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Article Summary: When Indian leaders persuaded hostile Sioux groups to surrender, the success of the peace talkers made an all-out military campaign unnecessary. An area including portions of five later states thus became safe for settlement.

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Photographs / Images: Julius Meyer and Indian Chiefs Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Swift Bear, and Spotted Tail; General George Crook commissioning Spotted Tail as Chief of the Sioux Nation in 1876 at Red Cloud Agency

INDIAN PEACE-TALKERS AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876

BY HARRY H. ANDERSON

THE Indian hostilities that comprised the Sioux War of 1876¹ were brought to a close in the spring of the following year with a suddenness that most contemporary observers did not expect. In January, 1877 there had

¹This conflict was an outgrowth of the gold discoveries in the Black Hills, located on the western edge of the Great Sioux Reservation. Attempts by the government to purchase the area from the Indians in 1875 were unsuccessful. A major source of opposition to the sale of the sacred "Paha Sapa" of the Sioux nation were the non-agency or hunting bands who roamed the country between the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains. This region had been designated by the Sioux treaty of 1868 as unceded Indian territory. During the winter of 1875-1876, these hunting bands were ordered by the government to come to the several Sioux agencies (Cheyenne River, Spotted Tail, Standing Rock, and Red Cloud) or be considered "hostile" and subject to punishment by the United States Army. The Indians ignored the ultimatum. When the Army took the field, the Sioux and their Northern Cheyenne allies showed surprising strength, and defeated the soldiers in the battles of the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn. By late fall, 1876, over one-third of the nation's military strength was concentrated on the northern plains to cope with this situation.

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been little outward indication of an early peace on the northern plains. Yet by the middle of May, nearly 4,000 hostile Sioux and Cheyennes had arrived at the agencies and surrendered to the United States government. This rather remarkable capitulation cannot be explained simply as the result of field operations carried on by the Army. Other forces, working predominantly among the Indians themselves, played a considerable role in preventing further bloodshed and suffering. In the winter months, when military movements were all but impossible, the authorities gained the cooperation of certain influential leaders among the agency Sioux. Motivated by a deep concern for the welfare of their people, these men, as peace-talkers, traveled through bitter cold and deep snow to the hostile camps, and, after extensive talks with the fighting chiefs, persuaded them to come in and surrender.

Several half-hearted attempts had been made from Camp Robinson, at the Red Cloud Agency in Nebraska, to open negotiations with the hostiles as early as October and November, 1876. Runners went out with the message that the Indians must come in to the agencies or troops would move against their camps and destroy them. But until severe winter weather made effective military operations impossible, these messengers were as much concerned with locating the hostile villages and guiding the troops to them as they were with actually persuading the Indians to surrender.²

The first serious effort by the Army to send an official peace delegation to the hostiles was made in early December. Two prominent subchiefs of the Miniconjou Sioux, Important Man and Foolish Bear, set out from Cheyenne River Agency on the Missouri River in search

² *New York Herald*, December 1, 1876, February 5, 1877; William Garnett Interview, Ricker Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

of the Crazy Horse village, then believed to be located in the vicinity of the lower Yellowstone River.³ The terms they carried were the Army's standard offer: unconditional surrender of the Indians' pony herds and firearms in return for assurances that no one would be punished for the Custer "massacre" of the previous summer.

The two chiefs succeeded in reaching the hostile village about December 22, after it had moved to the upper reaches of the Tongue River.⁴ They could not have arrived at a more inopportune time. The war faction in the camp, solidly in control of the tribal council, had already begun plans to re-open full-scale hostilities against the soldiers.⁵ A week earlier, however, the peace messengers would have found a very different situation.

Throughout early December there had been strong feeling among many headmen in the camp that some attempt should be made to open talks with the whites about ending the fighting. This peace movement was led by Sitting Bull,

³ In the fall of 1876, the large Indian camp that had destroyed Custer's command at the Little Big Horn in June broke up and scattered for the winter. One large portion stayed south of the Yellowstone River, in the vicinity of the lower Rosebud and Tongue. Crazy Horse, the Oglala Sioux war chief, was the leading man in this camp, and for the sake of identification it is usually referred to as "Crazy Horse's camp." By December it contained between five and six hundred lodges, or about 3,500 people.

⁴ Important Man and Foolish Bear made an extensive report on their visit to the hostile camp when they returned to Cheyenne River Agency. Colonel William H. Wood to the Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Dakota, January 24, 1877, War Records Branch, National Archives. (Hereafter cited as WRB, NA.) This is the basis for all subsequent statements about their experiences on the peace mission.

