Prelude to Wounded Knee: The Military Point of View

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"I have never felt that the action was judicious or justifiable, and have believed that it could have been avoided." [1] When General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Division of the Missouri, made this statement in *Serving the Republic,* he had two ideas in mind. First, the massacre that occurred at Wounded Knee Creek could have been avoided at the scene of the battle. Second, the reasons for the outbreak, though communicated by military spokesmen, went unheeded by the United States government. Why was no agreement negotiated by the government to pacify the Tetons? The answer lies in the relationship between the army and the government, and in the nature of Indian policy. To military spokesmen, it was not only the mismanagement of Indian affairs by civilian agents that precipitated hostilities, but also a defective Indian policy and the failure of the government to honor its commitments.

The history of the Plains Indian wars is a history of frustration for the army. The military had no voice in determining the sensibility of a ration and annuity system that was intended to produce Indian self-sufficiency or of a land distribution program that was blatantly unequal. Yet, the military was considered a police vehicle by which legislation, in the form of policy, could be enforced in case of Indian

1. Nelson A. Miles, *Serving the Republic* (N.Y.: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1911), p. 243. Mr. Youngkin wrote this article in December 1971 during his senior year at the University of Iowa. He would like to thank Dr. R. J. DeMallie, Jr. for his advice in the preparation of this article.

resistance. Military officers protested when they had to execute measures that would have been unnecessary if the government had honored its agreements. However, the officers were ignored when they attempted to warn the government of the Sioux grievances and of possible retaliation.

The military was also placed in a difficult position by the failure of the government to carry out the provisions in its treaties. Although the government committed the military to share in the responsibility for its legislation, the army had no voice in creating the treaties nor any way of honoring them independently. Because the military was a representative of the government, it was with the military that the Sioux lost confidence. Military officers, such as Generals Miles and Schofield not only sympathized with the Sioux grievances, but also communicated Indian complaints in correspondence and official reports. In a letter to Senator Henry L. Dawes, General John M. Schofield said that it was "essential to restore confidence with the Indians," and that this could be done only by fulfilling the government's compact with them.[2] In the conclusion of his letter, Schofield raised a hotly debated question. He suggested that if the military were allowed to handle the affairs of the Indians, the treaties would be more faithfully honored.

From a military point of view, the causes of the Sioux Outbreak of 1890-91 were many. General Miles sensed the despondency and hopelessness of the Sioux Indians and sympathized with them. In his annual report to the secretary of war in 1890, he discussed the Sioux grievances. Several of the less important clauses of Miles' report concerned unequitable boundary decisions and the failure of the government to "expand a just proportion of money received" from various railroads for the benefit of Standing Rock Agency.[3] The remaining clauses were concerned with sustenance, the crucial contributor to unrest at the agencies. By the Treaty of 1868 and the Agreement of 1876, the government had agreed to support

2. U.S., Congress, House, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1891-92,* H. Exec. Doc. 1, 52d Cong., 1st sess., 1892 (Serial 2921), p. 149 (hereafter cited as H. Exec. Doc. 1).

3. Ibid.

the Indians with annuities of beef, corn, flour, sugar, and beans while the Sioux learned to farm and thereby become agriculturally self-sufficient. Miles concluded by reminding the government of its failure to fulfill its obligations and suggested that the treaties of 1868 and 1876 be immediately honored.

However, the government had overlooked two obstacles to its policies. First, the Sioux were a nomadic people and wholly contemptuous of tilling the soil. Even coping with a scarcity of buffalo and other game was preferable to farming. Second, the Dakotas were not particularly suited for the nineteenth-century techniques of agriculture. The inhospitable land was the subject of discussion by Sioux agents in their yearly reports to the commissioner of Indian affairs. The agent for the Crow Creek Reservation, A. P. Dixon, reported the failure of crops in 1890 because of hot winds and severe drought and suggested that the government finance an artesian well.[4] In the same year, Agent McLaughlin of Standing Rock Agency referred to the Dakota terrain as rough and suitable only for grazing, and noted that insufficient moisture and hot winds had once again ruined the crops. The inexperience of the Sioux at farming and the agricultural unsuitability of the Dakotas made failure inevitable. The government, though receiving reports of agricultural disasters from the reservations, continued to reduce the quantity of annuities on the theory that it would force self-sufficiency upon the Sioux. General Miles blamed the government for failing to provide the full number of cattle, seeds, and agricultural implements stipulated by treaty and reminded the secretary of war that the crops had failed for four years at the Standing Rock Reservation.[5] He further stated that the absence of game necessitated the issue of a full ration.

