



Recruits for the First World War in combat training at Camp Funston, 1918.

“How Cola” From Camp Funston

American Indians and the Great War

by Bonnie Lynn-Sherow and Susannah Ural Bruce

In the summer of 1918 Richard Fool Bull sent greetings in his native Lakota to the Indian agency at Rosebud, South Dakota. “How Cola,” he began, “I am getting to be quite a soldier learning right along. . . . I got a dandy rifle and bayonet and I am anxious to make use of them on some German. When the war is over I’ll bring a German scalp with me back to Rosebud.”¹ Fool Bull’s bellicose enthusiasm was a perfect fit with non-Indians’ expectations of Indians as warriors. Fool Bull, however, was not typical of Indian soldiers who trained at Camp Funston at Fort Riley, Kansas, during the First World War. The story of Indians’ experiences at Funston, while unique in several details, supports earlier historians’ contentions that there was no characteristic Indian response to service in the Great War. U.S. military policy and Indian policy, however, were founded on a set of persistent stereotypes that shaped Indian soldiers’ service before and after World War I.²

Racial stereotypes, or more specifically, notions regarding the innate character of American Indians and their suitability for military service, were central to both the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the U.S. War Department in the years leading up to and during World War I. The Office of Indian Affairs, directed by Cato Sells, regarded America’s entry into the First World War as a golden opportunity for assimilation, similar to William Pratt’s boarding school objectives, allotment policies, and other programs designed to “kill the Indian and save the man.” The War Department, however, had different objectives. Based on accepted contemporary stereotypes, army officials believed

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1. “How Cola” was the spelling used by Fool Bull. “Kola” is the more common phonetic translation into English of this reference to brother-warriors. Richard Fool Bull to A. G. Wilson, Rosebud, S.D., July 1918, “Soldier Boys,” Records of the Rosebud Agency, box 345, RG75, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, Mo. (hereafter cited as Rosebud Agency Records).

2. An example of this conclusion can be found in Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At Home and at War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 183.



A panoramic view of Camp Funston, ca. 1918.

the average Indian soldier was akin to a secret weapon, having no fear of the enemy and possessing an uncanny talent for scouting, reconnaissance, and sharpshooting. These two different and contradictory recruitment objectives converged into a single set of policies that, unlike the treatment given other minorities, purposely integrated Indian soldiers into regular white military units.

One of the first tenets of this policy was the War Department's decision to block the formation of all-Indian companies. This decision originated in the Office of Indian Affairs. In response to a January 1918 query from the superintendent of the Pine Ridge Reservation about the desirability of forming an all-Indian unit, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells replied:

I am in full accord with the idea of giving to all Indians such a clear definition of patriotism as will form a lasting mental picture of their relation and duties to our common country. . . . This as you know is of prime importance in all our work with the Indian . . . but I do not think that thought can be properly upheld by encouraging a racial recognition in defense of a common cause.³

The discharge records of Indian soldiers indicate that Sells's directives not to allow too many Indian men into the same unit was observed. While groups of Indian men from the same agency or reservation were allowed to train

3. Cato Sells to Henry M. Tidwell, February 4, 1918, Records of the Pine Ridge Agency, box 657, RG75, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter cited as Pine Ridge Agency Records).

together, they were deliberately placed in separate units for the rest of their service and eventually discharged from different locations across the country.

Secretary of War Newton D. Baker concurred with Sells's assessment of all-Indian units as detrimental to the ultimate goal of absorption of the Indian into mainstream American society. Both he and U.S. Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March opposed

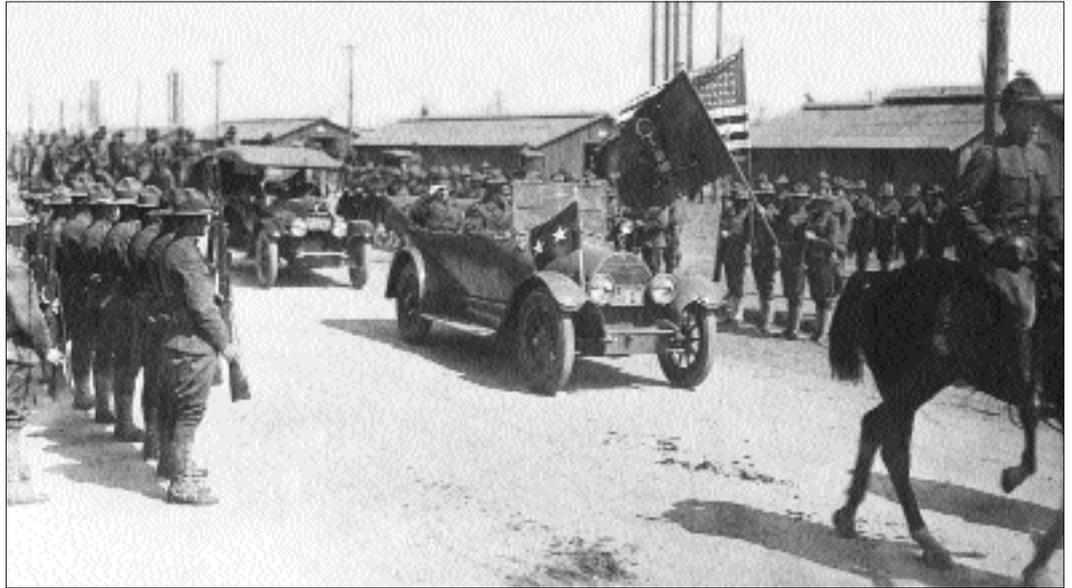
separate Indian units, with Baker pointing out the "failure" of this experiment in the 1890s. In 1893, reporting on the army's experiment with an all-Indian cavalry unit based at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, Lieutenant Z. B. Vance concluded that although the Indian soldier was "remarkably intelligent," honest, and forthright, he lacked ambition and discipline and so should "constantly be kept under the eye of a white man."⁴ In 1917 the army still believed that Indian soldiers were most effective under the guidance and direction of experienced white officers. It was anticipated by army officials that Indian recruits in World War I generally would act and behave as did the average soldier, but little was expected from them in terms of leadership or advancement.⁵

