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THE LEGENDARY MINING DISTRICT “EL TIGRE”

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The Legendary Mining District “El Tigre”

With 3,000 inhabitants, it became the municipal capital in 1924

Located at the top of the mountain range that surrounds the Bavispe River, lie the ruins of a thriving community that arose with the discovery of generous veins of gold and silver, and disappeared with the suspension of operations of the company that exploited them. El Tigre, belonging to the municipality of Óputo at that time, currently Nacozari de García, became a legendary and productive mine, which had a life span from March 1903 to July 1938.

To write a history of the mineral El Tigre, today a ghost town, is particularly exciting, because none have yet been written, despite the economic prosperity and social activity that it reached in an area very difficult to access. So inhospitable is its location that it proved impossible to trace its streets due to its steep and sloping terrain. Houses and other buildings had to be built on small spaces on the skirts of the hills and recesses that opened on the slopes of the mountain range.

“El Tigre” Mining District Part 1

Appearing out of nowhere, around bursts of rock glittering with gold and silver, a camp of men who came from very different directions —some of them even crawling up the slopes of the mountain after crossing the Bavispe River— began to form, becoming a town of 3,000 inhabitants, where gold and silver coins, as well as dollar bills, flowed in abundance. From a camp in the heights of the mountains, it became a mining town, which in population censuses was classified as a “mining district” (*mineral*). Emerging in March 1903,

by September 1904 it was already a “precinct”, and 20 years later, at the end of December 1924, it reached the category of municipal capital.

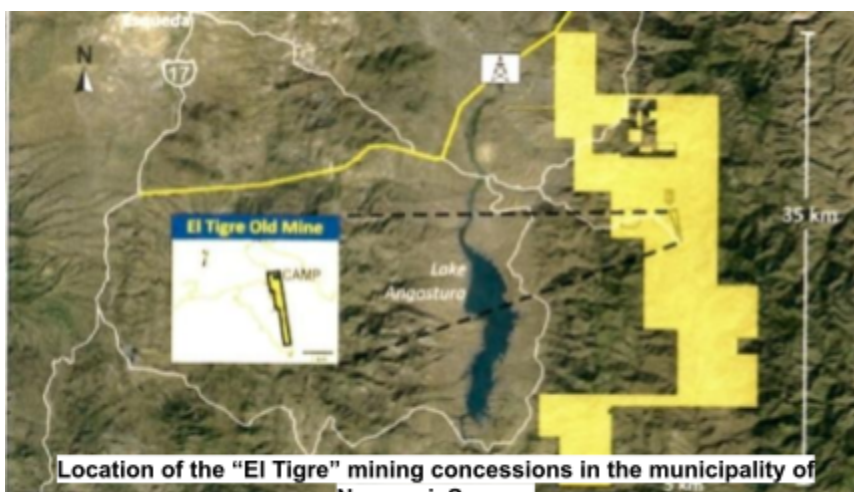
The goods and services demanded by its inhabitants and neighbouring communities generated the establishment of several grocers, who sold all types of merchandise: from wheat flour, galvanized metal buckets and tubs, horseshoes, saddles, ropes, shoes, nails, sugar, eggs, coffee, and much more. Hotels, butcher shops, fruit and vegetable shops, liquor stores, and barber shops were also established. For the amusement and recreation of the miners, there were several options for relaxation after their difficult shift in the tunnels and other mining installations: bars, brothels, and Chinese casinos, with gambling and the secret smoking of opioids occurring in the latter. Cheerful dances were also organized in the public plaza, where men and women showed off the latest trends in both fashion and dancing. El Tigre was the place where every type of trends arrived first, including new inventions, and from there they spread to the surrounding communities in the Sonoran mountains and the Bavispe River valley.

Public services and institutions also arrived at the isolated location of El Tigre, such as the telegraph, telephone, health centers, schools, and rural police. Despite this, it lacked an efficient transportation route which would allow the easier movement of metal, merchandise, and persons, as they were only connected to the vicinities by dirt roads in precarious conditions.

The mining district’s prosperity was not sufficient to join it with a railroad; transportation was carried out by beasts of burden, wagons pulled by 12



“El Molino”; residents from the United States lived in this neighbourhood



Location of the “El Tigre” mining concessions in the municipality of Nacozari, Sonora.

or more draft animals, and, after a certain time, heavy trucks that took the minerals to Izábal (today Esqueda), the closest railroad station on the way to Douglas, Arizona.

Neighbour to other large mining districts such as Nacozari de García and Cananea that have remained to the present time, exploiting copper on a large scale, El Tigre focused on the extraction of gold and silver. Over the course of 35 years, 380,000 troy ounces of gold and 75 million troy ounces of silver were extracted from El Tigre, equivalent to 11.82 tonnes of gold and 2,332.76 tonnes of silver, which ended up in the United States’ market.

Discovery and beginning of the exploitation

The most obscure information available regarding El Tigre dates back to 1900, when a fortuitous discovery was made of rocks containing gold in an area of land known as Gold Hill. An explorer from Texas named James Hewitt, but known in Arizona as James Taylor, was prospecting the waters of a stream in the summer of that year, accompanied by his dog named Tigre; the current flowed towards the Bavispe River through a canyon which lead way between the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental. Beneath the clear water, about a mile downriver from the mill

ruins which still lie on the outskirts of the ghost town, Hewitt, or Taylor, observed that the sand displayed a suggestive gold colour. He lifted his head, squinted his eyes, and put his sight on the farthest curve following the current, feeling a sudden impulse to go in that direction. Investigating upriver in search of the source of that sand, he thought that it surely must have come from a vein which crossed the stream at a certain point of the mountain. However, the results were disappointing for several days.

