

The People of Wounded Knee

Brattleboro Rotary Club
April 8, 2021

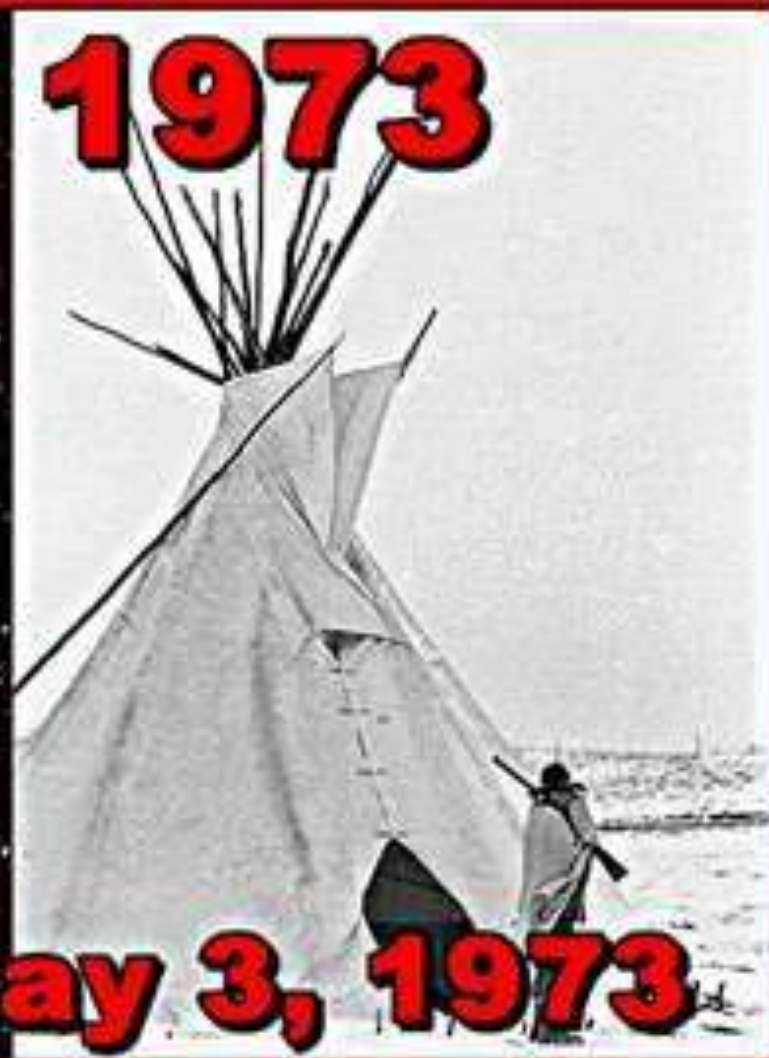
Dr. Boyd Bosma





Lakota Prayer

Wounded knee 1973



February 27, 1973 - May 3, 1973

MASSACRE OF WOUNDED KNEE

Dec. 29, 1890, Chief Big Foot, with his Minnekahe and Hunkpapa Sioux Band of 106 warriors, 250 women and children, were encamped on the Flat, surrounded by the U.S. 7th Cavalry (470 soldiers), commanded by Col. Forsythe.

The "Meekish Craze" possessed many Indians, who left the vicinity of the Agencies to "Ghost Dance" during the summer and fall of 1890. "Unrest" on the Pine Ridge Reservation was partly due to the reduction of beef rations by Congress, and to the "Ghost Dancing" of Chiefs Sitting Bull, Hump, Big Foot, Kicking Bear, and Short Bull. The Sioux were told by Kicking Bear and Short Bull that by wearing "Ghost Shirts," the ghost dancing warriors would become immune to the white man's bullets and could openly defy the soldiers and white settlers, and bring back the old days of the big buffalo herds.

On Nov. 5, 1890, Indian Agent Boyer (Lakota) Wakeluck at Pine Ridge called for troops, and by Dec. 1, 1890, several thousand U.S. Regulars were concentrated in this area at Dakota Territory.

On Dec. 6, 1890, Chief Sitting Bull was killed by Lt. Sutherland of the Standing Rock Indian Police. Forty of Sitting Bull's braves escaped from Grand River, and joined Chief Big Foot's band on Deep Creek. In camp and "Ghost Dancing" on the south fork of the Cheyenne River, Chief Big Foot was under close scrutiny of Lt. Col. Sumner and his troops, and on Dec. 23, 1890, they were ordered to arrest Big Foot as a hostile. However, the Big Foot band had already secretly slipped away from the Cheyenne country, into the Badlands, heading for Pine Ridge.

On Dec. 28, 1890, without a struggle, Chief Big Foot surrendered to the U.S. 7th Cavalry Maj. Wadsworth at the site marked by a sign five miles north of here. The band was then escorted to Wounded Knee, camping that night under guard.

Reinforcements of the U.S. 7th Cavalry including one company of Indian Scouts arrived at Wounded Knee from Pine Ridge Agency the morning of Dec. 29, 1890. Col. Forsythe took command of a force of 400 men. A battery of four Hotchkiss guns was placed on the hill 400 feet west of here, overlooking the Indian encampment. Big Foot's band was encircled at 0900.

Delineator — Irving R. Pond and Herbert H. Clifford

By — Stanley S. Walker, Sup. Highway Eng.

Wounded Knee Massacre
December 29, 1890



MASSACRE OF WOUNDED KNEE

(CONTINUED)

9:00 a.m. by a line of foot soldiers and cavalry. Chief Big Foot, sick with pneumonia, lay in a warmed tent provided by Col. Forsythe, in the center of the camp. A white flag flew there, placed by the Indians. Directly in the rear of the Indian Camp was a dry draw, running east and west.