The question of annuities was to become crucial to the disaffection of Indians on the reservations. Like General Miles, Captain J. H. Hurst, the commanding officer at Fort Bennett, Dakota Territory, petitioned the government with a list of

4. U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), p. 47.

5. H. Exec. Doc. 1, p. 134.

Sioux grievances, dealing in detail with the policy of annuities. The Sioux asked that cattle be given to them for breeding purposes instead of "farming implements for useless labor."[6] They also complained that the annuities arrived late and that the quality of beef was exceptionally low. Concluding his report, the commanding officer discussed the shrinkage problem of the beef ration. When the cattle were initially weighed in the spring, they were fat and in prime condition. However, by the time a twelve-hundred-pound animal reached the agencies in January, it was six hundred pounds of skin, horns, and bones. The Sioux could not "understand why they should be made to suffer this shrinkage and loss[7]. . . .The Government should bear the loss and not the Indians."[8] Hurst did not blame the Indian agent or the Office of Indian Affairs. He clearly indicated that an early appropriation of funds, which would overcome a limited and tardy delivery of beef, was the responsibility of the government.

General John R. Brooke, commander of the Department of the Platte, after having investigated the causes of disaffection among the Pine Ridge Sioux, reminded the government that by an act of Congress approved 28 February 1877, the Sioux were promised that there would be no reduction in their rations until they became self-supporting. In violation of this legislation, the government had reduced the beef issue in 1888 by 100,000 pounds. The Indians confronted the Sioux Commission with this breach of faith, whereupon the representatives of the government promised to rectify the shortage. However, "the promise was not redeemed and the inevitable deficiency resulted."[9] Agent Gallagher reported a deficiency of 265,400 pounds per month in April 1890.[10]

Commissioner Morgan maintained that the Interior Department could furnish such articles as clothing in lieu of

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 138.

8. Ibid., p. 139.

9. Ibid., p. 135.

10. Ibid.

subsistence "or in lieu of parts of the ration as fixed by the treaty referred to."[11] In this way he attempted to justify the reduction of the beef issue by one-half. General Brooke pointed out that the clause in the treaty that states "or in lieu of said articles equivalent thereof" was being misinterpreted.[12] To substitute clothing for food rations was not an equivalent trade and therefore in violation of the act of Congress. The inhospitality of the land inhibited progress towards the government's ultimate aim of self-sufficiency. Until that time was reached when the Sioux could support themselves, no reduction in any form of subsistence was justified. To document his complaints against the government, Brooke quoted American Horse's statements about the broken promises of the Sioux Commissioner at length in his report. Brooke concluded his report by warning the government that unfulfilled commitments could only serve to intensify factionalism and ultimately enhance the appeal of any vehicle, religious or political, that might relieve their suffering.

The military, as well as the Sioux, also suffered from the land policies of the government. Again, the army was forced to share responsibility for legislation that played an important part in contributing to the increasing resentment of the Indians. The Great Sioux Reservation contained 43,000 square miles, or more than one-third of South Dakota, and made the Black Hills inaccessible from the east. Public pressure demanded that the Sioux be moved aside to provide a gateway to the Black Hills. In 1882 a commission headed by Newton Edmunds, former governor of Dakota Territory, was sent to the Sioux to propose a land cession that would reduce the Great Sioux Reservation by half, and create six separate reservations with the remaining land. Edmunds extolled the advantages of six separate reservations, but failed to emphasize that ratification of the act would also mean the reduction of total reservation land by half.[13] The Sioux, misunderstanding the provisions of the document, signed the agreement with the belief that the

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 42.

proposed six reservations would equal the Great Sioux Reservation in area. The act, however, failed because it proved impossible to obtain the signatures of the required three-quarters of the Sioux men.

