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A Witness at Wounded Knee, 1973

OWEN LUCK

In late December 1890 the Sioux chief Big Foot and about 350 of his Miniconjou Lakota followers, including women and children, surrendered to a force of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry. They were intercepted just 20 miles short of their intended destination, Pine Ridge, South Dakota. There Big Foot had hoped to join forces with Red Cloud, another renowned Sioux leader who was also seeking some means of making peace with the U.S. government. Confronted by a force twice the size of their own, Big Foot and his followers, meagerly armed and exhausted from the 150-mile winter march from the Cheyenne River Reservation, quickly placed themselves in the hands of the army. They were marched to a cavalry encampment in southwestern South Dakota and confined to an area beside Wounded Knee Creek. Big Foot, perilously ill with pneumonia, requested that a white flag of peace be raised. The Indian group was guarded by armed troops, who were backed up by Hotchkiss guns mounted on the ridge above. Reinforcements arrived during the night, and by morning, with each side uncertain of the intentions of the other, tensions mounted. When the army set about disarming the Sioux, so few guns and knives were surrendered that the officers refused to believe the band had been so ill equipped. Commanding the men to disrobe, they found a rifle under the blanket of a young man who could not understand the order (he was a deaf-mute). In the resulting struggle the gun was fired into the air. Disaster quickly followed: some 150 unarmed Lakota were killed and many more wounded. The army, perhaps in retrospect as dismayed by the action as later historians would be, protectively labeled the event the Battle of Wounded Knee. To the Indians it has always been the Massacre at Wounded Knee.

So vividly remembered an injustice in the history of American Indian–U.S. government relations, Wounded Knee was a touchstone for the racial theater that sought center stage during the civil rights struggles of the early 1970s. In February 1973 local tribal leaders and members of the American Indian Movement (AIM)—in numbers close to the 350 followers of Big Foot some eighty years earlier—marched into the village of Wounded Knee and wrested control from the local Indian authorities to protest the continuing injustices against Indian peoples in this country and particularly the desperate living conditions of the Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation. This time the confrontation was more complex, involving Indian against Indian as well as against the federal government. Further, both

the Native American members of AIM and the Pine Ridge Indian police force and their supporters were armed. To the Pine Ridge establishment and some traditionalists on the reservation, AIM was an invading force. To AIM and its followers among the traditional local Sioux, the enemy was not only the reservation's corrupt political establishment and its tribal police but also the FBI. The confrontation lasted until May and continues to resonate among Indian people, who still cannot agree on which side best represented the interests of the local Indians.

—ALFRED L. BUSH



On February 28, 1973, at the request of the traditional Lakota leaders of the Pine Ridge Reservation, 250 Native Americans led by activists of the American Indian Movement (AIM) arrived in a caravan of fifty-four cars at the hamlet of Wounded Knee. There they seized control of the church, a trading post, and a museum. Immediately surrounded by government forces, they remained under siege for seventy-one days. Two native men would die, many would be wounded, Mary Brave Bird would give birth to a son, and the cries for recognition of treaty rights and freedom from oppression would go ignored by the American people.

The story you are about to read is my account of the liberation and siege of Wounded Knee. A coalition of local residents and sympathizers from many tribes and walks of life stood their ground against Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) police, FBI agents, U.S. Marshals, and elements of the U.S. Army armed with automatic weapons, armored personnel carriers, and information from the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). During the 1960s, COINTELPRO illegally and unconstitutionally monitored and subverted the antiwar protest movement as well as other grassroots organizations that were pursuing civil rights. The government now turned its full attention to AIM, founded in 1968 to struggle against political, economic, and cultural oppression, to lead the return to spiritual ways left behind, and to demand full implementation of treaty rights. The new Indian wars were about to begin.

I went to Wounded Knee in February 1973 as a photojournalist, hoping to find a story that would move my career forward. With the experience of two tours of duty in Vietnam as a medic for my credentials, I was able to gain the support of the New York chapter of

the Medical Committee for Human Rights by volunteering to carry in medical supplies and serve as a medic. Ron Rosen, another medical volunteer, and I arrived just a few days after AIM had taken over the hamlet on February 28, and we were the first medical support allowed inside the liberated area. From the start, I had intended to capitalize on this situation for my own personal gain, but what these people needed was a medic. And as they say, once a medic, always a medic.

My initial contact with Lakota people on the reservation occurred in front of the BIA building in the town of Pine Ridge, about sixteen miles southwest of Wounded Knee, where Oglala women were staging a peaceful demonstration against the political corruption and tyranny that was tearing their reservation apart. These were grandmothers, sisters, mothers, and daughters. They were eager to explain that the takeover was not an aberration, nor was it a spontaneous political protest; rather, it was the culmination of a series of tragedies and ongoing injustices. The people of the Pine Ridge Reservation demanded to control their own future and no longer endure the repression of Manifest Destiny.

Edgar Bear Runner, a Lakota activist whose father and mother were in the occupied area, explained that the trail to Wounded Knee was a long and terrible journey. A year earlier, fifty-one-year-old Raymond Yellow Thunder had been beaten to death by two white men, the Hare brothers. AIM had been called in because the BIA refused to help bring them to justice. AIM led a caravan of two hundred cars across the border to Gordon, Nebraska, and serious charges were finally brought against the Hare brothers. The AIM leaders, regarded as "city Indians," won some respect, and the traditional people had a new voice.