Indian soldiers, on the other hand, had few expectations. The decades leading up to and encompassing American participation in the First World War were a period of rapid change for Indian peoples. The focus of Indian policy in these decades was assimilation to white standards of behavior that required the destruction of Indian culture, religion, economic systems, and even kinship relations. In spite of Indians' solid contributions during the Great War both overseas and at home, American policy makers remained steadfast in their goal to eradicate tribal society and culture. Policy makers regarded compulsory and volunteer military service as corrective steps in the final elimination of the "Indian problem" in the United States. Ironically, the perceived

4. Britten, *American Indians in World War I*, 42; Lieutenant Z. B. Vance, "The Indian Soldier," *Journal of the Military Service Institution* 14 (1893): 1203, 1205.

5. Michael L. Tate, "From Scout to Doughboy: The National Debate Over Integrating American Indians into the Military, 1891-1918," *Western Historical Quarterly* 17 (October 1986): 417-37.

Major General Leonard Wood arriving at Camp Funston in 1918 to assume the camp's command.



special talents (bellicosity, stealth, marksmanship, devotion to the unit) of the Indian soldier so valued by the military were precisely those traits that the Bureau of Indian Affairs hoped would be erased through his service in the armed forces.

In a 1998 essay historian Alvin M. Josephy Jr. remarked that policy makers and non-Indians in the first half of the twentieth century believed “Indians and the problems generated by their presence would ultimately vanish—if not by disease and war, then by assimilation and attrition on the reservations.”⁶ Officials charged with Indians’ overall welfare believed it was their duty to stamp out a dying culture that, for the most part, was too primitive to survive in a modern world. Indians soldiers’ service in the army was hailed as a positive catalyst in this process. Certainly Cato Sells believed this when he wrote to the superintendent at Pine Ridge Agency that the “mingling of the Indian with the white soldier ought to have . . . large influence in moving him away from tribal relations and toward civilization.”⁷ This goal went largely unchallenged until the closing decades of the twentieth century.⁸

Nearly every aspect of U.S. policy regulating Indians’ official participation in World War I reflected the prime directive of assimilation, and this was true of Indians’ experience at Camp Funston. American Indians’ experiences, however, were in stark contrast to the treatment other minority groups received, specifically African Americans. In general, Indian service in the military strengthened and supported the three major goals of assimilation policy: the decline of Indian culture, customs, and language; the instillation of pride in American citizenship; and the elimination of all special “privileges” historically associated with Indian peoples such as their legal status as tribal members and

commonly held reservation lands. Each of these goals helped shape the experiences of Indian soldiers who were trained and served at Camp Funston in 1917–1918.

But many Indian soldiers who volunteered for service saw their time in the military as much more than an opportunity to fulfill America’s call for patriotic defenders. It also was an opportunity to meet their own culture’s expectations. In February 1918 Francis Nelson, an Oglala Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation, wrote directly to Secretary of War Newton Baker to explain his desire for military service. Either consciously or unconsciously, he revealed his wish to fulfill a related warrior tradition. Nelson explained that he was willing to “fight for his country and willing to die. . . . I think lots of our country for I was born here in America and being a Real American I will fight and die for it. . . . If I could only get out in those trenches and scalp a few of these dirty Germans, I would be one of the happiest Indians living.”⁹

An equally striking example of Indians’ perception of military service is that of Chester Armstrong Four Bear of the Cheyenne River Agency, who chose to disobey orders and return to the front lines rather than miss an opportunity to fulfill his tribe’s requirements for achieving warrior status. Having sustained several gas attacks while trying to deliver a message to the rear command from his company commander at the front, Four Bear was ordered to stay behind for medical treatment. Disobeying his orders, Four Bear started the dangerous journey back to his company. Along the way he rescued a French messenger, treated the man’s wounds, and pushed on until he found his

6. Alvin M. Josephy Jr., “Modern America and the Indian,” in *Indians in American History*, ed. Fred Hoxie and Peter Iverson (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1998), 199–200.

7. Cato Sells to Henry M. Tidwell, February 4, 1918.

8. Josephy, “Modern America and the Indian,” 204–6.

9. Britten, *American Indians in World War I*, 64.

unit. Before he left, the Frenchman removed his own Croix De Guerre and gave it to Four Bear.¹⁰

As Thomas A. Britten explained in his *Indians in the First World War*, opportunities for Indian men to become warriors were dwindling by the twentieth century. A tradition that required some demonstration of military bravery to maintain respectability, this requirement was nearly impossible to fulfill for Indian men born and raised on reservations. The First World War was their first opportunity, and some feared their last, for many Indian males to fulfill their tribal warrior traditions.¹¹ Thus, while the routine at Camp Funston fulfilled the Office of Indian Affairs' primary objective to assimilate Indians into mainstream society, it also revealed a tendency among young Indian men to satisfy their own desire for military service based on tribal expectations.

When the United States entered the world war on April 6, 1917, only 127,588 soldiers were enlisted in the U.S. Army and 80,446 in the National Guard. By the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, the U.S. Army had expanded to become home to approximately four million men. This process was the result of a massive project in the early months of the war to train volunteers and draftees for military service in camps constructed throughout the nation. One of those bases was Camp Funston, located on the Fort Riley Military Reservation in Kansas.¹²

Although no effort was made to recruit Indians together, transportation routes and other organizational economies meant that most Indian soldiers trained at a base not too distant from their reservation. Thus, at Camp Funston the majority of reservation recruits came from Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River in South Dakota. Indian boarding schools also were a predictable source of Indian soldiers nationally, and at least one multi-tribal group of Indians enlisted at Lawrence, Kansas, from Haskell Indian School and trained at Funston, although complete records of their service are not extant.¹³ Because the army did not keep separate records related to place of enlistment or discharge for Indian soldiers, it is extremely difficult to estimate the numbers and tribal affiliations of Indian recruits at Camp Funston. Agency records, howev-

er, do suggest that while Funston did receive a smattering of Indian recruits from Oklahoma, Iowa, and Kansas, the majority of reservation Indians at Funston came from the main agencies in South Dakota and Rosebud Agency in particular. This accident of geography would have a direct effect on Indians who trained at Funston.

