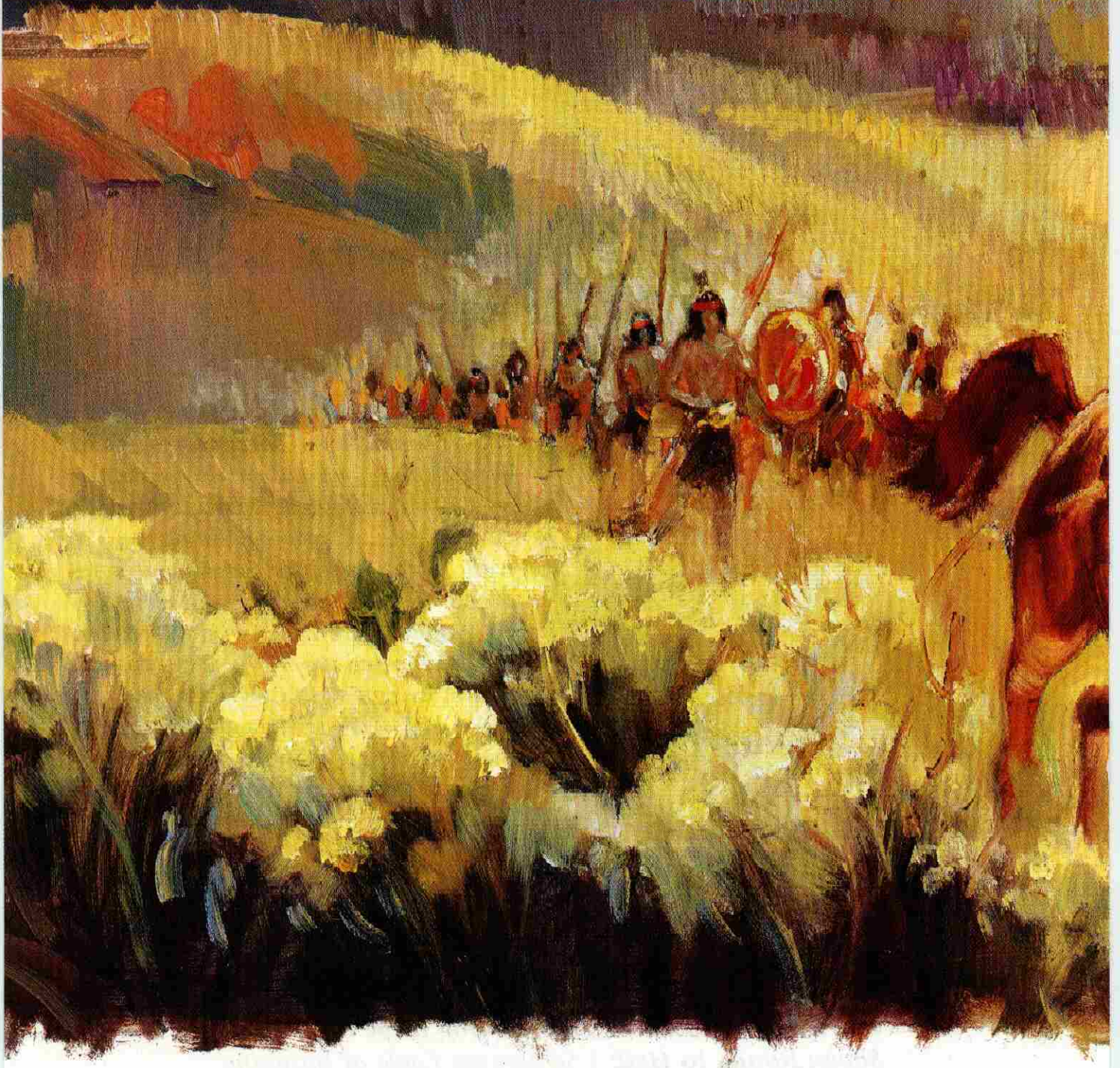


THE PUEBLO



The Pueblo Indians in the province of New Mexico had
In 1680 all their grievances flared into a fire
that surprised the Europeans with its

