

## *Siege of the Kiowas at Hueco Tanks – Part I*

*By Jay Sharp*

*Glenwood Gazette hardcopy publish date: April 2010*

*The Kiowas – a Plains Indian tribe with six bands – took the vast grasslands of western Oklahoma, northern Texas and northeastern New Mexico as their home range in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. (They shared the range with their close allies, the Comanches.) Fierce raiders, the Kiowas pillaged settlements of western Texas, New Mexico and Mexico's Chihuahua. Deeply mystical, they saw spiritual import in prominences of the landscape, the rituals of the season, meteorite showers in the night sky, vision quests of new warriors, and the rites of battle. Venturesome, they traveled as far south as Central America, returning to their plains homeland to tell of rude little men who lived in trees and swung by their tails.*

*For more than three decades, the Kiowas looked to a legendary warrior named Dohasan as their principal chief. They had chosen him as their leader in 1833, a portentous year when a great meteor storm – a torrent of falling stars – foretold mystifying celestial meaning. They saw him as a descendant of the tribal aristocracy, a fearless warrior on the battlefield, a member of the tribe's elite KoitsEnka military society, and an inspiration during hard times. They would see Dohasan, near the end of his life, rally Kiowa and Comanche warriors to defeat the forces of Kit Carson on the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle in 1864.*

-----

*The Kiowas' bands held their Sun Dance that year, 1839, at a big loop in southwestern Oklahoma's Washita River, just downstream from the juncture with Walnut Creek, and after the*

*celebration ended, Dohasan moved his Kata band over to the Wichita Mountains, where they would stay for awhile.*

*Meanwhile, the time had come to think about warfare and raiding.*

*Guadal-onte asked Dohasan and other warriors if they wanted to follow him on an expedition to raid out in far west Texas, 600 miles away, in the region of El Paso del Norte, The Pass of the North. This was the place where the Rio Grande cut between two mountain ranges and turned from south to southeast and where trade caravans forded the river in expeditions between the communities of Ciudad Chihuahua and Santa Fe.*

*The settlements, which had grown up along the rich Rio Grande bottomlands downstream from the pass must, Guadal-onte suggested, offer splendid opportunities for raiding. The settlers surely must have a lot of horses and mules and other possessions since they lived in a bountiful area along a trade route. They must be poorly protected, probably by no more than a few hapless soldiers, much like those that Kiowa raiding parties had encountered across northern Mexico.*

*Dohasan said, yes, he would go with Guadal-onte, not as leader, but as one of the warriors.*

### *El Paso del Norte Region*

*From all the Kiowas knew, the El Paso del Norte region did indeed appear tempting. It had more settlements than any other area on the trail between Ciudad Chihuahua and Santa Fe.*

*One of those settlements, the two-century-old El Paso del Norte, named for the mountain pass, had grown up just downstream from the ford, on the south side of the river. A resupply station for caravans, it surrounded an adobe mission church – Nuestra*

*Señora de Guadalupe – with a single bell tower rising at its southeastern corner. Pigeons swirled around the tower cupola. Pasenos [Mexican residents of the region], Pueblo Indians, horses, mules, burros, dogs and cats milled in the outdoor market immediately south of the church. Vendors hawked tamales and fruits and vegetables. The faithful, doing penance, walked on their knees across the placita to the mission's eastern entrance and into the chapel and down the aisle to the mission altar. Juan María Ponce de León's farm lay in the bottomland to the north, just across the Rio Grande. A small adobe workman's hut overlooked irrigated grape vineyards and wheat fields.*

*Not far downstream, a 20-mile long, two- to four-mile wide island, La Isla, split the Rio Grande. Most of the stream flowed along the south side of the island; a trickle of water skirted the north side. Ysleta, a village of Tigua Puebloans and Mexicans, lay toward the westernmost end of the island. Socorro, a community of Piro Puebloans and Mexicans lay five miles farther east on the island. San Elizario, a community surrounding a military post, lay yet another five miles farther east on the Island. Two other communities lay across the river, south of the island.*

*Haciendas, owned by the wealthier Pasenos, lay in the fertile, irrigated bottomlands between communities. The landholders lived in adobe houses built around central courtyards. In normal times, they raised livestock, fruit trees, vegetables, cereal crops and grapes. They produced excellent brandies and wines. They employed the paisanos [Mexican peasants], who lived in two-room adobe houses and worked as herdsmen and field hands.*

*Altogether about 4000 to 5000 people lived in the area, which must have been, Guadal-onte reasoned, no less than a banquet table set for raiders.*

