



Geronimo's Story of His Life

By *Geronimo* (1861 - 1941)

Translated by *Asa Deklugie*. Transcribed by *S. M. Barrett*.

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Geronimo. No word or image better symbolizes the fierce, fearless nature of the Native American warrior than Geronimo. "Geronimo" is traditionally shouted by paratroopers when they jump out of airplanes to express their fearlessness. The code name "Geronimo" was used by United States military for its operation to kill Osama bin Laden in 2011, probably in honor of the many devastating raids carried out by Geronimo and his warriors in the 1800's. There is a persistent rumor, probably a hoax, that members of the secret Skull and Bones society at Yale University, including Prescott Bush, filched the skull of Geronimo from its

grave at Fort Sill and that it is held in a glass case in the society's building in New Haven. The character has inspired four films and has been featured in countless western novels and television and radio shows, often fictionalized to suit the narrative context. Given the large place he occupies in the public mind, it is fascinating to hear the actual story of his life in his own words, which are recounted here in *Geronimo's Story of His Life*, an oral history dictated by Geronimo to S. M. Barrett, the Superintendent of Education in Lawton, Oklahoma, who wrote down the story as it was told and translated by Asa Deklugie, son of Nedni chief Whoa.

Geronimo (June 16, 1829 – February 17, 1909) was a prominent leader of the Bedonkohe band of the Chiricahua Apache tribe. Geronimo was not a chief, but was a superb commander of raids and warfare. While respected for his skills, he was not terribly likable or popular, but was held in awe for his supernatural powers, which included the ability to forecast events and heal others. After the end of the Mexican War in 1848, Americans began to settle in the Apache lands of the southwest. Geronimo joined with three other Apache bands to conduct raids and oppose Mexican and United States military campaigns in the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora and the U.S. Territories of Arizona and New Mexico.

The hostilities went on for thirty-six years, from 1850 – 1886, and were a natural extension of Apache-Mexican conflict, which had been going on since the 1600's. Geronimo's mother, wife and three small children were murdered by Mexican troops in 1858, sparking a quest for vengeance. In 1886, after an intense pursuit by some five thousand soldiers, Geronimo surrendered for the last time at Skeleton Canyon just north of the Mexican border, and was taken as a prisoner of war along with 27 other Apaches. They were exiled to Fort Pickens in Florida, moved to Alabama in 1888, and finally relocated to Fort Sill in Oklahoma in 1994, where they were given plots of land to farm and built villages.