REVOLT

Illustrations by Francis Livingston



by Jake Page

THERE WAS A CHILL in the air in the predawn hours of August 10, 1680, as Brother Juan Batista Pío settled himself on his horse. The Franciscan priest had heard rumors that the Pueblo Indians were planning to revolt against the Spanish who lived in New Mexico, the most remote and least productive colony in all of New Spain. Indians had murdered a Spanish settler the night before at the pueblo of Tesuque, situated among the low hills some 10 miles from Santa Fe, and Brother Pío set off for the village in the belief that he could calm its people and turn them from rebellion to join in the fellowship of Holy Mass.

Brother Pío and his soldier escort, Pedro Hidalgo, proceeded through the dark green piñon pines and desert junipers that dotted the rolling, reddish-brown landscape. Finding Tesuque deserted, they continued on into the surrounding countryside in search of the Indians. As they descended into a shallow ravine the two men saw the villagers, carrying weapons and with their faces painted red,

Pedro Hidalgo made a mad dash for his life after he realized that Pueblo Indians had murdered Brother Juan Batista Pío. The Franciscan's death marked the beginning of a resistance movement that drove the Spanish from New Mexico.

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violent rebellion
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headed for the mountains. "What is this, children?" the Franciscan cried out. "Are you mad? Do not disturb yourselves. I will die a thousand deaths for you."

As Hidalgo rode along, he watched Brother Pío move deeper into the ravine and disappear around a corner. A short time later one of the Indians suddenly burst from the ravine, carrying the friar's shield. Close behind him came another Indian, spattered with

blood. More Indians swarmed out of the ravine to attack Hidalgo, but the soldier spurred his horse into a gallop and escaped. He saw no sign of the priest. Hidalgo rode back to Santa Fe to alert the Spanish governor of New Mexico, Antonio de Otermín, that the uprising was no longer a rumor.

BROTHER PÍO'S MURDER that morning was among the first actions of

the Pueblo Indian revolt, an uprising that profoundly and permanently altered the history of the American Southwest. The violence had been a long time coming. The Indians' resentment against the Spanish had begun to smolder with Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's trek through their country in 1540-42. The Spaniard had demanded food and supplies from the Indians and had attacked any pueblos that refused him. The resentment intensified with the arrival of settlers, soldiers, and friars in 1598. The colonists found communities

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of trim multi-storied houses built of dried mud and surrounded by green fields all along the river the Europeans called the Rio Del Norte. They called the Indian towns *pueblos*, after the Spanish word for village. The settlers moved in between the pueblos, the friars moved into the villages, and the secular authorities established a capital in one of the northern pueblos, which they called San Juan. The Spaniards later moved the capital to Santa Fe, establishing what is today the oldest continuing capital in the United States.

It wasn't long before these developments had thrown the traditional world of the peaceful and agricultural Pueblo Indians into chaos. The Spanish governors demanded food tributes and labor, and they responded to Indian resistance with beatings, mutilations, or death. European diseases, such as smallpox and measles, devastated the native population, claiming more than one-third of the estimated 25,000 Indians that inhabited the Southwest.

Some cultural exchanges, however, proved beneficial. European irrigation techniques helped the Pueblo farmers, and the Spanish absorbed local Indian lore about herbal remedies. The colonists brought livestock and useful crops, such as peaches, to add to the

The Pueblo Indians' decades of resentment finally erupted as they burned the Spaniards' missions, murdered priests, and defiled alters. "Now God and Santa Maria were dead," the Indians said.



Indian staples of corn, melons, and beans. But even these advantages brought difficulties, as the bounty made the Pueblo villages all the more attractive to raids by nomadic bands of Apaches. Traditionalists among the Pueblo Indians complained that the new God of the Spanish and His representatives were not taking care of the people.