## *Guadal-onte's Call*

*The night before they left their Great Plains homeland to travel to El Paso del Norte, Dohasan and some 20 other raiders, including two apprentice warriors, and their women had entered Guadal-onte's tipi, and they had taken up his rhythmical beat on the wooden hoop encircling the hearth—the traditional call to battle. They had joined him in singing the War Path Song, beating a stretched buffalo hide, and singing the Journey Song—their actions confirming their commitment to join him on the raiding expedition.*

*Before dawn the following morning, Dohasan would ride out of the village with Dagoi, Tsone-ai-tah, Hone-geah-tau-te, Konate, Au-tone-a-kee, Au-tone-a-kee's brother, the two apprentice warriors, and others, Guadal-onte in the lead. Dohasan respected Guadal-onte, a proven warrior who had led successful raids in the past. Otherwise, Dohasan would not have followed him.*

*In accordance with Kiowa custom, Dohasan, even though he served as the tribe's principal chief and belonged to the elite KoitsEnka military society, would accept Guadal-onte's absolute authority. He would follow Guadal-onte without challenge, without question. That was, perhaps, the most fundamental law in Kiowa raiding and warfare.*

*The raiders traveled southwest over Texas' Rolling Plains until they struck the Comanche War Trail, which they followed down the southeastern edge of the Caprock Plateau. They camped at night and sang traditional Wind Songs. They reached the sandy and hummocky lands at the southernmost end of the Great Plains. They turned west, leaving the Comanche War Trail, and crossed a well-known ford of the Pecos River, just at the border between what is now Texas and New Mexico. They followed an*

*ancient trail that flanked the southern end of the Guadalupe Mountains. El Capitan Peak loomed on the right like the prow of a great ship. They passed through blindingly white salt flats, remnants of a lake which once paralleled the western flanks of the Guadalupe. They rode through the creosote desert to Ojo de Los Alamos (Cottonwood Springs) east of the Hueco Mountains. Almost certainly, it was here, where there was water, that Guadal-onte chose to set the raiders' reserve camp. He assigned the two apprentice warriors to stay there and care for the extra provisions and horses.*

*The foresight would prove to be a lifesaver.*

*Guadal-onte led Dohasan and the other raiders through a pass in the Hueco Mountains and across the desert to Hueco Tanks, an island of black, dense stony hills rising from the sandy desert floor. The people of many tribes had, for millennia, used Hueco Tanks as a refuge on the trail, a village site in a dry land, a place of worship and ritual, a destination for pilgrimage. Guadal-onte and his raiders stopped there to rest from the hard ride and the summer heat.*

*They could feel the mystery and mysticism evoked by Hueco Tanks.*

*The dark and tortured hills seemed as alien as an asteroid orbiting a planet in a distant solar system. They had originated as magma derived from the earth's core. The molten material protruded upward, intruding into depositional strata but never breaking through the earth's surface. Over time, the magma cooled underground and hardened into dense stone. Finally, erosion stripped away the overburden, exposing the hills, vuggy from bubbles of gas. Small basins, or "huecos," on rock surfaces trapped rain water and snow melt, sometimes within caves or*

*overhangs, where that most valuable commodity of the desert did not evaporate for months.*

*The Hueco Tanks plant community still spoke of the last ice age, which had ended 10,000 years earlier. Arizona oak and one-seed juniper, remnant trees from that earlier time, had retreated from the surrounding desert basin floor into the hills, reaching for the water of huecos, as the climate grew hotter and drier.*

*The wildlife community regarded Hueco Tanks as an ark in the desert. Mountain sheep, mule deer, coyotes, gray foxes, bobcats, black-tailed jack rabbits, desert cottontails and rock squirrels found shelter and water in the hills. Golden eagles and falcons glided above the peaks. Black-tailed rattlesnakes, diamondbacks and banded rock rattlers searched the hills for prey.*

*Bare outlines of adobe wall ruins and scatters of brown potsherds and stone tools and broken and discarded stone arrow points spoke of people who had vanished centuries before Guadal-onte and his raiding party paused at Hueco Tanks in that summer of 1839. Strange images, painted in multiple colors on stony surfaces within cloistered shelters, once served as shamans' portals to the spirit world. Figures of men with goggle-eyed faces and trapezoidal-shaped bodies, masks with spectral eyes, and serpents with plumed and horned headdresses, though long abandoned, likely resonated with the Kiowa world of visions and dreams.*

*It was in the afternoon when Guadal-onte led Dohasan and the other raiders out of Hueco Tanks and across the desert, heading southwest, for the 30-mile ride across the desert to the El Paso del Norte region. They would arrive under the cover of darkness.*

*By twilight, the warriors could still feel the day's heat radiating from the desert floor. As they rode into the night, they could see*

