HOW THE INDIANS CAME TO CARLISLE

By Louis Morton*

Late on the night of October 6, 1879, the townspeople of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, began to gather at the railroad junction just east of the town. Impatiently the crowd awaited the arrival of the train. Aboard were no distinguished passengers, only about 100 Indian boys and girls from some of the fiercest tribes in the West. For many of the townsmen, it would be their first sight of real Indians, but it was more than curiosity that had brought them out so late that brisk fall night. These Indians were no passing side-show. They had come to live at Carlisle, at the old military barracks where a school for Indians was to be formed. The train was bringing in the first class.†

From this beginning grew the famed Indian School at Carlisle. For almost forty years the school prospered, attracting wide attention and strong support from friends of the red man, to fall at last a fatality to World War I, when it was converted into an Army hospital.† Its students, numbering in the thousands, took back to their people a better understanding of the white man's civilization; its great athletes swept all opposition before them and left in their wake a string of broken records and a host of anecdotes. To Carlisle the school brought fame and a golden era it still recalls nostalgically. But all this lay in the future that night when the townsmen greeted the bewildered and sleepy Indian children who descended from the train at midnight to begin the long weary march to their new home.

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‡The Army War College now occupies the site of the Indian School.
The unique experiment in Indian education begun at Carlisle in 1879 grew out of the dreams of a young Civil War lieutenant. Such distant and seemingly unrelated events as a raid on Adobe Walls in the panhandle of Texas and a shipment of Indian prisoners to St. Augustine, Florida, merge in the strange story of the school's founding. And not least among the curious elements of this story is the selection of a school site in the rich Cumberland Valley of
Pennsylvania, on a post established by the British during the French and Indian Wars more than a century before.

The year 1874 was a year of unrest and trouble on the Southern Plains, that region now comprising Oklahoma and northern Texas, where the warlike Kiowas, Comanches, Southern Cheyennes, and Arapahoes lived. The buffalo hunters with their Sharps rifles had destroyed the herds to the north and were moving south into the Indian Territory, reserved by treaty for the red man. The buffalo was the staff of life for the Southern Plains Indian, providing him with food, shelter, clothing, and fuel. If the Army could not stop the buffalo hunter, the Indians would have to do it themselves. Without the buffalo, they would starve and freeze.²

In this emergency the tribes formed a temporary alliance and in June, 1874, struck the settlement of buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls. Repulsed with heavy losses, they broke up into small groups and ranged far and wide, attacking wagon trains and isolated communities and spreading terror throughout the Territory. That summer alone they killed about 200 settlers.³

Since the Bureau of Indian Affairs was obviously incapable of dealing with the situation, the Army was directed at the end of July to restore order. At the same time, the Indians were notified to return to their reservations by a certain date or else be treated as enemies to be hunted down and punished. And to make certain the guilty did not escape, the Army was given authority to seek out the offenders wherever they were. No longer was the reservation a safe refuge for the Indian.

The war was on. Under the direction of Lt. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the Military Division of Missouri, three separate columns converged on the Indian Territory with instructions to seek out the hostile bands and capture or destroy them.


³For an account of the fight at Adobe Walls and subsequent fighting on the Southern Plains, see ibid., 198-216; Lt. Gen. P. H. Sheridan, Record of Engagements with Hostile Indians Within the Military Division of the Missouri from 1868 to 1882 (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1883); Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army (Bantam Books: New York, 1957), 116-121; Paul S. Wellman, Death on the Prairie (New York, 1934), Chaps. X-XI.
The campaign that followed was bitter and long. Only 400 of the Indians had “come in to be counted” before the fighting started. The rest resisted, but their cause was hopeless. Pursued by the Federal troops and faced by the threat of starvation and exposure in a winter of exceptional severity, they surrendered in increasing numbers. By the spring of 1875, when the Cheyenne surrendered to Col. Nelson A. Miles, the uprising was virtually over.