The Lakota demonstrators also told of abuses at the hands of the tribal council president, Richard "Dick" Wilson. A squat, stocky mixed-blood with a military haircut, Wilson violently opposed AIM, bragging that "if Russell Means sets foot on this reservation, I, Dick Wilson, will personally cut his braids off." Wilson exploited the traditional full-bloods and secured his position by appointing family members and supporters to lucrative BIA jobs. On a reservation where the mean annual income was \$800, the majority of the traditional Oglala still lived in tar-paper shacks without running water or electricity. Wilson further protected himself by organizing a private police force



A peaceful demonstration outside the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Pine Ridge during the early days of the takeover of Wounded Knee. Edgar Bear Runner stands behind two tribal elders. All of the photographs accompanying this essay are from the Owen Luck Photographs Collection, Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

whose drunken, violent repression of any opposition quickly earned them the title of “goon squad.” During the seventy-one days, armed with intelligence, weapons, and ammunition from the FBI and U.S. Marshals, Wilson conducted a parallel war that would continue long past the end of the siege.

Edgar Bear Runner and Nellie Red Owl, a respected tribal elder, went on to explain that in January 1973 Wesley Bad Heart Bull was stabbed to death by Darold “Mad Dog” Schmidt, a white man who was charged with involuntary manslaughter and released. Sarah Bad Heart Bull, the victim’s mother, called AIM for help. On February 6, nearly three hundred Indian people arrived at the county courthouse in Custer, South Dakota, led by Dennis Banks, Russell Means, Leonard Crow Dog, and Dave Hill, to negotiate appropriate charges. When Sarah Bad Heart Bull attempted to join the negotiations, she was seized and beaten on the courthouse steps by two police officers, and the protesters who came to her aid were teargassed and beaten. Not since the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee had there been any resistance from the Lakota people. But history was made when the abandoned Chamber of Commerce building next to the courthouse was burned to the ground and two police cars were overturned in a riot that lasted nearly an hour. Thirty people were arrested, including Sarah Bad Heart Bull.

Edgar Bear Runner also told me that on February 27 AIM leaders and traditionalist members of the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization had discussed the possibility of seizing the town of Pine Ridge, the seat of the BIA’s and Wilson’s power. Pine Ridge, however, was strongly garrisoned by U.S. Marshals dispatched to the reservation after the Custer riot. At the urging of Lakota women, the elders determined to take a stand at Wounded Knee, never anticipating a siege by federal forces.

After my conversation with Edgar and Nellie, I roamed around town, making some pictures, until the FBI picked me up. From the outset, it was apparent that the government position was not to keep a tense situation under control so that all sides would be heard and an equitable resolution might be reached, but to support the BIA authorities without question with full paramilitary support. Despite our credentials and several bags of medical supplies, Ron Rosen and I were treated as if we were criminals. Legal volunteers already on the scene and awaiting access to the liberated area were also being casu-



U.S. Marshals and FBI agents armed with M-16 automatic weapons, sniper rifles, and armored personnel carriers block the road between Pine Ridge and Wounded Knee.

ally detained; they warned us not to press our concerns too strongly because we would be arrested without cause.

On March 5, we were finally granted permission to proceed to the liberated area. We were escorted to the first of two heavily armed roadblocks. The gravity of the situation became evident as we approached U.S. Marshals with M-16 assault rifles, supported by FBI special agents with sniper rifles in armored personnel carriers and by Wilson's goon squad.

The hamlet of Wounded Knee consisted of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church up on the hill, shadowing the mass grave of the original massacre of 1890 and overlooking a knot of buildings representing a cynical empire of exploitation. At Gildersleeve's Trading Post, tourists could buy western curios and a variety of postcards with images the dead and frozen victims of the massacre. A little farther down the road stood the circular museum, looking like a faux tipi. Random dwellings were scattered through the neighboring hills.



Elders gathering outside the trading post early in the liberation.

It was nearly sundown when we finally arrived in the occupied area. We were taken directly to the hospital, such as it was, located in a small cement-chinked log cabin, the only building with both running water and electricity. Fortifications across the road, around the church, were already substantial. During the next few weeks more positions would be created, and the existing emplacements further fortified. No one had planned this protest to last more than a day or two, and no one ever predicted the aggressive response of the FBI and U.S. Marshals. But the AIM activists and the Lakota people they represented were not giving in without a fight.

Initially greeted with a mix of gratitude and suspicion, Ron and I turned over the medical supplies we had brought from the Medical Committee for Human Rights. Lorelie Decora, a leader of AIM's Iowa chapter, and Madonna Gilbert, the founder of WARN (Women of All Red Nations), were the two Indian health care workers running medical operations at the time. They gladly accepted our offer to remain and help as best we could.

Ellen Moves Camp was the next person to greet us. It was obvious from the start that Ellen was the woman in charge. Her gregari-



Defensive fortifications.

ous smile and enthusiastic demeanor enlisted respect and admiration from everyone who met her. She accepted us at face value and put us directly to work, playfully calling us the “Vista Workers.” Ron and I were made to feel welcome with the good humor. There were those whose suspicions lingered a while, and others who would never come to trust us. Helen counseled us not to worry: “They’re just paranoid because they got nothing else to do. If they think someone’s after them, it makes them feel important.” This was Ellen’s way of not hurting our feelings and reminding us that years of mistreatment and abuse at the hands of white society had left an undying distrust of non-Indian people.

