

## Trust and Survival

*AWOL Hunkpapa Indian Family Prisoners of War  
at Fort Sully, 1890–1891*

EVA WOJCIK

Camp at Fort Sully, S.D.  
January 27, 1891  
The U.S. Indian Agent  
Standing Rock Indian Agency  
North Dakota

Sir:

The bearer, “Leaf,” comes to me this morning from Spotted Eagle’s camp on the Moreau River, with request that I advise him what to do. He states that he ran away from Sitting Bull’s with the rest of the refugees—got as far as Spotted Eagle’s—and, his wife falling ill, remained there until now. As he is as near his own agency as he is here, I advise him to return to Spotted Eagle’s camp, and, with his family, return and report to you.

Very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
H. C. Hale  
2nd Lieut. Infantry<sup>1</sup>

“Leaf” and his wife fled with 225 Hunkpapa Indians from the Grand River Camp on the Standing Rock Reservation to the Cheyenne River Reservation to council with Big Foot’s *tiyospaye* (band) when Sitting Bull was killed on December 15, 1890. Instead of joining Spotted Elk’s band, they surrendered to Capt. Joseph H. Hurst.<sup>2</sup> These Indian families did not contribute to the number of fatalities at Wounded Knee because they were being held by the U.S. military as prisoners of war,

though no state of war had been officially declared. The Cheyenne River Indian agent, Maj. Perain P. Palmer, questioned Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. J. Morgan regarding the POW status: "Why these Indians who belong to other agencies were brought here I cannot understand and why they are held as POWs when they took no part in any war."<sup>3</sup> Their POW status was the direct result of their surrender. All had fled Standing Rock without Agent James McLaughlin's permission. Most were members of Sitting Bull's *tiyospaye*. An unknown number had participated in the Ghost Dance. None of this constituted evidence of acts supporting the classification of these people as enemy combatants, but anything can be employed to suit the agendas of those in control—especially when the element of fear is also utilized.

An indeterminate number of Hunkpapas had defied the Indian police sent to arrest Sitting Bull and the military that eventually arrived to offer support. In a context filled with rumors of a forthcoming outbreak, such armed defiance placed these people in the hostile category, thereby designating them as potential military combatants. Ironically, this hostile status enabled Captain Hurst to offer them a form of comparatively safe refuge as prisoners of war. Acceptance of Hurst's offer may have prevented a massacre on the Cheyenne River Reservation. Why the Hunkpapas surrendered to Hurst apparently turned on personal trust and the captain's assurance of their certain death if they joined Big Foot's band.

In his official report of how he interacted with these Indians Captain Hurst wrote:

I had come to them as their friend, and that I wanted them to believe and trust me, and that I wanted them to give up their arms to me that night and return with me to Fort Bennett next morning, where they would be provided for and taken care of; that I could give no promises as to their future disposition and could only assure them of present protection if they trusted me.<sup>4</sup>

As the commanding officer of Fort Bennett and the inspector of Indian supplies at the Cheyenne River Agency since September 1, 1887, Hurst was a known entity to at least some of the Hunkpapas and certainly to Hump, who had served as a scout during the Nez Perce campaign and as an Indian policeman at Cheyenne River; Hurst later defended Hump against Palmer's efforts to have him imprisoned.<sup>5</sup> Hurst presented

himself as a friend and asked for the Indians' trust not as a ploy but with integrity and honesty. In the current situation a basis for trust had already been established by Hurst's second lieutenant, Harry C. Hale.

Hale had been sent per post orders no. 64 to Cheyenne City to gather information regarding the Standing Rock Indians. When they put in an appearance on December 20, Hale reported the following:

Just then Hump approached me and by signs asked if I would go with him and meet them. I assented and we rode over to where they had come in, and in a few moments I found from their manner that they were friendly. . . . I appreciated the importance of the situation, but was absolutely powerless to communicate with the Indians. I immediately formed the opinion that they could be easily persuaded to come into the Agency if I could but talk with them. While I was trying by signs to make them understand what I wanted, Henry Angell rode into the circle and took his place by my side. This generous man had not liked the idea of my going amongst these Indians and from a true spirit of chivalry had ridden over to "see it out." . . . [B]y Angell's knowledge of the language I told the Indians that if they would remain where they were for twenty-four hours I would go into the Agency and would return to them with the Chief and an interpreter and no soldiers with us in that time.<sup>6</sup>

Hale's open-minded attitude, his efforts to communicate via any means available, and his timely return with Hurst without a potentially threatening military force laid a foundation for trustworthiness and good faith with the Hunkpapas, who, for their part, awaited his return rather than continuing their search for Spotted Elk's band.

According to the Fort Bennett post return remarks record of events, Hurst, Hale, Sgt. Philip Gallagher, and two enlisted Indian scouts took their leave of Fort Bennett at 8:00 a.m. on December 21, 1890. Four companies of the Seventh Infantry under the command of Col. H. C. Merriam had arrived and camped at Fort Bennett. On December 21 these companies set out for the Cheyenne River.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Captain Hurst departed with only four men and "proceeded to a point on the Cheyenne River SD opposite the mouth of Cherry Creek, for the purpose of inducing the fugitive Uncapapas from Standing Rock Agency and the disaffected and semi-hostile Indians of the Cheyenne River

Agency who had concentrated at that point to surrender their arms and come into the Agency.”<sup>8</sup>

