

As the Lakota Indians adjusted to reservation life in the late 1800s, George Sword formed a bridge between the Lakota and non-Indian cultures. The former warrior served as the first captain of the Pine Ridge Indian Police, advocating a strategy of cooperation with the United States government to obtain better treatment for his people.

Sword, originally named Chase the Animal, was born in 1847 at the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri Rivers. His father and an older brother, Man Who Carries the Sword, were both chiefs. When his brother died, Sword took the name for himself. The younger Sword won fame as a warrior and raider, participating in such conflicts as the 1867 Wagon Box Fight in Wyoming. In 1870, a trip with an Indian delegation to Washington, D.C., served as Sword's introduction to non-Indian culture. Impressed with the extent of white settlement, he decided to cooperate with government officials. After the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, he led a group of Indian leaders to Crazy Horse's camp to persuade the chief to surrender and accept reservation life.

Following his 1879 appointment as Pine Ridge police captain by Agent Valentine T. McGillicuddy, Sword occupied an awkward position between two worlds. White agents turned in glowing reports on his loyalty, and the government built him a house. Conversely, traditional leader Red Cloud, who was also Sword's uncle, resented him. The conflict between old and new ways became glaringly apparent when Sword, formerly a well-known horse-stealer, killed Spotted Wolf while attempting to arrest him for the same offense.

Although he had once been a traditional holy man, by 1890 Sword had joined the Episcopal church. He also served as judge on the Pine Ridge court of Indian offenses, but he had not forsaken his tribesmen. Rather, he used his influence to make the best of the situation for his people. On one of several trips to the nation's capital, Sword and other leaders negotiated increased rations for the Pine Ridge reservation. On other occasions, he sympathetically explained the Ghost Dance religion to whites and criticized the military's murder of civilians at Wounded Knee.

George Sword died at his home on Pine Ridge on 17 October 1910.

by Joshua Garrett-Davis

## Dakota Images



George Sword

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