

La Paz

As told by a Hualapai elder

From the book: Kathad Ganavj/Coyote Stories

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This is the historical account of La Paz. They want to know about it and they ask me. I will tell what I know and have heard. When I tell this story, as the story progresses it will become unbearable. It is heartbreaking.

There is no old person or grandparent living in this generation who can tell this historical account. This is not just a story. It is true. It actually happened long ago. I heard it from my grandmother, who was very young and was among the ones who took the long walk. She saw what happened. When she told this story she would cry. I will tell her story. There are no reports of this account anywhere. If there is, their version is not from something they have witnessed or heard directly. There is no record anywhere.

A long time ago the Hualapai people lived around here. Of all the sites, you know only a few: places like Kingman, Hackberry, Valentine, Peach Springs, Seligman - - just these areas you know. There were many, many places. People were living everywhere covering the whole area from one place to the next. In Chloride, Kingman, Hualapai Mountains, down below the Big Sandy all the way up to Williams, and to the natural boundary of the Colorado River all over this land the Hualapai people lived.

The people were happy. They had many relatives living everywhere. They got up in the morning happy. They had families. They made their own homes and took care of their families. A child was taught how to do things, he was told things so that he would have a good life. Their day-to-day living was good.

They didn't go wandering off, but took care of themselves. They gathered seeds, plants, berries and nuts. These they gathered to live on. They minded their own business. They were undisturbed. A Hualapai never stole anything that wasn't his. He picked seeds from plants and ate them; he picked the ripe plants and ate them. He made his own house and lived in it. He hunted game and made clothing to keep him warm, and ate the meat.

But then the Europeans and the Spaniards came to this land. These people were mean. They struck and killed the Hualapai's. The Spaniards mistreated the Indians. They kept on killing and attacking the Hualapai. They considered the Hualapais not as human beings or living things. They called us animals. They thought we did not have a mind to know anything. We were a nuisance, they said. They wanted our ancestral land.



When the soldiers shot the Hualapais, they said the Indians shot first even though the Indian did not have a gun. The Hualapai just had a bow and arrow. He was taught to use it for getting game to eat and live on. He did not use it to kill or hurt people.

The U.S. military talked of rounding up the people. They did that. They rounded up the Hualapais and took them to Beale Springs the first time; then they took the people and dumped them near the Colorado River.

The Hualapais had leaders and they knew that the military were trying to steal the land. The military kept on attacking and killing off the people.

The people had nothing. They had very few belongings and went down there along with their children. They lived there but were unaccustomed to the land. They longed for their homeland, so they all escaped and returned.

They hid out in the mountains, hills, and canyons.

The military questioned, "What are we going to do now?" The cavalry started looking again. They said, "We are not going to leave them alone. We will go out and gather them up again." They kept looking and looking for the people, capturing them.

This went on for a certain length of time, then the searching and capturing ended with the people being taken captive to Beale Springs. There were many people rounded up and herded down there. Young children, women, small babies, they were all brought and placed in the one mile square area that was called the Hualapai Reservation.

They built a fence around it. They placed the captured Hualapai in this corral.

The people were forced to stay within the square. There were no plants or food to prepare. There was no place to wash and clean. The people were given very little to live on. The military used to give them cooked meals, but later they just gave out rations to fix somehow and eat.

The soldiers stood guard all the time. The guards on the east side were ready to shoot at any slight movement.



The corral was fenced with barbed wire. There was no talking or laughing. They just all stayed there keeping their eyes on the guards. The people asked each other, “How are we expected to survive?” They were given a few necessities which were old and not enough, like clothing, bedding, shoes. Many people were crowded there together. They filled the corral to the fullest.

It was summertime. The young children went without clothes. The people were from the mountains and were used to the cool climate.

The military didn’t care about the discomfort of the people and children. The people were hungry and sick. They cried and many died.

The guards would shoot at anything that aroused their attention and killed many of the people. The military brutally beat them on the heads with their bayonets.

The people had no way of burying their dead. All they could do was cry. They were afraid of the military and just stood by in terror as the killing went on and on. The women, girls, and children were killed by soldiers. To the west there was a hill. In there was a hole. The people would build a fire and stay there. (It is still there.) The people were treated and held captive for a long, long time.

Then there was a young Hualapai man who understood a little of the white man’s language. He told the people in a hushed voice that he heard the military say: “Before we take them down, we will search for the rest of the people.” This young man encouraged the people to escape. He said, “Take off while you can. Go to the mountains and hide there.” A long time ago the people were fast runners. Some of the people escaped and hid in the mountains. When they looked back, they saw the others who were closer to the corral being captured and herded back into the Beale Springs prison encampment again.

