

TAHQUITZ

A Luiseño Indian Legend

Ever so long ago when many Indians were in San Jacinto Valley, one great chief ruled them all. At first he ruled the people well. But in time he became so powerful and so arrogant that the people feared him.

Then he began to steal Indian maidens and carry them off and kill them.

Their scalps were found in his pouch.

The anger of the people was terrible. They seized the chief and carried him before a council of the leading men. They condemned him to die by fire.

A great pile of wood was made, and the evil chief was placed beside it. The wood was set blazing. The flames leapt higher and higher. It looked as though the chief must be consumed.

But suddenly a great spark shot up into the air. The evil chief disappeared. He had flown upward on the spark.

Then all the people saw that he was a demon who had lived among them as a man in order to work evil.

They called him Tahquitz, the demon.

The spirit of Tahquitz went up into the San Jacinto Mountains. For many years he dwelt in a cave on a lofty peak. The Indians named the peak Tahquitz after him.

Often the evil spirit of Tahquitz would descend the mountains, seize children or women or even strong men of the villages, and carry them off to his lair above the valley.

He ate the people whom he stole and kept the scalps in his pouch.

The people in the valley used to hear strange roarings and rumblings coming from the mountains. They used to say that the noises were the fierce bellowings of Tahquitz or the moanings of his victims.

After Tahquitz had persecuted and terrified the Indians of the valley for very many moons, a new chief arose among them. He was Algoot, wise, and strong, and valiant.

Algoot had a son beloved of all the people. He was Algoot's greatest pride and greatest love. He was strong and valiant like his father. But being a young man, he was not as wise as his father. He was daring—even reckless.

One day, the son of Algoot, with two other young men as companions, set out to climb far up into the mountains—to the very lair of Tahquitz.



FALLS IN TAHQUITZ CANYON

These Falls are Located at the Foot of Mount San Jacinto

They were bold and merry-hearted as they set out. They were not afraid of Tahquitz. They would destroy him and set the villages of the valley free from his ravages.

The young men climbed fast and far. Soon they were high among the vast rugged places of the San Jacinto Mountains.

When Algoot learned that his son had started for the lair of Tahquitz, a great dread seized him. He tried to throw it off. His son was true-hearted and fearless. He was sure of eye and swift of foot and strong in contest. His two companions were almost his equal as splendid examples of young manhood. Surely no great harm could come to three such youths—even in the haunts of the evil one.

But no matter how Algoot reasoned with himself and reassured himself, his fear for his beloved son grew. Finally he started out on the trail which the three young men had taken.

As he climbed, his anxiety increased and lent speed to his feet. On and up he pressed until he came close to the peak of Tahquitz. What he saw then made his heart almost stop beating.

There on the green floor of a quiet, little valley, he saw the two companions of his son stretched out as if dead.

But his son was not with them.

Cold with fear, Algoot knelt beside the two young men. He found that they were not dead. They had only swooned. He called them by name and clutched them by the shoulders and shook them.

After a long time the young men opened their eyes. As soon as they realized where they were and caught sight of Tahquitz Peak thrusting itself sharply up beside them, they almost fainted again with terror. They begged Algoot to take them away from that fearful place.

He asked for news of his son. But they dared not tell him until he had led them far down the mountain-side.

Then, pressing them to speak, he learned the horrible truth.

Until they reached the little Tahquitz Valley, all had gone well. But then had come the rumbling and roaring sounds so familiar to dwellers near the mountain. There had been thunder and lightning, clouds and darkness; out of the darkness a flash, and revealed in the flash the monster, Tahquitz.

With his rawhide-covered battle-ax he smote the son of Algoot to the ground. Then he seized the limp body of the young man, slung it across his shoulder and bore it off to his cave. As he strode, he crunched an arm of his victim between his fearful jaws.

No wonder the two companions of the son of Algoot had swooned.

When Algoot learned the fate of his son, his grief and fury were as deep and terrible as a stormy sea. He vowed in his heart to devote his life to avenging his son and destroying the demon, Tahquitz.

