

TORTILLA FLATS

This is tied loosely to my ongoing **Morrow Project Travel Guide**, though it is written and donated by Luccia Rogers.

Immediate and Early Events East of Phoenix, Arizona

Although Terry Griffith, who became known as, "The White Devil," attracted most of the attention of the Phoenix-based militia, there was one group that caused them more than a little grief and who were based in the Superstition Mountains. Starting in 1979, a then-25-year-old woman received an inheritance of about \$2 million. She used \$200,000 of it to purchase and upgrade one of the ubiquitous Apache Junction trailer parks. Five years after she bought the park, she began restricting residency to women, particularly lesbians. It would have been risky to openly refuse rentals to men, but as time went on, male residents got the message and didn't renew their leases.

Sarah Howe created her very own lesbian neighborhood in the desert.

Many of her residents were retired military women who were glad to be able to let down their guard. Others were retirees from other walks of life. Still others were women still in the workforce, but eager to live in an estrogen-rich environment. Like many feminists of the time, they governed themselves by consensus and created a barter system to exchange goods, services, education, and training.

As the Cold War heated up, survivalist groups of all types began laying in supplies and gathering weapons and ammo. The women of Sunset Oasis were no different. However, they had one advantage their neighbors lacked. They had a solid core of military, police, and fire department veterans among them. These women exchanged their expertise with their sisters. Shortly before the bombs fell, almost all the park's residents were part of a disciplined, organized, well-trained and ♦equipped company of Amazons.

Howe financed the placement of food, water, and weapons caches throughout the Superstitions. She and her military leader, Lt. Col. Melody, "Mel," Rayl, MSN (Master's of Science in Nursing), planned to lead their corps into the mountains on State Highway 88 and set up shop in the tourist trap of Tortilla Flat. Rayl was a veteran of Korea and Vietnam, earned two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star in her Army career. She was on track to become the Army's first woman general, but she kept trying to get transferred to combat specialties and the, "old boy," network got tired of her efforts. She left after 20 years.

When tensions were building before the war, Rayl and Howe sent patrol-sized units to their caches. Some of these were in shallow caves where prospectors over the decades before the war sought the gold of the Lost Dutchman. Others were no more than crevasses in the rugged mountains. The plan was to ensure other survivalists escaping the aftermath of the potential war didn't stumble on their supplies and to ensure safe passage for the rest of the community if evacuation became necessary. The patrols each spent a month on mission and rotated back, leaner, tougher, and ready to defend what was theirs.

After the bomb hit Luke, Rayl gave the evacuation order. The remaining 100 women mounted their Jeeps, Harleys, dirt bikes, Toyota FJs, and pickups and headed up the highway.

Their first challenge was a blockade by members of the Apache Junction Police and the Pinal County Sheriff's Department at the intersection of 88 and Apache Trail. They ordered the women to return to their homes. The outriders on dirt bikes moved off the road about 50 yards. The Harley riders moved to the front and trained their headlights on the half-dozen officers and their six cars. The nervous police pulled their service weapons and began backing toward their cars. Howe walked toward them, hands in the air, and whistled. All engines were turned off. In the silence, she told the police calmly she and her people wanted no trouble. But, she added, there was not enough food in the supermarkets and the air would be filled with radioactive dust for the next few months and life wouldn't be worth living here. She kept her hands high as she reached the front of her biker line. She said she was taking her people into the mountains. She added that the officers probably wanted to be with their families right now and that would be a very good idea. She told them

everyone behind her was armed, trained and willing to die to get to their destination. She invited them to get their families and make their way to Tortilla Flat. They would be welcome if they would accept her leadership.

The men looked at one another and holstered their weapons. The ranking deputy thanked Howe and reached out his hand. They shook hands, everyone smiled and breathed a sigh of relief. The cars were moved aside and the convoy headed for the hills.

The convoy included 5 dirt bikes of various makes and sizes. Each of the riders wore typical off-road gear that had been reinforced with Kevlar cloth and padding. They carried sidearms ranging from .38 to .44 magnum, 12-gauge shotguns in one fork scabbard and an AR-15 in the other. Heavy-duty, steel saddlebags were mounted on each bike and were loaded with ammunition, first-aid kits, MREs, and water. The Harley riders numbered 10 and were equipped with the same gear as the off-landers, but with additional space in trunks and saddlebags, they were able to carry more equipment. Two of the Harleys were outfitted with surplus police radios and took point and rear of the convoy while the dirt bikers ranged on- and off-road to ensure the perimeter of the column.