When all the Indians were in, the Army began to segregate from their tribes the leaders of the uprising and those alleged to have committed the worst offenses. After a preliminary investigation about 150 of the Indians were found guilty and sent to Fort Sill. Further investigation reduced the number to 72, all of them charged with murder and rapine. These, the authorities in Washington decreed, would be sent in irons to St. Augustine and confined in the old Spanish fort of San Marco, then known as Fort Marion, for an undetermined period.4

The task of taking the 72 dangerous and desperate red men across half a continent by wagon and rail to their future prison in Florida and guarding them during their imprisonment fell to 1st Lt. Richard H. Pratt, 10th U. S. Cavalry. It was a heavy responsibility for so junior an officer, and Pratt’s Army career had thus far been unexceptional. Born in Rushford, New York, and raised in Indiana, he had entered the Army as a private at the outbreak of the Civil War to emerge four years later as a captain. For two years he tried to establish himself in business but without success. In March, 1867, he went back into the Army as a 2d lieutenant in the 10th Cavalry, a Negro unit officered by whites. The following year the regiment moved into Indian Territory and since then Pratt had served often with the Scouts. Perhaps it was this service that won him the assignment to Fort Marion, for he had demonstrated a marked ability to win the respect and loyalty of the Indians attached to his regiment.5

4 Tousey, Military History of Carlisle, 277.
The journey from Fort Sill began late in April 1875. The nearest railroad was 150 miles away through Indian country, but Pratt had an ample guard of two companies of infantry and two troops of cavalry. When the party reached the railroad, the securely chained prisoners were transferred from Army wagons to a waiting train and taken to Fort Leavenworth. There Pratt waited for two days while arrangements were made for the long trip ahead.

On May 10, the strange expedition to Florida continued on its way. Thus far, the Indians had shown little disposition to rebel at their harsh fate. Separated from their families, shackled, and kept in close confinement, they faced the future with outward stoicism. Most were depressed; some were restive. In the guardhouse at Leavenworth, Grey Beard, the Cheyenne chief who had led the famed massacre of the Germaine family and taken the two youngest daughters captive, attempted to hang himself. Lean Bear, another Cheyenne chief “of some note and bad character,” had been ill on the trip from Fort Sill to Leavenworth and now lay on the seat, covered entirely by his blanket.

As the train moved on its slow way east through Indianapolis, Louisville, and Atlanta, the prisoners began to show the effects of confinement. A few became sick and had to have medical treatment. Lean Bear, who had lain silent under his blanket throughout the trip, had somehow secured a small pocket knife and just before reaching Nashville had stabbed himself in the neck and chest. His condition went unnoticed until two of the guards took him his ration, when Lean Bear raised himself and stabbed the guards. All three were left in the hands of a naval surgeon in Nashville and eventually reached Fort Marion.

Grey Beard’s behavior after his effort to hang himself had been exemplary. But as the train neared Florida he leaped from the car window and hid himself in the underbrush. Flushed out by searchers he ran down the track so quickly that the soldiers, thinking he had managed to work loose from his irons and would escape,
fired and wounded him fatally. "One of the young Cheyennes," Pratt explained to The Adjutant General, "wanted me to tie Grey Beard's hands and fasten him to a seat on the evening before he jumped off the cars. But," he concluded ruefully, "I thought it unnecessary."

Other than these two incidents, there were no serious disturbances during the long train ride. The rest of the prisoners showed little concern for the two Cheyenne chiefs, maintaining that if these two were so foolish as to invite further punishment, "it was their business." The whites along the way caused Pratt more uneasiness than the Indians. Hostile crowds gathered at the larger stations to stare at the Indians as at wild beasts in a cage and to hurl insults and threats. Fortunately, the Indians could not understand English. But there was no misunderstanding the mood of the mob, and it was only by good judgment and soothing words that Pratt was able to avoid trouble.

The journey finally came to an end on May 21, when the train pulled into St. Augustine. The usual crowd had collected but Pratt and his men quickly led their prisoners away to their new home. Here, in the old, casemated Spanish fort, the Indians would spend the next three years of their lives. How would they behave when the last heavy gate clanged shut on the outside world? How would they face a future of close confinement and enforced inactivity after a vigorous life on the open plains? For how long would they accept this separation from their wives and children?

No one could answer these questions, but much depended on the attitude of the white jailor. In this respect the prisoners were fortunate in having a sympathetic master who understood Indians and believed they would respond to fair treatment. There was in Pratt's manner no trace of condescension, no hint of superiority. He had found his Indian Scouts co-operative and loyal; he sincerely believed their less fortunate brothers would, if properly treated, prove as co-operative.