Of all the Native Americans' grievances, however, the greatest was the Franciscans' determination to stamp out all vestiges of the Indians' religion. The priests found the elaborate performances by masked dancers representing the manifold spirits of nature, called *kachinas*, particularly offensive. The Indians performed the dances in underground chambers called *kivas*, which the Spanish ridiculed as *estufas*, or stoves, for the smoke that issued forth from their roof entrances. The Spanish clergy saw such rites as works of the devil and witchcraft.

As the years passed, circumstances and Spanish intolerance worked to feed the Pueblos' resentment. Prior to the Spaniards' arrival, the Indians withstood the Southwest's periodic droughts by storing reserves and bartering with other pueblos. But the Spanish took all surplus as tribute, monopolized the Indian labor force, and prohibited trade between pueblos, so the Indians had nothing to sustain them when a four-year drought struck in 1666. According to Brother Juan Bernal, "For three years now no crops have been harvested. In the past year, 1668, a great many Indians perished of hunger, lying dead along the roads, in ravines, and in their huts. There were pueblos where more than 450 died of hunger." Then in 1671 a new epidemic broke out, possibly anthrax, killing thousands of Indians and creating the psychological havoc that only a totally mysterious catastrophe can cause. Thus weakened, the province became even easier prey for marauding tribes. The resentments smoldered.

In addition to roughly 100 celestial and temporal officials and soldiery, by the 1670s the Spanish population included more than 1,000 settlers who lived among 17,000 Pueblo Indians. Although drastically outnumbered, the Spanish colonial government continued

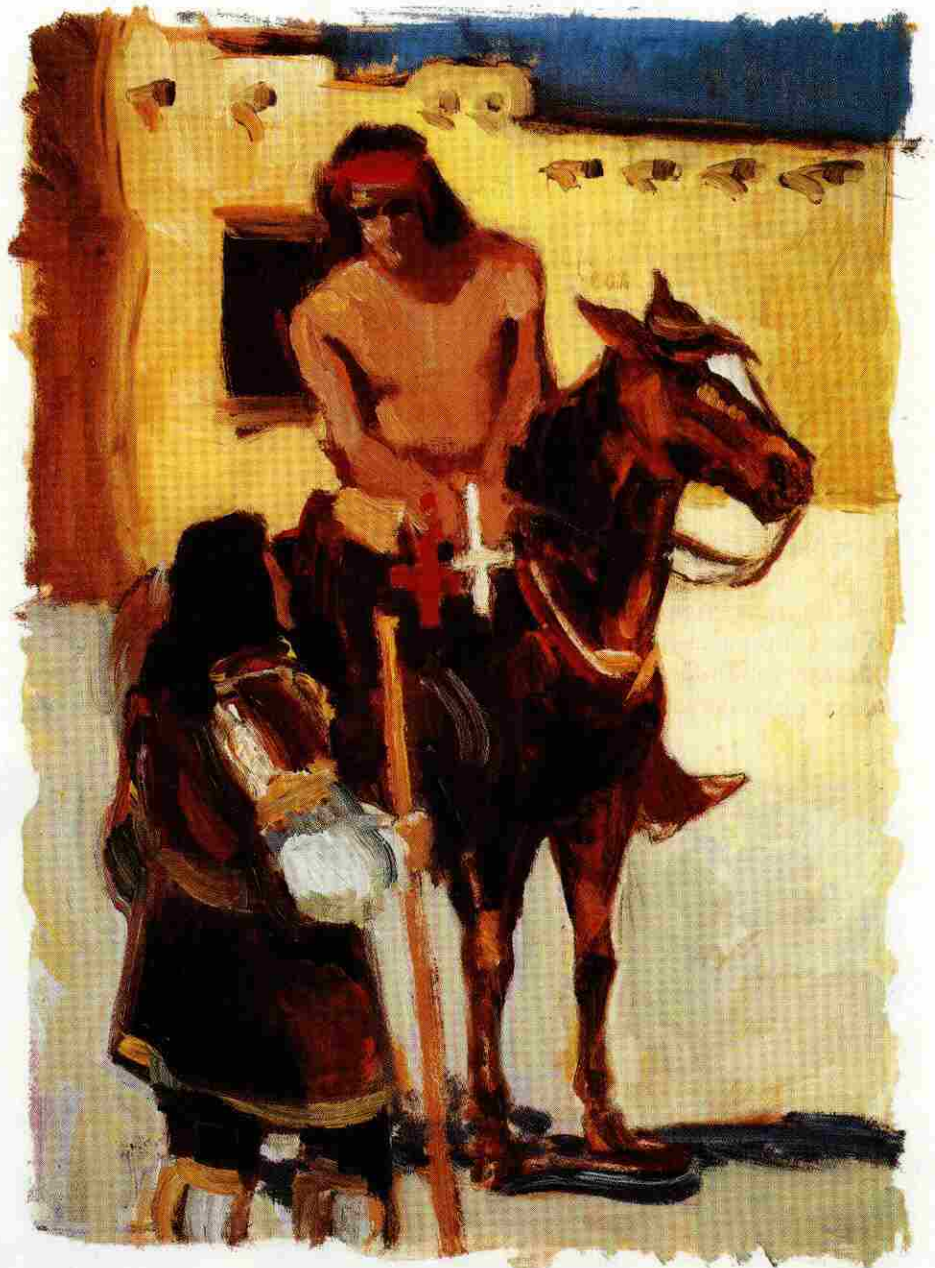
to crack down on native resistance, even stepping up its programs against native religion by outlawing it altogether and destroying many *kivas*. When Governor Juan Francisco de Treviño heard rumors in 1675 of Pueblo Indians practicing witchcraft, he rounded up 47 of their religious leaders, hauled them to the provincial capital of Santa Fe, and had them publicly whipped. The governor sentenced four to hang. In response, 70 warriors stormed Treviño's private rooms and threatened to kill him and lead a revolt unless he released the remaining 43 prisoners. Treviño relented.

