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WOUNDED KNEE:
THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE SIOUX

by

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B. A., University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1973

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1976

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Socolofsky, my major professor, who gave me several important research leads and made many suggestions for the betterment of this report. My sincere appreciation is also extended to Professor Mrozek and Professor Kaufman whose constructive comments were most helpful.

Grateful acknowledgement is also extended to Mr. Arne Richards and his staff of the Documents Division, Farrell Library who spent a great deal of their time initiating me into the maze of United States Government documents.

WOUNDED KNEE:
THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE SIOUX

From the time of the arrival of the earliest Europeans on the shores of North America, the Indian exerted a tremendous impact upon the settlement of the American frontier. Eventually he was no longer able to resist the encroachment of the white man. With the culmination of the Battle of Wounded Knee, the armed conflict between the white interlopers and the indigenous red man terminated. Wounded Knee was the end of a conflict that had been sporadically fought for over three centuries.

Called by some the Massacre of Wounded Knee, the Battle of Wounded Knee was the last major conflict between the United States Army and the American Indian. It took place in a remote portion of southwestern South Dakota between two forces who had fought each other intermittently over a period of 25 years, the U. S. Seventh Cavalry and the Sioux Indians. Accounts of the battle and the events surrounding it are conflicting and have often been emotionally presented. Many theories have been advanced to explain the causes and results of the battle. Robert M. Utley in his excellent treatment of the subject, The Last Days of the Sioux Nation, calls the battle a "regrettable tragic accident."¹ Others have attempted to seek a culprit by blaming a nation who thought the only good Indian was a dead Indian; or a government which starved the Indian and

made treaties only to break them to the benefit of a select few; or to the Sioux to whom, in the belief of many, fighting and killing was a way of life; or the U. S. Seventh Cavalry who exacted revenge for its defeat at the Little Big Horn; or to the leaders of the Messiah Craze such as Sitting Bull (Tatanka Yotanka), who readily exploited the unrest to restore their lost prestige; or to the reduction in the size of the reservations and cutting down on the amount of rations issued. There is an element of truth in each of these theories. Many factors influenced the actions of the troopers of the Seventh Cavalry and the members of Chief Big Foot's band of Sioux Indians.

The confrontation has been attributed to lack of leadership on the part of both Indian chiefs and U. S. cavalry officers. Chief Big Foot (Si-Tanka) has been classed as an inept leader with doubtful influence over the more militant members of his band. The U. S. Army officers and non-commissioned officers on the scene have been portrayed as lacking in experience, positive leadership and common sense in allowing their units to come in such close contact with the Indians and in their abortive attempt to disarm the members of Big Foot's band. It was an explosive situation that was to result in a massacre.

Many armed and belligerent Indian braves died on Wounded Knee Creek. Many more innocent women and children were also slain. Although reports vary on the number killed, Major

General Nelson A. Miles, Commander of the Department of Missouri, in his annual report to the Secretary of War reported that two hundred Indians (men, women and children) were killed or mortally wounded.² The Indian victims of Wounded Knee were buried in a common grave at the site of the battle on 1 January 1891. Belief in the Messiah and the Ghost Shirts had not protected the Sioux at Wounded Knee.

The Sioux believed that through the medium of the Ghost Dance they could rid themselves of the white man. They sought return to the life where they again were free to roam and where the buffalo, their life source, again darkened the plains. Return to such a life however was not to be. As inscribed on the monument erected to those who lost their lives during the massacre, not only did many innocent women and children die that day on Wounded Knee Creek, but more significant so did the Sioux nation.³

By late 1881, the seven bands of the Teton Sioux had been settled on the Great Sioux Reservation in what is now southwestern South Dakota, east of the Black Hills and west of the Missouri River. During the summer of 1881, Sitting Bull had led some 2,000 Sioux Indians back from Canada where they had fled following the fighting of 1876 and 1877. Sitting Bull settled his band, the Hunkpapa Sioux, in the northern part of the Reservation at Standing Rock Agency. Chief Red Cloud's Oglala Sioux were located in the southern

portion of the reservation, near the Nebraska border. The Brule Sioux were located at Rosebud Agency while the remainder of the bands, including Chief Big Foot and the Miniconjous were positioned at Cheyenne River Agency. The Great Sioux Reservation was to be the common property of the seven bands of the Teton Sioux and at the end of 1881 close to 16,000 of them occupied the reservation lands.⁴

The year 1881 brought about dramatic changes to the Tetons way of life. No longer could they roam the prairie as they desired. Buffalo were virtually extinct so they could not hunt. No longer could the warrior Sioux go to war. It was the intent of the Great Father to "civilize" them and make them into God-fearing tillers of the soil in the likeness of the white settlers in the area east of the Mississippi.

The Indians had lived in peace on the reservation for nearly twelve years when the severe drought of 1889 came after two dry years bringing poor crops and poor pastures. The Sioux had attempted agriculture and the raising of livestock with limited success. The severe South Dakota winters plus the recent lack of moisture discouraged not only the Sioux but also many of the settlers. The year 1889 also brought the blackleg disease to the small Indian herds and many of their cattle died.⁵ To compound matters, measles, grippe and whooping cough swept through the Indian camps, depleting the ranks of the Sioux.⁶

The Sioux Commission, led by Major General George Crook, visited the reservation in 1889. The commission departed with the necessary signatures on a treaty which reduced the Great Sioux Reservation by nearly one-half, approximately eleven million acres. The threat and menace that characterized the attempts the previous year to obtain the necessary signatures to reduce the size of the reservation were evident in the Crook Commission's proceedings. Crook clearly saw what would happen if this agreement failed. The Sioux would have to give up their lands and probably at considerable less compensation than provided by the agreement.

The treaty reducing the size of the reservation was unsuccessfully opposed by many of the old chiefs including Sitting Bull, Red Cloud and Big Foot. Using a rather complicated formula, the government paid \$.50 to \$1.25 per acre for the land.⁷ Red Cloud (Makhpia-Sha), during a stormy session with the Crook Commission, generally summed up the feeling of the old chiefs when waving a copy of the 1868 treaty he said: "I looked around to see if I could see any boxes of money that you had brought here to buy more land, and I could not see any, and now I think this is talk of sugar again just as this paper is."⁸

The commission made many promises in order to get the signatures. To soothe the old chiefs and clarify the treaty and other implied commitments, the chiefs were invited to Washington, D. C. On 18 December, 1889, they talked to

Secretary John W. Noble of the Department of the Interior and then to President Harrison. Some promises were granted such as lifting the ban on innocent dances and employing greater numbers of Indians at agencies, but other Sioux Commission commitments required Congressional approval, including the annual appropriation of \$100,000 to restore the cut in the beef allowance.⁹

When the chiefs returned to their reservations they found their people hungry because of the reduced rations and poor crops. Sickness and disease swept through their camps. Then, on 10 February 1890, President Harrison accepted the land agreement and opened it to settlement. There was little rush by settlers to claim the arid snow-covered land. This was just as well for no provision had been made for the Indians to move off the ceded land nor had surveys been made to determine the new boundaries of the reservation. Possibly spring would promise a better new year for the Sioux.