One day, while Taylor wandered along the edge of the stream, Tigre sniffed downriver. Suddenly he came across a puma, known as a mountain lion or American lion, and began to alert his owner by barking. Taylor quickly headed to him and, before they attacked one another, picked up a rock and threw it at the feline, immediately stooping to get another. Seeing himself faced with two enemies, the puma fled, leaving Taylor with the rock in hand. Now out of danger, Taylor noticed that the rock he held was unusually heavy for its size, awaking his curiosity. He then hit it against another rock and when it split discovered that its interior contained a great concentration of gold. Looking at his surroundings, he realized he was standing in the outcropping of one of the richest veins in the mining history of Sonora. "Some time later several tonnes of samples were sent, whose value, in agreement with Taylor, amounted to close to six thousand dollars, which suggested the idea of the true wealth of the minerals" [Herrick 1909, 483].

James Taylor in reality was named James Hewitt, but in Bisbee and Douglas, Arizona, he was known as Jim Taylor; he lived in the latter town for more than 40 years during the last



Plaza Hidalgo with its kiosk, 1920-1930.



Ruins of the Las Espuelas neighbourhood jail



Ruins of the old El Tigre mill.



One of the general stores from the 1910's

part of his life. Born in Texas, son of William Hewitt, at a young age he left for New Mexico to be employed as a cowboy, but his inclination for seeking out mines won out.

Now with the great discovery in his hands, the task was not easy; more than two years had to pass before seeing the firstfruits of the good luck he and his pet had had. Taylor needed associates with sufficient capital, as well as the formation of a company in order to analyze the requirements of Mexican law, and then to settle on the procedures to obtain the mining concessions on foreign soil.

He traveled several times to the mountain, staying alternately in the already established mining districts such as San Miguelito in the Cumpas municipality, and Pilares de Teras. In these places there were already capitalists exploiting veins, such as the Suits and Augustin C. Riordon. He managed to stir up enthusiasm in a handful of them with his discovery, and formed a group of eight members: James Taylor, as discoverer of the mine, followed by James E. Suits, Augustin C. Riordon, Harry H. Stine, and Edward M. Sturgiss, as well as Alexander Grant, E. D. Suits, and G. H. Suits. The deposits were grouped in two surfaces: one of 66 hectares, which was named Tigre Suertudo [Lucky Tiger], and another of 60, named La Combinación [The Combination], both located seven kilometers from Pilares de Teras.

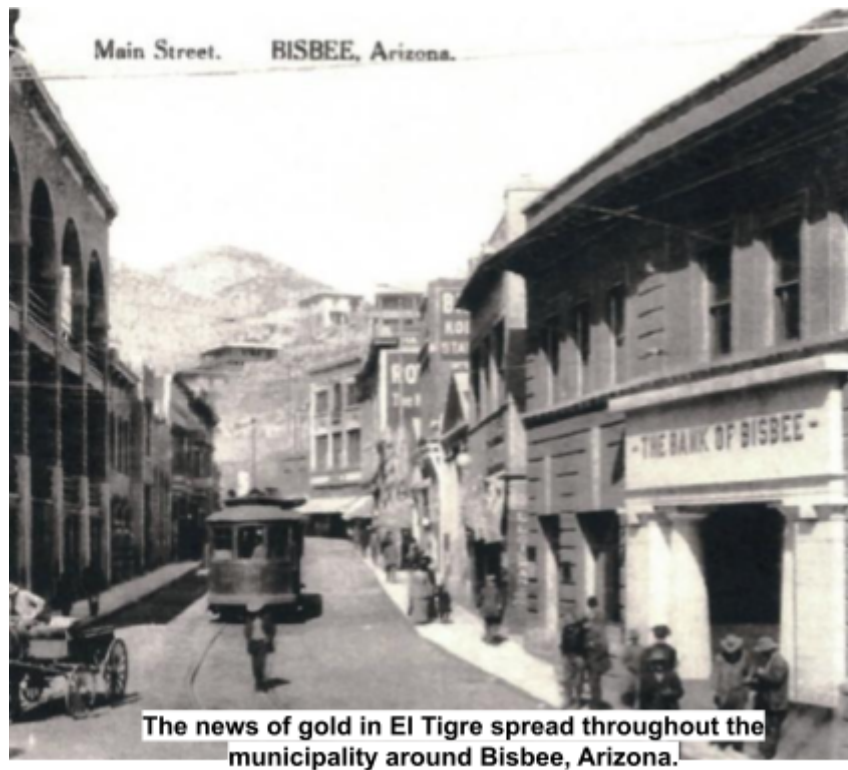
By May 24, 1901, James Taylor, Edward M. Sturgiss, and Harry H. Stine had traversed the area of the El Tigre veins, and had confirmed that they were standing upon a great treasure. However, the obstacles they had to face to formalize the corresponding report caused them great anxiety, as they feared that somebody would get ahead of them. Sturgiss confessed to the Bisbee newspaper nearly two years later: "I spent many sleepless nights once the discovery of the great value of the

property was out in the open, for fear that the wealth of the minerals we had found would escape us before we could get our title” (Bisbee Daily Review, February 17, 1903).

Since foreigners could not acquire mining concessions within a band of 20 leagues (equivalent to 96.5 km) along the length of the border with the United States, they used the name of John F. Hohstadt, a cattle owner known to them, resident of Douglas, Arizona, but a naturalized Mexican citizen and owner of the La Pera ranch on the outskirts of what today is the town of Esqueda. James E. Suits presented the requests for the Tigre Suertudo and La Combinación in the name of Hohstadt on May 20, 1902. The first included 120 mining belongings, and the second 60. The custom was that each hectare was considered a belonging. In both requests James Taylor was proposed as the expert prospector (*ibid.*, February 17, 1903 and July 1, 1905).

The corresponding titles were issued by the Mexican government on November 6, 1902; the Tigre Suertudo was granted the title of mining exploitation 19 46. The concessions were acquired with all legality, without any opposition being presented within the timeframe stipulated by Mexican mining law (Bisbee Daily Review, February 13, 1903).

