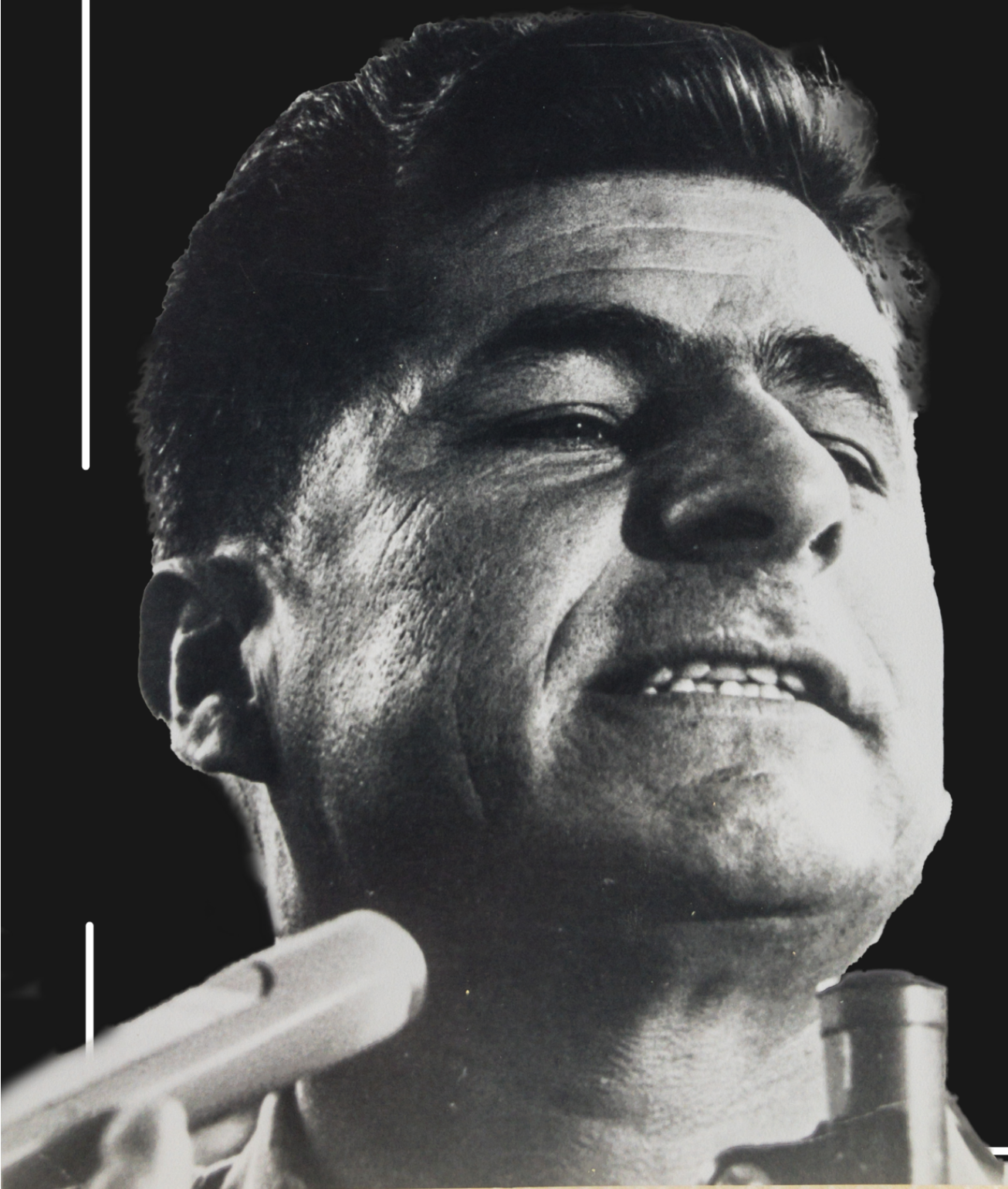


RAIDERS OF A LOST CAUSE

ASSAULT ON THE RIO ARRIBA COUNTY COURTHOUSE



EASTERN

NEW MEXICO

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HoundBytes



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Foreword

Message to our *HoundBytes* Readers

The 1960s were turbulent years in America. An unpopular war in southeast Asia, race riots, political assassinations and civil rights confrontations all worked to divide us as a nation. We wondered how we could find the will and the way to solve social issues that seemed insurmountable.

Many voices cried out for justice and redress. Some were heard. Others remained a faint cry in the wilderness. Reies Lopez Tijerina was one of those voices. He took on a cause which he hoped would right a centuries-old-wrong and appeal to the nation's conscience. Like Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, he found the social unrest of the 1960s to be the perfect time to launch his social

revolution. Ultimately, he would fail, but he and his exploits would become a footnote in American history, for having led the last real political and social revolution in America.

For three decades, I have been fascinated with many file folders collecting dust in one of my dad's plastic storage bins. On several occasions, he has mesmerized me with the story those folders contain. I have often encouraged him to write a book, but the time never seemed right. It is my belief that most of this material has never seen the light of day in any publication. It has the potential to capture the interest of the entire Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) community and beyond. The injustice visited on New Mexico's

earliest European inhabitants remains unaddressed to this day.

Incredibly, my dad was a close friend of Reies Lopez Tijerina in the 1980s and has told me stories over the years which come from Tijerina himself. In fact, Tijerina gifted him with photos from a family album which profusely illustrate this *HoundBytes* feature story. These photos, for the most part, are being published for the first time.

It is time to dust off the decades-old research material and bring it to life. So, sit back and enjoy a riveting account of an incident from New Mexico's history that is fascinating and almost unbelievable, yet most relevant among today's social justice issues.

RAIDERS OF A LOST CAUSE

Assault on the Rio Arriba County Courthouse

By Gary Lester



He Was Definitely Charismatic

In the early 1980s, my father, Richard Lester, worked for the Jemez Mountain School District in northern New Mexico. While serving as the district superintendent, he became friends with Reies Lopez Tijerina. This is his part of the story.

How I first met Reis Tijerina for the first time is not important to this narrative. Tijerina told me he trusted few Anglos. He rarely invited Anglos into his home. Yet, my friend Richard Bowman (correspondent for the El Paso Times) and I were both trusted and welcome guests in the Tijerina family home in Coyote, NM. He also invited us on overnight weekends to his bachelor pad in Albuquerque.

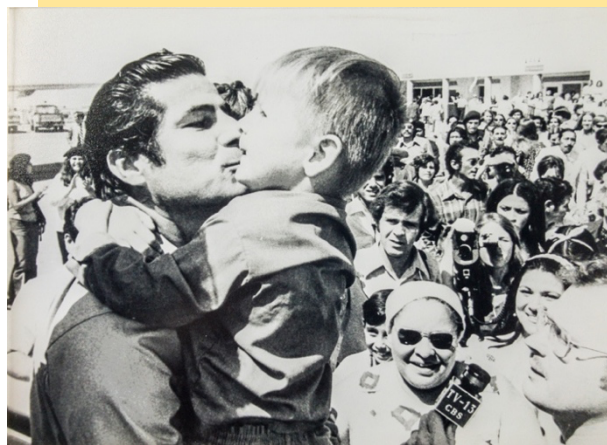
It was the early 1980s, and the Tijerina Revolution was not yet even twenty years old. Richard Bowman and I had a great time listening to Tijerina's stories late into the night, watching his very animated gestures and facial expressions, and then going to breakfast the next morning at his favorite café in southwest Albuquerque. Sometimes, we were joined by one of his chief Alianza lieutenants from the 1960s. The conversations were always interesting, and we all enjoyed steaming plates of huevos rancheros.

Around this time, Hollywood took an interest in Tijerina. Producer Larry Cano was looking for his next production, after his first successful project, *Silkwood*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. Somehow, Cano contacted Tijerina, who was not at all thrilled about

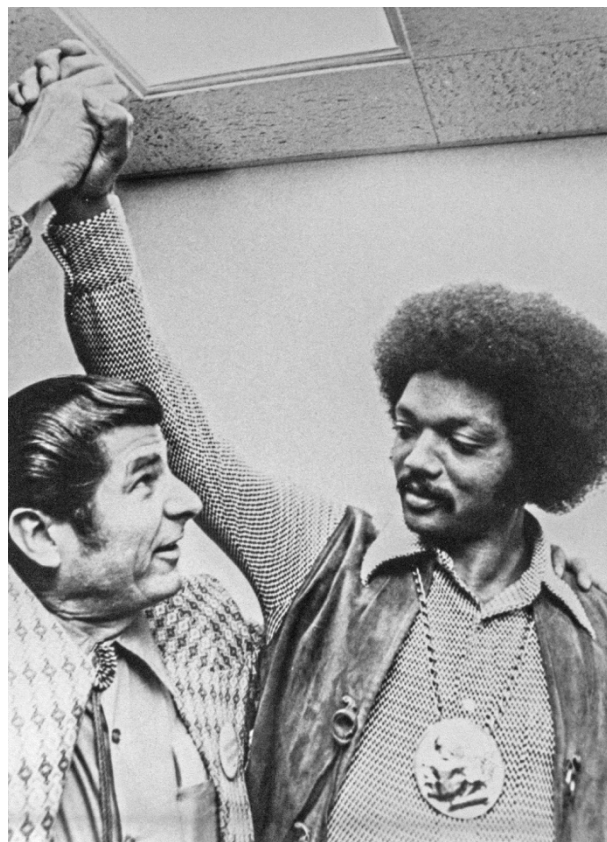
Hollywood gringos coming to his home in Coyote. However, Cano, according to Tijerina, was armed with a six-figure contract from Columbia Pictures for rights to Tijerina's story.