That night, there were ceremonies in what had been a cafeteria. Even though there had been ongoing small arms fire from the government positions, all weapons were collected and put aside before the *Chanupa* (pipe) was revealed for prayer. Leonard Crow Dog and Wallace Black Elk purified the air with burning sweet grass. The pipe was offered to the four directions. Crow Dog spoke first in Lakota then in English of the original Wounded Knee in 1890, and how it was important to remember that we were part of a just cause, that we were



Leonard Crow Dog (standing) offers the pipe to the four directions as Wallace Black Elk (kneeling) purifies the air with burning sweet grass.

not to sink to the level of the BIA and the FBI. He reminded us that it was our responsibility to behave with honor and dignity.

Elder Tom Bad Cob stood and spoke for a while, thanking the Great Spirit for sending so many people to help. He praised the young men and woman of AIM, reminding us all that we had been invited by the traditional leaders. Finally, Russell Means and Pedro Bissonette came forward and took the pipe. They pledged their lives to the cause and prayed for wisdom. The drum sounded, followed by the voices of many Indian nations heard in harmony. They sang, and when they were done, the room was silent. Crow Dog passed the pipe, and the people were blessed by the smoke. The room was silent, yet the music rang in my ears. Following the ceremony, there was singing and traditional dancing well into the night.

The next morning I was approached by a Lakota man, Marvin “G-Bear” Ghost Bear, who offered to lead me around the hamlet and introduce me to the remaining inhabitants of Wounded Knee. I grabbed my aid bag and conducted casual house calls. G-Bear was born, raised, and still lived in Wounded Knee. He would go on to

serve in the U.S. Army, earn a college degree in mathematics, and return to the reservation to teach. Marvin dedicated his life to his people as a husband, as a father of two beautiful daughters, as a teacher, and as a respected leader in his community until he died of kidney failure in the winter of 2001 following years of dialysis. Marvin was my friend.

That day in 1973, as G-Bear introduced me to the people of Wounded Knee, was not the first time I had been confronted with austere poverty. Having grown up in the suburbs of New Jersey, I had seen poverty at a distance—as my family drove by on our way somewhere else, as a young soldier in the rural South, and of course in Vietnam. I had also spent some time during the summer of 1972 in migrant camps across the United States. Wounded Knee was different. I am not certain why, just that it was. Poverty took on a face of its own, and I gazed into the eyes of a suffering people.

When we were finished, G-Bear invited me to his home to meet his wife. There, Marvin presented me with a ribbon shirt.¹ With sympathetic, knowing eyes, he looked deeply into me as we shook hands and thanked me for coming to help, reminding me in a kind voice that although he was glad for my presence, he would remain in Wounded Knee long after I returned home. I have never forgotten that lesson or Marvin Ghost Bear.

On March 9, Milo Goings, shot in the knee, became the first casualty of the liberation of Wounded Knee. The next morning, Crow Dog asked me to come with him to see Milo. As Crow Dog burned sweet grass, I found myself changing Milo's dressing and following Crow Dog's instructions that I must be mindful of the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, that there was an order to healing, and that it must be followed. First, prayer to the four directions and respect for the Mother Earth. Milo's wound was free of infection and healing well. As a medic in Vietnam, I had seen many gunshot wounds; this one was much farther along in the healing process than I had anticipated.

¹ Ribbons shirts are worn when attending ceremonies and are also part of a dancer's regalia at powwows. Each is different in its cloth pattern and design. The ribbons are generally sewn across the chest and back, shoulder to shoulder, with the ends hanging as fringe, and up and down the sleeves. Strips are also sewn around the wrists. The ribbon shirt Ghost Bear gave me is made of a red calico print cloth with thin, red, white, yellow, and pink ribbons.

Public sentiment in support of the defenders of Wounded Knee forced the government to call a ceasefire on March 11. Lawyers, food, medical assistance and supplies, and the press were allowed into the hamlet. There was to be a ceremony honoring Milo Goings for his bravery and the symbolic nature of his wound. Although the day started out like any other—fried bread with commodity peanut butter and grape jelly or oatmeal and black coffee for breakfast—there were a lot of people no one recognized, and tension was running high.

A suspicious fire broke out in the basement of one of the buildings. It was taken care of quickly, but the atmosphere was tense. Later that morning prairie fires could be seen in several places, ignited by flares launched from armored personnel carrier positions. It was early in the day, so flares meant we were being harassed. To further complicate the situation, an armed federal postal inspector, who had come into the area disguised as a Red Cross volunteer, was found sneaking around. Belligerent and uncooperative, he refused to identify himself, but his badge and weapon were discovered when he was frisked. At no time was he threatened or mistreated, as he later testified at the trial that resulted in Leonard Crow Dog's incarceration. It is clear that many of the charges that led to trials of all the AIM leadership, and Crow Dog in particular, served no other purpose but to disrupt the movement by subjecting the leaders to constant judicial harassment. Ironically, only Crow Dog, AIM's spiritual leader, served time.

It was time to gather. The elders had been meeting for hours and were ready to honor Milo Goings and the people of all races who had gathered in Wounded Knee to "vote with their bodies for justice." Crow Dog lit the pipe, and the ceremony began, led by Chief Frank Fools Crow. Many Native American men brought pipes to pray with, offering their solidarity.

There along the Big Foot Trail, where the Ghost Dancers were finally caught and massacred, we were led in prayer. Fools Crow, who had been born the year following the original massacre, passed on the saga he was told by his mother of the screams and gunshots that echoed through the cold winter morning, reporting the carnage of that awful day. Then he raised the pipe to the four directions. Milo Goings was praised for his bravery. Wisdom was sought, and blessings for safety were offered. Crow Dog, with an eagle wing fan, waved the smoke of burning sweet grass to bless each of the AIM leaders: Carter Camp, Russell Means, Dennis Banks, and Clyde Bellecourt.