The new miners were well known by the authorities and residents of the districts of Moctezuma and Arizpe, since they had been prospecting and working concessions in the zone for several years now, and even temporarily living in places like Bacerac and Real de San Miguelito, in the Cumpas municipality. James E. Suits was a resident of this last place,



and his services as practical engineer were frequently required to measure mining properties in the district. Augustin C. Riordon was proprietor of the Le Roy mine in Pilares de Teras, according to the Bisbee Daily Review. Taylor and his associates lacked the sufficient economic solvency to work the veins, and so they turned to Graham & Co. in search of advice, deciding that the best thing to do was sell. Interested companies that arose included: the Phelps Dodge Corporation, the Cananea Consolidated Copper Company, a company from New York and another from Philadelphia. The price: \$600,000 dollars; \$500,000 for the Tigre Suertudo, and \$100,000 for La Combinación (Bisbee Daily Review, January 17 and March 8, 1903).

The eight capitalists, in trials to determine the mine's potential, had begun to extract metal, sending it to El Paso, where the smelter's personnel continued to be astonished by the high

concentration of gold it contained. Furthermore, Graham showed off samples of the metal from El Tigre in Bisbee, amazing everybody with the richness of gold contained in the rocks. One reporter commented: “He showed us several samples from Tigre Suertudo, which looked like slices of rye bread, generously sprinkled with yellow sugar [...]. According to these samples, which were as large as an orange, for each tonne of metal they could obtain between \$10,000 and \$175,000 dollars per tonne” (*ibid.*, January 17, and February 10 and 11, 1903).

On February 10, 1903, 30,000 shares were put up for sale at \$10 dollars per share in the Miners & Merchants Bank of Bisbee, Arizona, and paperwork was begun to organize a corporation to administer the property (*ibid.*, February 11, 1903).

They subsequently agreed to place 10,000 shares on the market at \$15 dollars each, of which they reserved

40,000 for the company's treasury. The purpose was to obtain the necessary resources to acquire the reduction plant they so desired, this being a pressing need in order to process the metal accumulated outside of the tunnels and get as much profit as possible from the mine. By that date they had carried out trials on the minerals which were found underground, and they had the correct analysis for the most adequate type of machinery for concentration. It was determined that the capacity required for the mill was of 100 tonnes daily (ibid., March 30, 1904).

Regarding the installation of the beneficiary plant, composed of the mill and other elements related to the concentration of minerals, one of the alternatives considered was that of building it on the Bavispe River. This would allow them to have abundant water at hand, essential for this type of industry, and to lower the metal from the mine through a pronounced and abrupt slope. However, this was considered a last resort, and it was preferred to erect it closer to the place of extraction. There was also talk of installing a furnace instead of a mill (ibid., June 19, 1904).

The reports arriving in Douglas and Bisbee during the first half of 1904 provided an idea of the depths of the perforations being carried out in El Tigre. Tunnel number two, which corresponded to section three, was already at 700 feet, and it was still being dug out to reach 400 more feet, with the aim of joining it with the Brown shaft in section two. That shaft was where the original proprietors had extracted one of the richest metals that has been extracted from a mine in Mexico, with an approximate value of \$300,000 dollars per tonne (ibid.).



"Las Espuelas" neighbourhood, the most populated, also known as "Barrio de la Mina" [The Mine Neighbourhood]. The photograph below shows the current remains of this community



Cuts were made in the surface on the protruding minerals, and the course of the veins was followed, whose size and richness increased as they got deeper (ibid.). During those first years, the greatest force that moved all of the mining operations was that of animals, especially donkeys and mules. Basic human strength was employed in the tunnels, but the transportation of raw metal sent to El Paso (before the installation of the concentrating plant and the concentrated metal process starting locally several years later), would have been impossible without the use of beasts of burden or draft

animals. In April 1904, B. F. Graham declared in Bisbee that at that moment they were utilizing 500 mules to take the metal to Tigre station. These animals belonged to transporters who offered their services to the company through contracts, for which they received five dollars per tonne, a rate that had actually been recently reduced, as it had previously been higher. He also stated that the company was in negotiations to buy their own 500 mules in the state of Chihuahua to use exclusively for their own operations. Close to 200 men from El Tigre's surrounding areas

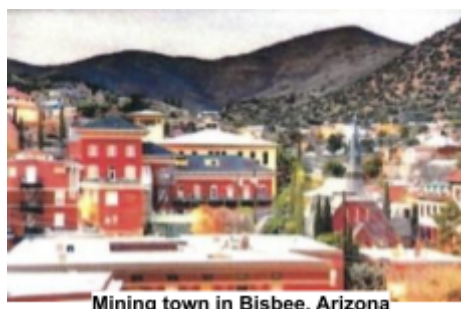


participated in this activity (ibid., April 27, 1904).

During the summer of 1904 in Tigre station [Izabal], the first loads of machinery destined for the mine began to be unloaded from the railway. In each train that crossed the border towards Sonora there could be found at least one shipment of machinery headed for El Tigre. In that same year, El Tigre Mining Company sent, under the name of Lucky Tiger-Combination Gold Mining Company, high grade metal valued at \$230,000 dollars to the smelter in El Paso, Texas; a quantity that was expected to be surpassed in 1905, with the production from the concentrating mill.

During the last months of 1904 and January 1905, the machinery and other implements of the concentrating mill arrived in El Tigre, after much effort during its transportation. Several weeks passed before the plant would be properly installed, and on February

2, the first test was carried out.



For two days the plant was working in trial mode, after which the miller, whose last name was Riordon, expressed that success was guaranteed, and that only some small adjustments on the concentrating tables remained to be done. Graham took the first concentrated lingots to Douglas for tests, and they gave 2.2 ounces of gold, 447 ounces of silver, 13 percent lead, 22 percent iron, 24 percent sulfur, and 16 percent zinc. The mill had the capacity to grind 60 tonnes of metal daily, which were reduced to six tonnes once concentrated, with an approximate value of \$2,000 dollars. The mill was fed only low grade metal, as the richer metal was sent to El Paso. From four wagons full of metal that had been processed recently in the smelter, they had obtained a gross profit of \$33,000 dollars (ibid., February 9, 1905).