Camp Funston, named for Spanish–American War hero and Kansas native Frederick Funston, was established on July 18, 1917, as a training camp for the Eighty-ninth Division and as an officer training school. Volunteers and draftees began arriving in September 1917 and continued to rotate through the training camp until May 1918. Seven months later Camp Funston was designated a demobilization center through which 77,800 men were processed in their journey back to civilian life.¹⁴

Major General Leonard Wood was camp commander at Funston during the war. Wood, like the camp's namesake, was a hero of the Spanish–American War, known for his training of the infamous Rough Riders and his close friendship with the unit's organizer, former president Theodore Roosevelt. Wood was the senior major general for the regular army in 1917; he had combat experience and was tremendously popular in the United States, Britain, and France.

Wood spent the prewar years calling for America's entry into the European conflict, or at least mobilization in preparation for it, and he did his part by inspiring and helping organize an unofficial officer training camp at Plattsburgh, New York. His goal was to prepare young men in the basics of military command should the nation suddenly need an officer core to train a volunteer army for war.¹⁵ The camp at Plattsburgh was highly successful and well publicized, as the famous and infamous of New York society trained shoulder to shoulder. The Plattsburgh camp served as a model for a national camp organization that began in the summer of 1917.¹⁶ As one of the origina-

14. *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, Zone of the Interior: Territorial Departments, Tactical Divisions Organized in 1918, Posts, Camps, and Stations*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1988), 884–86. During the First World War, units of the Seventh, Tenth, Fifteenth, Thirty-fifth, Forty-first, Forty-second, Eighty-ninth, and Ninety-second Divisions traveled through Camp Funston during garrison duty, mobilization for service in Europe, or demobilization. Throughout this period, nearby Fort Riley, established in 1853, served as a school for cavalry and light artillery as well as an officer training school. There, the Fifth Division, Headquarter Troops, mobilized for service in Europe while the Twentieth Infantry, Tenth Division, served garrison duty. The majority of American Indians, however, traveled through Camp Funston, thus this study focuses on their experiences at the camp.

15. Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1931), 46.

16. Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925. Vol. 5: Over Here, 1914–1918* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 214–16, 218.

10. *Ibid.*, 106.

11. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

12. Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 16; Leonard P. Ayers, *The War with Germany: A Statistical Summary*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 16.

13. "Haskell Indian School," Pine Ridge Agency Records.

Draftees arriving and being processed at Camp Funston, 1917.



tors of the project at Plattsburgh, Leonard Wood seemed an ideal officer for command at Camp Funston.

Unfortunately for the new recruits at Funston, however, Kansas was the last place Wood thought he should be assigned. He loudly demanded a command in Europe and visited the continent in December 1917 to demonstrate his ability and popularity with the Allied commanders, especially General John J. Pershing.¹⁷ But Wood also had made some powerful enemies. He repeatedly spoke out against President Woodrow Wilson's administration for its lack of preparedness, and even after American entry into the war, Wood shocked British and French allies with his caustic criticism of the state of the American army and its leadership. Pershing came to view Wood's European visit as a campaign to replace Pershing himself. Pershing had already decided that Wood was too old and ill for European service, and after Wood's controversial European tour, Pershing made it clear to Secretary Baker that he wanted Wood nowhere near the fighting. In fact, if Wood showed up for a European command, Pershing reported that he would have him immediately shipped back to the United States. In early 1918 Newton Baker did just that, bringing Wood home and determining that "the most insubordinate general officer in the entire army" would stay there and out of the news. Wood was unceremoniously ordered to serve out the war in the United States as commander at Camp Funston.¹⁸

Despite his disappointment, Wood had some success at Funston. He was effective in raising the standards of housing and training facilities, and he used his contacts in Washington to secure other improvements on the base. As Funston evolved into a camp of 1,401 buildings with as many as forty-two thousand troops training at one time, the organization and experience Wood brought to the camp proved crucial. That efficiency, however, did not make Camp Fun-

ston any more welcoming or comfortable for the new soldiers arriving daily.¹⁹

The journey to training camp initially was exciting for new recruits, with parades and bands at every stop on the rail line. John L. Barkley from Holden, Missouri, recalled his embarrassment at having worn overalls instead of a suit like the other men on the train bound for Camp Funston, especially as they were celebrated at one station after another.²⁰ As they entered through the post's main gates, the men were directed through rough-hewn buildings or tents as officers demanded to see their identification and directed them through an assembly-line-like examination by camp doctors. The process was so fast that some men took the mandatory oath of loyalty before the physician had completed his work, leaving the young soldier to pledge his patriotism partially or even completely unclothed. Not all, however, passed through the process smoothly. In July 1918 Indian soldier Richard Fool Bull observed: "I saw all the Rosebud boys going thru the mill the other day. All passed examination except Felix Eaglefeather and Little Crow."²¹ Failing the camp physical meant an immediate return trip home. Those who passed the original screening received a uniform, or whatever parts of the uniform were still in supply, which meant that trainees frequently wore a mix of civilian and military garb during their first eight weeks in camp.²²

New recruits then took psychological examinations to determine their most effective positions within the military infrastructure and to provide the army with a record of the

19. *Ibid.*, 236.

20. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 64.

21. Richard Fool Bull to A. G. Wilson.

22. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 62.

17. Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 83–85.

18. *Ibid.*, 86; Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War*, 239.



