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# Army's promise to Carlisle Indians' kin creates hope, skepticism

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([\*\*CHARLES FOX / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER\*\*](http://philly.reprintmint.com/006-default.html?src=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.philly.com%2Fimages%2F250*250%2F20160515-grave.jpg&verification=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.philly.com%2Fimages%2F20160515-grave.jpg&source=006&title=20160515-grave&caption=Asia Gilbertson Black Bull, left, and Shylee Brave of the Sicangu Youth Council, stand by the the grave of Chief Spotted Tail on May 12, 2016. Spotted Tail was among the first chiefs to agree to send children to Carlisle. )</a> Buy Photo</p></div>
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Asia Gilbertson Black Bull, left, and Shylee Brave of the Sicangu Youth Council, stand by the the grave of Chief Spotted Tail on May 12, 2016. Spotted Tail was among the first chiefs to agree to send children to Carlisle.

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by **JEFF GAMMAGE, STAFF WRITER**, CHARLES FOX, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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ROSEBUD, S.D. - Lila Kills In Sight grew up not knowing that she had a relative buried in far-off Pennsylvania, a boy who went away to boarding school and never came back.



**Carlisle Descendants Prepare For Repatriation**  
**([http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20160515\\_Army\\_s\\_promise\\_to\\_Carlisle\\_Indians\\_\\_kin\\_creates\\_hope\\_\\_skepticism.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20160515_Army_s_promise_to_Carlisle_Indians__kin_creates_hope__skepticism.html) viewGallery=y)**

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His loss simply wasn't discussed in her home.

Only recently did she learn of her tie to the child who died at the Carlisle Industrial Indian School - news she found as staggering as if she discovered she'd lost a family member in the Holocaust.

"Now I have all kinds of questions," Kills In Sight, 45, said during an interview on the Rosebud Sioux reservation in South Dakota. "Did he die alone? What did he die of? Did he know he was never coming home? Did he cry for his relatives?"

For American Indians here, the past is present. And Carlisle means one thing - a brutal, turn-of-the-century effort to cleanse natives of their "savage nature" by erasing their names, language, customs, religions, and family ties. When school founder Richard Henry Pratt went looking for Indian boys and girls in the late 1870s, he came here first.

Many children did not survive the school experience, among them Kills In Sight's relation, Friend Hollow Horn Bear. He lies next to a roadway, among nearly 200 native children in a cemetery on the grounds of what is now the Army War College.

After 130 years, he may be coming home.

During formal government-to-government consultations that took place here Tuesday, Army officials surprised a tense meeting-hall gathering by consenting to tribal demands to return the remains of 10 Rosebud children - and to pay the cost of doing so. Two other tribes have made similar requests. The government pledged that, through the official process for disinterments, it would accommodate all tribes that come forward.

At least five descendants of the Rosebud children live here on the plains of southern South Dakota. Still more dwell in distant communities or Western states. For them, the potential return of the remains provokes a particular ache.

"She was just a child when she died," said LaDonna Allard, a descendant of Dora Brave Bull.

When Allard sought information on her great-grandfather's sister, she learned that the child, also known as Her Pipe, was 16 when she arrived in Carlisle in 1879, part of the first class of 82 students from Rosebud and Pine Ridge. And she found a letter.

In January 1881, a friend of Dora's wrote home: "Tell Brave Bull that Dora [Her Pipe] has been a little sick, but is most well now."

Three months later, Dora was gone.

She wasn't the first. Children died before and would die later, nearly 100 in the school's first decade, stricken by tuberculosis, flu, and loneliness. Harsh discipline, hard labor, and malnutrition made students prey for epidemics. They could be beaten for speaking their language.

Many Indians now believe that what took place at Carlisle was genocide - a view supported by the U.N. definition of the term. But at the time, Carlisle and Pratt's attempt to "civilize" the children was embraced by white church leaders and even by some

Indians. The school spawned successors that embraced the motto "Kill the Indian, save the man."

At first, chiefs were persuaded to surrender children, often sending their own sons and daughters. Later, children would simply be seized by white authorities.