Promoters were at a loss until Senator Henry L. Dawes provided a precedent for land allotment in severalty with his General Allotment Act of 1887. The Dawes Act enabled advocates of the division of the Sioux Reservation to apply the policy of allotment in severalty to the Sioux lands. Heretofore, the Dawes Act had been incorporated only in treaties with other Indian tribes. Each family was to receive a patent for 160 acres. After the allotment, the government intended to negotiate for the surplus, and if successful, offer the land to the settlers under the Homestead Act. The provisions of the Dawes Act were incorporated into a new bill, the Sioux Act of 1888. The government offered the Sioux fifty cents an acre for the surplus land, intending the money to finance educational programs on the reservations. The Sioux did not concede and the document was not signed by three-quarters of the adult males, ending any hopes for compromise by the Democratic administration. The Sioux reminded the commission that the government had not honored the treaty of 1868, and they could therefore expect little more this time. They also objected to their lands being sold to homesteaders for two and a half times what they would receive.

The Republicans, victorious at the polls in 1888, were more intent on breaking up the Great Sioux Reservation than the Democrats had been. Political considerations were foremost in the minds of the Republicans. Dakotans were strongly Republican, and the party was anxious to promote the territory to statehood. To undermine past objections to the division of the Great Sioux Reservation, the Republicans made new concessions. The Sioux were to be paid $1.25 an acre for their land, and the government agreed to stand the administrative expenses. In addition, allotments were increased to 320 acres per family instead of the previous 160 acres. Again, the reaction of the Sioux was unfavorable. The allotment of land to individual families destroyed the land base for cattle raising, the only economically feasible means of livelihood on the reservations.

However, reformers, intent on civilizing the Sioux, understood the importance of the division of the Great Sioux Reservation in undermining tribal autonomy and leadership. The nonprogressive leaders proved to be a major obstacle to the reformers. They clung tenaciously to old beliefs and customs and obstinately resisted any encroachment on their authority. To assimilate the Sioux, the old way of life had to be destroyed. There was no better way to accomplish this than by undercutting the tribal society with land allotment in severalty. In theory, every family would be isolated and independent, and the influence of the nonprogressive leaders would be reduced. Those who wanted to kill the Indian but leave the man found the individualizing stimulus inherent in the Dawes Act indispensible to their civilizing programs.

The Sioux Commission of 1889, sent to negotiate the new land cession, was not above threatening the Indians. They inferred that the land would be acquired sooner or later and that the benefits would become less attractive with time. The Sioux were suspicious and raised many questions. Of the greatest concern was the belief that any new negotiations would void the treaty of 1868 and put an end to their annuities. They were aware that self-sufficiency was the government's expectation of the annuity and ration system. It was incomprehensible to them that there would be no connections between the proposed land cession and their food rations. Although the Sioux were originally opposed to the land cession, the endless hassle and dissension arising between the individuals and leaders eventually broke the opposition. In the final vote, 4,463 of the 5,678 eligible voters acceded.[14]

The negotiations for Sioux lands generated much Indian distrust and resentment towards the United States government. The military inherited this resentment when the Sioux Commission of 1889 withdrew. Though the army resented the inequitable land settlement, it was again left in the field to share the responsibility for a policy over which it had no control nor had any hand in creating. As a representative of the government, the army was held responsible by the Sioux for the loss of their lands. High-ranking officials, such as General

14. Ibid., p. 53.

Miles, became increasingly sensitive to the Sioux's loss of confidence in the government, and thereby the army.

However, the army was in a helpless situation. Being in the field and in direct contact with the Sioux, it was aware of the growing agitation and restlessness caused by the annuity system and the land cession, but was powerless to remedy the situation. The government had not only evaluated Indian affairs from a safe distance, but the Indian policy itself had been created in a vacuum. Stationed on the frontier, the army was in a better position to analyze government policy and relations. When Miles warned of the increasing disaffection on the reservations, his observations were based on first hand reports. Army officials understood the Sioux grievances, witnessed their alienation, and foresaw the trouble, but the government would not listen.

Another essential reason for the Sioux outbreak was the changes wrought by the Republican spoils system and home rule. Capable and experienced agents were crucial to the stability of the agencies at times of unrest. Such men of ability as Agent McLaughlin of Standing Rock had their hands full trying to keep the progressive Sioux from joining the nonprogressives. The Ghost Dance religion provided an issue around which both progressive and nonprogressive factions crystalized. At the same time the religion provided a symbolic basis for unifying the traditionalists, it also intensified factional differences between Christian progressives and pagan nonprogressives. There was an unabating contest between the agents and the nonprogressives for influence over the progressive majority. Only an experienced agent could withstand and resist the attempts of the nonprogressive leaders to encroach and undermine his authority.

