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The Navajo Wars

In the beautiful but unforgiving land of the southwestern United States, the Navajo and Apache people made their homes. Villages were little more than widely spaced homes, and the independent spirit of the people was necessary.

Homes were eight-sided log hogans with ingenious rounded roofs. Their main foods were hunted meat like bison and the harvested corn and squash grown in their gardens.

After the Spanish had arrived in that part of the country in the 1600's, many Navajo women and children were enslaved. This continued for about two hundred years. In retaliation, the warriors joined with the Apache and raided the pueblo, Spanish, and Mexican settlements.

It was through these raids that these two tribes captured their first horses. The horses made a huge difference for the tribes. Now they could hunt bison from the relative safety of the horse's back. They could range farther away in less time than ever before.

In August 1846, the first American settlers arrived in Santa Fe. They were determined to have the land for themselves. A few months later, soldiers met with the Navajo to establish the Bear Springs Treaty. The soldiers proved quarrelsome, however, and hostilities broke out on both sides.

In February 1848, Mexico signed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which formally ended the Mexican War. This meant they had to give up half their territory which included the future states of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California.

Navajo land which had been independent before the Spanish was added to Spanish holdings. Then it became part of the land ceded to the United States.

In 1851, Fort Defiance was built in what would be called Arizona. The United States government had decided that the Navajo and Apache were "wild" tribes. That meant they chose to be independent and would not immediately adopt the trappings of American life. They also refused to move to a reservation right away.

Seven years later, trouble broke out in earnest. Soldiers shot 60 head of livestock owned by a Navajo chief. He went to Fort Defiance to complain. The soldiers responded by burning the chief's fields and village. The people could see no other choice open to them but to fight to protect their homes and property.

In 1860, 1,000 Navajo warriors attacked the fort. They almost destroyed it but in the end were forced to retreat. It was because of this uprising that the army decided the only way to deal with the natives was to kill them all.

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Kit Carson arrived in 1863 to lead this new war. Out of the approximately 12,000 Navajo, 8,000 were captured. To capture the people, the soldiers shot many of their livestock; then, they burned their homes and crops. When the people were starving and dying of exposure, they were rounded up.

These starving, weakened people were forced to walk during a blizzard to their new reservation in New Mexico, 300 miles away. The old, sick, and very young who could not keep up were often shot.

At the new reservation, life was difficult because of disease and crop failures. It was not until four years had passed that the people were allowed to return to their former homes. The government had caused the loss of about 3,000 Navajo lives.

The Apache people took longer to contain. They were determined to live free or die trying. They led raids over vast distances led by men like Cochise and Geronimo. It was decided by the government to give the Apache warriors their wish to let them die. The army was told to kill every male who could bear arms and capture the women and children. It wasn't until the 1890's that the Apache raids finally ended.

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Questions

1. The Navajo home was called a _____.

- _____ 2. Which of these was not a settlement raided by the Navajo or Apache warriors?

A. Mexican
B. Pueblo
C. Sioux
D. Spanish

3. How did horses impact the Navajo and Apache people?

4. In the treaty ending the Mexican War in 1848, the Spanish gave up land that would become seven states. Name four of them.

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A. Buffalo Bill
B. John C. Fremont
C. General Sherman
D. Kit Carson

A. Cochise
B. Sitting Bull
C. Kicking Bird
D. Geronimo

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