Soldiers gather for meals at the mess hall in Camp Funston, ca. 1918.

mentality of the average American soldier. Unfortunately, the creators of these tests, Dr. Walter D. Scott of Northwestern University and Dr. Robert M. Yerkes of Harvard, developed a system that reflected soldiers' socio-economic background more than their intelligence. The Alpha-Beta tests, as they came to be known, contained questions such as "The Overland car is made in: Buffalo, Detroit, Flint, Toledo" or "Mauve is the name of a: drink, color, fabric, food." Even that portion of the test designed for illiterates asked soldiers to recognize that a net was missing from the tennis court or a horn was missing from a phonograph. Questions like these placed soldiers from rural or working class backgrounds at a severe disadvantage.²³

As a result of these flawed instruments, scientists concluded that approximately 47.3 percent of whites (Indians were included in this statistic) were below the mental age of thirteen. Championed as heroes only days earlier, half of all new recruits were now classified as "morons." For Indian recruits, with little exposure to off-reservation culture, psychological testing of this kind automatically relegated them to the lowest levels of the army hierarchy.²⁴

Assignments to regular units came next, and at Camp Funston as in other training camps in the United States, American Indians were attached to white regiments and were removed or singled out only if their inability to speak English proved a problem. Thus, on the surface the experience of the American Indian soldier at Camp Funston during World War I closely paralleled that of average white doughboy. Every morning trainees arose at 5:45 A.M. to stand reveille and then marched to breakfast at 6:20. A typ-

ical breakfast at Camp Funston consisted of cantaloupes, corn flakes with sugar and milk, fried liver and bacon, fried onions, toast, and coffee. Dinner was advertised as beef a la mode, boiled potatoes, creamed cauliflower, pickles, tapioca pudding, vanilla sauce, iced tea, and bread. This was followed by an evening meal of chili con carne, hot biscuits, stewed peaches, and iced tea.²⁵

For the most part, Indian recruits relished the vast quantity and quality of food served at camp, but after a few weeks they began to look forward to food packages from home. Fortunately for them, Red Cross, YMCA, and the Knights of Columbus (National Catholic War Council) volunteers worked hard to ensure that someone from the reservation remained in contact with the young Indian men at Camp Funston and forwarded food and gift packages to bolster their spirits. A grateful Robert L. Grier sat down on Christmas Eve 1917 to thank the Rosebud County Chapter of the Red Cross for his holiday package. "It is very kind of the people," he wrote, "to remember the soldiers so liberally and undoubtedly represents a great amount of work and sacrifice."²⁶ Many Indian families on reservations across the country responded to the war through volunteer work with the Red Cross, making up packages, knitting socks and mittens, and raising money. At Rosebud, the elderly male members of the community showed their support for the young men at Camp Funston by forming their own "home guard" and drilling daily should they be needed to defend the reservation from German attack. At Pine Ridge, agency farmers collected packages from the relatives and friends of Indian recruits, which the Red Cross then mailed. In this sense, the war emergency had a palliative, if temporary, effect on Indian-white relations.²⁷

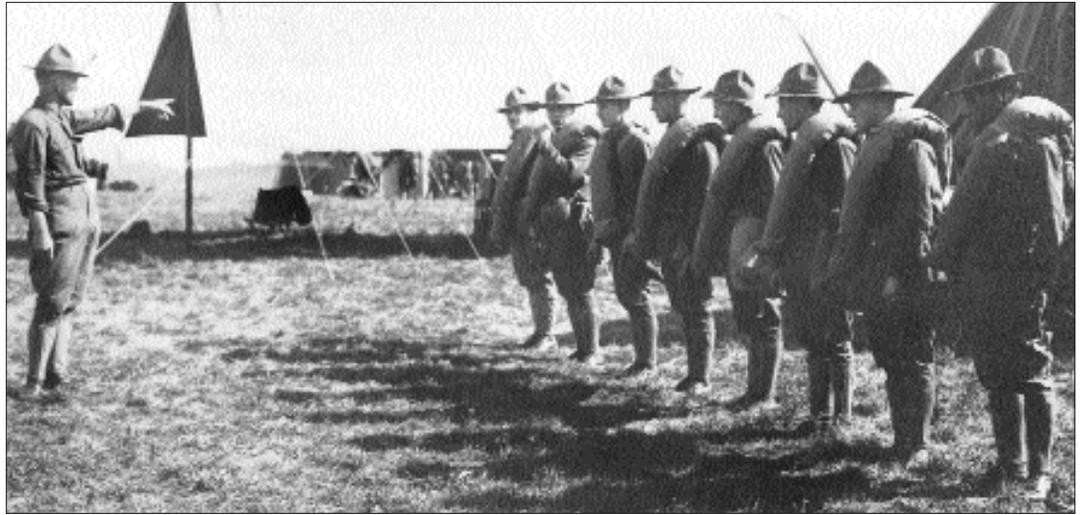
23. *Ibid.*, 61.

24. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

25. *Ibid.*, 65.
26. Robert L. Grier to "Kind Friends" at the Rosebud County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Rosebud, S.D., December 24, 1917, "Soldier Corr., misc.," box A-435, Rosebud Subject Correspondence, 1910–1925, Rosebud Agency Records.

27. Donald L. Parman, *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 65.

Camp Funston soldiers prepare for drill, ca. 1918.



