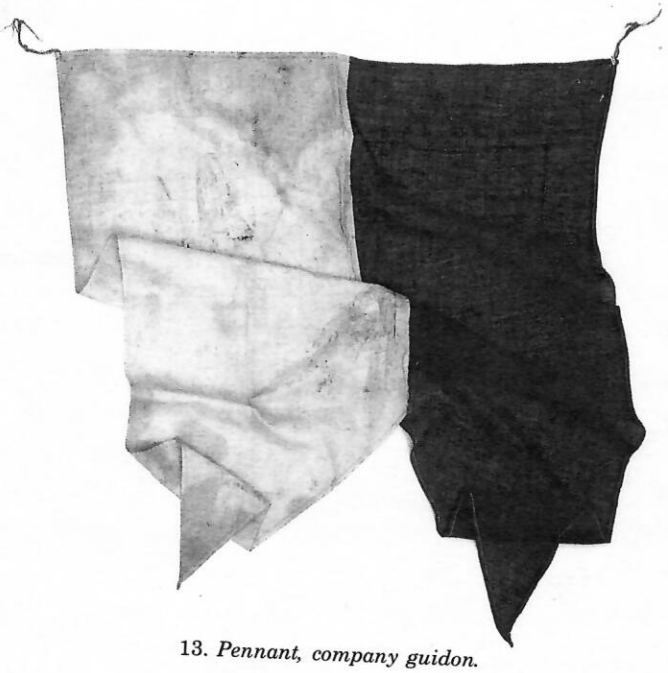
in Wooden Knee - Lost We Forget
Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Trudy Thomas & Jeanne Eder
1990



13. *Pennant, company guidon.*

WOUNDED KNEE: A HISTORY

by
Alvin M. Josephy, Jr.

December 28, 1890. A gentle wind, unusually mild for that time of year, blew across the South Dakota hills. Near Porcupine Butte on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation, a band of Miniconjou Sioux—120 men and 230 women and children, many on ponies, others in horsedrawn wagons or walking beside their travois—topped a ridge and started down its slope. Ahead of them, two miles distant on the lower ground, a long skirmish line of dismounted troopers of the 7th Cavalry, Custer's old regiment, waited for them. In the center of the bluecoats' line, two Hotchkiss guns pointed directly at theoncoming Indians.

The Sioux were tired from traveling and hungry. They had come from their home village on another reservation more than 150 miles to the north, hurrying across the plains and through the Badlands, evading other bluecoat armies to seek safety among the Oglala Sioux who had invited them to Pine Ridge. The Miniconjous did not want to fight. Their chief, Big Foot, known among the Sioux as a man of peace and a leader of wisdom and mild manner, lay dying of pneumonia in one of the wagons, bundled like a mummy in a blanket, an old overcoat, and a scarf, and dripping blood from his nose. A white flag fluttered from a pole attached to his lurching wagon.

No one knew if the soldiers would let them pass. Now that the Miniconjous had reached the Pine Ridge reservation, there was nowhere to go but straight ahead toward the agency where they would meet the Oglalas. The women and children were frightened, and the men were uneasy. But the warriors were determined to defend the people. Instinctively, the young men turned their horses' heads and spread out to right and left, forming a protective battle line opposite the cavalrymen.

The Indians came to a halt, and several Sioux went forward on foot to ask the cavalry commander, Major Samuel M. Whitside, for a parley. He refused to talk to them and demanded to see Big Foot. The chief's wagon moved up to the line of bluecoats, and Whitside leaned over, saw that the Indian leader was sick, and reached down and shook his hand. Turning aside, the officer conversed with his head scout. He wanted to disarm the Indians and take their horses from them, but the scout persuaded him that it would be unsafe to try to do it here. Women and children would be killed resisting, and the warriors would get away. Better, first, bring them into camp.

Through an interpreter, Whitside told Big Foot that he must take his people to the cavalrymen's camp on Wounded Knee Creek, about eight miles away, on the road to the agency. It is not known how much the sick Miniconjou chief understood, but he said, all right, that was where he was going anyway. The officer also asked Big Foot to surrender, and the chief, according to the commander, agreed to do so.

The Sioux were relieved. There would be no fighting. As word of Big Foot's surrender circulated among the soldiers, they, too, felt better. Some of them became friendly to the Indians, and Whitside had Big Foot transferred from his springless wagon to a more comfortable Army ambulance. Together, the Sioux and the troopers made their way across the hills to the cavalrymen's camp on Wounded Knee Creek.

By noon the next day, it was over. Big Foot and almost 250 of his people were dead, scattered across the frozen ground at Wounded Knee. More than 50 other Indians, some of whom would die later, were wounded, and uncounted others who had got away from the campsite were believed to have died or been wounded. Twenty-five cavalrymen were also dead, and 37 soldiers and two civilians (a priest and a halfbreed interpreter) had been wounded. In the whirlwind, a legacy of confusion, hatred, and mistrust was let loose to haunt a century of relations between the Sioux and the American government. In the Indians'

14. *U.S. Army Soldier dressed for winter on the Plains, c. 1890.*

mind, December 29, 1890, the date of the horrendous killing of the Miniconjous' old people and warriors, of their wives and babies, was established as a day of infamy.

What had happened on that terrible morning following the day when Whitside had intercepted the Sioux? What had Big Foot and his people done that brought them to such a sudden and violent end? To get at the answers to those questions, one must look back in history and contemplate the events of the preceding 40 years—the misjudgments, the misunderstandings, the aggressions, and the deceits—that led, almost inexorably, to the appointment at Wounded Knee.

Forty years before, in 1850, the various Sioux tribes, living and hunting on a great part of the northern prairies and plains from Minnesota and Iowa to what are now Montana and Wyoming, were still unconquered and free. By and large, they lived in harmony and balance with all else in their universe, possessing every right that freedom implies. They were free to govern themselves, to conduct their lives, social relations, and economies as they wished, to maintain their cultural values and traditions, and to believe in and practice their own religion.

Already, however, the Sioux were beginning to clash with whites who were invading their country. Emigrants, miners, teamsters, and others, bound for Oregon or California, were crossing their lands in growing numbers, slaying the buffalo and other game on which the Sioux depended, disrupting tribal life, and leaving in their wake dreaded sicknesses that killed the Indian people.

To safeguard the travelers from attempts by the concerned Indians to halt the white men's incursions, the government in 1851 called many of the plains tribes, including members of the Western, or Teton, branch of the Sioux, to a council at Fort Laramie and induced them to permit the use of roads through their lands, as well as the building of military posts to protect the roads. In return for the Indians' agreement not to interfere with white traffic on such highways as the Oregon Trail, the government promised the tribes the payment of annuities and the recognition of their ownership of the territory that each one claimed as its own.

Although the treaty at first was observed conscientiously by the Sioux, aggressive acts against them by intolerant and racist whites who used the Oregon Trail kept tensions high. In 1854, a misunderstanding over the Indians possession of an emigrant's cow and an impulsive attack on a Sioux village by a hot-headed army officer exploded in hostilities, marked the next

year by a savage assault by the Army on an unsuspecting Brule Sioux camp and an invading march by a military expedition through the Sioux country from Fort Laramie to the Missouri River in an attempt to overawe the Indians. Although quiet returned, the Sioux realized that their lands and freedom were no longer safe.

Events soon confirmed their fears. In 1851 and 1858, the Eastern Sioux in Minnesota, pressed by settlers who wanted their lands, and threatened and deceived by corrupt traders, agents, and government negotiators, were forced to cede almost all of their territory to the whites. Starving, lied to, and filled with grievances and frustrations, the desperate Eastern Sioux tribes in 1862 rose up and killed some 350 Minnesota settlers. The sensational outburst was quickly put down by the Army, which captured many of the Indians, hanged 38 of them, and pursued others westward across the northern plains, where some of them found shelter with groups of Hanktonai and Teton Sioux. The Army took the war to these tribes, falling on camps of innocent, buffalo-hunting bands of Yanktonais, as well as Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, and other Teton Sioux, and spreading the conflict to the west side of the Missouri River.

The hostilities on the northern plains soon merged with renewed fighting farther south along the Oregon Trail. Trying to protect supply and communication routes across the central plains during the Civil War, the Army attempted to clear the Brule and Oglala Sioux entirely out of the Platte River Valley, which the Oregon Trail followed. Along with Cheyennes and Arapahos, who were being forced out of their own hunting grounds in Colorado and Kansas (and some of whose people were treacherously attacked and massacred by Colorado volunteers at Sand Creek in 1864), the Brules and Oglalas fought back, thwarting plans to push them off land which the government in the Treaty of 1851 had recognized as belonging to them.