From the very start, Pratt was the friend of the Indian prisoners as well as their jailor. His sympathetic understanding of their plight and his desire to help them quickly won for him their confidence and trust. Three weeks after their arrival, he interceded with the War Department on their behalf and supported their

*Ibid. For the Lean Bear incident see ltr of 19 May 1875 to TAG.*
plea for clemency. At the same time he passed on to Washington the message of the Kiowa Chief, Mah Mante, who spoke for the prisoners in these words:

We want to learn the ways of the white men. First we want our wives and children and then we will go any place and settle down and learn to support ourselves as white men do. . . . We want to learn how to make corn and work the ground so we can make our living and we want to live in a house just as a white man.

* Ltr, Pratt to TAG, 11 June 1875.
“I believe,” Pratt added in his indorsement, “these protestations to be the result of convictions deep and lasting.”

Though Mah Mante’s words failed to move the authorities in Washington, they had a profound effect on Pratt. In the Indian plea to learn the ways of the white man, he found a program and a philosophy that guided him for the rest of his life. In essence, his system consisted of taking the Indian out of his tribe and teaching him to speak, act, and think like a white man. That done, there would be no more Indian problem for the simple reason there would be no Indian.

At Fort Marion, Pratt had a unique opportunity to develop and test his ideas. His first success came when he found work for the prisoners with the souvenir dealers in the town. In two months the red men earned collectively about $2,000. But more important than the money was their feeling that they could do white man’s work. Despite this success, Pratt was not satisfied; he wanted to teach the Indians a trade and constantly pleaded with his superiors for equipment of all kinds, for carpenter’s tools and agricultural implements. Crimes in penitentiaries, he observed, were taught a useful trade. Why not the Indians? They had shown “the greatest willingness and industry,” he declared, and had earned this opportunity.

Though he never succeeded in this design, Pratt was able to persuade the townspeople to employ more and more of his Indians in a wide variety of occupations. He was now allowing the prisoners to go to town without a guard so that their opportunities for employment were further enlarged. In addition to odd jobs, they took care of horses, milked cows, picked oranges, and took the tourists out on fishing trips. Soon they were earning so much that some of the townspeople complained to Washington that the Indians were competing with local labor.

Putting the prisoners to work had many beneficial results. So long as they were occupied, there were few disciplinary problems. And not only did the Indians earn their own money, but they could spend it themselves in town. Constant contact with the towns-

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9 See ltrs of 29 June, 11 and 17 July 1875 to TAG, and 6 January 1876 to General F. F. Dent.
10 Ltr, Pratt to TAG, 17 July 1875.
people made them feel more at home in a civilized society. They abandoned their blankets and adopted the dress of the white man. Encouraged by daily inspections and a system of demerits to keep their quarters and clothing clean, they acquired the habits of neatness and cleanliness. But more important than these external signs of civilization was the growth of self-respect and a sense of responsibility among the prisoners. On their own initiative, more and more of the Indians expressed a desire to settle in Florida with their families and earn their own living.¹²

One of the greatest barriers between the white man and the red, Pratt had recognized by now, was the inability of each to communicate with the other. Since he had no funds to hire instructors, he persuaded some of the ladies in St. Augustine to come to the fort to teach the Indians. Casemates were fitted out as schoolrooms and classes were held regularly. “The Indians,” he told The Adjutant General, “are eager to learn and I would like to make a more direct and persistent effort when they are in the mood.”¹³ But this request for help, like his others, was denied.

Soon after reaching Fort Marion, Pratt had removed the irons from the Indians and given them the full freedom of the fort. In July, 1875, he asked permission to organize the young prisoners into a company and to employ them as guards. “This is perfectly feasible,” he explained to his superiors in Washington, “and will add in every way to the success of their management. They are trustworthy and will act against each other under orders as well as soldiers.”¹⁴ The War Department readily acceded to this request, since it would release the troops assigned to the fort, and Pratt soon had the Indians serving as their own guard and carrying weapons. So well did this experiment work out that not once during the two and a half remaining years of their imprisonment did Pratt note a single serious breach of discipline.¹⁵

How far the 70 “wild and desperate savages” who had led the uprising on the Southern Plains had come along the path of civilization is revealed in the following letter from Pratt to Gen-