The agencies lost many of their experienced agents because of the Republican victory at the polls in 1888. Within the spoils system, home rule allowed senators and representatives to appoint Indian agents. South Dakota became a seat of Republican patronage. Charles McChesney, the capable administrator at the Cheyenne River Reservation, was replaced by Perain P. Palmer as a result of home rule. McChesney just had time to write his annual report to Commissioner T. J. Morgan before transferring the agency to his successor. Palmer

Soldiers of Wounded Knee in January 1891.

was not only inexperienced in dealing with Indians, but also lacked the necessary strength of character. Upon his installation at the Cheyenne River Agency, he reminded the Sioux ghost dancers that the Interior Department was unhappy with their behavior. Palmer was no match for Big Foot and Hump, and his authority and influence quickly diminished. The contest for influence between Palmer and the nonprogressive leaders ended in Sioux defiance of his authority. Had McChesney retained his position, the Sioux dancers probably could have been controlled and confined to the limits of the reservation.

Likewise, Agent Wright of Rosebud Agency and Agent Gallagher of Pine Ridge lost their positions because of home rule. Commissioner Morgan, in assessing the effect of the spoils system went so far as to say, "I am constrained to the belief that if the emergency had been met by decision and firmness, the excitement might have been allayed and quiet restored without resort to military aid."[15] Had the few capable agents been retained, the hostilities could have possibly been prevented. Capable and dedicated agents did exist, but were certainly the exception. Carl Schurz, former secretary of the Department of the Interior, observed that, "a thoroughly competent, honest and devoted agent is, according to my experience, so rare a jewel that were I at the head of the

15. Morgan to Noble, 12 Dec. 1890, quoted from Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation,* p. 112.

Interior Department, nothing could induce me to part with him."[16]

It was with the corrupt and incompetent agents that the army had its objections. The army recognized that political considerations were the basis of the spoils system and that the practice had damaging effects on Indian relations, but their criticisms were to no avail.

Despite their impotence to change the situation, accusations of maladministration of Indian affairs were frequently voiced by army officers. Brigadier General E. D. Scott wrote in 1939 that "there was plenty of opportunity for graft among agents, contractors, and traders, and no doubt that it existed, the Indian being the loser."[17] He also noted that the government attempted to protect the Indian from the corrupt agent by arranging that an officer be present to witness the issue of rations to decrease the possibility of fraud. Lastly, he recorded that the officers' reports were "remarkable indictments of conditions."[18] Scott's observations, while not coinciding with those of General Miles, emphasized another aspect of government-Indian relations. Scott reversed the usual military view and blamed the Indian unrest solely on the corrupt agents. Though the spokesmen disagreed in their indictments, civilian Indian agents were still under fire from all sides.

Army officers complained that often the civilian agents, owing their positions to political influence, were more interested in building a reputation and acquiring personal gain than in improving Indian relations. Therefore, the agents were anxious to show progress "in the direction marked out by the Government."[19] For these reasons, military spokesmen

16. Mary A. Johnson, *Federal Relations with the Great Sioux Indians of South Dakota, 1887-1933* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1948), p. 16n. 56.

17. Brigadier General E.D. Scott, "Wounded Knee, A Look at the Record," *Field Artillery Journal* 24 (1939):7.

18. Ibid.

19. Lieutenant W. P. Richardson, "Some Observations Upon the Sioux Campaign of 1890-91," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 18 (1896): 516.

Indians in camp in 1890 after the Wounded Knee incident.

believed that a "policy of assigning Army officers in charge of Indian agencies a good one so far as the Indians are concerned."[20] The military assessed their qualifications in terms of honesty, absence of personal interest, and a better knowledge of the Indians, which would allow them to more objectively judge their progress. Added benefits would be a better understanding of the needs of the Indians, and unbiased reports and recommendations. The army believed that it should be allowed to administer Sioux affairs since it was forced to deal with the consequences of Indian policies. Again, these suggestions were ignored.