The fighting along the Platte was the start of a series of defensive wars waged by the seven different Teton Sioux tribes to retain their country. Gold was discovered in western Montana, and even before the end of the Civil War, prospectors, supported by the Army, began traveling through Sioux territory, blazing trails to the western mines. In 1865, an unsuccessful military campaign through the heart of the Indians' powder River hunting grounds, and treaties made with a few compliant bands along the Missouri River, failed to halt Sioux resistance to the new incursions. During the next two years, persistent attacks by Sioux warriors under the Oglala chief, Red Cloud, forced the Army to abandon its attempts to protect the Bozeman Trail, a principal route that ran from the Oregon Trail through the Powder River hunting grounds to the northwestern gold fields.

To the Sioux, a treaty signed with the government at Fort Laramie in 1868 appeared to acknowledge a total Indian victory, for, according to their understanding, it promised to bar troops and other whites from their country, let the Indians live in peace, and allow them to trade at posts along the Platte River. But there were other provisions, and the Indians later insisted that the whites did not tell them truthfully all that was in the treaty.

For one thing, the Sioux, in signing the document, relinquished their right to much of the land that had been recognized as theirs by the Treaty of 1851, retaining only the territory of the present state of South Dakota west of the Missouri River. That area was designated as a Great Sioux Reservation, and the treaty called for all the Western Sioux to move onto it and, under the supervision and authority of agents, to accept individual family allotments and settle down to become farmers like white men. Any future cession of reservation land, it was noted, would have to be approved by three-fourths of all the adult male Indians. At the same time, another provision, somewhat confusedly, reserved the right of the Indians to continue to hunt on lands they had relinquished outside of the new reservation where they had traditionally hunted.

Although the Sioux did not realize it, the potential now existed for the government to limit severely not only the tribes" ownership and use of land, but also their freedom. The formal existence of a reservation, onto which the Indians would have to move, set the stage for control of them by agents and troops and for their enforced "civilizing" and assimilation by missionaries and teachers.

Signs of what lay ahead became evident almost immediately. Still determined to clear the Indians out of the Platte Valley, where the trans-continental railroad was now being built, the government soon after the signing of the treaty prohibited the Indians from trading at posts along the Platte River and ordered them to report to agencies on the new reservation. The resulting turmoil caused a split among the Sioux. The more peacefully-inclined Oglalas and Brules, following Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, were tired of fighting and settled down at the agencies. At first, as a concession to the chiefs, who claimed they had been lied to at the Fort Laramie Treaty meeting, the agencies were located outside the

reservation boundaries, giving the chiefs the ability to trade at the Platte River posts and thus the illusion that they still possessed the freedom of movement. But, very shortly, those Indians and their agencies were moved to sites inside the reservation. The other Oglalas and Brules, as well as the Yanktonai and the other five Teton tribes—the Miniconjous, Hunkpapas, Sans Arcs, Two Kettles, and Blackfeet Sioux—stayed north of the Platte River to avoid the whites and ignoring the agencies, continued in freedom to follow their old hunting life.

Peace was short-lived. In a flagrant violation of the 1868 Treaty, an expedition led by Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer invaded the Sioux reservation in 1874 and discovered gold in the Black Hills, the most sacred part of the tribes' lands. A stampede followed, and neither the Indians nor troops could stem the torrent of whites who entered the reservation. To try to avoid hostilities, the government offered to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux. The Indians, largely under the influence of the non-agency hunting bands, whom the whites called "hostiles," refused to bargain away the Hills, and in November 1875, the frustrated Grant Administration, to get the "hostiles" under control, ordered them to come in to the agencies by January 31, 1876, or be driven in by the Army.

The hunting bands, led by such chiefs as Crazy Horse (Oglala) and Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa), either could not or would not come in on such short notice in mid-winter, and in March troops started after them. The campaign to round up the Sioux reached a climax on June 25, 1876, when the Indians killed Custer and more than 250 members of his 7th Cavalry who had rashly attacked a huge concentration of their bands at the Little Bighorn River in Montana. Thereafter, as the bands split up, punitive military expeditions pursued them through the fall and winter. Sitting Bull and many of his followers escaped to Canada, where the Hunkpapa chief, who was also the spiritual leader of his people, remained in exile until 1881. After his return to the United States, he was confined at Fort Randall, and in 1883 was permitted to rejoin his followers at the Standing Rock agency on the Sioux reservation.

Given little time by the pursuing troops to hunt or rest, the other bands were beset by hunger, cold, and sickness. Time and again, they had to fight off soldiers who overtook them. Eventually, one by one, the bands gave themselves up at the agencies. The last to surrender were Crazy Horse and his Oglalas who, though starving, rode proudly into Fort Robinson near the Red Cloud agency in May, 1877. Four months later, suspected of planning to escape and regain his freedom, Crazy Horse was murdered in a scuffle in the guard room at the fort. With his death passed one of the greatest war chiefs and patriots of the Sioux Nation.

The fortunes of all the Western Sioux, meanwhile, had deteriorated rapidly. They had lost their freedom, and also the Black Hills. Ignoring the provision of the 1868 Treaty that said that no new cession of Sioux land could be made without the approval of three-fourths of the adult Sioux males, government commissioners in 1877 bullied the "non-hostile" peace chiefs at the agencies into signing a new agreement, which once again was not fully described to them. Threatened with the loss of their rations or with exile to the Indian Territory (today's Oklahoma) if they refused to sign, the chiefs, in the absence of the "hostile" bands that were then fighting the soldiers, gave away the Black Hills and a large part of the western side of the reservation.

With the Sioux beaten militarily and reduced to the status of captives, the government's policy toward them became one of hastening their assimilation by destroying their culture and the age-old structures of their society. The bands settled down at different sites on the Great Sioux Reservation, still looking for guidance from their chiefs and spiritual leaders. White agents, often corrupt and incompetent, as well as missionaries and teachers—all of them supported by the nearby presence of troops ready to enforce their orders—held complete power over the Indians, asserting their authority by punishments and threats of punishment, including the withholding of food, imprisonment, or banishment to the Indian Territory.

Without freedom of movement, the peoples' old routines of daily life became a memory of the past. The young men could no longer make war or hunt buffalo, and idleness and dependency on government rations sapped their morale and self-respect. The rations themselves were usually so meager and of such poor quality that malnutrition, sickness, and even starvation were common. The agents tried to teach the Sioux men to farm—considered women's work by the plains tribes—and some attempted to raise crops. Grasshoppers, drought, hail, and inexperience all conspired against them, however, and the results were slim and frustrating.

At the same time, the agents, following orders from Washington, did everything possible to undermine the traditional organization of the tribes and the influence of the chiefs and medicine men. Indian police forces, appointed by the agents, competed with the chiefs for authority

and acquired much of the power exercised formerly by special Sioux societies, which lost their reasons for existence and withered away. Ignoring and humiliating the chiefs, the agents chose lesser men with whom to deal, forcing the Indians to look to the new appointees to protect their interests. As the peoples' ties with the old chiefs weakened, the agents encouraged them also to move away from their chiefs' camps and spread out over the reservation as independent families.

Meanwhile, Sioux cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices were attacked as barbaric and pagan. In an assault on the Indians' freedom of religion, ceremonies and sacred rituals like those of the Sun Dance were prohibited. The practices of medicine men, both medical and spiritual, were banned, and Sioux holy men who defied the ban were arrested. The singing of Sioux songs, the telling of Sioux legends and lore to the young, the perpetuation of all manifestations of Sioux culture were discouraged, and Sioux children were taken from their families, often forcibly, and sent away to distant boarding schools to be taught to be like whites.

The harsh years of enforced assimilation demoralized and again divided the Sioux. Some, seeing no alternative, decided to try to follow the white men's road as the only path offering hope for the future. Cooperating with the agents and missionaries, sending their children to school and accepting Christianity, they became known as progressives. The others, still clinging to their traditional beliefs and customs, had as little as possible to do with the agents, who watched them suspiciously and regarded them as nonprogressives and potentially dangerous.

In the 1880s, new tensions arose that brought the two groups together temporarily in common defense of the reservation against the whites. Settlers and real estate developers in eastern South Dakota, demanding that the Sioux give up more of their land, were joined by politicians and investment interests in the East who pointed out that the Great Sioux Reservation, which extended solidly from the northern to the southern border of South Dakota, cut off the Black Hills from the rest of the Territory and barred the building of a railroad west of the Missouri River. Washington supported the new assault on the Indians' lands, and in 1883 a government commission went west to try to talk the Sioux into ceding about half of the reservation and agree to the breaking up of the rest of it into a number of separate reservations that would geographically divide the different Lakota-speaking Teton tribes from each other. The commissioners returned to Washington, claiming that they had won the Indians' approval, but the Sioux, supported by Indian rights organizations in the East, contested the claim as fraudulent. It was then discovered that the commissioners had induced fewer than 400 Sioux—rather than the three-fourths of all adult males required under the still-applicable Treaty of 1868—to sign the agreement, and when another attempt to gather enough signatures failed, Congress dropped the matter.

