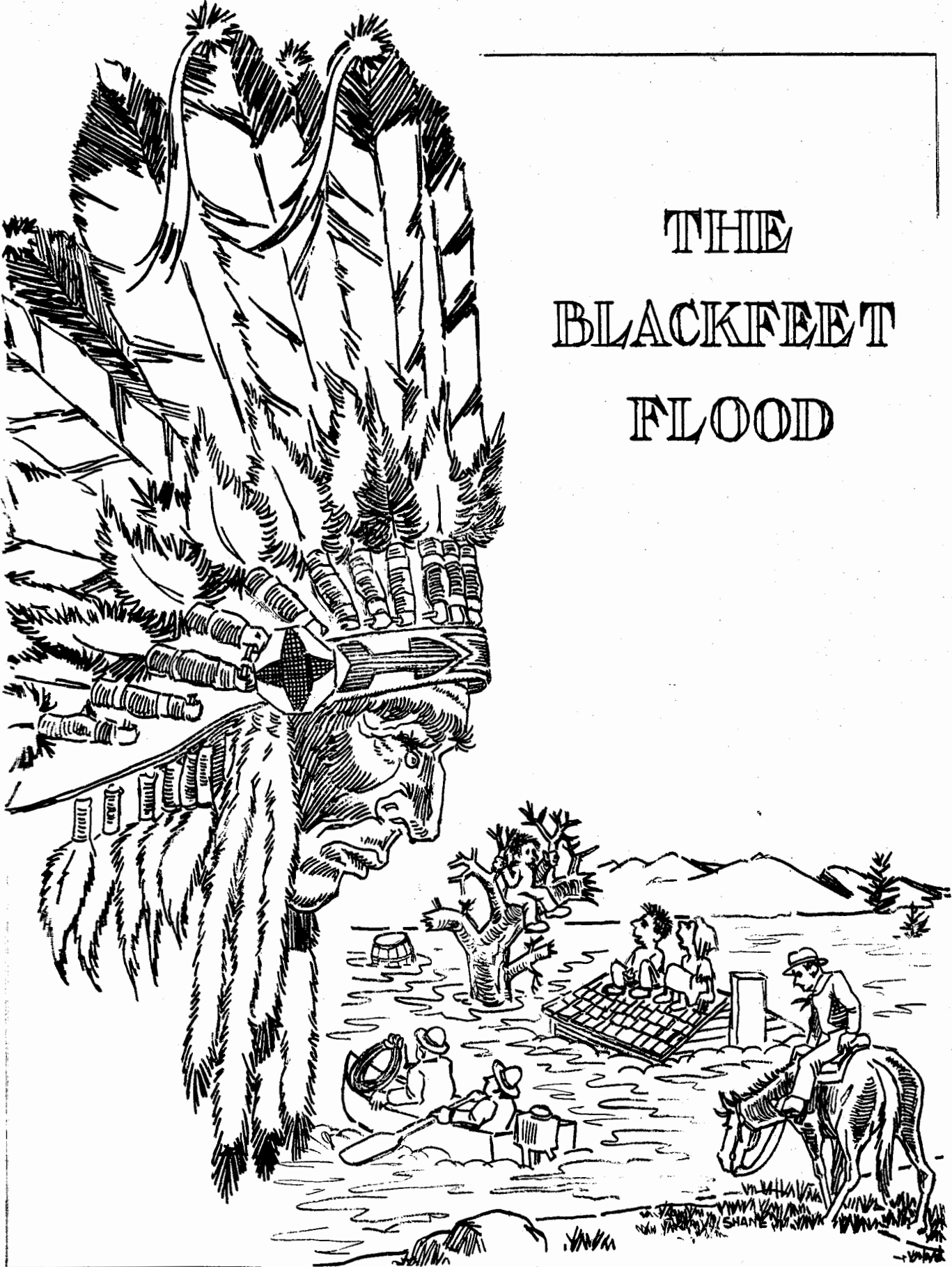


THE
BLACKFEET
FLOOD



THE BLACKFEET FLOOD

	<u>Page</u>
Foreword by Commissioner Nash	i
The Blackfeet Flood	1
Author's Note	44
After the Flood	45
Blackfeet Reservation Map Facing	4
Photographs Facing	38, 46

Department of the Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Billings Area Office
1964

FOREWORD

I learn daily of acts by Indian Bureau employees, performed selflessly in the interest of the Indian people we serve. Word of these incidents always increases my great pride in the dedicated men and women who make up the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Too often these acts of service go unrecorded and unrecognized. So I am glad to see the story told of some of the courageous acts performed by members of the Blackfeet Agency staff during the disastrous flood of June 8, 1964. Agency staff members can be assured that all their colleagues in the Bureau, from Florida to Alaska, are proud of the way they responded to the flood crisis.

Their story presented here differs from the routine government report, in that it deals more with human interest than statistics. This is as it should be. Our service is to people trying to solve their own problems. The facts and figures are incidental.

Philleo Nash
Commissioner of Indian Affairs
September 1964

THE BLACKFEET FLOOD

The downpour started before dawn on Sunday, June 7, 1964. Some Blackfeet Reservation residents may have sensed by mid-day that perhaps this was no ordinary rain. But they were in the minority.

The Blackfeet country is a country of extremes. Extraordinary weather seldom is regarded as extraordinary there. Often the climate nears perfection with bright days, clear air, cool nights. In winter, however, it can on occasion get cold enough for two overcoats. In summer it can get hot enough for two straw hats.

For four years prior to 1964 much of the reservation had been parched and burned by drouth. Now, maybe, the drouth was breaking. It was not to be expected that a Blackfeet drouth would break with a gentle summer shower.

The rain--hard, driving, rather warm--never stopped as Sunday ran its course. Before the day was over, water was pouring from the skies as if it were being dumped from buckets, tubs, tanks. (Nearly eight inches fell in Browning, the reservation headquarters, in about 36 hours. Normal precipitation for an entire year is only 14.74 inches.)

Out on the rolling rangeland, dry coulees became miniature rivers and stock reservoirs filled to the top. In the mountains to the west--the spectacular northern Rockies, with peaks piercing the sky 6,000 feet above the plains--the summer rain speeded the snow melt that had been delayed by a long, cold spring. The melting snows combined with the rain to turn the streams leaving the mountains into torrents.

Watermasters for the Blackfeet Indian Irrigation Project, operated by the Blackfeet Indian Agency, broke into their Sunday leisure to check the canals and cut down the heads of irrigation water. But most reservation residents shrugged as the cloudburst continued. This was a rain that called for two raincoats, maybe, but rain was better than drouth.

Just before 6 o'clock in the afternoon the electric power went off in Browning and elsewhere on the reservation. People blamed the trouble on the storm at first, and families with TV sets grumbled a bit at missing their favorite programs. The TV gap was filled in many a home with conversation about the impending tribal election in which 77 candidates had filed for 13 council posts.

In a couple of hours the power came on again. It developed that the storm hadn't caused the trouble. A speeding motorist had driven into a power pole.

Rain kept pouring down through the night. It still was pouring when Superintendent William W. Grissom of the Blackfeet Agency and his staff waded to work at 8 a.m. Monday, June 8.

Some of the Agency employees didn't stay at work long. In the basement of the main Agency building, where a number of offices are quartered, there was four inches of water. The clerks who worked in the basement were sent home for the day.

Superintendent Grissom, who'd been on the reservation for ten years and who'd been exposed to nearly everything Blackfeet weather could produce, left the main office and drove up to another office building known as "The Barracks". The Indian Bureau had inherited "The Barracks" from a CCC camp of the 1930's.

At The Barracks there was disturbing news. A report had been received about a man trapped in a tree by high water in the Two Medicine valley, about ten miles south of Browning. If Two Medicine Creek was that high, Grissom knew, there was danger on other streams that fed from the snow and glaciers in the mountains to the west. Hundreds of Indian families lived along the creeks, close to firewood and to the bottomland pastures.

The Blackfeet Agency as of that moment went on emergency duty—instinctively, intuitively, without formal command.

The Blackfeet Reservation is in northwestern Montana. It butts against the Canadian border on the north, and against Glacier National Park on the west. The reservation extends 58 miles north and south at one point within its exterior boundaries, and 52 miles east and west.

