

A Report from the Spotted Tail Indian Agency, 1877

Some punctuation has been added; items in brackets have been added for clarification.

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Spotted Tail Agency, Neb[raska]
May 1, 1877

To
Honorable Commissioner of Indian Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Sir

I have the honor to report the condition of Affairs at this Agency during the past month as follows:

The Beef now delivered by Messers. Powers & Mabrey is in good condition for the season of the year & mostly of cattle that have wintered in this section of the country, some of them even are half breed American cattle. In the other part of the ration, I am mostly getting very short, as shown by my weekly reports, owing to the large accessions [groups of Indians coming] both from Red Cloud Agency & the north. I trust that steps have been taken to force the freight contractor (McCann) to forward all the Corn inspected and delivered to him and that flour will be supplied as readily as possible. By suffering in issuing, with what is still on my last weekly report as on hand and the Hard Bread borrowed from the Agent at Red Cloud I can manage to make the issue for the present week, but unless quickly supplied, I shall have neither flour, H[ar]d Bread, or Corn on hand for issue during the coming week. I have telegraphed to you fully

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on the 25th ulto. and again respectfully urge that I be kept in supplies for the reasons given in the dispatch reference to above. Since my report of the 19th of April reporting an arrival of Indians at this Agency of 917 persons, there have been transferred from Red Cloud Agency the largest part of the Wahz ahz ahs [a Sioux tribe] that still remained at that Agency viz. 219 persons, besides these the following named Indians with their families have returned from the north, and after being disarmed & their ponies turned over to the Indian Soldiers have been taken up for rations viz.

Charging Shield	25 persons	Pure Hawk	4 persons
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Transcription

Primary Sources for Teachers 2006

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Medicine Blanket ?Wit?	4 “	Slow Bull	10 “
Chest	4 “	Bear goes in Woods	8 “
Spotted Elk	8 “	One That Strikes	4 “

Total 67 persons

which makes a grand total of 7133 Indians, Hlf Breeds, & Whites with Indian families now rationed at this Agency.

All the Indians coming from the hostile Camp, state that “Crazy Horse” with the Ogagallas & some Minneconjous are moving south & that he is intending to go into some Agency, as yet no positive information could be obtained to which Agency he is likely to move, I will report by telegraph as soon as I can get reliable information on this point, in case they should come to this Agency.

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In compliance with your instructions contained in your letter of the 23rd of March, I have notified the Indians in council assembled that the treaty stipulations entered into with them last fall have been ratified by Congress and approved by the president, with certain exceptions & that the Government intends to fulfill its part of the treaty and that it is expected that the Indians on their part will do the same. Since then their [sic] has been a great desire on the part of the Indians to farm and I am daily beset with applications for farming utensils and requests for giving aid in the execution of the work. It is my opinion and this is shared by all persons who have the opportunity to make personal observations, that this desire should be in no way interfered with or discouraged, that on the contrary all encouragement & help should be given them in the execution of this laudable desire and that sooner than to restrain them in farming in any way, any move that may have been contemplated should be deferred at least until next year.

The treaty stipulates that all children of a certain age should be sent to school, but owing to the limited means at present at census and this cannot be carried out to any extent. The present school accommodations are not sufficient for the children of the whitemen & half breeds, besides some of the Indians, of which Spotted Tail is one, object very much that the children should be

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instructed in their mother tongue. It is however a question to my mind whether or not success of any consequences can be obtained as far as schools are concerned; until the Indians have been permanently located for some years and it will be only a very limited number of children that will for the first number of years derive any material benefit of them. The greatest obstacle to be overcome will be the home influence, their habits & the home training will make them forget in two hours after they left school all they have learned during the day. It is my opinion that the system of boarding schools in operation at other Agencies should be inaugurated and that at first only a limited number of children should be directed to them, the scholars should slowly but

steadily increase every year until a general system of schools has been obtained in the course of time, any [too] stringent enforcement of this article will in my opinion result in a failure of the whole.

On the 12th of April I issued the remaining portion of the annuity goods to Spotted Tail, who had arrived a few days previously from the north. It consisted mostly of Blankets and Whitemen's Cloths [clothes]. I tried to induce some of them to wear these cloth[es], but with the exception of two, one of which has been wearing the Whiteman's dress for years and the other does wear them occasionally, I have heard of but two who did put on and wear them for one entire day, and

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though I have warned everybody against buying & trading anything in the shape of annuities from the Indians, I cannot but say that all the clothing will ultimately get into the hands of people, who have no right whatsoever to get them.

In all the councils & talks I had with the Indians who recently came from the north, they evince a desire to remain peaceably, and it is the opinion of all persons who come into contact with them, that at least for the present their profession is honestly meant. With the exception of ponies and arms they were destitute of everything, they are crowded two & three families together in one small tebe [tipi], which are all the worse for the wear & full of holes. I have at present no means to relieve or help them in any way to better their conditions in this respect and would respectfully suggest that if practicable, enough canvas to make about 50 or 60 lodges, should be purchased & sent to relieve the most needy wants, as the crowded conditions of the lodges will make it very unhealthy for them during the warm weather. Their lack of ammunition and the none success [non-success] of hunting buffalo when north caused a good deal of starvation among them, which was shared for some time by Spotted Tail's party and several days before the rations sent to them arrived they had been out of eatables entirely.

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Some additional Indians have been enlisted by the military authorities as soldiers and among them, the Chiefs Spotted Tail, Two Strike, and Swift Bear with some other Headmen, also 20 of the Indians recently returned from the north were induced to enter the service. This latter is regarded by the officers of Gen. Crook's staff & myself a great success and an additional proof that their demonstrations & promises are made on their behave [behalf] in good faith, an any way it commits them in the eyes of the more hostile Indians and compels them to remain at the Agency. No confidence on the part of the more hostile Indians can be refused in them any more. Some of these Indians have great influence in the council of the Hostiles & wonder in case of any more hostile movements on the part of the other Indians can be compelled in their present situation to side with the government.

The discipline of this Indian soldiery is at present very crude; but most of them comply promptly with all orders given to them and it is believed that if this should be kept up, quite an efficient

the claim of these parties being true, turned over to them. The mode pursued by me, is, that any person claiming a horse or mule, he has to take one of the Indian soldiers with him, who is to be present at the time the stock is turned over and to report the fact to me, in case of any dispute the animal in question has to be turned over to me & both parties have to proof [prove] their right to the animal. The ownership is determined by me after having obtained all evidence of both parties.

On the 26th of April I have caused the confinement at the post guardhouse at Camp Sheridan of Moses McGirk an employee of this Agency on account of trading tobacco, sugar, & coffee to the Indians, that was entrusted to his care as driver in transporting it to the camp of the northern Indians coming in, on the Cheyenne River, also for stealing sugar etc. out of the warehouse in which he was assisting in issuing, one sack of sugar weighing about 100 lbs having been found in the lodge he is living, but the evidence being only circumstantial, the amount of the stores stolen only small and this man's extreme poverty I have decided not to take any action in the matter; but to have him sent under proper escort off the reservation, which latter I have requested the Commanding Officer at Camp Sheridan to do.

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Very Respectfully
Your Ob[edien]t Servant
J. M. Lee
[First Lieutenant, 9th Infantry
Regiment]
[Acting Indian Agent]