took in the big El Torreón del Cañas ranch in the vicinity of Cerro Gordo. In the village of Salgado on this sprawling ranch, the Indians killed two women and carried away five captives. The warriors disported

<sup>12</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 221, marzo 24 de 1844.

<sup>13</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 219, marzo 17 de 1844.

<sup>14</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 221, marzo 24 de 1844.

<sup>15</sup> *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 24, junio 11 de 1844.

themselves contemptuously at a pond, while the villagers of Tascate several hundred paces away trembled. Seeing Colonel Velasco and Captain Armendariz arriving with considerable troops, the marauders set an ambush and almost trapped them. When they perceived a Mexican attack in the making they fled to the hills. Some rode swift horses. A few went on foot. One footman dropped his arms, "presented" his hand to Armendariz, and surrendered. The Captain kept on the heels of the rest. The red skins lost five warriors and had to abandon four of their five captives. In a few minutes the Mexicans had fleeced the dead. Back to Cerro Gordo their scalps went up to "public exposure on the portal of the soldier's quarters."<sup>16</sup>

This spring time activity on the perimeter of the Bolson soon died out. After mid-April the gazettes of Chihuahua and Durango made no mention of Comanches south of the Rio Grande until August. These dates mark roughly the beginning and the end of the six to eight month annual visits of Plains Indians in Mexico.

Three hundred Comanche would enter Mexico by the western and middle trunks "in the present Moon," according to information that Governor don Mariano Martinez de Lejarza of New Mexico dispatched to Chihuahua City in July. Before it reached its destination sixty Comanche had crossed the Rio Grande and appeared around Fort San Carlos at present Manuel Benavides.<sup>17</sup> By the fourth week of August they were riding down their Conehos trail into Durango. The big fall hunt for marketable goods was on. On August 26, the invaders cleaned up the horses and mules at the Sestin ranch on the upper Rio del Oro. They came away headed northward with a thousand head making for the Bolson gathering grounds. The horse rustlers had no trouble bursting through several ambushes that soldiers from Cerro Gordo set, nor in whipping men from La Noria in Chihuahua in a two hour fight. Raids from the Bolson were most common at the full moons. Colonel Velasco expected them to continue at such intervals until December; however, as it turned out, he should have said until April. He based his strategy for meeting them on the belief that they would split into small bands to work the country more thoroughly. The division of his forces into details<sup>18</sup> also worked except when his men met Comanches in ratios of less than about three to one in the Mexican's favor.

Two days after Governor don José Antonio Heredia of Durango ordered the biggest Mexican campaign yet to search

<sup>16</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 225, abril 7 de 1844.

<sup>17</sup> *REvista Oficial*, II, núm. 34, agosto 20 de 1844; *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 268, septiembre 5 de 1844.

<sup>18</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 268, septiembre 5 de 1844.

out the Bolson Governor Monterde of Chihuahua received another dispatch from Martinez on September 5. It was sufficient to have scared a dead Mexican. Some Comanche had told his emissaries that not three hundred but two thousand warriors had already prepared to tour Chihuahua in the last quarter of the year. On their word, they intended to shake down the country thoroughly. Their chiefs expected to take a position mid-way between Presidio del Norte and Ciudad Camargo. This would put them east of the capital city in the very heart of the Department. Its best towns would be strung along the Conchos Valley before them.<sup>19</sup>

On its way south the well armed Comanche horde divided. One party took the eastern trunk into Tamaulipas. The other three hundred rode down Alamito valley on the western. They crossed the Rio Grande in the first week of October. Mexican scouts believed that they detected Shawnees with them.<sup>20</sup> Troops in the posts along the River did not bother the invaders. They reached La Cruz del Refugio seventy-five miles southeast of Chihuahua City on October 15. The warriors killed a woman and stole a horse herd. They also left some horses that they rode for the Mexicans to have in good shape when they called again. The Indians abducted Anatasio, age nine, and Hipoliti Santa Anna; Ramona Romero, sixteen; Eulalia Romero; Domingo Garcia, fourteen; Bonifacio Gonzales, fifteen; Crescencio Corral, ten; and Eulalia Nunoz, fifteen. Capt. Armendariz rescued all of these except Eulalia Romero in a fight at the Laguna de las Palomas on October 26. Two other children that they carried away either died before this date, or would spend the rest of their lives on the South Plains, or possibly with reservation Indians who might have bought them. The Comanche left La Cruz following roughly the present Pan American Highway. Colonel don Mauricio Ugarte took the trail behind them with 250 men. At Las Garzas on the Conchos they took off Tomas de la Cruz, fourteen; Evaristo sosa, eleven; and Jesus Baca, thirteen. Their names appeared among those of children that Armendariz rescued on the twenty-sixth.