Among those released was a man named Popé, from the northern pueblo of San Juan. Popé was said to have remarkable powers, including the ability

An Indian the Spaniards knew as Juan presented them with a choice: leave the territory or be killed.

to communicate directly with a revered deity called Po-Se-Ye-Mo. Fleeing further Spanish harassment, Popé retreated to a *kiva* in the northernmost pueblo of Taos and communicated with Po-Se-Ye-Mo, who demanded nothing less than total eradication of the Spanish invaders. Various pueblos began to set aside some of their traditional isolation from each other and listen to this prophet's talk of rebellion.

Since the arrival of the Spanish colonists, the Pueblo Indians had attempted several revolts. Typically they had involved only a few pueblos,



which were ultimately betrayed by Indians loyal to the Holy Church and the Europeans. The Spanish publicly hanged rebellion leaders, so Popé became a fanatic about secrecy. He supposedly executed his own son-in-law when the man fell under suspicion.

Popé found a growing number of pueblos who were willing to work together against their mutual enemy. Achieving such unity among the Indian villages—historically independent, spread out over hundreds of miles, and speaking different languages and di-

The Spanish finally submitted to the inevitable and left New Mexico after more than 80 years of colonization. However, the Pueblo alliances that made the Spanish defeat possible soon fell apart.

alects—was one of Popé's most astonishing feats. Planning took place over several years, and in 1680 the auspices appeared good. Snowfall in the mountains along the Rio Grande had been heavy and the spring especially cool, delaying snowmelt. Popé knew that the snow would melt quickly in the summer heat, and the rivers would run unusually high. As a result, the triennial pack train—the only communication and supply source between New Mexico and the rest of the Spanish world—would be unable to ford the waterways. With their stores and ammunition running low, the Spanish in the province would be vulnerable.