The better year could well accompany the coming of the "Messiah." This Messiah was a Paiute Indian named Wovoka. Wovoka had experienced a vision; he "went to heaven and saw God and all the people who died a long time ago."¹⁰ When he returned to earth he returned as the Messiah to the Indian race. Wovoka's religion offered hope to all Indian nations. He held forth a belief in paradise, a place in which all Indians would be forever free from the influence of the white man. News of the Messiah reached the Teton Sioux in

the spring of 1890 when a delegation of the Teton Sioux, which had been instructed in the tenets of the new religion, returned from what is now western Nevada. They had talked to the prophet of the new religion. Wovoka preached that in the spring of 1891 a new world would come from the west which would cover the old world except for the Indian. The Indian with an eagle feather fixed to his hair would rise above the new world and then return to find eternal life among the Indian people and their ancestors. They would live surrounded by wild game. By participating in the dance one could go into a trance and visit the new world before it came. Wovoka taught the delegation the Ghost Dance and also that the true believer must accept the Christian ethic, which was to do right always, not to fight, and not to lie. The delegates listened and returned to the Great Sioux Reservation with their own interpretation of the new faith.¹¹

In his book, My People, the Sioux, Chief Standing Bear quotes one of the strongest believers among the delegates, Short Bull of the Brule Sioux, as he explained the words of the prophet to Indian Agent George Wright at the Rosebud Agency:

He told us we were to have a new earth; that the old earth would be covered up, and while it was being covered we were to keep dancing so that we could remain on top of the dirt. . . . He showed us visions of the olden times when buffalo were plenty; when the big camps were on the Plains. All our people were dancing and having a big feast.¹²

The question remains did the Indians really believe their fantastic prophecy? Chief Standing Bear, then a young Indian school teacher who had been educated at the Indian school at Carlisle, certainly did not believe, but he stated that others did.

One of the best testimonies of Indian acceptance of Wovoka's prophecy is the story told by Homer W. Wheeler in his book, Buffalo Days. At that time Wheeler was a cavalry lieutenant in charge of the Indian scouts at Darlington Agency near Fort Reno. He was well liked by his scouts whom he let attend the Ghost Dances. One day, one of his old scouts, One Horse, approached him with tears in his eyes, stating that he was very sad that the Lieutenant would not be able to join him in the new life. When Lieutenant Wheeler expressed much concern, One Horse said he would see what could be done. Several days later he returned somewhat cheered stating that a council had been held, and they had agreed that the lieutenant could be adopted into the tribe so he could enjoy the new life, but would have to marry a woman of the tribe. The council had already thoughtfully selected a wife for him.¹³

With the Sioux delegation's return from Nevada, Short Bull and Kicking Bear became the major agitators for the new religion. Short Bull preached his message at Rosebud that spring, but Agent Wright and a fine damp spring for planting kept the religious movement from making any real headway.

The other strong believer, Kicking Bear, returned to the Cheyenne River Agency and Chief Big Foot's Miniconjou Sioux. The agent there, Charles E. McChesney, did not interfere with Kicking Bear's evangelism. Kicking Bear wrote letters to the other agencies to summon all the Sioux to the Cheyenne River Reservation for instruction in the Ghost Dance. The agents effectively stopped this move and the fervor for the religion subsided. Kicking Bear went off to visit the Arapahoes in Wyoming.¹⁴

Rumors of the spread of the Ghost Dance reached Washington in the summer of 1890 and the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs queried the Sioux agents on the situation. The agents at Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River and Rosebud agencies acknowledged the existence of the new religion but minimized its importance while to the north at Standing Rock, Agent James McLaughlin stated that he had heard nothing of it.

Hunger continued on the reservations. Subsistence rations were scarce or did not last for the period for which they were issued. The farming season of 1890, however, raised the hopes of the agents and the Indians. Large numbers of Indians planted gardens and crops and sufficient spring rains got them off to a good start. But hopes of good crops were short-lived. Hot summer winds beat across the prairie, withering the gardens. Elaine Goodale, a reservation teacher, recalled the scene: "The pitiful little gardens curled up and died in the persistent hot winds. Even young men displayed gaunt limbs

and lack-luster faces. Old folks lost their hold on life, and heart-broken mothers mourned the last of a series of dead babies."¹⁵ The Sioux, whose hopes had been so high in the spring, again saw ahead another bleak winter of existence.

Such were the conditions under which Kicking Bear returned to the Great Sioux Reservation. In October, Kicking Bear visited Sitting Bull at Standing Rock. Kicking Bear had expanded the tenets of the religion and modified them to the Sioux culture. Gone was Wovoka's guidance to do right always, not to fight and not to lie. Kicking Bear told Sitting Bull that the white man's gunpowder would not work against the red men who were true believers, but of course, the red man's gunpowder would work against the white man. He also added, "And if a red man dies at the hands of the whites while he is dancing, his spirit will only go to the end of the earth and there join the ghosts of his fathers and return to his friends next spring."¹⁶

To the south on the Cheyenne River Reservation, Big Foot's band, incensed over the loss of much of their reservation through the treaty, had moved as far away from Agent McChesney as they could get, to the northwestern edge of the reservation. The agent requested and received troops to establish a camp of observation near the 130-man-band to insure that new land settlers would not be molested.¹⁷ More serious problems began to develop at Pine Ridge. The Sioux had modified the costume of Wovoka's Ghost Dance to include

the wearing of a "ghost shirt." The ghost shirt would make the wearer invulnerable to the white man's bullets. Other Ghost Dancing Indians adopted the ghost shirt, but only the Sioux gave it bulletproof qualities.¹⁸ No longer were the Long Knives to be feared. The situation was indeed explosive

Agent D. H. Gallagher at Pine Ridge received complaints about the excited dancing from the local farmers and on 23 August sent his Indian Police to stop the dancing. They returned saying they had been ignored; so the next day Gallaghe went to see the dance for himself. He also took the agency's interpreter, Philip Wells, Special Indian Agent Reynolds, and a detachment of Indian police. They were greeted by openly hostile warriors armed with rifles, but after a council with several chiefs the tension eased and all were invited to stay and watch the dance. The dance apparently alarmed both of the agents, since they sent off reports stating that restrictions should be placed on the dancing.¹⁹ The situation continued to deteriorate throughout the Great Sioux Reservation as most of the experienced Indian agents awaited their Republican replacements to be appointed by the United States government.

On 9 October, Dr. Daniel F. Royer, a physician from Alpena, South Dakota, became the agent at Pine Ridge. He had served two terms in the territorial legislature, but he had no experience in dealing with the Indians. When he arrived, he found on his desk a message from the Indian Commissioner

in Washington informing him that he must warn the Indians that the Ghost Dance was not to be allowed. He relayed the Commissioner's message to the dancers, who ignored it, and on 12 October Royer sent a letter to the Indian Commissioner stating that troops might be needed.²⁰ He talked to the chiefs and unsuccessfully attempted to persuade them to stop the dancing. Then on 27 October, Major General Nelson A. Miles, new Commanding General of the Division of Missouri, visited Agent Royer while heading a commission to discuss problems with the few Cheyennes at the reservation. The famous fighter, who had defeated the Sioux in the battles following the Seventh Cavalry's defeat at Little Big Horn, spoke to the chiefs the next day, but was openly rebuffed and told that the Sioux would continue to dance. General Miles still thought that the craze would die of its own accord with the coming winter. Agent Royer believed differently. After another unsuccessful day of trying to persuade the chiefs, he posted a letter to the Indian Commissioner on 30 October, stating that "the only remedy for this matter is the use of military."