The Indians were ordered to surrender their arms before proceeding to Pine Ridge. Capt. Wallace, with an Army detail, began searching the teepees for hidden weapons. During this excitement, Yellow Bird, a medicineman, walked among the braves, blowing on an eaglebone whistle, inciting the warriors to action, declaring that the "Ghost Shirts" worn by the warriors would protect them from the soldier's bullets. A shot was fired, and all hell broke loose. The troops fired a deadly volley into the Council warriors, killing nearly half of them. A bloody hand-to-hand struggle followed, all the more desperate since the Indians were armed mostly with clubs, knives, and revolvers. The Hotchkiss guns fired 2-pound explosive shells on the groups, indiscriminately killing warriors, women, children, and their own disarming soldiers. Soldiers were killed by cross-fire of their comrades in this desperate engagement.

Surviving Indians stampeded in wild disorder for the shelter of the draw 200 feet to the south, escaping west and east in the draw, and north down Wounded Knee Creek. Pursuit by the 7th Cavalry resulted in the killing of more men, women and children, causing this battle to be referred to as the "Wounded Knee Massacre". One hour later, 146 Indian men, women and children lay dead in Wounded Knee Creek valley. The bodies of many were scattered along a distance of two miles from the scene of the encounter. Twenty soldiers were killed on the field, and sixteen later died of wounds. Wounded soldiers and Indians alike were taken to Pine Ridge Agency. A blizzard came up. Four days later, an Army detail gathered up the Indian dead and buried them in a common grave at the top of the hill northwest of here. A monument marks this grave.

"Ghost Dancing" ended with this encounter. The Wounded Knee battlefield is the site of the last armed conflict between the Sioux Indians and the United States Army.

Wounded Knee was not quite the last battle. White Wolf, a Lakota warrior credited with killing 20 members of the Seventh Cavalry, escaped and helped lead an assault on the Army fort at Pine Ridge two days later.



Big Foot ghost dance 1890

300 men, women, children, elderly died

December 29, 1890



The 7th Cavalry's Hotchkiss cannon had five 37mm barrels and fired 43 rounds per minute

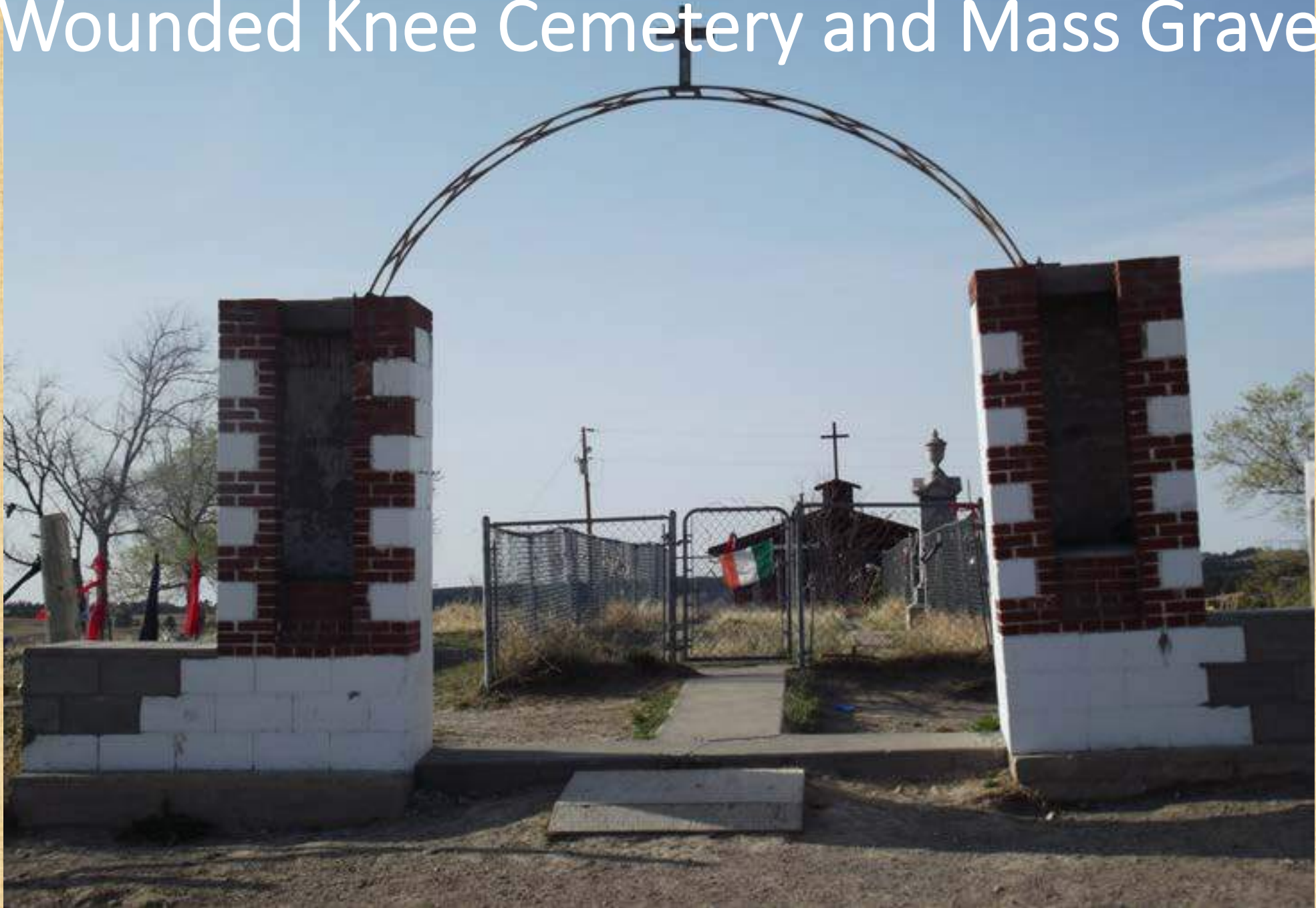


The "great hostile Indian camp" at the White Clay Creek watering hole



Wounded Knee Massacre (Dec 29, 1890)