Cano and a few key production people arrived at the Tijerina compound in Coyote. Tijerina had asked me to be always by his side, to make sure no one took advantage of him. I also reviewed his contract and assured him that it was genuine. These people were who they claimed to be, and they could make a major motion picture.

When the Los Angeles team arrived, they were all smiles and very pleasant. Tijerina was his charismatic self, and he soon had them on his team, although it was obvious to me that he still did not completely trust them. To make sure I had a reason to always be close by, Tijerina informed the group that I would write the paperback book that would come out with the movie. Agreed!



Tijerina kisses his son on the cheek during televised rally.



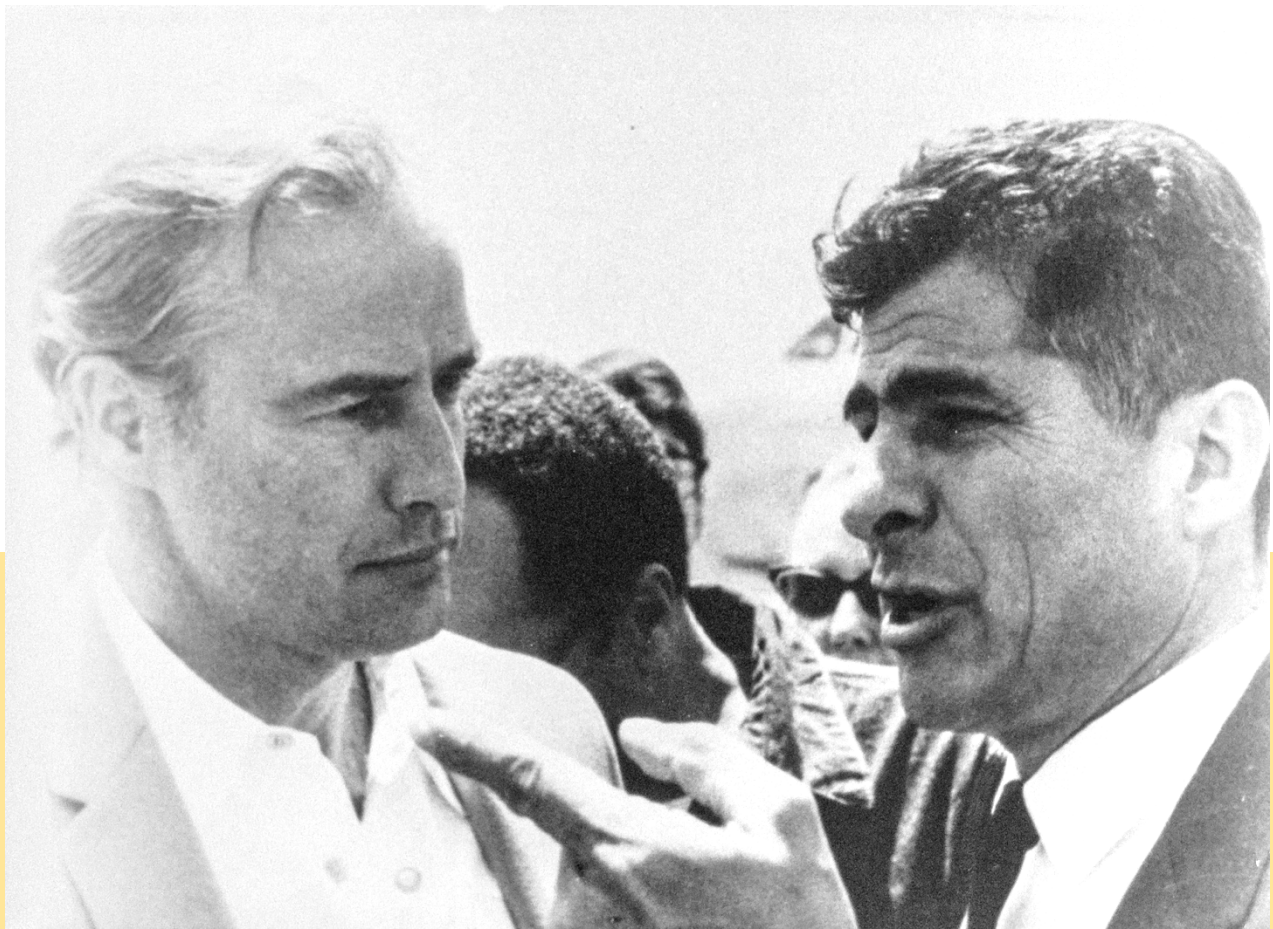
Tijerina poses with civil rights activist, Jesse Jackson.

I remember spending many hours with Larry Cano in the New Mexico State Archives in Santa Fe. Together, we examined box after box of Tijerina items. Cano photocopied what he needed for the movie, and I photocopied what I needed for the book. I ended up with a complete set of voluntary

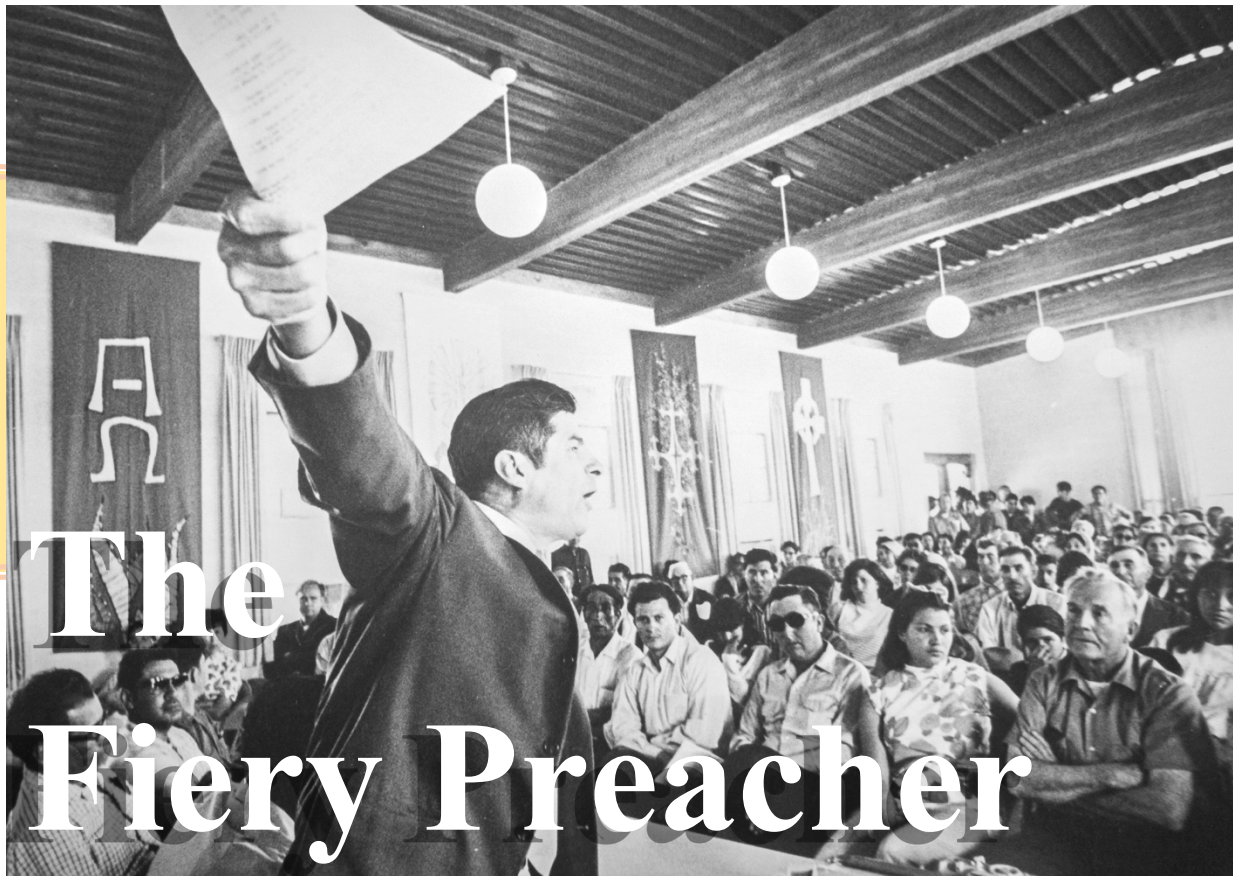
depositions, upon which this narrative is based.

To make a long story short, Columbia Pictures never made the movie. Their industry contacts at Warner Brothers learned that Robert Redford was already in production with a spoof of the Tijerina story – *The Milagro Beanfield War*.

The executives at Columbia decided there simply wasn't enough audience for both a spoof and a docu-drama. Larry Cano's production ended up on the proverbial Hollywood shelf, and my book was never written.



Tijerina discusses his beliefs and philosophies with actor Marlon Brando.



Settlers from Spain came to America long before America became a country. They made their new homes in California, Arizona, and New Mexico. Many of those settlers who arrived in New Mexico possessed land grants issued by the king of Spain and blessed by the Pope in Rome.

Several hundred years later, a number of those descendants of the original settlers still hold on to the sacred parchments which declared that this land was their land. Unfortunately, the 1960s brought these people no justice. The land had been taken from

them during the westward movement, just as it had been taken from Native Americans across America.

The United States government seemed uninterested in addressing the issue. Then, a fiery evangelical preacher descended upon New Mexico and took up the land grants gauntlet. With his passionate and substantial oratorical skills, Reies Lopez Tijerina became the voice of the Spanish land grants movement. He was on the radio. His words were carried in the print media. His followers began to grow into the size of an army. Northern New

Mexico belonged to Reies Lopez Tijerina – El Tigre Del Norte.