Before a dormant sweat lodge frame along the Big Foot Trail, Leonard Crow Dog lights the pipe.



Holding an eagle wing fan, Leonard Crow Dog (far left) looks on as Chief Frank Fools Crow offers the pipe to the four directions. To Fools Crow's right stand (from left to right) Clyde Bellecourt, Dennis Banks, and Russell Means.

It was in the eyes of Fools Crow that I saw the lostness of it all, the lostness that is reflected only in those who were born in a time when there was still a chance for the traditional ways. The plight of Fools Crow's people was etched deeply into his face; each age-worn line told of a broken treaty, a betrayed trust, a massacred village, a vanished herd of buffalo. What I saw in Fools Crow's face was the erosion of a people. As surely as the rains are washing away the delicate soils of the Bad Lands, so is the oppression of the United States wearing away the indigenous people of the Americas.

Beneath the brilliant winter sun all the races from the four directions were represented that day in South Dakota. United, we followed the drum and the singers to the sight of the 1890 massacre, to the solitary monument at the head of the mass grave in the shadow of the Catholic church. Wallace Black Elk led the prayers as the procession of liberators, each silently praying, was fanned with the eagle wing and blessed with sweet-grass smoke.



Supported by fellow Lakota warriors, Milo Goings, the first man shot at Wounded Knee, is honored for his bravery.



Chief Frank Fools Crow prays with the pipe.

Elders and chiefs met for the rest of the day. Finally, they proclaimed they would negotiate with the U.S. government only as equals, as the Independent Oglala Nation, a revival of the Great Sioux Nation established by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which granted the Black Hills to them in perpetuity. Knowing full well that government reprisals would be swift and violent, they nonetheless made their stand.

Later that day, the FBI intercepted a van with several Native Americans returning to Wounded Knee. No one had been informed that the roads were closed again, but I guess that was the plan. A firefight ensued and an FBI agent was wounded in the hand. That was excuse enough to reestablish the roadblocks. Now more than three hundred strong, the federal forces began construction of permanent roadblock positions.

The next morning, as Ron and I finished a breakfast of coffee and pancakes with sorghum syrup, Leonard Crow Dog and Wallace Black Elk came to speak to us at the clinic. Though the conversation was casual and friendly, there was no doubt that Ron and I were being mea-

sured and assessed, and that from these men approval or disapproval would be forthcoming. I asked for instruction as to how we should proceed without offending the traditional ways and was told that we would learn in due time.

After a while Crow Dog finally asked, "Do you dream?" I replied that I did. Crow Dog looked at me; then, suddenly, as abruptly as the interview began, it ended with the two of them just getting up and leaving. I watched as they left, stopped to talk with Ellen Moves Camp, and were finally gone. Ellen came over and informed us that we were to attend a sweat lodge; we would be told when. Later, Crow Dog came back to talk further about dreams. I would learn from him that dreams are sacred for the dreamer and for those who assist in their interpretation. We talked for a while, and again he abruptly ended our dialogue and walked off.

That night, I was summoned to the sweat lodge for the first of many *Inipi* (purification) ceremonies I would attend. It was cold as we stripped away our clothes and wrapped towels around our waists. The old men spoke in Lakota as we all gathered around the fire and watched the fire tender as he inspected the glowing stones that were being made ready for the ceremony. Crow Dog directed me to be first to enter and to sit just to the left of the door. As I crawled in, I heard the elders speak in Lakota and laugh heartily. Crow Dog looked over and said, "First-timers sit next to the door in case it gets too hot and they gotta get out fast." More laughter as the sweat lodge filled, with Crow Dog the last to enter. Once he sat, there was silence. Outside, the fire tender lit the pipe, prayed to the four directions, then passed the pipe in to Crow Dog.

Throughout the ceremony, Crow Dog prayed and instructed in Lakota, then English. The pipe came to me, and for the first time I drew in the sweet smoke of the *Kin-nik-a-nik* (a blend of herbs and tobacco). I passed it to the man beside me, and it went around until Crow Dog received it, offered a final prayer, and handed it out to the fire tender. Next, the glowing stones were passed in and placed in the fire pit with care and prayer. Crow Dog sprinkled the stones with cedar, the scent spreading with the smoke. The passageway was then closed. We were in the womb of the Mother Earth, Crow Dog instructed. I heard the hiss of water spattering on the glowing rocks, becoming steam. The heat grew as we sang and prayed. This ritual would be repeated three more times, with each round getting hotter.

It was in the intense heat of the final round that Crow Dog asked why I had come to Wounded Knee. There had been nothing in my life to prepare me for the sensations I was experiencing. The heat seeped into me, replacing the sweat that flowed from my every pore. The scent of cedar and sage permeated the air, creeping deeply into me with every breath—more so than during the previous rounds. Within me were inexplicable perceptions. Not hallucinations, but at once more ephemeral and elucidating, not an epiphany, though I felt an awakening, a moment of synesthesia equivalent to nothing I had ever known. A sense of well-being lifted the veil of pretense. To the Lakota, the *Inipi* is a purification; it allowed no place for me to hide from myself. I admitted that I had come to make my reputation as a photojournalist, using my experience in Vietnam to gain access. There was freedom in the admission. I knew from then on that I would help in any way I could as a medic.

