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Dameon Hansen, Idaho State University, graduate student, “Evolution of the Mexican American Border: How the Victorio Campaign in 1880 Changed Mexican American Border Management”

Abstract: This proposal is part of a greater thesis, but the specific proposal here will entail the specific defeat of Victorio around the Mexican American border lands region. Victorio was a warm springs Apache, which was part of the Chiricahua group. The time frame will be late summer 1880 to mid-October 1880. The paper will argue that the increased militarization of the Mexican American border in late summer until mid-October 1880 resulted in the death and defeat of Victorio. It will argue that despite this increased militarization the border was still soft enough to allow him to cross easily avoiding both the Americans, and Mexicans pursuing him. The border around mid-September 1880 was finally closed enough to prevent him from escaping across the other side. This was due to a cross border campaign that allowed the Americans into Mexico to help the Mexican army defeat Victorio. The Americans were asked to leave before he was defeated, but their presence before that event was enough to help influence Victorio’s defeat. The paper will include numerous illegal border crossings on part of the Americans, and cooperation on part of Mexico with America. Those activities will show that both sides knew only a cross border campaign was the way to defeat Victorio.

Evolution of the Mexican American Border: How the Victorio Campaign in 1880 Changed  
Mexican American Border Management.

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Victorio was a Chihenne Apache whose breakout from the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico in August 1879 resulted in major changes to the Mexican American border. The Chihenne Apache were one of the various groups of Chiricahua Apache. Victorio was fighting to keep his Warm Springs Reservation in New Mexico. He was given that reservation in 1874 but was told to leave in 1877 and report to the San Carlos Reservation as part of the American armies' concentration policy. Victorio spent between 1877 and 1879 attempting to avoid the San Carlos Reservation. In that period, he spent some time at both the Mescalero Reservation, and the Warm Springs area where his reservation was located at. He jumped the Mescalero Reservation in August 1879. He spent between August, 1879 and August, 1880 crossing the border to avoid both the American, and Mexican armies. Victorio was fighting both sides during this time frame. The Americans, and Mexicans needed state department permission to cross the border, and as a result until Fall, 1880 there were no authorized border crossings. The Americans crossed the border numerous times in their attempt to catch him. Their crossings were only successful at getting information, and their border crossings were unauthorized until fall, 1880. These crossings had no effect on Victorio's crossings. Victorio's crossings were effective at evading both sides. Victorio used his ability to cross the border to avoid both sides as a way of extending his success, but the hard border and cross border campaign initiated in August, 1880 discussed here resulted in the defeat of Victorio in October 1880.

The Victorio campaign between August 1879, and August 1880 against Mexico, and America was accompanied by raiding, and trading. These were both important cultural activities to Victorio's Apache. The continuation of those activities was one of the reasons the Americans and Mexicans opposed the Apache. They did not understand the cultural significance of those

activities and argued these activities should discontinue. The Apache refused to stop these activities, which explained why they continued during the Victorio campaign up to August, 1880. Trading and raiding were culturally significant activities that continued during the campaign, along with being the cause of conflicts with American, and Mexican societies.

The initiation of a cross-border expedition into Mexico of American army forces was documented by a correspondence written between August, 1880 and February 1881 involving John Hay, General Buell, General Kinzie, Col Terrazas, and Capt. Brinkerhoff.<sup>i</sup> It began with Secretary of War Ramsey informing Chihuahua authorities that an American force could enter Mexico. It cited that American troops would enter Mexico after August 16, 1880. It cited that on August 31, 1880 that Victorio was in Chihuahua near Lake Guzman where they could target him. It also included communication between Buell, and Mexican authorities telling them Col Terrazas, and Col Valle were tracking Victorio to prevent him from entering America. The documents also listed September 15, 1880 as the date when the cross-border operation began. It also cited that there was a planned attack on Victorio's forces by American and Mexican forces around Lake Guzman Mexico. It also listed the American troops under Col Buell around the Candelaria Mountains on September 24, 1880. It also claimed there was another planned attack with General Buell, and Col Terrazas against Victorio around September 26, 1880 around the Candelaria Mountains. On October 7, 1880 they are discussing where to meet and coordinate another attack on Victorio. The situation changed on October 9, 1880 when the American troops were told to go home by the war department. These documents showed us that Mexico was finally willing to do what was needed to defeat Victorio, which was a border crossing. Both sides had been building towards this action slowly for months.