Once in council with the Indians, Captain Hurst clearly delineated the consequences of the Hunkpapas’ original intention: “If they chose to join Big Foot, who was only ten miles up the river, the result would be the certain destruction of themselves and probably their families, and that I had nothing more to say to them.”<sup>9</sup> Hurst’s frank statement of the fatal consequence of the Hunkpapas joining up with Spotted Elk’s band put that path of action in a very stark light. The captain’s brutally candid statement takes on startling significance because by his own admission he said this on December 21, 1890, eight days prior to the massacre at Wounded Knee. Did his statement regarding certain death and destruction reveal insider knowledge of a definite military plan, or was it said in an effort to scare the Hunkpapas into surrendering? If it reflected insider knowledge of a planned attack upon Big Foot’s people, then why did Hurst take the risk of revealing it to the Hunkpapas, who still might have decided to join the doomed band and share their knowledge? If it was only a scare tactic, why did Hurst resort to such a level of severe consequences? Did he justify employing such a statement as part of his effort to save the lives of the Indians? What else did he have to gain? Apparently, the Civil War veteran, already in the twilight years of his career, could gain nothing beyond the prevention of loss of life. No matter what his motives, the major consequence of Hurst’s handling of the situation was that these Indians were not part of the massacre at Wounded Knee, and they were not confronted with violence at Cheyenne River despite the increased military presence in the area with which they could have come into conflict. Still, a partial answer may be found in the ramifications of the interplay of trust between the Indians, Hurst, and Hale.

According to his report, at no point in time did Hurst resort to physical intimidation or overt confrontation. He arrived among the Hunkpapas, briefly stated his intentions, and provided “two beeves” for fresh meat. Only when they were ready to talk at around 8:00 p.m., over four hours after his arrival at 3:30 p.m., did they meet in council. Providing a “liberal amount of smoking tobacco” helped establish an atmosphere for open communication after subtle observation of each other during the previous hours. During the council Hurst presented what he could offer—protection and food. He allowed the Hunkpapas

to make their own choice in their own time and manner rather than demanding immediate submission. As a result,

at midnight they came in a body and delivered up to me all the guns they said they had—seventeen in number, and twelve Winchester cartridges. I told them I was sure they were not acting honestly and that they were not giving up all their arms, but not being in a position to dictate measures, I quietly received such as they gave me.<sup>10</sup>

By remaining calm, honest, and nonthreatening, Captain Hurst succeeded in a situation where Col. James W. Forsyth, commander of the Seventh Cavalry, would fail on December 29 at Wounded Knee. For the Indians whom Agent Palmer described as “badly frightened and fleeing for safety,” the last thing needed was a confrontation of any sort, and Hurst avoided creating one.<sup>11</sup>

Hurst’s post return indicates that he, “assisted by Lieut. Hale[,] effected the surrender of 294 Indians, including 227 Uncapapa Sioux of Sitting Bull’s Band (81 men, 72 women, and 74 children), 69 Minniconjou Sioux belonging to the Cheyenne River Reservation, 148 ponies and 4 wagons.”<sup>12</sup> From a military viewpoint, Hurst kept one “hostile” group from increasing its numbers with the addition of the armed Standing Rock Hunkpapas and Cheyenne River Minneconjou. From a humane viewpoint, dissuading Sitting Bull’s people and the Cheyenne River Indians from joining Big Foot’s band kept them from becoming military targets. Taking them into custody as prisoners of war prevented their immediate return to the Standing Rock Reservation, where there was potential for more conflict with Agent McLaughlin, his Indian police, and the military stationed at Fort Yates under McLaughlin’s friend, Lt. Col. William F. Drum, commanding officer at Fort Yates. Yet the surrender of guns did not insure anyone’s safety. There was still the journey to Fort Bennett, and that would demand more mutual trust between the Indians, Hurst, and Hale.

After they spent the night of December 22 camped at Dupree’s ranch, Hurst sent one of his scouts to the agency and Fort Bennett with a

request to send out to Dupree’s ranch that night to meet us all the wagons that could be forwarded to aid in getting these people quickly to the post, and at midnight they reported to me. Early next morning, the 23rd instant, I received an order from Colonel Meriam,

7th Infantry, to proceed immediately to Fort Bennett, resume command of the post, turning over the Indians to Lieutenant Hale. . . . I appealed in person to Colonel Merriam to let me remain with these Indians until their arrival at Fort Bennett, for I feared the result of a sudden scare or panic among them, with Lieutenant Hale absolutely alone, as the Colonel's order took from him the two enlisted Indian post scouts and the only soldier accompanying us.<sup>13</sup>

Considering the prior efforts to intercept these Indians before they joined Big Foot's band, why did Colonel Merriam order Hurst's immediate return to resume command of Fort Bennett? Why did Merriam requisition the services of the English-speaking Indian post scouts, who were acting as much-needed interpreters, to instead "bring forward letter mail"?<sup>14</sup> Why did he reroute the wagon teams Hurst requested and give Sergeant Gallagher the task of returning alone to Fort Bennett with the surrendered guns? Why did he order Hurst to "give all possible aid in obtaining teams and forwarding the remainder of the 7th Infantry under Captain Sanno. If other teams are not available at once, the Agency teams should be used temporarily for that purpose instead of forwarding Indian prisoners, and for which there is now no need of haste."<sup>15</sup> Merriam's orders removed Hurst from control of the immediate situation, eliminated efficient communication with the Indian prisoners via the post scouts, took away a means of transportation, put a lone sergeant into the field in charge of a load of surrendered guns and ammunition, and left only Lieutenant Hale to escort 221 Indian prisoners, according to Hale's own count in the field, to Fort Bennett. What was Colonel Merriam thinking when he set up this scenario for a potential disaster? Was this a deliberate attempt to undermine Hurst's success? Was it based on awareness that these people posed absolutely no threat to anyone? Or was Merriam hoping that Hurst's fears of a panic among the Indians would be fulfilled, thereby providing a reason for the military to act with lethal force? These questions illustrate the problem of contending with conflicting viewpoints between officers in the field with direct contact with the Indians and those operating from an unengaged "distance," for example, Hurst's and Lt. Col. Edwin V. Sumner's perceptions of the Indians versus those of Maj. Gen. Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Department of the Missouri.