The plotters chose August 12, 1680, for the day of the uprising and dispatched runners to spread the word. The messengers delivered a knotted

string to all the rebel Pueblo leaders. They were to untie one knot each day. On the day they untied the last knot, it was time to strike. But rumors of the revolt reached the new governor, Antonio de Otermín, in Santa Fe on August 9. He immediately sent troops to search out and capture the Indian runners. Two youths were brought to the capital and tortured until they revealed that August 12 was the date of the uprising. They were then executed. The province of New Mexico was rife with intrigue and hidden allegiances, so Popé and the other leaders learned almost immediately that their plans had been discovered. They sent word around the pueblos that the date of the revolt had been changed to August 10, the very next day. With surprise on their side, the Indians of Tesuque killed Brother



Pío, while other Pueblos overran haciendas from Taos to Santa Fe, killing European men, women, and children. Taking horses and whatever weapons they could find, the attackers moved on. At missions Indian bands killed the priests, vandalized icons, befouled altars, and set the churches on fire in ferocious retribution for the stolen *kachina* masks and the other depredations the friars had wrought on their ceremonial ways for more than 80 years.

A handful of Spanish settlers escaped to Santa Fe with word of the uprising's progress. Otermín ordered all settlers in and around Santa Fe to congregate in the governor's palace for safety. By noon, the palace's plaza was jammed with settlers, soldiers, and livestock. Messengers brought word of Indian claims that "God and Santa

Maria were dead," and that their own god had never died.

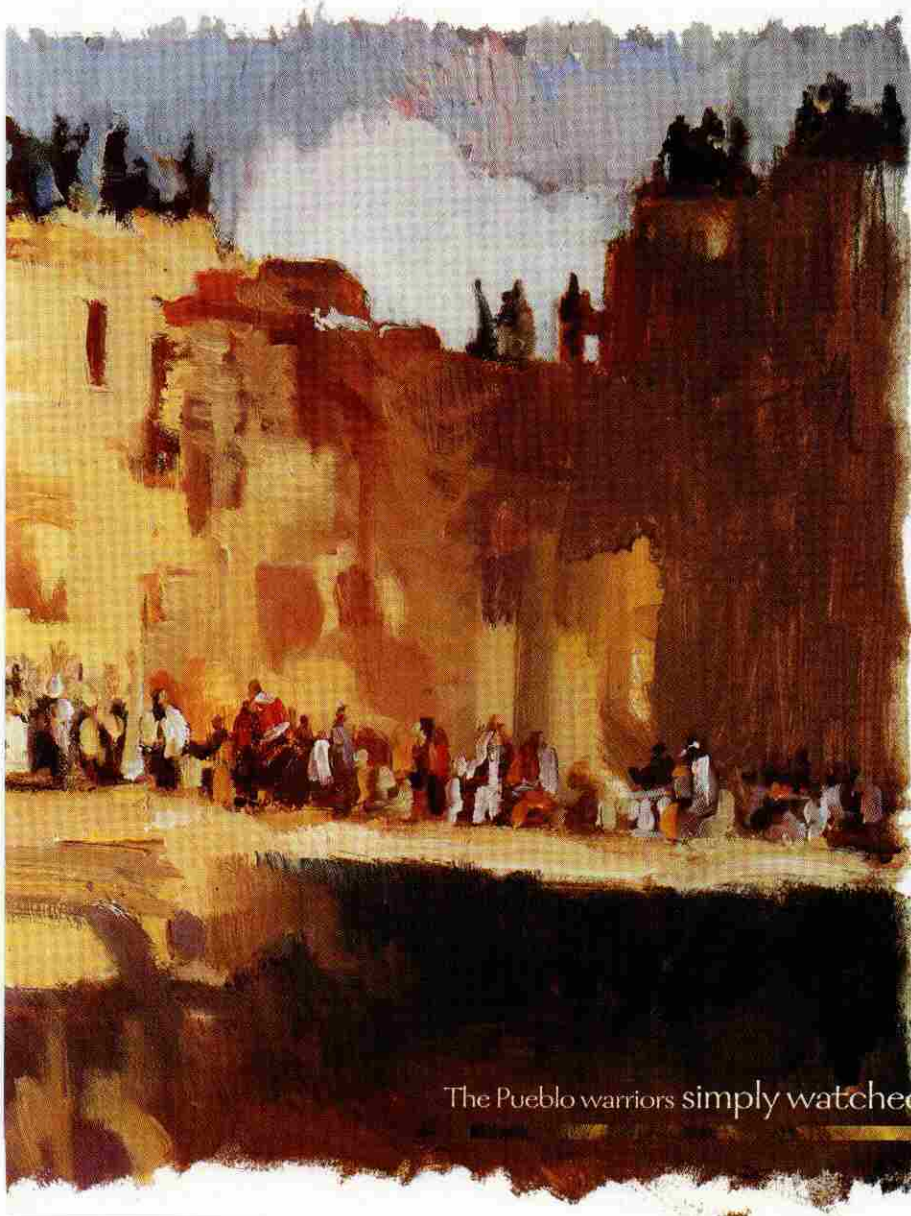
To the south, Indians sympathetic to the Europeans gathered together with the settlers under the command of Lieutenant Governor Alonso García in the Isleta Pueblo. A few rebellion Indians brought "news" to García that all the Spanish to the north—including Governor Otermín—were dead. A standing Spanish order forbade anyone, even the lieutenant governor, from leaving the province without the governor's permission. But believing Otermín dead and his own position untenable, García ordered those assembled to head south in the hope of meeting up with the triennial pack train and reinforcements.