*in the northern sky the stars of the seven sisters, borne, in Kiowa legend, by the Devil's Tower (now a national monument in Wyoming) to the safety of the heavens. They could see the North Star over their right shoulders. They could see in the eastern sky the constellation of Saynday, a figure of Kiowa mythology, watching over them as if they were his children. They heard coyotes yipping, trying to run down jackrabbits and cottontails in the darkness. They likely heard the occasional threatening buzz of a diamondback. The party came to the river, and the warriors, stealthy as Gray Foxes, deployed to survey the villages and haciendas of the region.*

### *The New Reality*

*El Paso del Norte may have offered a banquet table set for raiders at one time, but as Guadal-onte, Dohasan and the other warriors would now discover, things had changed.*

*The settlements of El Paso del Norte seemed to be, not wealthy as Guadal-onte had anticipated, but terribly impoverished. Hacienda corrals and pastures stood empty of horses, mules and other livestock. The paisanos lived in grinding poverty, owning little worth looting. The Pasenos and Puebloans seemed to be, not unprotected, but on high alert for raids. They lived clustered together in the villages and haciendas for mutual security; they meant to thwart the demons from beyond the boundaries. The wealthier landowners lived behind thick and protected adobe ramparts, designed to keep raiders at bay; the haciendas would be costly to attack. The military force included, not just a few hapless soldiers, but rather, 100 red-coated Mexican dragoons and several hundred militia, or citizen soldiers—an unexpectedly strong defense. They carried muskets, lances, bows and arrows, even stone missiles.*

*What Dohasan, the other warriors and their leader had not anticipated was that the Apaches, especially Mescaleros, had beaten the Kiowas to the raider's feast at El Paso del Norte. In an intensifying campaign of terror, the Apaches had savaged the population, killing, torturing and scalping adults; abducting children; stealing virtually all the livestock (including one herd of 20,000 sheep); and plundering residents' food and possessions.*

*They had imbued the people of El Paso del Norte with a bitter hatred and fear of marauding Indians. State government officials had put a price on Apache scalps (\$100 for the scalp of a warrior, \$50 for the scalp of a woman—now roughly equivalent to \$1500 and \$750). They dispatched mercenaries, or bounty hunters, to run down Apaches and harvest their scalps and ears. The military, feeling slighted by the government's turn to hired guns rather than soldiery, strengthened its own forces. El Paso del Norte's company of dragoons recruited militia from the local settlements and looked anxiously for ways, not only to wipe out raiders and protect the population, but also to redeem its honor.*

*Dohasan and the other warriors did not like what they had seen of El Paso del Norte, and now they wondered what Guadal-onte would have them do.*

*Guadal-onte had led the warriors 600 miles from southwestern Oklahoma to raid in the El Paso del Norte region. He knew that he, and they, would face embarrassment if they returned home empty handed. He fretted about how it would affect his ability to raise future raiding parties. Finally, he accepted that he had made a mistake in raising the raiding party. The haciendas' depleted livestock herds and the paisanos' impoverishment held little promise for plunder. The potential rewards would not be worth the risk of challenging the dragoons and the militia.*

*Guadal-onte turned his party northeast, putting El Paso del Norte behind him. Probably downcast, he would go home, his expedition a failure. Dohasan and the other warriors, with no opportunity for plunder, just hoped now that the military had not discovered their presence.*

### *Surprise*

*Guadal-onte led the party back across the 30-mile-long desert trail to Hueco Tanks and into a secluded V-shaped box canyon at the northern end of the easternmost hill. Dispirited by the aborted raid, he apparently did not immediately post sentries. His party entered the mouth of the canyon and, between its rugged walls, they turned their horses loose to graze. They settled in to rest in the shady coolness of a rock overhang (now called Comanche Cave) on the west side of the canyon, near a deep natural cistern full of sweet water. They saw white, yellow and ocher symbols on the rock wall, mysterious marks painted by shamans of the past, evoking thoughts of the Kiowas' own ethereal world of spirits.*

*Then, suddenly, like lightening from a clear sky, a fusillade of musket fire erupted all around them, balls ricocheting like hailstones from the rocks. Somehow, the El Paso del Norte dragoons and militia had learned of Guadal-onte's raiding party. Guided by Tigua Puebloan auxiliaries, the troopers – undetected since no sentries had been posted – had quietly surrounded the warriors, and now they ambushed them. The Mexican forces, fired by their success in finding and surprising normally elusive Indian raiders, had sealed off the mouth of the canyon, cutting off escape. With the thunder of their muskets, they poured down on the Kiowas all the pent-up fury of El Paso del Norte, Ysleta, Socorro, San Elizario and the surrounding haciendas. The soldiers meant, in one murderous moment, to avenge the savaging of families, the kidnappings of children, and*

*the plundering of homes and livestock. They meant to obliterate the raiding party. They meant to restore the honor of the military.*