The passage of the Dawes Allotment Act in 1887, however, provided a new opportunity to those who coveted the Sioux lands. Under the Act, reservations were to be broken up and the assimilation of Indians hastened by allotting the Indians separate parcels of land which they and their families would own and be able to farm like white men. After all the allotments had been made, the surplus land would be thrown open to white settlers under the Homestead laws. Making use of the Dawes Act, special legislation was framed to achieve the goals that had been sought unsuccessfully in 1883 with regard to the Sioux reservation. However, the legislation reversed the order of procedure called for by the Dawes Act. Instead of first making the allotments to the Indians and then selling to whites what was left over, it directed that negotiations be conducted first with the Indians for "surplus" land, which it was estimated would total some nine million acres.

The Sioux no longer trusted the government, and when negotiators appeared at the agencies, many progressives stood firmly with the non-progressives and refused to sign the agreement. In 1889, however, another group of commissioners, headed by Major General George Crook, promised the Sioux more money and many benefits and finally wore the Indians down. Crook's commission won enough signatures from the progressive Indians to satisfy Congress that three-fourths of the adult males had approved the land agreement. Approximately half of the Great Sioux Reservation was then opened to white settlement, and on the unceded land, six separate reservations—Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Rosebud, and Pine Ridge—were created for the Teton Sioux tribes and the Yanktonai.

The new loss of land infuriated many of the non-progressive Indians, who blamed the progressives for caving in to the whites. But more blows were to come. Two weeks after the commissioners left South Dakota, orders were received cutting down the Indians' rations drastically. The reduction had nothing to do with the land agreement—a Congressional economy move had cut the Sioux appropriation for the fiscal year 1890—but the

Indians, already close to starvation, regarded it as another betrayal. The government had gotten the land, and now it would let the Indians die of hunger. Already under attack, the progressives suffered other embarrassments. General Crook died in March, 1890, and none of the benefits he had promised the Indians ever came through. Also in March, reservation land designated as surplus,

15. *Shirt, deerskin, Pawnee, c. 1890.*

and therefore ceded, was thrown open to whites without giving Indians who lived there a chance to claim allotments on it. The confusion caused by the arbitrary action added to the Indians' resentments.

The winter of 1889-90 was a hard one for the Sioux. In addition to hunger, depression over the continued betrayals and loss of land, as well as despair and general hopelessness about the future, the Indians were battered by epidemics of whooping cough, measles, and influenza that took many lives. As spring approached, there seemed to be no end to their misery, no way out of their travail.

In March, in the depths of their despondency, the people were stirred by exciting news. During the previous fall, rumors had reached many of the western tribes, including the Sioux, about an Indian Messiah who had appeared in Nevada, working miracles and preaching of the coming of a new world without whites, where the Indians would be happy and free again. In their adversity, some of the Sioux had grasped at the story and had sent a delegation of eleven emissaries from Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River to Nevada to look into it. Returning in March, the emissaries reported that the rumors were true.

A Northern Paiute sheepherder and shaman named Wovoka on the Walker River reservation had fallen ill, it appeared, and during the solar eclipse had had a vision in which he was transported to heaven. There, God had shown him a radiant world where there were no whites and where all the dead Indians and the former huge herds of buffalo and wild game were still alive. This happy world, Wovoka was told, was already coming through the heavens from the west toward America. By adopting certain prayers and practices, the Indians still on earth would be lifted in the air as the new world met and rolled over the present one, obliterating it and driving the white men back across the ocean to where they had come from. The Indians would then be lowered to an eternal life of abundance and peace among their returned ancestors, relatives, and friends in the new world. Charged with conveying to the Indians what he had seen and been told, Wovoka after his vision had returned to earth as a Messiah who would rescue the tribes from their despair and suffering.

The religion he preached was a pacifistic one, based in large part on tenets of Christianity. To deserve the new world, which was to arrive in the spring of 1891, his Indian audiences were admonished not to fight among themselves or

16. *Bustle, Arapaho, c. 1885.*

with white men, but to be honest, peaceful, and chaste and to follow a moralistic code of conduct closely resembling that of the Biblical Ten Commandments. Specifically, Wovoka taught the Indians prayers, songs, and a special dance they were to perform at certain intervals that would enable them to receive advance glimpses of the wonderful new world that was approaching. To convince his visitors, like the Sioux, that he was, indeed, a Messiah speaking the truth, he used his shamanistic powers and knowledge to perform deeds that appeared to be miracles.

Initially, most of the Sioux people were skeptical of the reports of the new religion that their emissaries brought back to them. But the hardships of the winter continued into the summer of 1890, and new threats arose to increase their anxiety. First of all, a severe drought struck South Dakota, drying up the Indians' crops. At the same time, census-takers decided that the government was supplying more rations than there were Sioux, and the rations were cut again.

Starvation and sickness increased, and the death toll of the people, particularly of babies, children, and elders, rose. In the Indians' desperation, quarrels broke out about boundaries and living sites on the new reservations. And, finally, troops began to appear on the borders of the reservations, bringing unease and fear to the tribes that were now separated from each other. One group of cavalrymen, arriving to keep an eye on the Indians at Pine Ridge, established a camp just outside the western boundary of that reservation. Other soldiers, ordered to protect whites who were settling on the newly-ceded land, based themselves on the Cheyenne River, threateningly close to the reservation of that name and also to a band of non-progressive Miniconjous led by Chief Big Foot who had vigorously opposed the land agreement in 1889.

During the summer, a 41-year-old medicine man of Big Foot's band named Kicking Bear visited the Arapaho Indians in Wyoming, who had adopted Wovoka's religion and were zealously conducting the dance that he had prescribed to his followers. An Oglala from Pine Ridge who had married a Miniconjou and joined her band, Kicking Bear had been one of the Sioux emissaries to Nevada and, with his brother-in-law, Short Bull, a Brule from Rosebud, had become an ardent disciple of the Messiah. Observing the Arapahos, Kicking Bear acquired further information on how to conduct the dance of the new religion.

Garbed in loose-fitting Ghost Shirts, painted with stars, crescents, birds, and other symbols of the religion, and believed to make the wearers invulnerable to bullets, the Arapahos clasped hands and danced sideways in a great circle, singing for the return of the dead Indians and the buffalo. The dancers began slowly. Then the tempo increased. Individuals danced by themselves, praying, falling in a trance, and receiving visions in which they saw the happy land described by the Messiah.

Returning to the Sioux in August with what he had learned from the Arapahos, Kicking Bear stopped at Pine Ridge and found many of the distraught Oglalas now eager to adopt the new religion. Following Kicking Bear's instructions, dance groups were formed on different parts of the reservation, and numerous Oglalas were soon holding dances from morning till night. Their

17. *Dress, deerskin, Southern Plains, c. 1890 (?).*

enthusiasm was contagious and, like a prairie fire, the religion spread to the Rosebud reservation, where Short Bull organized Brule dance groups, and then to Cheyenne River, where Kicking Bear showed the members of Big Foot's band and others how to conduct the dances. In October, Sitting Bull invited Kicking Bear to bring information about the new religion to the Standing Rock reservation. The great Hunkpapa chief, living among his followers in a camp on Grand River, had been a thorn in the side of Standing Rock's dictatorial agent, James McLaughlin, ever since he had been allowed to live on the reservation in 1883, following his return from Canada and confinement at Fort Randall. Determined to destroy the chief's prestige and influence, agent McLaughlin was delighted when the government permitted the chief to leave the reservation and go on tour with the Wild West show of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. McLaughlin wished it would rid him of the chief forever, but when the tour ended, Sitting Bull returned to his followers on Grand River on the reservation and revived his feud with the agent.