West of Santa Rosalia de Ciudad Camargo the Comanche observed a large Mexican army moving to attack them early on the morning of October 16. Ugarte had just joined Armendariz and his three hundred men and Captain Campos with a company from Jiménez. Armendariz had been campaigning in the Bolson for over a month without finding the enemy. Seeing Ugarte and nearly 600 soldiers the Indians fled up a sierra north of Ojo Caliente. They divided and came

<sup>19</sup> *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 39, septiembre 24 de 1844; *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 227, octubre 6 de 1844.

<sup>20</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 284, octubre 31 de 1844.

down into two parties. The Mexicans tried to divert them from Durango, but failed. The nomads continued down the Rio Parral Valley picking up captives as they went. One was Alvino Corral, eleven, whom Armendariz rescued later at Laguna de las Palomas. Alarming reports preceded them. Companies of soldiers rushed here and there. On the basis of an erroneous figure which placed their number at two thousand, Governor Heredia ordered a mobilization of all forces in Durango.<sup>21</sup>

In his Department, Comanches sacked and burned houses and took off horses and mules on don Francisco Figueroa's Amador ranch on the upper Rio del Oro Valley on the twentieth. Many of his servants reached his ranch house safely, but the raiders slew the wife and two little sons of don Ignacio Ortiz and abducted his two daughters, Maria Remigia, twenty-four, and Marcelina, three. The marauders snatched Perfecto, age twelve, Saturnina, twenty-one, and Petra, thirteen, from the home of Clement Hernandez. They got Tomas Reyes, eleven, Nestor Rivera, ten, Luis Olguin, eight, Patricia Pillado, ten, and Maria del Rosario Cenicerros, twelve, out of other families. Armendariz recovered these ten children six days later, but the names of four other captives are not recorded because they were not rescued. The Comanche might have killed them before they reached the Laguna de las Palomas, or they could have been among those that the Indians escaped with to the South Plains. In this case they ended their lives on the Llano Estacado, or in the Indian Territory. They might have descendants in Oklahoma today, who knows?

Moving on the nomads destroyed a pack train, killed four drivers, and seized seven hundred pesos in coins. At Sestin ranch also in del Oro Valley they murdered three, kidnapped a woman and two boys, and drove off the horses. The names of this trio are not known, nor does it seem likely that Armendariz rescued them on the twenty-sixth. Around the Castañeda ranch they got many more horses and littered the country around the Arroyo de Sardinias with dead cattle and burros. Comanche policy was to spear cattle, sheep goats, hogs, and other domestic animals too slow to keep up with their droves.

The horse rustlers began their days early and actively. On the twenty-first they started out with taking the mules of don Juan José Ruiz at Agua Caliente, then those of don José Maria Celis. No where did they meet any resistance until six tried to run off the mules of don Transuilino Sanchez Alvarez on San Pedro ranch. When soldiers and citizens charged them,

<sup>21</sup> *Revista Oficial*. II, núm. 39, septiembre 24, núm. 40, octubre 1, núm. 42, octubre 15 núm. 43, octubre 22, núm. 44, octubre 29, y núm. 46, noviembre 12 de 1844; *El Registro Oficial* III, núm. 274, septiembre 26, núm. 283, octubre 27, núm. 284, octubre 31, núm. 286, noviembre 7, y núm. 287, noviembre 10 de 1844.

they fled, and another band swooped a mule drove from a pasture. These small parties combined, and don Tomas Carrete said that they numbered over five hundred when they passed through Los Sauces de Cardona. Other Mexicans confirmed his story that they carried a captured benefice with them.