There were 10 Jeeps, 12 Toyota FJs, and two dozen pickups of various makes, but all were four-wheel-drive. Each of these were crewed by 3 women who had trained as small fire teams in their monthly drills.

In the middle of the column was an Airstream RV that could serve as a command post and mobile clinic. Howe and her inner circle of 8 women rode in this, except for Rayl who rode her Road King at point. She believed a commander should lead her troops and took point to make up for all the male commanders who lead their troops from the safety of bunkers during military career.

The four cache patrols nestled among the peaks between Goldfield and the observation point at Canyon Lake were ready and alert as the convoy approached their positions. Only one of the women was injured in the attack. She was watching the sunset and realized she was exposed and staring at the fireball of the Luke bomb too late. Her eyes were damaged and her vision most likely gone. Two of her partners helped her down the mountain and were waiting with her at the Canyon Lake observation point. The trio joined the convoy and three others took their place with the cache patrol in the overlooking mountains.

The convoy moved slowly along the curves until they reached the marinas on the lake. A squad deployed to check for people on the houseboats and in the ranger station. They were supported by one of the radio bikes, a Jeep and a Ford F-250. Their first stop was the ranger station. They discovered it abandoned, presumably the rangers returned home to be sure their families were okay. They added their flag to fly below the Stars and Stripes and the [Arizona](#) flag; it was a rainbow flag with a black labrys at the center. Their intention was to secure access to the marinas for the owners of the boats moored there, if they returned for them and to ensure a source of water for themselves and anyone else who decided to head for these forbidding hills.

The convoy arrived in Tortilla Flat and was met by the owners of the tourist attraction and a dozen residents of some of the mobile homes and cabins in the nearby hills. After initially telling the women to move on, and firing warning shots over their heads, the patriarch of the family who owned the attraction backed down when Rayl told him to look at the barrels pointed at him. It was a simple case of being outgunned and he knew it was better to live with a new authority than to die.

Howe, Rayl, the rest of the leadership council and the established residents met in the back room of the bar as the rest of the women celebrated their survival with numerous rounds of cold beer and hot food from the grills outside. The women were wearing radiation monitors that were all in the red. They pulled new ones from their protective packaging and let them sit on the table as the meeting went on. Everyone could see the color change slowly from green to yellow to orange and finally, just barely, to red. Although the blast spread fallout over a one hundred-mile radius, the prevailing winds that day were from the east. This could change in an instant, but the mountains had shielded these people from the firestorm and the radiation, while high, would not become instantly lethal unless the wind shifted for a few days from the west. They would survive, perhaps with various cancers and tumors and other radiation illnesses, but they would survive.

The women made it clear they intended to establish a colony in the valley. Their control of the road into the little town

was complete. They had secured the state's resources at Canyon Lake. They were prepared to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible and invited the original residents to join them. They brought along hydroponics equipment, diesel generators that would be able to run on vegetable oil, seeds of all types stored in lead-lined containers, medical supplies, a still and at least 20 women who could still bear children. Their caches in the mountains were stocked with MREs to feed 100 people for one year, a ton of grain, first-aid gear, light weapons including 9mm handguns, AR-15s, and 12-gauge shotguns. They needed to get crops started immediately and everyone had to pitch in or be exiled for slacking off. Howe was clear on this point. She was prepared to exile anyone who was unwilling to join their attempt at survival in this valley. As most of the little band of residents initially chose to live there for the solitude, this was at first resisted. Rayl reminded them of the firepower they were carrying, hinted at reinforcements already stationed throughout the Superstitions and said she would personally march anyone unwilling to work to live out into the desert herself. At over 6 feet tall, 220 pounds, well muscled and a poster child for butch dykes, Rayl was imposing as hell. Consent was quickly achieved and a round was bought by the women for their new partners.

Diablo Blanco Sent A-Packin'

After three years, the Tortilla Flat colony was healthy, but not unaffected by the radiation and other after-effects of the Luke bombing. Most residents had elevated levels of radiation and this showed in an increase in cancers of various types. The eldest 12 and three babies died during a flu epidemic. There were 5 children born during the second year, 10 during the third year and it was decided to keep the birthrate down to less than 20 per year for the first decade. The quantity of food and water were the main limiting factors.