Victorio was headed toward Mexico while the cross-border operations were still being discussed between America, and Mexico. According to Watt Victorio headed toward Mexico from America around September 7, 1880.<sup>ii</sup> This told us that the border was still open despite advancements in previous months. Victorio was tracked heading to Mexico through the West, and East Potrillo Mountains. September 1880 was when Col Buell and Governor Terrazas began to negotiate about Col Buell entering Mexico. Their communication began after August 16, 1880. The cross-border operation would take time to affect Victorio though.

The plan to allow American troops to cross into Mexico was progressing by September 4, 1880, while Victorio hovered around the border.<sup>iii</sup> Col Terrazas of Mexico announced cooperation on September 11, 1880.<sup>iv</sup> In that document Terrazas recommended that the forces meet around Ojo Caliente in his initial plan around September 24, 1880. This was the long sought cross border campaign the American forces had been pushing for Mexico to accept. Victorio crossed the Mexican border south of the Florida mountains in New Mexico around September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1880 according to General Buell.<sup>v</sup> This document was supported by another document by Lt Col Dudley.<sup>vi</sup> Another document supported this and claimed that he made it across the border to Lake Guzman near the Potrillo mountains.<sup>vii</sup> This was by Brinkerhoff and was written on September 11, 1880. It supported the previous documents. The ability of Victorio to cross the border when they were discussing the border crossing campaign showed the campaign had yet to reach reality. The *Grant County Herald* published a letter from General Byrne on September 11, 1880 that claimed that Victorio was good at crossing the border easily, and escaping both Mexican, and American troops.<sup>viii</sup> This told us that the papers saw the real

reason Victorio was successful. The cooperative border campaign to defeat Victorio was well on its way in September 1880.

America conducted an illegal border campaign while the real one was under way. Col Buell wrote a description of the Mexican campaign on November 20, 1880.<sup>ix</sup> Buell confirmed that he sent “ Citizen scouts” to monitor Victorio’s position in Mexico in August, 1880. This showed desperation on the side of America. Buell confirmed that in August the idea of a cross border campaign took form on both sides of the border, and that by September 15, 1880 Col Terrazas and Chihuahua authorities approved a cross border campaign. He reported that the plan was for General Carr to meet the Mexicans at Boca Grande Pass, but Carr failed to meet them there. Lt Mills was at Palomas lake in Mexico on September 24, 1880. Col Buell arrived at Lake Guzman, Mexico on September 25, 1880. The events in August to September 1880 are evidence of the pressure on both sides to cooperate on a cross border campaign.

The cooperative border campaign was active in mid-September, 1880. There were close to 10 Texas rangers in Mexico legally helping track down Victorio according to a document written September 17, 1880 by Brinkerhoff.<sup>x</sup> General Pope also acknowledged the two countries were working together mentioning Col Buell, and Governor Terrazas on September 20, 1880.<sup>xi</sup> On September 22, 1880 Pope acknowledged that the Victorio campaign was the result of Victorio being forced on the San Carlos Reservation.<sup>xii</sup> This highlighted the basic problem, and that army brass knew it. Lt Mills also wrote about the Mexican Campaign to stop Victorio.<sup>xiii</sup> His document is dated October 11, 1880 and mentioned that around September 22, 1880 Mills worked with Gen Buell, and Carr. It also mentioned that the locations they were interested in

finding Victorio was Lake Guzman, and the Candelaria Mountains, which are both in Mexico.  
This cross-border

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cooperation showed that both sides had been moved to see the right way to defeat Victorio through every other way failing.

Col Buell entered Mexico on September 18, 1880 to help defeat Victorio.<sup>xiv</sup> Col Buell entered the West Potrillo Mountains in Mexico on September 23, 1880. Col Buell and other American forces met at Palomas Lake on September 24, 1880. Col Buell then headed towards Laguna de Guzman, and then towards Laguna de Santa Maria, and spent time waiting for Col Carr on September 26, 1880. Victorio was now in the Candelaria mountains. Col Buell then asked Col Grierson to join him in Mexico, but Col Grierson felt he was not legally allowed there. This shows that some Americans were uncomfortable with border crossings, not just Mexicans. Berger finally met Col Terrazas on September 30, 1880 along with 13 Texas rangers who were also there to help catch Victorio. They met at Los Blancos, and Buell had not yet arrived by September 29, 1880. There were four main commanders involved with the cross-border campaign including General Buell, General Carr, Col Terrazas, and the Chihuahua Governor were all involved in the cross-border campaign in Mexico.<sup>xv</sup> Victorio's mindset was supported in a document by General Pope written on September 22, 1880.<sup>xvi</sup> This one cited that Victorio was content to live peacefully at the warm spring's reservation, and hated San Carlos. This confirmed that some army officials saw that this campaign was avoidable, and risked violence sending him to San Carlos. Lt Mills documented the Mexican expedition on October 11, 1880.<sup>xvii</sup> Mills documented that on September 22, 1880 he left white water NM to go to Palomas lake, Mexico. He recounted meeting with Col Buell, and General Buell around lake Guzman. Mills