¹²Ibid., 285-286; also Pratt’s letters in Army War College file for period 1875-1876.
¹³Ltr, Pratt to TAG, 6 January 1876.
¹⁴Ltr, Pratt to TAG, 17 July 1875.
¹⁵Ltr, Pratt to General Sheridan, 17 January 1876.
eral Sheridan, written only a year after their arrival at Fort Marion:

There is nothing of note to report regarding these prisoners, unless that fact is of itself important. They are simply under good discipline; quite well behaved, doing the work I can find for them to do cheerfully and industriously. They have abandoned about all the appearances and characteristics of the savage and are as neat and clean in their dress and persons as the men of a disciplined company. My 1st Sgt is about as competent as the average of those we get in the colored troops. I have a two hours school daily with an average of fifty pupils divided into four classes with a good teacher for each. The teachers work from the purest and best motives of Christian charity and as a consequence successfully and there is no cost to the Government. . . . I try offenses by a Jury of their own number which works well and the few cases I have had have been awarded ample punishment.¹⁸

Though they had evidently adjusted themselves to their new life, the Indian prisoners were by no means reconciled to their condition. “We have lived in this old place two years,” declared Making Medicine, spokesman for the young men. “It is old and we are young. We are tired of it. We want to go away from it, anywhere.” And the old men said, “It has been a long time since we came here with lying and stealing and killing in our hearts, but we have long ago thrown that all away. Today our hearts are glad, our heads are bigger and we are glad for what we have learned.” In his reports to the War Department, Pratt not only urged clemency but proposed a plan. The old men, he suggested, should be sent back to their tribes where they would be “an element of great good.” The younger men should be re-united with their families and kept in the East to live among the white men.¹⁷

The War Department had other plans. It intended to send all the Indians, old and young, back to the reservation to carry to their tribesmen the lessons they had learned in Florida. As Pratt phrased it in a letter to General William Tecumseh Sherman,

¹⁸ Ltr, Pratt to General Sheridan, May 1876 (no day).
¹⁷ The words of the Indians are recorded in a letter Pratt sent to The Adjutant General in Washington on 20 February 1877.
Commanding General of the Army, this was a scheme “to form the nucleus for the organization and subjugation” of the tribes and he opposed it strongly. So did 22 of the younger prisoners who refused to return to their tribes under any circumstances. Taking advantage of this situation, Pratt early in 1878 asked that he be allowed to retain these men in his charge and to continue their education at a more favorable site with funds provided by the government.

The experiment at Fort Marion had by now received wide notice, and its success had won for Pratt important friends in and out of the government. Harper's Weekly had commissioned one of the leading illustrators of the day to picture the life of the prisoners, and the Smithsonian Institution had sent Clark Mills, creator of the Jackson statute in Lafayette Square near the White House, to make plaster casts of the Indians. The Episcopal bishop of Minnesota, Henry B. Whipple, preached at the prison and Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote about it in the Outlook. Thus, the War Department could not easily reject without a fair hearing Pratt's proposal to continue the training of the 22 prisoners who refused to return to their tribes. It referred the matter, therefore, to Maj. Gen. W. S. Hancock, commander of the Southern Department. Hancock visited Fort Marion and was greatly impressed by what he saw. A “marvellous” transformation had been wrought in the Indians during their imprisonment, he told the Secretary of War in a report full of praise. More important, he recommended that the 22 Indians be allowed to remain and that Pratt's proposal be accepted.

Here was the first step in the realization of the dream that now possessed Pratt. But though the government had entrusted to his care 22 young Indians, it had failed to provide funds or a school. With typical vigor and persistence he procured both. The funds came from private sources, from persons who had observed his experiment at Fort Marion and become converts to his cause. Bishop Whipple promised to support four of the prisoners; Mrs. Joseph Laroque of New York City raised money for two; and

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18 Ltr, Pratt to General Sherman, no date (1877). See also ltr to TAG, 20 February 1877.
19 Tousey, Military History of Carlisle, 286.
another lady in Syracuse undertook to provide for four more. Soon Pratt had enough for all, with the added protection and support of a group of prominent persons with a stake in his project.29

Selecting a school for the Indians presented real problems. It had to be in the East, preferably northeast, and had to offer agricultural and vocational training. But none of the school officials Pratt wrote to would have his Indians. Finally, after many failures, he was able to persuade General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder and head of the Hampton Institute in Virginia to provide a place for his charges. In April 1878, the 22 Indians, no longer prisoners but aspiring young students, arrived at Hampton Roads to begin their formal schooling. Thus was established the Indian Department of the Hampton Institute.