⁵ There were several distinct groups in the village. The war faction included the leaders of the warrior societies and several older chiefs who were almost fanatical in their hatred of the whites. At the other extreme was the "peace party," composed mainly of agency Indians. They had fled to the Crazy Horse camp when the Army moved to confiscate their firearms and horses in September and October.

an influential Oglala Sioux from Red Cloud Agency.⁶ When the Northern Cheyenne winter camp was destroyed by a cavalry column under Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie on November 28, 1876, that tribe traveled several hundred miles across country through the dead of winter to seek refuge with the Sioux. Without proper food or clothing they suffered terribly before arriving at the Crazy Horse camp sometime during the second week in December.⁷ The wretched condition of the Cheyennes added weight to the efforts of the peace faction. Sitting Bull and his supporters pointed to this suffering as an inevitable consequence of continuing the war. These arguments succeeded in convincing some of the moderates in the tribal council, at least to the extent of gaining their support for the opening of talks with Colonel Nelson A. Miles, commanding the military cantonment at the mouth of Tongue River on the Yellowstone.

On December 16, an advance party from the Sioux peace delegation was actually within the outskirts of the cantonment when Miles' Crow Indian scouts treacherously murdered five of the chiefs, including Sitting Bull, the Oglala, and sent the rest hurrying back to the safety of their village.⁸ A violent reaction swept through the camp. The peace party, now entirely discredited, gave up for the time being any further thoughts of negotiation. Crazy Horse and the other war spirits cited the incident as proof that the whites had no desire to end the fighting. They convened the tribal council and formulated a plan to carry

⁶ This Indian should not be confused with the famous Hunkpapa Sioux leader of the same name. In 1875, President Grant personally presented him with an engraved repeating rifle as a reward for his friendship. He had left Red Cloud Agency during the signing of the Black Hills treaty in October, 1876, completely disgusted with the tactics used by the government commission to force the agreement on the Sioux. Harry H. Anderson, "The War Club of Sitting Bull the Oglala," *Nebraska History*, 42 (March, 1961), pp. 55-61.

⁷ George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman, 1956) pp. 359-382.

⁸ Miles was furious at this action by the Crows. He discharged them on the spot, took their horses and other personal property and sent it to the Sioux in an attempt to reopen negotiations. *Army and Navy Journal* (New York), February 3, 1877.

the war to the soldiers. The two messengers from Cheyenne River Agency reached the camp shortly after this operation was put in motion.

When their message was presented to the headmen of the village, it was the war faction which replied for the council. The chief of the white soldiers was to be told that the Sioux and Cheyennes had not started the war; but they were now determined to continue the fighting as long as they had means to resist. Crazy Horse added his own post-script, warning Important Man and Foolish Bear that no one from the camp would be permitted to go back with them to the agency. When several groups attempted to slip away with the messengers, Crazy Horse and the tribal soldiers caught them, killed their horses, and took away their guns. Unable to travel through the deep snow on foot, and without weapons with which to hunt, these parties were forced to remain with the village and aid in preparations for the coming campaign.

The hostiles' plan for a winter offensive was merely a variation of the old decoy-party operation. Small parties of warriors carried out a series of annoyance raids against the Tongue River post with the intention of drawing the troops into an ambush in the rough and broken country of the upper Tongue.⁹ As the hostile leaders expected, Miles eagerly snatched at the bait. His command was moving against the Crazy Horse village by New Year's day, 1877. After brief skirmishes on January 3, 6, and 7, a full-scale engagement was fought in the foothills of Wolf Mountains

⁹ Colonel William H. Wood to the Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Dakota, February 27, 1877, WRB, NA. This is the statement of Red Horse, a Miniconjou council chief who was present when the trap was planned. The decoy-party maneuver was one of the few bits of military strategy known to the plains Indians. The Sioux used it with remarkable effectiveness, mainly because of their ability to vary the tactics of the decoy party to suit a specific situation. The Fetterman "massacre" at Fort Phil Kearny in December, 1866 is perhaps the best known example of its use.

on January 8.¹⁰ The fighting ended in a blinding snowstorm, with neither side being able to secure a decisive success. There were, however, several factors growing out of the battle that proved important to the eventual surrender of the hostiles several months later.

On the evening of January 7, Miles' advance scouts had captured a small party of Cheyennes, mostly women. They were taken back with the column to the Tongue River post, where the soldiers treated them with kindness and consideration. When Miles sent a party to open negotiations with the hostiles in early February, one of these prisoners went along. The kind treatment she had received did much to influence the chiefs to come in and talk terms.

Of more significance was the failure of the war faction among the hostiles to score the spectacular victory over the soldiers they had predicted. The peace party again felt strong enough to renew openly its opposition to the war, arguing that the Wolf Mountains fight was further indication that the white men could not be defeated. It was better to make peace with the whites now, before a larger force of soldiers could be sent against their camp.

These arguments suddenly received support from an unexpected source. Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa Sioux leader, arrived in the village and announced that he was taking the people of his tribe across the border to safety in Canada. Sitting Bull was as strong in his hatred of the whites and in opposition to the negotiations of a peace as were Crazy Horse and the other hostile extremists. But he now had decided it would be wise to end the fighting for a while, and go north to live in the land of the Grandmother, Queen Victoria.