When his movement seemed to be getting nowhere with the politicians, Tijerina made a fateful decision. On June 5, 1967, he staged a daring raid on a rural courthouse in Northern New Mexico. For a few brief moments, the world's attention was riveted on what was to become known as the last political civil insurrection in America. The Tijerina Raid would hold that distinction until January 6, 2021.

The Origin Story

Our story begins in 15th century Spain, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, sole proprietors of all Spanish land in America, decided to award grants of land which would stimulate exploration, colonization, and trade within the Spanish Empire.

By the 19th century, the Anglo-American was emerging as the dominant political player in the Southwest. Sacred Spanish land grants were considered up for grabs, and most did not survive the political onslaught waged to acquire them. Land-grant towns were also coveted by the land barons, who shaped and controlled the political and judicial systems which would enhance their wealth and power.

By the 1960s, less than a century had passed since the

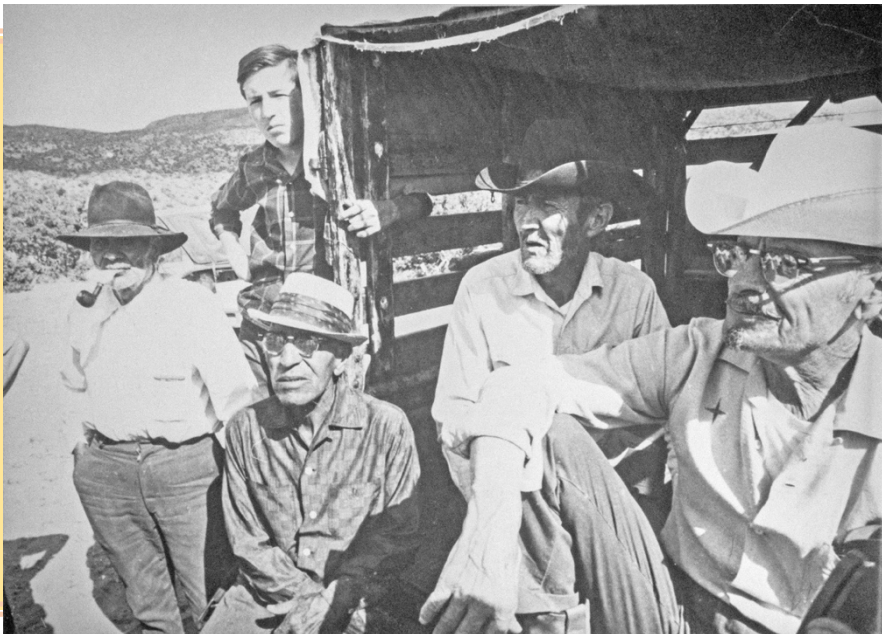


Tijerina Sitting with his wife.

Santa Fe Ring land-grab. It was not enough time for family resentment and anger to dissipate among the children of land-grant families. About this time, Reies Lopez Tijerina arrived on the scene in Northern New Mexico, and took the land-grant issue to heart.

Using brilliant oratory and taking full advantage of his charismatic personality, Tijerina preached the message

of desecrated land-grant towns, calling them living monuments to injustice. He organized a group called Alianza and became the leader of the crusade to restore justice and fair play to the land-grant chapters of our nation's history. Before we continue with the Tijerina story, we must look back at a famous explorer whom we honor with a national holiday -- Christopher Columbus.



Descendants of the original land grant owners.

Sacred Ground: The Desecration Begins

When Christopher Columbus first set sail from Spain, he did so with the authority and financial backing of Queen Isabella. The profits of his expedition were to accrue to her and her heirs. A papal bull issued in 1493 confirmed the arrangement. The Indies were to be exclusive possessions of the crown, guaranteed by the throne of St. Peter.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, as sole proprietors of all Spanish land in America, could rule over their dominions, or give the land away as they pleased. During these early days of exploration, Spanish colonial policy quickly emerged. Three types of land-grant remained popular for 300 years: *sitios*, proprietary grants and Pueblo grants.

The king awarded *sitios* to royal favorites strictly for personal exploitation. Proprietary grants were mostly given to individuals for various reasons. Pueblo or community grants were given to groups of ten or more petitioners willing to establish rural farming communities in the vast uncharted wilderness. It is the community grant which most concerned Reies Tijerina.

Tijerina notes that each of these New World village sites, including the town of San Joaquin in Northern New Mexico, was surrounded by common lands called the *ejido*. Spanish custom dictated that the *ejido* could neither be sold nor monopolized by one individual, but rather existed for the use of all villagers in perpetuity. Spanish law and custom dictated that the *ejido* be available to all villagers for all time.

The first visitors to bring the force and authority of Spanish law to New Mexico came by accident. Shipwrecked off the Texas coast in 1528, Cabeza De Vaca, along with three other surviving castaways, crossed New Mexico and Arizona on their way to Mexico City. Once there, they told stories of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola and the fabulous riches to be found to the north.



Tijerina is confronted by armed law-enforcement.

Among the interested listeners was adventurer, Coronado.

Mounting the first large Spanish expedition into the Southwest, Coronado also became the first explorer to acquire an accurate knowledge of the width of the continent.

Realizing that exploration must always precede colonization, Francisco Vasquez Coronado roamed far and wide throughout the American West. By the late 16th century, the stage was set for colonizers to follow in Coronado's footsteps.

On April 19, 1583, the Spanish king issued a cedula, which officially authorized the conquest of all of New Mexico. The terms of the contract required applicants to colonize at their own expense, noting that the crown would not finance any part of the ventures.

Among the early applicants for such a contract was Don Juan de Onate, who already entertained visions of becoming the first governor of New Mexico. Receiving his contract on September 21, 1595, Onate recruited his chief lieutenants and 200 colonists and soldiers. With this document, came an important appointment from the viceroy of Mexico. Don Juan was indeed to be the first governor and captain-general of the colony of New Mexico. His appointment was to last for two generations.

Onate and his fellow colonists represented the greatest government on earth in the 16th century. Their motives for coming were varied. Some were looking for adventure and excitement.



Both photos illustrate Tijerina and fellow supporters standing their ground against the New Mexico State Police.



Some sought the fabulous riches thought to exist all over the New World. Others came to extend the authority of the Spanish crown.

A few hoped to bring Christianity to the heathen savages. All followed behind the flag of Spain.

For the next 250 years, literally thousands of land grants were awarded by the Spanish

crown and later by the government of Mexico. The Mexican Constitution favored continued observance of the laws of Spain.

In 1832, the Mexican government approved the Tierra Amarilla land-grant to be established after Spanish law and custom. The Mexican Constitution further provided for an ejido which would exist independent of any private property. It could be neither sold nor exploited by any individual. Property belonged to all members of the community -- living, dead, and yet to be born.

On May 13, 1846, President James K. Polk proclaimed war with Mexico. Three months later, Mexico's Jefe-Politico, Manuel Armijo, surrendered the colony of New Mexico to Brigadier General Stephen Kearny. General Kearney offered nothing but encouragement and hope to the people of New Mexico.

Speaking from the Plaza of Las Vegas on the morning of August 15, 1846, he pledged the resources of the United States government to the protection of the citizens of New Mexico *and* their property.

Other Americans had different ideas. Sam Houston, ex-president of the Republic of Texas, noted that "white men had always cheated Indians, and since Mexicans are no better than Indians, I see no reason

why we should not go on the same course now and take their land."

Vecinos of Spanish and Mexican descent had lived on the land, worked on the land, and died on the land -- unquestioned for generations. With the coming of the Americans, that way of life would all change. The Spanish Land Grants of New Mexico would be lost forever, a casualty of man's greed. To some historians, lost land is the harbinger of a lost cultural identity. According to Reies Tijerina, "the ties of our culture with the land are indivisible."

In 1854, the U.S. Congress was not overly concerned about lost cultural identity. The United States, bound by the Treaty of Guadalupe Bay Hidalgo, had promised to respect and protect the traditional lands of the citizens of New Mexico. Politicians in Washington had no intention of keeping this promise.

When Surveyor-General William Pelham arrived in Santa Fe, over one thousand claims awaited settlement. Historian William A. Kelleher noted that claims approved by Congress, "were generally those with the most persistent influence on the outside of the most powerful political influence on the inside."

The legal business in Santa Fe began to flourish. So too the fraudulent land surveys. Because of vague wording in many of the grants, men whom

Governor E.G. Ross characterized as sharp, shrewd Americans, began to accept land as payment for a multitude of goods and services, only to stretch their claims to limits which would boggle the ordinary imagination.

In 1885, Surveyor-General George W. Julian was astonished at the absolute anarchy pervading the land-grant claims. The 130-acre Canada Ancha grant was now a claim for 375 square miles. Canon de Chama was an original grant of 184,000 acres. Previous surveyor generals increased the number until final claims were for 472,000 acres. American lawyers and settlers, with the full force of the United States judicial system and a sympathetic Congress behind them, eventually wrested control of more than 80% of the Spanish land grants from the descendants of the original colonizing families of New Mexico.

In May 1966, Reies Tijerina traveled to Spain to research land-grant matters in Spanish land law at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. A Spanish newspaper labeled him the Martin Luther King of the Spanish-Americans. At the time, his Alianza organization claimed a membership of 20,000 people throughout the Southwest and California.

In July, Tijerina called for a peaceful civil rights march on New Mexico's state capital, Santa Fe. Approximately one hundred followers hiked the 65

miles from Alianza headquarters in Albuquerque to the state capital. Governor Jack Campbell eventually received the group's proclamation, demanding executive action from the President on behalf of land-grant claimants. Campbell promised to send the proclamation to Washington, where it was met with total inaction.

