

Army completes 2nd year of Native American disinterments from Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery

By Alex Pinnell, Public Affairs Office 30 June 2018



Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery, file photo



Journalists captured photos of the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery before the second disinterment, during which it was closed to all but tribal members and the Army National Military Cemeteries team of experts.

Army National Military Cemeteries completed the second year of archaeology and forensic anthropology activities at the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery on June 26, 2018. The Army continued to honor Native American families' requests for the return of remains of Native American children who attended the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, so that they may be re-interred with their family.

The Native Americans, buried alongside soldiers and families in the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery, had been students of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School which operated on Carlisle Barracks from 1879-1918. This is the second year of disinterments from the cemetery since the ANMC team began its work in August 2017. At that time, Little Chief (aka Dickens Nor) and Horse (aka Horace Washington) were returned to their respective families of the Northern Arapaho tribe. However, the ANMC team found remains that were inconsistent with the expectation for the third Northern

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Arapaho student, Little Plume, and committed to further research to meet the family's request.

The experts present to discuss the findings were Art Smith, the ANMC Project Leader; Michael "Sonny" Trimble, Ph.D., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Chief Archeologist; and Elizabeth DiGangi, Ph.D., forensic anthropologist. The team disinterred the remains of Little Plume aka Hayes Vanderbilt Friday (Northern Arapaho family); George Ell aka George Ell (Blackfeet family); and Herbert Little Hawk aka Herbert J. Little Hawk (Oglala Sioux family). The team was confident that their findings were consistent and transferred custody for each to the closest relative, for reburial at the cemetery of the family's choice. In addition, they found a third elbow bone in Herbert Little Hawk's gravesite that was re-interred. Another disinterment for Her Pipe Woman (aka Dora Brave Bull) was postponed at the family's request.

In 2017, the ANMC team began with the objective evidence of the headstone location and records of Little Plume. "You have to go with the preponderance of evidence, including the headstone," said Trimble. "The evidence is not always as clear and strong as you want it to be in any endeavor... that's why the preponderance is always the key."

When that information was proved inaccurate, they consulted further documents from the time period suggesting some headstones were switched, which led to their discovery. The remains found in the headstone marked Little Plume were identified by DiGangi as consistent with those of Frederick Skahsojah, an Apache student, and a temporary marker was placed on his gravesite where he was re-interred.

This complication, and anomalies like the third elbow bone, arose from the movement of the Post Cemetery. DiGangi said the individuals who transferred the cemetery did not have access to the expertise of forensic anthropologists at the time. "My field was in its infancy then... The fact that one bone accidentally got placed in a separate container with somebody else is not surprising to me, because they wouldn't have been tracking that, simply because they didn't really have a knowledge of anatomy."

In 1879, Carlisle Barracks became the site of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs until September 1918. The school educated more than 10,000 Native American children, with representation from nearly 50 Native American Tribes from across the nation. During its 29 years, the school's image shifted with changing American cultural norms. It began as a relatively progressive concept of providing Indian children with an education and vocational training, but this

came at the expense of native cultures and languages. As the school went through administration changes in the early 20th century, the rules became more lax and open to native culture, until the First World War led to the closure of the school in 1918 and the barracks were transferred to the War Department's control.

It became a military cemetery when the Army assumed control of the post, and when it was moved in 1927, it resulted in the situation described by Dr. DiGangi.

Trimble said he was grateful to have served the tribes for a second time. In her work to verify the remains, DiGangi said she treated them with the utmost respect and diligence because she saw them as a life that once was. She further stated that the experience made her cognizant of her responsibility, and that she felt the privilege of helping these families. "We will carry this with us for the rest of our lives."

"We are honored and privileged that the Army had the opportunity to transfer the Native American children's remains from Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery to their families. We hope these dignified disinterments allow the families to find some measure of peace and healing," said Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director of Army National Military Cemeteries.

"Army National Military Cemeteries considers requests yearly as families send them," said Smith, who noted that the future of disinterments will continue on a case-by-case basis. The removal is done by hand without machinery, said Smith, allowing tribes to do any religious processes necessary as a show of respect. Throughout the planning and disinterment activities, an Army tribal liaison is in consultation with the Native American families and tribes to make the families comfortable, with respect for culture and privacy.