

May 22- June 5, 2010

TURTLE MOUNTAIN IRT



THE DAKOTA DOZEN

- By LCDR's Michelle Martin and Dave Risberg

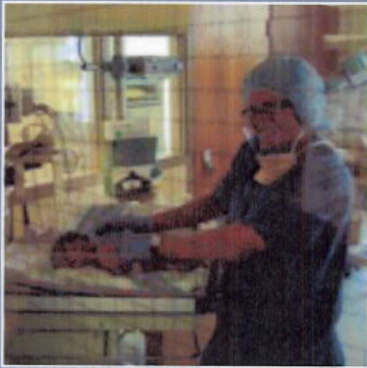
Upon arrival to Minot, we had the impression of a small town lost in the middle of the Great Plains of North Dakota. Yet as soon as we left the area and continued on with the two-hour ride towards the destination of Belcourt, our memory of Minot changed. What was once a small town we soon remembered as a larger city compared to what lay ahead. The further we went, the larger it seemed to become.

We discovered vast areas of farmland, green fields rolling out as far as our eyes could see. Homes were few and far between. We drove for quite some time before passing another vehicle. One local said; *"this is the type of place that your dog can run away from home and you can watch him running for three days..."*

North Dakota lies in the middle of North America. There is a stone marker in Rugby, North Dakota, located in front of a country store, identifying itself as being the "Geographic Center of the North American Continent". We drove right by it on our way to Belcourt, North Dakota.



NAVY MEDICINE



at Quentin Burdick MHC

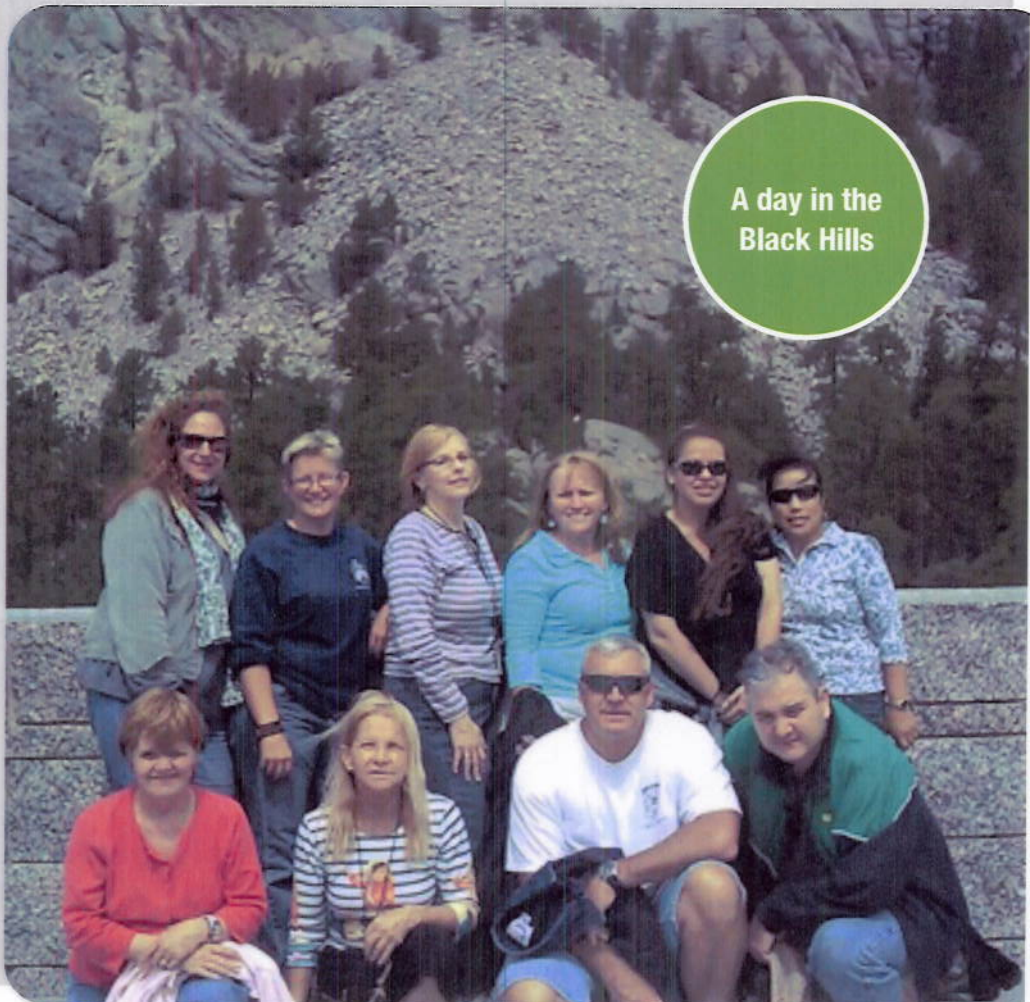
HM1 Stephanie Grimes caring for newborn after assisting with the Cesarean Section.