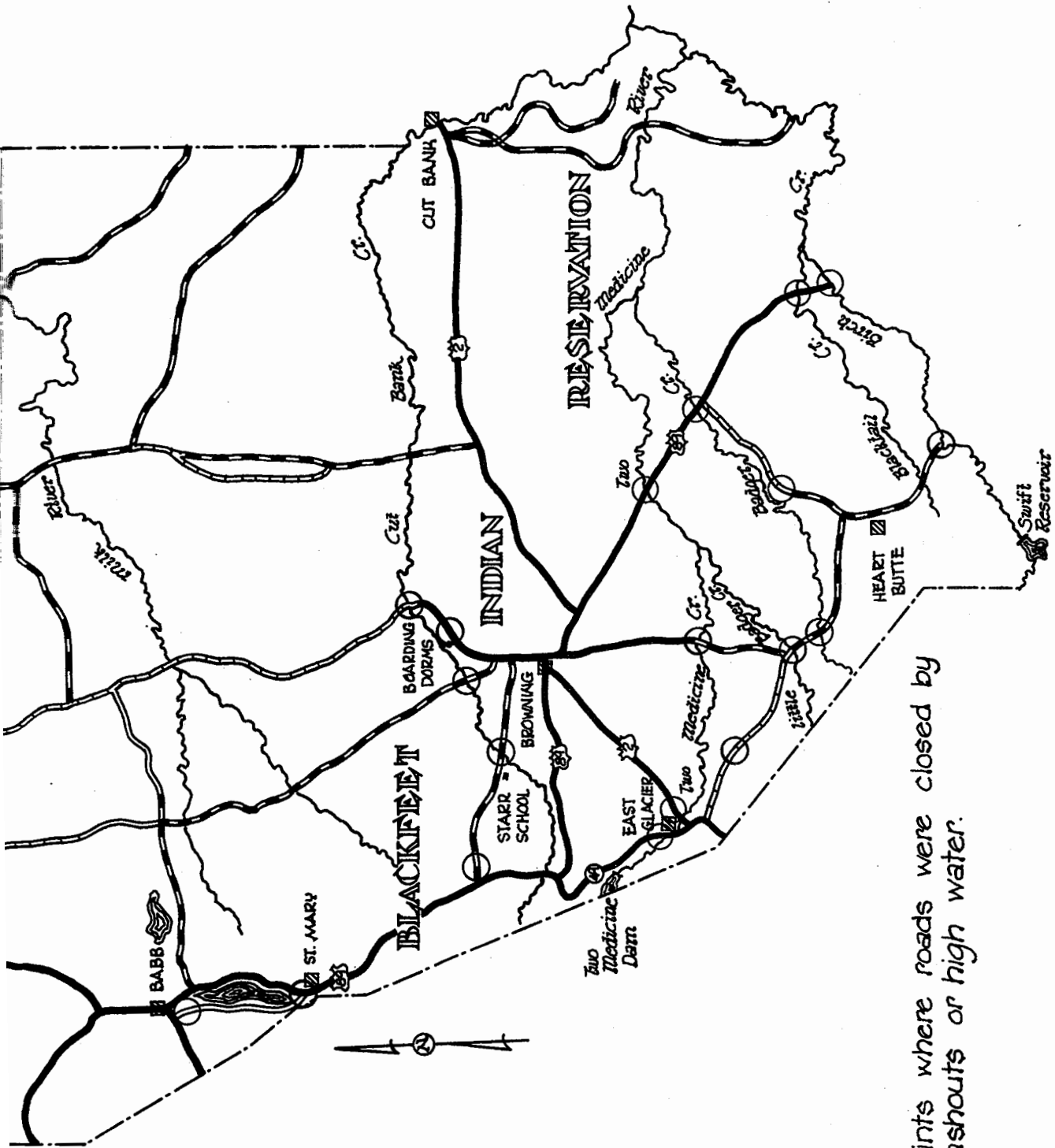
A small portion of the reservation—the extreme northwestern corner—is drained by the St. Mary River. The St. Mary runs northward into Canada and the water it carries eventually flows into Hudson Bay.

Most of the Blackfeet area is on the Missouri River watershed. Many streams originate in the mountains and cross the reservation from southwest to northeast on their way to join the Marias River, a principal tributary of the Missouri. Among these streams are Two Medicine Creek, Badger, Little Badger, Birch Creek, Cut Bank Creek and others. One important Missouri tributary, the Milk River, heads on the reservation.

The southwest-northeast streams tend to divide the reservation into segments, linked to the headquarters at Browning by a system of roads and highways maintained by the state, counties, or the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Within the exterior boundaries of the reservation are more than 1,500,000 acres of Indian lands—some owned by the Blackfeet Tribe, some by individual tribal members—held in trust for the owners by the United States Government.

About 6,500 people live on the reservation: 5,500 Indians, 1,000 non-Indians. The Indians living on trust lands receive most of their governmental services from the Blackfeet tribal organization or the Blackfeet Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Blackfeet Agency operates an irrigation project serving both Indian and non-Indian farmers; operates a dormitory where about 140 Indian students live each year while attending public schools in Browning; operates a museum; provides a great variety of land management and agricultural services; maintains a road system; supervises leasing and other transactions involving Indian lands; works with the Tribe in operating



○—Points where roads were closed by washouts or high water.

a credit program, in maintaining law and order, in providing welfare and other social services, in coping with unemployment, in promoting economic development, in handling many other problems.

Not all the services performed from time to time by the Agency staff are listed on the job descriptions of the 80-plus employees—as was demonstrated beyond question in the week of June 7, 1964.

The Man in The Tree

The man trapped in the tree in the Two Medicine valley, whose plight was related to Superintendent Grissom about 8:15 a.m. Monday, June 8, was Les Heuscher. Heuscher worked for Merle Magee, an Indian rancher, and lived by himself in a cabin on the ranch.

Heuscher stepped outside about 5 a.m. to find water at or near his doorstep. He ran to wake up the Magee family. He shouted his warning when Magee opened the door, then ran to turn loose a cow and calf from a nearby shed. The water kept rising and he ran again, this time toward a massive tree. He climbed the tree as more water rushed down the valley.

The Magees got out of the valley and made their way to Browning. Within minutes after they arrived, Jim Badura, a supervisory soil conservationist at the Agency, and Eugene Snyder, acting land operations officer, were on their way to attempt Heuscher's rescue. With them went Magee

and a number of Browning men. They took with them two boats—one rubber and one aluminum. One member of the party also took his skin-diving equipment.

By the time they arrived in the valley, the torrent was too strong for the boats to be used effectively. The rescuers made one pass downstream toward Heuscher's tree, but missed it by 15 feet or more. A second try also failed. On a third attempt, they were nearly upset when the ranch house floated off its foundation.

"I was scared as hell," Badura says. He and the others also were cold, wet and exhausted. Rain still was bucketing down.

Badura and Snyder reported back to the Agency by radio that Heuscher still was in the tree, but safe for the time being. They were called back to Browning and dispatched on another mission, and another crew with a bigger boat and more powerful motor was sent toward Heuscher's tree. Heuscher finally was removed about 7 o'clock that evening, during a period in which the waters had subsided briefly. Only minutes later, another flood crest swept down the valley, released by the breaking of the Two Medicine dam.

No one kept notes on exactly who did what, at what time, for the rest of that morning—or the rest of that week. But within the next half-hour nearly a dozen other Agency men in radio-equipped cars or trucks were on their way to the region south of Browning—the valleys of the Two Medicine, Badger

Little Badger and other streams—to check on danger spots and give the lowland dwellers what help they could. This group included Bernie Yednock and Clarence Gilham of the Forestry Branch; Clark Stanton, Charles Gerard, Rayne Pilgeram, Clayton Stephens, Richard Harbour, Andy Whitford and Floyd Gervais of Land Operations; Roy Buffalo of Employment Assistance; Bob Douglas and Stuart Wagner of Roads.

