

APACHE JACK'S 105th BIRTHDAY

The old man was a true poker-face and never showed emotion, but at the birthday party the Hawk family gave for him, he broke up

by Peter R. Odens

Photo: by Art Hawk.



Apache Jack on his 105th birthday, with Mrs. Art Hawk and her two pretty daughters.

HE KNEW Cochise and Geronimo, Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, and the Apache blood of his mother mixed with his father's Irish blood produced a man who was hard and fought hard to stay alive. But when a friend showed him a kindness shortly before he died, Apache Jack Kelly's tears flowed freely.

Daniel James Kelly was born on December 8, 1859 in Tombstone, Arizona. His father was Dan Kelly, an Irishman who had come to this country as a youngster and who had then joined the Union army. Sometime in the middle of the 19th century he had met and married a pretty girl of the Chiricahua Apaches who was the daughter of the third wife of Geronimo, known to the "white eyes" as Lizzy Crosseye.

But Dan Kelly was killed during the civil war and young Jack and his mother went to join the Chiricahuas who were then led

by their great and renowned chief, Cochise.

When Cochise died in 1874 Jack, then a lad of but 15, was present. "I don't quite remember everything about it," he confided to a friend one day, "but I can tell you for sure that Cochise was not buried together with his horse as everybody supposes."

Students of American history have often wondered where the Apache chief was buried and visitors to the Chiricahua National Monument in Arizona are told that only a few Apache warriors were present when Cochise was laid to rest somewhere in the Dragoon Mountains. There, Cochise's Stronghold is still being pointed out to tourists.

"I recall that Apaches from all over Arizona came to attend the funeral," Kelly, nicknamed Apache Jack, said shortly before he died. "It was somewhere in (Continued on page 62)

APACHE JACK'S 105th BIRTHDAY

(Continued from page 37)

the Dragoons, all right. Somewhere in those wild mountains a flat stretch of land was found where the grave was dug. The turf was carefully removed and then, after Cochise had been buried, it was replaced and horses were run over the place many times so nobody could see where a hole had been dug. Cochise's favorite dog was killed and placed in the grave together with him, as well as some food and his weapons. As for his horse, it was taken to another spot some distance away and killed and buried there. The Apaches were afraid there'd be some scavengers who'd desecrate the grave if they knew where it was, and hoped that they could be misled in this way."

In the last years of his life, Apache Jack's recollections were dimmed, but he distinctly remembered that Cochise was wrapped in a red army blanket before he was laid to rest. The story seems to coincide with that remembered by Tom Jeffords, Cochise's white friend. Jeffords saw Cochise the day before his death. At the time the Apache asked him if he supposed the two would ever meet again and Jeffords had shaken his head and said he did not think so. Cochise had nodded his head and had then predicted the exact time of his death.

Jeffords was not present when his friend died but he, too, heard later on that the story generally spread by the Apaches that Cochise was buried together with his horse was incorrect.

As for young Kelly, he remained with the Apaches for a short while, but after his mother died, he left the Indians and went out to make a living for himself among the whites. Basing himself in Tombstone, the place of his birth, he met many of the old lawmen and outlaws, including Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday. He did not seem to have any love for the Earp brothers whom he called outlaws, with the exception of Wyatt.

"He was different," he said. "He really cleaned up Tombstone—and he wasn't afraid of the devil himself."

Somehow, he came into the possession of Wyatt Earp's six-shooter and holster which, he claimed, "Mrs. Earp sent me." He also claimed that a pistol and holster he owned had belonged to Doc Holliday.

"Gave it to me in Bisbee one day," he said, "when he was sick. I had gone to see him and he said he wanted to give it to somebody who'd take care of it always. And this I did—never sold it."

"Doc and Wyatt became friends one day in Tombstone," Kelly continued, "when a fellow was trying to shoot Wyatt in the back. Holliday saw it and let him have it with his sawed-off shotgun."

Kelly often recalled how he, as a young boy, was hoisted up on a bar by some of the rowdies of the town. "But they wouldn't give me a drink," he related.

"Said that was for the grownups only. And I never became a drinkin' man—I was too hotheaded as it was, my mother being Apache and my dad an Irishman. Had I taken to drinkin', there's no telling what would have happened to me."

As it was, Kelly became a swamper, earning 25 cents a day, and criss-crossed Arizona with different freighters. Later on, he became quite popular as a driver because he spoke Apache fluently and never had any trouble with the Indians. When a bridge across the Colorado was built at Ehrenberg, Arizona, a few miles east of Blythe, California, his freighting business began to decline and he thought of trying his luck in the mines.

Having just five dollars in his possession, he invested \$2.50 in a burro and \$2 in a pack saddle. "The rest went for sowbelly and pinto beans," he said.

Apparently, Apache Jack Kelly made enough money in the mines to take a correspondence course in mining engineering and minerology, which helped him locate and exploit several mines, including an asbestos mine in the Castle Dome Mountains not too far from Yuma, and a cinnabar mine in central Arizona. He owned these mines until the day he died.

At one time, Kelly became a sailor and made several trips to Hawaii, but he always returned to his beloved Arizona, fighting to keep himself alive, a loner who never formed any romantic attachments long enough to get married. He also worked in a copper mine for some time, and there he was involved in an accident which burned one of his hands severely.

At one time, he made a trip to Fort Sill to visit Geronimo who was then held in prison there. He always admired the renegade Apache more than he did Cochise. "Maybe it's because my grandmother was Geronimo's wife," he said, "but anyway, I think he was smarter than Cochise and didn't give up."

Meanwhile, time flew by and the 19th century was succeeded by the 20th and Kelly grew old and lonely as old friends passed on. When he was told that he could apply for an old age pension, he refused. "Don't believe in it," he said grimly. But the year before he died, he changed his mind and did ask for the pension.

It was about 1960 when Apache Jack came to live in the Yuma County Nursing Home and it was there that he met Yuma newspaperman Art Hawk, who visited the home on an assignment. Although Kelly made it a habit not to speak to strangers and, in true Apache fashion, would often sit in his room staring straight ahead of him, never saying a word for hours, a friendship developed.



When Apache chief Cochise died, Apache Jack distinctly recalled he was buried in an army blanket. Shortly after that, Apache Jack went to live among the whites.

"You better get me out of here," the old man told Hawk, "because in here, I'm surely going to die." Since he was then about 104 years old, one can only applaud his sense of humor.

Hawk did make arrangements with the authorities of the nursing home by which he could take Kelly for a ride once in a while. Finally, when Apache Jack's 105th birthday arrived in 1964, Hawk drew up in front of the nursing home one day and took Kelly for a last automobile ride. Together, the two drove all around modern-day Yuma and even made a short trip across the Colorado into California. After an hour or so, they ended up in Hawk's Yuma home where his wife Jeanne and their teenage children had prepared a birthday party.

When Mrs. Hawk presented him with a birthday cake which showed ten red candles representing one hundred years, surrounding five white candles, the old man just stared and said nothing. But when she kissed his withered cheeks and said, "Happy birthday, Jack," the tears suddenly welled up in his eyes and he began to cry. Perhaps he remembered all his friends with whom he had lived the wild and dangerous life in the olden days and who had all "gone west." Or maybe Mrs. Hawk's obvious affection for him cracked open the old man's stoicism.

His trip to the home of the Hawks was the last time that Apache Jack left the nursing home. A few months later, he was dead. Art Hawk, retired from the Navy, supplied one of his old Navy jackets, without insignia, and in it, Apache Jack was laid to rest in Yuma's old cemetery.