Hurst received two telegraphic communications from his superiors regarding his efforts. The first, received December 21, stated: "Approves

of Post action taken for surrender.”<sup>16</sup> It seems Captain Hurst’s “Post action” was not the result of any orders from army headquarters, yet it was “approved.” Hurst cited no order number in relation to his expedition. Judging from his consistent connection of events with referrals to direct order numbers in his post returns, if there had been an order from a superior, Hurst would have cited it accordingly. Therefore, the captain was possibly acting upon his own initiative when he set out for the Hunkpapas’ camp.

The second communication from army headquarters was rather less supportive. Received on December 24, it states: “Senior Officer of Post held responsible if Sitting Bull’s people escape.”<sup>17</sup> Having acquired these Indians, Hurst had better keep them, or, as the senior post officer, he would face the consequences. Was someone farther up the chain of command less than pleased with the captain’s efforts? Or was this simply a matter of designating accountability? These telegraphic communications, considered in conjunction with Merriam’s subsequent orders to Hurst, Merriam’s denial of Hurst’s appeal to remain in the field, and Hurst’s assertion of certain death and destruction, raise suspicion regarding just how Hurst’s superiors really viewed this surrender. Did this surrender not fit into certain plans? Viewed in light of the massacre of Spotted Elk’s people on December 29, it would appear quite possible that it did not.

Neither Hurst nor Hale officially recorded whatever conversation transpired between them regarding Merriam’s orders, but both men must have been well aware of the situation developing beyond their control. Nor would the implications of Merriam’s orders have been overlooked by the post scouts, Hump and the other Cheyenne River Indians, and the Hunkpapas. Perhaps the best indicator of how the Indians viewed the situation lies in their cooperation with Lieutenant Hale during the journey; he reported no confrontations and no attempted escapes by the new prisoners of war. What he did report was the misery of his charges.

I was directed by Captain Hurst to take charge of the Indians. . . . He then went on to the post alone. Meantime eight box and five spring wagons had arrived from the Agency at the request of Captain Hurst, to convey those who could not walk. The column was started at 1 o’clock p.m., camped that night at Cook’s Camp, twenty three miles from Fort Bennett. The weather was cold and much suffering was endured by the poorly clad and tired Indians.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever tempers, doubts, and worries may have been simmering among the exhausted, cold, and hungry Indians, apparently no one deviated from the route to Bennett or threatened the solitary Lieutenant Hale.

In spite of the increased odds for the sort of scare Hurst feared, Hale and the Indians, including Hump and his family, arrived at Fort Bennett on December 24

about 5 p.m., and went immediately into camp by themselves on the river bottom below the Post. The Cherry Creek Indians with them were allowed to go to the camp of their own people the next day. The Standing Rock Indians, augmented by some that had joined them here, were transferred to Fort Sully on the 30th ultimo as military prisoners, by orders of the Department Commander, numbering 227—81 men, 43 boys, 72 women and 31 girls—148 ponies and 4 wagons, for which the commanding officer, Fort Sully receipted.<sup>19</sup>

Verification of the whereabouts and prisoner of war status of these 227 Sioux women, children, and men is available in the correspondence of Agent McLaughlin, the Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs, Agent Palmer, and Lieutenant Hale (who was put in charge of the prisoners' camp at Fort Sully) and in the Fort Sully and Fort Bennett command post returns. Identification of returning family groups is possible via the handwritten revisions of the printed Standing Rock issues sheets from June 1891. By the time of their journey back to Standing Rock, the number of Hunkpapa POWs would increase to 254.

A January 5, 1891, telegram to Standing Rock concerned clothing needs for these Hunkpapa families.<sup>20</sup> That Agent McLaughlin dealt with this issue and that the Office of Indian Affairs was well informed regarding their status is obvious from a letter McLaughlin received from the Department of the Interior dated February 7, 1891: "Authority granted for you to settle an indebtedness incurred in forwarding clothing to Standing Rock Indian Prisoners, at Fort Sully, a distance of one hundred and forty miles from the Agency, by Indian freighters."<sup>21</sup>

The Indian families fled their Grand River camp in winter without adequate food and clothing. The Cheyenne River Agency's daily diary ledger indicates that Hurst ordered rations of beef, coffee, sugar, flour, salt, and soap issued to them along with five wagon covers.<sup>22</sup> These were



people dealing with the consequences of recent violence. According to McLaughlin, there were fourteen fatalities on December 15: six Indian policemen, Sitting Bull, and seven others.<sup>23</sup> Sitting Bull's people were well aware that the Indian police would not have acted without the knowledge of Agent McLaughlin. Did they ever trust their appointed agent again?