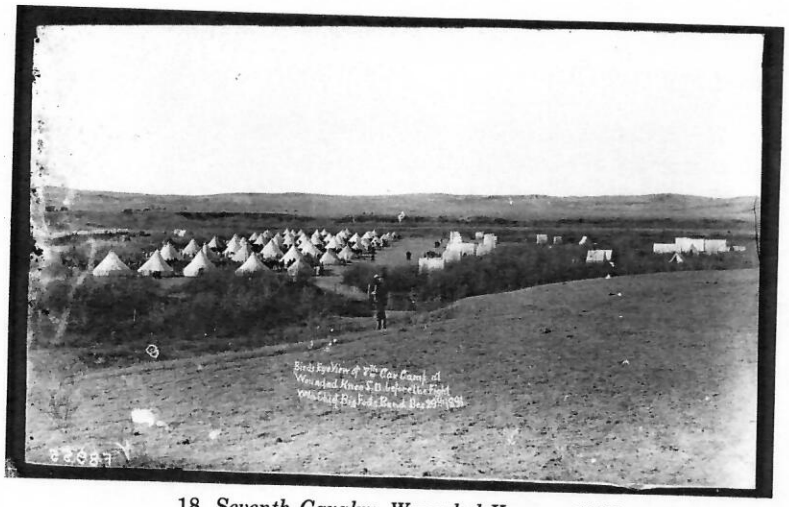
Sitting Bull had his doubts about the new religion of Wovoka, but under Kicking Bear's tutelage, his followers took it up and began to dance. Soon McLaughlin heard about it, and had the Indian police eject Kicking Bear from the reservation. The ousting played into the hands of Sitting Bull, who whether or not he believed in Wovoka's teachings, took over the leadership of the new religion on Standing Rock. As the dances continued to gain adherents, McLaughlin threatened Sitting Bull, but to no avail. Finally, the agent asked his superiors in the Interior Department to order the confinement of the defiant chief in a military prison. In the East, Sitting Bull was too famous an Indian, however, and, afraid of public criticism, the Secretary of the Interior hesitated to initiate such a drastic action.

In the meantime, the anti-white aspects and the highly emotional dances of the new religion alarmed the agents at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River and spread fear among the non-Indian populations of North and South Dakota and Nebraska who adjoined the reservations. Few whites could comprehend the essentially non-violent nature of the Indians' movement, which was becoming known awesomely as the Ghost Dance, and most were sure that it was the ominous prelude to a Sioux uprising. Newly-appointed to their jobs by the incoming administration of President Benjamin Harrison and largely unknowledgeable in dealing with Indians, the agents tried unsuccessfully to halt the dancing. As the Sioux flaunted their defiance, and the dancing continued, the agents, as well as newspaper editors and fearful business and political leaders in the white communities in the region, appealed to Washington to send troops onto the reservations to control the Indians.

On October 31, President Harrison, through the War Department, ordered Brigadier General Thomas H. Ruger, commanding the Department of Dakota, to investigate the situation. At Standing Rock, Ruger met with agent McLaughlin and, agreeing that the Ghost Dance would collapse there if Sitting Bull were removed from the reservation, laid plans to have the agency's Indian police force, supported by troops from nearby Fort Yates, arrest the chief. At Cheyenne River, Ruger found conditions less threatening, but ordered reinforcements sent to Fort Bennett, near the reservation's agency.

Meanwhile, the inexperienced agent at Pine Ridge had increasing difficulties with the Ghost Dancers on his reservation and finally panicked after a near-violent confrontation with some 200 of them who defied his authority. "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy," he wired the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington. "We need protection and we need it now."

The Secretary of the Interior agreed at last to ask the President and the War Department for assistance, and on November 17, many elements of the U.S. Army began heading for the Sioux reservations to overawe and suppress the Ghost Dancers. By order of Major General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the military Division of Missouri, 170 members of the 9th Cavalry Regiment and 200 infantrymen of the 2d and 8th Regiments, with a Hotchkiss cannon and a Gatling gun, arrived on the Pine Ridge reservation on November 20 and established a tent camp at the agency. On the same day, 230 members of the 9th Cavalry and the 8th Infantry, with another Hotchkiss cannon, reached the Rosebud agency. The following week saw the arrival of more troops: four additional companies of the 2d Infantry, another troop of the 9th Cavalry, the entire 7th Cavalry, which Custer had once commanded, and a battery of the 1st Artillery all joined the huge camp at Pine Ridge. At Rosebud, four companies of the 21st Infantry reinforced the troops already there. In addition, Miles ordered units in New Mexico, Kansas, and Montana to the two reservations and authorized the enlistment of two troops of Indian scouts from among the mixed-breed and progressive Sioux at Pine Ridge. The entire force was placed under the command of Brigadier General John R. Brooke, who came to



18. *Seventh Cavalry, Wounded Knee, c. 1890.*

Pine Ridge from Omaha, where he commanded the Department of the Platte.

The overwhelming show of power—more than 1,000 soldiers occupied the tent city at Pine Ridge—was intended to provide protection to the agencies and to the "loyal" or "friendly" Indians. In addition, the troops' arrival had another impact. Fearful of being attacked by the soldiers, many Sioux abandoned the dance groups and, obeying General Brooke's directions, moved into the agencies to join the progressives and establish tipi villages near the troops' camps.

The first reaction of the more dedicated Oglala and Brule Ghost Dancers on both Pine Ridge and Rosebud was one of anger. Uniting into a single camp of some 500 lodges, they moved with Short Bull, Kicking Bear, and other chiefs into the rugged Badlands in the northwestern corner of the Pine Ridge reservation and, taking refuge on a plateau in a natural fortress known as the Stronghold, continued their dancing. During the following days, General Brooke sent a stream of emissaries to them—progressives, halfbreeds, and a well-liked priest from the Holy Rosary Mission at Pine Ridge—promising them food and other inducements if they would stop dancing and come in to the Pine Ridge agency. At first, the dancers resisted the emissaries' pleas, reminding them of the Indians' many grievances against the whites and complaining that the Army was now trying to stop the peaceful practice of their religion. The holdouts' resolve gradually weakened, however, and, suffering from hunger and cold, many of the chiefs and their followers began to leave the Stronghold and head back to the agency. By mid-December, only the militant Short Bull, Kicking Bear, and some 200 other diehards were left in the Badlands, fighting off occasional attacks by groups of local militia and cowboys, but continuing to dance.

On the Standing Rock reservation farther north, McLaughlin, meanwhile, was delaying the arrest of Sitting Bull until the arrival of freezing weather and snow when he believed the Hunkpapas would be less inclined to leave their cabins and risk a war in defense of their chief. While McLaughlin waited, General Miles, who had no use for the civilian agents on the reservations and felt that the Army should be in charge of the Indians, took matters into his own hands. Convinced that Sitting Bull was responsible for the entire Ghost Dance problem and that his removal would go far toward ending the threat to the whites, he hit on the idea of having the chief's former employer, Buffalo Bill Cody, talk him into surrendering. Armed with an order for the arrest of Sitting Bull, Cody arrived at Standing Rock, only to be thwarted by McLaughlin. Resenting the interference by the showman, McLaughlin complained by wire to the Secretary of the Interior, who had the President telegraph orders back to the reservation suspending Cody's assignment. The former scout left Standing Rock, feeling confused and victimized.

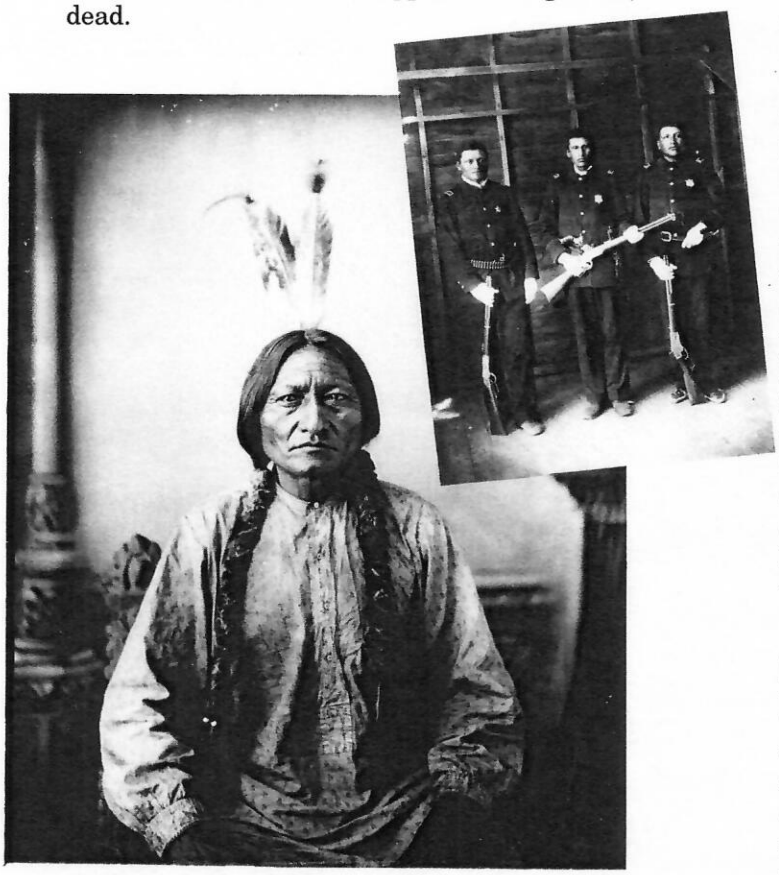
Despite the rebuff over Buffalo Bill, Miles still held the upper hand. Shortly after Cody's departure, McLaughlin was instructed by Washington not to arrest any Indian without orders from the Secretary of the Interior or the military—meaning Miles. On December 10, with his authority made clear, Miles moved again. Persuaded that the situation on the reservations was growing more dangerous, that Sitting Bull was trying to unite all the tribes of the northern plains in an uprising, and that he should be arrested at once, he ordered Lieutenant Colonel William F. Drum, the commanding officer of Fort Yates near the Standing Rock agency, to seize the chief.