The position of the war leaders was quickly becoming an impossible one. Underlying the growing peace sentiment and the decision of Sitting Bull, was the ever increasing

¹⁰ Official accounts of the battle of Wolf Mountains are in *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 494-496, 524, 525.

difficulty of keeping their large village adequately supplied with food. As long as they could keep the camp together, it was possible to use the tribal soldiers to prevent the people from going in to surrender. But even after the departure of the Hunkpapas, the task of killing enough buffalo and small game to feed some 3,000 people proved to be too great. Sometime during the last week in January, the hostile camp finally left Tongue River and scattered in several directions. The Oglala Sioux and most of the Cheyennes went westward to the valley of the Little Big Horn, while the other Sioux groups, the Miniconjous and Sans Arcs, divided up into a number of small camps along the Little Missouri, north of the Black Hills. Several small parties also went into the agencies, either to Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, or to Cheyenne River on the Missouri.¹¹

Ironically, even before the decision to break up the village was forced upon the hostile leaders, the government had found it impossible to keep troops in the field any longer because of the severe weather and the problem of supply. Further offensive action was postponed until spring; but then, with a well planned campaign, the Army intended to put an end to the Sioux War. At the Sioux agencies, however, a chain of events had already begun which would eventually make this spring offensive unnecessary.

Small groups of one or two families trickled in to Red Cloud Agency and reported the dissatisfaction and extent of the peace sentiment that existed among the hostiles. The Army authorities quickly saw the possibilities of such a situation. On January 6, Major Julius W. Mason, commanding officer at Camp Robinson, telegraphed to his superior, General George Crook, for permission to begin formal negotiations with the hostiles. Mason informed Crook that

¹¹ This reconstruction of events in the hostile camp is based upon the interrogations carried on by Colonel Wood at Cheyenne River Agency. In addition to the statements made by Red Horse and Important Man—Foolish Bear, four other reports were transmitted to Department headquarters on February 16, 19, 21 and March 1, 1877.

there was good reason to believe that Spotted Tail, the Brule Sioux headchief, could be persuaded to lead a peace delegation. Crook immediately gave his consent.¹² He knew Spotted Tail to be widely respected by all the Sioux, and his advice and influence would carry great weight. In addition, he was also the uncle of Crazy Horse, the leader of the war faction in the hostile camp.¹³

Despite Major Mason's optimism, Spotted Tail would not undertake the mission. He seems to have felt that even his prestige and influence would be of little use unless he could bring to the hostiles something more than the standard terms of unconditional surrender.¹⁴ Spotted Tail, though entirely friendly, was not a yes-man for the Army. Rather, he was an extremely rare example of a Sioux chief whose concern for his people went beyond the narrowly limited interests of his own personal following.

¹² *Army and Navy Journal* (New York), January 13, 1877.

¹³ Spotted Tail was the only important chief among the agency Sioux for whom Crook had any liking. Red Cloud had been deposed as the Oglala leader the previous fall because of his alleged unfriendly attitude, and Spotted Tail was then commissioned by the military authorities to be the head chief for his own and Red Cloud's people. At that time Crook told the press: "I had a satisfactory council with Spotted Tail and am satisfied that he is the only important leader who has the nerve to be our friend, and have therefore put him in charge as the head chief of all." *New York Herald*, October 25, 1876.

The original commission given Spotted Tail by Crook has been located on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, although it is no longer in the hands of the Spotted Tail family. It reads in part: "To Whom It May Concern—Know Ye That *By Authority from His Excellency, the President of the United States, through the Honorable, the Secretary of War, the General of the Army and the Lieutenant General Commanding, and for the purpose of Enforcing and Preserving Order among the Sioux Indians; I have Appointed and Commissioned "Sintiega Leska" or "Spotted Tail" Head Chief of all the bands of the SIOUX NATION . . .*" (signed) "George Crook, Brigadier General."

¹⁴ There is no definite statement as to why Spotted Tail would not make the trip. He was certainly in a position to go, otherwise Mason would not have approached Crook on the subject. The reasons given here are based upon a common sense interpretation of the situation, plus the fact that when Spotted Tail did go out to the hostiles in February, he brought them far better terms than the Army was prepared to give in January.