Some residents, particularly Rayl, pushed for higher birthrates to build up the numbers of soldiers. But, as all Tortillians were trained and drilled monthly, this idea was set aside.

The Tortillians numbered 130 people and they calculated their holdings in the Superstitions could easily support a maximum of 400, if they wanted to expand in the, "old," way. They made contacts with ranchers and survivalists north and east of their colony and with no exceptions, all decided to keep contacts with, "the outside," to a minimum and to come to each others' aid, if necessary. As the Dine closed their borders to the north to all, "white men," the network of ranchers and cabin dwellers between the Superstitions to the White Mountains became essential to the survival of all. The Tortillians established efficient fruit and vegetable farms, mostly under cover of plastic sheeting and within larger, empty houses and barns. This became one of their main income sources. The other was their cultivated cannabis, both hemp for fiber and indica for its psychoactive properties.

The nuclear winter feared by doomsayers before the war turned out to be a nuclear autumn. Sunlight was indeed cut down by about 15 percent in the Southwest. This had the positive side effect of turning the desert into a more temperate zone. But, the Tortillians and others knew this wouldn't last and so set up their agriculture as a series of greenhouses, preparing for the time when the temperature would most probably go back to pre-war norms. Their hydroponics allowed them to get through the first growing season with fresh vegetables, but they desired citrus to provide enough Vitamin C for the entire colony. The abundant Prickly Pear cacti were an excellent source of this, and their trees wouldn't bear until the second year. This provided an impetus for the colony to begin trading with their distant neighbors. It took them three months to grow their first marijuana crop via hydroponics and, preserving only five pounds for ceremonial and personal needs, they equipped their envoys with 10 pounds of very high quality pot. Even though they suspected many ranchers would be Mormons, or at least socially conservative, they also knew the experience of surviving a nuclear war would affect changes in thinking. Besides, if the ranchers couldn't use the herb, they could trade it themselves for weapons, ammunition, medicinal herbs, and other goods.

A large number of vacation homes and cabins, having been unclaimed by their Phoenix-dwelling owners, were taken over by wanderers and refugees. Some of them were dangerous as they shot first and asked questions later. The Tortillian trade missions were heavily armed and their speakers made it clear they were on missions of peace. This usually worked to gain them access to private property. Generally, those who were Mormon were waiting to be contacted by members of their church, as the post-apocalyptic vision of Joseph Smith were kept alive by the modern church and they had brought along their canned food, weapons and ammunition. The envoys only revealed their location as, "down south," but made it clear they were well-defended and not at all interested in religious, political, or social conversion. The families usually agreed to trade and to join in with the region's very loose defense agreement. Those

who did not were told they wouldn't be bothered again. Maps were marked and the pledges were kept.

In the third year, scouts reported that a militia was being raised in Apache Junction. They seemed mostly interested in Phoenix, so the Tortillians decided to just watch and wait. One night, a pair of scouts, one man and one womyn, were captured by a patrol near the Goldfield mine. After torture including serial rape of the womyn, Rain Sherrisdottir, the man was killed for refusing to talk. The woman was told to return to, "whatever hole she crawled out of," and sent naked into the desert.

She was tailed by the same patrol. They were not very good, not disciplined, and she lost them after only three hours. The first, old cache was behind a peak of a mountain three miles from the mine. As she approached, the Tortillian patrol came out to greet her, treat her wounds, give her food and water, and a quick debriefing. Rain insisted on taking the news about the militia back herself.

While in the custody of the militia, Rain heard the men brag about their weaponry, their leader, Terry Griffith, and how they were going to be kings of Phoenix and the whole valley. She knew even though she lost the patrol in the hills, they would come up the highway to the colony before too long. Something had to be done.

Tortillia Flat's high council decided, in record time, to dynamite the road. This was a last resort solution, but they knew that men capable of torture and rape would not be likely to negotiate on equal terms with a community led by wymyn. As the militia seemed bent on conquest, they needed to be prevented from coming north at all costs.