To the north, Agent McLaughlin still had the control and respect of Sitting Bull's Hunkpapas and saw no need for immediate military intervention. However, he regarded Sitting Bull as the source of the Ghost Dance problem and by a letter dated 17 October requested permission to arrest him. This was denied by the Indian Commissioner on 29 October.

It must be remembered that Sitting Bull was the darling of the vocal National Indian Defense Association led by Mrs. Catherine Weldon who came to visit Sitting Bull in the spring of 1889 and stayed, much to the dismay of Agent McLaughlin. Sitting Bull had also appeared in many Eastern cities where he had been heralded as the Indian who killed General Custer.²¹

At the Upper Cheyenne River Reservation, Chief Big Foot's band continued to dance the Ghost Dance under the watchful eyes of the U. S. Army. Meanwhile, settlers had begun to trickle into the newly opened land. To compound the agency's problem, Chief Hump, head of the agency police and hero of the Little Big Horn, had joined in the dancing and feasting activities. The situation continued to worsen at Rosebud Reservation to the east of Pine Ridge where Agent Wright had been suspended, pending investigation of some discrepancies in rations, and had been temporarily replaced by Special Agent E. B. Reynolds. The newly established newspapers began to sound the alarm as settlers reported an increasing loss of horses and cattle, while the storekeepers did a brisk business in selling rifles and ammunition to the Sioux. Pressure also began to mount in Washington as letters and petitions arrived demanding that settlers and their possessions be protected. On 31 August, President Harrison ordered the Department of the Army to investigate, and Brigadier General Thomas H. Ruger, Commander of the Department of Dakota

visited the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Reservations. His superior, General Miles, was at that time still heading the Cheyenne Commission. Ruger agreed with Agent McLaughlin at Standing Rock that Sitting Bull had to be removed, and he reinforced Fort Bennett near the Cheyenne River Reservation bringing it up to two companies. He assessed the situation as "less than reassuring, but still not dangerous."²

At Pine Ridge, Agent Royer had lost control. On 11 November, the agent's Indian police were seized by the Ghost Dancers as they tried to arrest an Indian named Little for killing cattle. Feasting was an important part of the Ghost Dance ritual; and with rations cut, beef was in short supply. Chief American Horse successfully intervened amid cries to "kill the police and burn the agency." The scene took place on ration day at Agent Royer's agency, and his telegram shows how terrified he was:

Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. I have fully informed you that the employees and government property at this agency have no protection and we need it now. I have submitted to you the result of six weeks calm conservative investigation and nothing short of 1,000 soldiers will settle this dancing. The leaders should be arrested and confined in some military post until the matter is quieted and this should be done at once.²³

On the advice of the Acting Indian Commissioner and the Secretary of the Interior, the President, on 13 November, directed the Secretary of War "to assume responsibility for the suppression of any threatened outbreak, and to take such steps as may be necessary to that end." This directive gave

a free hand to the U. S. Army; and in light of Royer's grave concern, troops were dispatched to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Agencies and along the railroad and telegraph lines west and south of the reservations. All the troops were under the command of Brigadier General John R. Brooke, commanding the Department of the Platte.

Was the dispatch of troops to assist Agent Royer really necessary? The arrival of the soldiers probably united and solidified the ghost dancers, who saw the coming of the soldiers as an attempt to deny them religious freedom. This was a major contributing factor to the later outbreak of hostilities. The Indians were belligerent, suspicious and highly excitable. They viewed any act by the white man as an attempt to curtail or halt ghost dancing activities. With the Indians in such a state, any small administrative act could provide the spark that would lead to bloodshed.

The news of the Indian problems and the movement of troops finally reached the eastern newspapers. The New York Times on 19 November 1890, in an article entitled "Indian War Scare," contained a report from Mandan, North Dakota, concerning the local people's apprehension: "Enough Indians were now traveling about this section to run off all the cattle and kill half the settlers in the county." The article also quoted a telegram from General Miles, in overall charge of the military action, to the Commanding General of the Army, Major General John M. Schofield. The telegram

stated that the "Indians were exciting themselves with frequent war dances" and that the "Messiah, who is to exterminate the white man" was now predicted to appear in December, but that "Troops in adequate numbers have been stationed at threatened points." General Miles had come to Washington to confer with the Secretary of War and with General Schofield, whose office had released a statement printed in the same Times article. It stated that there appeared to be little immediate danger of an outbreak, although the Indians were well mounted, armed and provisioned and "in good condition to go to war." The release further stated that the stories of the flight of Dakota settlers were "overdrawn" and that if the Indians went to war it would be because of the "strange superstition that now possesses them," not because they were hungry since they were "well supplied by the government."²⁴

The troops moved in on the night of 20 November at both the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations. When the Seventh Cavalry marched into Pine Ridge, in its advance guard was Private Jesse G. Harris who stated, "I was put about one quarter mile in front and about one-half mile to the right of the main command, with orders if I met any hostile Indians to shoot and fall back . . . It wouldn't have taken me long to fall back. I was scared."²⁵ The Seventh Cavalry troops were to remain at Pine Ridge until 27 December, 1890.

It is not difficult to imagine the tales that were told

in the Seventh Cavalry's tents at the Pine Ridge camp. The most recent engagement of the Regiment against the Indians had been more than thirteen years earlier on 30 September 1877, when three companies constituting a part of General Miles' command had charged into a Nez Perce village only to be repulsed by Chief Joseph's well disciplined warriors entrenched on commanding terrain. The Nez Perce capitulated on 5 October, but only after killing five and wounding nine Seventh Cavalry troopers.²⁶ The previous major battle had been Custer's engagement at the Little Big Horn where 265 members of the Seventh had been killed. Some of the officers and men who had found the bodies of Custer's command, many of them mutilated by the Sioux, were still in the regiment in 1890. When the Seventh was ordered after Big Foot's band, it had a strength of about 500 including 81 very frightened recruits, 31 of whom had joined the regiment at Pine Ridge.²⁷

Even as the Seventh Cavalry encamped at Pine Ridge, the United States Senate debated a resolution to provide 1,000 rifles and 50 cartridges per rifle to the states of North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. The rifles were to be issued to the settlers of these states to provide protection from the Indian menace. The debate of the resolution turned into an attack by Senator Vorhees of Indiana on the administration's policy of "inequity and of crime against the Indians . . . taking their lands and not even paying them enough to

keep them from starving to death." Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, Chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, answered these charges and those of Senator Hawley who suggested that cattle to the red man would be more appropriate than guns to the white man. Senator Dawes stated that it was Congress that cut the appropriation each year to force the Indian to become more self-sufficient and, furthermore, that there would be trouble until Sitting Bull and Red Cloud, "the bane and the curse," were removed. Newspapers were quoted during the debate, stating it was the opinion of General Miles that the Sioux were being starved and would rather fight than starve. Senator Pierce from North Dakota entered the discussion saying that the Indians were always hungry, and the trouble was that they were "allowed to live upon the bounty of the Government" and thus had idle time to become dangerous men. He quoted an interview with General Miles concerning the causes of the problem as "insufficient food supplies, religious delusion, and the innate disposition of the savage to go to war." Senator Vorhees closed the debate with a broadside at the Republican administration and its starvation policy which would cost the lives of soldiers at the expense of those like the Senator from North Dakota who were "looking on their lands with a longing and a lust" and thinking that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."²⁸