With the acceptance of the land cession and the increasing number of progressives, reformers began to believe that the Sioux were a conquered people, ready to accept both the white man's way of life and the rule of the government over the authority of the nonprogressive chiefs. However, an obstacle appeared to halt this "progress." The longing of the Indians for the restoration of the old way of life was rekindled with the

20. Ibid.

appearance of the Ghost Dance religion, which, as a religious creed, had the potential to unite the Sioux in opposition to government attempts at reform. Because this new revival of tribal unity and customs ran counter to the civilizing desires of the reformers, they treated the new movement with scorn. The agent at Pine Ridge spoke of the Ghost Dance in 1890 as though it were only a trifling irritant to the course of progress and assimilation. "There has been something of a backward movement, temporary we trust, on account of the revival of certain superstitions and customs."[21] The Sioux themselves were to treat the Ghost Dance with far more attention.

The doctrine of the Ghost Dance religion was formulated in Nevada during the later 1880s by a Paiute Indian named Wovoka. Raised by white parents and influenced by Christian and Mormon teachings, Wovoka, known by his white name, Jack Wilson, claimed to be a prophet who had received a "divine revelation."[22] Christian ideals of brotherly love, peace, and nonviolence promised rewards of spiritual reunions with the dead, the return of the buffalo, and the eventual elimination of the white man. The missionaries had tried for years to instill in the Indian an appreciation for New Testament ideology, but the

21. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1890,* p. 56.

22. There is some controversy concerning the status of the Paiute medicine man. In an interview with James Mooney in Nov. 1891, he claimed to be a prophet who had received a divine revelation. However, the accounts of Short Bull and Porcupine clearly indicate Wovoka's position as messiah.

> The people assembled, and Christ came among us and sat down. He said he wanted to talk to us again and for us to listen. "I am the man who made everything you see around you. I am not lying to you, my children. I made this earth and everything on it. I have been to heaven and seen your dead friends and have seen my own father and mother. In the beginning, after God made the earth, they sent me back to teach the people, and when I came back on earth the people were afraid of me and treated me badly. This is what they did to me (showing his scars). I did not try to defend myself. I found my children were bad, so went back to heaven and left them. I told them that in so many hundred years I would come back to see my children. At the end of this time I was sent back to try and teach them. My father told me the earth was getting old and worn out and the people getting bad, and that I was to renew everything as it used to be, and make it better" (Porcupine's account in James Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and Sioux Outbreak of 1890," *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1892-1893,* pt. 2 [Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896], pp. 795-96).