Training at Camp Funston was as regulated as meals. The day's drill began at 7:30 A.M. For the next four hours men trained to march in line and in columns, dig trenches, attack with bayonets, care for their uniforms, make and pitch tents, and care for their rifles. They took classes in personal hygiene and participated in and defended themselves from gas attacks, among other things. After dinner at noon, soldiers returned to the parade ground to continue drilling until the call for retreat, presentation of arms, and the playing of the national anthem during the flag lowering at 5:45. Following the evening meal, soldiers enjoyed a brief free period until lectures at 7:00 P.M. Ten o'clock was lights out marked by taps.²⁸

Throughout the war, training camps across the country felt the influence of progressivism. This was largely due to the work of the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA), established by President Wilson only days after America's entry into the war. Initially charged with educating and protecting American soldiers against venereal disease, the CTCA expanded its mission to preserving the moral fiber of American society.²⁹ The CTCA's goal was to improve morality and social stability through "education, recreation, and repression." These goals fit hand-in-glove with Indian assimilation policies. Training camps made room for movie theaters, recreation centers, and other activities offering "wholesome" entertainment for soldiers during their off-hours while severely limiting their access to alcohol and prostitutes. As Fool Bull joked, "There is no whiskey here and I'm glad of it, for I know I'll never keep out of the guard house if there was. The orders are pretty strick [sic] here and it's a man's hat when they found booze on him."³⁰

Across the country, the CTCA oversaw the construction and management of thirty-four Liberty Theaters with capacities from two thousand to ten thousand men. Popular Hollywood movies were shown every night, in addition to performances by leading actors from vaudeville and actors associations, donated free of charge.³¹ The CTCA also appointed numerous athletic directors and instructors to work in the camps. Although boxing was the most encouraged sport, the association provided equipment and instructors for nearly every activity including the less popular but no less enthusiastic song leaders charged with maintaining camp spirits. For Indian soldiers who had attended reservation boarding schools, sing-alongs were an already familiar activity. Popular war tunes like *Uncle Sam*, *Wrap Me in the Dear Old Flag*, and *Canning the Kaiser* were already known to Indian students at Cheyenne River School and others.³²

The CTCA was not alone in attempting to offer soldiers some positive distractions from training life. The American Red Cross, YMCA, Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, the Travelers' Aid, the American Library Association, and the Playground Association of America all organized to furnish camps with the amenities necessary for comfortable, wholesome living. When Indian soldiers went abroad, many of these benevolent societies accompanied them, assisting with correspondence to families, medical care, and providing general comfort. On occasion, the Red Cross even followed up on Indian soldiers who were rejected for

28. Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925*, 319–24.

29. Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), xvii.

30. Richard Fool Bull to A. G. Wilson

31. Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925*, 330–32.

32. *Ibid.*, 332; "Closing Entertainment of Cheyenne River School, May 30, 1918," "Boarding School Corres.," Cheyenne River Agency, RG75, National Archives and Records Administration.



Groups such as the Knights of Columbus and YMCA helped offer soldiers positive distractions by providing them recreation and education during off-hours. The Knights of Columbus hall at Camp Funston is seen at left, while at right, soldiers gather for indoor relaxation at the camp's YMCA.

training due to illness or disease to make sure they arrived back at the reservation safely.³³

Indian recruits at Funston fell into two distinct groups in response to camp life: those who were accustomed to military regimentation as a result of their boarding school experiences and those who had been raised on reservations, separate from mainstream society. Boarding school graduates seem to have had less difficulty with camp routine. In October 1917 Pine Ridge Indian recruits were drawn mainly from the Indian schools at Rapid City and Flandreau, South Dakota; Haskell Indian School in Lawrence; and Genoa Indian School in Nebraska. According to a 1919 army report, "the Indian [is] competitively prepared by his technical training in special government and public schools to render advanced battalion and regimental intelligence services. He has received military training at Carlisle, Haskell, Riverside, Chilocco, Phoenix, and Chemawa and he has qualified since graduating from such schools as telegrapher, telephone operator and draughtsman."³⁴ Boarding school recruits at Camp Funston, with its cavalry units, also were valued for the husbandry skills they learned at school. For those Indian men accustomed to life in small rural communities, however, the experience was much more difficult. In the fall of 1917 Grover E. Burnett (Lakota) clearly was homesick as he thanked his family for the early Christmas packages that had arrived in camp.

33. Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900–1925*, 334–35; Henrietta Lund to Claude Covey, Rosebud, S.D., October 25, 1918, "Soldier Boys Corres.," Rosebud Subject Correspondence 1910–1925, Rosebud Agency Records. The Indian recruit mentioned in the letter is Seven Dog Prairie, who was discharged from Funston after being diagnosed with tuberculosis.

I received the xmas pkg. All OK and thank you one and all, dear friends not only for the presents but for your kind wishes. It makes one feel as if he is not forgotten altogether by his home people. I find every thing in the pkg very useful. We boys are getting along alright—if it wasn't for so much wind in this country it would be so much better. It is dustier here than it is in Rose Bud on a windy day it is windy every day here.³⁵

Homesickness was a constant theme in letters sent home by Indian soldiers at Camp Funston. Reservation superintendents varied in personal replies to Indian soldiers, but Superintendent Claude Covey from Rosebud, South Dakota, wrote regularly to the Lakota men stationed at Funston. On November 22, 1917, he asked Private James Witt to share his greetings with "all the Rosebud boys" and to let "each one know that we think of you all and wish you the very best there is which is to be in at the finish and get the kaiser and all his war lords, every one of them."³⁶ As in the nation at large, and in keeping with assimilation policy, Indian recruits were reminded constantly of their role as defenders of democracy and nationalism. Witt, who was one-eighth Cherokee but lived in South Dakota, would have his chance to "get the Kaiser" in 1918 at the Battle of Belleau Wood. He returned to the Rosebud Reservation minus his left arm.

34. John R. Eddy to Brigadier General Spaulding, February 15, 1919, Records of the Historical Section of the General Staff, Records of the American Expeditionary Force, RG120, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

35. Grover E. Burnett, Camp Funston, KS to Friends, c/o Red Cross Committee at Rosebud, S.D., November 22, 1917, "Soldier Corres., misc.," Rosebud Agency Records.

36. Claude Covey, Rosebud, S.D., to Private James Witt, Camp Funston, Kans., November 22, 1917, "Soldiers Cases," box A-436, ibid.