Some Were Out Earlier

A number of others, from the Irrigation crew, already were in the field. Project Engineer Mark Stout, knowing that fields under the canals must be reaching the saturation point, had radioed to Watermasters Hunter Wippert and John Reid at 6:30 a.m. to direct them to cut the water out of both the main canals and smaller laterals. Reid checked the headworks at the Four Horns feeder canal, and found Badger Creek was rising rapidly. He radioed in to the project office in The Barracks and was told to start warning the people along the creek to evacuate. By 7:30 a.m. other Irrigation personnel, including Jim Bigelow, John Gobert, Patrick Schildt and Harvey Brown, were checking on project facilities and alerting families in the danger zones.

Jim Bigelow had driven from the Agency to close the Two Medicine head-gate. He'd barely crossed Badger Creek when the bridge behind him went out. He drove on and crossed Whitetail Creek, just before that bridge washed out.

Most of Bigelow's time in the next two days was spent in the Heart Butte district helping people of that area, along with other Agency men. Bigelow didn't leave Heart Butte until Wednesday noon, when a light plane landed to fly him to Cut Bank. He would have stayed on longer except that his wife was in a hospital in Bozeman, 280 miles to the south, for an operation. He managed to reach Bozeman before she went into surgery.

School Buses Sent

Early radio reports from the field to the Agency indicated that many families along all the streams might have to be evacuated to places of safety in Browning or elsewhere. By 9:30 a.m. Superintendent Grissom had asked that the two school buses from the Bureau's school dormitory plant on Cut Bank Creek be sent to the flood zone.

Cut Bank Creek also was rising. The dormitories were being used that week in connection with a summer program for 83 Blackfeet youngsters. Reservation Principal Wilson Woodger, in view of the possibility that he might have an evacuation job of his own to contend with before many hours, was somewhat reluctant to let both buses go—but he sent them out, anyway. One, piloted by Merlin Crawford, was dispatched to pick up refugees in the Blacktail and Badger Creek areas. The other, driven by Charles Powell, was to bring refugees of the Two Medicine valley into Browning.

Crawford got almost to Birch Creek before he learned that all highway crossings in all directions were under water. He was marooned in the Grandview school area, as were Al Salois and Frank Merchant of Irrigation and Bob Douglas of Roads. Grandview school was turned into a refugee station for homeless people of that district, and the bus radio served to keep refugees and rescuers in touch with the Agency for the next two days.

Powell's bus succeeded in its mission, and brought several loads of Two Medicine refugees in to the shelter that had been set up in the Browning high school. Then Powell returned to the dormitories—none too soon. Cut Bank Creek had kept on rising, and much of the campus was under water. The 83 youngsters all were evacuated by 3 p.m., however, and taken to homes in Browning. By 5 p.m. the dormitory staff members were out of their homes and offices. The bus and personal cars of employees were parked on the hill overlooking the campus as temporary shelter. The creek subsided and the employees made their way back into the creek bottom by 7:30 o'clock. The power was off, and everyone spent Monday night in the girls' dormitory. Not until Wednesday were they able to get back into their homes, and the campus was without electricity until June 15.

Two Medicine Tragedy

Tragedy other than loss of homes and property was developing in two reservation locations by mid-morning of June 8. One location was on Two

Medicine Creek, near the point where U. S. Highway 89 crosses the valley about 14 miles south of Browning.

Two Medicine Creek at that point normally is a shallow, rippling stream, not more than 30 feet wide. Its usual channel hugs the south side of the valley. The channel is lined with cottonwoods and brush. Grassy meadows lie north of the trees, carpeting the valley floor.

A number of Indian homes are in the valley both east and west of the highway crossing. Some were in the trees and some in the open. Infrequently in past years, during the spring run-off or after exceptionally heavy rains, the creek has risen and water has reached into the homes for a day or two. Seldom have the floods been serious.

Agency personnel drove up and down the valley roads on the morning of June 8, advising those residents whom they saw that it would be wise for them to move to higher ground. Among the Agency people in the area was Elmer Morigeau, Agency road superintendent.

Morigeau had sent two members of his crew, Bob Douglas and Stuart Wagner, to check bridges on the "short cut" between Browning and Heart Butte and to post warning flags if necessary. Then he left the Agency for the Two Medicine valley, although he was fighting a touch of flu.

Morigeau came to the Highway 89 crossing about 9:30 a.m. Two Medicine Creek already was out of its banks by that time, with water spreading

across the half-mile wide meadow north of the creek and edging up toward the highway.

Morigeau turned left, on to the graveled road leading eastward down the valley. He saw two families coming across the flooding meadows and stopped to help them to safety. A little way down the road he saw a pickup loaded with people starting across the meadow. He shouted and waved to them to hurry.

Further on, Morigeau stopped to help another group. The school bus from the dormitory had arrived by that time, and picked up those people. Morigeau continued to the Holy Family Catholic Mission where several people lived. There he warned one of the residents, George Wippert, that they should leave. Down the road at the Earl Shoop ranch, he noted that the Shoops were moving out. Morigeau turned back west.

Bernie Yednock and Clarence Gilham of the Forestry Branch had reached the Highway 89 crossing some time after Morigeau arrived at that point. The approach to the bridge was under water by then, but still was traversable. Yednock and Gilham started eastward on the dirt road leading down the valley. They met Morigeau near the mission.

Morigeau told Yednock the mission people had been warned, but suggested that Yednock and Gilham continue on for a way to see if there were any others in need of help.

Morigeau continued westward. As he rounded a bend and came in sight of the highway again, he saw that the people in the pickup to whom he had shouted earlier on his way down the valley were in grave trouble. The water had risen substantially. What had been only a backwash earlier was now a turbulent lake. The driver of the pickup had missed the trail leading across the meadow toward the hillside, and had driven into a hole. Only about a foot of the cab still was above water.

Morigeau stopped his vehicle and radioed to Superintendent Grissom at the Agency, calling for a boat. Grissom located Kay Hoyt, a Browning service station proprietor who owned a boat, and Hoyt started toward the Two Medicine crossing.

The flood that covered the meadow was sweeping fallen trees and other debris downstream. Torrents still were pouring from the skies. Swift currents—estimated at 25 knots or more—had formed both in front and behind the pickup. The currents made it impossible for the strongest swimmer to reach the truck from shore.

Upstream a short distance was a high point of land, as yet barely under water, which could be reached by wading. From that point Roy Buffalo, Agency employment assistance officer, and two other young men were attempting to effect a rescue. Soon they were joined by Yednock and Gilham, who had returned from the mission area.

Buffalo and the others ripped a section of barbed wire from a nearby fence. They tied the wire and what rope they could locate to a spare truck tire.

They hurled the tire into the current, so that it would be carried downstream to the pickup. Their hope was that the pickup occupants, one at a time, could grab the tire and be pulled to safety.

There was difficulty in getting the tire to the pickup, because of the action of the current. Several tries failed. Each time the tire had to be pulled back upstream. Buffalo and others on the high point had bloody cuts from the barbed wire before their part in the ordeal was over.

There also was difficulty in making the people in the truck understand what they were to do. At one point, three people grabbed the tire at one time. Their weight was too much, and they clambered back into the truck. One girl, 14, was pulled almost halfway to the high point but lost her grip. She was swept away and drowned. Eventually two people--an elderly man and a woman--were pulled to safety on the tire.

The water became deeper and more turbulent. The men on the high point struggled to keep their own footing. While they were working, the body of a young boy was brought upstream by the tricky, fast-changing currents. Apparently, he had dropped into the water from the truck. Buffalo pulled him from the water. Yednock carried him ashore and attempted artificial

respiration, but it proved futile.

Hoyt arrived around 11:30 o'clock with his boat. It was launched, and with it four women and a child were rescued. The effort to save the people in the truck had lasted about two hours.

There had been 17 persons in the pickup when it started across the meadow. The driver apparently had left the vehicle when it first became stalled, perhaps to go in search of help. Two persons, Richard Grant and Violet Cobell, had been pulled to safety with the spare tire. Five others, Fay Grant, Lucille Guardipee, Nellie Buel, Cora Buel and a child, had been rescued by boat.

