Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Macfarlan -- 343-9431
For Immediate Release: December 23, 1967
Print PDF

Indians from as far away as Idaho, Montana, Minnesota and the Dakotas are being flown with heavy snow removal machinery to help open some 2,000 miles of roads blocked by snow on the huge Navajo Indian reservation in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Reporting today on measures underway to aid the storm-stricken Navajos, and other Indians, the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs said six 40,000-pound gross weight four-wheel drive snow plow trucks are scheduled for movement by big C-124 Air Force planes today.

The huge snow removal machines were being loaded into the planes at Grand Forks (N.D.) Air Force Base, Ellsworth Air Force Base at Rapid City, S.D., Glasgow Air Force Base in Montana and Hill Air Force Base in Utah. The plows are being flown to Kirtland Air Force Base near Albuquerque, N.H. Their crews of Indian operators and mechanics were accompanying the plows, the Indians giving up their Christmas at home in order to help out the Navajos.

Tribes participating included the Red Lake Chippewas and Leech Lake Chippewas of Minnesota; Standing Rock Sioux of North Dakota and South Dakota; Blackfeet, Fort Belknap Sioux, Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux of Montana; and Fort Hall Bannocks and Shoshones of Idaho.

The Indian operators are familiar with coping with snow depths of several feet, such as are blocking many roads on the big Navajo reservation, which is about the size of the state of West Virginia.

Original plans had called for movement of two of the machines and their crews yesterday but the number has now been increased to six. Two rotary snow plows loaned by the National Park Service in California are due in the Navajo area today, also.

A total of 437,000 pounds of surplus food commodities made available by the Department of Agriculture had been moved out of Phoenix to Navajo country through yesterday and an additional 160,000 pounds was scheduled for movement today. In addition to food dropped for Indians, airlift of 124 tons of hay was carried out yesterday with 200 tons scheduled for dropping today.

The Air Force established a rescue station at Tuba City after a convoy worked its way through from the east on the surface. This will enable loading and refueling of helicopters at Tuba City so they may make mercy missions over isolated areas which could not be covered with flights from the Window Rock area.

A plow opened a road to the rim of the Colorado River's Grand Canyon where the trail starts down to the Havasupai reservation and movement of food and hay to the Indians deep in the canyon was started by horseback.

The death of a new-born infant at a Bureau trailer school on the Navajo reservation was reported, increasing to four the number of storm-connected deaths reported by the Navajo area office.

Area Director Graham Holmes said at Window Rock that mercy missions are continuing to operate but he knew of no specific human disaster conditions. The temperature at Window Rock fell to eight

degrees below zero this morning.