As we emerged from the sweat lodge that last time, a cloud of steam bellowed into the cold night air, lost to the winter with my pretense. There was no mention of what we had spoken of. We stood there steaming, all glad to be alive—Black Elk, Crow Dog, Heavy Runner, Stan Holder, Milo Goings, Carter Camp, Oscar Bear Runner, and me. Purification comes in ways we do not understand, but purification comes. Someone handed me a towel.

Later that night, Stan Holder, the head of security and a Vietnam veteran, told me that Crow Dog had said I could stay, but that I should not photograph anyone without his or her permission. From that time, my photography became secondary to my role as medic and dedicated participant in this historic struggle.

Early the next morning, Ellen Moves Camp woke me and said Crow Dog wanted to speak with me. She gave me some coffee and fried bread, and I went to wait outside. Crow Dog arrived and motioned me to follow, silently leading me through the hamlet. Following Wounded Knee Creek, we approached a small shack and were greeted by three older men. We drank black coffee and talked, each man taking his turn to share something important about how to behave properly. There was instruction about prayers to the four directions and the benediction *Mitakuye Oyasin* (All My Relations). They explained that I should go forward with a good heart and help the people in a natural way. They then spoke at length in Lakota. Finally,

Crow Dog motioned that it was time to go. We returned in silence to the occupied area.

Pointing at the sweat lodge, Crow Dog told me to clean it up and get it ready for a warrior sweat that night. I guess I was standing there looking lost, because he then said, "Remember your first sweat, remember what we spoke of today. Everything is sacred." He turned and walked away. I did as instructed, then returned to the clinic. Ellen, who had saved me a bowl of beef soup and some fried bread, apologetically informed me that there would be no meat for a while and that in general food was running low.

Ron Rosen and I worked out a training protocol. Starting that afternoon, we would begin teaching CPR and basic first aid to as many people as possible in Wounded Knee. Later that day Wallace Black Elk explained that we were to conduct an inspection of living and sanitary conditions throughout the village, a procedure that would allow us to assess the overall status of anticipated medical issues before they became problematic. Bob Free, head of everything that worked and master of repairing anything that didn't, took us around the camp, building by building, introducing us. Living conditions were rough, but I did not witness any self-pity. At this point, we had no idea whether or when additional medical assistance would be forthcoming. My experience in medical operations in Vietnam proved invaluable as we implemented training and provided basic medical support until doctors and other health care professionals were allowed through the federal blockades. For the time being, we were helping, our training program was in place, and it would ultimately prove a success when we all endured outbreaks of minor illnesses and influenza. Most important, first aid was crucial as the fighting intensified and produced casualties.

The next morning Crow Dog came to the clinic. He took Ron and me aside and asked us to smoke with him. As he passed the pipe, Crow Dog spoke of the pan-American revolution that was taking place among indigenous peoples. He explained that spiritual and political autonomy was essential to Native peoples, and that until whites understood this basic fact, the violence AIM did not seek or initiate would continue to follow its leaders wherever they went. Native people asked only that existing treaties be recognized as internationally binding agreements between nations, as originally intended. AIM

hoped to be recognized by the United Nations, he told us. Finally, as he fanned us with sweet-grass smoke, Crow Dog thanked us again for coming to Wounded Knee and presented us with medicine bundles, small doe-hide pouches filled with organic herbs that are sacred to the people of the High Plains. (I wore mine as a reminder of that winter, until 1979, when the neck strap had broken too many times to be repaired. I now keep it with other spiritual artifacts, including the ribbon shirt from G-Bear, that sustain me in times of spiritual need.) As Crow Dog departed, he suddenly turned to me and paused. "Follow the winged ones," he offered. "Listen to them and hear what they have to say. You will know what to do." Just as abruptly, he turned and left.

On March 16, at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the Independent Oglala Nation swore in 356 people as citizens: 189 Oglalas, 160 Native Americans from other tribes, and 7 whites, blacks, and Chicanos.

The following day, Rocky Madrid, a Chicano, was wounded. It was late when a firefright broke out. Rocky and I grabbed our aid bags and, escorted by Stan Holder and three others, raced down the dirt road toward one of our fortifications. Suddenly, M-60 machine-gun fire blasted up the road at us—tracers ricocheting off the hard surface. Similar experiences in Vietnam told me we had been set up for an ambush. The FBI started a firefright and, knowing that support would come down the Denby road, strafed the night, hoping for "joy." I was diving for cover when Madrid was hit in the stomach. I grabbed him, and we went down into the roadside ditch. Stan Holder covered us. A quick inspection of the wound in the dark revealed little. I applied a dressing, then Stan and his men helped me get Rocky back to the hospital. Inside, with a good light, I discovered that the 7.62 Nato round had lodged itself between the flesh and abdominal muscle, just below and to the side of Rocky's navel. Crow Dog was there in no time, and I assisted him with the removal of the bullet.

Ken Tilsen, a Minnesota attorney, and members of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee (WKLDOC), a group of unpaid volunteer lawyers dedicated to defending the Native American cause, arrived on March 22 with a court order that directed officials to allow six lawyers in six cars filled with food access to Wounded Knee each day from March 26 through March 31. Learning of this mission, Dick Wilson set up his own roadblocks between Pine Ridge



Marvin Ghost Bear (*left*) and Oscar Bear Runner (*right*) provide security at a road-block.

and the U.S. Marshals. His men ransacked the cars, often confiscating or destroying the supplies intended for distribution inside Wounded Knee. Neither the FBI agents nor the U.S. Marshals did anything to enforce the court order.