Tentatively detailed to assist General Armstrong, Lt. Pratt was sent that fall to recruit fifty additional students from the recently defeated Nez Perce tribe. Under the great Chief Joseph, this tribe had virtually fought the U. S. Army to a standstill before succumbing, and its remnants were now held prisoner at Fort Leavenworth. With the bitter taste of defeat still fresh, Chief Joseph refused to let his children go, and Pratt had to return to Washington to admit defeat. His failure, he was convinced, was due to the influence of Indian agents and missionaries, who wished to keep the red men on the reservation. Whether this was so or not, Pratt was given sole authority to deal with the Indians thereafter and he finally did succeed in securing 43 more students for Hampton.

The Hampton interlude was not a happy one for Pratt.21 His connection with the school had been regularized by an amendment to the Army Appropriations Bill which detailed him to “Indian education,” but he no longer controlled the education of the Indians. And though the experiment was pronounced a great success by all, including the President, the Secretary of War, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, it failed to satisfy Pratt. The first tenet of his system was to bring the red man into direct

29 Ibid., 287; Eastman, Pratt, the Red Man’s Moses, 63.
21 An account of the experience of the Indians at Hampton can be found in Eastman, Pratt, Chap. VI and Brunhouse, “History of the Carlisle Indian School,” 8-9.
association with white people, to teach him to live and work and mingle freely with the whites, thus removing the prejudice on both sides. At Hampton, a Negro institution, this aim could not be achieved, Pratt felt. Inevitably, the Indian would become identified with the Negro and find himself subject to the same racial prejudice. The education of the Indian at Hampton, Pratt argued, would not only make impossible the realization of his ideals but would add a heavy burden to the load already carried by the red man.

These views inevitably led to a clash with General Armstrong. But Pratt maintained his position stoutly and finally told the general that he wished to be relieved from his assignment. He was willing, he said, to conduct a school for Indians but not on the present basis. With Armstrong's consent, Pratt went to Washington in the spring of 1879 on no less ambitious a project than to persuade the government to support his plan.

On his arrival, Pratt went first to see Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior and the cabinet officer responsible for Indian affairs. The interview was an unqualified success for the Army officer. With passionate conviction he set forth his ideas on Indian education, which, the Secretary pointed out, were in direct conflict with the government's policy of reservation schools. But Pratt was ready with an answer. The German-born Secretary's own career, he declared, was the best proof of his theory. "It would have been impossible for you to have accomplished your elevation," Pratt told him bluntly, "if when you came to this country you had been reservated to any one of the solid German communities we have permitted to grow up in some sections of America." To prove he was right, he asked the Secretary to give him "three hundred young Indians and a place in one of our best communities." And lest the Secretary be at a loss to find such a place, Pratt was ready with a suggestion. The abandoned Army barracks at Carlisle, he told Schurz, would be ideal. It met all the requirements of location, was free of the border prejudice against Indians, and its "industrious people would be examples for the pupils." It would only be necessary, he thought, to get permission from the Secretary of War. Schurz listened attentively to these proposals
and finally turned Pratt over to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The first hurdle was past.  

Pratt's selection of Carlisle Barracks was a skillful move, for the abandoned post was proving a political embarrassment. One of the oldest military forts in the country, with a rich tradition and a beautiful setting, Carlisle Barracks had outgrown its usefulness as a Cavalry school and mounted service depot by 1870. Cavalrymen were needed in the West, not in Pennsylvania, and the main market for horses was in St. Louis. To bring both men and horses to Carlisle and then send them back West was both costly and time-consuming. In 1871 the post was discontinued and a small detachment left to care for the buildings and fixed equipment.

The attitude of the townspeople had not encouraged the War Department to continue the post. Complaints about the troops had been frequent, the ministers even protesting that Sunday concerts had kept their parishioners from church. But in obliging the clergy and others by removing the offending garrison, the War Department had deprived the merchants of a large source of revenue. They responded with letters and petitions, one of which The Adjutant General indorsed with the statement, "There may be some occasion when its [Carlisle Barracks] use as a camp of instruction or other military station would be useful, provided some of the Civil Authorities and inhabitants of the town near, would agree to stop throwing impediments in the way of the military authorities as they did most of the time during the later years of its occupancy as a depot." General Sherman responded with the blunt recommendation that the post be sold, but the Secretary of War sent a more diplomatic note to the voters of Carlisle.