Descending to the valley, Algoot undertook at once a rigorous course of training. He talked to no one, but bent all his energies toward perfecting himself physically and preparing himself spiritually for the conflict with Tahquitz.

He ate only the most nourishing food. He rested from early night to early day. He took long, hard walks. He swam and raced and scaled great mountains. He sought out the grizzly in his lair and wrestled with him. He trailed the mountain lion and fell upon him and tore him limb from limb.

In time the lungs of Algoot were twice the size they had been, and his muscles were tougher than the fibres of the strongest trees.

Many moons had gone by when Algoot called his people together. "My people," he said to them. "I have not asked you to grieve with me. I have not talked to you of my sorrow. I have kept it burning deep in my heart, that it might add flame to my fury and fire to my resolution to destroy the monster, Tahquitz. At last I am ready. Today I go to seek him and to challenge him. Farewell, my people. Let your blessings and your prayers go with me."

So, followed by the cheers and the benedictions of his people, Algoot turned to the mountains.

He never stopped climbing until he had come to the valley and the peak of Tahquitz. There he took his stand and called in a loud voice to the monster of the mountain.

"Come forth, Tahquitz, slayer of women and children, devourer of young men! Come forth and face the avenger!"

At first Tahquitz gave no sign. So Algoot called again:

"Coward, is it but women and youths you dare to face? Crawl out of your hole! Here is a man suited to your strength!"

At length Tahquitz came out of his cave. He yawned and stretched and pretended he had been asleep.

"What are you talking about, silly little creature?" he said to Algoot.

"I called you coward—slayer of women and children, devourer of youths. I challenged you to match your strength with mine. Do you dare to fight me, coward?"

Tahquitz glared with fury. He seemed ready to spring at Algoot and tear him to pieces. But his cunning restrained him.

He thought that if he could get Algoot to go back into the San Jacinto Valley for the combat, the people would crowd around to watch. Then, after he had slain Algoot, he could seize several people and carry them back to his cave with him. They would furnish good food for several days. So he said to Algoot:

"Yes, I will fight you. I will fight you and kill you, little one. Go you back into the valley where the river of my mountain flows into the lake. There I will meet you and crunch you with my blows and with my teeth."

Algoot knew that Tahquitz would use treachery. But he was ready for anything. So he went back into the San Jacinto Valley to Algooton—the place which white men call Lakeview.

At that time the San Jacinto River flowed down from the San Jacinto Mountains and ended in the San Jacinto Valley. There it emptied into a large lake. The land to the west of this lake was high, shutting in the valley.

It is different today. It is different because of the fight which Algoot and Tahquitz had there.

Soon after Algoot had reached Algooton, Tahquitz came dashing down from his peak. But he did not descend into the valley. From the mountain-side he hurled huge boulders into the valley at Algoot. He thought that he could kill Algoot in that way and save himself the trouble of fighting with him.

But Algoot was so quick to see the boulders flying through the air and so swift to avoid them that they fell harmlessly to the ground. Then Algoot picked up some of them and with tremendous strength hurled them back at Tahquitz on the mountain-side.

For a long time they fought fiercely. So today there are many massive rocks scattered over the floor of the San Jacinto Valley. They are the boulders which Tahquitz sent hurtling down at Algoot.

But after a while Tahquitz saw that he could not defeat Algoot so easily as he had thought. Roaring with fury, he descended into the valley and engaged the good chief in hand-to-hand combat.

They fought madly, rushing at each other and grappling each other and dashing each other off again.

The people of the valley stood around watching. All the while they cheered Algoot and yelled curses at Tahquitz.

As the two fought, Tahquitz used his magical power to change his form. Just as Algoot thought he had the monster in a grip from which he could not escape, Tahquitz would change his form and Algoot would lose his hold.

It was very confusing, but Algoot fared much better than might be expected.

So thorough had been his training and so furious was his vengeful purpose that after the battle had raged for a number of hours he began to get the advantage of Tahquitz.

At last Tahquitz turned himself into a sea serpent and slid into the waters of the big lake which then existed in the valley. It was the lake into which the waters of the San Jacinto River flowed.