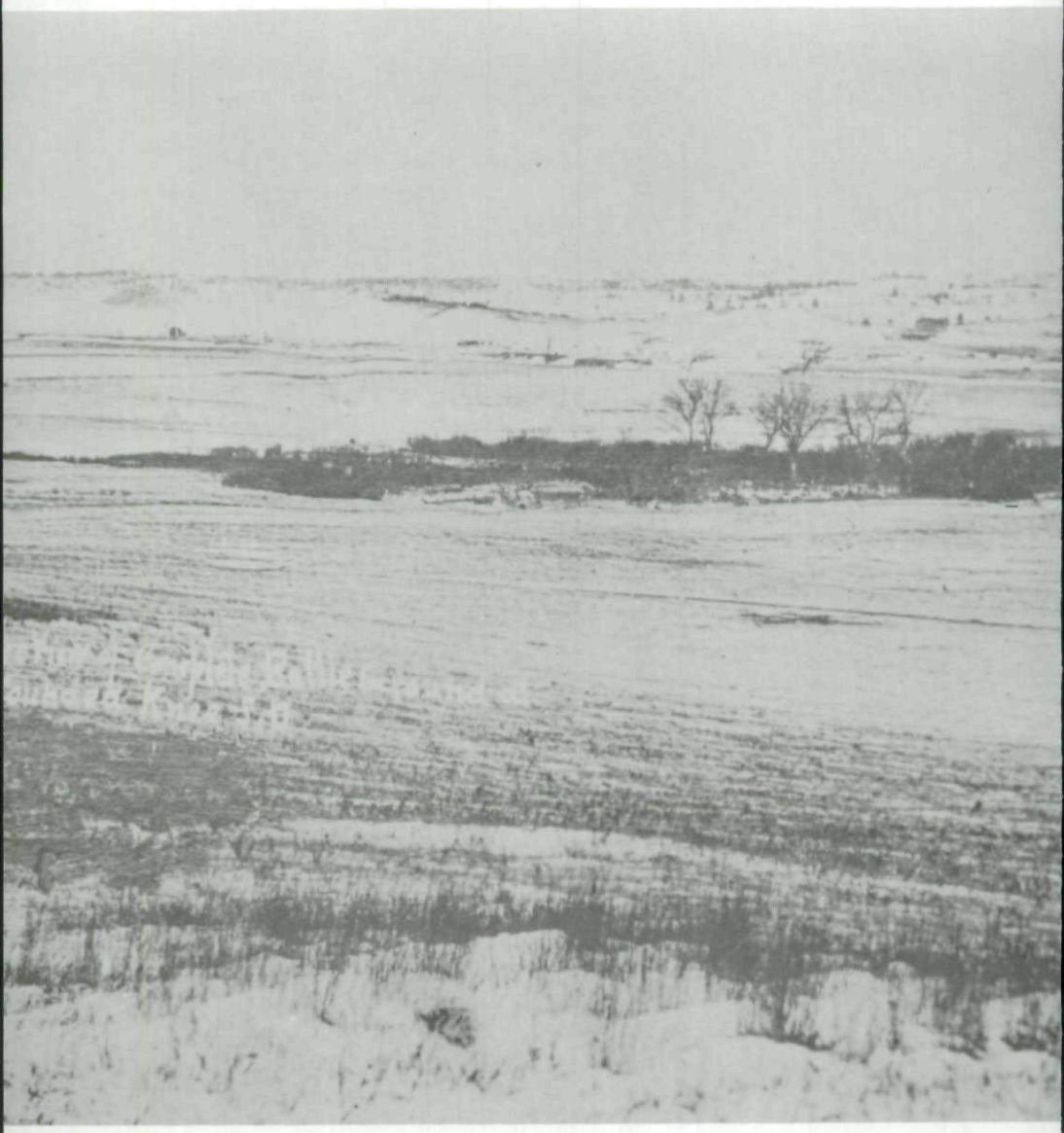
reward of salvation in the next world was not so attractive as the establishment of a utopia on this earth. However, Wilson's utopia was to be awaited patiently. Because the Dakota Indians were starving, restless, and eager to hasten the restoration of the old way of life, the Ghost Dance craze was practiced in earnest in the Dakotas. What initially was a passive religion was transformed by the Sioux into an active and unifying force. While not an aggressive movement, the explosive potential of its defensiveness alarmed the civilians, the agents, and the army.

General Miles evaluated the Messiah Craze with his usual candor. In his annual report to the secretary of war in 1890, he credited the strength of the religion's appeal to the irresponsibility of the government in fulfilling the stipulations of the treaty of 1868. Clearly, this failure generated disaffection and enhanced the appeal of any vehicle that might relieve the oppressed people. The inadequacy of food supplies on the reservations was the single most important contributor to the dissatisfaction.