Wounded Knee Cemetery and Mass Grave



The Occupation of Wounded Knee

On February 27, 1973, 48 years ago, 300 people met at the community center in Calico, 10 miles north of Pine Ridge, and made the decision to occupy Wounded Knee. Spies for tribal chairman Dick Wilson and his GOON Squad were made to believe that the group planned to occupy the BIA headquarters in Pine Ridge, where armored personnel carriers, snipers on rooftops, and armed GOON squad members, FBI agents, and others waited their arrival. About 20 cars, including Francis and Phyllis Mesteth, headed across the hills directly to Wounded Knee, while 51 drove to Pine Ridge, then startled the waiting forces by turning and driving the 17 miles to Wounded Knee. John Terrones, a friend with the Justice Department Community Relations Service, ran 2 blocks to get his car to follow the caravan to Wounded Knee. The next day, despite his Justice Department credentials, the FBI arrested him for being part of the takeover, then falsely claimed the occupiers had kidnapped the white residents, who vocally denied the untrue propaganda. Thus began the 71-day occupation that exposed the mistreatment of American Indians around the world. Later the CRS gave me credit for saving the agency, which Nixon was trying to abolish. They offered me their entire files on the occupation if I would write a book about what the FBI actually did there. I didn't.

The Bad Guys—Dick Wilson, the FBI, and the BIA

- Tribal Chairman Dick Wilson (1934-1990) ran a virtual reign of terror on the Pine Ridge Reservation against “traditionalists” who opposed him, including police firing at civilians from 21 police cars purchased on a \$4.5 million law and order grant from the Nixon administration.
- Wilson used a \$450 million grant to replace the BIA police (mostly Navajos from Arizona) with his own GOON Squad (Guardians of the Oglala Nation), who beat and murdered Wilson’s opponents and helped him control bootlegging on the reservation.
- Neither the FBI nor the BIA did anything to resolve the situation. After dissolving the Tribal Council, Wilson took a personal cut of 12% of federal program money coming to the reservation, angering four women leaders who worked with the
- Johnson-O’Malley Indian Heritage Program passed in 1970.
- The “Grandmothers of Wounded Knee” organized the Oglala Civil Rights Organization headed by Pedro Bissonette, later murdered by Wilson’s Goon Squad.
- Pedro’s mother, Gladys Bissonette, was the grandmother of 19-year-old Jimmy Eagle, who accidentally touched off the 1975 “Incident at Oglala,” which resulted in the deaths of two 27-year-old FBI agents and the



Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization



Gladys Bissonette



Bobby Onco (1946-2014)



Dennis Banks (1937-2017) with
Pedro Bissonette (1944-1973)

In the two years after WK in 1973, at least 76 Lakotas were killed by Wilson's Goon Squad. I met with Gladys Bissonette in May 1975 and in the next five weeks before my return, 9 people were killed, including four children. No cases were brought by the FBI, which conducted its own reign of terror after 1973 and again after the killings of two agents in 1975. Joseph Trimbaugh, an Indian-hater who led the FBI force, wanted to force a shoot-out and to remove any other agencies working for a peaceful settlement. Mark Felt (Deep Throat) basically ran the FBI after Hoover's death in 1972 and may have ordered the killing of Buddy Lamont by an FBI sniper.

Francis & Phyllis Mesteth (1931-2004)



Phyllis and Francis Mesteth chaired the local people's negotiating committee and were true heroes in trying to end the occupation without violence in spite of constant harassment from the FBI and other federal officials. A peaceful settlement of the Wounded Knee occupation would have been impossible without them. This picture on the right was taken in our home when we brought them to Washington to be honored by the NEA. Francis was a Road Man (preacher) for the Native American Church and conducted a ceremony for me in 1977 with national leaders from the NAC.

Lawrence "Buddy" Lamont (1944-1973)



Buddy Lamont, a descendant of Red Cloud, gave me food my first day at Wounded Knee. Son of a newspaper publisher and an easygoing, popular, well-respected member of his tribe, he was shot by an FBI sharpshooter from long range when he left a bunker to smoke during a lull in the shooting. I was in the Pine Ridge jail trying to get back to Washington at the time, and we learned about the shooting from his relatives brought there after taking his body to Pine Ridge.