Drum had already been cooperating with McLaughlin in forming a plan for the chief's arrest, and they now prepared to put it into effect. The date set for the arrest was pushed forward when McLaughlin learned that Kicking Bear and Short Bull had invited Sitting Bull to visit the Brule and Oglala Ghost Dancers at the Stronghold on the Pine Ridge reservation. The prospect of the influential chief joining forces with the defiant Sioux at the Stronghold alarmed McLaughlin and Drum, and they determined to seize Sitting Bull before he could leave Standing Rock.

In the early morning hours of December 15, the agent sent a force of some 40 Indian policemen through a cold, drizzling rain to Sitting Bull's camp on Grand River. Behind them, two troops of the 8th Cavalry from Fort Yates, under Captain E.G. Fechet, followed to about ten miles from

Sitting Bull's camp, where they waited to support the police.

At dawn, the policemen emerged from trees fringing the river and rushed Sitting Bull's log cabin, waking him up and telling him that they had come to take him to the agency. The chief offered no resistance, but got dressed and, surrounded by the policemen, left the house. Outside, a huge crowd of his Hunkpapa followers, whose cabins and tipis were clustered around his home, gathered excitedly about the chief, trying to protect him and urging him not to go with the agency police. Heeding their cries, Sitting Bull suddenly halted and refused to go further. As the police, headed by Lieutenant Bull Head, tried to pull and push him along, the crowd became wild with anger. A shot rang out, striking Bull Head in the side. As he fell, he fired his revolver, hitting Sitting Bull in the chest. Another policeman, Sergeant Red Tomahawk, who had been pushing Sitting Bull from behind, shot the chief in the back of the head. Sitting Bull, the great chief and medicine man of the Hunkpapa Sioux and to the whites the most famous and feared Indian in the country, dropped to the ground, dead.



19. *Sitting Bull, c. 1883.*
20. *Indian Policemen, c. 1890 (?). The man in the center is Red Tomahawk.*
21. *Sitting Bull's Cane, Sioux, c. 1885.*

Consternation struck the Indians who had been swirling about him. In the altercation that followed, the chief's enraged people attacked the policemen with guns, clubs, and knives. The police fought back, and men on both sides were killed and wounded. During the struggle, the noise of the gunshots and the shouting and crying were like signals to Sitting Bull's trained horse, which Buffalo Bill had given him during his days with the Wild West show, and incongruously it began to perform circus tricks. At length, Sitting Bull's followers, mourning the death of their chief, withdrew into the trees along the river, and the battered policemen retreated with their casualties into Sitting Bull's cabin and sent a messenger to Fechet's troops for help.

The soldiers hurried to the scene, engaging in a brief skirmish with scores of angry Hunkpapas who resisted them from the trees lining the river and from a knob near the settlement. Firing their Hotchkiss gun at the Indians' positions, Fechet's men finally forced the Sioux to withdraw up the Grand River, then returned to the Standing Rock agency with the dead and wounded policemen and the body of Sitting Bull—which was wrapped in canvas and buried unceremoniously in the post cemetery at Fort Yates.

Afraid that Sitting Bull's followers who had retreated from Fechet's troops would pose a new peril by joining, and thus strengthening, the Ghost Dancers on the Cheyenne River reservation or at the Stronghold on the Pine Ridge reservation, McLaughlin sent messengers to find the fugitives and persuade them to come in to the Standing Rock agency. The emissaries overtook the destitute and wounded refugees, leaderless, hungry, and frightened, on the Cheyenne River reservation and managed to talk about half of them into returning to Standing Rock. The rest, numbering close to 200, continued their flight south, hoping to find safety with Big Foot's band of Miniconjou Ghost Dancers on the Cheyenne River along the southern boundary of the reservation.

Among the whites, Big Foot was considered almost as dangerous a threat to peace as Sitting Bull had been. The leader of a group of devout Ghost Dancers, whom white observers had regarded as "wild" and defiant, Big Foot had moved his band far up the Cheyenne River to get away from the agency and to practice the new religion without interference. In the following weeks, a military emissary had been able to

induce the only other important body of Ghost Dancers on the reservation, led by Big Foot's friend, Hump, to give up their dancing and go in to the agency. Hump's defection had disheartened Big Foot, and he, too, along with a number of his followers, had stopped dancing and turned away from the Messiah's religion. Whites were unaware of his change of heart, however, and because his band, still composed of many ardent Ghost Dancers, lived in freedom and continued to avoid control by the agent, they viewed him as a menace.

Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, the commander of some 200 troops stationed just west of Big Foot's band to protect white-owned ranches on the Cheyenne and Belle Fourche rivers outside the reservation's boundaries, visited with Big Foot on several occasions and found the chief and his people peaceful and offering no problems. If anything, the officer decided, Big Foot was a cooperative Indian, able to exercise a helpful, moderating influence on those elements in the band who were still dancing under the leadership of a zealous medicine man named Yellow Bird.

22. *Jacket, man's, Sioux, c. 1890.*

During the second week of December, Big Foot, whom the various Sioux tribes knew for his ability as a peacemaker in settling disputes among themselves, received a message from Red Cloud and other Oglala chiefs, offering him 100 ponies if he would come to Pine Ridge and help restore harmony among different factions on that reservation. The day, however, when the government issued rations and annuities at the Cheyenne River agency was approaching, and Big Foot and his fellow council members decided that they would first lead their people, who were running out of food, down to the agency to draw their much-needed rations and would then determine whether to accept the Oglala chiefs' invitation.

On December 15, Big Foot's band started downriver to the Cheyenne River agency. It was the day that Sitting Bull was killed. Two days later, Sumner received a vaguely-worded message from department headquarters, informing him that the arrest of Big Foot would be "desirable," but conveying no order to him to make the arrest. Shortly afterward, the officer learned the reason for his superiors' suddenly-heightened interest in Big Foot. Scouts informed him that a large body of Hunkpapa refugees, fleeing from Standing Rock after Sitting Bull's death, were about to link up with Big Foot's band and intended to ask the Miniconjous to go with them to the Oglala and Brule Ghost Dancers at the Stronghold on Pine Ridge. At that moment, General Brooke at Pine Ridge was about to send a force of some 500 "friendly" Sioux to the Stronghold to try to persuade Kicking Bear, Short Bull, and the rest of the dancers who were still there to come in to the agency. The last thing he would welcome would be the reinforcing of the Pine Ridge Ghost Dancers by Big Foot's Miniconjous and the Standing Rock Hunkpapas.

Sumner vacillated, not certain what he should do, then started his troops down the Cheyenne River after Big Foot. On December 21, he overtook the Miniconjou band, finding that it had already met the fleeing Hunkpapas. Their report of the murder of Sitting Bull and of the fighting with the Army at Standing Rock had alarmed the Miniconjous, thoroughly frightening the women and children and making the men angry. The tension had mounted higher when Big Foot had learned at almost the same time that a force of soldiers, other than Sumner's, was marching toward the Miniconjous, up the Cheyenne River from the direction of the agency. They were four companies of the 7th Infantry under Colonel H.C. Merriam, ordered to effect a junction with Sumner. The Indians had become confused. Why was the Army threatening and killing the Sioux, who were doing nothing but dancing peacefully? The upshot had been that most of the refugee Hunkpapas had decided to avoid further trouble and go to the Cheyenne River agency. Only 38 of Sitting Bull's people, Sumner discovered, had joined Big Foot's band.

Planning to keep Big Foot under observation, Sumner had no difficulty persuading the chief to turn his people around and, escorted by his

troops, return upriver. Even though they risked hunger and starvation by not drawing their rations, the Miniconjous were too uneasy about the intentions of the soldiers coming upriver to want to continue toward the agency. On the way back with Sumner, their apprehension intensified, and when they reached the site of their own village, they were so fearful and wrought up that to avoid a fight, Sumner left them there overnight, with a promise from Big Foot, whom Sumner trusted, that he would restrain the young men and come to Sumner's army camp the next day for a council.

That night, Sumner received a message from General Miles, who had established his headquarters at Rapid City. Miles warned him to watch out for some hostile Indians who were reported to be coming down from the north to threaten the whites' settlements. Believing that Sumner had already arrested Big Foot and his band—although Sumner had never received orders to do so—Miles also told him to bring the prisoners to Fort Meade near Rapid City.