recounted that on the 24<sup>th</sup> General Carr was at Boca Grande, Mexico. This document indicated that Col Grierson was in America guarding the Rio Grande, while there would be a planned

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meeting around Lake Palomas of Mexican and American forces. Grierson guarding the Rio Grande showed that America was making sure their border was secured. Col Terrazas planned a failed combined attack on Victorio on September 24, 1880.<sup>xviii</sup> This document planned on the American force at Boca Grande combining with Mexican forces around Lake Guzman. Col Valle cited that on September 29<sup>th</sup> he met General Buell near the Candelaria mountains 80 miles from lake Guzman. The cross-border campaign moved into October 1880.

In October 1880, the Americans and Mexicans worked together in Mexico to defeat Victorio.<sup>xix</sup> On October 1, 1880 Col Terrazas told Col Buell that Victorio was going for the Sierra de Los Pinos Mountains. Col Buell, and Terrazas met on October 2, 1880 at Cantarrecio, Mexico. Col Buell, and Terrazas tried to send Victorio towards Col Grierson. Col Grierson had decided to meet halfway and send a force of men to close to Ojo Caliente, TX around October 7, 1880 to prevent Victorio from going into Texas. It was during this time around the beginning of October 1880 that both Buell, and Terrazas headed for the Candelaria Mountains. The cooperation ended between America, and Mexico was the most important step towards defeating Victorio.

Mexico took over the campaign against Victorio in Mexico in October 1880 after sending American forces home in early October 1880. Col Terrazas was now approaching time to track Victorio and attack him according to Watt.<sup>xx</sup> Col Terrazas with Mata Ortiz tracked Victorio to Los Lagunas or Lagunita, Mexico before October 7, 1880. Col Terrazas, and Ortiz on October 7



found proof that Victorio had been in Sierra de Los Pinos recently. Col Buell was southeast of Fort Quitman in Mexico going towards the Sierra Borracho, and de Los Pinos when he was asked to leave by Mexican Col Valle on October 9, 1880. The cooperation of Mexico and the US

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Army was over for 1880. This told us that Chihuahua would allow American help in their territory if they needed them, and that Chihuahua was done with American help with Victorio. It also told us that Chihuahua may have worried about national sovereignty when it came to having Americans in their territory too long. Col Buell left for America the next day. Watt claimed that Col Buell knew he was not in Mexico with official permission from the federal Mexican government, and that Col Terrazas may not have officially asked the American forces to leave, but all-American forces were gone by October 12, 1880. This also told us that the state of Chihuahua acted semi independently of the federal government of Mexico. America leaving Mexico was followed by the end of Victorio.

The end of Victorio was the result of the cooperative campaign. Col Buell also addressed his campaign into Mexico on October 15, 1880.<sup>xxi</sup> Buell listed the goals of the campaign, and that before they left Mexico, they were 100 miles south of Quitman, TX. This has one letter acknowledging the death of Victorio by Col Terrazas on October 14, 1880. This letter listed 78 apache dead under Victorio including Victorio. The survivors of the defeat of Victorio were listed as 30 according to Brinkerhoff.<sup>xxii</sup> Col Buell also addressed his campaign into Mexico on October 15, 1880.<sup>xxiii</sup> Buell reported that him, and Capt. Beyer pursued Victorio from the Candelaria Mountains on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October. Through this period Buell still had citizen scouts in Mexico. Buell cited that Jack Crawford was with him in Mexico in the beginning of October. Buell cited that on October 9<sup>th</sup> Col Terrazas asked him to leave Chihuahua and head back to

America. General Pope followed by a similar request on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Buell cited that his force was all on the American side by October 12, 1880. Buell also included a letter from Col Terrazas notifying him of Victorio's defeat on October 14, 1880. In that document Col Terrazas cited that

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he defeated Victorio who was out of ammunition at Tres Castillos killing 78 apaches including Victorio taking 68 hostages. Buell claimed that his presence was helpful in defeating Victorio despite his leaving before. It seems that America's role in the campaign was the pivotal role of preventing Victorio from leaving the immediate area in Mexico until Victorio was trapped enough for Mexico to defeat him. Buell also cited that General Grierson was not allowed to cross the border. Grierson was always unsure about crossing it. The survivors of the defeat of Victorio are listed as 30 according to Brinkerhoff.<sup>xxiv</sup> The cross-border campaign resulted in the death of Victorio.