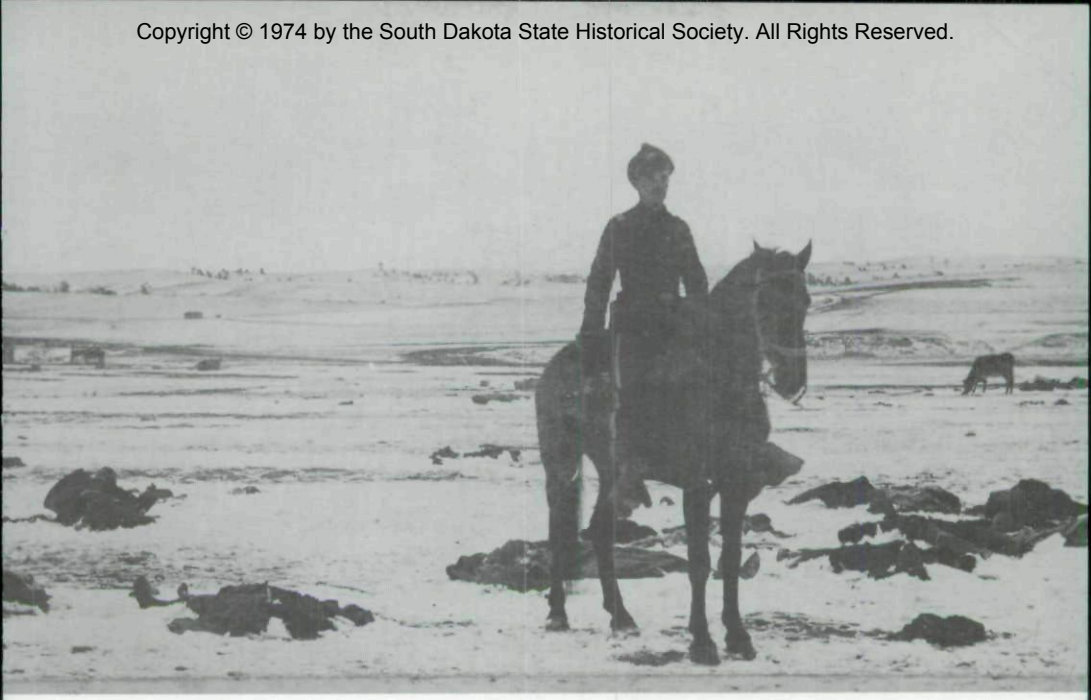
Miles was not alone in his sympathy with the interests of the Sioux. Captain Hugh L. Scott wrote to his superiors saying that Wovoka "has given these people a better religion than they ever had before, taught them precepts which, if faithfully carried out, will bring them into a better accord with their white neighbors and has prepared the way for final Christianization." [23] Though Miles understood the appeal of a messiah to the unfortunate Sioux, he differed from Scott in his estimation of the religion. He denied its validity and extrapolated on its inherent dangers. Christian tenets as an end in themselves were totally acceptable, but Miles thought the Sioux adopted the religion as a means to forge an Indian unity for the purpose of executing measures to fulfill or hasten the rewards of the Ghost Dance. This presented a danger. The government, the Indian agents, and the military became alarmed at the possibility of a religious movement that could unite the Plains Indians militarily.

Miles was especially concerned with two aspects of the religion. In the first place, he feared that the leaders might

23. Report of Captain Hugh L. Scott, 10 Feb. 1891, in Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion," p. 783.



Bird's-eye view of the battle ground at Wounded Knee.



Scenes at the Wounded Knee battlefield.

utilize the fanaticism and superstition of the Sioux and "encourage them to assume hostilities toward the Government and white people."[24] Miles referred to these leaders as so-called prophets, giving hope to a "doomed race that some divine interposition was about to rescue them from their impending fate."[25] He accused these leaders of "rekindling the flames of hostility" that had been smoldering for years and of giving the Indians false hopes.[26] Sitting Bull was especially singled out for attack by Miles and by Agent McLaughlin of Standing Rock Agency. From the beginning of the chief's residence at Standing Rock, McLaughlin had been partially successful in his efforts to undermine Sitting Bull's authority. Now, at a time when the Indians were already dissatisfied with the administration of their affairs, Miles believed that the Sioux leaders were surfacing in order to utilize the unrest in consolidating or gaining their former power. They were allegedly influencing and inciting the Indians to hostilities against the government in the guise of fulfilling the Messiah Craze. Miles was convinced that the dance was a conspiracy against the government and was instigated by the nonprogressive leaders.

Secondly, Miles feared that the psychological effects of the religion might contribute to a defiant attitude among the Indians. In their reports concerning the Messiah delusion, military personnel reminded their audience of the Indians' expectations of the religion. A religious fervor or craze, a result of continuous dancing for days, was causing an anticipation for a new order of things that made the Indians more quarrelsome with authorities. The army and the civilians believed that annihilation of the white man became the central theme during the dances. For the last ten years the Sioux had been subservient and generally receptive to efforts by the missionaries to convert them. Agents had also been able to engage them in agriculture. Then, within a few months, an intense religious movement widened the gap between progressive and nonprogressive elements. The dance suddenly

24. H. Exec. Doc. 1, p. 142.

25. Miles, *Serving the Republic,* p. 234.

26. Ibid., p.238.

restored feelings of hope and defiance that had been dormant for nearly twenty years. Miles attributed incidents of insubordination partly to a disaffected minority element that became more hostile when engrossed by the psychological trance of the Ghost Dance. The Indian police were unable to cope with this new type of hostile or revitalized nonprogressive.