The warriors kept the prelate dressed in his frock, pantaloons, and gloves. They forced him to make mock confessions to a wounded captive. The warriors carried along a sort of Indian Joan of Arc to inspire them in battle also. She wore an elaborate garb and rode a big horse with much trapping. They sported an ensemble of musical instruments sufficient for a regiment according to Carrete. These included flutes and cornets. From some twenty instruments they sent forth a stream of discordant sounds. In the intervals of revelry, they lanced calves and shot the farm yard poultry with arrows. The marauders made a sweep of the children also before leaving. They abducted Miguel Herrera, twelve; Merced Quiñonez, six; Blas Eulalio Sendreda, thirteen; Maria de Jesus Nuñez, eleven; and probably others. Armendariz recovered these four at Laguna de las Palomas.

Dashing across country again they left smoking houses and panic in their wake. At villages on El Corral de Piedra ranch, they repeated the same old story, four dead, two boys kidnapped, cattle and sheep lanced, and horses and mules stolen. Juan Antonio Soto, fifteen, whom Armendariz recovered, was probably one of the captives. Joaquin Martos and over thirty men from Santa Maria del Oro chased around pretending to protect the people, but they really seemed more concerned with staying out of sight of the Comanche. The Indians went right on with their brokerage business of collecting livestock and slaves. Of course, they would not sell all of the captives that they were taking. Some of the girls would grow up to become wives of Comanche chiefs possibly. Little Mexican boys would develop into warriors. A few might become chiefs even and lead back raids upon their own people. At one place, the villians nabbed Loreto Vicana, thirteen, and Eugenio Flores, twelve. They snatched Macedonio Ribota, thirteen, from Santa Cruz del Oro. At de Orgános, they took Concepcion N, nine, and Jesus Alvarez, sixteen. But Armendariz saved all of them from uncertain futures in cooler climates at Laguna de las Palomas.

The Comanches surrounded Magistral in the edge of a sierra, but did nothing new, just the routine of killing the men, grabbing children, sacking houses, and driving off the livestock. When Martos slipped in after they had left he found old and young weeping for the dead and lost. Breaking up into small parties, the raiders visited villages large and small over a great area. What the Justice of the Peace of San Bernardo reported about them cleaning the country of ani-

mals, scattering the people, and leaving the population "afoot, helpless, and miserable," did not tell half the story.<sup>22</sup>

When the Comanche made night camp at the Pass of the Corrals on the twenty-first they had eighteen known captives and more than 2,000 head of animals. But the true figures were doubtless greater. In the District of Indé a dozen raiders paid for an attempt to take a hundred horses from the cowboys on San Salvador ranch on the next day. One Estevan Rubio broke through a guard of braves and speared their leader to death. All together they lost six warriors "according to the scalps and heads" delivered to the ranch administrator. The fired-up Mexicans also captured Tapiquisqui. He "spoke Spanish fluently and desired to join us and to become a Catholic." While this side show went on, the main body of Comanche actors garnered flocks and herds over neighboring plains.

Fifty of them met poor Martos at the head of the Sierra del Oso. This number of Comanche were considerably too many for over thirty Mexican soldiers. Martos and his men lifted heels for Los Sauces. Here they found the people weeping, flying to certain strong houses, and dragging livestock to shelter.<sup>23</sup>

The Comanche learned that Colonel Velasco and company from Cerro Gordo were of a little stronger metal, for they lost four of their captives to the soldiers.<sup>24</sup>

When and how the Indians came by Maria de la Cruz Silva is not clear. It was during this week probably. When Armendariz rescued her at Laguna de las Palomas, she gave her age as twenty and her home as Nazas on the river of the same name.<sup>25</sup>

She must have been one of at least thirty-two captives that the Comanche had when they burst across northern Durango for the Bolson with a "considerable horse drove" on the Wednesday night of October 23.<sup>26</sup>

Re-entering Chihuahua they raised a dust for Laguna de las Palomas with Captain Armendariz and 200 horsemen stripped to bare necessities trying to keep within sight of them. Numbering less than two hundred, the raiders reached the lagoon where they camped. About sun up on October 26, they were shocked to see that Armendariz's three companies had set a trap to effect their carnage. Besieged and catching lead from several directions, they found Captain Ze-

<sup>22</sup> *El Registro Oficial* III, núm. 285, noviembre 3, y núm. 286, noviembre 7 de 1844.