Four points were selected along the steep and narrow canyon. Explosives were planted above and below the roadway to ensure it was gone and that the rubble would also become impassable on the canyon floor. The blasts might attract the attention of the militia, but they wouldn't be able to come in force to the heart of the Tortilla Flat holdings.

Rain had reported that the militia was preparing to head into Phoenix. Scouts watched for signs of their movements and when they moved from their headquarters at the former city library, the signal was given. Five hours later, after the main body of the redneck army began their march east, blasts rumbled behind them in the distance. The remnant left behind, mostly old men and a few wymyn and children, reported they heard the explosions. The order was given to investigate.

About 20 starving, scrawny, fragile old men and about a dozen wymyn and children went north along the highway. They came to the first blast zone. The road dropped off into the canyon. A hole about 50 feet deep and 100 feet high into the side had been carved by the blast. This would help ensure the hole in the road wouldn't be easily bridged. Some of the younger wymyn were sent by the men to climb down to see about getting around the gap. They had to backtrack a quarter mile to where the canyon walls weren't practically vertical. They arrived finally at the rubble beneath the gap and shouted up that it was impossible to climb. One of the men, an ancient retiree and Korea War veteran named Ed ordered them to get over the rocks anyway they could. As the wymyn had no climbing gear and no climbing experience, they vainly looked for a way up. Ed began screaming at them for their refusal to follow orders and shot at their feet. He barely heard the shot that sent the hollow point round into his head.

The panicked men started shooting in all directions until cooler heads prevailed. A voice from above them told them to drop their weapons into the canyon and place their hands on their heads. One of them screamed, "fuck you," at the voice and started shooting his handgun up at the peak. He was dropped by a shot to the chest. After this, the others slowly dropped their various shotguns, rifles, handguns and knives into the canyon. Five Tortillian wymyn and five men then moved from behind their cover. They kept their weapons trained on the group as they moved closer. The voice from the top of the mountain next told the wymyn in the canyon to gather up whatever weapons they could. They were safe, nobody was going to hurt them again. After a long minute, they began to pick up the guns and rifles and pistols that were undamaged from their flight to the canyon floor. Four Tortillian wymyn came from behind rocks near them and offered them smiles and open hands to show their peaceful intentions.

They were invited to join the colony at Tortilla Flat. Their choice was clear: they could join or die, as they could not afford to allow anyone from the militia with knowledge of their community to live. As life is always preferable to death, they agreed to join.


The group took a week to make a trip that normally took a half hour by motor vehicle. They were kept at the lake and

not told about the colony's true size and capabilities.

Tortillian patrols kept watch for anyone leaving the militia's headquarters to search for their now, "lost patrol." After three months, nobody came up the highway and monitoring of the militia's radios revealed their belief the patrol was destroyed by radioactive mutants or some other mishap. Their attention returned east toward the ruins of Phoenix and remained in that direction until their leader returned, vanquished and practically alone.

Two generations later, the Tortillians had settled into a comfortable existence. The incidence of birth defects was higher than pre-war and the state of medicine much more primitive. Like other communities, they countered this with a higher birth rate to allow for early deaths from congenital defects. The matriarchy of the early years remained intact as there were almost twice as many wymyn as men and the children had been raised to respect each sex's strengths and weaknesses. Had Howe and Rayl and their first council failed in their efforts at establishing defense and trade and cultural agreements with the Amerinds, the Mormons, and the Aztlans, they would most likely have been replaced by a male-dominated group. However, they possessed far superior firepower from the start, had continued to train every member of the community as a soldier, and were highly-skilled diplomats. By the time the births of the third generation began, Howe and the remaining six of the original council stepped aside for the next generation of leaders. The four wymyn and three men were collectively called, "The Crones," and served as counselors, judges in extremely serious cases, and were honored for their wisdom and foresight.

They had not been very successful in coaxing grains like corn from the rocky earth in the canyon and around the lake. This meant they needed to import it if they wanted to have fuel for their fleet of vehicles. About a dozen of the ranchers in the higher ground south of Winslow agreed to trade corn for hemp fiber, cannabis, clothing, and fresh citrus in season. As the children of the ranchers grew older, some of them accompanied their parents to the bazaar that sprouted up when the Tortillians arrived for trade in the spring and fall. Through no small coincidence, the Tortillian caravans would include a number of young, mating-age wymyn and men. Thus, the gene pools, social, political, and family ties were strengthened between the two groups.