Introduction of electric energy

Until 1911, the driving force required in El Tigre had been obtained by steam, and the fuel was wood. On average, every year they burned 150 tonnes of white pine wood (80 percent) and cedar (20 percent) to produce the electricity required for the extraction and concentration of the minerals. Fifty men and 150 mules were involved in the cutting and transportation of wood; the wood was cut in cords of 3 x 4 x 8 feet in the sawmills of the neighbouring forests, and was sold to the company for \$4.32 dollars; meanwhile, carbon cost \$15 dollars per tonne and was produced in four furnaces. This system for obtaining combustible was presenting problems since the prices were constantly rising, and provisions were increasingly lacking, whereby the supply of wood threatened to run out due to its over-exploitation.

It was difficult and expensive to change the source of energy, but once the installations were expanded it was indispensable to substitute this system. At least four alternatives were analyzed: a) continue burning wood, b) build a plant in Izabal, 30 miles away, which would generate electricity by steam power, using petroleum as fuel, c) construct a dam on the Bavispe River, ten miles away which would allow them to operate a hydroelectric plant, and, d) install a steam plant in Douglas, Arizona, powered by electricity, which would generate electricity which would be sent to El Tigre, 65 miles away.

The final decision was to build the plant in Douglas, with two steam exhaust turbo-generators, operated by electricity from the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company, with an annual cost of \$56,000 dollars, versus the \$79,000 which the plant in

Izabal would have cost, despite being half the length of transmission (ibid., 524).

In an article in 1913, The Engineering & Mining Journal affirmed that electricity arrived at the mine in June 1911. The 60 cycle triphasic current was transported through three number four copper cables on wooden posts, with a telephone line set up below them. The space between each post was 200 feet, except at the Bavispe River crossing, where it was necessary to leave a stretch of 1,600 feet. The work was handled by Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Porter, from New York (ibid.).

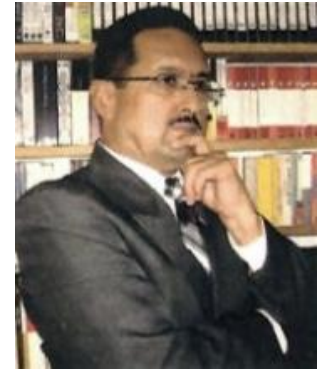
The electricity arrived with a potency of 1,500 horsepower, of which the company utilized the following quantities: in the old plant with its additions, 161.65; in the new cement plant, 86.2; in the cyanidation plant, 402.3; for the workshops, mine, light, and all of the business departments, 116.95, which totaled to 767.10 horsepower. In this way, the mining company had almost double the electric energy available than what they needed (AGES, Oficialía Mayor, volume 2684).

The cost of the line was \$318,229.17 dollars, and required 1,626 posts between the dynamo generators in Douglas, Arizona, and the receptors in El Tigre, with a life expectancy of 12 years.

Between March and May 1911 the turbines and the rest of the equipment which would generate electricity for El Tigre were installed in the Copper

Queen Company powerhouse in Douglas. During an interview in that city on March 24 of that year, Lillywhite declared that up until that moment they had not had any delays due to the armed rebellion that at that time was developing in Mexico; however, by the end by the end of April they were forced to suspend the crew's labour for several weeks, since the rebels were cutting down the cables behind them (Bisbee Daily Review, March 25 and May 2 and 4, 1911).

At the beginning of May 1911 the building that would hold the transformers was finished, located south of the smelter, and the transformers were now ready to be installed. Furthermore, there was also a powerhouse being built in the mining town, which was a building that would store the equipment receiving the electricity. The transformers were now in place, and it was hoped that the plant would begin to operate on June 15 of that same year (ibid., May 4, 1911).



Irene Ríos Figueroa

Born in Los Algodones, Álamos, Sonora, in 1961. He is a normalist professor, retired as director of secondary education, with a Bachelor in Social Sciences of normal, higher education, a Bachelor of Computer Science, a Bachelor in Law, and a Masters in Social Sciences, specializing in historical investigation methods.



“El Tigre”, municipality of Sonora in 1924

From prosperous mining district to ghost town

El Tigre as economic and social center; mine and community

El Tigre was a mining town par excellence. The mine, as a source of work, was the origin of the community, which was made up of the miners' families who arrived from diverse places, attracted by the opportunity of finding employment. From its opening in 1903, the news that a new mine was beginning its work had been spread many kilometers around, and little by little people had begun to arrive from Sonora as well as from Chihuahua and Arizona to find jobs in the new mining district.

Families depended on the mine, since their economic sustenance came from it, but the mine also needed the



Mule drivers on the El Tigre roads

community, since they made up the physical labour that developed their operations. For this reason, the mine and community were interdependent, and formed a permanent partnership, in which the luck of one depended upon the other. This observation is so obvious that upon the disappearance of the mine as a productive unit, the town vanished.

Its topography tends downward, forming a canyon. This downward slope is so extreme that in a stretch of four kilometers it descends 600 meters, beginning from the location of the town.