A few days later Crow Dog requested that I leave Wounded Knee, find a plane, and return to get him out. Two attempts on his life had failed, and the idea of walking out seemed too dangerous. Without giving the matter more than a listen, I agreed to help and recruited Rocky Madrid.

The afternoon before we left, Crow Dog organized a ceremony for us. First, Black Elk passed the pipe, and we were blessed by the smoke. Finally, Crow Dog cut small pieces of flesh from our shoulders and upper arms. That evening Rocky and I attended a warrior sweat lodge. Hotter than usual, the steam rising from the glowing rocks saturated me, drawing out my apprehensions. It was an honor to pray with such brave men as those who came forward for the ceremony that night. It is more than just steam and heat that engulfs in

the sweat lodge. The energy and goodwill of those who enter with you provide a confidence that only those men who have been under arms together appreciate.

The following morning, we left Wounded Knee without fanfare. Once in Denver, working from separate safe houses, we looked into acquiring a plane, gathered food and medical supplies, and prepared to fly into "The Knee." Rocky recruited a Chicano buddy who was a pilot.

Good to our word, with some adhesive tape modifying the plane's identification numbers, we landed, just missing power and telephone lines, in the middle of the day, right before the eyes of an astonished squad of FBI special agents at their roadblock just outside the liberated area. We quickly unloaded the medical supplies. Crow Dog thanked us, but he had decided to stay. The FBI agents were not so surprised by our departure, and congratulated our successful mission with some automatic weapons fire. We returned the borrowed aircraft and went about our business.²

During the next several weeks, I walked in and out of Wounded Knee under the cover of bad weather, carrying messages and returning with food and other needed supplies. Avoiding the feds was actually quite simple so long as I traveled alone.

While in Rapid City, at a safe house, I was approached by members of the AIM leadership to evaluate and advise about a scheme for an airlift involving multiple planes. A group of non-Indians from the Southwest had planes and a plan. They behaved as if they were in a bad spy movie, and obviously felt self-important in making the offer. But they did have the planes, food, medical supplies, and parachutes. I had the experience of one successful mission. Who was I to go against the wind?

At first light on April 17, with Wounded Knee on the horizon, we adjusted our heading, checked altitude and wind direction, and pro-

² "The first airlift dropped four hundred pounds of food into the perimeter. . . . The single plane . . . almost got caught on a telephone wire, but managed to duck under it and come in for a hard landing on the road close to the trading post. As soon as it touched down, everybody ran up and unloaded it. . . . It all happened so fast that the plane took off before the feds had a chance to react. . . . The copilot had been one of our medics for almost a month and he could show the pilot the way by picking out landmarks. He was white with a tiny bit of Mohawk in him. He made a Sioux-style flesh offering before going on this mission" (Mary Crow Dog, with Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* [New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990], 141).



An FBI roadblock.

ceeded. From three aircraft, all but one canopy opened as we parachuted nearly two tons of food and medical supplies into the besieged hamlet. I left the crew during a refueling stop in Nebraska and made my way back to Rapid City. There I learned that the FBI had opened fire on the defenders as the supplies landed. Enfilades of armor-piercing machine-gun fire from government positions strafed the foundation of the church on the hill, mortally wounding Frank Clearwater with a bullet to the head as he was awakened to help with the food retrieval. Frank, who had arrived only the day before with his pregnant wife, later died from his wound.

When I returned to the Pine Ridge Reservation years later, Lorelie Decora, the first aid responder when Clearwater was wounded, told me about that morning and the betrayal of a cease-fire by the government forces. "He just kept saying to me, 'I just walked in . . . I just got here.' They kept us pinned down . . . we couldn't get him back to the hospital."