The people knew where the springs were located. They fled from one spring to another, hiding in the mountains.

There was another man who understood the English language in the Beale Springs prison encampment. “My people, I really don't understand what the military are planning. Are they going to shoot and kill us all? They keep talking like this. Keep watch.” They didn’t sleep well as brutal abuse and killing went on and on. That’s the way the people were treated.



The people received very little of the rations that were supposed to be issued. They went hungry. Another Hualapai overheard the plans of the military and warned the people, “They are planning to move us somewhere or kill us all. Whichever choice they make, whatever our fate is, be strong.”

“How can we escape? We are surrounded by the soldiers. They make it impossible. Why are they doing this to us? What have we done?” The people couldn’t comprehend the brutal treatment.

The day came. The military opened up the gate to the prison camp. “Today you will walk!” they said. Any of the people who lagged behind were struck with the bayonets. The soldiers stabbed and slashed their bodies, making them bleed.

The soldiers mistreated them. The people were beaten and whipped. They were assaulted and abused. The people were abused. The people were very afraid. They were forced to take the long walk at gun point. They went, young girls, young boys, young men and women, old people were forced to march.

There is a trail by the Hualapai Mountains, which they took. They went to Bill Williams Fork over to Havasu Lake. While they were herding them on the soldiers had whips and lariats. They whipped the people if they did not hurry along. Sometimes when they threw the whip it would wrap around their necks. When this happened, the soldiers yanked them down. The people would just faint or die. The sick and injured were left to die on the trail.

The soldiers used the butt of their gun to beat the people. The people were brutally beaten. The young girls, when they got one, were abused. They were dishonored and ridiculed. One little girl cried and trembled all over. The soldiers abused and whipped her severely. The young children cried out but were beaten severely. The soldiers beat them with their guns. The soldiers killed and killed. They killed many of the Hualapais.

My grandmother led and guided her grandfather. Everyone cried. The old man said, “I am thirsty. I am hungry. I am very tired, my feet hurt.” My grandmother, as a very young child, held on to his hand. He said, “Grandchild, it is about time, sit here, stay here.” The soldiers saw him resting. They threw the rope around his neck, dragged him and left him at a distance. He cried, “Grandchild, wait for me, wait for me.” She saw him laying there with the tears streaming down his face. “He is almost dead” she thought. She was afraid to go to him because of her fear of the soldiers. They went and whipped him again. This time they killed him. Many people, young and old were left dead along the trail.

The people were stripped naked and were forced to walk on and on. The people cried out loud, “What’s wrong with our homes? Why do you treat us this way? Where are you taking us?”

Even if the people did no harm or anything wrong, they were brutally beaten and killed. The soldiers rode on horseback and they surrounded the people on all sides. They beat the people on their backs. Whipping them black and blue to make them hurry along.

At some place they stopped to sleep. They had been told to take their own food to eat. They took what little ration of flour they had. And that’s all they had to eat. The soldiers did not cook or fix any food for them to eat. They mixed their flour in a pot of water and drank that.

The people were very tired and exhausted and would fall asleep when they reached a resting place. During the night they moved, crying, “My sister, my brother, my children, my grandparents. Be strong, take care.” They cried in sorrow, “When the sun rises will we still be alive? Maybe they will shoot us all when we reach our destination.” They continued their forced march.

Many people died along the way. Many of the young children were injured or sickness overtook them and the older children had to carry them on their backs. Weak and maimed, they assisted each other in this forced march.

It must have been two or three nights before they reached La Paz. There were many people who started out on this march and half of them arrived at La Paz.

When they got there it was horrible. It was late spring and the intense heat was unbearable.

The people were given rations which were poisonous. When the people ate it, there was an epidemic of a bad case of dysentery. Many people got sick and died. The sickness and the deaths continued. Young men would be seen walking around. Then during the night children and the old people would be pronounced dead. The people mourned. They buried the dead in the ditches, sand, washes or anywhere. Many, many people died and were buried at La Paz.

The treatment of the people at La Paz was worse than on the forced march or at Beale Springs prison encampment. La Paz was located about two or three miles from the Colorado River. The waste land was very dry, sandy and sterile. There was a few shrubs of catsclaw and arrowweed.