The Cheyenne River Agency dealt with many of those who stampeded from Standing Rock. On February 10, 1891, Agent Palmer wrote to the commissioner of Indian affairs:

These are the Indians who left Sitting Bull's Band at the time Sitting Bull was killed. They were badly frightened and were fleeing for safety. They were stopped at the Cheyenne River by Indian Police and Agency Farmers. 37 of them were brought to the Agency by the Farmers, the others were brought in by Lieut. Hale with the assistance of Agency Employees and Agency Teams. 79 more were gathered up at different points on the reservation by the Police and returned to Standing Rock Agency all could have been returned in like manner.<sup>24</sup>

The 227 others could have also been returned to Standing Rock but were transferred as POWs to Fort Sully, where they remained for five months.

Full responsibility for these 227 Hunkpapas was laid upon Lieutenant Hale; they were not returned to the care of Agent McLaughlin. Hale was "detached" from Fort Bennett and "attached" to Fort Sully, where the Indian POW camp remained until the departure of the Hunkpapas at 4:00 a.m. on May 16, 1891.<sup>25</sup> In February 1891 Hale was promoted to first lieutenant after an examination before a board of officers at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>26</sup> Upon his return he resumed charge of the Hunkpapa POWs and remained in charge of them until their return to Standing Rock on May 23. Was this a reward for a job well done or a tightrope act for a man who formerly had been in charge of the post school and Indian scouts? Whether being placed in charge of Sitting Bull's people was a reward or a testing consequence for his own actions is unclear. But what is clear is that none of the 227 prisoners escaped while under Hale's charge, according to the available Fort Sully post returns. Once in camp, the Hunkpapas apparently settled in as best they could, and the women commenced birthing: a male infant on February 3, females on April 1, 18, and 20, and a male on May 8, 1891.<sup>27</sup>

At least five children were born at Fort Sully and partly account for the increase in the Hunkpapas' numbers to 254 by May 16, 1891. According to the Fort Sully post return for the month of January 1891, the total number of POWs was 237, an increase of ten individuals.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, neither Capt. J. M. Sarno nor Major Hampson recorded any information regarding the Hunkpapas' arrival in the return remarks. Nor do Sarno's entries shed any light on the February post return, in which Standing Rock Indian prisoners total 248.<sup>29</sup> By March there were 250 Hunkpapa POWs.<sup>30</sup> In April they numbered 253, with the increase explained by three births.<sup>31</sup> The May arrival of Takes the Gun's son brought the total to 254 prior to the Hunkpapas' return to Standing Rock.<sup>32</sup> While commanding officers did not expound upon the state of affairs regarding the Indian POWs at Fort Sully, someone actually recorded a birth father's name—Takes the Gun. Even if this was simply because this piece of information was willingly provided, the fact that it is known shows that at least one Hunkpapa was more than just an indistinct member of a prisoner group. Takes the Gun was an individual, the father of the male child born on May 8, and the commanding officer considered it worth recording his name. There is no record of the names of the birth fathers or mothers of the other infants. At the time it was agency practice, at least at Cheyenne River, to record the birth father's name for an infant along with sex and date of birth without reference to the mother. The recording of this father's name might simply be an example of someone providing more accurate records, or it could be the result of daily contact over several months with the Indian families.

Another piece of Lieutenant Hale's correspondence with Agent McLaughlin provides a glimpse of the interactions of individuals and the sorts of issues during this period of transition. Hits the Kettle (probably Strikes the Kettle, depending upon an interpreter's word choice) repeatedly requested a letter of recommendation from Hale in his quest to be made a headman of his band upon his return to Standing Rock. Hale wrote that he declined to do so,

as being in charge of him under peculiar circumstances, I could scarcely judge of his character. . . . I stated to him, however, that I would write to his agent, informing him of the fact that he has been one of four headmen chosen by me from the band of Indians lately under my charge and that while under my charge, he has

never given me any trouble; but, on the contrary, he seemed willing to aid in any way possible, in conducting the affairs connected with the daily life of the Indians under my charge.<sup>33</sup>

Hale avoided infringing on what McLaughlin might view as his territory by refraining from in any direct way telling McLaughlin what to do regarding Hits/Strikes the Kettle's request. But he did lend subtle support by citing that the man had been helpful in the role Hale assigned to him.

It is worth notice that a Hunkpapa man wishing for a particular social-political status within his own cultural group requested the support and backing of a white man who was not only not a member of his cultural group but actually a minor authority figure of the dominant culture actively imposing its own values upon his people. Hits/Strikes the Kettle's request of Hale indicates an awareness of the process of the politics of personal power among the white men he has to contend with as an Indian who no longer has complete control of his life no matter where he is, on or off the reservation. His request also suggests respect, trust, and value not only of Hale's position as an authority figure but also of Hale as an individual. During the months spent at Fort Sully, Hale apparently made a strong positive impression upon Hits/Strikes the Kettle. On another level, the request indicates something of the evolving state of Sioux social structures during this time of transition. It is not a sign of intact internal cultural integrity when validation is sought from those outside the tiyospaye for achieving the gain of a particular social position within the group. Yet Hits/Strikes the Kettle did turn to a man, regardless of racial-cultural identity, who had some appreciation for his assistance and abilities, not just a random authority figure.