The next proclamation issued by Alianza declared the Pueblo de San Joaquin Rio De Chama an independent free city-state. The proclamation was delivered by process server to William D. Hearst in Albuquerque's regional U.S. Forest Service office. Hearst replied that the property listed in the proposed claim was located in the Pueblo San Joaquin and belonged to United States government. "Full resources will be used to protect it."

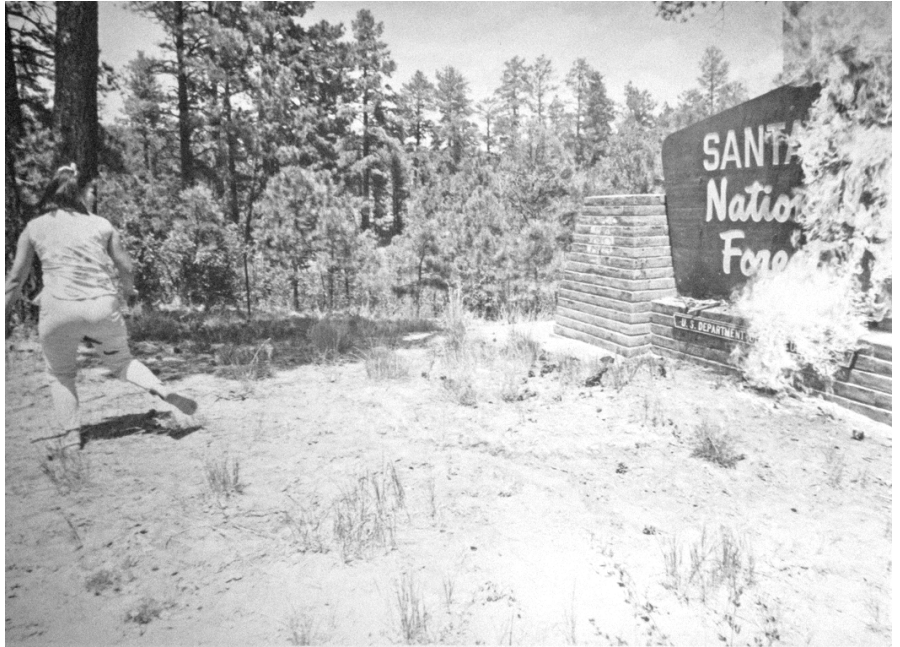
Tijerina and the Alianza members viewed those remarks as fighting words. Tempers flared. Then, the most symbolic event in the land-grant campaign occurred.

Tijerina and one hundred followers took over a portion of a national forest in northern New Mexico by force. For the first time in more than 100 years, the town of San Joaquin was revived as a communal entity. Holding the land by the authority of centuries-old Spanish land grants, the group expelled two forest rangers, after arresting and trying them. The rangers were convicted of trespassing. They were then fined \$50,

given a suspended sentence, and sent on their way.

The crowd cheered, as federal and state officers watched silently from the road. After a few days, the protesters grew tired of the occupation and left. The forest rangers reclaimed the land, tearing down the signs proclaiming República de San Joaquin del Rio de Chama. U.S. Attorney John Quinn began preparing charges which would ultimately result in only one conviction.

Tijerina, however, was determined to take possession of the town of San Joaquin by summer -- once and forever. He set a tentative date of June 3 at the site of San Joaquin. Fate would intervene, however. The small Rio Arriba courthouse would be the next target of the land grants activists, and on June 5, 1967, it would be held for ninety minutes against the full might of the State of New Mexico.



Alianza Member burns down Santa Fe National Forest sign.



Tijerina's Alianza organization attempts to reclaim land.

Revolution!

Monday, June 5, 1967.

High clouds rolled overhead in northern New Mexico. By three o'clock in the afternoon, Angie Zamora and Gloria Garcia were about ready to call it a day. The Confia Clinic in Tierra Amarilla had seen its usual trickle of visitors that day. Dr. Dabbs wasn't in this week, because of Air National Guard duties in Wisconsin. Angie and Gloria had little to do but wait for the clock to signal closing time. News reports on the radio indicated another war had flared up in the Middle East.

When the phone rang at 3:15, an excited caller informed Gloria that a shooting had taken place at the Rio Arriba County Courthouse. An ambulance was needed immediately. Angie Zamora grabbed her purse and walked out to the clinic ambulance. Monday, June 5, was not to be a normal day – not in the Middle East and certainly not in northern New Mexico.

###

Fifteen miles out of town, state police officer Juan Santistevan was fighting off the boredom of a routine patrol. At 2:30, a radio call summoned him to the Hartman Butane Garage in Tierra Amarilla. According to the radio operator, there was an accident involving



The Rio Arriba County Courthouse (photo by Richard Lester)

two vehicles. Officers Alex Quintana and George Chaves were also dispatched and on their way to the scene. Acknowledging the radio call and switching on his emergency red lights, Santistevan hit the accelerator of his black patrol unit and raced to the scene of the accident.

Within minutes, the state patrolman arrived at the Hartman Butane Garage. Before he could begin his accident investigation, four shots rang out from the vicinity of the courthouse. Santistevan jumped back into his state police unit and roared toward the building. A hail of gunfire would shortly demolish Patrol Car 234 and turn Santistevan's day into a living nightmare.

###

Nobody saw them coming. Twenty armed raiders in a caravan of three cars and a pickup truck entered Tierra Amarilla from the south. Known as T.A. to the local folks, the quiet rustic mountain village is in

a valley in northern New Mexico's mountainous high country.

On June 5, the local movie house offered a twin bill featuring *El Fugitivo* and *El Rifle Implacable*. Outside the F.H. Strauss store, with its flaking paint and rotting wood, a faded sign proclaimed a big dance scheduled for tonight.

The thick-walled Adobe hotel had long since been boarded up. The town's major building and purpose for existing these days was the county courthouse and the legal activity which transpired there in the name of Rio Arriba County.

While formidable in structure, the two-story building also showed evidence of neglect and decay, with its fading pink and blue walls. As one New York Times journalist would later note, all of Rio Arriba County, including the county seat of T.A., was "nothing more than Appalachia with a language problem."

###

The raiding party crested the heavily forested rise south of town and slowly approached the courthouse. Leading the caravan was Esequiel Dominguez in his 1952 Brown Ford station wagon. Cirilio Garcia followed behind in his 1964 white and blue Chevy station wagon.

Moises Morales was driving his wrecked white 1965 Chevy. Taking up the rear of the convoy, Juan Valdez drove his green Dodge pick-up truck, which appeared heavily loaded. A tarp over the back bed covered the assault gear. Three persons were in front. An unknown number were in the back. Among the passengers of the last two vehicles, however, was Reies Lopez Tijerina.

Parking west of the courthouse, Juan Valdez, Baltazar Martinez, white-haired Baltazar Apodaca, and Rose Tijerina (Reies' daughter) entered the building. Gloria Sifuentes was taking a break from her typing chores in the County assessor's office. Standing in the front hallway at the candy machine, she was among the first to spot the intruders. Gloria remembers that "the three men and the girl walked over to the state policeman standing near the radiator." Gloria heard one of the men tell the officer, "Okay, hold it right there." According to Gloria, "That's when I heard the shot."

###

Nick Saiz had been a New Mexico state police officer for about three years. In June 1967, he was assigned to duty in Shiprock, New Mexico, but for security reasons in connection with a proposed arraignment in Rio Arriba, he found himself assigned to duty at the Rio

Arriba County Courthouse on the afternoon of June 5.

A few hours earlier, sitting with fellow officers George Chavis and Alex Quintana in the sheriff's office, there was little to do but pass the time with small talk and war stories. When the call came in requesting assistance at a two-car accident at Hartman's Butane Garage, George and Alex decided to handle the call. Shortly afterward, Officer Saiz escorted the assistant district attorney from the courthouse to his car. Returning to the building, Saiz leaned against the antique steam radiator in the lobby, casually noting three men and a girl of about 19 entering the courthouse.

As the group approached, Saiz noticed too late that something was amiss. One of the men aimed a pistol in his direction. He heard an order to turn over his weapon. Turning to the side, his hand rushed for his holster – stopped only by a flash of blinding pain as a bullet slammed through his left shoulder, chest, and lung. And that, said eyewitness E.R. Gleasner, "was when the war began."

Officer Saiz knew he had been seriously wounded. His futile attempt at resistance forced the opening shots in what history would record as America's last civil insurrection. The title would hold true until the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021.

###

Upstairs in his chambers, Judge J.M. Scarborough was discussing a default divorce case with blind attorney Monroe Fox. Accompanying Fox were his wife, his guide

dog, and his client. Following the conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Fox turned to go downstairs while a young man, claiming to be the son-in-law of one of the defendants tried that morning, approached the judge. At that moment, Officer Nick Saiz felt the blinding pain of a bullet slashing through his arm and chest.

"I heard a sharp noise," said Judge Scarborough, "but I rather thought it was of some other origin. I continued talking to the young man. Shortly, I heard a series of sharp noises that I definitely recognized as gunshots."

"Suddenly, the door to the main courtroom burst open and Mrs. Fox rushed back in.

"Someone is shooting," she yelled. Her husband trailed behind her with arms outstretched, bleeding. "Help me, Judge. Help me, Judge."

Justice of the Peace Tomas Cordova, who had joined the group moments before, took the blind attorney's arm and escorted him -- along with his wife and dog -- into the judge's private chambers. Judge Scarborough followed, with his court reporter, Mike Rice. Locking the doors behind them, the group proceeded to look out the east window of the courtroom, to determine exactly what was going on.