There was no shelter and protection from the sun. The food they rationed was no good. The main items were flour and coffee. This they fixed somehow and ate. More people died. The cycle of sickness and death continued.

There was a captain besides the agent stationed at La Paz who ordered, “The people imprisoned at La Paz are to be given good land and water so they can plant food.” This was the plan but the agent at La Paz did not follow the order. The people were not given any seeds or plants to grow. More rations and beef were ordered to be given but his agent did not do this. Nothing like this was done. The inflicted, enduring misery continued. The extremely hot summer sun beat down on us. The sweltering land offered no refuge. Arrowweed shafts were laid on the catsclaw tree for minimal shade. The people sat under this for protection from the hot sun. When the sun went down, it was a little cooler then and the people would prepare earthbaked bread and coffee for meals. The means were meager but were a source of survival.

The terrible hopelessness of the situation was mirrored in their grief-stricken faces and the people spoke among themselves, “We seem to take for granted that somehow we will survive and matters will improve but can we stay here and exist? Our ordeal is worsening. The people who came on the forced march, those that arrived, there were many of us. Now, our children are all dead. Our men and women are all dead. There is no way that we can survive here.” Bake earth-oven bread,” they planned. “When we receive our ration of flour, make the bread.” That’s all they had to take along. “Take whatever you can carry. Do this. We are not going to stay here. We are going to escape.”

A strong courageous Hualapai leader urged the people to escape. “We cannot stay here. The military wants us to stay and eventually die from starvation, sickness, infectious disease and sorrow. The military has dumped us here and in order to survive, we have to escape. When we receive our ration of flour, bake fresh earth-oven bread and carry whatever you can on the escape to our ancestral homeland.”

Before they left they held a pow-wow ceremony. They cried, bidding farewell to their cousins, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters that they were leaving. They hugged each others knowing that if they all went together, the soldiers would kill them all. They planned the directions they would go.

Some of the Hualapais headed in the direction of Blythe. They claimed land and made their homes. “We will take the name Pai Pai,” our relatives said as they headed in that direction. As they left everyone cried. Some went on towards the west (Barstow) and settled there.



The agent at Parker used to send them rations but then he said that the rations will no longer be sent. “From now on we will stop doing this. You will come on your own and get your flour,” the agent said. It was about forty miles or more that the people had to go to get their rations. “You will walk over there to get your rations and then walk back,” they were told.

The young man said, “They told us to go after our own flour. It is a far distance to go. We haven’t eaten any good meals to have strong bodies. Why waste our energy over flour? We are not going to let the love for flour eventually cause us to lose our lives. Escape from this place is the only solution.”

The people realized that in order to survive, they had to escape. Finally one day, they followed their plans of escape. They retraced the trail to imprisonment and death. They nourished their bodies on the stored earth bread, water, and resting at nightfall.

The return to their ancestral homeland was exactly one year later. It was late spring and the land was fresh and green. They came upon the Halchidoma people. They were planting crops. The refugees continued on and at Bill Williams Fork saw mescal which was one of their main food staples. They were relieved to be back in their own familiar land, “We have fulfilled our plans of escape and have returned.” Some of the people remained there to bake and harvest mescal. The rest of the people continued their escape to their own territories by traveling through the mountains. They returned home to their country around Kingman, Chloride, Peach Springs, Hackberry, Valentine, Mađwiđa, Pine Springs and Seligman.

When they had escaped, the agent at Parker said, “The Hualapais have all escaped. They ran away when we weren’t watching.” He went to the officer in Fort Mohave and told him this. The officer said, “You imprisoned them there and they endured captivity. The orders for you to carry out, were to give them plenty of meat, and other rations, but these things were not carried out. The people starved and they died off. The year of captivity is enough. Do not pursue and herd them back. Let them return home. That is final.” The soldiers wanted to round them up and bring them back again but they were ordered not to. So the people came home to stay.

This is what my grandmother told me. She cried when she told the haunting story of what she saw, her grandfather, the abuse of the children, all of the killings and death and she would cry with remorse. I tell this to my children here at home. It is not good. “The Place Where We Shed Tears,” they call it, the “La Paz March”, the “Trail of Tears” and the “Force March”.

When the Hualapais returned to their ancestral territories, they found that many white men had occupied the land. They lived all over in the canyons, Diamond Creek, Clay Springs, and everywhere.

On January 4, 1883, President Chester A. Arthur signed an executive order creating a 997,045 acres of reservation land around Peach Springs, Arizona for the Hualapais.

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