<sup>23</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 284, Octubre de 1844.

<sup>24</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 284, octubre de 1844.

<sup>25</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 286, noviembre 7 de 1844.

<sup>26</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 284, octubre 31 de 1844.

peda's company cutting off their retreat toward the pond. They saw Captain de la O's company and some immense sand dunes blocking escape on the opposite flank. Armendariz and his third company threatened them from another position. The Indians tried dispersing into two groups again; but the troops threw "more than seventy" of them into the water. All of these drowned or took their own lives, according to Armendariz. About fifty in the second party broke through the troops along the edge of the pond and escaped northward toward the Sierra Mojada.

The nomads lost thirty-two Mexican captives whose names have been mentioned already. They left twenty-five hundred horses and mules many buffalo robes blankets saddles, arrows, etc. on the field. Don Juan's report was silent about the scalps of the dead.<sup>27</sup> It is inconceivable that his men left them undisturbed. A more plausible conclusion is that they fleeced the Indians, and that he saw no need to mention such a routine matter. He sent those captives from Chihuahua to Hidalgo del Parral and Jiménez. The gazettes of Chihuahua and Durango carried lists of their names and of their parents and advised them where to get their children.<sup>28</sup> The *Revista Oficial* of Chihuahua could offer the people no further comfort than to say that the Indians had treated them worse in some previous years.<sup>29</sup>

Those Comanche who had followed the eastern trunk into Tamaulipas spread grief also. An alleged five hundred struck seventy-five miles below Laredo in the second week of October. The invaders destroyed eighty Mexican fighters near Guerrero. They burned Los Moros and La Palmita, killed people, and took captives.<sup>30</sup> During November any place from El Paso del Norte and the Rio Conchos to the Gulf could expect a Comanche attack. In the first week four hundred warriors were reported in the Sierra del Murciélago as General José Maria de Arlegui began assembling companies from over half of Durango and posting men to watch passes near the central trunk line. In the same week four hundred new Comanches entered Chihuahua. They surprised Presidio del Norte but the soldiers repelled them.<sup>31</sup> These probably were the same four hundred that Colonel Ugarte fell upon in a dawn attack at La Ramada ranch between Santa Rosalia de Ciudad Camargo and Jiménez on November 14. They dashed on into Durango leaving fifty-two dead on the field and along the

<sup>27</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 45, noviembre 3, y núm. 286, noviembre 7 de 1844; *Revista Oficial*, núm. 45, noviembre 5 de 1844.

<sup>28</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 286, noviembre 7 de 1844; *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 46, noviembre 12 de 1844.

<sup>29</sup> *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 45, noviembre 5 de 1844.

<sup>30</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, III, núm. 284, octubre 31 de 1844.

<sup>31</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV, núm. 289, noviembre 17 de 1844.

way,<sup>32</sup> if one report is correct. The invaders had good American rifles and plenty of lead and powder. On the other hand Ugarte listed a shortage of the same items, fatigue of troops, and poor condition of artillery and horses, as reasons for not following them.

The people of La Ramada joined in the desecration of dead nomads. Since Indian scalps possessed both state and open market value on the Mexican frontier, it can hardly be supposed that they overlooked the good marketable shocks of hair. Ugarte and Governor Monterde identified two of the dead "Indians" as "Anglo-Americans." They charged Texas authorities with sending them to lead the invasion. One had white complexion, red hair, a Nordic face, and metal rings about his ankles. Ugarte believed that most of the Indians were "not Comanches, because of their countenances, dress, etc. This affirms more the idea that the Texans foment them to make war upon us."<sup>33</sup> The Comanche had come to Mexico for adventure and business. Losing part of their force did not deter them in their pursuits. Thirty surprised a pack train only eight leagues from Cerro Gordo on November 16. They got fifty pack mules and destroyed the cargo. A much larger party moved toward the Llanos de la Zarca, where the fabulous herds of La Zarca ranch roamed. It eluded soldiers, and went into the Sierra del Oro on November 17.<sup>34</sup>