Downstairs in the hallway, Gloria Sifuentes was running from the candy machine back to her office. There she reported to a stunned coworker, "They just shot a policeman!"

###

Rio Arriba County Sheriff Benny Naranjo was passing the time in his office with his deputy and jailer, Eulogio Salazar. Salazar seemed lost in his private thoughts, as Benny scanned the newspaper from a chair at the side of the desk. As the first shot was fired down the hall, he turned to his jailer.

“What was that?”

“Wasn't that a shot?” countered Salazar.

Without waiting for a response, the deputy ran down the hall, only to encounter Reies Lopez Tijerina. Salazar claimed that Tijerina warned him, “You better not try to escape, or I'll kill you.” Tijerina denied that such an exchange ever took place. In fact, Salazar later admitted that he wasn't paying attention to anything Tijerina said, because they had known each other for approximately 11 years. Salazar simply turned and ran back to the sheriff's office.

Just inside the office, the fleeing jailer crashed head-on into a startled Sheriff Naranjo, who had torn off his shoulder patches and hidden his badge in a desk drawer.

Salazar recalled, “I did not say anything to Benny Naranjo, and at this time, I saw Benny's pistol fly up in the air. I don't know whether he had it in his hand, or whether he had it in his holster. Maybe Reies knocked it out of his hand, because Reies was right after me.”

The frightened deputy then ran to the window, shoving it

up with explosive force. As he started to jump out the window, gunfire erupted outside of the courthouse. One of the bullets hit the deputy on the left side of his face near the jaw. He recalled the moment of impact:

My head felt like it was on fire, but I did not black out. I remember that when I jumped out the window, I held myself up against the wall with my left hand. I immediately turned to the right to run around the northeast corner of the county courthouse.

By now the entire building was in an uproar. County Manager Joe Branch had been presiding over a county commissioners' meeting in his office. The group had just concluded discussion of a problem concerning Ojo Caliente with Deputy Sheriff Pete Jaramillo, when the gunfire opened.

Commissioner Nick Salazar hit the floor, squatting under the table. The other commissioners were also looking for cover. At that point, Salazar recalled, “Someone kicked the front door open and came into the office. I don't know how many came into the office, but I did see one man wearing khaki fatigue pants and combat boots.”

Joe Branch also remembered seeing the raiding party burst in. Branch notes that he was not sure whether it was Baltazar Martinez or another person who later pulled the phone from the wall, threw it on the floor, and stomped on it.” (State

police reports indicate Juan Valdez destroyed the phone. Valdes was also the one who shot Officer Saiz in the hallway).

According to Branch, “One who kicked the door open came into the office and told everyone to lay on the floor or he would kill us. I became very excited and frightened, and I was really in a state of shock.”

So was Deputy Sheriff Pete Jaramillo. While lying on the floor, he carefully removed his pistol from his holster and slid it under a desk.

“You, stand up!” ordered Baltazar Martinez. “Give me your pistol. Put your hands in the air.”

“I don't have my pistol,” Deputy Jaramillo responded, turning to display an empty holster.

The young raider, with a dagger and dynamite sticks strapped to his belt, glanced around. He quickly spotted the lawman's weapon near the desk. “Kick that pistol toward me.”

Deputy Jaramillo complied. Martinez picked up the gun, ordering everyone on their feet. With their hands in the air, the county commissioners walked out into the hallway past an unmoving state police officer who appeared to be dead.

By this time, Oralia Olivas, who was eating lunch two houses down from the courthouse, became concerned enough with the uproar to go outside to see what was going

on. "What's happening?" she inquired of a couple of girls running from the courthouse. They continued to flee without responding.

Oralia spotted Salomon Luna running toward his house but could not get an answer from him either. Other people appeared to be running from the vicinity. Suddenly, the confused woman heard her name called out by a voice which seemed far away. She continued to walk and "again I heard my name. At this time, I stopped to listen. I looked back and saw my brother-in-law, Eulogio Salazar, standing a little way from the house. He was swaying."

Asking the wounded lawman what happened, he answered in a garbled voice, "I've been shot."

Taking him into the house, Oralia quickly fetched a large pan of water and started cleaning the wounds on Salazar's jaw. She continued to clean his mouth and wounds, noticing several chips of white bone. "I also took out bits of his denture plate," she said.

As Oralia removed several teeth from her brother-in-law's mouth and throat, she spotted blood on his right arm running down his wrist. "What you have here?" she asked Eulogio.

The jailer responded that he had been shot. Rolling up his shirtsleeve, Oralia was unable to find the wound. Tearing the sleeve off, she discovered a round purple hole in the

shoulder from which the blood was oozing. In an attempt to stop the bleeding, she applied a tourniquet. Her daughter Rosemary and son-in-law, Placido, placed an emergency call to the Confia Clinic for an ambulance. Then, they ran off to fetch a doctor.

The first emergency vehicle to arrive at the scene was not an ambulance. Instead, the sporadic gunfire had drawn the attention of state police officer Juan Santistevan who barreled into the courthouse area from the west. He recalls that there were approximately five men lined up along the road right in front of the courthouse. "They started shooting at me."

With approximately fifty feet between him and the gunmen, Santistevan slammed on the brakes and crouched down on the seat of his patrol unit. Bullets slammed into the vehicle near the right headlight and through the driver's side of the windshield.

Santistevan shifted into reverse from a reclining position in the front seat, to slowly back the besieged police car away from the attackers. Additional bullets crashed into the windshield, as the attackers began advancing on the patrol car.

Radioing Santa Fe for help, Santistevan decided to get out of the vehicle to look for assistance from officers George Chavis and Alex Quintana, who were right behind him moments before the shooting started. Now they were nowhere to be

seen. Officer Juan Santistevan decided he would not face the gunmen alone. He fled from the vehicle, running down the hill, and went behind Victor Garcia's house. "I stood there for a while, looking through the window. I could see them nearing my car. I took off towards the T.A. Junior High School, located at the bottom of the hill."

After collecting his wits for a few minutes at the junior high school, Santistevan decided to make another attempt to locate -- and team up with -- fellow officers Chavez and Quintana.

Spotting their police units near the village café, he made his way to the building and established contact. The café would become the state police command post for the duration of the ninety-minute raid. None of the three state police officers would make any attempt to interfere with the raid until well after the last intruder had fled the scene.

The second emergency vehicle on the scene was Angie Zamora's ambulance. She received a much quieter reception.

Parking in the middle of the road in front of the courthouse, Angie could hear sporadic gunfire. A man approached the ambulance, demanding in Spanish, "Give me the keys."

"No," replied the spunky twenty-year-old.

"I'm in a real hurry. Give me the keys!" insisted the man.

"No," came the young woman's reply. The stranger reached in the window to take them.

Angie Zamora remained adamant in her refusal to give up the keys to the emergency vehicle.

Finally, the man ordered her to wait right there as he hurried back into the courthouse.

Radioing back to the clinic, Angie notified Gloria Garcia of the situation. Gloria's advice was to leave immediately.

"No," responded Angie. "I've been ordered to stay here, and I will!"

Gunfire punctuated her closing radio message to the clinic.

Not knowing whether the shots were aimed at her, little Angie Zamora ducked down in the seat, determined to remain on duty in her ambulance, which was parked in front of the courthouse.

Inside the occupied court building, Juan Valdez appointed four of the detained county employees to get state police officer Nick Saiz, put him on a stretcher, and take him to the ambulance.

Dan Sanchez, caseworker for the welfare department, left to retrieve the stretcher from Angie Zamora. As the stretcher carrying Saiz came out of the courthouse, Angie went around to the back of her vehicle, opened the door, and showed the stretcher bearers how to fold the wheels. Turning to one of the armed raiders in the street, she explained, "We are not on anyone's side. We are just here to do our job."

"Bueno! Bueno!" came the reply.

Inside the courthouse, things were settling down. Judge Scarborough, along with Mr. and Mrs. Fox, and court reporter Mike Rice, remained undiscovered in the judge's private chambers. After about an hour of hiding, the judge unlocked the door leading into the old health department office, where he discovered a phone still in working order. Rice called the governor's office in Santa Fe and told gubernatorial aide Larry Prentice about the armed

attack and occupation of the courthouse.

"They're shooting at us," he whispered. "They're shooting live bullets at us. I'm under a table. I can't speak up because they'll kill me."

Prentice promised to contact state police chief Joe Black immediately. Help was already on the way, however.

In the final phase of the takeover, hostages were driven from various places of concealment. All courthouse occupants, including two prisoners confined in the jail on alcohol-related charges, were gathered up in the county commissioners' office. During this stage of the operation, white-haired seventy-two-year-old raider

Baltazar Apodaca cautioned the more militant team members not to harm anyone. Sheriff Benny Naranjo later reported to reporters that several times he heard Reies Tijerina saying not to hurt anybody.

Despite his ordeal, Sheriff Benny Naranjo would emerge as an apologist for Tijerina within an hour after the raid ended. In front of KOB-TV cameras, Naranjo explained, "It wasn't any jailbreak like you guys said. That's all wrong... I kept hearing them say that Reies said not to hurt nobody. Reies said not to hurt nobody. The one who got shot, that was because he went for his gun."

When authorities later attempted to pin the Salazar shooting on Tijerina, the only eyewitness to that shooting

other than the victim was Benny Naranjo. He refused to implicate Tijerina, noting that Deputy Salazar attempted to jump out of the north window “and I don't know if they shot him when he was going through the window or whether they shot him when he hit the ground. I looked out the window and I saw approximately three or four subjects with rifles... There were a lot of people standing outside... I did not get a good look at the boys standing outside the window. I just don't know what happened.”

With the departure of the wounded state police officer, Nick Saiz, in the Confia Clinic ambulance, Reies Tijerina gathered his men.