It was apparently in 1878, while the Army was making preparations to get rid of the post, that Lt. Pratt hit on the idea of placing

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22 Quotations are from Pratt's MS autobiography, quoted in Brunhouse, "History of the Carlisle Indian School," 12. See also Eastman, Pratt, 77 and Tousey, Military History of Carlisle, 289.

23 Carlisle Barracks dated from 1757 when two companies of the Highland Regiment and a battalion of the Royal Americans under Col. John Stanwix were stationed there to provide security for the frontier. The Forbes expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1758 assembled here for the march westward.


25 Ltr, TAG to General Sherman, 4 August 1876, quoted in Tousey, Military History of Carlisle, 267.
his school there. There were numerous buildings on the 27 acres that comprised the barracks, and these would provide all the facilities he needed initially. The town, which was only a mile away, could furnish supplies and possibly financial assistance. But to be certain that there was no objection from the townspeople, Pratt visited the town to consult with one of its leading citizens. The leaders of the community, he suggested, should send a petition to Washington asking for the school, thereby serving his purpose and theirs. This suggestion was readily adopted, and Pratt acquired another ally in his fight for the school.

Pratt’s visit to the Secretary of War, George W. McCrary, was fully as successful as his meeting with Carl Schurz. The Secretary was quickly won over and promised to look into the possibility of turning Carlisle Barracks over to the Department of the Interior. But the transfer proved to be more complicated than either the Secretary or Pratt had anticipated, for the Army’s legal experts quickly pointed out that public property could not be transferred without congressional approval. A special act of Congress would be required and Secretary McCrary had his staff draft the necessary legislation. This involved more delay, but finally the bill was introduced simultaneously in both houses and referred to the appropriate committees. With the support of his influential friends, Pratt was able to get the bill reported favorably out of committee by May, 1879. But at this point he met another obstacle. The legislative calendar was so crowded and the session so near an end that there was no chance at all the bill would be acted on that year.

Pratt was equal even to this emergency. Why not lend the military post at Carlisle to the Department of the Interior temporarily? he asked. The bill was sure to pass in the next session and the transfer could then be legalized. Secretary McCrary was willing to make the attempt and an elaborate arrangement was contrived to give the action a surface legality. First, the Secretary sent a letter to the commander of the district in which the post was located, stating that a bill authorizing the transfer had been re-

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ported favorably on the floor of both houses. What disposition should be made of the barracks in the meantime? the Secretary asked. The district commander gave the answer expected of him. The barracks at Carlisle, he declared, would not be required in the future for any military purpose and he could see no objection to the transfer. In his opinion, no better place could be found for an Indian school. General Sherman gave his approval next, adding only the proviso that Indian girls as well as boys should be educated there. In September, 1879, Secretary McCrary signed the order that gave Carlisle Barracks to the Department of the Interior, pending final action by Congress, which came in July, 1882.30 Exultantly, Pratt wrote to his wife, "Carlisle is ours and fairly won!"30

At last Pratt had his school. But he had no funds and no students. Secretary Schurz provided the first from the "Civilization Fund," money received from the sale of Indian lands in Kansas, and friends contributed more. Even with this help, Pratt had a difficult time meeting his expenses. "I languish for want of funds . . .," he wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in December, 1879. "The pressure is pretty heavy and I may get choked off if there is no relief."31

Getting students proved in some respects the most difficult task Pratt had yet faced. On it depended the existence of the school. If the Indians refused to send their children back East—and there was no way to force them—then all Pratt's efforts would have been in vain. He must find some way to persuade them to entrust their children to him and to a government in which they had little faith. His task was made more difficult by the requirement of the Indian Bureau that more than half his students come from the most troublesome of the tribes, and that as many as possible be the children of important chiefs. In government hands, it was believed, these children would provide a powerful lever with which to bring the Indians to terms in the event of hostilities.32

Among the most powerful and discontented of the tribes in the
West were the Sioux, led by their chiefs Spotted Tail and Red Cloud. Defeated in battle and robbed of their beloved Black Hills, the Sioux were now living in Dakota, at the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Agencies. There they nursed their grievances, watched the white man take gold out of the hills that had been their former home, and dreamed of their past glory. No people ever had less reason to trust the U. S. Government. And it was to them that Pratt was sent in September, 1879, to gather 72 of the children for his new school.