Nine persons had died. Rose Grant, 84, mother of several of the women, drowned in the cab of the pickup. The other victims, the youngest a baby only two months old and the oldest only 14, had been swept away. The children who died were Elaine Guardipee, 4; Keith Guardipee, 2; Alvin Guardipee, 3; Terry Lee Guardipee, 2 months; Robbie Grant, Jr., 5, and Rolanda Rose Grant, 3; Galela Lynn Cobell, 14; and Lorraine Long Time Sleeping, 5. The Guardipee youngsters were the children of Aloysius and Lucille Guardipee; Robbie and Rolanda were children of Robert and Fay Grant; and Galela was the daughter of William and Violet Cobell. All the families were related. Lorraine Long Time Sleeping was a foster child in the Grant home. Her body was not found until June 25. There were no other casualties during the flood on Two Medicine Creek.

Catastrophe on Birch Creek

The second major tragedy of June 8 was developing on Birch Creek, which twists northeasterly from the mountains and is the southern boundary of the reservation. At the head of Birch Creek, at the southern-most tip of the reservation, was Swift Dam. This 50-year-old, rock-filled structure had been built by farmers and ranchers of the region under the Carey land act. Swift Dam was 157 feet high. Its reservoir, with a normal storage capacity of about 31,000 acre feet, caught the drainage from an area of about 185 square miles. The reservoir storage fed a canal system that supplied water to about 93,000 acres of lands on and off the reservation. Municipal water for the town of Valier also came from the Swift Reservoir. The dam was owned and operated by a private ditch company.

Along Birch Creek below the reservoir and on east to the vicinity of the town of Dupuyer lived a number of Indian families. As was the case in the Two Medicine valley, most of them lived close to the stream in order to be near shade, water and firewood.

The story of the situation along Birch Creek on the morning of June 8 can be told best by the people who were there. One of those people was Mrs. Merle Tatsey.

Mr. and Mrs. Tatsey, with their own four small children, a foster

child, Tatsey's father and one of his cousins lived on Birch Creek about ten miles below the dam. Merle Tatsey works for the Roads Branch of the Blackfeet Agency, and Mrs. Tatsey was working temporarily as a clerk in the Irrigation office. The family was planning to move into Browning soon, and already had made arrangements to rent a basement apartment.

It rained hard on Birch Creek all day Sunday, and it still was raining when Mr. and Mrs. Tatsey first awoke about 5 a.m. Monday.

The youngest of their children had been ill for two or three days with measles. The baby seemed no better that morning, and Mrs. Tatsey was somewhat concerned. Usually she went to work in Browning, leaving all the children in the care of her father-in-law. But on this morning she decided that it would be best that she stay home with the baby. She asked her husband to stop at The Barracks in Browning on his way to work and inform Mark Stout, her supervisor, that she wouldn't be in that day.

They went back to sleep. When they awoke again it still was raining. Tatsey said he doubted it would be possible for his road crew to work, because of the rain and mud. He suggested that they both go into Browning and spend the day cleaning up the apartment into which they planned to move soon.

The couple didn't stop for breakfast. They had only a cup of coffee before starting to town in their station wagon. They reached the top of

the hill above their home, but had proceeded on only a short distance when they came to a coulee filled with water, too deep for the station wagon to cross. They drove back to their home, planning to try again in their pickup.

Back at the house, they noted the river had risen considerably since they left. It now was within three feet of the top of its banks.

They decided to have breakfast before starting to town again. After breakfast, Tatsey got into the pickup to drive to a neighbor's place for a can of drinking water. He didn't return for a time. The neighbor family had become somewhat alarmed by the rising water, and decided to leave the valley. Their car had stalled, and Tatsey and his cousin "Happy" tried to get it started for them.

Around 11 o'clock, Mrs. Tatsey looked out the window toward the southwest and saw the trees along the river toppling over: "They were falling like they were being chopped down." She grabbed the baby and hurried the other children toward the back door of the house. Then she looked out the window again and saw her husband and his cousin coming.

The pickup had stalled, probably because of the rain. The two men saw a wall of water coming down the valley, jumped out of the vehicle, ran to the house, and helped Mrs. Tatsey get the children up the hill. Behind them was Tatsey's father, hard of hearing, who had been outside the house when they left. He started to run up the hill, stumbled over a clump of

wire, and fell. But he came on, almost at a crawl. He barely escaped the rising flood.

The family had fled without any belongings except the clothing they wore. Most of them didn't even have coats. They started to walk toward Blacktail. After a couple of miles, they stopped to build a fire, but all their matches were wet. Presently a pickup came by driven by Tom Hall, Sr., one of their neighbors. Earlier he'd stopped for Ellen Rutherford and her family. Everyone got into the pickup, and they started on.

Before long the pickup became stalled in the mud. The men dug, pried and pushed, but failed to get it out. Merle and "Happy" Tatsey left the others in the vehicle and started to walk on to Heart Butte, seven or eight miles away, for help.

Mrs. Tatsey and the others waited in the rain. In time another truck came by, and helped get the pickup out of the mud. They drove on to Blacktail Creek. There the pickup was stopped again—the bridge was out.

They crossed the creek on foot. Vehicles from Heart Butte, rounded up by Merle and "Happy" were on the other side. It was 6:30 p.m. before they arrived at the David Hall place, where they were to spend the next several days. They couldn't get into Heart Butte, where BIA personnel and others had set up a shelter for flood refugees, because of another bridge washout.

Not until they arrived at the ranch did the Tatseys learn for certain what had happened. The Swift Dam had given way under the pressure of tons of water pouring off its drainage. The water behind the dam had swept down the Birch Creek valley, leaving desolation behind it. Twenty or more persons had been killed.

Merle and Ramona Tatsey had lost their home, their furniture and other personal belongings, their station wagon and their pickup truck. But all of them survived. It was fortunate, Mrs. Tatsey believes, that the baby had been ill that morning. Otherwise she and her husband would have gone to work at their usual time and left the children with their grandfather. She doubts that he would have been able to save them from the flood.

The Birch Creek casualties all died within minutes after the dam broke. House-to-house warnings had not been possible. Agency personnel had not been able to reach that valley after the danger became apparent, because bridges to the north already had been washed out.

Birch Creek residents who perished included eight members of one family: Mrs. Tom Hall, Jr., 33; Thomas Hall III, 12; Margerie Hall, 10; Martha Hall, 8; Kathy Hall, 6; Marlin Hall, 4; Edward Hall, 2; and Jody Hall, 1.

Other Birch Creek victims included Peggy Bradley, 8; Jerry Wayne Thomas, 3; Linda Arnoux, 16; Sam New Breast, Jr., 35; Mrs. Sam New Breast; their daughter, Patricia New Breast; Ernest Lauffer, 58; Gilbert England, 43; Ralph Oberlack, 65; Joe Hamline, 52; Bean Theakson, 45. A month after the disaster

Blackfeet men working under the direction of the Montana National Guard still were probing the piles of driftwood and silt for seven missing bodies.

Flood waters took two other lives on the reservation June 7 - 8. Up in the northwest corner, a truck driven by Ivan Williams, a state highway department worker, went into the St. Mary River and Williams died. Stanford Creighton of Cardston, Alta. was killed when his car plunged into Kennedy Creek north of Babb.

The toll was heavy. It might have been greater had it not been for the rescue efforts directed by Superintendent Grissom of the Blackfeet Agency, and carried on by Agency personnel and others.

Two Medicine Dam Goes Out

The Swift Dam on the headwaters of Birch Creek, at the southern tip of the reservation, was owned and operated by a private ditch company. Thirty air miles to the northwest, on Two Medicine Creek, was another dam. The Two Medicine Dam was a federal structure, operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to store water for the Blackfeet Indian Irrigation Project.

Like the Swift Dam, the Two Medicine Dam was built half a century ago. It was 36 feet high, 900 feet wide at the crest, of rolled earth and riprap construction with a rock-filled log crib. It had a normal surface area of about 850 acres, and stored 16,000 feet of water. Two Medicine was an old-fashioned dam, without the complicated control systems sometimes found in

more modern structures. There was one outlet gate at the bottom, which was open on June 8 and had been open since the previous November. The spillway was at the top near the center of the dam, with earthen embankments extending outward on each side.