“Let's go, let's go!” he exclaimed.

Moises Morales' white Chevy was the first to leave, followed by Juan Valdez in his Dodge pickup, and Esequiel Dominguez in his Ford station wagon. Except for Baltazar Martinez and Baltazar Apodaca, who remained at the courthouse as rear guards, the raiding party retreated south on State Road 162.

###

Unknown to the raiders, a reporter for the *Albuquerque Journal* was on the telephone to his editor when the raid began. Before being discovered and taken hostage, Larry Calloway was able to alert Albuquerque of the momentous events taking place in northern New Mexico.

The raid was still in progress when United Press International flashed a bulletin throughout the world.

Calloway witnessed much of the action from his vantage point inside the wooden pay-telephone booth in the courthouse hallway. Placing a collect call to the Albuquerque bureau, the young reporter gave his story to Ed McManus. He believed it was close to three pm.

“I dictated about three hundred words to him, and I still hadn't finished dictating when I heard a shot behind me.”

Calloway turned to see a group of four people. One of them held a pistol. While he did not see the wounded state police officer, Calloway's instincts told him he was in the middle of a volatile situation. His first thought, after hearing the shot, was to drop to the floor in order to get out of the line of fire.

“I laid on the floor in the telephone booth against the wall, and I could hear more shooting going on all over the inside and outside of the courthouse. I could hear a lot of people running up and down the stairs. I believe I laid in the phone booth for approximately twenty minutes.”

All this time, newsmen in Albuquerque at the other end of the line were alerting authorities and the public. They listened intently to the sounds of the insurrection. Rumors as to exactly what was going on in

T.A. were running rampant. A jailbreak was in progress. An armed assault on the courthouse had taken place.

Many people were taken hostage. The entire town was being held captive. Fifty men with tommy-guns were shooting people. Imagination and panic blurred reality on that June 5 afternoon in New Mexico. Twenty minutes after giving the alert, Calloway was discovered by the raiders. He described his capture:

I could see three men, one of which was standing at a distance. One of them grabbed me, pulled me to my feet, and said, “Who are you calling?”

I explained that I was a reporter phoning in a story.

The raider picked up the receiver, listened for a moment, and then pulled the phone off the wall. Larry Calloway spent the rest of the courthouse occupation with the majority of the detained county employees in the county commissioners' office.

At the Olivas' house, Oralia continued to clean Eulogio Salazar's wounds, while awaiting a doctor and the ambulance. The wounded jailer, now using mostly sign language, indicated he was feeling very bad, to the point of losing consciousness. His worried sister-in-law opened the back door to allow better circulation of air and began fanning him with his hat.

“Also, I used a wet towel with cold water to wipe his face, neck, and head,” recalled

Oralia, "because he was perspiring quite heavy."

As her family had still not returned with the doctor, Oralia decided to seek help from the wounded jailer's wife. She helped Eulogio to the bedroom, where he lay down. Propping three pillows under his head to provide as much comfort as possible, she headed over to his home, just a short way from the courthouse.

Finding no one there, she returned to her house, where Eulogio's brother, Tito, was backing out of the yard in his pickup. With him was his wounded brother.

Eulogio Salazar was finally on his way to the Espanola hospital, sixty miles away. In Espanola, waiting doctors were preparing to receive him, as well as the wounded state policeman Nick Saiz.

With the departure of the main party of raiders, Baltazar Martinez did not intend to stick around for a prolonged rear-guard action. Accompanied by Baltazar Apodaca, he singled out two of the hostages to accompany him on the getaway. With hands tied behind them, heavysset Deputy Sheriff Pete Jaramillo and reporter Larry Calloway were hustled to the door of the commissioners' room.

The group marched out to Tommy Cordova's red pickup truck parked across the street near a tree. After considering taking Nick Saiz' parked state police cruiser, Martinez then

spotted a 1966 green GTO parked near the northeast corner of the courthouse. He asked Deputy Jaramillo, "Is that your car?" "Yes, it is," replied the lawman.

Martinez left the pickup and discovered keys in the GTO's ignition. According to Jaramillo, "the keys have been left in my car by Sheriff Benny Naranjo, who had been listening to the news on the car radio earlier in the day."

Handcuffing Pete Jaramillo with his own handcuffs, Martinez ordered Larry Calloway into the backseat, to be guarded by Baltazar Apodaca. Upfront, Baltazar Martinez drove with his left hand, while covering Pete Jaramillo with his right.

With the GTO's gas gauge riding close to empty, Martinez decided to pull into a Shell station just south of the Martinez house. A young boy came out of the station.

"Fill it up," ordered Martinez. "Fill it up with the best gas and check the oil. If it needs oil, put in the best oil."

Turning to Calloway in the backseat, Martinez asked, "You have any money?"

"My billfold is in my left pocket," Calloway responded.

At this point, the young gas station attendant became very nervous. He later told authorities, "I was so nervous, I couldn't even find the dipstick to the engine."

Somehow, the young Joe Romero Junior poured a quart

of oil into the crankcase and filled the gas tank.

Martinez reached back and removed Calloway's wallet, extracting a twenty-dollar bill. He paid Joe Junior for the gas, oil, and two cans of Coca-Cola. Placing the change back in the wallet, Martinez then returned it to Calloway's coat pocket.

Once again, the GTO was on the move, heading toward Canjilon on Highway 84. Back in T.A., families settled behind closed doors, peering cautiously through living-room curtains.

Suddenly, a Santa Fe state police dispatcher called for State Unit 31. The call was overheard in Deputy Jaramillo's GTO. In Spanish, Baltazar Martinez warned, "If you don't want Pete Jaramillo killed, open the road for me." He then reached down and shut off the police radio.

The raid on the Rio Arriba County Courthouse was over. The wrath of the forces of law and order was yet to come.

A Wounded Cause

Reies Lopez Tijerina was always a powerful and persuasive speaker in public. In private, his life was characterized by a gentle and sensitive heart. He devoted his attention to family and friends and was always ready to feed whoever showed up at his door.

During the height of land-grant movement, Alianza headquarters was the frequent meeting place for hearty meals, dances and weddings. As with his colleagues in the various civil rights movements of the 1960s, Tijerina preached the gospel of non-violent confrontation.

With the bloodshed at Rio Arriba County Courthouse on June 5, 1967, which Tijerina attributed to some of the youthful, more radical Alianza members, a disheartened Tijerina became the subject of the most intensive manhunt ever mounted in the Southwest. When he was finally taken peacefully into custody, the light of land-grant cause had already begun to dim. For a few heady moments, however, the cause shared time on international newswires with the war which broke out almost simultaneously on June 5 in the Middle East.

The initial response of the State of New Mexico to the courthouse raid seemed characterized more by rage and wounded pride than by the forces of law and order. Alianza family members were indiscriminately gathered up and detained as bait in a muddy sheep pen. The National Guard was mobilized, and a tank actually rolled up to the Rio Arriba County courthouse.

Any just cause in which people hold passionate beliefs is likely to attract its share of firebrands, as

well as moderates. Reies Tijerina's cause appeared long on rhetoric and symbolic action, while short on violence – until June 5. Unfortunately, unexpected violence gave the movement maximum world attention, but it also assured a quick demise to a movement, whose leadership believed in a show of force, but never condoned violence as a legitimate means to an end.



Tijerina supporter, being arrested by New Mexico State Police.

New Mexico Goes to War

Tierra Amarilla, the town of yellow earth, was deserted. An eerie silence enveloped the main street. Nothing moved. Thirteen-year-old Sammy Martinez and his brother Harry had never seen anything quite like it. Ignoring their parents' orders to remain inside the house, they climbed out of a second-story window, found an attractive vantage point, and watched the raid unfold from the moment the Confia Clinic ambulance began loading the wounded Nick Saiz for transport.

With the departure of Baltazar Martinez and his hostages, the fury, frustration, and outrage of the afternoon were all spent. Now there was nothing. No sound. No signs of life. A frozen tableau. Blood smeared a courthouse wall and floor.

Bloodstains could also be seen on the ground below. Bullet holes pockmarked walls and doors of the stricken county building. Broken glass lay scattered everywhere. Disabled police cars remained stationary in their tracks, their doors hanging open.

County Commissioner Nick Salazar recalled the scene inside the courthouse after the raid: *I remember that all of the offices were open; there were papers laying all over the*

floors, the safe was open, and Abelardo Martinez and myself stood by for quite a while knowing that there was a large amount of very important papers laying on the floor.

After locating his wife, Justice of the Peace Thomas Cordova decided to protect the county records, which were strewn all over the floor:

We decided that it would be best if we had some witnesses, in case anything was missing. They would know that we did not take it. Cipriano Padilla and Nick Salazar assisted us in putting all the papers and cash register into the vault. After this, I remembered about Judge Scarborough and Monroe Fox being upstairs, and we thought that maybe they had shot them...

That same thought entered Sheriff Benny Naranjo's mind. Huddled with the other hostages in the county commissioners' room, Naranjo opened the door a crack. He spotted reporter Doyle Akers from Santa Fe.

"Have you seen anyone outside? Naranjo whispered.

"No," Doyle answered. "I haven't seen anyone outside, but I did pass Pete Jaramillo's car going south from the courthouse."

Telling the female employees they could leave, Naranjo and Akers ran to the second floor. After hearing all the

shooting upstairs, the Rio Arriba Sheriff was certain that the raiders had found the judge, the court reporter, and Mr. & Mrs. Fox, and had killed them all.

Finding the courtroom empty, Naranjo raced to the judge's private chambers, where he discovered the outer door in shambles. The inner door was closed and locked.