During the winter of 1867-1877 there was much reason for Spotted Tail to be concerned for the future of his people. In September, he and the other Sioux chiefs were forced, by threats of starvation, to agree to the cession of the Black Hills and Big Horn country, and were also subjected to a strenuous, but unsuccessful, effort to remove the whole tribe to Indian Territory. As it was, the Sioux were certain to be moved from their present agencies to new locations along the Missouri River. Under such circumstances Spotted Tail considered it to be foolish to expect the hostiles to surrender. They would not only be deprived of their guns and ponies, but along with the agency Sioux, be sent into the hated Missouri River country as well.¹⁵

When it became clear that Spotted Tail would not cooperate under the terms the Army was then prepared to offer, Major Mason was forced to look elsewhere for his emissaries. He finally assembled a small group of headmen from Red Cloud Agency under the leadership of Sword (or Chase the Animal), the head soldier of the Oglala Bad

¹⁵ The best accounts of conditions among the Sioux in 1876-1877 may be found in George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk* (Norman, 1937), pp. 280-303, and *Spotted Tail's Folk* (Norman, 1961), pp. 219-257. The Oglalas and Brules had an agency on the Missouri in 1868-1870. They came away from there with bitter memories of the large number of old people and children that had died of disease, and of the trouble caused in their camps by whiskey-peddling whites.

Face band.¹⁶ Sword's party of about thirty persons left Camp Robinson on January 16.¹⁷

Several weeks after this party set out, General Crook visited Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies to talk with the agency chiefs and obtain first-hand the latest information on the hostiles. While Crook was staying at Camp Robinson, the newspapers of February 6, carried the first of Miles' telegraphic reports of his fight with Crazy Horse in Wolf Mountains on January 8. This news of Miles' activity had an immediate affect on Crook and his party. His aide, Lieutenant John G. Bourke, recorded in his diary that "it was vain to hope for any further chance of distinction. *Miles had* evidently whipped the last of the *Indian* bands into fragments; at least so his telegraphic dispatches asserted. Still we hoped for the best."¹⁸

¹⁶ This is the George Sword who served for many years as Captain of Indian police after the establishment of Pine Ridge Agency in 1878. He was a nephew of Red Cloud, the noted chief of the Oglala Sioux, whose band had been dismounted and disarmed by General Crook's order in October, 1876. Red Cloud was imprisoned for a day or two, and removed from his official position as head chief of the Oglalas. The selection of Sword to lead the delegation of peace talkers sent out by Major Mason in January, 1877 indicates that Red Cloud was then still out of favor with the military authorities. For a collection of material on the disarming of Red Cloud's band, including accounts by Indian and white participants and official military reports, see *Nebraska History*, XV (October-December, 1934), pp. 277-295.

¹⁷ The terms carried by the Sword party were the usual unconditional surrender of guns and ponies, although Sword and several others stated many years later (in the Ricker interviews) that they were also authorized to inform the hostiles that the government would give them an agency in their own country. This latter provision, the promise of a northern agency for the Sioux, was to play an important role in the negotiation carried on with the hostiles later in the winter. It is not clear who originated such a promise. But at various times, the Army's field commanders, Crook and Miles, both gave the hostiles to understand that if they surrendered they would be given a place to live in the "northern country" (the Black Hills-Powder River regions), and not have to go to the Missouri. It was this provision that Spotted Tail was anxious to bring to the hostiles. In view of his failure to make the trip in January, it seems highly doubtful that, no matter what Sword said afterwards, he had been authorized to make such an assurance.

¹⁸ John G. Bourke manuscript diary, entry for February 6, 1877. The multi-volume Bourke diary is deposited in the library of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

Crook, however, did more than hope. The newspapers made no mention of the surrender of the hostiles, and although the battles may have all been fought, there was still much credit to be gained in negotiating the peace. On February 7, he and his staff traveled to Camp Sheridan, the military post located at Spotted Tail Agency. Here Crook talked at length with the Brule head chief, and renewed the efforts to get Spotted Tail to go out as a peace-talker.

The chief still held out for better terms, particularly with respect to the future location of the Sioux agencies. His Brules and the Oglalas at Red Cloud Agency did not want to go to the Missouri. Neither did the hostiles, for they were anxious to get an agency in their own country. Spotted Tail knew Crook to have considerable influence in Washington. Perhaps he had even been told that the new Great Father (President-elect Rutherford B. Hayes) had served as a Brigadier General under Crook during the Civil War. If the General wanted his assistance to bring the hostiles in, he should be willing to help Spotted Tail salvage something out of the war for his people. Crook still hesitated. No matter how fair this may have seemed to Spotted Tail (and probably to the General himself), Crook knew his superiors, Generals Sherman and Sheridan, would not be happy about any bargains being made with the Sioux.