Independent Oglala Nation



The Grandmothers of Wounded Knee



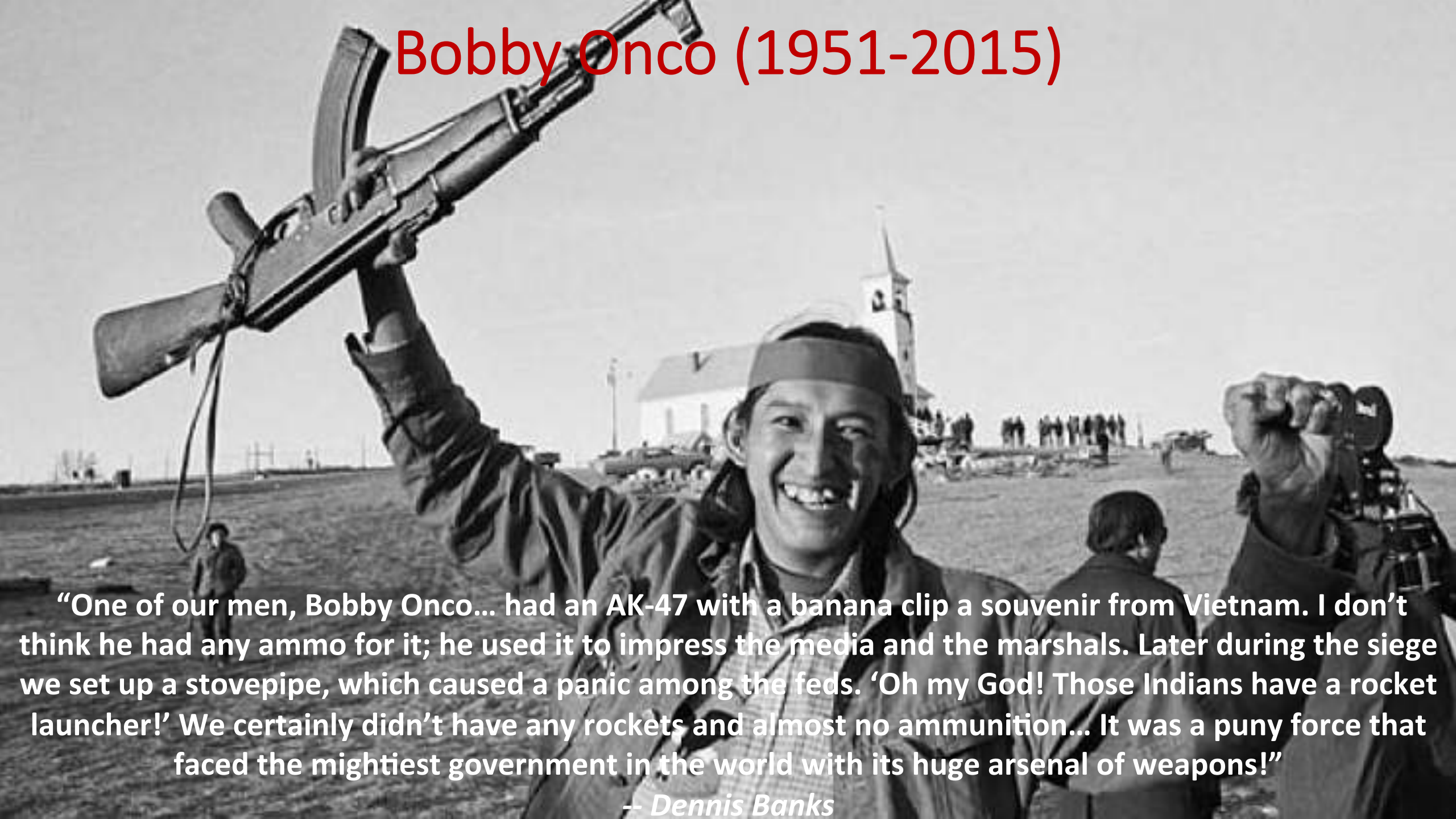
Gladys Bissonette, "the brave-hearted woman of Wounded Knee", was an [Oglala Lakota](#) elder who was one of the leaders of the traditional faction during the violent turmoil on the [Pine Ridge Indian Reservation](#) during the 1970s. [Dick Wilson](#) became Tribal Chairman in 1972 and began a "reign of terror" on the reservation. Wilson favored mixed-blood residents and close family and friends for positions in his office and created a special enforcing unit, known as the "[Goon Squad](#)," to police the region. This Goon Squad soon began to terrorize the residents of the reservation who openly spoke out against Wilson or disagreed with him, especially those who were pure-blooded Indians. Many attempts were made at impeaching Wilson, but Wilson always interfered and subsequently kept his position by sending out his [Goon Squad](#) to stamp out the residents who dared try to impeach him. "The past administrations all along have been pretty sly and crooked with Indian funds," said Gladys, "but they weren't quite as hard on us as this drunken fool we got now." (*Wikipedia*)

Chief Frank Fools Crow (1890-1989)



Hank Adams

Bobby Onco (1951-2015)



“One of our men, Bobby Onco... had an AK-47 with a banana clip a souvenir from Vietnam. I don’t think he had any ammo for it; he used it to impress the media and the marshals. Later during the siege we set up a stovepipe, which caused a panic among the feds. ‘Oh my God! Those Indians have a rocket launcher!’ We certainly didn’t have any rockets and almost no ammunition... It was a puny force that faced the mightiest government in the world with its huge arsenal of weapons!”

— Dennis Banks

Rev John Adams, National Council of Churches



Reverend John Adams of the United Methodist Church and John Thomas of AIM brought mail from the Iranian hostages in 1979 and 1980 to their families. John Adams headed a delegation of 40 persons from the NCC to broker a settlement in Wounded Knee in March 1973, but the FBI and Dick Wilson's Goon Squad broke it up. When Wilson banned the NCC from the reservation, the FBI escorted them off. I entered WK a month later when it appeared an attack by federal forces was imminent.

Wounded Knee 1973

- Army units from the 82nd Airborne
- Two F4 Phantom jets
- Several National Guard helicopters
- 17 armored personnel carriers
- Machine guns, flares
- 150 FBI agents
- Over 200 US marshals
- 100 BIA police
- CIA investigators
- Secret Service agents
- Justice Department agents
- Various federal officials

National Council of Churches, 1973



AIM Leaders



Russell Means (1939-2012) Dennis Banks (1937-2017) Leonard Crow Dog (1942-)