"Judge! Judge!" yelled the excited sheriff. Mrs. Fox opened the door. Her husband and their seeing-eye dog were the only occupants in the room. Suddenly, someone yelled from the adjoining welfare office.

"Sheriff! Sheriff! Is that you?"

Entering the office, Sheriff Naranjo spotted Judge Scarborough and Mike Rice.

"I thought you had been killed," explained the judge.

"I thought they killed you," answered Naranjo.

At that moment, two state police units rounded the corner by the school, cautiously approaching the courthouse. Shotgun barrels protruded from the vehicles' windows. The State of New Mexico was about to reassert its authority in Rio Arriba County.

With Governor David Cargo out-of-state visiting with George Romney in Michigan, acting governor E. Lee Francis alerted General John Pershing Jolly, commander of the New Mexico National Guard.

Francis informed the general that his assistance might be necessary. It wasn't long before state police chief Joe Black asked Francis to call out the National Guard.

Francis recalled that he felt very relieved at that point, noting that, "the main job now is up to State Police chief Joe Black and his men, along with Major General Jolly and his National Guard troops."

As the Michigan Air National Guard prepared to return Governor Cargo to New Mexico, a call for assistance went out to the New Mexico Mounted Patrol, the Jicarilla Apache Police, the United States Forest Service, the FBI, and several northern New Mexico sheriff's departments.

###

State police helicopters took to the skies with submachine gun-toting officers riding shotgun. State police cruisers converged on T.A. with sirens screaming and red lights flashing.

Troop trucks carrying more than three hundred rifle-toting national guardsmen were also on the move toward Rio Arriba. State police reinforcements and National Guard jeeps formed a protective ring around the courthouse, ready to ward off a second assault. Two Korean War duster tanks, equipped with 40 mm cannons, lumbered into the area.

The largest manhunt ever mounted in New Mexico was underway. Reies Tijerina had

become the state's most sought-after fugitive. New Mexico had gone to war.

###

With a gun to his head, Deputy Sheriff Pete Jaramillo still found himself a captive in his own car. Racing south toward the small ranching community of Canjilon, the green GTO suddenly passed the state police unit heading for T.A. Jaramillo noticed the state police officers execute an immediate U-turn.

Within minutes, the GTO approached a state police roadblock. Martinez stuck his head out the window and yelled, "You better let us go, or I'll kill Pete." Pete Jaramillo remembered that, at this time, Martinez "kept the pistol pointed directly at my left temple."

State police officer Sam Gallegos helplessly waved the vehicle through the roadblock.

Arriving at Canjilon, the raiders and their captives encountered more opposition. Deputy Jaramillo detailed their arrival:

After we got into the town of Canjilon, where the road crosses near a Chevron station, there was a large puddle of mud and water, and there was also another state police roadblock. Again, Baltazar Martinez told the state police that they had better let us go by, or he was going to kill me.

Martinez was paying more attention to the state policeman, and he did not watch what he was doing. So, we got my car stuck in the mud puddle on the

side of the road. At this time, he pulled me out of the car and placed the pistol at the back of my head.

Martinez then stepped out of the vehicle. Holding the captive deputy at gunpoint, the two started to march down the side of the road.

Back at the vehicle, Apodaca - the other captor - then ordered reporter Larry Calloway out of the car, holding a carbine to his neck. Slowly they walked toward the gate of the churchyard. At that moment, in full view of officers standing by, Calloway saw his chance:

I felt that if I could get my left hand free from behind, I could try to get the carbine from Baltazar Apodaca. Eventually, he let it slip to my right side and I turned around, pushed the barrel down towards the ground with my left hand, and grasped the stock with my right hand.

Two shots rang out as the reporter wrestled the firearm from the old man. In the scuffle, Larry Calloway lost his glasses. The last thing he remembers seeing was several police officers rushing over to handcuff Apodaca.

While Calloway was making his escape, Deputy Pete Jaramillo found himself being pulled by his handcuffs over to the post office, still Baltazar Martinez's prisoner.

Suddenly, a thin gray-haired old lady rushed up to the pair. Aurelia Martinez, mother of the young kidnapper, implored her son to let his hostage go. Martinez then spotted three boys sitting in a green Plymouth in the driveway between the post office and Bob's General Store. He whisked his captive over to the vehicle and into the backseat, were 12-year-old Danny Garcia and his 13-year-old friend Ray Baldonado were both startled and frightened.

Then, the old lady climbed into the crowded vehicle. Martinez ordered 19-year-old Leroy Garcia in the driver's seat to fire up the engine and head for the hills. With a roar, the engine came to life, as Leroy Garcia hit the accelerator and took off down the road.

As the three youngsters, the old lady, the excited raider, and the captive deputy sped southeast from Canjilon toward the mountains, Pete Jaramillo began to hope for an imminent release.

During this time, the mother almost had her son convinced to set the deputy free and turn himself in.

Apparently, Baltazar Martinez had thought about turning Jaramillo loose because he told the driver to stop the car – which he did.

Spotting state police cars pulling up behind them, Martinez changed his mind and decided to hang onto his hostage. The three young boys in front were tired of the drama and

made their escape to a nearby hill. Mrs. Martinez walked back to the police units to converse with the officers. Returning to the vehicle containing her son and his captive, the old woman again implored her son to turn the deputy loose.

"I want to turn him loose," explained Martinez. "I'm not going to turn myself in. I don't want to go to the electric chair."

Hauling Pete Jaramillo out of the backseat, Martinez inched his way backwards. Upon reaching the bushy area of the mountain, the pair began to run. Overweight and out of shape, Jaramillo was not up to the task:

It was during this time that I could see him falling back a little way, and he appeared to try to be listening for sounds and noises. He would yell at me once or twice to keep running, but I could see that he was getting further away from me all the time, and I could see that he was still trying to hear if anyone was coming after us.

It was at this time that I fell near a large pine tree. I fell on my face, and I just lay there for a while trying to get my breath.

Deputy Sheriff Pete Jaramillo did not realize it at the time, but his captor would not return. He was, at that moment, a free man.

Manhunt

By nine o'clock on Wednesday morning, Reies Tijerina was still at large. The press attacked the land-grant leader all week, referring to him as King Tiger. Governor Cargo decided that the military were only scaring people. The National Guard had outlived its usefulness.

Cargo ordered a withdrawal. Equipment was packed up, pup tents were taken down. A hospital van, field kitchen, troop trucks, jeeps, and tanks retreated from the battlefield that was Rio Arriba County.

###

Around midnight on Saturday, June 10, Ubaldo Velasquez from Coyote wheeled his brown 1964 into the service station at San Ysidro. A suspicious attendant noted that Velasquez had two other men with him.

The passenger riding in the front seat was a young Hispanic male about nineteen years old. The individual in back was about 5'10" tall, 175 pounds, with wavy black hair. He was wearing a western shirt and khaki pants. The most striking feature about the stranger, however, were his penetrating green eyes.

As the stranger walked toward the service station for a drink of water from a water hose, the attendant's pulse raced. He knew in his heart that he had just come face-to-face

with the Southwest's most famous fugitive.

State police dispatcher Frank Wallace was also excited. The gas station operator seemed pretty sure of himself on the telephone.

His description matched that of Tijerina. Wallace pushed the button on his radio console and alerted all police units in the area.

“Tijerina in a brown Ford headed south on State Road 44 with two other males!”

Driving through Bernalillo, a town just 70 miles north of Albuquerque, two state police narcotics officers first spotted the brown Ford.

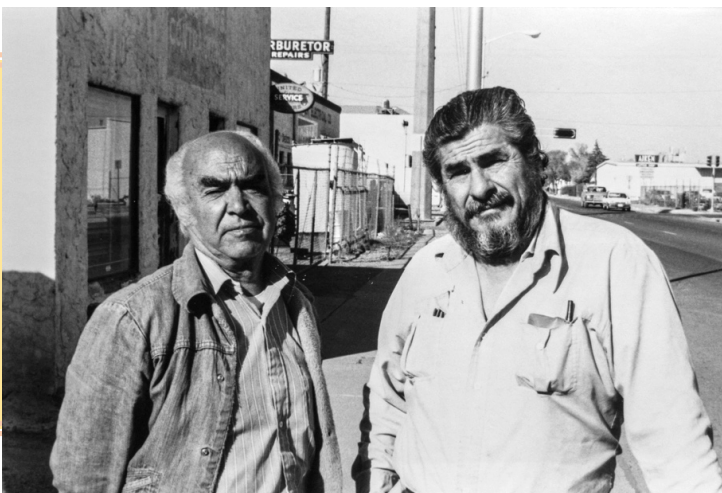
Following close behind, they radioed for a backup unit. In a matter of minutes, a marked state police car, coming from the opposite direction, swerved in front of the Ford. Officers from both vehicles swarmed over the suspicious vehicle at gunpoint. The largest manhunt in the history of New Mexico came to a quiet end.



Alianza Headquarters

Ubaldo Velasquez and his 19-year-old passenger, were removed from the front seat. There was no resistance. Awakened from his sleep in the back seat was Reies Lopez Tijerina – King Tiger. Moments later, no less than six police cars with sirens blaring and red lights flashing, raced the prisoners to the Santa Fe Jail.

Despite the fanaticism that seemed to characterize the first days of the search, Chief Joe Black made an interesting statement to the press, characterizing the capture of the Alianza leader. Tijerina, he noted, “was a jewel that dropped out of the setting, and we picked it up.”



Reies Lopez Tijerina shown on the right with a former Alianza member.

Afterward

With the removal of Reies Tijerina from leadership of the land-grant cause, the children of Cortez and Coronado found little hope of righting the wrongs of the century before.