Whatever reluctance Crook had to grant Spotted Tail's requests ended completely on February 9, with the arrival of two runners from the hostile camps. They reported that many of the hostiles were willing to make peace on the best terms possible, but only if Spotted Tail would come to them in person as Crook's representative. If Spotted Tail brought the tobacco, it would be proof of the General's sincerity, and they would come in to surrender.¹⁹ This was

¹⁹ *New York Herald*, February 15, 1877. It was the custom of the Sioux when sending a proposal to the leaders of a camp to present them with packages of tobacco wrapped in red and blue cloth. If they opened the packages, the offer was accepted. If the packages were returned unopened, it was rejected.

enough for Crook. Here was assurance that Spotted Tail could bring in the hostiles, in sufficient numbers at least, to justify granting the concessions he asked. Crook therefore promised to do all in his power to prevent the removal of the Sioux agencies to the Missouri, and to secure for the hostiles a location of their own in the northern country. But in return, the Indians would still have to give up their guns and ponies when they came in.²⁰

On February 13, the Brule chief, with a party of 200 picked warriors, several white men, and a pack train of Army mules carrying a large supply of presents, left Camp Sheridan for the hostile camps. Spotted Tail expected to be gone about a month and a half. Messages would be sent back periodically to keep Crook informed on the success of his negotiations.²¹ It was clear now that many of the hostiles were anxious for peace, and would go to the agencies as soon as Spotted Tail guaranteed Crook's promise of decent treatment. The real test of his diplomacy would be to persuade Crazy Horse and the other war chiefs that it was also for the best interests of their people to end the fighting.

Even before Spotted Tail's party had left Camp Sheridan, the other peace-talkers under Sword were already in contact with the Oglala-Cheyenne villages in the vicinity

²⁰ Spotted Tail softened this stipulation somewhat by getting Crook to agree that the surrendered ponies would be distributed among his party and the others who aided in bringing in the hostiles as a reward for their service. Report of Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee, Acting Agent at Spotted Tail Agency, May 16, 1877, and General Crook's endorsement thereon, Letters Received, Department of the Platte, WRB, NA. What this actually meant was that the animals would be returned by the agency Indians to their former owners as "presents" soon after the surrender.

²¹ Bourke diary, entry for February 10, 1877. Army headquarters was amazingly ignorant of what was actually going on in the Sioux negotiations. On March 28, General William T. Sherman made the following statement to a newspaperman: "Spotted Tail's mission of peace is entirely voluntary, he having proposed that he should visit the camps of Crazy Horse and the other hostile Indians and endeavor to induce them to enter the reservation. The government in no way aided his undertaking, further than allowing him to attempt it." *New York Herald*, March 29, 1877.

of the Little Big Horn River.²² Their message was received favorably by at least two elements in this camp, the Cheyennes who had experienced much more than the usual amount of hardship during the winter, and an anti-Crazy Horse faction among the Oglalas. No Water, the chief of this latter group, was a long-standing enemy of Crazy Horse. In 1870 he shot and almost killed the war chief after Crazy Horse attempted to steal his wife. With the outbreak of the fighting in 1876, the two had formed an uneasy truce based upon their mutual hostility to the whites. As No Water's enthusiasm for the war lessened, this situation became increasingly difficult, especially during the winter as Crazy Horse assumed personal leadership of the camp and used the tribal soldiers to forcibly put down any sentiment contrary to his fanatical desire to continue the fighting.²³

Factions among the Cheyennes were also receptive to the message of the peace-talkers. They were not anxious to make peace with the whites, particularly after their treatment by Mackenzie; but in their present condition, the warriors found little reason to go on fighting. The suffering of their women and children was too great a distraction. Thus when the Sword party arrived at the camps of Crazy Horse and the other Oglala and Cheyenne leaders, the No Water following and a portion of the Cheyennes led by Little Wolf, an important tribal chief, openly welcomed the opportunity to make peace. Crazy Horse seems to have attempted, unsuccessfully, to prevent their departure for the agencies, and thereby not only renewed the old trouble with No Water, but also incurred the bitter hostility of Little Wolf's people. On March 13 and 14, some 250 of these Indians straggled into Red Cloud Agency. They were

²² Sword Interview, Tablet No. 16, Ricker Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

²³ The Crazy Horse—No Water trouble is described in Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas*, (New York, 1955), pp. 238-249.

the first group of any size to respond to the urgings of Crook's peace-talkers.²⁴

Colonel Miles' remoteness, and the difficulties of winter communication, prevented him from learning immediately of the success or utilization by operation of Crook's peace-talkers. When word of the departure of the Sword party did reach Tongue River, Miles quickly responded with a peace program of his own. On February 1, Johnny Brughier, a mixed-blood Sioux, left the cantonment with tobacco and presents to search for the hostiles and open negotiations. Accompanying Brughier was Sweet Taste Woman, one of the Cheyenne captives taken prior to the Wolf Mountains engagement in early January. She was a woman of some influence in her tribe through family connections with several prominent Cheyenne headmen.²⁵

The peace terms sent out with Brughier and Sweet Taste Woman indicate that Miles, like Crook, was going further than the inflexible unconditional surrender called for by higher authorities. In his official reports Miles naturally does not disclose this; but Cheyenne information states that Sweet Taste Woman brought to the chiefs assurances from Miles that if they surrendered they would

