

Sioux Agent Daniel F. Royer Saw Dancing and Panicked

The natives called him 'Young Man Afraid of Indians' By John Koster

In late November 1890, Daniel F. Royer, Indian agent at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, received a letter that precipitated the Wounded Knee Massacre and destroyed his own attempt to save the Sioux from what other whites hoped would be extermination. Lakota Chief Little Wound wrote the letter through John M. Sweeney, the teacher at No. 8 Day School:

Little Wound understands the soldiers are coming on the reservation. What are they coming for? We have done nothing. Our dance is a religious dance, so we are going to dance until spring; if we find then that Christ does not appear, we will stop, but not in the meantime, troops or no troops. We shall start a dance on this creek [Medicine Root, 50 miles north of Pine Ridge] in the morning.

I also understood that I was not to be recognized as a chief any longer. All that I have to say is that [neither] you nor the white people made me chief, and you cannot throw me away as you please; but let me tell you, Dr. Royer, that by them [my people] I will be recognized as long as I live.

I have also been told that you intended to stop our rations and annuities. Well, for my part, I don't care. The little rations we get do not amount to anything, but, Dr. Royer, if such is the case, please send me word so that me and my people will be saved the trouble of going to the agency.

Sweeney, the teacher, appended his own description:

Dr. Royer, Little Wound and a number of people from Yellow Bear Camp have commenced dancing on this creek this morning, November 20, and if I am al-

lowed to express my opinion, I think that he will continue to dance until he is stopped by force. He is a very obstinate man... of ungovernable temper, and he is carried away with the dance craze, seeming to believe firmly the absurd doctrines which are preached at these dances....

The dancers are those that did not sign the Indian bill [to cede part of the Great Sioux Reservation], and in fact they seem to be always in some trouble. They are continually finding fault with the agent, the government and everything pertaining to civilization, and I think that this has become more noticeable since the Sioux Commission successfully accomplished their object in passing the Sioux bill.

It is a positive fact that the Indian dancers are well armed and have plenty of ammunition, and my opinion is that they have been preparing for trouble some time. Indians whom I have talked to have told me that they would all fight if it became necessary, and they seemed to think that the Great Spirit will assist them so that they can easily overcome the whites.

Royer himself had requested troops in no uncertain terms in a November 18 telegram to the commissioner of Indian Affairs: "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. I have fully informed you that employees and government property at this agency have no protection and are at the mercy of these dancers. Why delay by further investigation? We need protection, and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined in some military post until the matter is quieted, and this should be done at once." Sweeney's letter did nothing to restore Royer's calm and kept the

agent agitating for government protection. Within a week, half the U.S. Army was converging on the Sioux reservations.

Royer had been a newspaper publisher in the Dakotas when the following editorial had appeared earlier in 1890:

The nobility of the redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them. The whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they die than live the miserable wretches that they are.

The author of the editorial, however, was not Daniel F. Royer but newspaperman L. Frank Baum, who later wrote *The Wizard of Oz*. While Baum was thumping for extermination (see related feature, P. 28), Royer was serving as a founding member and head trustee of the Methodist Episcopal church in Alpena, Dakota Territory, where Sunday school was taught by Dr. Charles Eastman—three-quarter Santee Sioux and, like Royer, an advocate of Indian survival through cultural exchange. Royer didn't become the instigator of Wounded Knee because he lacked compassion or because he personally hated Indians. His failure stemmed from fear and a lack of insight. The half-starved but truculent Sioux promptly took Royer's panic by nonviolent defiance to be threatening. The Sioux may have been asserting their manhood by teasing him by calling him "Young Man Afraid of Indians."



Lakotas line up to receive their food rations at the Pine Ridge Agency office, where political appointee Daniel F. Royer took charge in October 1890. Measly allotments and Royer's crackdown on Ghost Dancing were primary causes of tension on the reservation.

Born in 1851 in the Cumberland Valley town of Waynesboro, Pa., Royer was 39 during the lead-up to Wounded Knee—hardly a “young man.” He had graduated from Carlisle College, earned certification as a teacher at the State Normal School and then studied medicine at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. Royer was also a trained pharmacist, but success eluded him. When he moved to Dakota Territory in 1884, he worked as a pension examiner and served two terms in the Dakota Territorial Legislature just before statehood was declared in 1889.