At the Cheyenne River Reservation, General Ruger estimated that one-third of the Indians, nearly all Minneconjous, were engaged in the dances and resisted the Indian police and the efforts of the agent to enforce his authority. The belief in their own indestructability encouraged the threats of the nonprogressives. Even armed combat against overwhelming odds was not feared, because the Sioux had included in the Ghost Dance religion a belief in ghost shirts that were bulletproof. The idea of battling these defiant Sioux, who were convinced of their own invincibility, was awesome to the regular cavalryman. In 1896 Lieutenant W. F. Richardson wrote that "with an amazing disregard of consequences, unusual among Indians, they flung a death challenge at more than four times their own number."[27]

Miles believed that his earlier convictions were being confirmed. The hostile leaders, such as Sitting Bull, Kicking Bear, and Short Bull were utilizing "the wretched condition of the Indians to spread disaffection among the different tribes."[28] Miles quickly noted that the result was an immediate effort by the Sioux hostiles to acquire arms and ammunition. It was no wonder that the settlers were alarmed by a group of hostile Indians "wrought up to a frenzy of wild excitement."[29] The threatening attitude of the Sioux, the alleged advocation of genocide, and the efforts to rearm justified the presence of the military. Agreeing with Miles, Brigadier General E. D. Scott, in examining the accounts of the participants of Wounded Knee, again emphasized the danger of the spiritual exaltation and the injection of violence into the peaceful religion that transformed

27. Richardson, "Some Observations upon the Sioux Campaign of 1890-91," p. 526.

28. H. Exec. Doc. 1, p. 143.

29. Ibid.

it into a means for military unity.[30] Further insight into the military point of view is disclosed in a letter of Captain W.E. Dougherty, a participant in the Battle of Wounded Knee, who wrote that the dance was merely a fad. He credits the movement with no other distinction than a means by which the leaders might "foment an agitation."[31]

To the army it was neither the Ghost Dance in itself nor the increasing disaffection at the agencies that caused the Sioux Outbreak of 1890-91, but a combination of both elements. Had the reservation system been less destructive of Sioux culture and the government more responsible in honoring its agreements, the appeal of the Ghost Dance would have been far less effective. As the elders and nonprogressives witnessed the old way of life being destroyed and their children being Anglicized, they became resentful and restless. It was in this wretched state of affairs that the Ghost Dance emerged as a solution to restore the old way of life.

The observations of military officers, such as General Miles, were, for the most part, accurate and perceptive. They not only recognized the immediate reasons for the Sioux outbreak, but had a clear understanding of the complex issues that gradually led to the alienation and disaffection of the Sioux. Military officers could see that the land cessions were inequitable, that the Dakotas were unsuitable for agriculture, and that the Ghost Dance was actively defensive and potentially explosive. However, though the military understood the appeal of such a revitalization movement to a disenchanted people, they misinterpreted the goals of the Ghost Dance and, thereafter, overestimated its potential power as a political tool by which certain chiefs could regain some of their former power. It was more the presence of the military than any conspiracy on the part of the Sioux that precipitated the confrontation.

However, it was not only in high channels of government that military officers were at a loss in shaping Indian policy. They were equally incapable of influencing the attitudes of the

30. Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion," p. 783.

31. Captain W.E. Dougherty, "The Recent Messiah Craze," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 12 (1891): 576.

enlisted men toward the Indian. Race hatred and fears are contributing factors in precipitating violent incidents. This is particularly applicable in interpreting the conflicts of the Plains Indian wars. Even if General Miles had been influential in government circles, he would have been powerless to combat racial prejudice in the army itself.

The military protested against the Indian policy of the government as unrealistic at every turn. However, the role of the army as a dependent arm of the government prohibited military influence in determining the direction of Indian policy. The essential conflict was one of roles. While the government considered the army a vehicle that enforced its legislation in case of Indian resistance, military officers more broadly interpreted their proper role as an advisory one. The unwillingness of the government to listen to the advice of its military spokesmen rendered the attempts of military officers ineffective in combating the mismanagement of Indian affairs.

The massacre at Wounded Knee was constructive in that it emphasized the government's tragic mistake of ignoring its military critics of Indian affairs, but it was a high price to pay for this lesson. Had the government heeded the warnings of military spokesmen, the tragedy at Wounded Knee might have been averted.

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