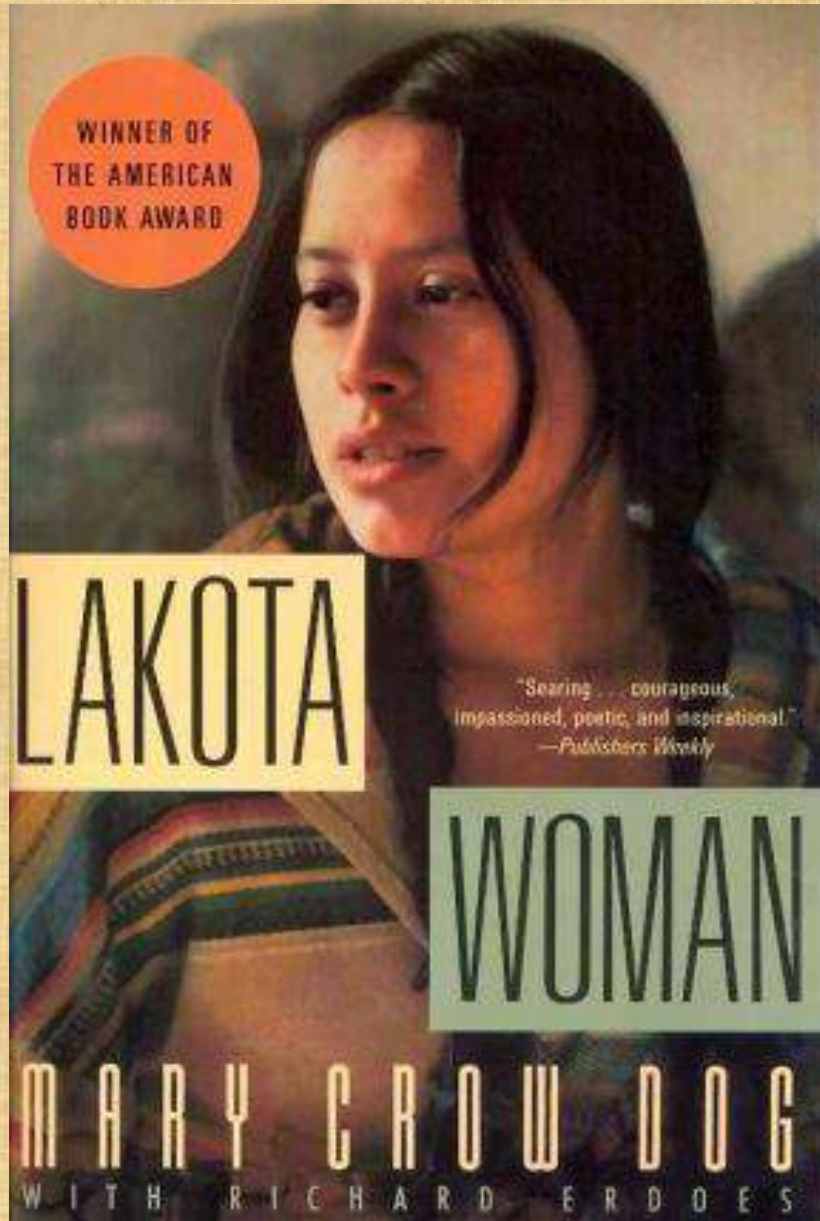
Leonard Crow Dog (1944-)



Carter Camp (1939-2013)

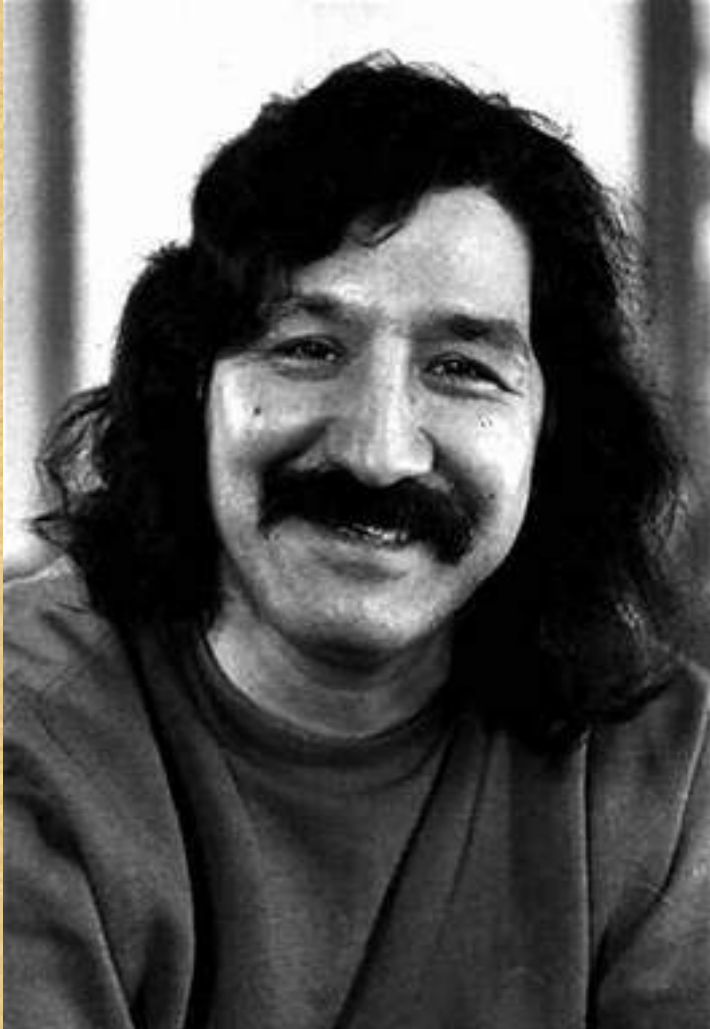


Mary Crow Dog (Mary Brave Bird) (1954-2013)



Lauri Bosma (8) with Pedro Crow Dog (4) July 1977

Leonard Peltier (1944-)



Stan Holder



For STAN the MAILMAN
the true warrior
Donna J. Baker

Annie Mae Aquash (1945-1975)



Anna Mae and Nogeeshik Aquash



Leonard Crow Dog/Sweat Lodge



On April 26, my final day in Wounded Knee, I was confronted by two armed members of the Symbionese Liberation Army, who demanded I join them in bunker duty that night. I replied I was not there to carry a gun and they said they would be coming for me. Diane Bird informed me a month later that they had planned to “bump” me that night and blame it on the feds. I arranged to leave and met with the local people’s negotiating committee, informing them I would return to Washington to try to carry the message on how to handle negotiations. Leonard arranged a sweat lodge as a purification ceremony before I left to meet with the government. Later the FBI and CRS both credited my strategy for bringing the conflict to an end.