Sumner faced a predicament. In the Miniconjous' high state of tension, any attempt to force them to go to Fort Meade as prisoners, he felt, would result in a bloody battle with a large loss of Indians' lives and the probable escape of many of the most dangerous warriors. Moreover, he did not think that he had enough men to move the unwilling band to Fort Meade and at the same time cope with hostile Indians who were supposed to be coming down from the north (that report, eventually, proved to be false). The best solution, Sumner decided, was to induce Big Foot—about whose situation and motives he was more realistic than Miles—to take his people in to the Cheyenne River agency where he had originally been heading.

The next morning, the Standing Rock Indians, fearing that they had got themselves into a trap between the troops of Sumner and Merriam, fled from Big Foot's village, and the Miniconjou chief postponed visiting Sumner while he tried unsuccessfully to find the frightened Hunkpapas. When Big Foot failed to appear at Sumner's camp as he had promised to do, the officer sent an interpreter and a local white rancher, who knew Big Foot, to find out what the trouble was. Far from diplomatic, the rancher panicked the Indians by telling them that they were about to be sent to Fort Bennett, the army post near the Cheyenne River agency, and that if they refused to go, the soldiers would shoot them.

Ignoring the appointment with Sumner, the alarmed members of the band's council met with Big Foot to consider their options, deciding finally to head south immediately to the protection of the chiefs at Pine Ridge. At first, Big Foot, who was not feeling well, resisted making the long journey, preferring to go peaceably to the Cheyenne River agency. But the other headmen argued for accepting the Oglalas' invitation, and Big Foot finally agreed. During the night of December 23, the band struck off for the south, leaving in their rear Sumner's troops, as well as those of Merriam.

Big Foot's escape from the forces on the Cheyenne River infuriated General Miles, who was now sure not only that the Miniconjou chief was one of the most cunning and treacherous of all the Ghost Dance leaders, but that he was taking his people to the Stronghold to stiffen the resistance of the Brules and Oglalas, just when General Brooke was beginning to have success in talking the last of those holdouts into giving themselves up. Determined to intercept and seize Big Foot before he could reach the Stronghold, the Army organized a huge search for him. Covered by a swarm of reporters, who had flocked into the bleak, muddy agency town of Pine Ridge to be present at the surrender of the followers of Kicking Bear and Short Bull, the campaign to capture Big Foot became of almost equal news interest, acquiring the drama of a hunt for an elusive band of religiously-crazed Sioux and their dangerously fanatic chief.

Making their way south out on the Plains, desperately trying to avoid being overtaken or cut off by troops, the lonely band of some 350 Miniconjous were anything but belligerent or dangerous. The Indians' journey across the hard winter ground and through the silent, eroded Badlands to the White River on the northern border of the Pine Ridge reservation was one of suffering and hardship. Buffeted by icy winds and snow squalls, the people froze and were hungry and sick. Big Foot's illness became worse, and his family wrapped him in blankets and laid him in the box of a bouncing, jolting wagon. On December 24, he developed pneumonia.

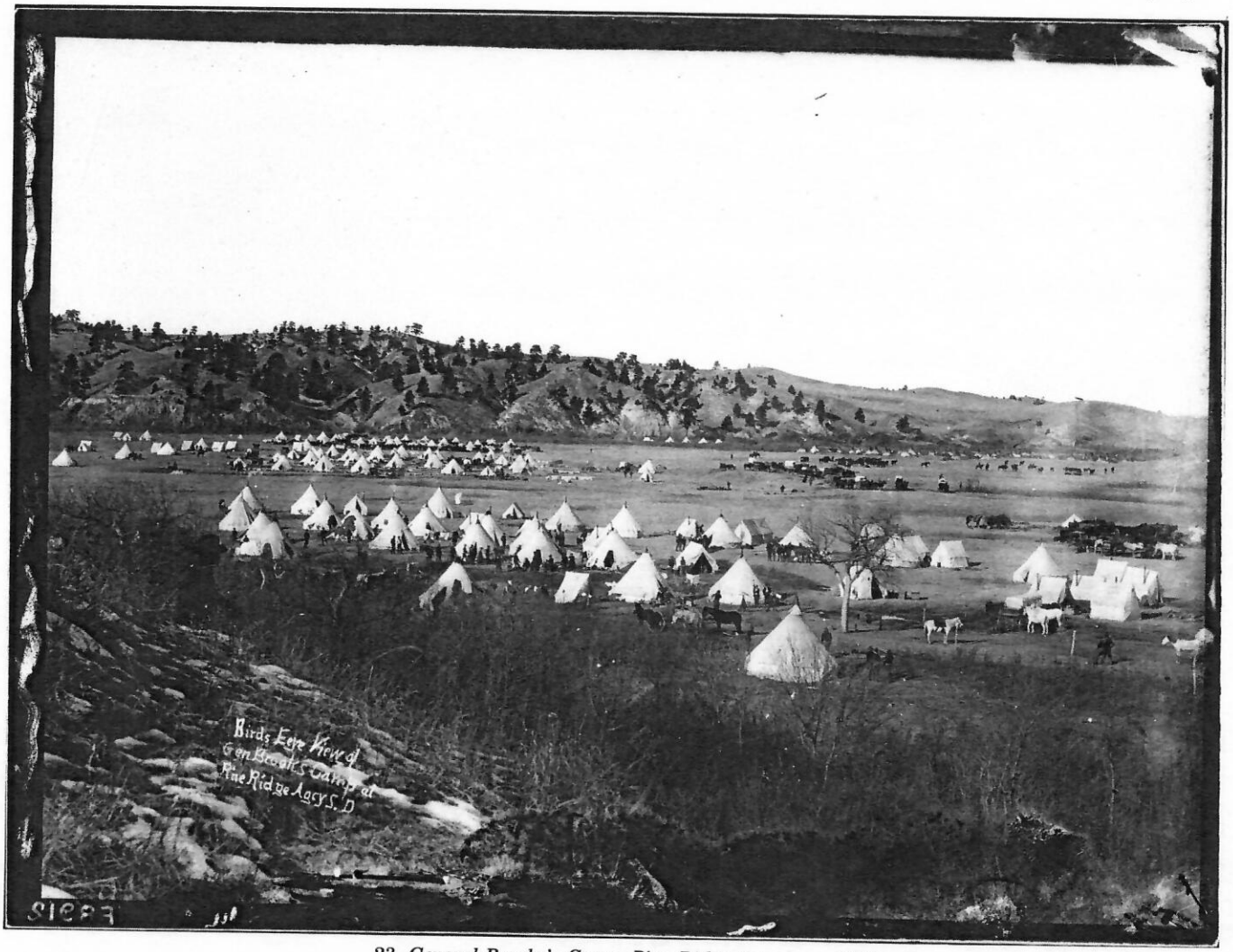
Most of all, the people feared the soldiers, who were all about them, but whom they managed to evade. Time and again, they slipped past searching bodies of troops, first of Colonel Eugene A. Carr's veteran 6th Cavalry, which had been called to South Dakota from Arizona and New Mexico to help suppress the Sioux, and then of black troopers of the 9th Cavalry, dispatched from Pine Ridge under Major Guy V. Henry. At last, the Indians entered the northern part of the Pine Ridge reservation and sent three riders to the Oglala chiefs near the Pine Ridge agency, announcing that they would soon reach their camps and telling them that Big Foot was very

ill. In response, Indian messengers returned with word that Kicking Bear and Short Bull had at last led the Ghost Dancers out of the Stronghold in the Badlands, that they were all on their way to the Pine Ridge agency, and that Kicking Bear would like the Miniconjous to time their arrival at the agency to coincide with his own.

At his Pine Ridge headquarters, meanwhile, General Brooke, pleased that the Ghost Dancers at the Stronghold had finally given up and were on their way to the agency, had learned that Big Foot's band had reached the Pine Ridge reservation and was heading not for the Stronghold, but southwestward toward Porcupine and Wounded Knee creeks and the Pine Ridge agency. He immediately directed Major Samuel Whitside, with four troops of the 7th Cavalry and two Hotchkiss guns, to intercept and capture the band, take away the Indians' horses and guns, and hold the prisoners for further orders.

Riding east to the valley of Wounded Knee Creek, Whitside and his men established a camp near a trading post and sent out some Oglala Indian scouts toward the northeast to locate Big Foot's band. Late in the morning of December 28, contact was made, when four of the scouts were surprised at Porcupine Creek by an advance groups of the Miniconjous. When the main party of Indians came up, Big Foot sent two of Whitside's scouts back to the officer to inform him that his people were peaceful and would move directly to the soldiers' encampment on Wounded Knee Creek. Mistrusting the Indians—who had slipped out of Sumner's hands and evaded other troops—Whitside ignored the message and, ordering his men to saddle up, hurried them across the hills toward Porcupine Creek. A little after 2 p.m., they intercepted the Miniconjous, and after a discussion with the sick chief—as related earlier — escorted the Indians back toward Wounded Knee Creek.