*The Kiowas reacted like startled antelope. They snatched up shields and weapons and bolted from their exposed rock overhang, leaving food and water behind. They sped southward along the west wall of the canyon, taking cover behind boulders and oak and juniper trees. Au-tone-a-kee insisted that they stop and fight. Several paused. A musket ball found Au-tone-a-kee's brother. The raiders then raced on, dragging the wounded warrior with them. Musket fire took down their grazing horses, the animals filling the canyon with anguished screams. The warriors dashed beneath another overhang, with a long sheltering roof running down the western side of the canyon. Momentarily shielded from the musket fire, they followed it to the end of the box canyon, where they expected to make a desperate stand for their lives.*

*To their surprise, they discovered, at the very apex of the canyon, not a solid wall of stone, but a cave, a labyrinth of dark passages formed originally by the molten rock reaching for the earth's surface. Quickly, they plunged inside. They disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them. Mexican muskets fell silent, no longer able to target victims.*

*The Kiowas had their shields and weapons, and for the moment, they could fight off any enemy who dared to enter the cave. But they had no food. No water. Their horses lay dead or dying. Au-tone-a-kee's brother moaned in agony. Their enemies, hundreds of dragoons, militiamen and Indian auxiliaries, surrounded them. They could hear officers shouting commands in Spanish.*

*The Kiowas were trapped.*

*They quickly found cover behind massive boulders. They readied their weapons to beat back an assault on the cave. They would make it costly. They waited. The Mexican officers' shouts subsided, grew further apart. A silence fell, broken only by the moans of the dying warrior. The raiders waited.*

*Gradually, they realized that the Mexican force had no intention of attacking the cave. The officers knew that the Kiowas would make it too bloody. They would simply lay siege. Starve the raiders to death. It should not take long in the heat of the desert summer.*

### *Siege of the Kiowas at Hueco Tanks – Part II*

*In the summer of 1839, a Kiowa raiding party led by a warrior named Guadal-onte and including the tribe's principal chief, Dohasan, had aborted a plan to raid in the El Paso del Norte region. They had found the potential payoff too lean, the fortifications too strong. They had turned northeast headed for home, in the southern Great Plains. They had taken brief refuge at Hueco Tanks, about 30 miles east of El Paso del Norte. There, they came under ambush by the Mexican militia, and they had holed up in a cave at the southern end of a box canyon, now under siege. They had lost their horses in the opening fusillade. One warrior had suffered wounds. The Kiowas had managed to keep their weapons and their war shields, but they had neither food nor water.*

-----

*Dohasan waited to see what Guadal-onte would do. Dohasan, principal chief, KoitsEnka, had no intention of usurping command or even challenging Guadal-onte's absolute authority. That would violate the Kiowa ethic of warfare.*

*When darkness came that first night, the Kiowas crept out of their cave and beneath the overhang with the long sheltering roof along the western side of the canyon to reach a small pool of water trapped in a hueco. One of their horses, shot, had fallen dead into the water. Quickly, they hacked strips of meat from the animal. They would have to eat it raw. Quickly, they drank from the pool. They had no containers for hauling water back to the cave. The soldiers discovered them and opened fire. A ball struck Dagoi in the leg. He dragged himself back into the cave, the second raider wounded. The soldiers built a fire to light the pool at night. They posted sentinels in the day. No one could approach the pool again without being seen. The decaying flesh of the dead horse would soon poison the water in any event.*

*The Kiowas explored the otherworldly chambers of their cave, a refuge which, they knew, could now turn into their tomb. They searched urgently, like trapped wild animals, for any way to escape. They could see openings through the roof of the cave, possible avenues to freedom. One had a juniper tree growing at its edge, offering possible handholds for scaling the rock walls. The Mexicans, however, would surely watch these openings.*

*The warriors discovered a long corridor running west, partially obstructed with massive boulders, narrowing as it went, but passable. At its end, through an ascending shaft clogged with stones and debris, they could see a hint of blue sky. The Mexicans might not know about this opening. The shaft would have to be cleared, however, before a man could slither through. A climb up would be precarious, especially in the blackness of night, when any escape attempt would have to be made. It would probably be impossible for the wounded. But it seemed to offer the only hope for any of the raiders.*

*Buoyed by the possibility, the warriors took turns climbing up the stony walls, clinging to tenuous hand- and footholds and*

*burrowing laboriously, like moles, upward through the shaft. Gradually, they widened the opening, revealing more and more of the blue sky, until at last, a man could get through. Hope rose. One of the warriors pulled himself up to look over the edge of the hole and locate the positions of the enemy.*

*A musket ball narrowly missed tearing his head off.*

*The Mexicans had either discovered the burrowing and laid in wait at the mouth of the shaft for an escape attempt, or a soldier had seen the warrior by chance and fired at him. The Kiowas retreated back down the shaft and into their cave. They could hear the Mexicans refilling the shaft with rocks and soil.*