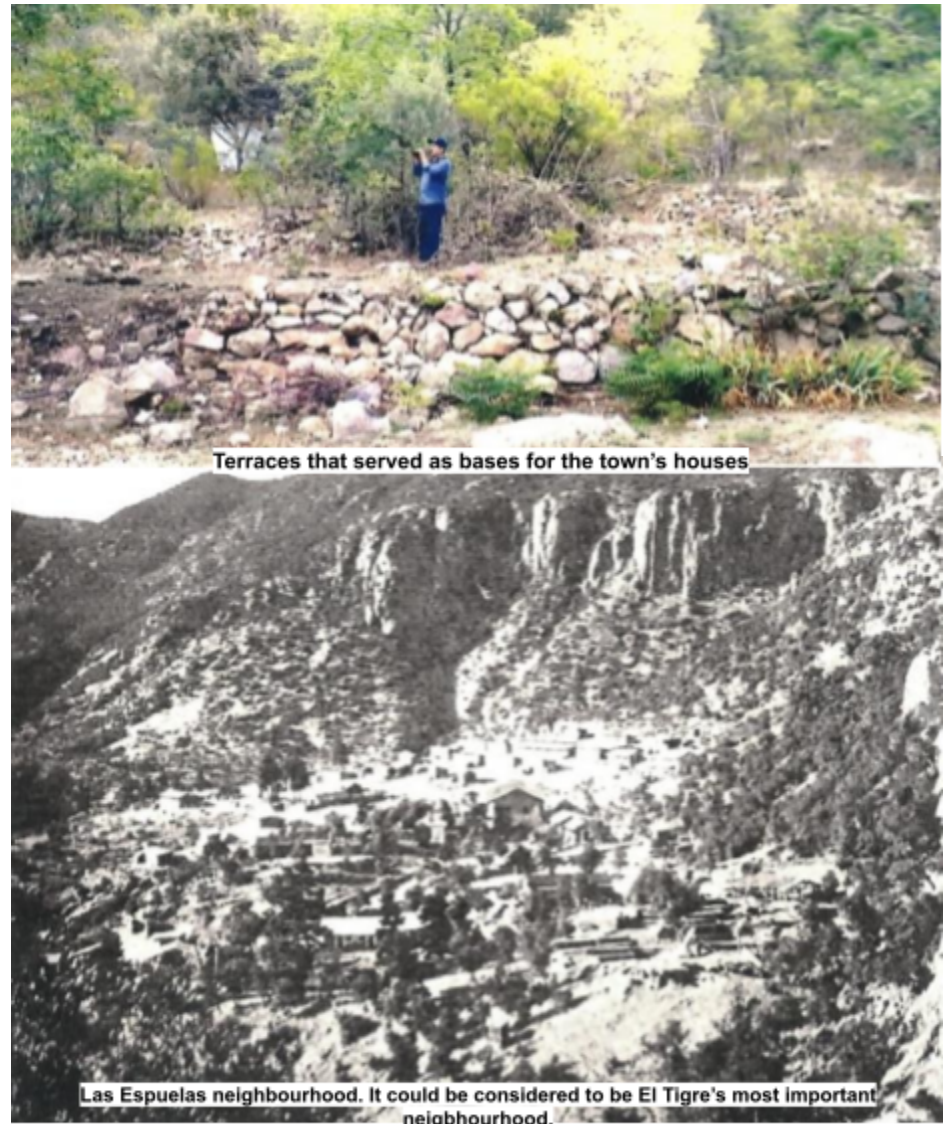
Drawn back by the folds of the mountain, whose skirts exhibit the various perforations by which riches were extracted, the new residents of the mining district began preparing terracing to build their homes. Most of them were made of wood and adobe, so they were destroyed with the passage of time, by both nature and plundering; all that remains today is a multitude of terraces—formed by rock walls—underneath the weeds.

Social and political organization of the mining town

Just over a year after the emergence of El Tigre as a mining camp—in March 1903—it was granted the political category of precinct, corresponding to the Óputo municipality. During El Tigre's first decade, the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz prevailed in Mexico, in which state and national leaders had very little appreciation for democratic methods. But in 1910, the storm clouds of the social revolution which defeated the old dictator covered the whole country, and great political agitation and military violence arrived in places as far as the Bavispe River basin and the El Tigre mountain. Furthermore, it was during the turbulent period of 1910 to 1920 that the company built their new industrial facilities and brought the electrical lines from Douglas, Arizona, permanently maintaining all of those assets and services active, among which were also the telegraph and telephone.

At the end of 1922, the prosperity of El Tigre was such that their tax collection greatly surpassed that of the Óputo municipality to which it belonged. Besides that which was paid by the mining company, there were also the taxes paid by different small businesses. For this reason the authorities agreed to impose a monthly contribution of ten percent from that precinct's tax collections for the expenses of the municipal capital.

In view of the local town council's aspirations, the difficulties of traveling to and communicating with the municipal capital, and the abandonment they felt from the municipal authorities, the mining district's political participants



considered that they had enough economic strength, as well as sufficient residents, to separate themselves from the Óputo municipality. Therefore, on December 31, 1922 more than 130 residents, headed by Matías Chávez, requested that the Congress of Sonora elevate the precinct to the category of municipality, proposing to include in their intended demarcation, besides El Tigre, the precincts of Pilares de Teras, Playa de Teras, and Valle de Teras. The petition was enforced with a socioeconomic analysis.

After some delays due to the opposition of the municipality of

Óputo and the state governor's contrary opinion, the Congress of Sonora passed Law number 125 on September 30, 1924, which erected the municipality of Villa de El Tigre, composed by the towns of El Tigre, Valle de Teras, Playa de Teras, and Pilares de Teras, with the first being the municipal capital.

Bandits, delinquents, and offenders in the mining district

As in all of the Sonoran mountain range, in the El Tigre mountain there were also persons inclined to breaking the law and other societal norms; some from necessity, but most of them due to their fondness

for adventure and excitement. Due to its isolated location, El Tigre was the preferred hiding place for all types of bandits.

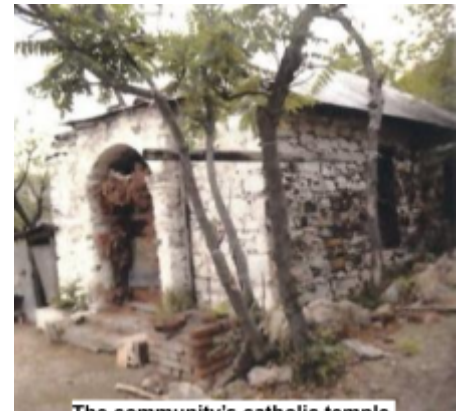
During the first years of the decade of 1900, bandit Bill Stiles ravaged the districts of Moctezuma and Arizpe, both alone as well as associated with other famous bandits from the Bavispe River basin, such as Antonio Cano, and Jesus López Trujillo. They committed all sorts of atrocities, among which were cattle raiding, violent robbery of individuals, as well as assaults on mines and carriages transporting minerals or valuables.

At the beginning of 1904, Bill Stiles, accompanied by Albert Alvord, had assaulted a carriage coming from Magdalena, from which they stole two bars of gold. On their escape route they passed close to Nacozari on February 9, leaving their tracks on the ground. Policeman Gabriel Fimbres formed a squad of ten men, with persons from the region along with two Americans who had been part of the carriage that had been assaulted. On the morning of February 11, 1904, they began their pursuit, finding their tracks in the Cañada de San Pedro, Nacozari Viejo, and following them to the Cañón de los Huérigos [sic]; night fell upon them there, and they spent the night in Óputo.