Thanks to this disinformation campaign, Otermín remained isolated in Santa Fe for three more days as reports

of death and destruction poured in. On August 13, the governor received word that many pueblos that had professed loyalty to the Spanish government were now joining the rebellion. According to Brother Francisco Gómez, Otermín, "foreseeing that all the nations [of the province] will join together and destroy this villa," ordered Gómez to "consume the most holy sacrament, and take the images, sacred vessels, and things appertaining to divine worship, close the church and convent, and bring everything to the palace."

Two days later, as small armies of Indians assembled outside the capital to lay siege, Otermín was astonished to see his former manservant, an Indian he called Juan, arrive on horseback for a parley at the governor's palace. Juan wore as a sash one of the cloth bookmarks from the altar of a nearby convent and carried two crosses, one red, the other white. He offered Otermín a choice—take the white cross and the Spanish could leave the province without further harm. If the Spanish governor chose the red cross, more blood would flow.

Otermín chose neither, but instead offered amnesty to the Indians if they would go home after swearing fealty to Spain and the Holy Church. The Indians simply jeered at this and began setting fire to Santa Fe's outlying buildings. Otermín ordered all his soldiers—who numbered less than 100—into battle formation outside the government buildings. According to Spanish records, in a day of fighting "many of the enemy were killed and they wounded many of our men, because they came with the harquebuses and the arms which they had taken from the religious and Spaniards, and were well provided with powder and shot." Despite their losses, the Indians held fast until more warriors arrived and forced the Spanish back into the plaza of the governor's palace. During the next three days, the Indians' ranks swelled to some 2,500, and they rained arrows into the plaza, adding to the panic that was rapidly growing as food supplies ran out and sanitary conditions



The Pueblo warriors simply watched as the hated invaders finally left.

grew desperate in the heat.

Then on August 18 the Indians cut off Santa Fe's water supply by damming the river that ran through the plaza. Two days later, deciding that "it would be a better and safer step to die fighting than

nor for desertion and began court proceedings. In his defense, García argued that all intelligence from the north reported everyone there dead, and he claimed never to have received Otermín's orders to send aid to Santa Fe.

Mexican province was to be reestablished as soon as possible. But it wasn't until 1693 that the Spanish staged a successful return under a new governor, Diego de Vargas. As before, the Europeans met resistance with force, liter-

The lesson of the revolt was clear—the Pueblo people would rather die than relinquish their religious practices.

of hunger and thirst," Otermín and his remaining soldiers charged the Pueblo Indians. In the melee, the Spanish claimed to have killed some 300 Indians and captured another 47. They herded their captives into the plaza for interrogation and execution. The remaining warriors temporarily withdrew, but every Spanish soldier bore at least one wound, including Otermín, who had three.