Judging from the consistently polite tone of his correspondence, Hale attempted to deal diplomatically with everyone, writing letters for Indians such as Kills the Enemy, who desired to settle financial matters with McLaughlin regarding payment for past services rendered.<sup>34</sup> He also tried to fend off school officials seeking to increase their enrollment numbers by acquiring school-age children. At least one of these schools turned to McLaughlin for assistance in accomplishing their goal when Hale and Hampson would not comply:

I am informed from the Indian Office that the prisoners at Ft. Sully are soon to be turned over to you. When this happens can

I not meet you or your representative at Ft. Sully and endeavor to get the consent of the parents to sending the children to the Pierre School. The commanding officer cannot give me any of the children as he expects orders to deliver all of them to you.<sup>35</sup>

Was it a matter of “cannot” or “would not” with Hale and/or his superiors? Possibly it was “would not,” considering Hale’s subsequent resolution of this issue. At any rate, Crosby G. Davis, superintendent of the Industrial School at Pierre, South Dakota, did not get the children he wanted from Hale or McLaughlin.

As far as dealing with McLaughlin, Hale repeatedly deferred, at least in formal correspondence, to the agent’s knowledge and experience. He seems to have refrained from getting into a direct power struggle with the Standing Rock agent, whose control-oriented ego must have been well known. What Hale did do was address several letters to the U.S. Indian agent with no reference to McLaughlin by his given name. Hale’s written ability to navigate this social-political minefield is commendable for a man probably with little prior direct experience contending with such elements. Then again, the West Point graduate, with a long career in the military ahead of him, may have been acutely aware of precisely how to deal with social politics of this particular sort. Confined Indians, the Standing Rock agent, and the school “recruiters” were not the easiest sorts of people to deal with under any circumstances. Yet the lieutenant seems to have managed this not for his own gain, unless it was to keep his precarious balance on his tightrope act, but more for the benefit of the Indians. If nothing else, keeping the Indians “satisfied” kept them from causing Hale trouble, thereby keeping him out of trouble with his superiors. In return, the Hunkpapas were probably well aware that refraining from causing Hale grief was in their own best interests, and they acted accordingly.

Hale’s resolution of the school issue reveals not just some awareness of how things operated on the reservations but also a certain level of practical ingenuity. Rather than giving permission to Davis to come and take the Hunkpapa children from their parents, despite stated good intentions coupled with the intense desire to increase school enrollment, Hale set up a school at the camp, employed Andrew Fox, an Indian, as school-teacher, and had him legitimately recognized by the Office of Indian Affairs by having him paid irregular employee funds by the Cheyenne

River Agency.<sup>36</sup> Even Agent Palmer acknowledged that a school would be a good thing for the children.<sup>37</sup> The remarkable thing Hale achieved was keeping the families intact. The prevention of the children being sent off to outside schools maintained some level of social balance and family integrity within the Hunkpapa group.

Dealing with Lieutenant Hale after contending with Agent McLaughlin may well have been a study in contrasts for the Standing Rock prisoners. Perhaps they realized they'd found more than a measure of safety with Hale and Fort Sully because while some were willing to return to Standing Rock, others were less than eager to do so and required some persuasion. A May 2, 1891, letter by command of Major General Miles stated:

32 families desire return to Standing Rock. Family group of "Thigh," numbering four, desires to return to Canada. . . . 47 remaining families, 168 souls should be strongly advised to take advantage of this opportunity to return to their proper reservation. There are many reasons why they should return to their Agency, especially on account of the interests and rights under the recent treaty. They should be assured of full protection and equal rights given all other Indians on that reservation. Should they not follow this advice, they will be held as prisoners of war for future consideration.<sup>38</sup>

After months as POWs 168 people still needed convincing to return to the Standing Rock Agency and apparently some reassurance that they would not be facing punishment upon returning. Why else would Miles cite "full protection and equal rights given all other Indians on that reservation"? It signifies his awareness of a need to address an important concern: these Indians expected reprisals from Agent McLaughlin, and Major General Miles must have known it.

The Standing Rock agent made no secret of his disdain for the Ghost Dance: "The dance is demoralizing, indecent and disgusting."<sup>39</sup> This dance did not meet McLaughlin's criterion of being a civilizing activity that furthered the acculturation of the Sioux. Clearly, McLaughlin had no qualms whatsoever about imprisoning Indians who did not behave in accord with his views of what constituted a progressive, nonhostile Indian, as his December 26, 1890, letter/pass regarding Bull Ghost reveals:

To Whom It May Concern,

The bearer Tatnkawongi (Bull Ghost) has been a prisoner in our Agency guard house for the past three weeks having been suspected by the Indian Police of endeavoring to disseminate the Ghost Dance doctrine in some of the settlements.

Whatever of the Ghost Dance doctrine he may have believed has been fully eradicated by his confinement. He has had his hair cut of his own accord and promises to do all that can be expected of a progressive and well disposed Indian in future, and desires to live near his brother Catka (David Howard), I therefore commend him to John Grass that he may guide him in his good resolution.<sup>40</sup>

Being under suspicion landed Bull Ghost in the agency guardhouse for three weeks until McLaughlin considered him sufficiently reformed. Speculation is not necessary regarding what course of action Agent McLaughlin wished to take regarding the Ghost Dancers in the Grand River camp: McLaughlin desired “a penal colony for this class of Indian.”<sup>41</sup> According to the agent, this particular class was made up of those who stubbornly adhered to their traditional cultural lifestyle, values, and spirituality. After the events of December 1890 he informed Commissioner Morgan in a reply describing the state of affairs at Pine Ridge, which McLaughlin described as an “asylum” for Ghost Dancers, that “they would not dare talk of the Ghost Dance here.”<sup>42</sup> All of this is in accord with the critical attitude toward those McLaughlin, his peers, and Commissioner Morgan consistently, repeatedly, and commonly referred to in official correspondence as traditional, hostile, non-progressive, undeserving, and/or non-treaty-signing Indians.