And what of the Indians back on the Great Sioux Reservation? The arrival of the troops quickly separated the

Ghost Dancers or hostiles from the so called progressives or friendlies who abandoned their camps and clustered around the agencies of Pine Ridge and Rosebud. The Ghost Dancers assembled about forty miles to the north of the Pine Ridge Agency, sacking the abandoned camps of the friendlies and appropriating cattle as they went. Major General Brooke, in charge of the operations in the area, sent one of his scouts, Joe Merrivale, to persuade the Ghost Dancers to come into the Pine Ridge Agency. The Ghost Dancers fired a volley over the scout's head and he quickly retreated. Other scouts were more successful and encouraged some Indians under Little Wound and Big Road to return on 27-28 November. The remainder, including about 600 warriors, moved with their appropriated cattle to the northwest edge of the Pine Ridge Reservation into an area called the Stronghold, a portion of the Cury Table Plateau which jutted up from the plains several hundred feet. With an area of about four square miles, the Stronghold was connected to the main plateau by a narrow steep sided ridge, its only entrance unless one scaled the 200 foot cliffs. This natural fortress also had two springs and grass for the cattle. The Sioux, primarily Oglala and Brule, under Kicking Bear and Short Bull, danced and feasted safely in their Stronghold.²⁹ Although Chief Big Foot, whose Miniconjous were dancing at the Cheyenne River Reservation, had professed peaceful intentions, the militance of his followers had not abated. The tragedy of

Big Foot was to repeat a theme familiar in the history of Indian wars--a chief hurried unwillingly toward disaster by fiery young men he could not control.

Agent McLaughlin still retained control of the Hunkpapas one hundred miles to the north but continued to press for the seizure and jailing of Sitting Bull as soon as the snows came. General Miles attempted to facilitate the seizure of Sitting Bull through the use of "Buffalo Bill" Cody, his friend and scout during his campaigns against the Sioux in 1876-77. Sitting Bull had been a feature attraction in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. On 27 November, Buffalo Bill and party plus reporters arrived. The Indians had quieted down, and the last thing McLaughlin and the commander of adjacent Fort Yates, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Drum, wanted was to get them stirred up again. They successfully stalled Cody for two days awaiting an answer from Washington to McLaughlin's urgent telegram to suspend Cody's mission. The answer came after a conference attended by the Secretary of War, the Secretary of Interior and the President. Cody would not intervene.³⁰

General Miles was furious and went to Washington to plead his case to General Schofield, the newspapers and Senator Vorhees. He wanted no more interference from the agents and felt the Army, not the Department of the Interior as represented by the Indian Agents, should be in charge. The conflict between the Department of the Interior and the

Army had been brewing for years.

Military officers bitterly objected to their exclusion from reservation affairs until after the outbreak of trouble. In their view, this gave them the unenviable task of fighting a war which they had been denied any part in preventing. Colonel Orlando B. Wilcox expressed the Army's resentment in these words: "After depriving the Indian of his lands and proper means of subsistence, at what point in his subsequent career of starvation, misery and desperation shall you regard him as a public enemy? For it is only at some such point that the military can come in without being regarded as the intruder."³¹ General William T. Sherman, Commanding General of the Army, identified the same problem and phrased his comment much more bluntly: "The Indian Bureau keeps feeding and clothing the Indians regardless of their behavior, till they get fat and saucy, and only then are we notified that the Indians are troublesome and are going to war, after it is too late to provide the remedy."³² General Miles had made his point, but dual responsibility for the Sioux problem continued

Upon his return to Chicago, General Miles found that the problem had become isolated to the Stronghold and the Cheyenne River Reservation more than 100 miles to the north where the Miniconjou were dancing in two separate camps under the leadership of Chiefs Hump and Big Foot. Big Foot's band had been under observation since spring, and the troops continued to observe them from a camp several miles away.

Their relationship with Big Foot and his band was almost cordial, and they had even mingled together to pose for photographs.³³

General Miles knew Chief Hump well, for the great warrior of the Little Big Horn had surrendered to the General in 1877 and then served very effectively as scout for the Army for the next seven years under one of Miles' officers, Captain Ezra P. Ewers. At the recommendation of General Miles, Ewers was brought up from his station in Texas to talk with Hump. He arrived on 4 December, renewed his friendship with Hump and convinced him to return with his band to the agency at the request of the General. On 9 December, Hump and his band returned, and Hump again put on his uniform of Army scout. All except thirty of Chief Hump's followers returned to Fort Bennett with Captain Ewers. These thirty broke away to join Big Foot and increased Big Foot's band to 116 warriors.³⁴

Brigadier General John R. Brooke, Commander of the Department of the Platte, made progress with the Indians in the Stronghold primarily through the help of Father John Jutz, a 70 year old Catholic missionary who had established a mission and a school near Pine Ridge Agency in 1888. The Father returned with a nervous and fearful group of thirty lesser chiefs and warriors. General Brooke treated them courteously, listened patiently and then gave them a big feast. He promised them more food and jobs as Army scouts if they would return with their people. Numerous reporters, armed to the

teeth, were now at Pine Ridge. The New York Times of December seven carried a detailed account of Father Jutz's brave visit and also an article entitled, "General Schofield on the Situation - The Practical Difficulty of Disarming the Indians Explained." In the latter article, the ease with which Indians could buy rifles was explained together with their habit of hiding the rifles until they were ready for war. The article then quoted a letter to General Miles in which the Secretary of War presented the President's views. General Miles was congratulated on his "persuasive methods to bring in as many Indians as possible and to complete military preparations before any arrests are made." The President also expressed "his full confidence that the responsibility is placed in good hands." The article also quoted a message from General Miles to General Brooke stating, "You are in command there and authorized to use your discretion to control those Indians, to prevent an outbreak or to suppress one if it should occur."³⁵ Trouble was still anticipated. On 15 December, the first of the 900 Brule Sioux from the Stronghold began to arrive peacefully at Pine Ridge Agency. To the north at Standing Rock, a platoon of Indian police backed by a cavalry squadron moved to seize Sitting Bull.