On this same day the Comanche nation operated other large armies over wide areas of Mexico. Tehuacanas accompanied one party. Soldiers from Camargo and Mier in Tamaulipas attacked it. The Indians killed nine Mexicans, but suffered major capital losses. They had to give up fifty-five Mexican captives, and to leave twenty of their own dead and some stolen horses in enemy hands. A few of the dead warriors wore medals of silver, tin, and other materials. With the date 1837, some bore emblems of the bust of President Martin Van Buren and of the American Union.<sup>35</sup>

Another great party of Comanche appeared at the water holes of Los Mastañas in Chihuahua on the same November 17. Having arrived recently below the Rio Grande they took the western, or Conchos route<sup>36</sup> and entered Durango on the twentieth. With other Plains Indians already in this section, they presented a formidable threat to the country. An alleged number of 500 had camped on the Llano de la Boquilla when Armendariz marched upon them with 300 men. They tried to break through his line but found that he had dismounted

<sup>32</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV, núm. 291, noviembre 24 de 1844; Alcance al *Revista Oficial*, II, núms. 46 y 47, noviembre 19 de 1844.

<sup>33</sup> Alcance al *Revista Oficial*, núm. 46, noviembre de 1844; *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 46, noviembre 26 de 1844.

<sup>34</sup> *El Registro Oficial* IV, núm. 291, noviembre 24 de 1844.

<sup>35</sup> *Revista Oficial*, II, núm. 47, noviembre 19 de 1844.

<sup>36</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, núm. 292, noviembre 28 de 1844.

his cavalrymen and formed it in a square. This formation held held them, until they finally fled. The Indians left a captive Mexican woman and lost nine dead to the Mexican's seven. The soldiers returned to Cerro Gordo where they received news of a rebellion in Jalisco to unseat Dictator Santa Anna.<sup>37</sup>

The Comanche probably knew nothing about Mexican politicians mixing their name with domestic issues. But on November 26, Governor Monterde made a special appeal to the citizens to repel the invaders. "whose movements are directed by the Texans." He said that the very evil machinations of the Texans were aimed at aiding the revolutionary General Paredes y Arrillaya by employing the Indians. Only by supporting the "unconquerable General Santa Anna" could the country be saved from Comanche ferocity.<sup>38</sup>

For two weeks after the Comanche defeat at La Ramada, raiders rounded up horses in the District of Hidalgo, and on November 27, they appeared at the gates of Hidalgo del Parral. One report said that they were "directed by the Texans, who came with them." Smirking over the carnage by their warriors, they found the people trembling, praying, and fearing lest the Indians turned their streets into a "slaughter pen" even though Hidalgo was a military post. The raiders actually killed only a few, but drove off some animals. They massacred and pillaged as they moved on into Durango.<sup>39</sup>

The Assembly of this Department noted that Plains Indians had overrun Durango "in all of its extremities." They had put the country and the people in a "most grave and deplorable" condition.<sup>40</sup> These nomads prolonged their 1844 raid through the first quarter of the following year. Governor's reports during these months bulged with stories of people killed<sup>41</sup> and livestock, women, and children taken off, while talk of improving the frontier defenses against the northern peril went on.<sup>42</sup> Occasionally luck favored the Mexicans, and the Comanche paid painfully. At one such time, when a band entered Ramos ranch, Colonel don Juan N. Flores went after their hair with his peons. They returned with four heads, which he remitted to the authorities of his district<sup>43</sup>

The raids of the South Plains Indians finally ran out in the spring, but the warriors came back in the fall for an even more devastating invasion. These annual incursions into Mexico finally ceased a generation later only when the Army within the United States forced the Comanche and Kiowa onto reservations and compelled them to stay there.

<sup>37</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV, núm. 293, diciembre 1 de 1844.

<sup>38</sup> Found in files of *Revista Oficial*.

<sup>39</sup> *Revista Oficial* II, núm. 49 diciembre 3 de 1844.

<sup>40</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV, núm. 301, diciembre 29 de 1844.

<sup>41</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV, núm. 311, febrero 2, y núm. 318, febrero 27 de 1845.

<sup>42</sup> *El Registro Oficial*, IV núm. 319, marzo 2 de 1845.