



Justice for an Old Veteran

Andres Moreno

By Robert Hutchison

Andres Moreno was a decorated veteran awarded "The Indian Campaign Medal." His white passenger/assailant was an itinerant lawyer named Knox Lee from Alabama. This murder took place on July 16, 1887 at a location called Baecker Butte, the highest elevation on the Mogollon Rim at 8,120 feet. Two months prior, Samuel S. Shulll was murdered at a location 22 map miles north in

May, 1887.* As one ponders the discoveries of those present at the crime scene, some testimony does not make logical sense and new developments have cropped up. After 130 years, we cannot allow this injustice to sit idle any longer.

As we review the 1995 spring edition of a magazine titled "The Smoke Signal," we reference a very intriguing article titled "Murder of an Unsung Hero" by Stan Brown. Referring to Brown's article, "As one studies over two hundred pages of testimony from the Coroner's inquest, the jury trial and the campaign of correspondence to free Knox Lee from prison, the truth seems to point in this direction: Lee did, in fact, kill Andres Moreno from 'above and behind' as Moreno stooped to pour a cup of coffee at the campfire on that damp, muddy day.

As Lee was serving a six-year sentence for involuntary manslaughter, he spent the next year and a half in the Yuma Territorial Prison conducting a letter writing campaign for his own pardon. Lee found a politician by the name of LaFayette P. Nash who was willing to provide additional "alternative facts" (my coined words) in an attempt to cast doubt. In a letter by Nash, dated January 3, 1889 and forwarded to the Arizona Territorial (A.T.) Governor Conrad Meyer Zulick, he claimed "while hunting up his cattle, he had dug up the old Mexican and found a bullet in the back of Moreno's neck." Do you really believe a politician (Nash) is going to be gathering cattle at the highest elevation on the Mogollon Rim during the preceding month of December, 1888? Then, with a pick and shovel dig into frozen ground while his cattle stand around in deep snow and wait for him to perform another autopsy on a frozen corpse?

The original medical examiner, Dr. Cook, doing the on-site autopsy (first ever), claimed the bullet came from "above and behind." Impanelled witnesses from Pine, A.T. were at the scene and agreed to these findings on July 19, 1887. They witnessed Dr. Cook taking off the skull and removing the brain in order to trace the path of the bullet through the bones, entering the back of the skull and out the right eye socket and nostril.

In Lee's initial testimony, he claimed his first shot missed Moreno during his plea of "self defense." But, this first shot had, in fact, passed through the palm of Moreno's right hand and left powder burns so thick, Dr. Cook reported "some of the grains of powder (were) forced nearly through the skin. Lee testified that "the two men had been seven feet apart when the first shot was fired. This is probably the only true statement Lee made because two men standing face-to-face with right arms extended toward each other would measure almost exactly seven feet apart.

The previous paragraph changes the "involuntary manslaughter" charge to "murder in the first degree with premeditation." The first shot Moreno received through the palm of his right hand was a defensive wound with no weapon in that hand. Then as Moreno was doubled over clutching his wounded hand in excruciating pain, Lee shot him in the back of the head from "above and behind" as the medical examiner stated and not while Moreno was stooped over pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Sadly, Moreno's wife was left to raise their seven children alone at the age of 35. She died in Globe, Arizona in 1942. If these dates are correct, she died at the age of 110.

This "Smoke Signal" article was provided by an accomplished fellow historian named Pat Kelley, a 30-year resident of Overgaard, Arizona. A great deal of my success in research and development can be attributed to his appreciated guidance and friendship.

*gymoaz.com/history