Today the Rosebud Sioux, pushed by a group of tribal youths who visited the cemetery in summer, lead a growing movement for repatriation, passing a resolution in January to seek the children's return.

"The Indian way of thinking is always about togetherness," said Archie Little, locally famous for his acting roles in *Dances With Wolves* and Jane Fonda's *Lakota Woman*. "To separate us was not a good thing."

On Tuesday, representatives of half a dozen tribes heard Army attorney Justin Buller offer not only a promise but an apology - accepted by some and rejected by others.

"There's a lot of anger, a lot of frustration, but I'm also full of hope," said Robert Rattling Leaf, a Rosebud tribal councilman.

In a matter of days, the conversation has begun to shift, from whether or not to how and when. The Sioux seek fast repatriation, preferably by summer's end. Spiritual leaders will be involved at every step. Beyond that, there's no guidebook.

"It is basically figuring it out as we go," said Sandy White Hawk, a Rosebud Sioux and executive director of the First Nations Repatriation Institute in Minnesota.

The Rosebud reservation is massive, a reach of cattle farms and prairie grasses almost twice the size of Rhode Island.

Tribal leaders are considering creating a special group burial space for the children within the new Veterans Cemetery, a 70-acre resting place set north of Mission. Its two huge tepees break the line of endless green.

From the air, the circular roads and walkways of the cemetery form the outline of a giant turtle - a protector, its hard shell offering shelter and safety.

"Our people have been coming through here for thousands of years," said Russell Eagle Bear, the Rosebud historic-preservation officer. "When we bring our kids back, they'll be taken care of in a good way. Not next to a highway."

Yufna Soldier Wolf, a Northern Arapaho official, spoke Tuesday on behalf of three tribe members buried at Carlisle. One is her great-uncle, Dickens Nor, whose real name was Little Chief. He arrived in Carlisle in 1881, age 14, and died less than two years later of pneumonia.

Soldier Wolf knows where she wants him to rest: among the sagebrush in her family plot, on the Wind River reservation in Wyoming, the same place where she will one day be buried.

On the Rosebud reservation, the famous Chief Spotted Tail, a fierce warrior and able peacemaker, is buried on a hillside, overlooking his people. It was Spotted Tail who, after much cajoling, surrendered the first children to travel to Carlisle, his own among them.

Rosebud has produced one of the few native congressmen, a well-known opera singer - and TV game-show host Bob Barker. The longtime emcee of *The Price Is Right* spent much of his youth here, where his mother was a teacher.

Today about 10,000 Indians call the reservation home, their lives constrained by high unemployment and limited opportunity. Nearly half the population lives in poverty. People find jobs on ranches, at a small casino, and at Sinte Gleska University, a tribal college founded in 1973. Some senior citizens can't afford to heat their homes during below-zero winters, and the tribal government struggles to find money to help them.

About 40 percent of the population is under 18 - and threatened by gangs, violence, and suicide. More than 20 lethal drug overdoses occurred here in 2014, when most South Dakota counties had fewer than four.

Some researchers say the social ills that haunt many tribal communities can partly be traced to boarding-school trauma. It's not just that children died at places like Carlisle. It's that families were split apart, cultures lost, students raised without parents in difficult environments. What are often called "boarding-school survivors" have shared stories of sexual and physical abuse.

"For Lakota people, everything changed in the boarding-school era," said Vikki Eagle Bear, a Rosebud youth counselor.

That's why the repatriation effort has created fresh energy. Here, ancestors are not just pictures in a book. Bringing the children home from Carlisle, people say, will show that Rosebud Sioux do not forget.

Kills In Sight grew up in the Spring Creek community, and lives there now, her great-grandmother a daughter of Chief Hollow Horn Bear. A Tribal Council member, she was initially unsure if it was right to move her ancestor's body. After talking with elders, she accepted the idea. She's skeptical that the Army will keep its promise. And counting on it all the same.

"It's unfinished business," Kills In Sight said. "It's emotional. It's spiritual. It's bittersweet."

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