About 7:30 a.m. on June 8, Agency Irrigation Engineer Mark Stout detailed Harvey Brown to check on the stream flow and general condition of the Two Medicine Dam. Brown drove to East Glacier, but found the road underpass there filled with water. He tried next to get in to the dam by the Looking Glass Mountain highway, but found it was blocked by slides. He reported to the Agency, and a call was placed from there to Jack B. Dodd, assistant superintendent of Glacier National Park, at West Glacier. Dodd agreed to assign a ranger to keep a watch on the dam.

The National Park official called back to the Agency about 9:30 a.m. The ranger had reached the dam, and reported water was within four feet of the top. By 11:30 a.m. the freeboard was only two feet. After receiving that report and conferring with Grissom, Project Engineer Stout telephoned Station KSEN at Shelby, 55 miles east of Browning, and asked the station to broadcast a warning that the dam might go out. (Earlier in the day the station had carried warnings on the Swift Dam, and it was through a broadcast that the Agency first learned the Swift Dam had given way.)

Flood waters finally topped the Two Medicine Dam about 3:30 p.m., and

by 4:30 p.m. channels had been cut in both sides of the embankment. By next morning the dam was gone, except for the concrete structure in the center, and the lake had drained out.

Although the dam finally washed away, Two Medicine valley residents should be grateful that the break did not come until the afternoon of June 8. By that time most valley residents had been warned and had been evacuated. The record also should make it clear that most of the destruction in the valley occurred before the dam broke. The damage might have been much greater if the water behind the dam had swept down a few hours earlier.

Inspection From Air

By mid-afternoon Superintendent Grissom knew that the Swift Dam had gone, that Two Medicine was going. Radio reports from men in the field had kept him generally informed on what was taking place along Cut Bank Creek, Two Medicine Creek, Badger and Little Badger, and elsewhere. But it was decided that someone should take an overall look at the reservation from the air, to check on people in isolated locations who might be stranded.

The Cut Bank Flying Service was asked to send a small plane to Browning. The pilot landed on a highway near the Agency, and Realty Officer A. D. Stephenson climbed aboard. They took off into the rain, despite the clearly hazardous conditions.

The first flight took them over the dormitory campus on Cut Bank Creek, then up the creek and over Two Medicine Dam. They passed over the dam about

5 p.m. Water had broken over the embankment on both sides and established fairly definite courses.

Stephenson and the pilot covered other watersheds in the southern part of the reservation, landed at Cut Bank to refuel, and started a second flight. They passed over the dam again about 7 p.m., and saw that the lake had dropped by about three feet. As they flew down the Two Medicine valley near the junction of the north and south forks, Stephenson noted a wall of water that appeared to be at least five feet high sweeping through the canyon.

On the Monday flights, Stephenson had noted people marooned at the Holy Family Mission, and saw a man clinging to the roof of a building near the dormitories. (He was rescued the following morning.)

Another flight was made Tuesday morning to the Archie St. Goddard ranch in the Heart Butte district, where about fifty flood refugees had gathered. The plane landed on the nearest roadway, and Stephenson found the refugees in reasonably good spirits. Trucks with food supplies and other needed items, as reported by Stephenson on his return, were able to get to the ranch that afternoon.

A Night in the Brush

Floyd Gervais, 33, soil conservation aid on the Agency Land Operations staff, had been sent into the flood zone early Monday morning. He made his way to the Badger Creek area before the bridges went out. He encountered a

bus load of flood victims stuck in a mudhole, and his own 6 X 6 truck mired down when he tried to pull the bus out.

Gervais left his own vehicle in the mud and joined Jim Bigelow, an Agency engineer who had come by in a pickup. Together they canvassed the area, to give what help they could to local residents.

Among those in trouble were several members of the Tom Lame Bear family—a woman, a girl and four small children. They were in a house cut off by fast-rising water.

Tom Lame Bear, the man of the household, had left for help before the house was completely marooned. When he returned, he couldn't wade back to the women and children.

Around 10 a.m. Galen Evans, about 19, and another youth from the Calf Robe family came by on horseback. They tried to ride to the house, but failed. Galen's mount lost its footing and threw him into the current. He was swept down into a clump of brush.

Floyd Gervais and other rescue workers—among them Tom McKeown, Browning high school principal whose wife is a guidance teacher at the Indian Bureau dormitories—tried to reach Galen by boat. The boat was too light for the current. They tried to wade in to him, wearing life jackets, but were swept off their feet.

Through the day efforts to get the boy to safety continued, without success.

Henry Evans, Galen's father, had been working with the others. Toward evening Henry Evans slipped away. He was next seen upstream, riding a half-broken horse, coming down the current toward the point where Galen was stranded. As he neared his son, he slipped from his mount, and joined Galen on the clump of brush and trees to keep him company through the night ahead.

Henry Evans had a flashlight in his pocket. From time to time, after darkness fell, he would signal with the light to let the watchers know he and Galen still were all right. On the bank, Gervais and the others kept a fire going throughout the night to let the Evanses, and the Lame Bear women and children, know they hadn't been forgotten.

Helicopters Give Aid

Reports of stranded persons had led Superintendent Grissom to conclude, rather early in the rescue effort, that helicopters might prove useful. He called the Cut Bank airport, where he knew one 'copter was located, but learned that particular aircraft wasn't equipped for air-ground pickup. Grissom then called Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, 125 miles away. The Air Force was willing and anxious to help—but it was raining hard in Great Falls, too, and aircraft couldn't get off the ground at that time.

Two Malmstrom 'copters did get into Browning Monday evening, and made a flight or so before dark. Father Gillen of the Holy Family Mission on Two Medicine, who had declined to leave that morning when the flood danger

became apparent, was one of the first 'copter passengers.

Tuesday morning a helicopter removed Henry and Galen Evans from their brushy perch, and also lifted the Lame Bear group to safety.

Gervais, along with Andy Whitford, Bigelow and other Agency people, stayed in the Heart Butte district through the day Tuesday. That evening Gervais went out by helicopter. Next morning he came back in on a light plane, bringing with him insulin for diabetics and other needed medicines. After delivering the medicine, he set out to check on the Eubanks and Mitten families, from whom no word had been received. A youth in the latter family, about 20, had just cut his hand when Gervais arrived. Gervais took him back to Heart Butte, saw him placed aboard a helicopter.

Much of the rest of Wednesday and the day following, Gervais served as helper to Mrs. Inez Larson, a Public Health Service nurse.

Mrs. Larson's home is seven miles from the Heart Butte school. Because of road and bridge washouts, she was unable to get to the school and the persons sheltered there until Tuesday evening. In the following hours and days, she gave insulin to diabetics, and gave typhoid shots to almost everybody at the Archie St. Goddard and David Hall ranches where many refugees had gathered. (A doctor had flown in earlier from Cut Bank and given typhoid shots to the Heart Butte people.)

Like many others on the Public Health Service and Indian Agency staffs, Mrs. Larson worked many hours, day and night, beyond her regular schedule. Like many others, she declined to ask for the overtime compensation to which she was entitled.

Boy Learns About Radio

Among Agency personnel sent to lend assistance in the Two Medicine district Monday morning were Clayton Stephens, range conservationist, and Richard Harbour, supervisory soil scientist. On their rounds, they found a group of some 13 people, most of them children, and located an abandoned house that could be used as a temporary shelter. Meantime the flood had washed out the bridge over Two Medicine Creek which connected that vicinity with Browning.

One of the children was ill and in need of medical attention. Stephens and Harbour radioed Superintendent Grissom, gave their location, and were promised that a helicopter would be sent to them as soon as possible.

A 'copter dropped in before nightfall, and took aboard the child and the mother. Stephens and Harbour went along to assist, and the group landed at the Cut Bank airport. Harbour went back to the Agency at Browning. Stephens stayed on at the airport through the night, and also through the next day, to help in relaying radio messages between the Agency and the aircraft operating out of Cut Bank. One problem had been that the pilots flying in the area weren't familiar with the local landmarks and locations, and had trouble getting to the spots where help was needed.

Next morning one of the children in the house on Two Medicine—a boy 11 years old—started the motor of the pickup the two Agency men had left behind. He'd been watching Stephens and Harbour use the radio transmitter the day before. Now he tried to use it himself. Apparently he had been a keen observer. He turned the proper switches, got a message to Superintendent Grissom, and was assured that help would be along soon. A temporary crossing over Two Medicine was constructed later in the day, and the refugees were taken to the shelter in Browning.