On the morning of the 12th they took up their tracks again, following them upriver towards Pilares de Teras, heading to Cajón de los Otates to spend the night there; a little before arriving they had found the remains of a young bull that the bandits had butchered the previous day. Stiles and company knew the terrain very well, since during their flight they often left the main road to



Remains of the "Las Espuelas" jail.



The community's catholic temple.



The old general store, now a camp for the personnel who carry out exploratory geological work. The corresponding studies point to a new mining phase for "El Tigre".

go into rough paths, trying to lose their pursuers.

While Valencia¹ and his men slept in the house of the Valle de Tera's police commissary, Fortunato Estevané, Stiles came close to them, watched them, and then went ahead a league to Francisco Frago's house to sleep. With this news, Fimbres arrived that same day, February 3, around 1:00 p.m., at Frago's house. There he found out that Valencia had continued upriver, taking the

¹ "Another small group of nationals, led by Miguel Valencia, had already passed through this area with the same objective as themselves." Mineral El Tigre, page 374.

homeowner with him as he suspected him of hiding the fugitive. Fimbres doubted that Valencia would find the right path and was determined to track nearby; he found hidden in the Cajón de Monte Visto a very sweaty, agitated horse, belonging to the assaulted carriage. Before finding the horse, he had found Alfredo Frago, Francisco's brother, who was leaving the spot where the horse was hidden.

As they were returning to Francisco's house, they coincidentally also found him returning, now freed by Valencia, as he believed him to be innocent. Francisco told Fimbres that Valencia

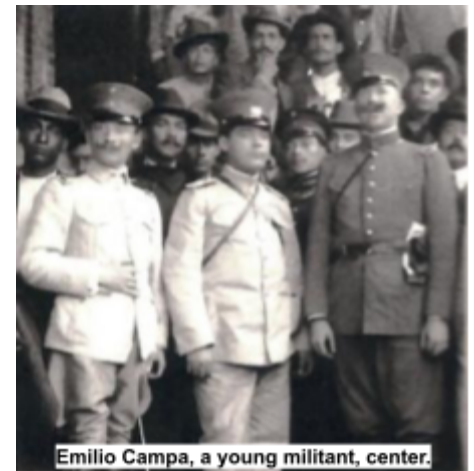
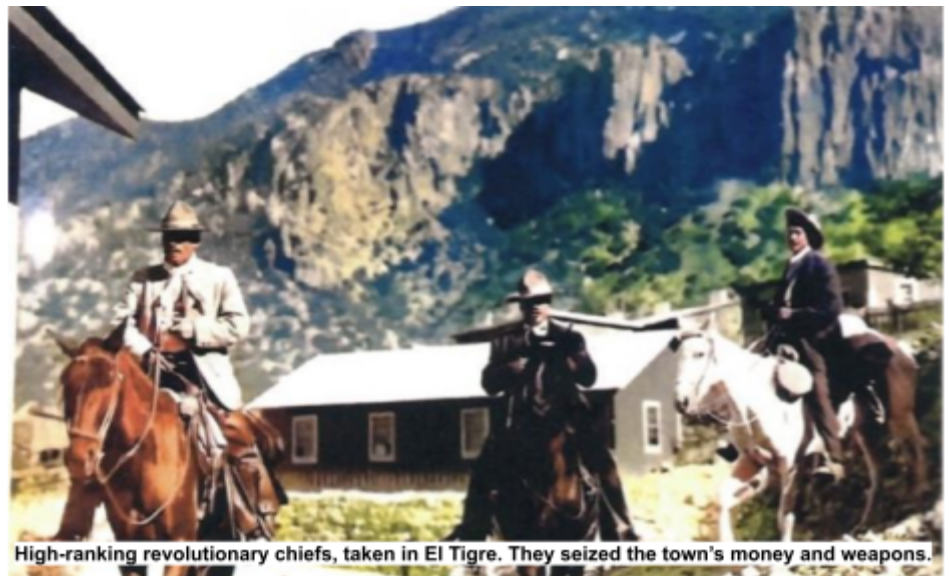
had sent him a message urgently telling him to join him in El Tigre by the quickest path, because he was upon the bandit's tracks. Fimbres and his men pushed their horses to urgently ride up to El Tigre through a steep path, having to stop for the night half a mile from the mine. On the morning of February 14, Fimbres found Valencia in El Tigre, who denied having sent him a message by Fragoso, which confirmed his conniving with the bandits.

Cattle theft was a recurring practice in the mountains of Sonora, and particularly in the El Tigre mountain and the Bavispe River valley. Due to its proximity to the state of Chihuahua, the incursion of cattle raiders was frequent, who made off with large herds of cattle stolen from the estates and ranches of that state.

The production, trafficking, and sale of alcohol were activities that at least in the decade of 1910 to 1920 were among the main concerns of the government of Sonora. It was considered that the consumption of intoxicating beverages altered public peace and fostered illicit conduct.

The official desperation for putting an end to activities which put alcohol within the reach of consumers was such that Plutarco Elías Calles, as Governor of Sonora, issued notice number 158 on June 10, 1919, to the municipal presidents, in which he decreed that "[...] all those individuals who in some way are found producing or trafficking liquor [...] will be shot, and the necessary forces for this end are being commissioned".

In El Chiltepin, in the Villa de El Tigre municipality, it was 5:00 p.m. on January 10, 1926, when Eduardo



Encinas was watching over the operation of his small distillery. It was very cold, and they were preparing to spend the night in the mountain, warmed by a campfire. Resident of Esqueda, Encinas had ridden up to the El Tigre mountain to find economic sustenance for his family, setting up a small mezcal production, whose product he would then sell in the neighbouring areas. Soon he heard a horde of horses, and discovered several cavalrymen emerging from a curve in the road headed towards him. It was a group of rural policemen, under the command of Francisco B. Ochoa, chief of the rural police in the Arizpe and Moctezuma districts, who was

traversing the region looking for clandestine distillers. As it was a small scale distillery, Eduardo Encinas was set free, although his decommissioned utensils were not returned to him.