HM1 Joy Lail hard at work scheduling a surgery she would scrub in for.

LCDR Perkins performing a nursing assessment in the Emergency Department.

The United States Navy had the distinction of sending twelve Navy Reservists to Turtle Mountain, which was sponsored by Naval Hospital Jacksonville. They provided care for a two-week period in Belcourt, North Dakota at the Indian Health Service (IHS), Quentin N. Burdick Memorial Health Care Facility. The hospital provides quality healthcare through a collaborative multidisciplinary team approach dedicated to professionalism, tribal values, culture and spirituality. The goal for the IHS is to raise the health level of the Native American and Alaskan Native people to the highest possible level. The hospital serves an under-served community of the Chippewa tribe in the Turtle

Mountain Reservation near the geographic center of North America located southeast of the International Peace Gardens. The northern boundary of the reservation runs parallel to the Canadian border, along the 49th parallel. The dimensions of the reservation are 6 x 12 miles. There are currently 26,000 enrolled tribal members of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. The mission was a joint operation including Army, Navy, Air Force Reservists organized by the United States Air Force. The twelve-member Navy Reserve team was composed of 1 medical doctor, 6 nurses and 5 hospital corpsmen. It was a 30 to 40 degree negative climate change for most.



It did not take long for people in the community to recognize that the Navy was in town. Word of mouth is faster than the Internet in a remote area such as Belcourt. While enjoying coffee at a local café we would be engaged in conversation with the locals, and answered many questions from inquisitive people who took a cheerful interest in our mission.

The Officer in Charge, a Radiologist, was able to perform and interpret various studies, sparing several patients from having to travel to outlying facilities. When his radiological skills were not needed his Flight Surgery experience was utilized in the Emergency Room, where he provided routine medical care as well as responded to the many needs of a 4 person motor vehicle accident. His “can do” attitude was most appreciated by the emergency room staff.

Three of the Nurses staffed the Hospital’s Emergency Room which sees both adult and pediatric patients. One worked the night shift, alongside the Navy Chief, which in a remote area becomes extremely busy in the evening. You never know what is going to come through the doors.

The Navy Chief’s Emergency Medical Services came in handy as he made numerous runs to homes of those in need. Ironically, those who came by ambulance often got a

Two of the Nurses and three of the Corpsmen, including the Senior Chief, staffed the clinic. We soon learned not to call the Chiefs “Chief” on an Indian reservation for obvious reasons. The clinic offers a variety of services for both scheduled and none scheduled patients. When the clinic was not busy the Navy Reservists often worked in the Emergency room.

Two of the Hospital Corpsmen worked on a Medical Surgical unit which included a Labor and Delivery Room. Both were eager to assist in the Operating Room and arrived to work early for scheduled Caesarian sections. They performed above and beyond their scheduled duties. Their enthusiasm was for all to emulate.

One of our Nurse Corps Officers made home visits. She traveled on dusty roads to remote areas to perform well baby assessments, diabetic teaching, and wound care. She was welcomed into homes with smiles and shown works of family Native American Art. One of her patients even played music on his family fiddle from the 1860’s.



Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa

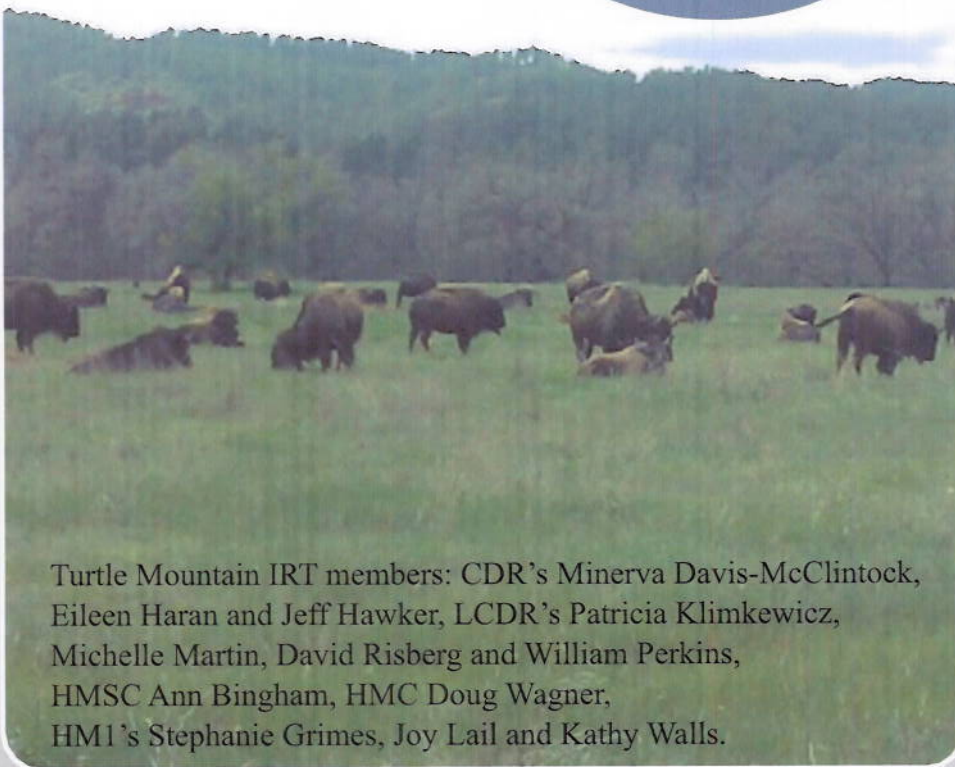
ride home too. The chief complaints and injuries seen in the Emergency Room are similar to those in a rural area: lacerations, orthopedic injuries, dehydration, chest pain, uncontrolled diabetes and/or hypertension.

BELCOURT, NORTH DAKOTA

The Native American Veterans invited our unit to participate with a Church service and the Memorial Day presentation at the local cemetery. They dress like other Veterans for a ceremony; military uniforms from younger years, displaying the worn look that comes with frequent use, never to have been put away or forgotten. Some had Eagle's feathers in their caps, and badges that identified Native American Pride. Ceremonial guns donned feathers too. We proudly marched alongside them in our modern uniforms and military sharpness. They played Taps and rendered a twenty-one gun salute. It was touching and a great cultural experience for all.

When we returned to our homes and Navy families what was asked is not how many patients we saw or what type of injuries they had. It was the differences with working and living in a small community that was of interest. The Native Americans take great pride in keeping their culture and heritage alive today. The cultural enrichment we walked away with and the impression we left behind will have much longer lasting effects for all involved. The individual experiences varied, but the mission remained the same, selfless service.

**Herd of North American
Buffaloes "Tatanka"**



Turtle Mountain IRT members: CDR's Minerva Davis-McClintock, Eileen Haran and Jeff Hawker, LCDR's Patricia Klimkewicz, Michelle Martin, David Risberg and William Perkins, HMSC Ann Bingham, HMC Doug Wagner, HM1's Stephanie Grimes, Joy Lail and Kathy Walls.

MEMORIES



Memorial Day Services

Tribal veterans joined by Turtle Mountain IRT detachment prior to a twenty-one gun salute for departed veterans buried at St. Ann's Cemetery.

LCDR Risberg embracing the opportunity to spread Navy goodwill to the reservation youth.