²⁴ *New York Herald*, March 27, 1877; Report on Surrendered Hostiles by Lieutenant William P. Clark, May 24, 1877, Letters Received, Department of the Platte, WRB, NA. The charge that Crazy Horse and the Sioux had refused to aid the Cheyennes after Mackenzie destroyed their winter camp in November, 1876, was first circulated following the arrival of the Little Wolf band at Red Cloud Agency. *New York Herald*, May 11, 1877; John G. Bourke, *On the Border With Crook* (Columbus, 1950), p. 394. This has been denied by many of their fellow tribesmen. Several of the Cheyenne chiefs later told Billy Garnett that the Sioux had received them as hospitably as their own meager resources would permit. The only explanation for the story recorded in the newspapers and by Bourke would be the bitterness produced by Crazy Horse's attempt to prevent the Little Wolf band from going in to make peace. Their association with No Water clearly points to this.

²⁵ *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 496, 525; Verne Dusenberry, *The Northern Cheyennes*, Montana Heritage Series, Number Six (Helena, 1955), pp. 4, 5.

be given a place to live in their own country. Here again was the northern agency being used as bait!²⁶

Brughier and Sweet Taste Woman found the hostile camp in the same general vicinity as it had been at the time of the visit by the Sword party. The chiefs listened carefully to the peace proposals and finally agreed to go to Tongue River and talk further with Miles about ending the war. A three-day council at the cantonment broke up on February 23. Many of the hostile leaders found Miles' terms agreeable and returned to the camp to bring in their people.²⁷

It was while these Oglalas and Cheyennes were en-route to Tongue River that the first of the runners from Spotted Tail's party reached them. After leaving his agency on February 12, the Brule chief had encountered several small bands in the country south of the Black Hills. He easily persuaded them to go in to the agencies, and then continued northward to the camps of the Miniconjous and Sans Arcs scattered along the Little Missouri River.

These villages contained some 170 lodges, perhaps 1,500 people. A number of their chiefs were friendly and anxious for peace, but fearful that the soldiers would punish them for being involved in the war. Others still expressed a strong desire to continue the fighting. Spotted Tail talked at length with the various chiefs, assuring them that Crook had said no one would be treated badly when they came in to surrender. The General was an important man, close to the Great Father, and he had promised he would help the Sioux get the agencies they wanted. If they did not surrender, many soldiers would be sent against them. Their villages, and their women and children, would

²⁶ The Dusenberry article contains the statement about Miles' promise of a northern agency, based upon personal communication with John Stands-in-Timber, the Cheyenne tribal historian. Mr. Stands-in-Timber, a grandson of Sweet Taste Woman, has given the same information to the present writer in a letter dated March 15, 1958.

²⁷ *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 496, 525.

never be safe from attack. The chiefs considered these words and then made their decisions: they would bring their people in as soon as the weather was better and the ponies could travel.²⁸

As these talks were in progress, several of Spotted Tail's party were sent ahead to Crazy Horse and the other Oglalas and Cheyennes. The runners intercepted these bands at Otter Creek, on the Tongue, as they were on their way to surrender to Miles. Brughier, who had been sent along by Miles to shepherd them in, claimed that Spotted Tail's messengers brought ammunition with them, and made promises of liberal treatment if the hostiles would go to the southern agencies instead.²⁹ What really impressed the chiefs, however, was the fact that Spotted Tail was carrying on Crook's negotiations. They knew and trusted the Brule chief, while Miles, for all his assurances and expressions of friendship, was still a white man and a soldier.

It was decided that the camps should remain at Otter Creek while the chiefs went to the Tongue River post for another talk with Miles. They pressed him for counter proposals to the terms offered by Spotted Tail. Some conces-

²⁸ Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee to the Assistant Adjutant General, District of the Black Hills, April 5, 1877, Spotted Tail Agency File, Indian Office Records, National Archives. This is a transcript of Spotted Tail's account of his trip as taken down by Lieutenant Lee.

²⁹ *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 496, 497, 525. These charges are open to serious question. Miles states that the terms offered the hostiles by Spotted Tail included the right to retain their guns and ponies, and to procure ammunition. Spotted Tail had been told explicitly *not* to make any such assurance, and regardless of what schemes the chief had to get back the pony herds, there was little he could do to prevent the confiscation of the weapons. He had struggled long and hard to get the terms he wanted from Crook. Spotted Tail was far too intelligent to throw away Crook's friendship by offering what the General had distinctly forbidden.

sions were made, but the chiefs were not satisfied.³⁰ Seeing this, Miles prevailed upon nine of the party (mostly prominent Cheyennes) to remain at the post as hostages to guarantee that at least some of their people would come in there.