Racing ahead of the column, a courier carried the news of the capture of Big Foot to Wounded Knee. From there, word was relayed by a series of flashing heliograph mirrors to General Brooke at his Pine Ridge headquarters, 17 miles away by



23. *General Brooke's Camp, Pine Ridge Agency, c. 1891.*

the reservation's roads. In the same message, Brooke was asked to dispatch more troops to help Whitside overawe the Indians and persuade them to give up their arms peacefully. Brooke immediately turned out Colonel James W. Forsyth, commander of the 7th Cavalry, with four more troops of that regiment, two more Hotchkiss guns, an interpreter, and another body of Oglala scouts, and sent them off to reinforce Whitside. Once the Indians were disarmed, Brooke told Forsyth, he was to order Whitside to march them to the railroad at Gordon, Nebraska, from where they would be sent to Omaha for imprisonment or exile.

Accompanying Forsyth to witness the disarming of the Miniconjous was a small group of civilians, including a Catholic missionary, a Pine Ridge trader, and three newspapermen. Most of the correspondents at Pine Ridge, including the reporter-artist, Frederic Remington, who was on assignment for *Harper's Weekly*, remained at the agency, deciding that the expected arrival and surrender of Kicking Bear and the holdouts from the Stronghold would be bigger news than the seizure of Big Foot.

At Wounded Knee, Whitside's camp had been pitched in the valley between the creek on the east and a hill on the west. Coming from the northeast, the Indians were led south past the rows of cavalry tents to an open flat beneath the hill, where they erected their own village in an arc of tipis. A shallow, dry ravine with steep walls ran from west to east along the rear of their village, opening into Wounded Knee Creek.

At the south edge of the cavalry camp, which was separated from the Indians' village by about 100 yards of open land, Whitside had a large wall tent, heated by a camp stove, set up for Big Foot. At the same time, the officer ringed the Indians' village tightly with sentinels from two of his troops and placed his Hotchkiss guns on the hill to command the tipi village. About 8:30 that night, Forsyth arrived with his reinforcements. The colonel had his men bivouac north of Whitside's camp and added his Hotchkiss guns to the two already on the hill above the Indians. To deal with 350 Sioux, Forsyth, who took over command from Whitside, possessed a force of slightly more than 500 soldiers and Oglala Scouts.

During the evening, Forsyth and his officers of the 7th Cavalry, some of whom had fought the Sioux at the Little Bighorn 15 years before, opened a small keg of whiskey which the trader had brought from Pine Ridge and drank to the capitulation of Big Foot. Later, their celebration led to an accusation—contested, and probably untrue—that the officers were drunk during the events of the next morning. (The enlisted men, too, were accused of being drunk, but none of them had participated in the drinking). Of more substance, perhaps, was a charge that the officers and many of the men of the 7th looked on their disarming of Big Foot's people the next day as a measure of revenge for what the Sioux had done to Custer and their regiment at the Little Bighorn. Whether it was a motivation for the savagery of what occurred, however, will never be known.

At any rate, if the troops were celebratory, expecting an easy and victorious time the next morning, the Indians were just the opposite. The patrolling sentinels surrounding their village, the guns pointing down at them from the hill, and the arrival of Forsyth's additional troops all seemed to be ominous signs. Many of the people stayed awake much of the night, filled with apprehension and fear.

At daybreak, Forsyth distributed rations of bacon and hardtack to the Miniconjous and, soon afterward, had his interpreter summon all the Indian men to a council in the large square in front of Big Foot's tent. Nervous and uneasy, the Sioux were herded into a close-packed, semicircular line, facing the cavalry camp, with their backs to the worried Indian women and children whom they had left in the village. To impress the Indians that resistance would result in their annihilation, Forsyth had deployed his troops in commanding positions on all sides of the council grounds.

Tension, already high, mounted when Forsyth informed the Indians that he wanted them to surrender their guns. Remembering Sitting Bull's murder, and fearing that, without guns, they could be slaughtered, the Miniconjous hesitated. Two of them went into Big Foot's tent to seek his advice and were apparently told by him to give up their old guns and keep their good ones. Returning, they told the other Indians what their chief had said. A short time later, when Forsyth sent a first group of Indians back to their tipis with orders to return with their rifles, they brought back two broken carbines, claiming that those were the only guns they had.

The day before, Whitside and his men had seen many of the Indians carrying good Winchesters. Realizing that the Sioux were deceiving him, and beginning to fear trouble from them, Forsyth had Big Foot carried out of his tent and placed on the ground in front of the Indians. At the same time, he moved Troops K and B of the 7th Regiment close up behind the Miniconjous. Forming an L-shaped line on the south and west sides of the council square, the bluecoats cut the Indians off

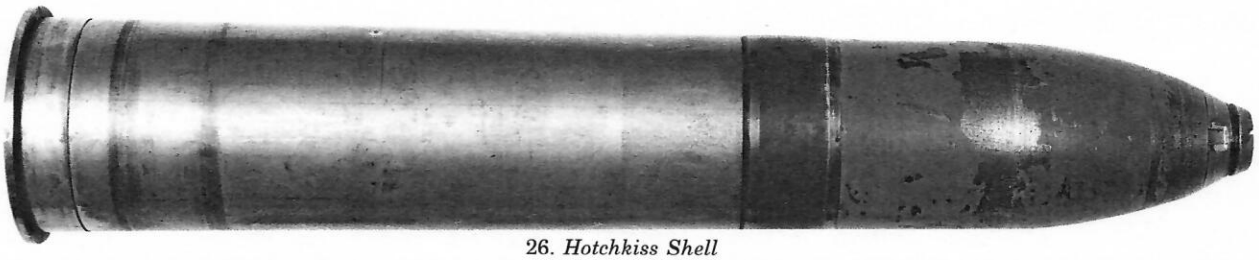
24. *Hotchkiss Cannon, American Ordnance #104.*

from the tipi village. When Big Foot insisted in a weak and barely audible voice that his people had given up all the guns they possessed, Forsyth told him he did not believe him and detailed some of his men to search the Indian village.

As the troopers went through the tipis, seizing guns, crowbars, awls, and anything that could be used as a weapon, the Indians became increasingly restless and angry. Some of them—worried about the women and children in the village—tried to get through the line of dismounted cavalrymen, but were held back. A few wore the Ghost Shirts of their religion, and their old medicine man, Yellow Bird, who had been making the troopers nervous by singing and dancing through the crowd, occasionally scooping up a handful of dust and throwing it at the soldiers, began crying to the Miniconjous, assuring them that the white men's bullets would not be able to harm them.

25. *Winchester Model 1866 carbine .44 caliber.*

When the troopers finished going through the village, having turned up 38 rifles, Forsyth told the Indians that he wanted them to open their blankets and satisfy him that they had no concealed weapons. The older men came forward at once, pulled off their blankets, and showed that they carried no weapons. The younger men, however, began to grow excited. Three of them were searched, and a Winchester and another rifle, hidden beneath their blankets, were taken from them. With his voice rising higher and higher, Yellow Bird began to whirl about furiously in his dance. The commotion alarmed the troopers, many of whom were recent recruits, filled with fear of Indians. At the rear of the Miniconjous' circle a deaf Indian raised a rifle above his head with both hands and shouted that he had paid money for it and would not give it up without being paid for it. Two soldiers grabbed him from behind and tried to wrestle the gun away from him. Just as the medicine man scooped up some more dust and threw it in the air as if it were a signal, the deaf man's rifle, pointing harmlessly toward the sky, went off.



26. *Hotchkiss Shell*

In an instant, the fears of both sides exploded in uncontrollable violence. Each survivor of that morning had his or her own flashes of memory of what happened next. Some said that five or six young Indians threw aside their blankets and fired point-blank at the bluecoats of Troop K, who were standing between the Indians and the tipi village. Others said that the nervous members of both Troop K and Troop B, reacting instinctively to the shot from the deaf Indian's rifle, sent a volley crashing into the Miniconjous. Once started, the fury could not be stopped.

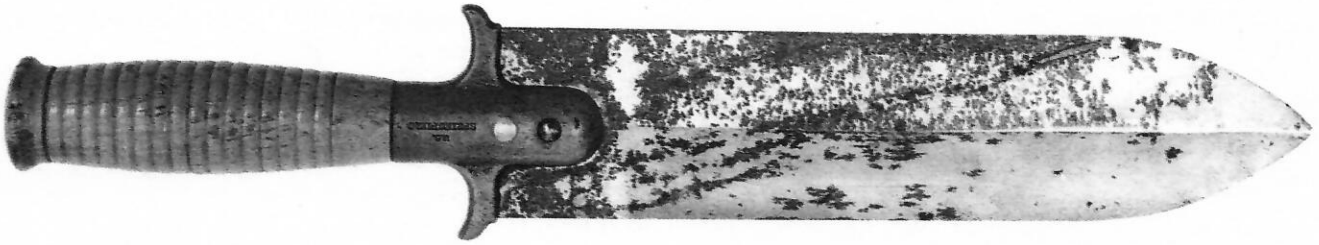
The council site became a scene of horror, as the Indians and troopers fought at close range, shooting at each other as fast as they could. Bullets flew in every direction, cutting down Indians and soldiers in heaps. In their frenzied fire, the troopers in the L-shaped line hit fellow-troopers, and Indians, missing the soldiers, sent bullets ripping into the tipi village, where women with their babies and older children were screaming and running about, trying to get away.