Motor Fails, Horses Tow Boat

Agency Forester Robert C. Brown and Tom Whitford, who had been sent to the Starr School neighborhood on Cut Bank Creek northwest of Browning, found when they arrived about 10 a.m. Monday that families living along the river weren't particularly concerned by the rising water. None had moved out of their homes at that time.

The Agency men advised the residents they'd be wise to get to higher ground, and to take along bedding and clothing. Cut Bank Creek was coming up fast, and Brown radioed the Agency for a boat. Bob Harwood brought out his light aluminum boat with a 3-horsepower motor and Tom Blackweasel, Agency realty clerk, came along.

The motor was too small to be effective in the strong current, but nevertheless rescue work proceeded. Floyd and Gordon Takes Gun, two

brothers living in the vicinity, showed up with two good saddle horses. They tied on to the boat with their lariats and rode into the flood. In all, they helped remove families totaling 27 people from nine homes.

One elderly couple, stranded on a stretch of high ground in the stream, was afraid of the boat. Two Public Health Service employees who had joined the other workers waded out to the high ground, and carried the refugees ashore through more than three feet of water. Brown and others also carried to safety a woman and three children who hadn't hailed the rescuers until the boat had left the area.

By early afternoon the water was too deep for even the long-legged horses of the Takes Gun brothers. On the last try, the riders were swept off their saddles and went under, but both riders and horses were pulled back to shore.

Brown radioed to the Agency for a more powerful boat and Kay Hoyt, just back from the rescue effort with the Grant-Guardipee-Cobell families on Two Medicine, was sent to Starr School. Bernie Yednock and Clarence Gilham, who'd also been working on Two Medicine, came out to Starr School with rope for a safety line between the shore and a point on which 16 persons—seven adults and nine children—were stranded.

Before darkness fell, all families in the Starr School district had been accounted for, and most of the residents were safe in the school for

the night. Meantime all bridges connecting the area with Browning had gone out. One had washed away just after Kay Hoyt crossed it with his boat. The other collapsed just after Tom Vander Veldon, a social worker who'd joined the Agency staff only that morning, and Tom Rezin, another social worker, had crossed it with a truckload of food for the refugee center in the school.

The group marooned at the school or in nearby homes, in addition to the local residents and the rescue workers already named, included Elders Taylor and Bryce, Mormon missionaries who had come out with Hoyt.

Peter Red Horn, tribal credit clerk who lives in the vicinity, took over as housing chairman and made certain that everyone had a dry place to stay. Mrs. Annie Old Person and Mrs. Joe Bear Medicine headed the kitchen detail.

Among the refugees was a Mrs. Cut Finger. She called Peter Red Horn aside early Tuesday, and soon he approached Bob Brown: "Mr. Brown, we have a little problem. I think Mrs. Cut Finger is going to have a baby."

Clarence Gilham, who had more knowledge of such matters than the others, conferred with Mrs. Cut Finger. He determined that she apparently was having labor pains.

A plane was summoned by radio, and landed on the nearby airstrip. Mrs. Cut Finger was flown to the Public Health Service hospital at Browning. Her

pains must have been false. The baby wasn't born for several days.

The Cut Bank Creek flood peaked about 3 a.m. Tuesday. The Agency people and others from Browning got back into town Tuesday afternoon.

Two-Way Radios Prove Worth

Nerve center for all the rescue work in the field was the desk of Superintendent Grissom in The Barracks at the Agency. Grissom himself was at the radio mike much of the time, giving direction to staff members in the flooded areas, getting information on conditions in all the trouble zones. When Grissom had to leave the mike, it was taken over by Theo LeMieux, 29, land operations clerk. Mrs. LeMieux, a member of the Black-foot Tribe, also knew the reservation's people and geography well.

Telephone service began to fail early Monday morning and the communications burden fell principally on the Agency's short-wave radio system which linked vehicles in the field with the Agency.

By noon it was obvious that provision would have to be made to care for many refugees, at Browning and elsewhere, that night. It also was clear that the Agency staff would need assistance from other Bureau personnel in the hours and days ahead. Grissom tried to place a call to the Area Office in Billings, nearly 350 road miles to the southeast. The Agency lines were not functioning.

Grissom sent Mrs. Pearl M. Babineau, who headed the Agency welfare branch,

to the Browning telephone office. She assured the manager that her call was on an emergency matter. She was taken to the rear of the building, and followed the manager up a ladder toward the ceiling and a maze of wires. There a special connection was made. Mrs. Babineau talked with Area Director James Canan, holding the phone with one hand and the ladder with the other. She explained the flood situation as it was at that time, and received authority for the Superintendent to obligate funds as might be necessary in connection with the emergency.

Maintenance of communications with outside communities was to call for further ingenuity before the crisis ended. For a time, outside phone calls could be received, but it was not possible to call out. Mrs. Babineau needed to talk with the Glacier County Welfare Department and the county Red Cross representative, both in Cut Bank. So the Browning police contacted the Cut Bank police department by radio. They asked the Cut Bank police to phone the officials Mrs. Babineau wished to reach, and to request those officials to call Mrs. Babineau at the Browning police station. The same arrangement was used on other essential calls. Thus the Red Cross and other organizations were alerted to the problems of Blackfeet flood refugees.

Although word of the crisis had gone to off-reservation agencies and officials, Grissom knew it might be some time before help came. Meanwhile refugees were going to need food and shelter. So Agency staff members helped convert the Browning high school gym into a lodging place, and at

Grissom's direction bought foodstuffs from Browning stores. (The bill later was paid by the Red Cross.) The school's regular kitchen staff, on vacation for the summer, was called back to help feed the refugees.

Child Saved From Drowning

Browning itself was soaking wet, and as much as three feet of water was measured at some low spots in town. Basements were filled and roofs developed leaks. At the Museum of the Northern Plains Indians, just west of town, rain beat down so hard that the drain spouts on the two-story brick building overflowed. Water seeped inside the outer brick wall, and damaged inside plaster at the second-story level.

Browning youngsters nevertheless went out into the rain to see what was happening. They found that Willow Creek, usually a placid wading stream, was running bankful across the Agency campus. Jenell Howell, 8, daughter of a non-Indian Browning teacher, and other children were playing along the creek when Jenell fell into the water.

Jenell was carried downstream, and had passed under two bridges when Willard Gillette and Myron Echohawk, BIA Road Branch employees from Havre, saw her plight. Gillette jumped into the torrent, seized the child and managed to get her to the edge so that she could be pulled out by those on the bank.

Gillette himself was so weakened by his struggle to save the child

that he couldn't climb out of the raging creek. He was pulled to safety by Echohawk and Henry (Buddy) Cobell, Browning policeman.

In the late afternoon Monday Grissom reviewed the situation and found it might be much worse. Some people still were in difficulty, but their locations were known—thanks to the two-way radios of Bureau personnel in the field. Roads and bridges were out all over the reservation—U.S. Highway 2 leading to Cut Bank was Browning's only surface link with the outside world and even Highway 2 had been covered with water in places for a short time. However, Bureau people had arrived in the marooned segments between the creeks and rivers before the roads and bridges became impassable. They were working effectively throughout the marooned areas, and had taken many people to places of safety at Starr School, Heart Butte, Grandview School, the Archie St. Goddard ranch, and other locations.

Area Office personnel were en route or preparing to leave for Blackfeet. Helicopters from Great Falls had arrived. Organizations such as the National Guard, the Red Cross, the private pilots' association in Cut Bank, and others were informed on reservation needs.

A detachment of servicemen from an Air Force radar station at Cut Bank had arrived at the Agency. "They moved in and went to work as if they were veterans in handling disasters," said one observer. They helped in guarding the washed-out bridges that night, helped local police. Next day they

set up a short-wave radio unit that placed the Agency in touch with all short-wave stations in Montana.

The most urgent hours of the crisis had passed by 10:30 or 11 o'clock that night—no one was keeping much track of time. Grissom sent most of the Agency workers home, to sleep a few hours before daylight came again. But Grissom himself stayed by the short-wave radio, to answer inquiries that might come in from the field. Mrs. LeMieux stayed on also, until 3:30 a.m. She was back again at 6:30 o'clock Tuesday morning, and worked through until 1 a.m. Wednesday.

