

Chief Spotted Tail

Personal Reminiscences

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Sintégaleska. Spotted Tail.

Oglala Dakota.

Chief Spotted Tail

The greatest excitement ever caused in Dodge was the advent of an Indian, one of the principal chiefs of the Cheyennes. In the winter of 1872, W. D. Lee, of the firm of Lee & Reynolds, doing a large business at Supply as freighters, government contractors, sutlers and Indian traders combined, brought this Indian to Dodge City to show him the wonders of the railroad and impress upon him how civilization was advancing.

There happened to be several hunters in town at that time, driven in by a heavy storm and snow. No sooner did the Indian make his appearance on the street than the excitement began. Most of the hunters hated an Indian, and not a few of them had suffered more or less from their depredations. Among the latter was one Kirk Jordan, a very desperate man, whose sister, brother-in-law and whole family had been wiped out by the savages, and their home and its contents burned

and every vestige of stock stolen.

This had happened in the northwest part of the state. Jordan had sworn to kill the first Indian he saw, no matter what the consequences might be. He was a leader and a favorite with the hunters, and, together with his companions, being inflated with liquor, had no trouble in getting followers. We ran the Indian into a drug-store and locked the doors. There was no egress from the rear, but two families occupied houses adjoining the drug-store, and some one quickly tore off one of the upright partition boards that separated the drug-store from the dwellings containing the families, and the Indian squeezed through.

The board was quickly and neatly replaced, leaving no trace of its having been removed; so when the crowd of excited hunters burst into the store and could not find the Indian, they were as puzzled as ever lost a trail upon open prairie.

Chief Spotted Tail

That afternoon I thought things had quieted down, and I saddled one of Lee's finest horses (Lee had brought up a magnificent team), and led it around to the back door—of course the Indian had been previously instructed to mount and make for his tribe as fast as the horse would carry him; but before I rapped at the door I looked around, and from the back of the dance hall, a hundred yards distant, there were fifty buffalo guns leveled at me.

I knew those fellows had nothing against me, but I was afraid some of the guns might go off by accident, and wished right there that the ground would sink down deep enough to cover me from the range of their guns. I led the horse back to the stable as quickly and quietly as possible, feeling relieved when inside. I at once dispatched a courier to the commander at the fort, with the request that he send up a company of cavalry, but he wouldn't do it. As soon as it

got dark, Lee and I got in his carriage, loaded with buffalo-robies, had the Indian rushed out, robes piled on top of him, and went out of Dodge on the run. We met Captain Tupper's troop of the Sixth United States cavalry about a mile out, coming after the chief. There were no more Indians seen in Dodge except under big escort.



In 1874, George Armstrong Custer led a reconnaissance mission into Sioux territory that reported gold in the Black Hills, an area held sacred by the local Indians. Formerly, the Army tried to keep miners out but did not succeed; the threat of violence grew.

In May 1875, delegations headed by Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, and Lone Horn traveled to Washington, D.C. in a last-ditch attempt to persuade President Grant to honor existing treaties and stem the flow of miners into their territories.

The Indians met with Grant, Secretary of the Interior Delano, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Smith, who informed them that Congress wanted to resolve the matter by giving the tribes \$25,000 for their land and resettling them into Indian Territory. The Indians rejected such a treaty, with Spotted Tail's reply to the proposition being as follows:

"My father, I have considered all the Great Father told me, and have come here to give you an answer.... When I was here before, the President gave me my country, and I put my stake down in a good place, and there I want to stay.... I respect the Treaty (doubtless referring to the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie) but the white men who come in our country do not. You speak of another country, but it is not my country; it does not concern me, and I want nothing to do with it. I was not born there.... If it is such a good country, you ought to send the white men now in our country there and let us alone...."

Washington DC



On the night of August 5, 1881, Crow Dog and his wife happened to deliver a load of wood to the Agency while the Tribal Council was in session. Finished with the job, they were driving their team back towards home camp when Crow Dog noticed four men coming up behind him. The meeting must have just broken up. The men were chiefs, three on foot, Two Strike, He Dog, and Ring Thunder, and one riding ahead, Spotted Tail—Crow Dog recognized him from his distinct upright posture.

On impulse, Crow Dog stopped his team, handed the reins to his wife, grabbed his rifle, jumped down from the wagon, and knelt down in the dust of the trail as if he were trying to tie his moccasin strings. As Spotted Tail rode up, Crow Dog lifted the rifle and shot him through the chest. Spotted Tail fell off his horse, struggled to his feet, took several steps toward Crow Dog while trying to draw his revolver out of its holster. Before he could do this, he fell backward and lay still. Crow Dog leaped on his wagon, whipped his horses, and went flying up the trail to the safety of his camp.

Death of Spotted Tail

According to Luther Standing Bear in his memoir My People the Sioux, Spotted Tail was killed by Crow Dog after taking the wife of a crippled man. Perhaps more significantly, he was said to have sold land not belonging to him. Although this angered many of the Sioux leaders, Chief Standing Bear cautioned the others against hasty action. Spotted Tail's flaunting of his presumed power was brought to a head when he stole the wife of a crippled man. When told by a council of chiefs to give the man his wife back, Spotted Tail refused. He said the United States government was behind him. At this point, several men decided that Spotted Tail should be killed but, before they could act, he was killed by Crow Dog on August 5,

Today, Spotted Tail is buried at the Episcopal Cemetery in Rosebud, South Dakota. His gravesite overlooks the Rosebud Agency where the US Government and Brule people interact every day. Sinte Gleska University also stands near as its mission embraces the lofty vision Spotted Tail had for his people.



Gardner,

Washington, D. C.