Two days prior, Agent McLaughlin had received a written request from Sitting Bull to visit Pine Ridge, and the Indian police reported that he would go with or without permission. McLaughlin wrote an arrest order for Sitting Bull and had it

carried to Lieutenant Bull Head. It included a "P. S. You must not let him escape under any circumstances,"³⁶ and was written in both English and Sioux. Bull Head's police entered the camp at 5:30 a. m., and Sitting Bull submitted meekly to arrest; however, the camp was aroused by the time the police brought Sitting Bull through the door of his house. There was a confrontation. Sitting Bull shouted to his warriors to save him and a bloody fight broke out. After taking a bullet in the side, Bull Head shot Sitting Bull; the police withdrew to the house and the hostile Hunkpapas to the adjacent woods. The cavalry arrived a short time later, after scattering the hostile Indians with some long range light artillery fire. Eight Hunkpapas, including Sitting Bull, were killed at the cost of six Indian police dead or dying and one wounded.³⁷ As the police and cavalry were preparing to depart, Crow Woman, who had donned his Ghost Shirt, galloped toward the firing soldiers and police three times at ranges of 80 to 400 yards and escaped unscathed in full view of many members of the tribe. A large number of the tribe followed the cavalry back to the safety of the agency, and the remainder, including Crow Woman, moved south to join Big Foot's band.³⁸

With the death of Sitting Bull, the only prominent Indian chief who was considered possibly dangerous was Chief Big Foot, camped to the south of the forks of the Cheyenne River. Lieutenant Colonel Edwin V. Sumner's command from the Eighth

Cavalry had been given the job of watching Big Foot's band. They were performing this mission when on 19 December, thirty-eight of Sitting Bull's Hunkpapas, including fourteen warriors joined Big Foot. Big Foot had also received accurate reports of an Infantry regiment of four companies moving toward him from the east. He joined Sumner's command to return to his old camp. Later that evening Sumner recieved a message from General Miles, who had now moved his command post to Rapid City, South Dakota. Sumner was to move west with Big Foot and his band to Fort Meade and screen the northern Black Hills settlements from possible hostile raiding parties.³⁹

Lieutenant Colonel Sumner felt that he could not take Big Foot without a bloody fight that did not seem necessary, particularly since specific orders had not yet been received to arrest Big Foot. Moreover, Sumner felt that Big Foot was making a concerted effort to keep the more militant members of his band quiet. At that point he foresaw no problem with Big Foot and the Miniconjous.

Sumner asked Big Foot to move east to the agency while he prepared his command to move west to screen the Black Hills. In the meantime, Big Foot was considering an invitation from the Pine Ridge chiefs who had offered him 100 ponies to quiet things there. Big Foot wanted to go east to Fort Bennett, but his council feared a trap. Late on the twenty-third, Big Foot's band moved south, and a message to that effect was sent to Sumner by one of his scouts. On the

twenty-fourth, Sumner received a telegram directing him to arrest Big Foot and any of Hump's or Sitting Bull's warriors he found with him. General Miles' message stated that "if an opportunity is given, they will undoubtedly join those in the Badlands . . . disarm them, and take them to Fort Meade or Bennett."⁴⁰ The direct order for Sumner to arrest Big Foot came too late. Big Foot and his band, on the night of 23 December, had eluded Sumner's scouts and headed south for Pine Ridge.

Numerous units searched for Big Foot's band as they moved south toward Pine Ridge. The trip was slow and painful for Big Foot who was prostrate with pneumonia and was being jolted in a wagon bed. Big Foot's messengers went ahead to Pine Ridge and returned reporting that all of the Indians were abandoning their positions in the Stronghold and coming in on the 29th and that there were troops on Wounded Knee Creek. Big Foot ordered messengers to contact these troops which they did about noon, 28 December. The troops, one squadron of the Seventh Cavalry, were under the command of Major Samuel W. Whitside. The meeting of the cavalry and Big Foot's band was somewhat tense, but a white flag appeared from a pole on Big Foot's wagon after the cavalry had deployed as skirmishers with cannons to the front. Big Foot was transferred to the more comfortable Army ambulance wagon which at least had springs. Major Whitside discussed his orders to disarm and to dismount the Indians with his chief scout,

Sangreau. They decided against disarmament at that time since many of Big Foot's warriors were still riding wildly about brandishing their rifles. Major Whitside reported the capture by messenger and heliograph and requested that the remainder of the regiment join him. He escorted the Indians to his Wounded Knee Creek camp.

The elements of the Seventh Cavalry and Big Foot's band closed the camp late in the afternoon. The camp, located in a shallow valley about 300 to 500 yards across was bisected by a dry wash. Low hills to the east and west were nearby. The Indians set up their camp about 200 yards south of the cavalry camp along the dry wash which ran near the rear of the Indian camp. Chief Big Foot was placed in a heated wall tent erected for him at Whitside's direction. The ailing Indian Chief was attended to by the assistant regimental surgeon.

Colonel James W. Forsyth arrived with the remainder of the Seventh Cavalry and two more light cannons early in the evening. His total troop strength was approximately 500 men, supported by four cannons. The cannons were placed on the low hill to the west of the two camps, about 200 yards distant. The bulk of the troops camped north of the Indians, but sentries and interconnecting patrols kept watch on the camp throughout the night. Plans for the next day were discussed over a keg of whisky which had been brought up with Colonel Forsyth's troops. Colonel Forsyth's verbal orders

from General Brooke as he later recalled were: "To disarm Big Foot's band, take every precaution to prevent the escape of any; and if they fought, to destroy them."⁴¹

Colonel Forsyth was well liked and respected by his men. Although his experiences with Indians had been limited to a few skirmishes in 1877, he had a splendid record during the Civil War. A West Point graduate of 1856, within eight years he had risen to Brigadier General of Volunteers through brevets for gallantry and meritorious service. His service included commanding one of Sheridan's cavalry brigades in the Civil War raid from Winchester to Petersburg. He had reverted to major after the war and served with the 10th and the 1st Cavalry Regiments and had assumed command of the 7th Cavalry on 11 January 1886. Concurrent with this command, he also commanded Fort Riley, Kansas, from 10 September 1887 to 10 November 1890, where he developed and organized the practical instruction for the Cavalry and Artillery School. He was an experienced, capable soldier but not an experienced Indian fighter.⁴²

Big Foot's band awoke the morning of the 29th to find themselves surrounded by soldiers 100 to 300 yards distant. Preparations were being made to disarm the Indians prior to taking them to the agency. They were given breakfast rations by the cavalry, and then the approximately 120 warriors were summoned to Big Foot's tent by Forsyth's chief scout, Sangreau. The plan was simple enough. Working through Chief Big Foot,

the Indians would be directed to return to their tents in groups of twenty, get their weapons and turn them in to the cavalry. In theory it seemed like a good plan, in execution it would prove impractical as experienced Indian fighters from General Schofield on down realized. Also not taken into account, or at least not well understood, was General Miles' philosophy in dealing with the Sioux which he learned the hard way in 1876-1877.

The Indian is a most dangerous warrior within 200 yards, the range within which he is accustomed to kill game. . . War is entirely voluntary with him. If he thinks it is a good day for scalps and plunder, he is very daring. . . There is no such thing as order, positive authority, or discipline among them. Knowing this I found it to our advantage to hold them at a safe distance.⁴³

About 100 warriors were assembled between the two camps, facing Big Foot's tent. Colonel Forsyth spoke to the warriors through Sangreau, explaining why they must surrender their guns and that they were "perfectly safe in the hands of their old friends, the soldiers and that starvation and other troubles were now happily at an end."⁴⁴ Twenty warriors were counted off and told by Sangreau to go to their tipis and return with their rifles. Upon returning, only two much abused and broken rifles were presented. But nowhere was there evident the Winchester carbines observed by Major Whitside's troopers the previous day.⁴⁵ Not satisfied with the warriors' performance, Colonel Forsyth ordered Big Foot brought out of the tent and propped up in front of the line of warriors. The Chief was bleeding from the nose and

too weak and stiff to stand. The Indians began to mill about nervously and move toward their camp about 150 yards to the rear. Colonel Forsyth moved two dismounted troops totaling 110 men from the cavalry camp in behind the Indian warriors at a distance of about 30 yards, cutting them off from their camp. Colonel Forsyth asked for Big Foot's assistance in obtaining the weapons; Big Foot refused to cooperate. It seemed evident that the warriors were not going to surrender their weapons voluntarily. Again the soldiers were ordered to move up closer to the Indians while another detachment was ordered to search the tipis. After a thorough search the soldiers returned with about 40 rifles, most of which were old and of little value.⁴⁶ Again the Winchester carbines, observed by Major Whitside in his first encounter with Big Foot, did not appear.