In spite of encouragement from home, not every American Indian at Camp Funston settled down to camp life or resigned himself to the war effort. In numerous documented cases, and in contrast to the stereotype of the bloodthirsty Indian soldier, several of the Rosebud men actively worked to be discharged from Camp Funston and sent home to their families. For the Rosebud Lakotas, Camp Funston



was a grim reminder of the grisly murder of their own kinsmen at Wounded Knee only a quarter-century earlier. Based on a survey of discharge papers, the average Indian recruit at Funston was between twenty-four and twenty-seven years old. Rosebud recruits then, had grown up entirely in the shadow of this terrible event—a situation that may well have dampened their enthusiasm to serve at the same camp that had housed and trained the soldiers responsible for the deaths of nearly three hundred Lakota men, women, and children in the bitter winter of 1890–1891.³⁷

Unlike conscientious objectors, however, most Indian soldiers did not seek exemption from military service to avoid combat. Rather, they saw their draft as a violation of their status as noncitizens. As legal wards rather than full American citizens, they feared they would not be protected from government seizure of property if their families were unable to pay taxes while they were in service, or that the government would deny them veterans benefits after the war. Thus, the majority of Indians resisting the draft or military service at Camp Funston sought exemptions or deferments until they could settle their legal status as American citizens.

This certainly was the case for Pierre From Above, a Lakota man who declared that he would not fight without the full rights of citizenship. As he wrote to the Rosebud Agency, “This doesn’t mean that I am backing out the

Army, but I rather be a citizen before I go.”³⁸ From Above had good reason to be concerned. In 1917, in response to reformers’ and western politicians’ demands, Commissioner Sells embarked on an aggressive campaign to have thousands of Indian wards declared “competent” to manage their own affairs. This meant that the average Indian allotment holder’s land was now subject to taxation and other legal obligations. Mortgages on Indian land increased dramatically, ultimately resulting in dispossession. Under Sells’s new policy, any Indian of less than one-half Indian ancestry was automatically declared competent, while full bloods could be declared competent by superintendents whether they made application for competency or not.

Public support for Sells’s new policy was strong because of an increased demand for agricultural products and a widespread belief that Indians were less productive farmers than whites. Competency policy virtually guaranteed that Indian lands soon would fall to white control. This was particularly hard on the Indians at Pine Ridge and other South Dakota reservations where most of the allottees were unable to speak, write, or read English and were vulnerable to the intricacies of legal land title. New patentees were quickly offered mortgages on their land and then relieved of it as lenders foreclosed.³⁹

Other Indian recruits were concerned for the safety of their family members in their absence. For Private Louis Whitehorse, being drafted into the army meant he was unable to protect and support his family. In the fall of 1917

37. See Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (N.Y.: Henry Hold and Co., 1970); Richard E. Jensen, R. Eli Paul, and John E. Carter, *Eyewitness at Wounded Knee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

38. Pierre From Above to Claude C. Covey, Rosebud, S.D., received October 2, 1917, “Soldier Boys,” Rosebud Agency Records.

39. Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887–1934* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1991): 103–6.

40. C. W. Kerlin to Claude C. Covey, Rosebud, S.D., August 13, 1918, “Soldier Boys,” Rosebud Agency Records.

Whitehorse filed a claim for exemption "on account of having a dependent wife." Whitehorse's request was denied by the district board. The secretary of the local exemption board explained that Whitehorse "was ordered to report for entrainment on October 5, but he failed to do so . . . and on October 26th he was arrested as a deserter and taken to Fort Mead and from there to Camp Funston."⁴⁰ Whitehorse continued to ask to be allowed to return to the reservation, but to no avail. In the spring of 1918, while he was still serving time for desertion at Funston, his wife died.

Similarly, George Big Owl and his wife, Millie Peneaux, of Rosebud, tried to have George discharged from Funston because of Millie's affliction with polio. They wrote to various officials both in the army and the Office of Indian Affairs asking for help. As Millie wrote to the agency superintendent, "I can't take care of my childrens because I can't walk and I have no relatives to help me . . . supposed you were in my place, suffer like this what would you think? Sure enough you will think of killing yourself and then you will be better off."⁴¹ Millie Peneaux even wrote to Kansas senator Charles Curtis, an enrolled member of the Kansa tribe (and a future vice president), asking for help, but her efforts were in vain. In July 1918 the superintendent told Millie that it was useless to make "any further attempts toward getting George exempted." Covey explained that she was better off financially while George was in the army and that "instead of looking at it as you do you should indeed be proud of your husband for having an opportunity to do his part in this great war."⁴²

The plights of Whitehorse and Big Owl seem doubly tragic considering that exemption boards across the nation were still in the process of trying to clarify the rules and to whom they applied. Some boards exempted all married men, while others refused to hear cases of dependency that would have legally served as grounds for exemption. As the war continued, the War Department attempted to clarify the guidelines for Selective Service and Exemption Boards, but by then, many Indians already had been forced into service and could only argue their cases from within the military system or through slow and inefficient correspondence with their agency superintendents.⁴³

By the spring of 1918, nearly one year after the United States had entered the war and called the first draft, the

local exemption board of Mellette County, White River, South Dakota, was still unclear about exemption guidelines. Secretary C. W. Kerlin explained:

We have received no ruling from the War Department in regard to exempting Indians who were not citizens. I understood that some of the Boards had received this ruling, and last week while at Pierre [South Dakota] I had a talk with Adjutant General Morris, and I asked him in regard to this matter, and he said that he had sent out such a ruling to a few of the Boards whom he thought would have Indians among their registrants, but we failed to receive any. I understand that this ruling is to the effect that an Indian receiving his trust patent from the Government since May 1906 is not a citizen, [and] not subject to draft.⁴⁴

Kerlin was wrong from the standpoint of the Office of Indian Affairs that maintained all Indians were subject to the draft regardless of citizenship. Local boards who heard conflicting opinions continued to be inconsistent in their treatment of Indians, making the appeal process that much more difficult. The average non-Indian conscientious objector in World War I could appeal to a military board. This was not, however, the tack taken by most Indians seeking exemptions. Indian recruits preferred to work through their reservation superintendents, as they did on most other matters pertaining to state or federal government regulations.