When the chiefs returned from their talks with Miles, the village moved to the forks of Powder River to meet Spotted Tail in a grand council. A number of other small camps joined the Oglalas and Cheyennes here. Crazy Horse was not present. Apparently reluctant to meet his uncle face to face, he instead sent word to Spotted Tail through his father. The elder Crazy Horse gave assurances that his son would agree to whatever decisions were reached by the other chiefs in his camp.³¹

When the council assembled, Spotted Tail repeated his proposals, particularly emphasizing Crook's promise to try to obtain for them an agency in the northern country. The hostiles were impressed. They knew Crook to be a big chief of the white soldiers, and in their own political system, it was the leaders of the warrior societies who controlled the affairs of the tribe. If men like Crazy Horse could tell the tribal chiefs what to do, why could not General Crook do the same to the Great Father and get him to give them their northern agency?

The Sioux almost unanimously agreed to follow Spotted Tail in to the southern agencies. The Cheyennes were undecided. Their warrior societies discussed the several alternatives (for there were still some in the camp who

³⁰ This is evident from a careful reading of Miles' report (*The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, p. 496). He states he told the delegation their people now had to "surrender such ponies and arms as I might require." (italics added) There is considerable difference between this and the original demand for unconditional surrender of *all* their guns and horses. And it must be remembered that this is what he was writing to his superiors. What he was actually telling the Indians, as already noted, was a good deal more.

³¹ Lieutenant Jesse M. Lee to the Assistant Adjutant General, District of the Black Hills, April 5, 1877, Spotted Tail Agency File, Indian Office Records, National Archives.

were opposed to any surrender) in a session lasting the better part of two days. Unable to agree, the warriors turned the decision back to the chiefs, who finally concluded to split up the tribe, each chief taking his following where he felt they would be treated best.³²

Assured now that nearly all of the hostiles in the Powder River camps would follow him in, Spotted Tail hurried back to report the success of his mission to General Crook. He arrived at Camp Sheridan on the afternoon of April 5, having been gone for fifty days. He was soon followed by small, fast-moving parties of hostiles that began to arrive almost daily.

The favorable report brought back by Spotted Tail encouraged the military authorities to take further steps to insure the success of the peace negotiations. Red Cloud, the leading man among the Oglala Sioux at the agencies, was pressed into service to make certain that the hostiles, particularly his fellow tribesmen under Crazy Horse, abided by the promises they had made to Spotted Tail. Red Cloud left Camp Robinson sometime in early April with a large party, a pack train, and a considerable quantity of rations. His mission was to speed up the arrival of Crazy Horse's people, bringing provisions for their trip to the agency so that they would not have to stop enroute to hunt.³³

The first sizable result of Spotted Tail's mission was the surrender of 105 lodges of Miniconjous and Sans Arcs at Camp Sheridan on April 14. Crook and his staff were on hand for the event. As a token of good faith, the In-

³² John Stands-in-Timber to the present writer, March 15, 1958.

³³ William Garnett, who was military interpreter at Camp Robinson in 1877, stated that the Red Cloud mission originated with Lieutenant William P. Clark, a member of General Crook's staff then in charge of the enlisted Indian scouts at the post. According to Garnett, Clark promised Red Cloud he would be restored to his former position as head chief at the Oglala agency and made a sergeant in the enlisted scouts if he would agree to undertake the mission. Humiliated by the elevation of Spotted Tail to the position of head chief of both the agency Oglalas and Brules, Red Cloud immediately agreed to Clark's proposition. William Garnett Interview, Tablet No. 1, Ricker Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

dians were permitted to carry out the ceremony in their own special manner. At ten o'clock in the morning, a large force of warriors charged down on the post, firing their guns and filling the air with sharp war-cries. Shortly thereafter, the chiefs and headmen, about thirty in number, rode onto the parade ground where Crook was waiting to receive them. Touch the Clouds, a gigantic warrior nearly seven feet tall, advanced before Crook, addressed him as *kola* (friend), and announced that with a good heart he was giving up his rifle as a token of submission to the General. Dismounting, he laid his gun at Crook's feet, shook hands, and then moved off as the others followed his example. After the entire village went into camp near the post, government rations were issued and the former hostiles exchanged feasts with their Brule cousins. For them the war was finally over.³⁴

A week after the Miniconjous and Sans Arcs surrendered at Camp Sheridan, the remnant of the Northern Cheyennes arrived at Red Cloud Agency. Crook was again present. The Cheyenne column, as it approached the agency, was led by six of the tribal chiefs and a warrior carrying a white flag. When one of the chiefs came forward and asked to shake hands with Crook, the General refused, until the Cheyenne announced that "we wish to give you our guns and horses today and bury the hatchet."³⁵ This satisfied Crook that they knew what was expected of them, and he shook hands with all six of the chiefs as he personally received their weapons. As the rest of the tribe filed by to give up their firearms and ponies, observers were shocked by their pitiful condition. A newspaper correspondent who was present wrote that they were "destitute in the extreme, having no lodges, no cooking utensils, and only a few tattered blankets and robes. They were very emaciated, and many still suffered from limbs frozen in their flight in the Mackenzie fight in November."³⁶ Yet

³⁴ *Chicago Times*, April 17, 1877.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1877.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

had they not been given reasonable terms of surrender, these very proud people, and many of the Sioux as well, would probably have gone on fighting or followed Sitting Bull to Canada.