One year, about 30 years after the blast, the fall bazaar came to a screeching halt. Outriders on ancient dirt bikes roared into the camp with news of a column of cavalry headed directly toward them. They appeared to be Amerind and were heavily armed with traditional bows and arrows, spears, and military and sport long rifles, assault rifles and shotguns. Some of the ranchers wanted to break camp, run for their homes and defend their land. But, cooler heads prevailed, especially Rayl whose granddaughter and successor, Skye, was a daughter of one of the ranchers and whose family included Dine in their bloodline. "It was their land before it was ours. Maybe they waited til we screwed up to repossess it," she said. "I'll stay here to talk with them if you all want to run away."

Shamed, the hotheads settled down and a feast was set out for the 100 members of the horse column. In a scene reminiscent of too many bad Hollywood westerns, the Amerinds first stopped at the far edge of the land on which the bazaar was held. With a loud cry from their leader, the horsemen and wymyn suddenly broke into a gallop and circled the camp. The dust grew thick as they made 10, 20, 30 circuits of the bazaar. A shot rang out and they all stopped. Their leader, Darren Seklestewa, who called himself Spear, turned his horse toward the center of the camp. He stopped inches from the calm, tall, ancient warrior-womyn Rayl and her mate. All others in the camp were seated at the long table, laden with food and drink. "What are you doing on my people's land?" he demanded. "We are about to enjoy a meal in your honor," replied Skye, "Please join us, strong one." "I could kill you all and take back what your people stole from us." "You could. But the blood of your people flows in our veins and in the bodies of some of the rest of us. The Maker gave the land to all people, we are here on it to create life and joy, but will fight as we have in the past to defend ourselves." "I have heard of your victories. I want to meet your general, the womyn Rayl."

With this, Rayl pulled a knife from her boot. "I am the one you want. What is your business with me and with our trade here?" She extended the handle of her old, but deadly British commando blade toward Spear. "Here, a gift from one warrior to another in peace. Let my people stand with yours, let our children grow in peace. Let the land heal."

He was surprised to hear her use the words his people spoke in blessing. He took her knife, tested its heft and smiled. "What I have heard is true. You are not like the White Devil in the ruins, or the Catholics or the slavers in [California](#). Your people are lucky to have you lead them." He pulled his knife, hand-made with elk-antler handle, and held it to her,

handle-first, "From one warrior to another. Yes, my people will stand with yours. Our children will grow in peace. The land will heal."

She took the knife. He dismounted. Cheers and shouts rang out. The cavalry rode to the corral where youngsters waited to help them with the feeding and watering. As each rider reached the table, they were greeted and shown a place to sit. The food and drink were plentiful, musicians began to play and sing when they finished their meals and the table soon gave way to crowds of dancers.

The elders and other leaders retired into the home that served as the bazaar's offices and headquarters. The family that lived there received payment from individual traders at a rate of about 10 percent of their deals in exchange for having their lives upended for the two months it took to prepare and clean up the bazaar grounds. They had found the antique boardroom table that the dozen ranchers, Amerinds and Tortillians now sat around in an office building in Phoenix on a scrounging raid. It was time to update each group on what they knew of the new world and to formalize their agreements.

Much mead, cider, spring water, tobacco, and cannabis were shared during the meeting. At the end, new arrangements existed that included: exchanges of military equipment and training between the Tortillians and the Amerinds, to this end, Skye and Spear would spend one year with each other's troops. Each would select 10 of their best soldiers to go with them. At the end of the year, each group would return to share what they had learned.

The Morrow bolt hole disrupted and later taken over by Griffith had been found during a routine patrol by members of the mixed Tortillian/Amerind forces during the Trade year. The Tortillian council recognized they were safe from the redneck commander as he lay in stasis in the tank. The order was given to take him out. Since he was helpless, the patrol decided only to trigger the end of the stasis cycle. They also wrecked the controls so the system couldn't be used again. General Redneck awoke and realized he was not going to be able to extend his life. He turned his attentions to plotting his return to Phoenix.

One of the great successes of the Tortillians is their absence from most accounts of the survivors of the war. What they wanted was to survive, thrive, and be left alone. In this, they were unequalled.

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