Regardless of their approach, neither conscientious objectors nor Indians had much success in securing discharges from Camp Funston. One reason may have been the command policy of General Wood, who became well known for his intolerance of objectors. This was likely due to Wood's impatience with those who failed to support a war that he had been demanding the nation enter since 1914. In any case, Camp Funston became notorious for its brutal treatment of conscientious objectors. When rumors of torture leaked out from the base, investigators gathered evidence of gross mistreatment of objectors for a period between July 5 and October 21, 1918. These included "bayoneting, forced cold showers under fire hoses for up to fifteen minutes at a time (sometimes repeatedly) in the middle of the night, vicious blows, and hanging by the thumbs." Prisoners' testimony led to public demands for an official investigation of what became popularly known as the "Camp Funston Outrages."⁴⁵

41. Millie Peneaux to Claude Covey, Wood, S.D., June 19, 1918, *ibid.*

42. Superintendent, Rosebud Agency, to Millie Peneaux, July 29, 1918, box A-435, *ibid.*

43. Frances H. Early, *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 64.

44. C. W. Kerlin to Claude C. Covey, Rosebud, S.D., March 27, 1918, "Soldier Boys," Rosebud Agency Records.

45. Early, *A World Without War*, 112-13.

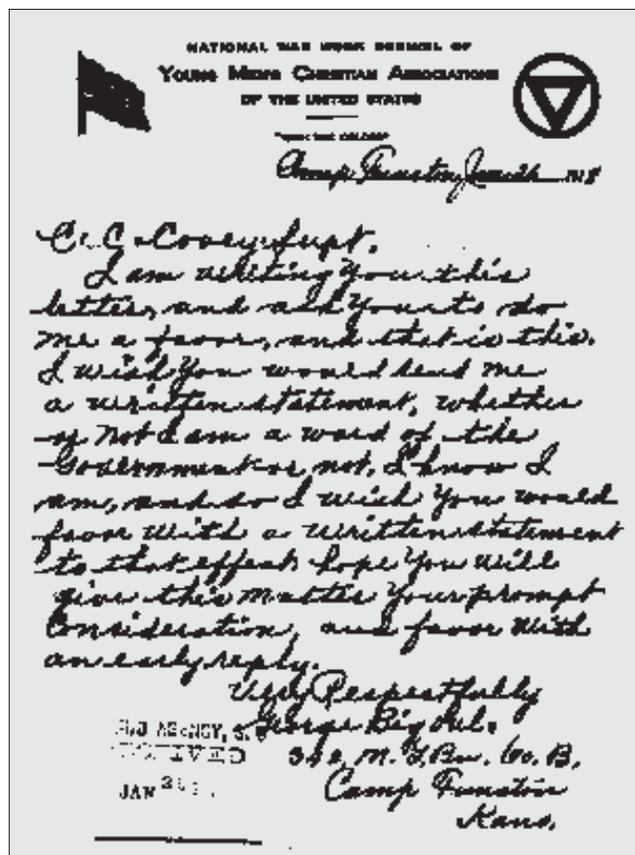
Many Indians applied to be discharged from military service, some because they were not American citizens and others because of family obligations back home.

Other aspects of soldier training at Funston fell outside of accepted procedure. According to official war policy, the average American soldier was supposed to spend six months training at camp, two months training in France, and one month in a quiet sector at the front before entering battle. Indian soldiers writing home from Camp Funston, however, noted that their training might last only one month before they departed for France. One private from Rosebud agency noted that "Our Captain introduced us that we shall fight the Germans as soon as we are trained." Richard Fool Bull wrote in July 1918 that Camp Funston is "only a receiving camp and about a month's training is all we get here and equipments [sic]."⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that American Indians were not unique in experiencing rushed training periods. This was a reflection of a massive, rapid build-up of the American army comparable to their allies, who had been mobilizing and fighting for the previous three years.

Although the army did not keep separate records of Indians' participation in World War I, their contributions were regularly noted in local newspapers and by agency superintendents during and after the war. Several Indians who trained at Camp Funston served with distinction overseas and ultimately were killed or wounded in the conflict. Moses Clown, a Haskell student born at Cheyenne Agency, was inducted into the army in June 1917 and sent to Camp Funston for training. He left for Europe with Company B of the 314th Military Police, which was attached to the Thirty-second Division. Just ten days before the November armistice, Clown and four others in his unit were killed during an artillery bombardment.

Funston trainees Thomas Blackbird, Oliver Leftheron, Edward Lessert, William Fire Thunder, Felix Fly, Thomas Garcia, Vincent Bad Wound, Benjamin Prettyboy, and Frank Two Two, all of Pine Ridge, saw service in France in the last days and months of the war and returned home safely. Antoine LeDeaux and Allen Kills Warrior who trained at Funston suffered eye and lung damage after a German gas attack. Eddie Cottier, another Funston recruit, was wounded during the Battle of Meuse-Argonne Offensive on October 21, 1918. His wounds were severe enough to warrant amputation of his left leg at the thigh and part

⁴⁶ Pierre From Above to Claude C. Covey, October 2, 1917; Richard Fool Bull to A. G. Wilson.



of his right foot. Funston trainee Corporal Roy Lessert of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) saw several engagements before he was killed in November 1918. Joseph Thunder Hawk of the 350th Infantry Regiment, Eighty-eighth Division, was in three different engagements with the AEF and was gassed several times. He died at Pine Ridge Reservation on January 21, 1921.

Upon their return to the United States in 1919, American Indian soldiers found a nation grateful for their service but not fundamentally changed in its opinion of Indian peoples. Indian veterans were expected to return to their former lives on the reservation, even though many no longer were physically able to do the same work they had done before. Selling their farms and ranches, often to their white lessees, numerous Indian veterans now found work in the Indian service or as common laborers in agriculture and local industry. Wartime spending had reduced the federal money available for reservation hospitals and schools, and veterans often returned to a diminished level of service for themselves and their families. Indian lands similarly had been seized through liberal long-term leases to white farmers who



Although the American soldier was supposed to have six months' training in camp before entering battle, some troops received far less before they departed for France. Here troops arrive in London on their way to the front.

