



Larcena Pennington Page Survives Capture By Apaches

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Bloodied and scarred, her disheveled hair matted with mud and scant clothing on her emaciated body, Larcena Pennington Page, on her hands and knees, crawled out of the Santa Rita Mountains today, exactly two weeks after her March 16, 1860 abduction by five Tonto Apaches.

Taken from her Madera Canyon campsite along with ten-year-old Mercedes Sais Quiroz, who Mrs. Page was tutoring in English, Mrs. Page related a tale of horror, degradation and unbelievable bravery as she made her way out of the wilderness with little more than handfuls of snow for sustenance.

Posses from Tubac to Tucson had given up hope of finding the two captives alive after losing their trail high in the craggy Santa Ritas.

A lumberman from a nearby camp discovered Mrs. Page crawling along the road. "I could hear (the lumbermen) at work and sometimes saw them, but could not attract their attention," she said. The man carried her back to the pinery. Her frail body was covered with stab wounds and bruises, and her feet embedded with hundreds of pebbles and thorns. Only a thin chemise covered Mrs. Page's raw flesh.

Dr. C.B. Hughes rode out from Tucson to the lumber camp to tend Mrs. Page, but Dr. Hughes held little hope she would survive. Mrs. Page's husband, John, brought her to Tucson so she could receive better care. At this time, doctors feel certain she will recover from her wounds but will probably bear the scars of her ordeal for years.

According to John Page, he and his partner, William Randall, had left to cut timber about two hours before the attack. After tidying the camp, Mrs. Page, who was ill with chills and fever, rested before starting her lessons with Mercedes. Mr. Page is certain the band was watching and waiting until he and Mr. Randall departed. When Mr. Page discovered the women missing, he immediately formed a posse comprised of local men as well as soldiers from Ft. Buchanan and set out after the captives. Posses from neighboring communities joined the search.

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Mrs. Page recalls her screams of terror as the Indians swooped down and ransacked the camp. Mercedes understood some of the Spanish the Indians spoke and told Mrs. Page they boasted of killing John Page.

As one warrior stood over the women with his lance pointed at their throats, the rest looted the store of food and gathered as many goods as they could carry. They were particularly interested in Mr. Page's clothing and took all his suits and shoes. They then destroyed everything of no use to them.

The small band forced their two captives at an exhausting pace. Mrs. Page says they traveled over "a rocky and mountainous trail, penetrating deeper and deeper into the mountains." Handfuls of snow were all that quenched the women's thirst. Both Mrs. Page and Mercedes shredded bits of their clothing, broke branches and twigs, and dragged their feet attempting to leave traceable remains for a posse to follow. But believing her husband dead, Mrs. Page had little faith anyone would discover their disappearance for days.

The forced march was more than Mrs. Page could manage in her weakened condition. At sunset and about 15 miles from where they started out, she could go no farther. Mercedes heard the men talking about a search party coming their way and after much discussion, one of the men heaved Mrs. Page over his shoulder and the Indians raced off at an even faster pace. They carried Mrs. Page a few more miles but finally dumped her on the ground and ordered her to remove her clothing, including her shoes. As she shed her jacket, shirt and skirt, one of the Indians tried on her shoes and pranced around pretending to be a woman.

As she turned to climb onward, Mrs. Page felt the first lance pierce her side. Again and again the Indians forced their lances deep into her flesh. Suddenly they pushed her over a ridge. As she tumbled down the steep ravine, only the trunk of a pine tree stopped her plunge to certain death. But the men were not done with her. As she lay in agony with blood oozing from her stab wounds, they threw rocks down upon her to make sure she was dead.

Mrs. Page does not recall how long she lay on the ridge before regaining consciousness. She does remember the sharp searing pains coursing through her body and her screams of pain. She knows she fainted repeatedly, awaking to the same agonizing wretchedness. Speculation is she lay on the freezing mountaintop about three days, in and out of consciousness, before regaining enough strength to start her homeward journey.

Mrs. Page credits patches of snow clinging to nooks and crevices along the ravine with saving her life. The frozen earth stemmed the blood flowing from her stab wounds, and small snow spots provided her only nourishment for days.

At one time, Mrs. Page heard her husband calling her and knew she was at death's door. Then she realized he was above her on the ridge. But her cries were too weak for him to hear and she listened as he led the posse after her shoeprints worn by one of the Indians. She now knew her husband was still alive which made her more determined to get off the mountain.

Mr. Page recalls passing the ridge where his wife lay below. He said he and the posse

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passed the same point again when he was forced to return to camp for the night and wait for daylight before resuming his search.

Weak, half naked and shoeless, Mrs. Page could walk but a few steps before resting. "My feet gave out the first day and I was compelled to crawl most of the distance. Sometimes after crawling up a steep ledge, laboring hard for half a day, I would lose my footing and slide down lower than the place from which I started." Her stab wounds bled profusely, weakening her even more.

The day Mrs. Page happened upon a bear's nest, she was sorely tempted to crawl in and sleep but feared the bear would return. Sometimes she found a sandy spot and dug a hole, covering herself with leaves and branches and attempted to sleep. If the ground was too hard, she "scratched holes in the sand at night in which to sleep, and before I could travel was obliged every day to wait for the sun to warm me up."

Her diet consisted of wild onions, seeds and all the grass she could stomach. She was so hungry when she spotted a rabbit grazing on grass she had expected to eat, she threw a stone and miraculously killed it with one blow. She skinned and ate the rabbit on the spot. "No food ever tasted so good as that raw rabbit," she claimed.

Mrs. Page happened upon a recently abandoned logging campsite. Successfully restarting the still smoldering fire, she gathered up spilled coffee grounds and a handful of flour she found on the ground. With water from a nearby stream, she formed a loaf and cooked her meager meal. After bathing in the stream, she slept next to the fire and was warm for the first time in days.

Near the end of her strength, she heard men shouting below and watched them take off in their wagon, but they were too far away to hear her faint cries or see her waving the remains of her petticoat trying to attract their attention. She started after them. It took her two days to crawl down the mountain to the spot where she had seen the men. It was while she was staggering along the wagon trail that the lumberman found her.

Doctors say Mrs. Page sustained between 11 and 15 stab wounds over her entire body. Negotiations are underway with the Apaches to release Mercedes Sais Quiroz in exchange for a handful of Indian prisoners. Her release is imminent.