At the Rosebud Agency, Pratt presented his plan to the Sioux chiefs assembled in council. There were forty of them, including the famed Spotted Tail, White Thunder, and Two Strikes, and they listened carefully to what Pratt had to say. When he finished Spotted Tail rose to his feet. “The white people,” he said, “are all thieves and liars; we do not want our children to learn such things.” Bitterly he reminded Pratt of the land that had been stolen from his people and of the gold that should have been theirs but for white treachery. “We are not going to give our children to learn such ways,” he declared, then sat down.23

To Pratt it was clear that on the Sioux chief’s decision rested the success of his expedition. “Spotted Tail,” he said, “you are a remarkable man. You are such an able man that you are the chief of these thousands of people. But, Spotted Tail, you cannot read or write. You cannot speak the language of this country. You have no education.” The Sioux, he pointed out, had to rely on interpreters and others to tell them the contents of the treaties they had to sign. Perhaps, he suggested, they might themselves be digging gold in the Black Hills had their chiefs been educated. If they educated their children in the ways of the white man, Pratt told the chief, the young would be better able to avoid the mistakes of their elders and to stand up for their rights as the white man did. “As your friend, Spotted Tail, I urge you to send your children with me to this Carlisle school and I will do everything I can to advance them in intelligence and industry in order that they may come back and help you.”24 With this appeal Pratt retired from the council.

24 Ibid., 15.
Chiricahua-Apache children on arrival at Carlisle Indian School from Ft. Marion, Florida. U. S. Signal Corps

Chiricahua-Apache children four months after arriving at Carlisle Indian School. U. S. Signal Corps
The discussion that followed did not last long. Spotted Tail had been convinced and the rest accepted his decision. Approaching Pratt, who had been waiting nervously for the meeting to end, the Indian Chief said, "It is all right. We are going to give you all the children you want." After that Pratt had no difficulty. Ninety children were offered but he accepted only about two-thirds that number. Included in the group that finally left with him were the children of Spotted Tail, Milk, and American Horse. The elderly White Thunder offered his grandson, the only child of school age he had.

Pratt's next stop was at the Pine Ridge Agency where Red Cloud lived with his people. His success at Rosebud should have helped him here for the prestige of Spotted Tail was great. But because of outside influences, which he thought came from the local missionaries, he was able to secure only 16 more children. He had now a total of 82, ten more than he had been instructed to take from these tribes, and many of them were from the families of the chiefs. Truly he could claim that his school would be not only a controlling influence over the Indians but also a guarantee of the good behavior of the tribes whose children he held.

Authorized a total of 120 students, Pratt was now free to select 38 other children from the tribes in the Indian Territory. In this he had the help of two of his former prisoners whom he brought from Hampton to help him in founding the new school. One he sent to the Kiowas and Comanches, the other to the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, tribes he had known during his service in the Indian Wars and among which he had many friends. A white assistant carried the message to the Pawnees. When the group rendezvoused at Wichita, Kansas, Pratt counted 55 additional students. The fact that some of them were the children of his Fort Marion Indians was a source of particular satisfaction. After a trying journey, the group finally reached Carlisle on October 28, three weeks later than the first arrivals. The student body was complete, and on November 1, 1879, the Carlisle Indian School opened officially.

There were still many difficulties to be overcome. A staff had to be hired; clothing, food, fuel, and equipment were needed. All these were procured in due time and the school was put on a firm
basis. The run-down buildings of the old barracks, including the Hessian Guardhouse, were renovated and new structures added; the school acreage increased from 27 to 303; and the annual enrollment expanded until it reached 1,000 students representing virtually every tribe in the United States. By the time Pratt retired as a brigadier general after 25 years as its head and guiding spirit, the Carlisle Indian School had become a national institution. The dream of the young lieutenant had finally been realized. From the frontier wars on the Southern Plains and the old Spanish prison in St. Augustine had come a school for Indians in the East and a new approach to the Indian problem.