When the Indians ran out of bullets, they rushed at the soldiers, fighting hand-to-hand with knives and bare hands and breaking through the troopers' line. Many raced to the tipi village, but others ran to the northeast or to the west. During the pandemonium in the council square, the troops whom Forsyth had deployed around the area, as well as the gunners on the hill, watched in frozen shock, unable to fire into the swirling mass for fear of killing their own men. (Later, Forsyth would be court-martialled for the inept deployment of his men, many of whom were killed or wounded by their own crossfire on the council square). Once the Indians broke loose from the soldiers and raced away from the square, the Hotchkiss guns and the outlying troops, mostly mounted, went into action. From their perch on the hill, the gunners sent explosive shells into the Indian village and against groups of fleeing Miniconjous, ripping apart men, women, and children with pieces of flying shrapnel. Those who kept going, uninjured, were pursued and cut down by the fresh troops, maddened by what they viewed as the Indians' treachery.

On the council ground, Big Foot and most of the elder Miniconjou headmen were among the first casualties. The chief was shot in the head and killed instantly as he tried to rise from where he had been lying on his back. Yellow Bird, the medicine man, disappeared in a tent from which he sniped at the troopers until they riddled the tent with bullets and then set it on fire, roasting the religious leader to death.

Running from the tipi village while the fighting raged on the council square, some of the women and children got into wagons and headed up a road that led toward the northwest. Seeing that there were no men with them, the troops at first let them get away, then went after them, trapping, killing, and capturing small groups of them a mile and more from Wounded Knee. The bulk of those in the village made their way toward the rear of the tipis, then, followed by the Indian men who had broken through the line of troops on the council grounds, ran south, crossing the ravine to open ground, where three lines of Forsyth's troops and Indian scouts opened fire on them. With shells from the Hotchkiss guns exploding among them and the soldier's rifles flaming at them from the front, the Indians were literally mowed down in clumps of dead and wounded. The survivors retreated into the ravine and, pursued by the soldiers, ran along it in both directions.

In the smoke, dust, exploding shells, and flying pieces of metal, a few Indians tried to resist. Here and there in the ravine, groups of Miniconjous



27. *Intrenching/Hunting Knife, U.S. Army, c. 1880.*

28. *Gathering Up the Dead at the Battlefield at Wounded Knee, S.D., 1891.*

29. *Chief Big Foot's Knife, c. 1880.*

fought back briefly, defending women and their babies and children, who tried to claw shelters for themselves in the dirt walls. Assisted by the Hotchkiss guns, the troopers attacked them furiously, wiping them out or forcing them to surrender. As the resistance in the valley died out and the carnage ended, Forsyth sent soldiers hurrying westward to search for Indians who had escaped. In the upper part of the ravine and elsewhere, desperate refugees were found and killed in episodes of unrestrained viciousness. One group of troopers ran into a party of 150 mounted Oglala and Brule warriors who, having heard the sound of fighting, had ridden from the agency to help the Miniconjous. After a brief exchange of fire, the Oglalas and Brules realized that they were too late and withdrew.

By noon, the struggle was over. Big Foot's band had been all but annihilated. Leaving the Indians dead where they lay—bunched on the council square and scattered in knots up and down the ravine and across the open ground—Forsyth gathered his own dead and, putting the wounded of both sides into wagons, marched back to the Pine Ridge agency, where General Brooke and others hailed the fight as a stirring victory.

That night, a heavy snow began to fall, and in the silent valley of Wounded Knee Creek, a white blanket covered the Indian dead. Three days later, a detail went to the field and buried the frozen bodies of 84 men and boys, 44 women, and 18 children in a large grave on the hill where the four Hotchkiss guns and been.

The reporters who had accompanied Forsyth sent the story of what had happened to the outside world. Some editors congratulated the Army on a glorious triumph over dangerously hostile Indians. But others, criticizing the attack on surrounded and surrendered Indians, and the killing of Indian women, babies, and children, accused the 7th Cavalry of having sought revenge on the Sioux for the defeat at the Little Bighorn by perpetrating a massacre at Wounded Knee.

To Indians, the issue of whether it was an accidental fight or a massacre has never been in question, but the United States government,

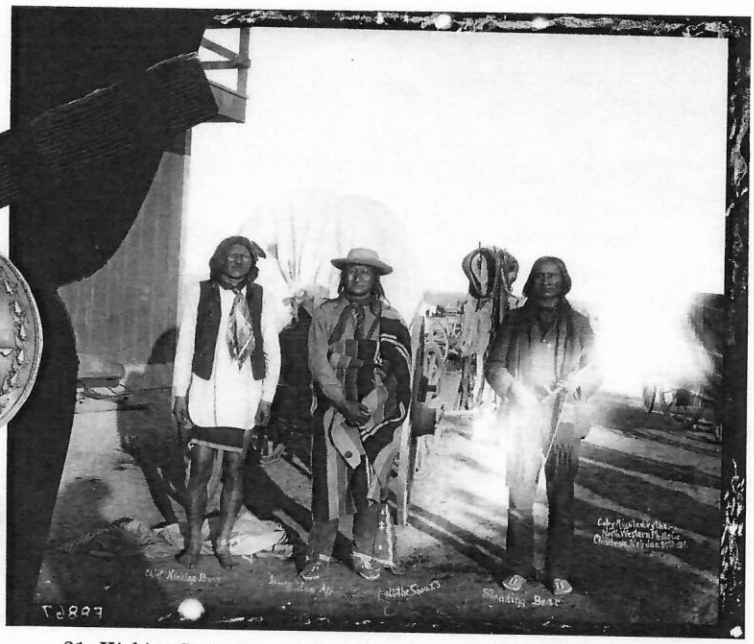
allowing the Army to define the action, continues to this day to insist officially that Wounded Knee was not a massacre, but a battle that resulted from misunderstanding on both sides. Although it is difficult to imagine what misunderstandings possessed the Indians about the whites, it is certain that the white ignorance about the Indians, together with a 400-year heritage of avarice, racism, and conflict, were at the root of Wounded Knee. The more immediate causes ranged from the unwarranted hysteria of the agents and the white population to the sending of troops onto the reservations and the mistakes of Miles and some of his officers. What resulted—especially the brutal hunting down and slaughter after the initial desperate fighting on the council grounds—fits the dictionary definition of a massacre: "savage and indiscriminate killing."

There were other ramifications. For several days after Wounded Knee, angry Oglala and Brule warriors made scattered attacks on various buildings at the agency and on other centers on the reservation, causing a number of casualties to the troops. At the same time, Kicking Bear, Short Bull, and the other Ghost Dancers who had been coming in from the Stronghold took fright at Big Foot's fate and, accompanied by several thousand Indians who fled from the agency, returned to the Badlands. Miles kept them under pressure, however, and on January 15, 1891, Kicking Bear and the other remaining Ghost Dance leaders finally surrendered. Their fate was a surprise to them. Instead of being sent to prison, they were hired by Buffalo Bill and, with the approval of the Secretary of War, toured Europe for a year, earning money as star attractions of the Wild West show.

The promises of Wovoka's religion and of the Ghost Dance could not long survive what had happened at Wounded Knee. The Ghost Shirts had not repelled the soldiers' bullets, and the Indians gradually turned away from the prayers, dances, sacred songs, and visions of a world without whites. But more than the Messiah's religion was trampled on and gunned away in the tragedy at Wounded Knee. With the death of Big Foot's Miniconjous, there expired the last free band of Sioux Indians. From then on, the Sioux would know for a certainty that they could no longer hope to be masters of their lives, able to exist and worship as a free people.

As the Oglala holy man, Black Elk, later said, the nation's hoop was broken and scattered at Wounded Knee. There was no center any longer, and the sacred tree was dead. As for the soldiers who shattered the hoop at Wounded Knee, 18 of them received Congressional Medals of Honor for what they had done.

30. *Sioux Indian War Medal, Nebraska State National Guard, 1890-1891 (left), Congressional Medal of Honor, undesignated, c. 1890 (middle), Indian War Medal with matching chest ribbon (right).*



31. *Kicking Bear, Young Man Afraid, Standing Bear, Pine Ridge Agency, January 1891.*