After a short jail stint, Tijerina spent his golden years relaxing at his home at the land-grant town of San Joaquin in the present-day village of Coyote, New Mexico. Some of his time and energy were taken up with visiting grandchildren in Albuquerque. His memories included invitations to lecture throughout the world, especially in Third World countries where the cause of people dispossessed of the land made him a genuine hero. The Tijerina crusade for land grants justice continues to this day, to strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of those who have been evicted from their homelands by force of arms.

In the 1980s, Hollywood considered telling the Tijerina story on the silver screen. Mexican filmmakers, by contrast, had already produced a Tijerina epic. He continues to stir the imagination of those in faraway places who yearn for the eventual restoration of land that they call home.

Interview with Richard Lester

June 17, 2023 9 a.m.

Daytona Beach, Florida

Interviewer: Gary Lester

1. How did you first meet Reies Lopez Tijerina?

Richard: I first met Reies Tijerina in 1983 when I was working as the principal of Coronado High School in Gallina, New Mexico. At the time, Tijerina lived in a well-protected compound in the nearby village of Coyote. He lived in fear that the authorities would somehow bring harm to his children as revenge for his past exploits. Consequently, the State of New Mexico Department of Education had a very expensive arrangement to provide instruction in his home.

My superintendent at the time, Eufrazio Vigil, was asked to do what he could to entice Tijerina to send his young daughter to school and save the state a bundle of money. Now, Tijerina had a deep distrust of Anglos. As luck would have it, I was the only Anglo administrator in the school district. Despite this handicap, I was assigned to win Tijerina over. Surprisingly, after making a few visits to the compound and spending a good deal of time chatting with Tijerina, he agreed to send his daughter to school in Gallina.

The next year, I was named superintendent. At that time, I was able to really shower Tijerina with appreciation. I named him as one of my parent committee members and made sure he attended every conference in Santa Fe, housed in the posh Hilton Hotel, and wine and dined throughout the weekend. He loved every minute of those events and became a celebrity in state educational circles.

While principal, and later superintendent, I became close friends with Reies. Another friend (Richard Bowman, a newspaper reporter) and I packed sleeping bags every other Friday night, and did camp-overs with Reies in his hideaway digs in Albuquerque. He regaled us with stories of his life and adventures into the early morning hours, when Richard and I took to our sleeping bags and slept on the couch or floor in Reies' small living room.

On Saturday mornings, we would head over to Reies' favorite Mexican café for breakfast. It was located near the old Alianza headquarters. There, we would meet up with Eduardo (Eddie) Chavez, one of Reies' chief lieutenants in the Alianza movement. More war stories about the good old days over plates of steaming hot huevos rancheros or carne asada. Those were really fun times.

2. Were you involved in a movie deal with Tijerina?

Richard: Yes, I was. On one of my visits to the compound, Reies told me he had been "contacted by a big city gringo named Larry Cano" about a movie. Reies, being paranoid when it came to most Anglos, was really suspicious. Hollywood movie? Big city Anglo? Sounds like trouble.

So, Reies said he would allow this guy and his four-member team to visit the compound, but he

wanted me there every minute they were there. If anything didn't look right, I was to alert him.

The day they arrived, I was by Reies' side. Despite his suspicions, he was his charismatic self and won the Hollywood group over in minutes. They offered him a substantial contract for life rights to his story, whether a movie was made or not. He demanded one concession: I had to be present and actively involved through the entire process. I was to be his bird in the coal mine, so to speak. To justify my presence, Cano and Tijerina agreed that I would write the paperback book to accompany the movie.

That day, Larry Cano, Academy-Award winning producer of *Silkwood*, backed by 20th Century Fox, cemented the Hollywood deal. Cano's team included director Frank Zuniga, who had just finished directing *The Golden Seal* (he was Hispanic, which Tijerina liked), and screenwriter William Douglas Lansford (*The Deadly Tower*).

When pre-production began, Larry Cano and I drove up to Santa Fe and visited the Archives building. There, we photo-copied hundreds of pages of voluntary depositions about the courthouse raid.

As for the movie, it ended up in the script graveyard at Fox. Turns out, some of the studio's spies discovered that Warner Brothers had Robert Redford under contract to do a spoof about Tijerina and the courthouse raid. It was titled *Milagro Beanfield War* and was already in production. Fox decided there was not enough audience to accommodate both a fictional version of the story and a docu-drama.

With the demise of the movie, Larry Cano didn't get a second Academy Award, my book project went down the drain, but Tijerina got to keep his money from Fox.

3. Was Tijerina a violent man?

Richard: No, absolutely not. His other close Anglo friend, Richard Bowman, agrees. He was a loving, doting father to his children. He

passionately believed in his cause. He had the ability to inspire love, affection, and loyalty in everyone who befriended him. I know in my heart that there was not a violent bone in his body.

The courthouse raid was indeed marred by violence. Tijerina intended for it to be a non-violent show of force, similar to the takeover of the national forest, where no shots were ever fired. Tijerina did admit that -- like any major social movement -- his attracted a few bad apples, who he wasted no time in removing.

That said, State Police Officer Nick Sais did act heroically, and it is tragic that he was shot. A number of the raiders were teenagers, lacking wisdom, good judgement and common sense. They fired the guns that day, one at Sais, and randomly up in the air outside the courthouse window when Deputy Salazar took a bullet.

I spent hundreds of hours with Reies. Never at a loss for words or stories, always ready for a good laugh, and affectionate toward his children, the Tijerina I knew didn't have a violent bone in his body.

4. Any unusual Tijerina stories that also stick out in your memory?

Richard: Tijerina had a really great sense of humor coupled with his showmanship. He started off as a Pentecostal preacher in Arizona. When Arizona booted him and his followers out, they relocated to New Mexico.

Making believe his life was in danger during the trip, he disguised himself as a woman. Absolutely no reason for it. He just did it on a whim. Hilarious. He talked about it to me on several occasions. I tried to get him to tell me if he looked beautiful or ugly. He left it to my imagination.

Tijerina was also proud of his work with Palestinian leaders and his trips to the Middle East. He became quite a hero to the Palestinians, who

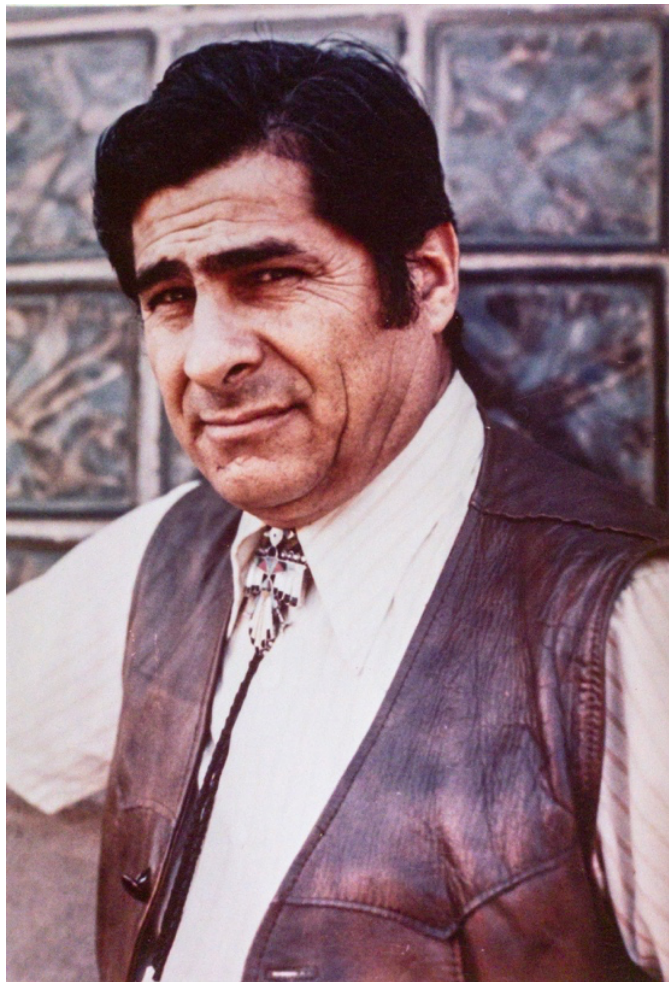
equated Tijerina's land grants cause to theirs – the loss of ancestral homelands coupled with a near-impossible struggle to regain them. It is a part of Reies' life that few people are aware of.

As for jail time, Reies wore a coat of legal Teflon. He was never prosecuted for the courthouse raid. Not enough proof for a court case. No desire to even pursue it in state court. He was convicted in federal court for the take-over of the national forest. He was sent to La Tuna in El Paso, where he was such a hero among the prison population, that the facility became almost impossible to manage. The feds found a way to commute his

sentence and get rid of him. Don't quote me, but I think they could only tolerate him for about a year. Some folks may dispute all this, but I got it directly from King Tiger's mouth. Could be true.

5. Any final thoughts?

Richard: I'm glad that my notes and materials will find the light of day through your capstone project. As for Reies, he was one of my best friends. A lot of fun. Fond memories. I miss him.



Reies Lopez Tijerina

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Raiders of a Lost Cause: Assault on the Rio Arriba County Courthouse was developed, written, and formatted for the internet by Gary Lester. It is based on hundreds of pages of voluntary statements and other documents gathered by Richard Lester in 1984 from the Attorney General's file, Alianza Federal de Mercedes, located in the New Mexico State Records Center & Archives, 400 Montezuma, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Photographs were presented by Reies Lopez Tijerina to Richard Lester in 1984 and digitized and electronically restored by Gary Lester in 2023.

Interview of Richard Lester was conducted by Gary Lester in June 2023.



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