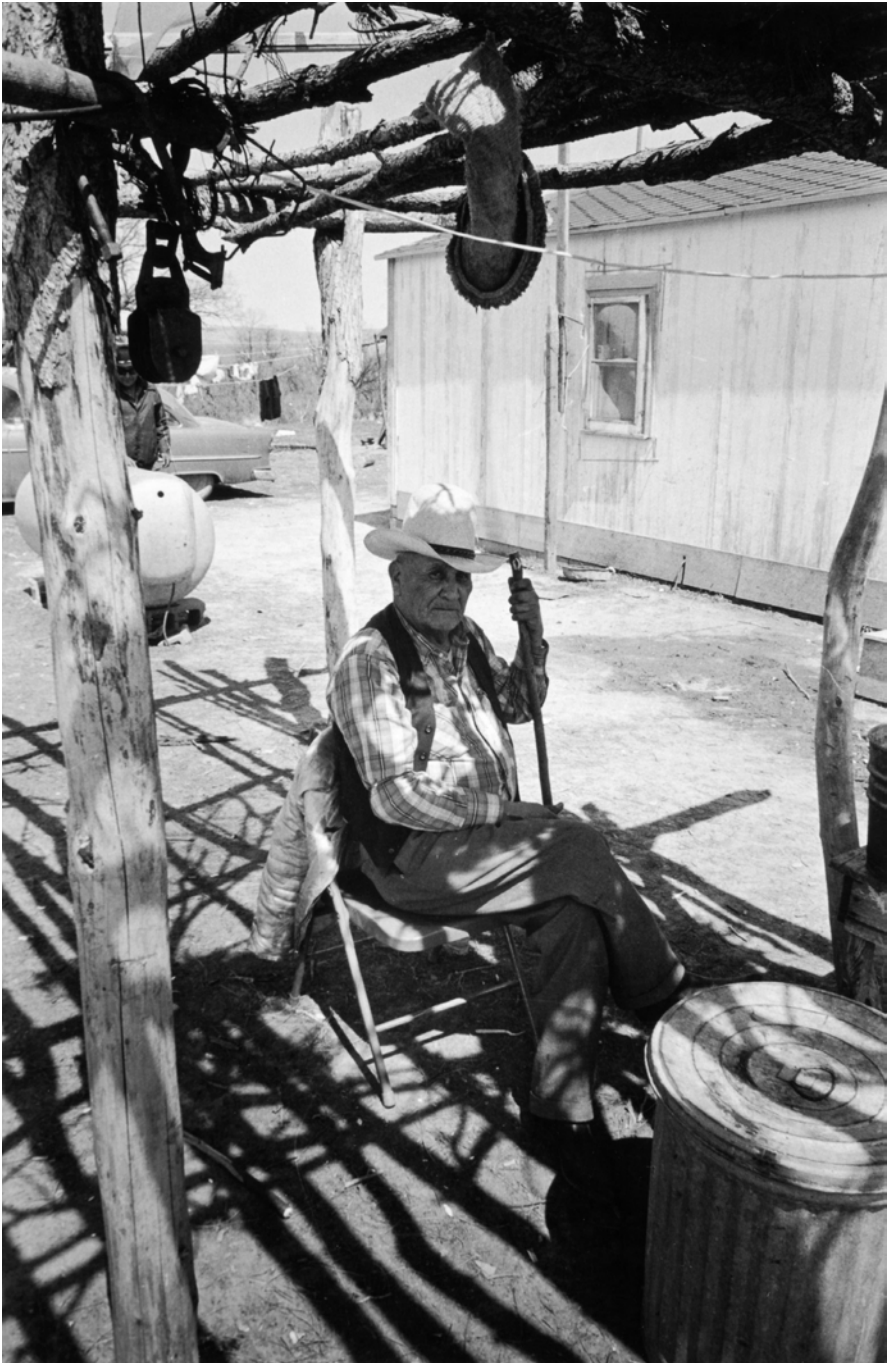
When I learned that there was to be a funeral for Clearwater at Frank Fools Crow's camp in Kyle, I decided that was where I needed

to be. Bob Pledge, New York bureau chief for Gamma Presse Images, volunteered to drive me as close to Kyle as possible. After hydroplaning off the road in a sudden downpour, we were assisted by some passing ranchers. They pointed: Kyle was about twenty miles that way. I thanked my colleague and headed out toward a place I had never been before, under overcast skies, with no sun or shadows to confirm my position. As a sparrow hawk fluttered overhead, screeching a warning, I recalled Crow Dog's advice: "Listen to the winged ones."

I had to hide from roving vigilante patrols as they cruised in their pick-up trucks, looking for trouble. On two occasions I was in the awkward position of having to pass within yards of them. Sliding up and down muddy switchbacks was wearing me out. Eventually the clay separated the sole from one of my boots, and I had to tie it on with my boot laces. It was late when I glimpsed a distant light blinking through the darkness. With nothing more than blind faith to go on, I headed toward an uncertain beacon. Eventually I was able to see that it was in fact a tipi.

I arrived at Fools Crow's just after one in the morning. The tipi sheltered a coffin, shrouded with a star blanket, holding the remains of Frank Clearwater. I remember standing there for a long time, just staring into the dim, warm light. At first I didn't hear the soft, comforting woman's voice asking if I was okay. Later I was told that I had been standing there, just staring into the tipi, for more than an hour, and that when I was led inside I hadn't spoken to anyone for quite a long time. Finally, I accepted some soup and found a dry place in an old log cabin to spread out my sleeping bag.

Frank Fools Crow was a taciturn man. Although he welcomed me into his home, it would be some time before he and I would begin a relationship that lasted until his death. The old man told me how it was after the massacre in 1890, how he was brought up by hunter-warriors who were the last to have hunted the buffalo herds and warred on the Great Plains as a free people. He told me of the religious oppression of his people, how their ceremonies were banned and they were harassed. He told me how the men were forced to cut their hair short, and how the children were taken away, sent to mission schools to become Christian Indians. "It was pitiful how they broke up families, sending people to faraway reservations." Frank and I talked of his life many times over the weeks that I was in and out of his camp during the days of Wounded Knee. In his lifetime he had ridden the plains



Frank Fools Crow at home in Kyle.

hunting the last of the buffalo herds, survived unprecedented persecution. He once said to me, "There have been two world wars in my life, [and] Korea and Vietnam. Man learned to fly. I have watched a man land on the moon on television. And now I am watching a new generation of my people struggle for cultural survival. What am I supposed to think?"

While the ceremonies honoring Clearwater were readied and performed, the camp was under constant harassment by BIA police, white vigilantes, and federal agents. The stress built as Fools Crow and the other elders gathered. Nightly attempts to raid the encampment were thwarted by the ever-vigilant AIM security (in which I proudly claim membership). A government roadblock was set up just the other side of where Frank's driveway met the road.

We finally set out to take Clearwater's body to Crow Dog's Paradise, Leonard's family home on the Rosebud Reservation. As we left Fools Crow's, the procession was stopped and the body was removed from the casket while the authorities searched for weapons. We were detained like this, for an hour or more, at least six times. At one checkpoint, because I refused to stop photographing the event, FBI agents took me into custody without arresting me. They handcuffed me, confiscated my cameras, exposed all the film I had in my possession, and finally set me free.