Another indication of the stressed state of these people was their abandonment of their wagons en route to Cheyenne River. Twelve family heads provided Hale with the locations of their wagons and harness. On May 12, 1891, Hale wrote to Agent Palmer requesting the retrieval and safekeeping of the POWs’ property left behind in December. Hale’s letter provides the following list of owners of the wagons: Sleep, Medicine Man, Crow Indian, His Running, Old Bull, Standing Cloud, Pretty Bear, Old Crow, Kills the Enemy, Yellow Earring, In the Mouth, and Afraid of the Hawk.<sup>43</sup> Evidently, when it was no longer feasible for these individuals and their families to travel by wagons, they left them behind without hesitation in the course of flight from the Standing Indian police

and Fort Yates military. The idea of returning to the Standing Rock Reservation carried legitimate elements of concern for the POWs reluctant to return, yet return they did.

On May 23, 1891, 254 Indians returned to the Standing Rock Reservation. What was on James McLaughlin's mind at this point? He had been left out of the information loop regarding an event that directly concerned him, as evidenced by his May 13, 1891, letter to Commissioner Morgan:

Yesterday I sent transportation to Cheyenne Agency to bring to this Agency the 254 Standing Rock Indian prisoners now at Fort Sully and expect their return in about 10 days. I have received no direct authority from the Indian Office but I presume this action was desired as indicated in copies of correspondence between the War and Interior Departments furnished the Commanding Officer Fort Yates and by the latter shown to me.<sup>44</sup>

McLaughlin may not have been informed by his superiors, but he had his own source of information in the person of Lieutenant Colonel Drum. McLaughlin had no problem asserting his influence over the situation by arranging transportation that had not even been requested. In one way or another, Agent McLaughlin had to establish his authority, his presence, via his involvement in the return. Nor was he completely honest with Morgan, as seen in the May 10, 1891, date of the telegram sent to Major Hampson at Fort Sully. McLaughlin had already been making arrangements, not on May 12 but on May 10: "Twenty Indian teams and wagons can reach Cheyenne River Agency Saturday Sixteenth instant for Standing Rock Indians, advise if more are necessary."<sup>45</sup>

McLaughlin also sent word to Mr. A. C. Wells, head farmer, on May 12, directing that "you will proceed to CRA for the purpose of taking charge of and conducting the Indian Prisoners now at Fort Sully to this Agency. You will take full charge and control of the transportation sent for these prisoners from this reservation during the journey."<sup>46</sup> By May 16 McLaughlin's tone had changed somewhat, probably because he had been informed that his head farmer would not be in complete control of anything. On May 16 he sent a telegram to Wells care of the commanding officer at Fort Sully: "You will cooperate with the military who will escort the Indians to this Agency. You will simply take charge of the transportation and act as guide and Interpreter until the party reaches here."<sup>47</sup>

At some point it would appear that someone, possibly Commissioner Morgan or Major General Miles, put the brakes on Agent McLaughlin's desire to exert his control of and influence over the return process, at least for a time. What, if anything, was said to Colonel Drum, who was so generous with information that had not been sent to McLaughlin? Whatever was imparted to Drum or to McLaughlin, the result was a change in the agent's attitude regarding the role of his agency employees in this return journey. To show his compliance, McLaughlin sent his telegram care of the commanding officer—an indication of his need to show cooperation and to head off conflict between his head farmer and Lieutenant Hale. Wells was to cooperate with and aid the military. Indian scout Iron Moccasin had already received the assignment to act as interpreter from Hale and Hampson.<sup>48</sup> At least for the extent of the return journey there would be the buffer of the soldiers from Fort Sully, Hale, and a non-Standing Rock Agency interpreter between the returning Hunkpapas and the loyal employees, both white and Indian, of the Standing Rock Agency. In some ways the return trip must have provided a transition time for all, but only those involved knew exactly how tense and problematic this journey must have been. Some positive communication must have occurred between all concerned despite their differences.

Useful information regarding the identities of those Hunkpapas who returned to their reservation rests in the revised rations issues lists of Standing Rock Agency—the additional names handwritten in black ink on the preprinted sheets provide the identities of heads of families and the numbers of their family members on their ration tickets. The Standing Rock Agency's issue clerk revised the issues sheets during the long absence of these POWs (no one knew if or when they'd ever return to the agency); therefore, when they did return they were added to the rolls and given new ration ticket numbers. Thus, the ration issues of June 1891 provide verification of identities of family heads and number of family members through the government's own method of record keeping, necessary for accuracy during a time of intense external public and internal government scrutiny in the aftermath of the slaughter at Wounded Knee.<sup>49</sup> While these lists are imperfect because they do not record the names of women and children unless they were the ticket holders, they are a means to identify those Hunkpapas held as POWs from December 1890 to May 1891, and they provide a way to track the families who returned to Standing Rock.



Returning to the Standing Rock Reservation was not the end of the journey. Closing the physical distance between Fort Sully and the Standing Rock Reservation was probably easy in comparison to having to deal with the psychological and emotional distances between the POWs and those who had not fled the reservation. The gap between the two reflects the larger issues faced by those labeled at the time as treaty and nontreaty Indians: those ready to attempt acceptance of a radically different cultural order and those trying to hold on to their traditional values and identities. All were in search of some degree of self-determination and a way of surviving in an increasingly hostile landscape, a landscape so hostile that for some the best route at one point involved becoming prisoners of war rather than fully autonomous people able to move about freely without a permission pass from an agent. How do people adjust their mindset when their homeland has been transformed into a military zone and the right to self-determination on the private and public levels is denied them? This desire for self-determination is evident in White Hawk's wish to continue on beyond the Standing Rock Reservation, as conveyed by Lieutenant Hale:

Camp of Indian Prisoners Fort Sully, May 10, 1891  
To U.S. Indian Agent,  
Standing Rock, N.D.