During the search, the Indian band's medicine man Yellow Bird, dressed in his Ghost Dance costume, danced and chanted before the crowd of warriors now squatting on the ground with their blankets around them. Yellow Bird was urging the warriors to resist. The soldiers' bullets would be harmless against their "ghost shirts" which nearly all the Indians wore. The search completed, Colonel Forsyth and Wells talked and then announced that the warriors would have to submit to individual search. The old warriors volunteered to be searched first and were found to be unarmed. Then, one by one, the young warriors began to be searched. The first three yielded

two rifles. Yellow Bird had started to dance again and the warriors began to mill about restlessly. The line of troopers separating the warriors from their camp, nervously backed up a few paces and bunched together in small groups. While the guns were being taken, ". . . a crazy man, a young man of very bad influence and, in fact, a nobody, among that bunch of Indians fired his gun and immediately the soldiers returned fire and indiscriminate killing followed."⁴⁷

One can only imagine the thoughts that must have been passing through the minds of the young warriors at that moment Yellow Bird had said the signs were right as had Sitting Bull before the Battle of Little Big Horn. The cavalry was threatening the camp of the women and children as Custer had done at Washita. The Ghost Shirt had protected Crow Woman from the soldiers' bullets after Sitting Bull had been killed by the Indian police. The messiah was to come in December. Counting coup was assured since the soldiers were so close. Were these not the same soldiers that the Sioux had defeated at Little Big Horn and the same ones who killed women and children at Washita? And what of Big Foot, their chief? He was unable to lead the fight. The situation needed only the proper catalyst to allow the young warriors to take the initiative. The loud report of the rifle shot provided that catalyst.

At the shot, five or six young warriors facing K Troop threw off their blankets, leveled their rifles, hesitated an

instant and then fired. The battle was on. Many of the warriors broke through the line of cavalry after the initial exchange of shots and fled to their camp. They and many women and children tried to escape up a dry wash. The fighting, initially at close quarters broke into isolated and confused skirmishes or wanton slaughter of entire groups.

At the sound of the first volley, the artillerymen opened fire with their Hotchkiss guns. Firing at the rate of nearly fifty rounds per minute, the result was devastating. In a few minutes 200 Indian men, women and children were lying dead or mortally wounded.⁴⁸

The Indians who miraculously survived the initial volleys of the Hotchkiss gun, fled up the ravine pursued by the infuriated troopers. There is little doubt that what followed was anything else than a massacre. Fleeing women with infants in their arms were shot down after all resistance had ceased. The fact that so many women and children were killed and their bodies found far from the scene of action, in some cases as much as two miles away, one would think that blind rage was at work. The soldiers wantonly slaughtered anything resembling an Indian.

The newspapers played up the battle to a nation that had been told for weeks that an Indian war was imminent. The New York Times, on 30 December, headed its column with "Big Foot's Treachery Precipitates a Battle." It further stated that "The Indians were shot down wherever found, no

quarter being given by anyone The members of the Seventh Cavalry have once more shown themselves to be heroes in deeds of daring." The article made no direct reference to the killing of women and children and only estimated Indian losses at 50, probably because the reporters at the scene had rushed back with the story before surveying the battlefield. According to reports, General Schofield, "though deeply regretting the incident, (he) was not greatly surprised when he learned of the treachery displayed by the Indians." Secretary of War Proctor also expressed regret.

He supposed inasmuch as Big Foot was connected with Sitting Bull's band, it was a case where the Indians wanted revenge for the killing of their friend.⁴⁹

One segment of the press depicted the conflict as a triumph of brave soldiers over the treacherous, blood thirsty Indians. The other segment was outraged that the members of the Seventh Cavalry would shoot down innocent women and children as revenge for the debacle at Little Big Horn.

Colonel Forsyth's regiment returned to Pine Ridge that night with their wounded and dead plus captured and wounded Indians. Many of the Pine Ridge Agency Indians fled to join Short Bull and Kicking Bear with their band which was coming from the Stronghold and only about fifteen miles northwest of the Pine Ridge Agency at White Clay Creek. Skirmishes with the Indians continued for several days. As band after band of Indians surrendered, the camp at White Clay Creek swelled to over 4,000 of which about 1,000 were warriors, now

termed hostiles. Under General Miles' orders, the camp was quickly surrounded by troops who were kept at a distance. General Miles had nearly half of the U. S. Army's infantry and cavalry in the Pine Ridge area.

General Miles had arrived at Pine Ridge from Rapid City, S. D., on 31 December 1890. He was not happy; and initially, his anger was directed at Lieutenant Colonel Sumner who had allowed Big Foot to escape. Subsequently, when he and the press learned the full extent of the casualties of the Wounded Knee Battle, he was convinced that Colonel Forsyth's poor judgment was to blame. When the sensational reports of the number of women and children killed reached the President and the rest of the nation, the pressure began to build in Washington. General Schofield telegraphed the President's request that "an inquiry be made as to the killing of women and children on Wounded Knee Creek."⁵⁰ How General Miles felt is probably best expressed in his letter to his wife:

The Forsyth action was a useless slaughter of innocent women and children If Sherman, I mean our boy, could not make a better disposition of his troops, I would be disappointed. At the time only two troops could fire upon the warriors, but they could and did fire upon women and children.⁵¹

General Miles reacted to General Schofield's telegram by relieving Colonel Forsyth and convening a fullscale court of inquiry to determine if Forsyth had disposed his troops so that they shot one another, and if his men had killed noncombatants indiscriminately. There was little doubt in

General Miles' mind that Colonel Forsyth had blundered and disregarded his instructions of 18 and 22 November as well as of 7 December which all clearly stated "not to allow the command to be mixed up with Indians in any way." After considering these instructions and taking extensive testimony from many witnesses, both military and civilian, the Inspector General on General Miles' staff concluded that casualties among women and children "could be ascribed only to the fault of the Indians themselves and to the force of unavoidable and unfortunate circumstances."⁵² As to the troop dispositions, Forsyth was criticized: "Colonel Forsyth's command was not held at a safe distance . . . the attack of the Indians resulted in complete surprise."⁵³ General Miles endorsed the report concluding that, "Forsyth not only disobeyed explicit orders but also demonstrated incompetence."⁵⁴ General Schofield and the Secretary of War reviewed the report and telegraphed General Miles that, "the interests of the military service do not . . . demand any further proceedings in this case . . . by direction of the President, Colonel Forsyth will resume command of the regiment."⁵⁵