El Tigre, target of attacks during the Mexican Revolution ***Maderismo***

During the armed movement that broke out on November 20, 1910, El Tigre was visited by military parties from different sides. In mid-February 1911, the revolutionary groups descended the El Pulpito canyon and invaded the Bavispe River valley. Colonel José de la Luz Blanco captured the towns of Bacerac,

Bavispe, and San Miguelito, and imposed new authorities. From there he prepared to head to El Tigre on his way to Fronteras and Agua Prieta.

On the morning of Wednesday, March 1, 1911, some 250 armed men were filling the roads leading to the mining district. When they were at the door to the town, three shots were fired and the cavalymen descended upon the streets in hordes. It was the signal that Blanco had indicated to enter. The authorities in charge in El Tigre did not put up any resistance, and nobody was injured.

The revolutionaries plundered the precinct's funds and took hold of a large lot of arms and ammunition belonging to The Tigre Mining Company, which in those days had increased with shipments from Douglas for their own protection. The *maderistas* seized at least 200 weapons and 50,000 cartridges.

There were persons who felt insulted at not having been rewarded politically by Madero, like Isidro Escobosa, Emilio Campa, Francisco Escandón and Pascual Orozco, along with others who were unhappy with Madero's tolerance of enemies within his cabinet, such as Francisco and Emilio Vázquez Gómez.

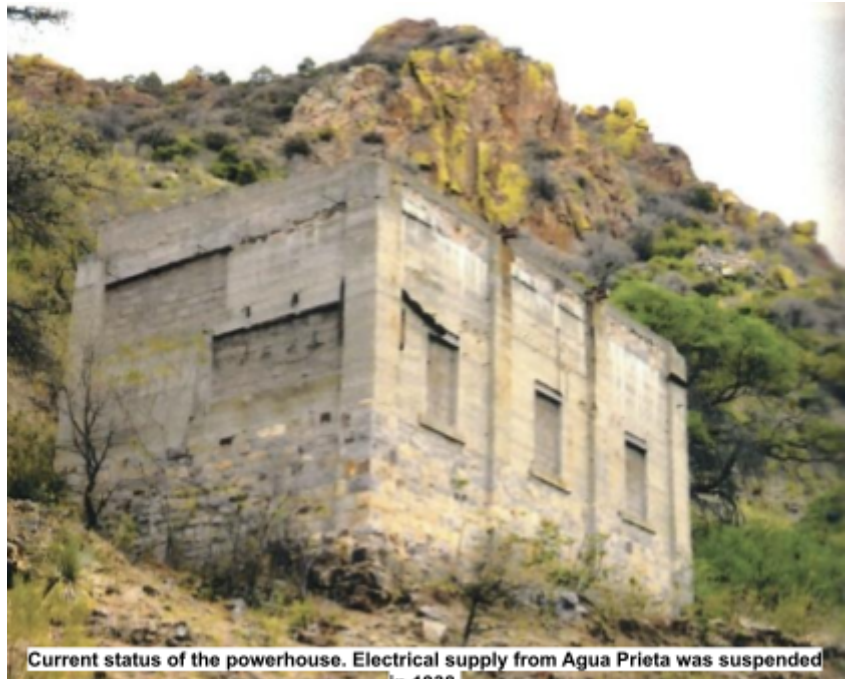
On October 8, 1911, at 6:30 a.m., Escobosa attacked the El Tigre mining district, but was not able to enter the town. Police commissioner Captain Encarnación T. León led the defense with 32 residents, later receiving support from 65 soldiers under Captain Luis Arvizu who arrived from the south. After several hours of battle, now after noon, the attackers fled to the north in sorry conditions. They passed through Pílares de Teras at 4:30 p.m., closely followed by Arvizu, who was pursuing them. Escobosa's final



Antonio Rojas, center, in the black hat.



José Inés Salazar, from the *Orozquista* movement



Current status of the powerhouse. Electrical supply from Agua Prieta was suspended in 1938.

balance in his failed attempt at capturing El Tigre was that of two dead and six injured, along with eight lost horses.

With matters in this state, on the night of April 6, 1912, Major Jesús Trujillo of the federal army, began to move from Izábal station towards El Tigre, accompanied by 25 armed men, while Fructuoso Méndez left the mine to provide reinforcements in Bavispe with 37 men. It is most likely that these movements were done on foot, as Trujillo, in an urgent telegram, expressed: "There are no horses".

The *orozquista* rebellion

As if the *anti-maderista* rebellion registered up to that time was not enough, in Chihuahua another

notable revolutionary leader rose up against Madero in March 1912: Pascual Orozco. Orozco was motivated by his ambition for personal reward and was influenced by the petty tyrants who had been harmed by Madero's triumph. The *colorados*, which was the nickname by which the *orozquistas* were known, entered Sonora in the summer of 1912. On August 3, 800 men entered by Puerto San Luis, close to Agua Prieta, and on September 6, 300 more were reported.

The capture of El Tigre by the *colorados* was imminent. To prevent this, the American residents agreed to propose an armistice to the invaders, hoping to avoid much trouble, while in Douglas the idea to

send a committee to travel to the mining town and rescue the women spread.

On the morning of September 11, the *orozquista* leaders Antonio Rojas and José Inés Salazar, allied with Emilio Campa and leading 800 soldiers, asked for the surrender of Agua Prieta, giving them 24 hours to evacuate. Plutarco Elías Calles' fear of defeat was justified, as they only had 180 men to cover their three flanks.

Rojas threatened James S. Douglas, representative of the Phelps Dodge Corporation, that he would destroy the mining camps of Nacozari, Moctezuma, and El Tigre, if he did not desist in his attempt to introduce a troublemaking group into Sonora to protect those mining districts. Furthermore, he warned that they would destroy the electrical lines between Douglas and El Tigre.