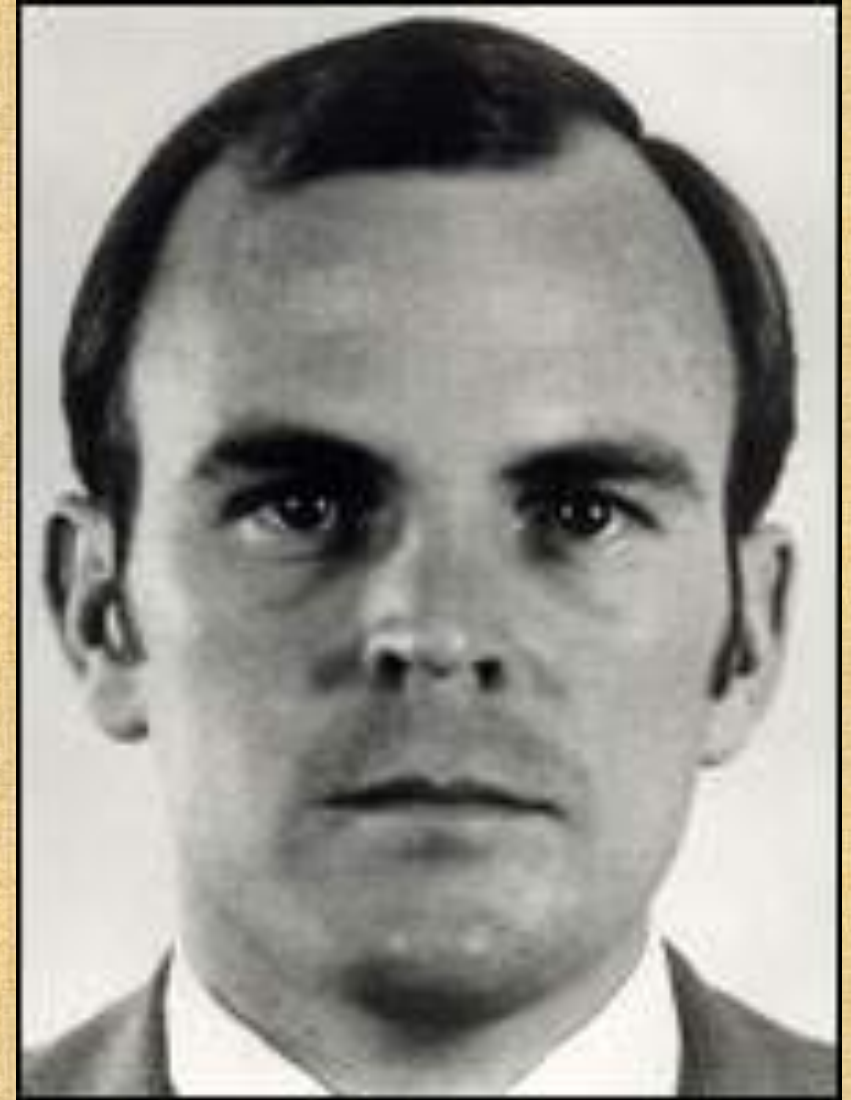
**Signing the Peace Treaty May 5, 1973
Russell Means & Kent Frizell**

Incident at Oglala (June 26, 1975) (Wounded Knee II)



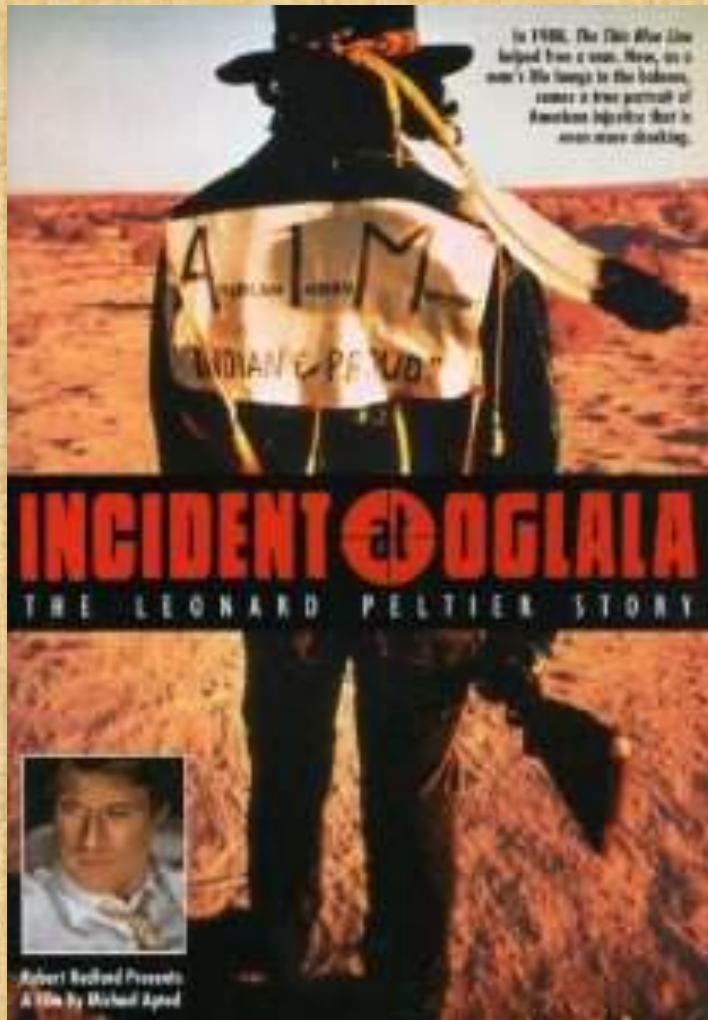
Ronald A Williams 1947-1975

- Gladys Bissonette
- Pedro Bissonette
- Jimmy Eagle
- Ellen Moves Camp
- Phyllis Mesteth
- Lou Bean
- Agnes Lamont
- Dick Wilson
- William Janklow
- Leonard Peltier
- William Kunstler
- Myrtle Poor Bear
- Annie Mae Aquash



Jack R Coler 1947-1975

Incident at Oglala (June 26, 1975)