General Miles bent his efforts at bringing in the Indians at White Clay Creek. He massed his troops around the Indians and allowed only one route of escape, toward the agency. He then wrote Red Cloud and the other chiefs reminding them that, "A great many troops are on all sides, but not a shot will be fired . . . against any (Indians) if they do as I direct."⁵⁶ The Oglalas under Red Cloud wanted to come in, but the Brules

resisted. Under increasing pressure from other Sioux Chiefs, the Brules slowly gave in and on 16 January the surrender was complete as Kicking Bear laid his rifle at the feet of General Miles as he had done once before in 1877. This time the Oglala Sioux under Big Road collected the weapons from their people. General Miles complained bitterly during these two weeks that, "I received many insulting communications denouncing what the writers supposed to be procrastination or timidity . . . and from others anxious to have hostilities precipitated in order that the vultures might prey upon the spoils of war."⁵⁷

The friendly overtures made to the Sioux nations by General Miles, with evidences that the government desired to end the conflict and settle their grievances, had their effects on the Indians. Through the influence exerted by the friendly chiefs, over 4,000 Indians moved to within sight of the agency and expressed their desire for peace. General Miles' troops moved in around them and on 16 January 1891, the Indians officially surrendered, bringing an end to the outbreak.⁵⁸

Thus ended the so called outbreak of 1891 and the final subjugation of the Sioux. In the Government's telling of the story, it is possible to observe the enormous gap between cultures, both Indian and white and military and civilian, which caused misunderstandings and injustices to escalate into murder and devastation.

But what of the actions of the military at Wounded Knee?

There can be no question concerning the humanity of the officer in charge. Colonel Forsyth had endeavored to make Chief Big Foot as comfortable as possible on the night of surrender, 28 December 1891. He had even sent his own surgeon to administer to the ailing chief. He had separated the women and children from the warriors. Strict orders had been given to the soldiers that women and children were not to be hurt. The butchery of women and children was the work of infuriated soldiers whose comrades were shot down without warning (See Appendix I). In defense of the soldiers, it should be noted that a number of them were raw recruits, not experienced in battle or inbred with military discipline and they probably had difficulty in distinguishing between men and women by their dress. These reasons do not, however, excuse the leadership of the Seventh Cavalry for allowing the butchery to continue.

It must be concluded that on the morning of 29 December, no trouble was anticipated or premeditated by Colonel Forsyth or the Indians. The Indians in good faith desired to surrender and be at peace. The officers of the Seventh Cavalry were operating in the same good faith and were making preparations to receive the surrender of the members of Big Foot's band and return them to the reservation. Notwithstanding the peaceful intent of Big Foot and his band, the medicine man Yellow Bird urged the warriors to resist. This effort of Yellow Bird resulted in an Indian firing the shot which began the melee. But it should not be immediately concluded that

the answering volleys and the attack of the troops were right and justifiable. Was there not still a chance for peaceful negotiation through insightful leadership? In any case the wholesale slaughter of women and children by the Seventh Cavalry was inexcusable.

For his conduct of the disarming of Big Foot and his band, Colonel Forsyth was relieved of his command. In his time he was criticized by General Miles, the Indians and a few humanitarians, but congratulated by Washington and the nation. President Harrison summed up his feeling which reflected those of the nation in his Third Annual Message to the Senate and House of Representatives on 9 December 1891.

That these Indians had some just complaints, especially in the matter of the reduction of the appropriation for rations . . . is probably true; but the Sioux are naturally warlike and turbulent, and their warriors were excited by their medicine men and chiefs, who preached the coming of an Indian Messiah who was to give them power to destroy their enemies. In view of the alarm that prevailed among the white settlers near the reservation and of the fatal consequences that would have resulted from an Indian incursion, I placed at the disposal of General Miles, Commanding the Division of Missouri, all such forces as were thought by him to be required. He is entitled to the credit of having given thorough protection to the settlers and bringing the hostiles into subjugation with the least possible loss of life.⁵⁹

And in nearly the next breath the President stated:

Since March 4, 1889, about 23,000,000 acres (11,000,000 from the Sioux) have been separated from Indian reservations and added to the public domain for the use of those who desired to secure free homes under our beneficent laws.⁶⁰

In the eyes of the President the U. S. Army had performed its

mission to serve its Commander in Chief faithfully and had done so to the benefit of all the nation.

As for the Sioux, if there had been no promised Messiah or no Ghost Dance, would the outbreak have occurred? The presence of the U. S. Army was perceived by the Sioux as a threat to their religious freedom even though the religion was based in part upon Christian teachings. The arrival of the soldiers made the Indian a belligerent in his own land. The soldiers were there to stamp out his newly found religion with its promise of a better life.

It is difficult to understand why the white man felt threatened by the Ghost Dance. They should have viewed the Ghost Dance as did Chief Little Wound of the Oglala Sioux, ". . . if this is a good thing we should have it, if it is not, it will fall to the earth by itself."⁶¹ Had the Army remained on the periphery and not attempted to disarm Big Foot's braves on Wounded Knee Creek there is serious doubt that any confrontation would have occurred. As it was, spring came and went and when no Messiah appeared the Sioux soon forgot the religion that had promised so much.

The Army had again triumphed over the Indian. The Army had won not by brilliant and insightful leadership, but rather by superior numbers and devastating firepower. The victory with its devastating slaughter of Big Foot's band did not however, deter the advancement of those officers in command nor did it degrade the Army in the eyes of a grateful

nation. General Miles in 1895, four years after Wounded Knee was to ascend to the highest position in the Army. As for the officers Miles had relieved of command, Colonel Forsyth later rose to the rank of Major General. He was replaced in his old command by Colonel Sumner, the officer responsible for Big Foot's escape. Both of these officers had been subjected to boards of inquiry by General Miles. As the crowning irony to the Wounded Knee confrontation, a skirmish that had lasted only a few hours, three officers and fifteen enlisted men were awarded Medals of Honor (See Appendix 2) for their heroic deeds during the action at Wounded Knee Creek.⁶²

Footnotes

¹Robert M. Utley, The Last Days of the Sioux Nation, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 230.

²Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, p. 150.

³Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 5.

⁴U. S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Department of the Interior for the Year Ended 31 December 1891, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), pp. 411-12.

⁵James C. Olson, Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p. 320.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁷Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 52.

⁸Olson, Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem, p. 315.

⁹Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 56.

¹⁰U. S. Bureau of Ethnology. Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1890-92. Part 2. The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, by James Mooney, (Government Printing Office, 1896), p. 764. (Hereafter cited as Mooney, Ghost Dance).

¹¹Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, pp. 69-70.

¹²Luther Standing Bear, My People, The Sioux, ed. E. A. Brininstool, with an Introduction by William S. Hart (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928) p. 218.

¹³Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928) p. 36.

¹⁴Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 75.

¹⁵Elaine Goodale Eastman, "The Ghost Dance War and the Wounded Knee Massacre." Nebraska History, 26 (1945) p. 29.

¹⁶James McLaughlin, My Friend the Indian, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 188.

¹⁷Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 80.

¹⁸James P. Boyd, Recent Indian Wars, (Philadelphia, 1891) pp. 194-195.

¹⁹U. S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report, 1891, pp. 411-12.

²⁰Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 103.

²¹Stanley Vestal, Sitting Bull; Champion of the Sioux, 2d. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 275.

²²Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, pp. 189-91.

²³Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 111.

²⁴The New York Times, November 19, 1890.

²⁵Don R. Rickey, Jr., Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 273.