While Crook was realizing this return from Spotted Tail's efforts, Colonel Miles at Tongue River had but a small response to his negotiations. On April 22, a band of less than 300 Cheyennes, together with a dozen Sioux, came to his post to accept the terms he offered. Nearly all were relatives or followers of the hostages retained by Miles after the conference on March 23. This whole situation had resulted in nothing but frustration for the ambitious Miles. Crook, whom Miles intensely disliked, and Spotted Tail had stolen "his" hostiles, and with them the recognition (and promotion) he so eagerly sought. Even worse, the commander at Cheyenne River Agency, without the use of any promises or other pressures, was able to report almost as many hostiles surrendered at that place as had come to Miles at Tongue River.³⁷

The last and most important of these surrender ceremonies took place early in May, when Crazy Horse brought his Oglalas in to Red Cloud Agency to lay down their arms. Under the urgings of Red Cloud and his party,³⁸ the Crazy Horse people reached a point some 30 miles from the agency on May 2. Here, after receiving a large issue of rations and beef on the hoof, they went into camp and feasted on such a grand scale that their movement was not

³⁷ *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 497, 536, 539. For a critical evaluation of Miles and the validity of his claims of success as contained in his official reports, see Harry H. Anderson, "Nelson A. Miles and the Sioux War of 1876-77," *The Westerners Brand Book* (Chicago), XVI (June, 1959), pp. 25-27, 32.

³⁸ The Red Cloud mission proved a success, in that he apparently was able to prevent any sizable defection from the Crazy Horse camp as it traveled to the agency. This had not been the case with the hostile force that had surrendered earlier at Spotted Tail Agency. A party of about 30 lodges under the Miniconjou chief Lame Deer, broke away from the main group near Bear Butte, and attempted to return to the Powder River country. There they were discovered by a column under Colonel Miles, and their village destroyed on May 7, 1877. *New York Herald*, April 27, 1877; *The Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1877*, pp. 497, 498.

resumed for two days.³⁹ The surrendering hostiles finally reached Red Cloud Agency about 2 p.m. on Sunday, May 6. Their arrival was an impressive sight.

Crazy Horse and his chiefs were at the head of the procession. They were followed by the warrior societies in a regular formation, several hundred fighting men decked out in war bonnets of all kinds, with red and blue blankets, and leggings and war shirts ornamented with items of silver, brass, tin, and glass. Behind the warriors came the rest of the camp stretching out for several miles, the old men, women, and children, and a gigantic pony herd of over 2,000 animals. This village, containing 146 lodges, about 900 people, had for years been one of the strongest centers of opposition to the whites among the hunting bands of non-agency Sioux. When Crazy Horse brought them in to surrender, the Sioux War of 1876 was, for all practical purposes, at an end.⁴⁰

As events of the summer and fall of 1877 proved, the presence of these former hostiles at the agencies was no guarantee of their conversion into peaceful agency Indians. They were a wild people, suspicious of even the simplest forms of civilization that existed in their new environment. Crazy Horse was killed while resisting arrest in September, and by the end of the year nearly all of the hostiles had broken away from Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies and joined their kindred spirits under Sitting Bull in Canada.⁴¹ There they stayed until hunger and hardship brought all the Sioux exiles back to surrender for the last time in 1880 and 1881.

These subsequent events should not, however, detract from the accomplishments of Spotted Tail and the other peace-talkers. Many of the factors which undid their work, the petty jealousies, broken promises, fear, and distrust, were obstacles they also had to deal with, and which they

³⁹ *Chicago Times*, May 15, 1877.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1877; *New York Herald*, May 28, 1877.

⁴¹ George E. Hyde, *A Sioux Chronicle* (Norman, 1956), pp. 5, 6.

were able to overcome. The Army was prepared to achieve with an all-out military campaign what the peace-talkers succeeded in doing with words. When they brought the hostiles in to surrender, an area including portions of five later states was made safe for settlement. This land of the Indian and the buffalo was now ready to be transformed into a region of the cattleman, the farmer, and the miner. It is true that this transformation was inevitable. But to recognize that it was accomplished with less bloodshed and suffering than at the time was expected, is to pay tribute to the efforts of the Sioux peace-talkers.



Above—Julius Meyer and Indian Chiefs. Standing left to right, Julius Meyer and Chief Red Cloud. Front row, Sitting Bull of the Oglala, Swift Bear, and Spotted Tail.

Below—General George Crook commissioning Chief Spotted Tail as Chief of the Sioux Nation in 1876 at Red Cloud Agency.