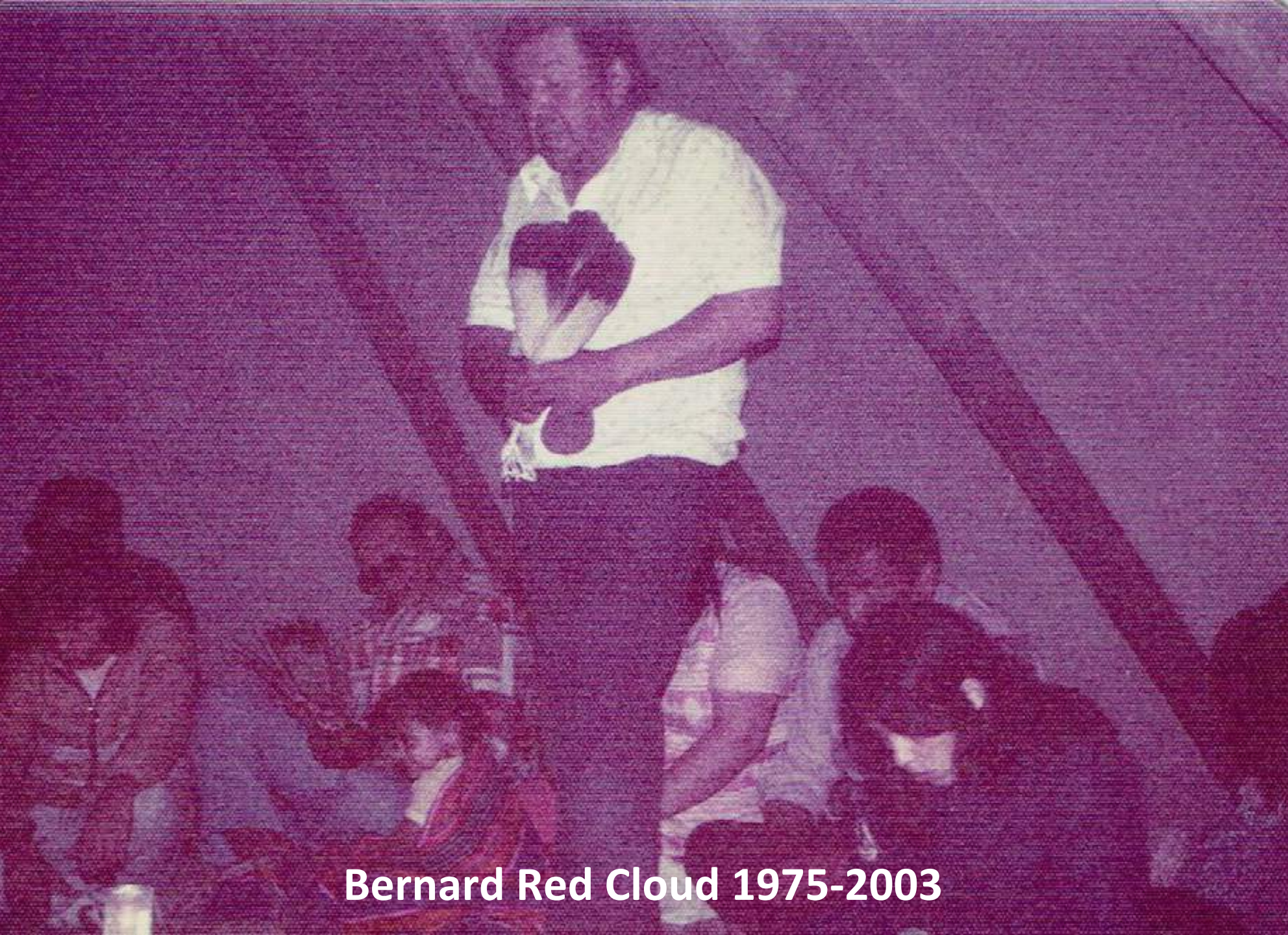
Leonard Peltier 1944-

Bail Refund (July 12, 1977)

OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE PINE RIDGE, S. D. 57770		DETACH AND RETAIN THIS STATEMENT THE ATTACHED CHECK IS IN PAYMENT OF ITEMS DESCRIBED BELOW. IF NOT CORRECT PLEASE NOTIFY US PROMPTLY. NO RECEIPT DESIRED.	
		DELUXE - FORM TWG-3 V-7	
7/12/77	Refund of \$300.00 cash bond/cases dismissed Wounded Knee Defendant.....	\$300.00	

**Refund of \$300.00 cash bond/cases dismissed
Wounded Knee Defendant...\$300.00**

Hilda Cloud, one of the eight Lakota people who planned the occupation at Calico Community Center on February 26, became a tribal judge and authorized return of my bond from 1973. The same tribal attorney who worked with the FBI to prevent my release from the tribal jail in 1973 had misspelled my name, but released the check. I was never charged.



Bernard Red Cloud 1975-2003

Bernard Red Cloud, the direct descendant of Chief Red Cloud, conducted a traditional medicine meeting in my honor in 1976. I was given a name (which I can't recall) which meant "Messenger of the Great Spirit" in recognition of the role I had played in helping to bring about a peaceful resolution of the Wounded Knee conflict. The eagle or "water bird" in Lakota flies closest to Heaven and thus is the messenger of the Great Spirit. The meeting included leaders of the American Indian Church, the only group in the US allowed to use peyote for religious purposes.



With Mary Hoof, then 14, in 1981. Mary had been in Wounded Knee during the entire occupation in 1973.