Dear Sir:

The bearer, White Hawk, has asked me to help him to effect a transfer of himself and family from your agency to Canada. Not knowing whether such a transfer is practicable or not; I merely make hereby, his application for him; in accordance with my promise to him. He has a family of four members: One woman, two boys and one girl.

Very respectfully,  
H. C. Hale  
1st Lieut. 18th Infantry  
In Charge of Indian Prisoners<sup>50</sup>

Such expression of the desire for self-determination was denied Big Foot's people, who thought they would be back on their way to Pine Ridge on the morning of December 29, 1890. They were unaware of

the commanding general's orders, sent to Maj. S. M. Whitside, Seventh Cavalry, at 7:00 a.m. by courier: "You will proceed with your Battalion and the Indian prisoners to Gordon, Neb., where you will transfer the Indians to Colonel Frank Wheaton, 2nd Infantry, on Dec. 30, if possible. The ponies and wagons will not accompany the Indians further than Gordon."<sup>51</sup> More likely than not, Spotted Elk's band would have resisted being sent to Gordon, the nearest railroad location for shipping them elsewhere. Therefore, Forsyth and Whitside had no choice but to disarm their prisoners before informing them of their real destination. Unlike Hurst and Hale, they were unable to evade violence.

#### NOTES

1. Harry C. Hale, 2nd Lieut. 12th Infantry, to U.S. Indian Agent, Standing Rock Indian Agency, North Dakota, January 27, 1891, Miscellaneous Correspondence 1891, folder 1 of 2, box 34, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records' Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Record Group (RG) 75, National Archives Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri (NACP-KC).

2. Joseph H. Hurst, Capt. 12th Infantry, Commanding Officer of Company and Post, Fort Bennett, South Dakota, Remarks Events Record December 21, Post Return December 1890–91 (National Archives Microfilm Publication [NAMP] M617, roll 107), Returns from U.S. Military Posts 1880–1916, RG 94, NACP-KC.

3. Perain P. Palmer, Major, Cheyenne River Indian Agent, to Commissioner Morgan, February 14, 1891, Document No. 68505 of BIA Letters Received, Special Case 188, Messiah Craze and Ghost Dance 1890–1892, special roll 5, James McLaughlin Papers, Assumption Abbey, roll 35 (also NARA roll O4365), RG 75, NACP-KC.

4. Joseph H. Hurst, Capt. 12th Infantry, Commanding Officer of Company and Post, to Ruger, Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Dakota, Saint Paul, Minnesota, January 9, 1891, p. 1862, Exhibit "F" (NAMP M983, roll 2), Headquarters, Department of California, Report of Operations Relative to the Sioux Indians in 1890 and 1891 in the Department of Dakota, pp. 1794–2006, October 1891, Headquarters, Department of California, San Francisco, October 19, 1891 to the Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C., RG 94, NACP-KC.

5. Harry C. Hale, 2nd Lieutenant, 12th Infantry, to Post Adjutant, Fort Bennett, South Dakota, December 26, 1890, p. 1858, Exhibit "E" (NAMP M983, roll 2).

6. Hale to Post Adjutant, December 26, 1890.

7. Hurst, Remarks Events Record December 21.
8. Hurst, Remarks Events Record December 21.
9. Hurst to Assistant Adjutant General, January 9, 1891.
10. Hurst to Assistant Adjutant General, January 9, 1891.
11. Perain P. Palmer, Major, Cheyenne River Indian Agent, to Commissioner Morgan, February 10, 1891, Document No. 6223 of BIA Letters Received, Special Case 188, Messiah Craze and Ghost Dance 1890–1892, special roll 5, James McLaughlin Papers, Assumption Abbey, roll 35 (also NACP roll 04365), RG 75, NACP-KC.
12. Hurst, Remarks Events Record December 21.
13. Hurst to Assistant Adjutant General, January 9, 1891.
14. H. C. Merriam, Colonel 7th Infantry, Commanding, Camp at Dupree's Cheyenne River, South Dakota, to Captain J. H. Hurst, 12th Infantry, 10 p.m., December 22, 1890, "a" attached to Hurst, Exhibit "F," pp. 1867–68 (NARA M983, roll 2).
15. Merriam to Hurst, December 22, 1890.
16. Joseph H. Hurst, Capt. 12th Infantry, Commanding Officer of Company and Post, Fort Bennett, South Dakota, telegram, December 21, Post Return December 1890–91 (NAMP M617, roll 107, Returns from Military Posts 1880–1916).
17. Joseph H. Hurst, Capt. 12th Infantry, Commanding Officer of Company and Post, Fort Bennett, South Dakota, telegram, December 24, Post Return December 1890–91 (NAMP M617, roll 107, Returns from Military Posts 1880–1916).
18. Hale to Post Adjutant, December 26, 1890.
19. Hale to Post Adjutant, December 26, 1890.
20. Fort Sully Commanding Officer to Standing Rock Agent, telegram, January 5, 1891, Administrations of Grand River and Standing Rock File 1864–1898, 2/3, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.
21. R. V. Belt, Acting Commissioner Office of Indian Affairs, to James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, Standing Rock Agency, February 7, 1891, Commissioner & Personal Correspondence McLaughlin 1891, folder 2 of 2, box 34, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.
22. Cheyenne River Agency Diary 1882–1890 [1891], p. 94, Entries for December 22, 24, 26, and 28, 1890, box 273 (518365), Cheyenne River Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.
23. James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 19, 1890, Standing Rock Letterpress December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, pp. 21–29, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.
24. Palmer to Morgan, February 10, 1891. Head farmers acted as the

agent's supervisory delegates while instructing the Indians in the fine arts of agriculture.