By August 21, Otermín recognized that the situation in the plaza was hopeless. He believed that from north to south "all the people, religious, and Spaniards have perished . . . For which reasons, and finding ourselves out of provisions, with very few horses, weary, and threatened by the enemy, and not being assured of water, or of defense" Otermín decided to "withdraw, marching [south] from this villa in full military formation until reaching the Pueblo of La Isleta." There he expected to find Lieutenant Governor García. The Spanish said Mass, then Otermín and approximately 1,000 others filed out of the plaza. Most were on foot.

They feared the Indians would attack once they left the shelter of the plaza, but no assault occurred. Instead, the Pueblo warriors simply watched as the hated invaders finally left. All along the dreary road south the Spanish saw the burned buildings and grisly remains of the revolt's victims, while the Indians monitored their progress from the surrounding high ground. On August 26, just a day away from Isleta and the much-needed provisions they expected to find there, Otermín learned from a captured rebel Indian that García had taken his people away to the south.

Otermín sent scouts to overtake the lieutenant governor, and García immediately rode north to meet the governor. Otermín arrested his lieutenant gover-

Otermín acquitted García, and together they resumed their journey south.

They reached El Paso del Norte in early October. There, in what are today the slums of Ciudad Juárez, a few Indians and the Spanish refugees settled uncomfortably, some for good. Otermín estimated that 380 settlers had died in the uprising, and of that number only 73 had been adult males. Twenty-one out of 40 Franciscans had been martyred.

Although their victory proved temporary, in the history of Indian-white relations in North America the Pueblo Indians were the only Native Americans to successfully oust European invaders from their territory. A few years earlier in New England, eastern woodlands tribes had battled against colonists in King Philip's War, but they were defeated and driven to near extinction. Other great Indian leaders such as Pontiac and Tecumseh later organized their people into rebellions against encroaching Europeans, but they too were beaten. The Sioux would win the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, but they ultimately lost the war for the Plains. Apart from the Pueblos, only the Seminoles were able to retain some of their homeland for any length of time, by waging war from the swamps of the Florida Everglades (see "The Florida Quagmire," October 1999).

For the Pueblo Indians, victory was short-lived. Popé demanded complete eradication of all things Spanish, including the valuable crops, such as peaches, they had introduced. He became something of a dictator, and the Pueblo alliance began to unravel soon after the Spanish exodus. Leadership changed hands, old feuds resurfaced, and the pueblos reverted to their normal quarreling. Popé apparently died in disgrace.

In January 1681 the Spanish government issued an order that the New

ally obliterating some pueblos. Not for another three years would an uneasy peace again reign in New Mexico. The success of the Pueblo revolt continued to affect the regions beyond New Mexico, however, for years afterward. Word spread south into the tribes of Mexico and encouraged rebellions and resistance that plagued the colonists for decades. Plains Indians gained access to Spanish horses and began to breed them, transforming tribes such as the Cheyenne, Sioux, Apache, and Comanche into some of the finest light cavalry the world has ever seen.

There was lasting change in New Mexico too, as demonstrated by the returning Spanish, in particular the Franciscan friars. They now had an odd respect for the natives. The lesson of the revolt was clear—the Pueblo people would rather die than relinquish their religious practices. The friars, thus chastened, made no further attempt to stamp out the pagan religions of the Pueblos, but instead allowed them and the Catholic rites to co-exist. Pueblo people today attribute the persistence of their cultures to the 1680 uprising.

On a given Pueblo Indian feast day, the people assemble at night in the mission church for Mass and at dawn they carry the patron saint's statue from the church to the plaza. Enshrined there, the saint watches the new day unfold as hundreds of Pueblos dance through the day in a performance that both celebrates and reinforces their own unique heritage and culture. ★

Jake Page and his photographer wife, Susanne, have produced two books on the Hopi and Navajo Indians, along with numerous other books and articles on Indian affairs. Page is currently writing a popular history of the Pueblo rebellion.