*The chance for escape cut off, the raiders, imprisoned in the primal embrace of the earth, fell into despair and frustration. Days passed. They ate the last of the meat they had managed to hack from the dead horse, trying to stave the emptiness in their bellies. They licked the damp surfaces of the rocks within the cave, trying to relieve their increasingly torturous thirst. Autone-a-kee's brother died, mercifully. Dagoi suffered from the wound to his leg. The pervasive stench of the rotting flesh of a dead man and dead horses evoked visions of deaths still to come.*

*The warriors looked expectantly at Guadal-onte. What would he do?*

*They could hear Spanish voices on the hills around them. They could hear the scream of golden eagles soaring in the sky above them, buoyed by the updrafts, free. From the mouth of their cave, they could see enemy campfires on the surrounding hills at night. They could feel, in the black recesses of their cave, the tightening grip of dread.*

*Dohasan could see that Guadal-onte, who had led his followers on a failed raid and then led them into a disastrous ambush, had*

*lost faith in his medicine, his power. He had lost his spirit and ability to command. He felt paralyzed, unable to use his absolute authority. The Kiowa warriors did not speak of mutiny. If Guadal-onte, who had proven himself in past battles, could only find his will to lead, they would follow.*

*They waited, beginning to feel themselves choking with frustration and impatience.*

*With empty bellies and dry raw throats, they felt their energy fading, apathy taking hold, irritability rising. They could see muscles starting to waste, cheek bones starting to protrude, eyes starting to sink, skins starting to wrinkle. They looked withered, like old rawhide. In the darkness of their natural crypt, in that strange rocky island in the desert called Hueco Tanks, they dreamed of freedom and home. They prayed to their medicine and Kiowa deities for release.*

*After days of intensifying agony, they heard someone yell down to them, in the familiar tongue of the Comanche, from the top of the cliff just above the entrance to their cave. It sounded like a voice out of a vision. "Don't give up," the person yelled. "The Mexicans are going to throw some food down to you soon. It will be all right, because they hope to take you alive. I will help you escape later." It must be a Comanche captive, the Kiowas thought, taken sometime earlier by the Mexicans. Obviously, the soldiers could not have understood his promise, made in Comanche, to help them to freedom.*

*Hope rose. They could feel it in their chests. They heard the thuds of something falling before the mouth of their cave. Mad with hunger and thirst, they rushed out of their entombment to retrieve the "food" only to be met by rattlesnakes, musket fire and derisive laughter. They had to scramble to avoid snake bite,*

*kill the rattlers and duck musket balls. They could not escape the laughter.*

*The Kiowas retreated back into their cave. The unthinkable – rebellion against their leader – had now become thinkable. They knew that they could not count on Guadal-onte.*

### *Ascent into Darkness*

*Tsone-ai-tah spoke, accusingly, to Guadal-onte, “We have lost one man. Another is wounded. We are starving, getting weaker by the hour. We are going to die here like helpless women.” The other warriors nodded.*

*Dohasan could see the wildness, the irrationality, in Tsone-ai-tah’s eyes.*

*Tsone-ai-tah turned on Au-tone-a-kee, who had wanted to stop and fight at the start of the ambush. “...you are the cause of all our trouble,” he said to Au-tone-a-kee. “You are responsible for your own brother lying there all black and bloated.” Tsone-ai-tah sprang on Au-tone-a-kee with a knife, not to drive the blade into flesh, but to chop the hair from his scalp. Other warriors, stirred by Tsone-ai-tah’s madness, grabbed the cut hair from his hand and flung it across the rotting corpse of the brother. Au-tone-a-kee stood silent, in anguish and pain.*

*“If you are willing to die like women,” Tsone-ai-tah said to Guadal-onte and the others, “there is no help for us. Let us get out of this foul place and die in the open like men and warriors!” Guadal-onte did not challenge Tsone-ai-tah. He had forfeited his leadership. “...if any of this affair reaches our people,” said Tsone-ai-tah, angrily, “it will be that we were killed in battle— not starved like badgers in a hole in the ground.”*

*“Are you willing to make a rush for it after dark, even if everyone of us is killed?” Tsone-ai-tah asked the raiders. He did not try to take charge. He called for a leader to deliver them from the cave. “We will all follow,” he said, “but you, Shaved Head, will go last.” The warriors looked at Dohasan, who remained silent. He felt reluctant to commandeer leadership. It violated the code of Kiowa warfare.*

*The warriors waited impatiently. The afternoon light melted into darkness. Deep into the night, with the Mexican sentries growing drowsy and their fires burning down, Tsone-ai-tah whispered, “...are you ready?” The warriors lashed their weapons to their wrists for the climb out. “...if we are going to die,” Tsone-ai-tah said softly, “let it be now!” They would make their break, with or without a leader.*

