

# Battalion Classified

# 'Ghost town' survives on gold boom memories

United Press International  
CONGRESS, Ariz. — With his four burros nosed among the sagebrush between the highway and the railroad tracks, Bob Sundown, an American who hasn't really made it from yesterday into today, stirred a campfire under a pot of beans.

"I think I'll just sit here awhile and think of women," he said.

Sundown, his burros and his four-wheel wagon — it looks like the vehicle that brought Americans west a century ago and, dangled with the pots, pans, radios and the other fallouts of civilization that he trades, it looks like a moving storage closet — roam the deserts and plains from Montana to Arizona.

"I'm not a dropout," he said. "I'm

a drop in." He said he drops into towns like Congress to keep his hand in society.

"It's not that I worry about the state of civilization today. I just don't think about it very much."

Congress thinks a bit about Sundown, however. He comes through Congress about only once every three years. But he is a tourist and Congress savors tourists almost as much as it does the gold found occasionally up in Weaver Creek.

The Rand McNally Atlas editors occasionally have marked down Congress, 45 miles northwest of Phoenix, as a "Ghost Town." And Congress resents it. Ella Wilson, who runs the Totem Trading Post, said, "We are not a ghost town. I am no ghost."

Congress hasn't really got a grip on itself. Several generations ago the town buildings centered around the

Weaver Creek gold diggings. That dried up. So the next buildings began rising on the road leading north into the hills and Prescott. But Wilson's trading post is about the only habited building there now.

Currently, the activity is a half-mile up another road, where the post office, the grocery and the cafe play where the deer and the antelope rarely set foot. "Things ain't been too lively since we had that drop in the price of gold around the turn of the century," said Chester Tucker, 75, a retired forest ranger living in a desert without trees.

"Really, the trouble is that everybody who lived about the creek diggings have about died out. Oh, I've found me some gold, all right. But the friends of yesterday are gone," the old ranger said.

"Trouble is it gets up to about 118 degrees and stays there an uncomfortable time. It was the heat that died old Ned Perrot. And Vivian Hale. And Ed Wiseman. And Fred Frederickson. And even Mr. Upton."

Out under the midday sun, Sundown, his beans eaten, was moving from burro to burro, talking to them, telling them jokes.

"Old Moose there," said said, pointing at one burro. Barney is 17, too. George is 13. George is the most civilized; he acts like a gentleman. He bites any stranger but, of course, too civilized to do so.

"I was a Marine in World War I. I was all right, I suppose, as soon as the war ended in 1918, I got me my wagon and my burros and been on the trail ever since."

"I make my living by trading beans and have enough to offer for hospitality. Oh, I've got those roosters and seven hens, too," said, pointing a scuffed black hat birds pecking around his feet.

"The chickens are friends, so I got to be really hungry. I think about eating one, but darn sure ain't good enough for me to give them names."

"Saddest thing ain't the heat. It's the old folks I sometimes see. They know where they've been where they're at and they're happy as the kids; they know where they are."

"Happier still is something Sundown said. 'That's the one while a woman comes around.'"

Up in the grocery, Lily Hale she liked life among the 500 Congress. "We of Congress are senators or representatives by God, we are all speakers."

Outside, across the road and by the tracks, Bob Sundown talking to his burros again.

The braying of Moose, George Barney and Tilley rolled across flat land like the tumbledown

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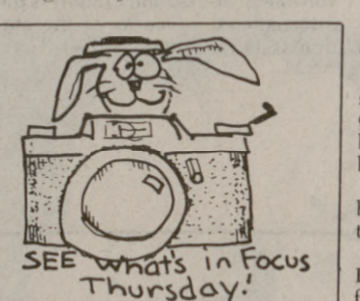
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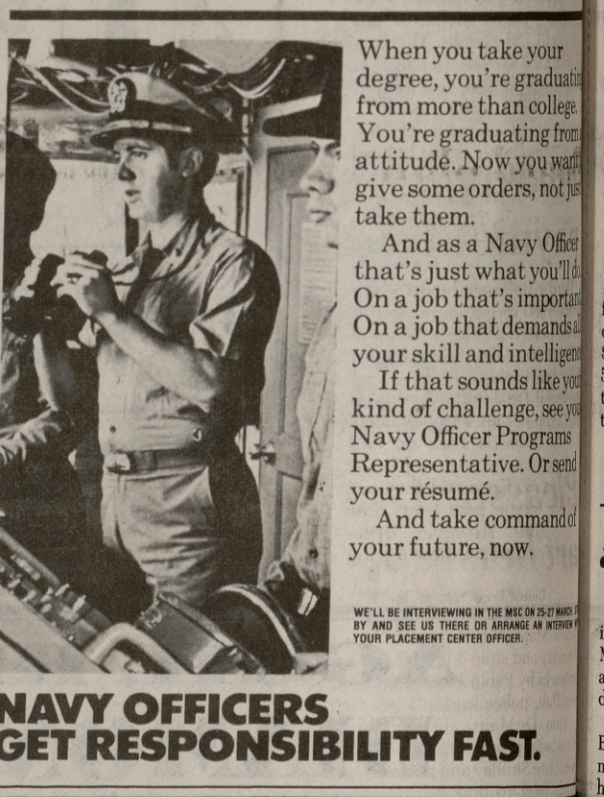
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