Historical Section of the American Expeditionary Forces asked a number of field officers to complete lengthy questionnaires on the conduct of Indian soldiers during the war. The survey assumed Indians' special abilities in several ways. For example, the first half of the questionnaire asked if the Indian soldier had been able to "stand the nervous strain; prove a natural leader in the ranks; associate readily with white men; was regarded well by white soldiers or demonstrated any special fitness for duty." The second half of the questionnaire, titled "Scouting," went to the heart of the matter with

profited from high wartime prices for agricultural products.⁴⁷

There were, however, some positive aspects to Indians' participation in the war. In some Indian communities, wartime service helped to revitalize old warrior traditions, societies, and rituals. Seen as an expression of patriotism, American officials were more tolerant of these ceremonies than they had been of earlier rituals like the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance. Some veterans, as at Cheyenne River Agency, formed their own American Legions to honor their veterans and oversaw the erection of memorials to their fallen comrades. Many of these world-wise veterans assumed positions of leadership within their tribal communities.

Within American mainstream culture, Indian heroism in the Great War took on mythic proportions and only served to strengthen long-held stereotypes about the "natural" ability of the Indian soldier. In the spring of 1919 the

47. David L. Wood, "American Indian Farmland and the Great War," *Agricultural History* 55 (July 1981): 249–65. Wood contends that the practice of bringing more Indian land into production had two goals: to "produce more food for the United States and its allies," and to "accelerate the process of absorbing Native Americans into the American 'mainstream.'"

queries about the soldier's "courage, endurance, good humor, keenness of senses and dexterity, judgment and initiative, ability to use maps, buzzers etc, night work as a runner, observer and verbal reporter." While most officers described Indian soldiers as normal or fair, without any exceptional attributes, a fair number succumbed to stereotypes, characterizing Indian soldiers as having exceptional abilities in terms of courage, sense of direction, and as couriers. Despite these attributes, most commanders considered Indian leadership abilities to be "average" or "normal." This was in keeping with stereotypes forged before the war, which maintained that Indians made good, even exceptional, regular soldiers in the right place but could not handle the responsibility of command.⁴⁸

In the case of Camp Funston, which was absorbed into Fort Riley following the war, the conspicuous service of Haskell Indian School students during the Great War led to some unexpected positive connections between the school and the base, albeit based on the same old stereotypes that

48. Sampling of questionnaires of Seventh Division, Tenth Division, and Forty-first Division, all of which were stationed at Camp Funston during the war, Records of the Historical Section of the General Staff, Records of the American Expeditionary Force, box 3471.

Student battalion at Haskell Institute, 1920s.



had influenced the army survey in 1919. As the horror of the war receded into the distance, both the school and the fort looked for ways in which to publicize their continued importance in American society. This led to the establishment of two companies of all-Indian student-soldiers, one a mounted cavalry unit and the other an artillery unit. Their functions were not chosen randomly but were selected for their seeming “natural” fit with Indians’ affinity for horses and sharpshooting. The mounted Troop C of the 114th Cavalry at Fort Riley was made up entirely of Haskell students. The students were carefully selected for their good conduct and represented a cross section of different Indian tribes.

These Indians come from twenty states of the Union. The Cherokees, with thirteen men, have the largest representation on the Troop roster with eleven Siouxs running a close second. In addition to the above there are six Pimas, five Navajos; four Utes; two each Snohomish, Creek, Seneca, Chippewa, and Menominee; and one each from the tribes of Pomo, Stockbridge, Sac and Fox, Shoshone Omaha, Wichita, Pawnee, Piute, Bannock, Klamath, Cheyenne, Arickaree and Oneida.

Mounted Cavalry Troop C in particular enjoyed the strong support of both the base and the school. As the War Department reported, “When there are distinguished visitors, the Indian Troop is always called upon to give its silent drill.” For ten minutes, “without command or guiding signal, the Indians go silently through a drill involving 1192 movements in marching and the manual of arms, never stepping outside of the limited space assigned, brushing the lines of spectators, but never touching them.” Troop C was designated the “banner” troop of Kansas because “in athletic competitions members of the Troop clearly display the traditional Indian prowess.”⁴⁹

49. Press Release, War Department, March 14, 1927, Pine Ridge Agency Records.

Like Troop C, Indian military service at Camp Funston captured the complex expectations and experiences of the Anglo-Indian military relationship during the First World War. Both the BIA and the U.S. Army supported the idea of incorporating Indians into regular army units, but for very different reasons. The BIA hoped to use the war as a tool for assimilating Indian peoples into American society. The army, on the other hand, saw the Indian not as a future member of American society but as a member of an ethnic group with a celebrated warrior tradition, a set of talents that could be uniquely channeled for military use.

As their experiences demonstrated, many Indians proved to be successful soldiers, and in numerous cases their military service aided their assimilation into American society. But Indian peoples also took their own successes from the world war. This was true in the case of Pierre From Above, who demanded to be able to settle his home affairs prior to service, or in the case of Chester Armstrong Four Bear, who disobeyed orders and returned to the front lines rather than receive treatment for his wounds. What is commonly overlooked is that Indian soldiers used their military experiences to satisfy their own cultural goals and made good use of their training after the war for the advancement of their communities. Time and again, Indians at Camp Funston demonstrated a sense of sovereignty in their military service, even to the point of incarceration and punishment for standing their ground. The most successful Indian soldiers were those who combined their sense of tribal sovereignty with the nation’s demands for universal military service. They learned, in spite of BIA and U.S. Army policy, to make the most of the war for themselves and thus gained the lasting respect of the nation at large.