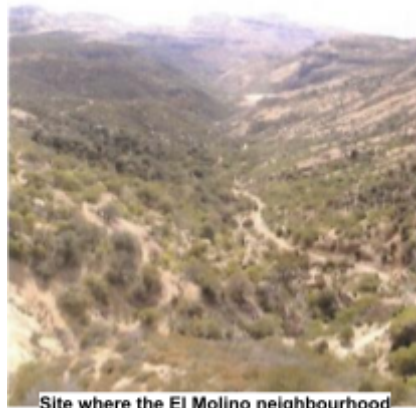
When the *orozquistas* saw a troop of more than 1,000 men arrive in Douglas from El Paso, Salazar and Campa fled towards Colonia Morelos, where they plundered the Mormons' houses and businesses, while Rojas headed to the El Tigre mining district.

From Colonia Morelos, Salazar and Campa went up to El Tigre to join Rojas, and together attack the town, on September 13, 1912. The attack began at 6:00 a.m. At 7:30 a.m., Salazar sent a messenger with a white flag to ask the chief of the federal garrison to surrender, but the offer was rejected. It was then that Salazar resumed the battle, which lasted until 5:00 p.m.

At that time the rebels retreated, but at nightfall they attacked once more while the place was without communication as their telephone line was cut. The skirmish, which



Revolutionary troops passing through El Tigre.



Site where the El Molino neighbourhood was located.



Los Chinos, 15 km from El Tigre, where the "La Acordada" police hung their detainees.

had begun at dawn on Friday, September 13, lasted all of Saturday the 14th, until at 11:00 p.m. that day, the military garrison of 100 federal soldiers surrendered after 35 hours of relentless attacks and the death of their commander.

Assassination of Madero and Post-Revolution

The *orozquista* attack would not be the last incursion of revolutionaries in El Tigre. When Francisco I. Madero was assassinated in February 1913, the country would be shaken once again, and the rivalry between parties was formed once more. During the fight against Madero's assassin — Victoriano Huerta — Francisco Villa and Venustiano

Carranza became enemies, and their confrontation included the invasion of *villista* troops in Sonora.

Villa, with 11,000 soldiers, entered by the El Pulpito canyon on October 19, 1915 to attack Agua Prieta. Faced with Villa's imminent arrival by the Bavispe River, Plutarco Elías Calles prepared the city's garrisoning. Villa chose the route of Colonia Morelos, but sent a force of 2,000 cavalymen through El Tigre to be stationed in Cabullona. In this way he would carry out a pinching effect on Agua Prieta.

In regards to the *villista* troops' attitudes on their passing through El Tigre, the Bisbee Daily Review reported that "the vanguard has not bothered the mining operations in El

Tigre”. However, half of Villa’s army who had headed separately to Hermosillo, deserted in the mountain range and was attempting to escape Sonora. A fraction of 400 soldiers attacked the El Tigre mining district and obligated Captain Loreto to evacuate the stronghold, faced with the overwhelming number of the enemy. There they plundered the general store and several houses of both Mexicans and “Americans”, appearing to have obtained good results from their plundering, and then continued towards Chihuahua.

After the attack, the mining company’s manager and their doctor, as well as 16 other persons, fled on horseback in the early morning of December 1, 1915, by the Pílares de Teras and Colonia Morelos road, headed to Douglas, Arizona. Twelve hours later, another group of company employees followed, and with them the last Americans from the mining district. Several hours after their exodus, 300 *villistas* came down upon El Tigre, led by General Pablo López. However, after a brief confrontation against the 100 garrison elements, they retreated.

From prosperous mining district to ghost town

In 1929 the Great Economic Depression commenced, affecting the economy worldwide. Many businesses went bankrupt, national production and fiscal revenue fell considerably, millions of people became unemployed, and the prices of industrial production plummeted; they fell so far that it was not affordable to continue operations. Among those products were the metals that were extracted and processed by The Tigre Mining Company.

The mining company, far from satisfying the labourers’ demands, wanted to fire almost half of their workforce, as there was no market for production nor resources to pay their salaries. The company, which at the beginning attempted to lay off 125 workers, later requested authorization to completely terminate their employment. Their demands were not successful, but the company significantly reduced their economic investment in the mining district, raised prices and reduced credits in their general store, and suspended the multiple contracts they had with local individuals.

The decrease in the mine’s prosperity went hand in hand with the decline of Villa de El Tigre as a municipality, as the decrease in the number of inhabitants consequently caused a fall in their tax revenue, which made the administration of the municipality unsustainable. On December 26, 1930, the Congress of Sonora issued Law No. 68, which eliminated 47 of the 74 municipalities existing in Sonora. Among those was Villa de El Tigre, which was reduced to a precinct—conserving the same jurisdiction—added to the municipality of Nacozari, and returning to its previous name of El Tigre. Law 68 came into effect on January 1, 1931, and established that the elections for new police commissioners would be carried out during the month of April, and that meanwhile the Governor would name temporary ones.

Finally, on Sunday, July 17, 1938, the company executives issued the order to totally suspend work, which was carried out on Monday the 18th. The suspension was intended to be temporary, but the passing of days,

weeks, and months confirmed the definitive closure of the mine, leaving 200 workers unemployed. The first consequence of this decision was that the electrical supply to El Tigre was cut, which the Arizonian company Edison provided from Douglas, and which cost \$2,500 dollars a month.

The closure of the mining activities finished with the hope of the mining district’s recovery. Then the plundering of metals in the tunnels and the dismantling of the facilities by the unemployed miners who did not know where to go began.

In the political-administrative sphere, the town closed a cycle upon returning to its original status. On May 16, 1967, the Congress of Sonora passed Law No. 98, by which it declared the disappearance of the precinct El Tigre, in light of its existence not being justified due to its scarce population. The legal disappearance occurred on June 7, 1967, upon being published in the aforementioned Law in the Official Bulletin of the State of Sonora.

With information from the book “Mineral El Tigre, Ghosts of the ruins of a prosperous mining district in Sonora (1903-1938)”.

**By: Irene Ríos Figueroa
irenerf1@hotmail.com**