*Then, from the darkness, the warriors heard the voice of Dohasan, chanting softly.*

*Oh, sun, you remain forever, but we KoitsEnka must die. Oh, earth, you remain forever, but we KoitsEnka must die.*

*His death song. It signaled – the raiders understood – that Dohasan had made the decision to take command from Guadalupe and to lead them from their dark prison, even though he believed that he, and the others, would likely die.*

*Dagoi, crippled by his wound, his strength nearly gone, said to Dohasan, “Don’t leave me here. I want to see my father’s face again.”*

*Dohasan spoke to Dagoi softly and sadly, “It is our life or yours. If we stay to help you, no one will get away. Make your heart strong. Die like a Kiowa warrior.” Dagoi settled back. “Tell my comrades to come back and avenge my death.” He sang his death song. He knew he would die at the hands of the Mexicans.*

*In the darkness, Dohasan found handholds at the opening with the juniper tree at the edge. He grabbed a limb. He hoisted himself upward to solid footing, the first of the warriors to leave the cave prison. He extended his bow back as a lifeline, pulling warrior after warrior up to the surface. He led them east, across a saddle in the hills, through boulders, loose rocks, the saw-tooth sotol plants. They could see the Mexican fires burning on the hills around them.*

*Someone stumbled. The soldiers heard them. They opened fire. A ball struck Hone-geah-tau-te, knocking him off his feet. He lay where he fell. A ball struck Konate, knocking him to the earth. He rose, seriously wounded, but somehow pressed on with the other warriors.*

*Dohasan led them from the hill down to the desert floor on the east side of Hueco Tanks. By luck, they found soldiers' horses. They mounted the animals and fled east, across the open desert, toward the pass through the Hueco Mountains. Amid canyons and cactus, they eluded Mexican pursuit the following day even though their strength had been exhausted by the ordeal in the cave. They had learned from their fathers to endure fatigue, hunger, thirst and pain; and now that lesson would save their lives.*

*The following night, Dohasan led the raiders into the reserve camp at Ojo de Los Alamos, where Guadal-onte had, with the foresight of experience, stationed the two apprentice warriors to guard spare provisions and horses. The party believed that three warriors – Au-tone-a-kee's brother, Dagoi and Hone-geah-tau-te – had already died. They thought that Konate, barely conscious, his wounds already starting to fester, probably would die before they could get him home.*

*They ate from spare provisions and drank from Ojo de Los Alamos water, the first time since the ambush that they could satisfy their hunger and thirst. The next morning Dohasan led the decimated raiding party east, on the return trail toward home, mounted on fresh horses.*

### *The Long Way Home*

*Following Dohasan, the warriors re-traced their path across the creosote desert, the salt flats, passing El Capitan, crossing the Pecos River. They would soon reach the Comanche War Trail, at the southern end of the Great Plains. Along the way, they could see, they believed, that Konate would die. Fevered, the larva of blow flies at work in his wounds, he had passed from consciousness. He could go no farther.*

*Dohasan and the warriors came to a spring at a place they called Sun Mountain. The weary Kiowas decided to leave Konate there to die. They laid him near the spring, where he could reach the water in the unlikely chance that he should regain consciousness. They piled stones around him to help protect him from wolves and coyotes. Morosely, they turned north, up the trail, abandoning a comrade and a friendship forged in the crucible of battle and suffering.*

*Along the way, they encountered a party of six Comanche warriors, en route to raid in Mexico. They told the Comanches about the siege they had endured at Hueco Tanks and the dying comrade they had left at Sun Mountain. They asked the Comanches to cover the body with stones to protect it until a party could be sent back from the Kiowa camp to recover the bones.*

*Some days later Dohasan led the raiders into the Kata village at Rainy Mountain. He and the other warriors told about the*

*failure of the raid, the disaster at Hueco Tanks, the extraordinary mutiny against Guadal-onte's command, Dohasan's assertion of leadership, their escape from the cave, the deaths of four warriors.*

*The families of Au-tone-a-kee's brother, Dagoi, Hone-geah-tau-te and Konate plunged into despair. The women set up their mournful wailing. They sliced their faces and arms, which became streaked with the blood of grief. Relatives shot the five raiders' horses. They burned their possessions. No one would ever speak their names again.*

*Days later, while Dohasan's Kata band was still immersed in anguish over the catastrophe at Hueco Tanks, seven riders from the south approached the camp. As they drew near, the Kiowas realized, to their surprise, that six of the riders were the Comanche warriors who had been asked to cover Konate's corpse with rocks. They then realized, to their complete astonishment, that the seventh rider was Konate, who the raiders had left for dead beside the spring at Sun Mountain. Somehow, he had survived and begun to recover. The Comanches had brought him home.*