Sun Dance



- **PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — FBI data shows homicides on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation nearly doubled in 2016 from the previous year.**
- **FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Robert Perry says the spike in killings is linked to an increased use of illegal drugs, specifically methamphetamine.**
- **Perry says there has not been a significant homicide spike in the eight other reservations in South or in North Dakota.**
- **From 1980 to 2000, counties making up Pine Ridge Indian Reservation comprised the poorest of our nation's 3,143 counties. The 2000 census found them the third poorest, not because things got better on Pine Ridge, but because things got worse on two other South Dakota Indian Reservations.**

Pine Ridge Statistics as of 2007

- **Unemployment rate of 80-90%**
- **Per capita income of \$4,000**
- **8 Times the United States rate of diabetes**
- **5 Times the United States rate of cervical cancer**
- **Twice the rate of heart disease**
- **8 Times the United States rate of Tuberculosis**
- **Alcoholism rate estimated as high as 80%**
- **1 in 4 infants born with fetal alcohol syndrome or effects**
- **Suicide rate more than twice the national rate**
- **Teen suicide rate 4 times the national rate**
- **Infant mortality is three times the national rate**
- **Life expectancy on Pine Ridge is the lowest in the United States and the 2nd lowest in the Western Hemisphere. Only**



The Community Relations Service of the US Department of Justice was one of two agencies of Justice that actively worked for a peaceful settlement of the fighting at Wounded Knee. CRS was headed by Gil Pompa, a close friend whose agency worked to overcome the causes of ethnic violence in schools and communities around the country. I worked extensively with both agencies, each of which were targets for elimination under Nixon. Each gave me credit for saving them, CRS because of the successful ending of Wounded Knee and CRD because of our work together on school desegregation.

The other was the Civil Rights Division of Justice, headed by J Stanley Pottinger, with whom I had become friends and negotiated federal civil rights policy when he replaced Leon Panetta as head of the Office for Civil Rights after Panetta was fired by Nixon for enforcing the law.

Another friend, Bert Levine, the Deputy Director of CRS, wrote a book about his agency, crediting the dual-negotiations strategy for ending the standoff. Stan Pottinger and Leon Panetta still appear frequently on national television, even after all these years.

Conclusion

- An enormous firefight was initiated by federal forces after I left for Pine Ridge, ending with the FBI sniper killing of Buddy Lamont at 7:30 a.m. the next morning.
- Following my return to Washington on April 29 after being held illegally in the Pine Ridge jail by the FBI for two nights, I used the next week to contact people in the government and private organizations to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict at Wounded Knee.
- On Monday April 30, everything in DC came to a stop because of the Watergate Massacre.
- I was aided by a delegation of 12 chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy who came from New York to join me in meetings with the South Dakota Senators, Ted Kennedy, and other officials.
- On Wednesday May 2 the Iroquois flew me to the Onandaga Reservation near Syracuse to meet all night with my friend, Chief Lloyd Elm, and the leaders of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, all women who choose and sometimes dismiss the chiefs.
- On Thursday May 3 the 12 Iroquois chiefs and I met with Brad Patterson, whom I knew, in the White House from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. I told him I had been invited into WK by the Indians and considered it an Indian affair, but if there was any shooting on Friday, as both sides expected, I said I would call a press conference and lay the whole blame on Nixon.
- Patterson flew to Wounded Knee on Friday morning and on Saturday, May 5, 1973, an

Aftermath

- Things in Pine Ridge returned to pretty much as they had been (bad) until Wilson lost his re-election in 1976.
- The new administration respected rights of the traditionals and reorganized law enforcement, eliminating the GOON Squad, but FBI harassment of AIM members and other participants continued for several years.
- I was invited to meet with the new Pine Ridge Tribal Police and wrote guidelines for local police advisory committees and advised on enforcement issues. I also arranged with Leo Cardenas of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service to provide training for the new tribal police force. CRS paid for my transportation and offered me their files if I would write a book about the FBI's actions at Wounded Knee.
- Documents released by both the FBI and CRS gave credit to the dual-negotiations strategy I had devised for the successful completion of negotiations at the last possible moment.
- The 9-month trial brought by the FBI against Russell Means and Dennis Banks ended in a mistrial when a juror died after alternates had been dismissed at the end of the case and the FBI refused to accept an 11-juror vote of not guilty. Federal Judge Fred J. Nichols castigated the FBI for misconduct throughout the trial and dismissed all charges because of the official misconduct.
- The 11 remaining jurors came to Washington as a group to ask the FBI to drop any further charges. I was assigned by the NEA to participate in the meeting. The case was not renewed.
- The school superintendent in Pine Ridge asked me to file civil rights charges against his own school district.
- Phyllis and Francis Mesteth are gone, but I stay in touch with many of their children and grandchildren on Facebook. We share good memories, especially of the couple who did so much to help their people.

A Final Note

Five months after the occupation ended, in October 1973, the FBI finally called me at my office five blocks north of the White House, indicating they wanted to come to my home in Alexandria to talk with me about any illegalities I might have witnessed.

I replied that I probably had, but was also concerned about illegalities I'd seen conducted by the FBI. The agent replied, "I'll put down that you refused to meet with us."

I replied that I had not refused to meet with them, but would be delighted to do so, and that I would be happy to answer any questions they might want to ask truthfully, fully, and honestly if only they would meet with me in my office in DC so that I could have one of our attorneys sit in as a witness. They refused to come and I never heard from them again.

I learned later that the FBI had interviewed the manager of our townhouse complex in Alexandria, who knew nothing about me, but was surprised to learn that a group associated with the American Indian Movement was renting a townhouse a block from his office. I never had contact with them.

The deaths of the two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975 represented a tragic moment, amplified by the inexperience and overeagerness of the two young agents, and made worse by FBI reactions and wrongdoings on the reservation and against AIM leadership that culminated in the wrongful life sentence of Leonard Peltier and the undeserved assassination of Annie May Aquash, both of whom I had gotten to know.

That period was a bad time for what is supposed to be our premier law enforcement agency and for human rights activists on the reservation and later across the South. I've known personally in later times a number of outstanding agents, including Bob Moore, who headed the FBI and the Justice Department in Mississippi and led what we've come to know as "Mississippi Burning." Joe Trimbaugh and J Edgar Hoover were disgraces to their agency. Fortunately, the FBI in recent years, especially since the appointment of James Comey in 2013 has been led by responsible and professional officials.



Tommy Arapahoe



Joey Mesteth



Robin Mesteth



David Arapahoe



Joey Mesteth

Pine Ridge Pow Wow