At first dawn the rescue and evacuation efforts were renewed. The search was pressed for bodies missing on Two Medicine and Birch Creeks. Agency work crews began the enormous task of reconstruction even before the extent of damage could be fully determined. Their first efforts were to repair roads and bridges so that traffic between Browning and the marooned areas could be restored.

Commissary Set Up

An important job Tuesday, and Grissom stayed at his post to see that it was done, was to get supplies of food, clothing and blankets to the shelter stations in the field. Food stocks available in Browning soon were exhausted but others, including surplus commodities, came in from the outside. Air Force planes brought supplies to the Cut Bank airfield, and

National Guard pilots shuttled them on to Heart Butte, Starr School and the other refugee centers.

A commissary was established in the new forestry warehouse on the Agency campus, and Bill Pease of the Realty Branch became head "storekeeper". Dorothy Gallup, state extension agent who works on the reservation, came over from Cut Bank to help at the commissary. Women employees of the Agency and Agency wives also joined the volunteer staff. The commissary was kept open from 7 o'clock in the morning until 10 at night for the first ten days, and remained in operation until June 26.

Many Gifts of Clothing

Despite all the activity on the reservation during the flood and in the first few days after the rain stopped, much of Montana wasn't well informed on the Blackfeet situation. One reason was the reservation's isolated location. Another was the fact that other areas of the state also were having flood trouble. The other areas, including Great Falls and Kalispell, attracted most of the attention of news media. Nevertheless, many private citizens and organizations made known their interest in the Indian refugees.

Gifts of clothing from churches and other groups came in faster than the articles could be sorted and distributed. There were enough clothing gifts to take care of all summer needs, and many items have been stored

for use next fall and winter.

In Washington, the federal government moved swiftly to help the Blackfeet people. Montana's senators asked for funds to finance rehabilitation of the reservation, and the appropriation was approved by Congress within a month. The Bureau of Indian Affairs at all levels—Agency, Area Office and Washington Office—had begun planning the reconstruction program even before the appropriation was voted. Reconstruction work—to include the building of 129 or more homes, the replacing of the Two Medicine and Swift dams, the rehabilitation of farm lands and the irrigation system, much work on roads and bridges—is expected to take two years or more.

Superintendent Key Man

Many people had important parts in the Blackfeet flood emergency: Agency people, tribal people, private citizens on and off the reservation, representatives of other governmental units and private organizations. It is not possible to list them all.

The key individual in the rescue effort—the man who organized, directed, coordinated the work of the many people who served far beyond the call of duty—was Superintendent William W. Grissom, 44.

Bill Grissom, native of Oklahoma, first came to the Blackfeet country in 1954 as a BIA soil conservationist. In 1955 he became Land Operations Officer. As head of the branch that is responsible for soil and moisture

conservation, range management, irrigation development and other related activities, Grissom came to know intimately the geography, the terrain, the creeks and coolees, hills and hollows of the reservation's 2,500 square miles. He also came to know almost every Blackfeet family.

When the superintendancy of the Blackfeet Agency became vacant in February 1964, Grissom was designated acting superintendent. His appointment as superintendent became effective May 18, 1964—only three weeks before the floods began.

Physically, Grissom is built along much the same lines as Paul Bunyan of the lumberjack legends. He is tall, big-boned, broad-shouldered, slow and sparse of speech, prematurely gray. In the spring of 1964 Grissom, like many other Montanans, started a beard in observance of the state's territorial centennial. His beard and the twinkle in his eye have caused him to be described on occasion as looking like a cross between Moses and Santa Claus.

Bill Grissom is not the best source of information on what took place on the Blackfeet Reservation in the crowded week of June 8.

"I was too busy to keep track of what was going on," he says. "Everybody pitched in, and did what needed to be done." That is about all he will say concerning the flood, short of direct questioning.

Those who worked with him and who watched him at work during the flood have much more to say.



TENT HOMES PROVIDED FOR REFUGEES IMMEDIATELY AFTER FLOOD
(Great Falls Tribune photo)



UPPER LEFT: Blackfeet Agency Superintendent William W. Grissom, who directed rescue effort.

AT RIGHT ABOVE: Mrs. Theo B. LeMieux, Land Operations clerk, served as radio operator during the emergency. Two-way radios kept flood zone workers in touch with Agency.



LEFT: Mrs. Merle Tatsey, Irrigation clerk, and her family narrowly escaped Birch Creek disaster.

"Bill was tremendous," is a verdict that is almost unanimous. "He never got rattled, never lost his temper."

Grissom knew from the minute the trouble started that communications would be vital. Thus he stayed close to the phone and the short-wave radio at The Barracks, keeping in constant touch with personnel in the field. He gave orders, made suggestions, kept everybody informed on what others were doing.

Those things that had to be done—requests for help from the Air Force and others, arrangements for boats, for feeding refugees, for shelter, for whatever else that came along—Grissom either did himself or ordered done. Browning residents helping in the rescue and relief effort placed themselves under Grissom's direction as naturally and easily as if they were on the Agency staff. Agency, town and armed service representatives worked together as one coordinated unit, with Superintendent Grissom serving as chief coordinator. "People would come in to tell Bill about families in isolated locations, or spots where someone might be in trouble," says one observer. "Chances were that Bill, because of his great knowledge of the reservation and the Indians, already had thought of the trouble spots and sent someone to check on them."

Grissom stayed at his post in The Barracks from 8:15 a.m. Monday, June 8, until late Wednesday night, June 10. He kept awake by drinking coffee,

chewing cigars, and sometimes going to his home, only a few steps away, to take a cold shower. He objected to going to bed Wednesday night, and stayed in bed only about four hours. He put in a 16-hour day Thursday, stayed in the office most of the week-end, cancelled out on a Bureau-wide Superintendents' Conference in Santa Fe the next week in order to stay home and start getting reservation affairs back in order. On June 12, when Secretary Stewart L. Udall visited the reservation briefly to inspect flood damage, Grissom was too busy to attend the conference with tribal officials. When Indian Commissioner Philleo Nash met with the Tribal Business Council June 11 to discuss rehabilitation needs, Grissom was present, but he blushed under his beard when tribal members praised his work.

Dr. William Sabbag of the U.S. Public Health Service staff at Browning is among those who have high regard for Grissom and the other BIA people.

The Public Health Service staff played an extremely important role in the flood emergency, and played it well. Some thirty persons were treated at the hospital in Browning during the emergency, principally for exposure. PHS people, or others working under their direction, gave typhoid shots to about 5,500 persons in the days immediately after the flood, as well as administering to other needs.

"We couldn't have functioned nearly so well in the emergency without BIA help," Dr. Sabbag says. "We made use of their radios, their transpor-

tation, their personnel. They helped us at every turn, and Mr. Grissom stayed at his post both day and night."

During the emergency, Superintendent Grissom commendably disregarded regulations, whenever regulations got in the way. And he proved that a government facility can function for at least a limited time without benefit of paper work. Not one letter did he sign or open the week of June 8.

Says a Blackfeet tribal member and Browning businessman of Grissom: "He is quite a superintendent." Few people who know him will disagree.

People Aren't Always Logical

Any disaster, natural or otherwise, gives rise to questions afterward: Why was this done? Why wasn't that done? Would it not have been better to do thus and so?

Some questions have been raised about the Blackfeet flood of June 1964, concerning the actions and reactions of both the flood zone residents and those who were trying to help them. Not all the questions can be answered easily. This was a time of crisis, and human reaction in time of crisis is not always logical.

Perhaps the questions most frequently heard are: "Why didn't the people move faster when they saw the water rising? Why didn't they take to the hills before they were cut off?"

The answer to both of those questions may be found in the exceedingly

casual attitude of the typical Blackfeet resident—Indian and non-Indian—toward adverse weather. He lives in a region known for temperature extremes. To outsiders, at least, it seems that he takes a perverse delight in going about his usual business in his usual way in defiance of blizzard, flood or heat wave.