The *Grant County Herald* listed the death of Victorio on October 23, 1880.<sup>xxv</sup> Col Terrazas also announced the initial death of Victorio.<sup>xxvi</sup> It reaffirmed that 78 apaches died, along with 30 apaches still unaccounted for. There are other sources that support the same story of the death of Victorio at Tres Castillo.<sup>xxvii</sup> Victorio's death was not the end of the campaign.

American troops could enter Mexico officially on October 16, 1880 even though they had already entered.<sup>xxviii</sup> This was from the Federal government in Mexico not the state of Chihuahua. This was a little too late, but still an important development. This shows that even if the state of Chihuahua was faster than the federal Mexican government at realizing this need, they still figured it out in the end. This document was signed by Mexican senate secretaries, Leonidas Torres, and Rivera y Rio. This meant it passed the Mexican congress. It also stated that

the issue was in the works since May 1880. It allowed American troops to enter Mexico to pursue Victorio for the first time on order of the Mexican federal government despite the death of Victorio making it a little outdated. This approval was important in symbolism, because American troops had already entered Mexico to help defeat Victorio.

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It is now time to evaluate how that Apache themselves felt about the defeat at Tres Castillo. Eve Ball recorded that They believed that Victorio stabbed himself in the heart when he saw he had no way out.<sup>xxix</sup> Ball also recorded that Victorio and his people fought until they used all their bullets before they killed themselves with their knives at Tres Castillo.<sup>xxx</sup> These reflected cultural meanings behind his death and role for the Apaches.

The Victorio campaign between August 1880, and mid October 1880 was an example of how strong border management could change the course of Apache success which had been previously supported by weak border controls. The introduction of a cross border campaign by Mexican authorities between August , 1880 , and October 1880 succeeded in defeating Victorio. It succeeded because it removed the loose border controls that enabled Victorio to succeed previously. The cross-border campaign that allowed American forces into Mexico supported Victorio's defeat, because it brought American forces into Mexico to help trap Victorio. The Americans entry in Mexico helped overcome the logistical disadvantage they suffered in their numerous unauthorized border crossings before they were allowed into Mexico. The combination of the cross-border campaign, and strong border controls was vital to defeating Victorio, because the lack of both of those supported his previous success.

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- <sup>i</sup> “Annex, Original documents,” Helion, Accessed March 1, 2021, 117, 266-283. <http://www.helion.co.uk/hwms-annex.pdf>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Robert N Watt, *Horses worn to Mere Shadows: The Victorio Campaign 1880* (Warwick: Helion and Company, 2019), 338-353.
- <sup>iii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 118.2, 286.
- <sup>iv</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 119, 287.
- <sup>v</sup> Annex, Original documents, 112.1, 247-8.
- <sup>vi</sup> Annex, Original documents, 112.3, 252-3.
- <sup>vii</sup> Annex, Original documents, 116, 265.
- <sup>viii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 98.1, 208-9.
- <sup>ix</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 127.2, 302-308.
- <sup>x</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 125, 298.
- <sup>xi</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 120, 288.
- <sup>xii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 121, 289-90, .
- <sup>xiii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 123, 294An.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Watt, *Horses worn to Mere Shadows*, 362-374.
- <sup>xv</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 120, 288.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 121, 289.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Annex, Original documents, 123, 294-296.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Annex, Original documents, 119, 287.
- <sup>xix</sup> Watt, *Horses Worn to mere Shadows*, 362-374.
- <sup>xx</sup> Watt, *Horses Worn to mere Shadows*, 374-384.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 127.1, 301.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 130, 311.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Annex, Original Document, 127.2, 302-9..
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 130, 311..
- <sup>xxv</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 132, 314.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 133, 134.1, 315-318.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Annex, Original Documents, 134.2, 135, 316-320.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Annex, Original documents, 107, 227-9.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Eve Ball, *In the Days of Victorio: Recollections of a Warm Springs Apache* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 11-102.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Eve Ball, *Indeh: an Apache Odyssey* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 50-181.

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