*The grateful Kiowas staged a feast and a dance to honor the Comanches. They gave the rescuers fine horses to thank them. The bonds between the tribes grew stronger than ever.*

*Konate told how he had awakened beside the spring, and realizing he had been abandoned, sank into hopelessness and despair. However, as night enveloped him, he said, a wolf climbed over the wall of his rock shelter, not to tear him apart, but to care for him. For four nights, the animal lay beside him, warming him, licking his wounds, comforting him. On the fourth night, the Tai-me, a Kiowa deity, spoke to him in a vision, promising recovery, sending a cooling rain. On the fifth night,*

*the six Comanche warriors arrived, and seeing that Konate might recover, they cared for him, abandoning their raid and escorting him home. As he had traveled with the Comanches northeastward across the rolling plains, he discovered a Tai-me icon, a symbol of his vision, resting at the crest of a low rise. He had brought it home, reverently. He would place it each year in a position of honor in the Sun Dance medicine lodge.*

*Years later, when the grief had subsided and Dohasan's Kata band thought of the siege at Hueco Tanks as an ill-starred chapter in the tribe's history, another rider from the south approached the camp, now located on the Arkansas River. He wore a colorful serape and a shining skullcap. He rode a fine horse. As he drew near, the Kiowas realized, to their disbelief, that the rider was none other than Hone-geah-tau-te, whom the Mexicans had shot that night during the escape from the cave at Hueco Tanks.*

*Hone-geah-tau-te told how the soldiers found him lying among the rocks. They scalped him. They dragged him behind a wild horse. They stuffed rotted meat into his mouth when he begged for food. They gave him mud when he cried for water. He refused to die. Finally, a kind Mexican man had rescued him from the torture. He nursed Hone-geah-tau-te back to health. He arranged for a silver plate to be affixed over Hone-geah-tau-te's head to cover the wound from his scalping. Eventually, he gave Hone-geah-tau-te presents and sent him back to his Kiowa homeland.*

*Apparently, an unknown Kiowa eventually returned to Hueco Tanks, and on a large smooth stone surface in an overhang near the mouth of the canyon where the ambush occurred, he painted what appears to be the visual story of the siege. He left images of a man, presumably Kiowa, clutching at a belly pinched by hunger and reaching for water lying just beyond his reach; a*

*red-coated dragoon and citizen soldiers, choking off symbolic escape routes; a man upside down, presumably dead; a tree, possibly the juniper which Dohasan used to pull himself and the other warriors from the cave; white circles, filled with black and bisected with a white slash to symbolize an escape in the night; and a man in a broad-brimmed hat, rocked back on his heels as if in surprise.*

*The dragoons and the militia, after a siege of 10 days, had managed to kill only two raiders and capture but one, letting all the others escape on the military horses. They knew that mercenary bounty hunters had far surpassed the military in attacking and killing dozens of Apaches, displaying scalps and ears as gruesome trophies in public plazas. The reputation of the military was on the line.*

*When the soldiers returned to El Paso del Norte from Hueco Tanks, they reported that they had ambushed, not a Kiowa raiding party of about 20, but an Apache raiding party of 150. They reported, not that they had allowed all but three of the Kiowas to escape, but that they had decimated all 150 Apache warriors. Those savages, they said, would never kill another Mexican, abduct another child, plunder another home.*

*The people of the villages, the markets, the placitas, the mission churches, the haciendas, the fields and pastures of El Paso del Norte rejoiced at the success of their soldiers.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*In the fall of 1997, Dohasan's great-great-grandson Dewey Tsonetokoy, his teen-age son Scott, his sister, his niece, my youngest son's wife Terry, and I explored the Hueco Tanks caves where the Mexican military force had held Dohasan and the other Kiowa raiders captive for those 10 awful days of suffering*

*158 years earlier. (Hueco Tanks, about 30 miles east of El Paso, off U. S. Highway 62/180, is now a Texas state historical park.)*

*Before we entered, Dewey conducted a “smoking ceremony” to purify us. It was essential because “Kiowa warriors died here,” he explained. We crawled into the caves, and with the sunlight that sifted through crevasses, we could see features which Dohasan had described in a personal picture diary, or calendar history.*

*Terry and I withdrew. We did not want to intrude on a Kiowa moment.*

*Scott, Dohasan’s great-great-great-grandson, with the help of a rope, climbed alone up through the perilous shaft where the Mexicans had thwarted the Kiowa escape. He reached the opening and emerged from the darkness into the sunlight, much like the first Kiowas, according to tribal legend, emerged from a cottonwood log onto the earth’s surface.*

*“I almost cried,” said Dewey.*

*Scott had earned his Kiowa name: Hay-Gal-Oop Gal-Oye-Tope, or He Who Went Through and Came Out.*