25. Jesse A. P. Hampson, Major, Commanding Officer, Fort Sully, South Dakota, Post Return Remarks Record of Events May 16, Post Return May 31, 1891 (NAMP M617, roll 1240), Returns from U.S. Military Posts 1800–1916.

26. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Regarding Officers, Post Return February 1891.

27. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events for February, April, May, Post Returns February 28, April 30, May 31, 1891.

28. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events January, Post Return January 31, 1891.

29. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events February, Post Return February 28, 1891.

30. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events March, Post Return March 31, 1891.

31. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events April, Post Return April 30, 1891.

32. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events May, Post Return May 31, 1891.

33. H. C. Hale, 1st Lieut. 18th Infantry, to U.S. Indian Agent, Standing Rock Agency, N.D., May 22, 1891, Commissioner & Personal Correspondence McLaughlin, folder 1 of 3, box 34.

34. H. C. Hale, 2nd Lieut. 12th Infantry, to U.S. Indian Agent, Standing Rock Indian Agency, N.D., January 10, 1891, Miscellaneous Correspondence 1891, folder 1 of 2, box 34, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.

35. Crosby G. Davis, Superintendent, Pierre School, to Major James McLaughlin, Standing Rock Agency, March 6, 1891, Miscellaneous Correspondence 1891, box 34, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.

36. H. C. Hale, 1st Lieut., 18th Infantry, In Charge of Indian Prisoners, to U.S. Indian Agent, Cheyenne River Indian Agency, South Dakota, May 1, 1891, Cheyenne River Indian Agency Unprocessed Records, FRC 518512, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.

37. Palmer to Morgan, February 10, 1891.

38. By Command of Major General Miles, signed, E. L. Huggins, Capt. 2nd Cavalry, Aide-de-Camp, to Commanding Officer Fort Sully and Capt. Hurst, Commanding Officer Fort Bennett, May 2, 1891, Document No. 17202 of BIA Letters Received, Special Case 188, Messiah Craze and Ghost Dance 1890–1892, special roll 5, James McLaughlin Papers, Assumption Abbey, roll 35 (also NACP roll 04365), RG 75, NACP-KC.

39. James McLaughlin, Standing Rock Indian Agent, to Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Report on Messiah Craze, Standing Rock Letterpress June 18, 1891–December 31, 1891, pp. 193–95.

40. James McLaughlin, Standing Rock Indian Agent, to “Whom It May Concern Pass” for Bull Ghost, December 26, 1890, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress, December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, p. 34.

41. James McLaughlin, Standing Rock Indian Agent, to Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 2, 1892, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress, January 1, 1892–June 2, 1892, p. 289.

42. McLaughlin to Morgan, April 2, 1892, pp. 286, 290.

43. H. C. Hale, 1st Lieut. 18th Infantry, Camp at Fort Sully, South Dakota, to Major P. P. Palmer, U.S. Indian Agent, Cheyenne River Indian Agency, South Dakota, May 12, 1891, Cheyenne River Miscellaneous Correspondence Received 1870–1916, box 354, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.

44. James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, to Commissioner Morgan, May 13, 1891, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, p. 407.

45. James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, to Major Hampson, Commanding Post Fort Sully, South Dakota, telegram, May 10, 1891, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, p. 395.

46. James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, to A. C. Wells, Head Farmer, Standing Rock Indian Agency, North Dakota, telegram, May 12, 1891, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, p. 404.

47. James McLaughlin, U.S. Indian Agent, to A. C. Wells, Head Farmer, Standing Rock Indian Agency, c/o Commanding Officer Fort Sully, South Dakota, telegram, May 16, 1891, Standing Rock Agency Letterpress December 13, 1890–June 18, 1891, p. 414.

48. Hampson, Post Return Remarks Record of Events May 16, Post Return May 31, 1891.

49. June 9–June 22, 1891 Issues to Indians, Abstract D, Weekly Issues, Standing Rock Indian Agency Records, Oversize, BIA, RG 75, NACP-KC.

50. H. C. Hale, 1st Lieut., 18th Infantry, In Charge of Indian Prisoners, Camp of Indian Prisoners, Fort Sully, South Dakota, to the U.S. Indian Agent, Standing Rock, North Dakota, May 10, 1891, Commissioner & Personal Correspondence McLaughlin 1891, folder 1 of 3, box 34.

51. Fayette W. Roe, 1st Lieut. 3d Infantry, A.D.C., Headquarters, Dept. Platte, in the Field, Camp at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, to Major S. M. Whitside, 7th Cavalry, Commanding Battalion 7th Cavalry, in the field, copy, p. 756 (104) (NAMP M983, roll 1); “Sioux Campaign, 1890–91,” pp. 651–975, January 1891, Report of Investigation into the Battle at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, fought December 29, 1890, RG 94, NACP-KC.

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