The creeks started rising early in the morning of June 8. It had been pouring down rain for 24 hours. But so what? A little high water was no cause for alarm. There hadn't been a really serious flood since 1908. Why be concerned?

That was the attitude of many valley dwellers, some observers surmise. That was why some families chose to stay in their houses even after they were warned, either by people knocking at their doors or by the water swirling out of the creek banks. It might be noted that before the week ended many refugee families were asking for tents, so that they could move back to their former home sites. Tents were ordered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and soon were transformed into temporary homes.

If the crisis demonstrated a casual attitude toward adverse climate, it also demonstrated the ability of reservation residents—Indians and non-Indians, Agency people and private citizens—to work together effectively, courageously, with a common purpose. No one in the reservation community had disaster training, no one claimed expert knowledge in fighting floods.

Nevertheless the Agency staff and their neighbors went into action, did what needed to be done. Without their efforts, the flood toll might well have been much greater.

'Feeling Sorry for Others'

The Blackfeet Tribe in the future will observe each June 8 as a day of mourning: The commemoration was ordered by the Tribal Council at a special meeting June 11, three days after the flood struck. John Tatsey of Heart Butte, a tribal member and correspondent for the weekly Glacier Reporter of Browning, best expressed the thought of all reservation people—Indian and non-Indian alike. He wrote in the issue of June 25: "There has not been much going on in the line of pleasure since the flood, everyone feeling sorry for the ones that lost their lives and property—it's pretty hard to think different than only sad."

###

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The foregoing account of some of the events that occurred during the Blackfeet flood is based largely on informal interviews with Blackfeet Agency staff members in the week of July 6 - 11, 1964, a month after the disaster.

The Agency staff at that time was extremely busy with the reconstruction program. It was not possible to talk with all the individuals who took part in the rescue and relief effort. Very probably there were many incidents of performance beyond the call of duty which were not related to the writer.

It should be noted that in almost every instance Agency employees were reluctant to discuss their own roles. In every instance, however, they lauded the efforts of fellow workers.

Individuals differed as to details in their versions of some of the incidents. If any errors have resulted for this or other reasons, the fault probably is with the writer rather than the informants.

There has been no intent to minimize the work performed during the emergency by organizations or individuals other than those connected with the Blackfeet Agency. Other organizations and individuals did make invaluable, indispensable contributions. The purpose of this document is not to recite all that was done, but rather to record the story of some of the Agency people for the benefit of their co-workers in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and elsewhere in the Department of the Interior.

John R. (Bob) White
Billings Area Office
July 1964

AFTER THE FLOOD

Even before the floodwaters of June 8, 1964 had subsided, the Blackfeet Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was at work on rehabilitation and reconstruction. Funds were made available at once to meet the immediate needs of the nearly one thousand Indians whose homes had been lost or damaged. Additional sums were allocated to start the most urgent repairs to the reservation road and irrigation systems.

Within days U. S. Senators Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf of Montana introduced an amendment to the Interior Appropriations Bill to provide funds for the initial reconstruction program to be carried out by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Interior Appropriations Bill, carrying \$5,262,500 for the Blackfeet program, was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson July 7, 1964. Additional sums were made available through the U. S. Public Health Service, the Bureau of Public Roads and other agencies.

As of September 1, 1964, reconstruction accomplishments included the following:

HOUSING: The Bureau of Indian Affairs is providing new homes for those households who lost their dwellings in the flood. The Red Cross made grants to help repair homes less seriously damaged.

The Bureau's initial goal was to construct 125 or more "core" homes before severe winter weather struck. These "core" homes are 20 x 24 feet, built so that additional rooms can be added later as each family's needs may require.

Building materials were ordered as soon as needs could be ascertained. A construction contract was signed between the Bureau and the Blackfeet Tribe. The Tribe is serving as contractor on the housing project, with the Bureau providing supervision. (This same procedure is being followed in other parts of the rehabilitation program, assuring maximum employment of Indian labor.)

An assembly plant was set up on the Agency reserve, where the homes are being built. When completed, the houses are hauled to their locations by trucks and low-boy trailers.

The first home was finished August 20. Eight had been completed by September 1, at the rate of one for each working day. A two-per-day rate

was reached by September 15, and all the "core" houses were scheduled for completion by early December.

ROADS: Damage to the reservation road system, including washouts of bridges and approaches, was estimated at more than \$800,000. Repair work is being done by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and paid for by the Bureau of Public Roads.

By September 1 temporary repairs had been made so that all roads on the reservation system were open to traffic except for one little-used crossing. Work will start this fall on rebuilding of one of the six major bridges which were destroyed, and permanent reconstruction of the other five will start next spring.

IRRIGATION: Initial repairs were made on main canals so that water delivery on a limited basis was resumed by July 14. A pumping plan to supplement river flow into one canal was installed and placed in operation by August 6.

As of September 1, work was nearing completion on replacing 300 feet of a 72-inch siphon across Whitetail Creek.

In all, 39,156 cubic yards of earth had been moved in repairing dikes, canal breaks and diversion dams. Twenty structures (headgates, checks, etc.) had been replaced.

Work of repairing damages will continue through the winter as weather permits. It was hoped that water can be delivered to all irrigated acreage—more than 37,000 acres—during the next crop season. However, water supply will be limited for at least two years until storage lost by the destruction of Two Medicine Dam can be replaced.

Bureau of Reclamation engineers are designing a new dam and investigating possible alternate sites, and it was expected that the construction contract could be let in April 1965.

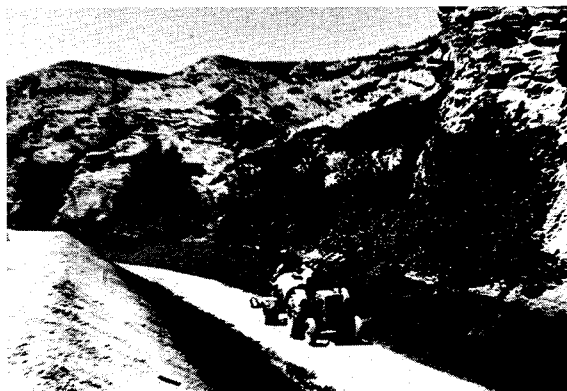


A NEW HOME for a flood refugee family is hauled down Browning's main street. More than 125 homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair, and are being replaced.



LEFT: One of the major breaks on the main Two Medicine canal. This photo was taken shortly after the flood of June 8, 1964.

RIGHT: The canal break shown above was repaired by BIA crews and water was turned into the canal again on July 14, 1964. Water supply will be limited until storage lost by destruction of the Two Medicine dam is replaced.



LAND CLEARING AND REHABILITATION: The flood left an estimated 20,000 acres of agricultural land covered with silt or debris, eroded, or otherwise damaged. The restoration program will include removal of debris, land leveling, stream bank protection to prevent erosion, and changing of some stream channels. This portion of the program had been started by September 1, although the major emphasis up to that date had been on housing.

FARM OUTBUILDINGS, FENCES, CORRALS: Work on this program is to start in December 1964 or January 1965, after all the "core" homes are completed.

ASSISTANCE TO FARM FAMILIES: As of September 1, 65 farm and ranch families had received aid totaling over \$115,000 for machinery repair, purchase of hay, or other expenses necessary to keep their operations going. The program was continuing, with the Tribal Credit Committee assisting the Agency staff in its administration.

FLOOD-CONNECTED WELFARE: Thirty-five Indian families numbering 202 individuals, who were self-sufficient before the flood, had received welfare assistance prior to September 1. (A number of other families in the flood zone were on the welfare lists prior to the disaster, and help to them is continuing.) The demand for additional welfare assistance because of the flood was not as great in the first months as might have been expected, because many of the family heads were employed in the reconstruction program.

Nearly 150 Indian workers were employed on various phases of the reconstruction program during the summer. Indian employment will continue high in the months ahead. Wherever possible, work is being done either by Bureau force account or tribal contract.

All levels of the Bureau are involved in the program. Personnel from the Billings Area Office, other Agencies in the Billings Area and other Areas, and Field Offices have been detailed to the Blackfeet Reservation to aid in planning, supervision and other phases of the effort. The program will not be completed for many months, but progress thus far gives promise that the rehabilitation accomplishments will be a credit to all concerned.