### *Primary Sources*

*Dickerson, W. E. S. “Pueblo Indians.” The Texas Handbook Internet Site, copied February 2000.*

*Dominguez, D. L. “Hueco Tanks—A Vital Resource In Southwestern History.” Password. El Paso: The El Paso county Historical Society, 1986.*

*Hendricks, R. and Timmons, W. H. San Elizario: Spanish Presidio to Texas County Seat. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1998. Hendricks, R. "Corpus Christi de La Isleta Mission." The Texas Handbook Internet Site, copied February 2000.*

*Kirkland, F. and Newcomb, W. W. The Rock Art of Texas Indians. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967.*

*Kohout, M. D. "Coon's Rancho." The Texas Handbook Internet Site, copied February 2000.*

*Kohout, M. D. "San Elizario, Texas." The Texas Handbook Internet Site, copied February 2000.*

*Lister, F. C. and Lister, R. H. Chihuahua: Storehouse of Storms. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966.*

*Martineau, L. The Rocks Begin to Speak. Las Vegas, NV: KC Publications, 1973.*

*Mayhall, M. P. The Kiowas. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.*

*Mooney, J. "Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians." Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1895-96.*

*Nye, W. S. Bad Medicine and Good Tales of the Kiowas. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.*

*Porter, E. O. San Elizario: A History. Austin, Jenkins Publishing Company, 1973.*

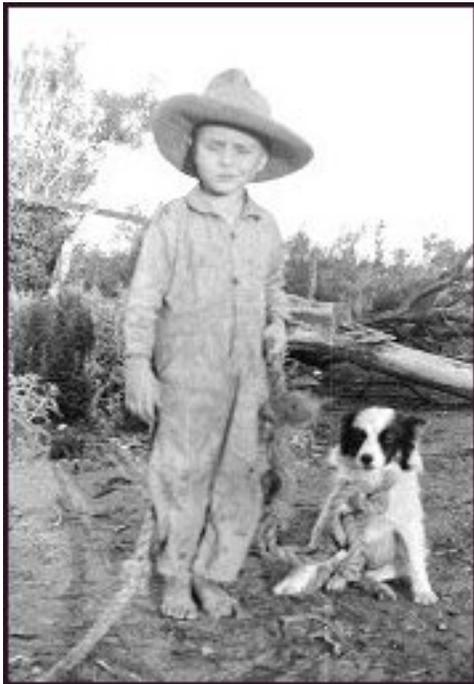
*Sharp, J. W. "Konate's Staff." Texas Unexplained. Austin: Texas Parks & Wildlife Press, 1999.*

*Sharp, J. W. "The Tale of Two Indian Battles." Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine. Texas Parks & Wildlife, February, 1998.*

*"Socorro, Texas." The Texas Handbook Internet Site. Copied February 2000.*

*Sonnichsen, C. L. Pass of the North, Four Centuries on the Rio Grande. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1968. Timmons, W. H. "La Isla." The Texas Handbook Internet Site. Copied February 2000.*

*Timmons, W. H. "San Elizario Presidio." The Texas Handbook Internet Site. Copied February 2000. Tsonetokoy, D., Sr. Personal communication, 1997.*



### *About Jay Sharp*

*Looking back on my life, I realize that I've never known what I wanted to be when I grow up. (Still don't.) As a consequence, I could never hold a steady job.*

*Raised in a small and isolated farm and ranch community in the Rolling Plains of north Texas, I went off to University of Texas at Austin ("The University," we called it, just to irritate the Texas*

*Aggies) in 1954, and I graduated (with supremely ordinary grades) in 1958 with a BA degree in Arts and Science, with a major in English and minors (as best I can recall) in math, history and Spanish.*

*After Martha (an extraordinarily tolerant woman) and I married in 1959, we lived - while having two sons - in eight different cities in 15 different apartments or houses while I worked at 15 or 16 different staff or contract jobs for 10 or 11 different organizations. I worked in city government, heavy industry, the defense industry, the manned space flight industry, the maritime industry and the natural gas industry. I spent considerable time on assignments across the United States and in Scandinavia, Western Europe, Algeria and various other places. (My wife and I have also traveled a good deal in the U. K., France, Spain and Mexico.)*

*Among a lot of other things I've done over the course of my working career, I have written some 250 documentary motion pictures, including an outdoor television series that ran in 111 markets over three years. I have sold probably 250 articles and numerous photographs to regional and national print and Internet magazines. I edited a regional popular magazine and a couple of scholarly journals. I did a book called Texas Unexplained for Texas Parks & Wildlife.*

*Always more comfortable behind a camera than in front of one, I can only offer here one of the few pictures that exist of me. It speaks vividly to my sophisticated upbringing.*