²⁶Melbourne C. Chandler, Of Gary Owen in Glory, (Annadale: The Turnpike Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 74-6.

²⁷Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 201.

²⁸U. S. Congress, Senate, Resolution to Issue War Department Surplus Rifles to the States of North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska. 51st Cong., 2d. sess., December 3, 1890, Congressional Record, 22: 44-48.

²⁹Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, pp. 120-22.

³⁰Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), pp. 358-61.

³¹Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1878, vol. 1, p. 184.

³²U. S., Congress, House, Military Committee. Hearings before the Military Committee on Responsibility for the Sioux on 31 January 1874, 43d. Cong., 1st sess., 1874, p. 276.

³³Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, Photo 8.

³⁴Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, p. 147.

³⁵The New York Times, December 7, 1890.

³⁶Stanley Vestal, Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux, Photograph of Major McLaughlin's order for the arrest of Sitting Bull, opposite p. 282.

- 37 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, pp. 194-95.
- 38 Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 163.
- 39 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, p. 223.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 231-32.
- 41 Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 204.
- 42 George M. Cullum, Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1891), Number 1738.
- 43 Nelson A. Miles, Serving the Republic, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1911), p. 163.
- 44 Eastman, The Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee, p. 38.
- 45 Lt. John C. Gresham, "The Story of Wounded Knee," Harper's Weekly, (Feb. 7, 1891), p. 107.
- 46 Mooney, Ghost-Dance, p. 868.
- 47 Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1892, Account of Turning Hawk, p. 180.
- 48 Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, p. 150.
- 49 New York Times, December 31, 1891.
- 50 Schofield to Miles, Jan. 2, 1891, cited in Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 245.
- 51 Virginia W. Johnson, The Unregimented General, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), pp. 294-95.
- 52 Proceedings of an Investigation made Pursuant to Special Order No. 8, Headquarters, Division of the Missouri, in the Field, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Jan. 4, 1891, Wounded Knee Investigation Report cited in Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 247.
- 53 Ibid., p. 247.
- 54 Ibid., p. 248.
- 55 Ibid., p. 248.
- 56 General Miles to Red Cloud, Jan. 1, 1891, cited in Utley, Last Days of the Sioux Nation, p. 255.

⁵⁷James P. Boyd, Recent Indian Wars, (Philadelphia, Publishers Union, 1891), pp. 274-79.

⁵⁸Secretary of War, Annual Report, 1891, vol. 1, p. 152.

⁵⁹J. D. Richardson, ed., Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, 53d. Cong., 2d. sess., 1907, House Miscellaneous Document No. 210, pts. 1-10, 10 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 9:201-02.

⁶⁰Ibid., 9:201-02.

⁶¹"Dr. V. T. McGillycuddy on the Ghost Dance," in Stanley Vestal, ed., New Sources of Indian History, 1850-1891, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), pp. 88-9.

⁶²U. S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Veteran's Affairs, Medal of Honor Recipients 1863-1973, Committee Print No. 15. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 275-332.

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APPENDIX I

APPENDIX I

WOUNDED KNEE CASUALTIES

Below is a complete list of the officers and enlisted men who were killed or died from wounds received at Wounded Knee Creek, 29 December 1890. The casualties are listed in an official reply from the Army's Adjutant General Department dated May 26, 1891 (Mooney p. 872).

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Adams, William | Kelner, August |
| Bone, Albert S. (died of wounds) | Korn, Gustav |
| Coffey, Ira S. | Logan, James |
| Cook, Ralph L. | McClintock, William F. |
| Corwine, Richard W. | McCue, John M. |
| Costello, John | Mann, James D. (died of wounds) |
| Curmings, Pierce | Mezo, William S. |
| DeVreede, Jon | Murphy, Joseph |
| Dyer, Arthur C. | Nettles, Robert H. |
| Elliott, George (died of wounds) | Newel, Charles H. (died of wounds) |
| Forrest, Harry R. | Reinecky, Frank T. |
| Frey, Henry | Schwenkey, Phillip |
| Graubery, Herman (died of wounds) | Stone, Harry B. (died of wounds) |
| Hodges, William T. | Twohig, Daniel |
| Howard, Henry (died of wounds) | Wallace, George B. |
| Johnson, George P. | Zehnder, Bernhard (died of wounds) |
| Kelley, James E. | |

APPENDIX II

APPENDIX II
RECIPIENTS OF THE
MEDAL OF HONOR

BATTLE OF WOUNDED KNEE, DECEMBER, 1891

Austin, William G., Sgt.

Clancy, John E., Pvt.

Carlington, Earnest A., 1 Lt.

Gresham, John C., 1 Lt.

Hamilton, Mathew H., Pvt.

Hartzog, Joshua B., Pvt.

Hawthorne, Harry L., 2 Lt.

Hillock, Marvin C., Pvt.

Hobday, George, Pvt.

Feaster, Mosheim, Pvt.

Loyd, George, Sgt.

Mc Millan, Albert W., Sgt.

Sullivan, Thomas, Pvt.

Toy, Frederick E., 1 Sgt.

Trautman, Jacob, 1 Sgt.

Ward, James, Sgt.

Weinert, Paul H., Cpt.

Ziegner, Hermann, Pvt.

WOUNDED KNEE,
THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE SIOUX

by

VANCE LAVERN TURNER

B. A., University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1973

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

1976

The Battle of Wounded Knee was the last major battle between the United States Army and the American Indian. Accounts of the battle and the events precipitating it have been and continue to be, conflicting and often emotional. Many theories have been advanced to explain the causes and results of the battle if it can indeed be called a battle. Many have called the "battle" a regrettable, tragic accident. Others have sought a culprit by blaming a nation who thought the only good Indian was a dead Indian; or a government which supposedly starved the Indian and made treaties only to break them to the advantage of a select few; or the U. S. Seventh Cavalry which exacted revenge for its defeat at Little Big Horn; or the Sioux to whom fighting and killing was a way of life; or to the leaders of the Messiah craze, such as Sitting Bull, who readily exploited the unrest to restore their lost prestige; or to the large reduction in the size of the reservations and the failure to provide a full allotment of rations. There is an element of truth in each of these theories.

Reasons for the catastrophic confrontation have been attributed to leadership, both Indian and U. S. troops. Chief Big Foot has been classed as a poor leader with very little influence over the more militant members of his band. The Army leaders, lacking in positive leadership and common sense in the positioning of their units and in their abortive attempt to disarm the Miniconjous, and Chief Big

Foot in lacking control over the Ghost Dance fanatics, created an explosive situation that was to culminate in a massacre and an end to a way of life. In retrospect, there was a complicated chain of events leading to the conflict on Wounded Knee Creek and many varied influences impacted upon the actions of the combatants.

Many factors influenced the actions of the Seventh Cavalry troopers and Big Foot's band of Sioux Indians. The Seventh Cavalry, in the opinion of General Nelson Miles, wanted a definite and final end to the Sioux problem. On the other hand the Sioux were ensconced in the belief, that by means of the Ghost Dance and the coming of the Messiah, they would soon be rid of the white man and would return to the days when the buffalo were plentiful and they enjoyed the freedom of the plains. To the true believer in the Messiah, the white man's bullets could cause no harm.

An attempt will be made to clarify the background of events which culminated in the battle and point out the many influences which caused the Sioux to opt for battle with the Seventh Cavalry.