The sea serpent was fearful to see. But Algoot was not dismayed.

He splashed into the water and seized the serpent and wrestled with it. The serpent's body was slimy and wriggly. But Algoot caught it and held it in a grip that could not be shaken off.

The serpent swayed this way and that. It writhed and twisted and lashed the waters and the shores of the lake with its tail. So violently did the sea serpent lash about with its tail that at last, with a terrific stroke, it made a great crooked gash in the hills running from the rim of the lake right out to Elsinore Valley.

At once the waters of the lake and the San Jacinto River rushed out through the gash, across the Perris plains and through the cañon which we call Railroad Cañon, and down the gorge to the Elsinore Valley. There the waters were gathered in the valley basin and came to rest. So Lake Elsinore was formed.

When the waters rushed out of the lake in the San Jacinto Valley, Tahquitz in his sea serpent form was left floundering in the mud.

Algoot was not slow to seize the opportunity. Exerting tremendous force he strangled Tahquitz.

Tahquitz was dead. But it was necessary to burn the body and every vestige of the monster for fear he might come to life and make trouble again.

So Algoot told the people to collect wood for a great fire. While they did so, he went up into the mountains to rest. He went not into the San Jacinto Mountains, but into the San Bernardino Mountains, to a place above Arrowhead Springs. To this day one can see the outline of his body there on the mountain where he sat.

When he had rested, he came down from the mountains carrying an armful of green wood with him.

Back in the San Jacinto Valley, he threw the wood onto the great pile which the people had made. Then he lifted the body of the sea serpent onto the pile and set it blazing.

Everybody watched to see Tahquitz at last entirely consumed. But alas! Although the flames destroyed the body, the green wood sent out a spiral of smoke on which the spirit of Tahquitz, the demon, rose out of the flames.

So the spirit of Tahquitz returned to his cave in the San Jacinto Mountains. It is there to this day. Roarings and rumblings are still heard coming out of the mountains. The Indians will not go near his dwelling place among the peaks.

Tahquitz never appears now except disguised as a man. He still works evil, for it is he who makes earthquakes. And he brings sickness to the Indians' who still dwell in the valley.

But he has never done anything about the gash which he cut through the country during his combat with Algoot. The crooked channel west of Algooton (which the white men call Lakeview) and the cañon to the west of the Perris plains remain to this day. And so does Lake Elsinore.

CALIFORNIA HISTORY NUGGET



December, 1937

CALIFORNIA HISTORY NUGGET

Volume V

DECEMBER, 1937

Number 3

Published six times a year during the months of October through March by
the California State Department of Education, Sacramento, California

Application for entry as second-class matter pending

Editorial Office: California State Historical Association,
3551 University Avenue, Los Angeles

Publication Office: Division of Textbooks and Publications,
California State Department of Education, Sacramento

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

OWEN C. COY, Director, California
State Historical Association

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

H. M. MCSPADDEN

HELEN HEFFERNAN, Chief, Division of Elementary Education and Rural
Schools, California State Department of Education

IVAN R. WATERMAN, Chief, Division of Textbooks and Publications,
California State Department of Education

CONTENTS

	Page
The First Farmers, Woodcut by Franz Geritz - - -	Cover
Four California Gardens - - -	67
Sea-Otter Hunting on the Pacific Coast - - -	71
Gabriel Moraga, Conqueror of the Great Valleys - - -	77
American Place Names in California - - -	81
Tahquitz--A Luiseño Indian Legend - - -	87
The Editor's Sluice Box - - -	94

The *California History Nugget* is furnished free of charge as supplementary textbook material to California public elementary schools and junior high schools.

Subscriptions: 50c per year; single copies, 10c. Subscriptions should be addressed to the Publication Office. Subscription is included with membership in the California State Historical Association at \$3.00 per year.

Correspondence regarding contents and contributions to the *California History Nugget* should be addressed to the Editorial Office.

Material in the *California History Nugget* is the property of the California State Historical Association. Credit must be given for the reproduction of any article, either as a whole or in part. Special permission must be obtained for the reproduction of illustrations.