We buried Clearwater on a bluff overlooking Crow Dog's Paradise. I helped dig his grave and lower him to his final rest. My actions on the morning of the airlift had created the situation that allowed the FBI to take another indigenous life and not be held accountable.

After Clearwater's funeral, my activities were based out of Rapid City, about a hundred miles from Wounded Knee. I continued to go in and out of the liberated area, bringing in food and supplies under increasingly difficult conditions. The FBI and U.S. Marshals had strengthened their presence and were harassing everybody in the area. Their shoot-to-kill approach was thwarting resupply efforts.

Buddy Lamont was killed by a sniper on April 26 as he walked up the main road in the hamlet of Wounded Knee. Buddy had volunteered to serve in Vietnam even though his great-uncle had been murdered by the Seventh Cavalry and lay frozen in the snow of the first Wounded Knee of 1890. Now Buddy, a full-blood Lakota, was claimed by the same racism, along the same creek, by the same government, with the same disregard. Defying resistance from the U.S.

government, Buddy's mother, Agnes Lamont, finally laid her son to rest next to the mass grave of Big Foot and the other victims of the 1890 massacre.

It is my belief that the sadness that permeated the defenders after Buddy Lamont's murder finally brought about their surrender on May 5. This was not a group of rabble fearful of death or incarceration, but Buddy was liked, respected, and now he was dead. By then, too, the trading post had been burned to the ground, the surrounding hills were seared black by fires, and there was no drinking water. The American press and people were no longer paying any attention to the dreadful conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation, having become transfixed by the Watergate soap opera. The promise of frank discussions with White House representatives about the 1868 treaty and the criminal actions of Wilson's tribal government seemed too good to turn down.

Among the last defenders to leave on May 9 were Carter Camp, Leonard Crow Dog, Wallace Black Elk, Gladys Bissonette, Ellen Moves Camp, Rachel Hollow Horn, and Lou Bean. What I remember most clearly about the day the AIM people were brought to Rapid City was old Tom Bad Cob across the street from the jail, with his cane raised over his head, dancing and singing the saddest Lakota lament I have ever heard. All afternoon that old man was there, until the door slammed shut after the last warrior was imprisoned. Then he got into his old pick-up truck and drove off.



On May 17 a delegation with no authority came to Pine Ridge and met with the hundreds of hopeful American Indian people who had gathered at Chief Fools Crow's camp in Kyle. The promised meeting was an empty, cynical gesture of contempt. The government men went back to Washington, promising to return by the end of the month with answers. Again, hundreds of hopeful Indian people gathered at Fools Crow's camp on May 31. This time no delegation showed at all.



On that day in 1973 when Marvin Ghost Bear introduced me to the people of Wounded Knee and invited me into his home, he presented me with two gifts: a beautiful ribbon shirt and the lesson that, though



Outside the Rapid City Jail, Tom Bad Cob protests the plight of his people.

glad for my presence, he would remain in Wounded Knee long after I returned home. I have never forgotten that lesson or Marvin Ghost Bear, because that encounter would largely come to define my approach to photographing Native Americans and First Nation Indigenous people of Canada.

I learned, as I became aware of cultural and social edicts, not to try to occupy the same emotional landscape as my host. As a photographer concerned with social documentation, I believe my primary concern is to create enduring images that will challenge a viewer's assumptions while at the same time, if only for one evanescent moment, remind the viewer of the mutual love of life that is shared by all peoples and provide the energy for an open discourse. I learned to avoid the stereotypical perceptions commonly based on opposing, often objectionable, cultural and ideological prejudices, which deny a people their own history. Living in a village for months at a time allows me to see the everyday struggle for survival of individuals, as a nation and as a race. By acquainting myself with my hosts' semantics, with-

out overstepping the moment of another's life with the interjection of self, I try to tell their story in their own words—as much as that is possible for a photographer. On a recent trip to the Makah Reservation in Neah Bay, Washington, I was in the shop of artist Greg Colfax while he added the final touches to a welcoming pole he was carving for the tribe. Greg shared the following idea with me: “The final insult to Native Americans is when a white man comes along and tells us that we are not Indian enough.”

Each of us has his or her calling. The Lakota and other Plains Indians have the *Hamblecha*, what we call the Vision Quest. People of the coastal Northwest have the Tribal Journey. For me, initially, following in the footsteps of Timothy O'Sullivan, the journey west to explore the vast expanses of the High Plains was a means to escape the claustrophobia of war. Standing at times where there was nothing taller than myself as far as I could see, I wished I could have made the journey when Edward Curtis struck out. In my time, however, there are rare moments when reality dematerializes into dream: attending an honor ceremony at Wounded Knee, participating in an *Inipi* (purification) at Crow Dog's Paradise on the Rosebud Reservation, or making portraits of Makah men and woman in a traditional long house at Neah Bay.

Romanticism aside, the history of Native people today is a dichotomy: pervasive reservation poverty versus gambling casinos creating Native American millionaires; the labor of gill-net fisherman at Neah Bay versus a Makah entrepreneur who takes a one-hundred-foot commercial fishing vessel to the Bering Sea each winter; a funeral presided over by a Lakota holy man with his *Chanupa* (pipe) and a minister with her Bible. This is the history I am documenting. This is where I work.