The 1888 presidential election brought him what ultimately proved a poisonous political plum. The Republicans backing Benjamin Harrison defeated the Democrats backing Grover Cleveland, and Indian Affairs took a turn for the worse. Cleveland had rebuffed the first attempt to parcel out the Great Sioux Reservation into allotments and open the extra land to settlers, as the number of Indian signatories was insufficient. Harrison had no such scruples. And Daniel F. Royer, failed physician, pharmacist, teacher and editor, became Indian agent at Pine Ridge by dint of federal patronage.

When Royer arrived at the reservation in October 1890, he tried to stop Buffalo Bill Cody from recruiting Lakotas for his

Wild West, because he wanted the warriors to learn new ways. Royer also tried to have his Indian Police stop the Ghost Dancing. They failed. At one point, Royer brought his nephew, a farm boy named Lewis McIlvaine, from Huron, S.D., to teach baseball to the Indians. McIlvaine reported that by this time his uncle was terrified of Indians, kept a loaded rifle in his buckboard and once pointed it at a Lakota man he had ordered to stop dancing. The old warrior tore open his shirt to reveal a chest harrowed by the scars from the Sun Dance. Royer backed down. Later he panicked and fired at some dry weeds blowing over the roadway. His nephew left the reservation. Royer essentially barricaded himself in his office—and kept sending telegrams.

Royer's telegrams were the catalyst that brought the troops, but agent James McLaughlin at Standing Rock—a bolder man than Royer—actually lit the fuse when he ordered his Indian Police to arrest his personal bugbear, Sitting Bull, who was *not* a Ghost Dance leader. Sitting Bull was killed when a gunfight broke out between his followers and the police. Then Big Foot's band fled. When soldiers closed in and tried to disarm his warriors at Wounded Knee Creek, a bigger gunfight and slaughter followed.

Royer's timidity made him the culprit of Wounded Knee in the eyes of the Army, which issued 25 Medals of Honor for a “battle” in which friendly fire struck perhaps half the troops and innocents were slain. The blame stuck. Later historians labeled him “tremendously incompetent” and “contemptible,” but Robert Utley probably found the right adjective: “mediocre.” For Royer himself was the victim rather than the villain of a plum system that handed incapable people precarious jobs after they had failed at everything else. He had no business meddling in Indian Affairs.

The panic that led to the tragedy at Wounded Knee slowly destroyed Royer as well. He moved to Los Angeles in 1896 and acquired real estate that kept him afloat financially, married a widow and raised a daughter of his own and two stepdaughters, but he ultimately succumbed to alcoholism and narcotics abuse. Perhaps he was haunted by what his own cowardice had helped cause and by what reform-minded writer Helen Hunt Jackson termed “A Century of Dishonor.” Before he died in the 1920s, Dr. Royer had lost both his physician's license and his pharmacist's certificate. He may have been the last casualty of the “battle” of Wounded Knee. ww

Pressing the Issue at Wounded Knee

Many South Dakota dailies and weeklies attacked the Sioux in print, some even calling for their extermination, both before and after the bloody clash of December 1890

By Randy Hines

Historians often cite mistakes and misunderstandings as the reason for the bloody clash that occurred on the morning of December 29, 1890, as soldiers disarmed a Sioux band on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Details vary as to what set off the mostly young and untrained bluecoats' hail of bullets that cold morning. Some say a deaf Indian refused to turn over his gun because he could not hear the order to do so. Others say a young brave named Black Coyote did not want to surrender his brand new rifle, which went off during the ensuing struggle.

What happened next is clear. The 7th Cavalry's four rapid-fire Hotchkiss guns and its 4-to-1 manpower advantage over the starving Sioux left no doubt as to the outcome. Within minutes the gunfire leveled some 150 (estimates range from 128 to 300-plus) Sioux men, women and children, some in their tepees, oth-

ers gunned down up to two miles from their makeshift camp on Wounded Knee Creek. (The number of Indian warriors under Minneconjou Chief Big Foot appears in most accounts as 106 or 120.)

No matter who fired the first shot, the soldiers had the upper hand in numbers and weapons. Because of that, and because Big Foot (also known as Spotted Elk) was in bad health and not looking for a fight, the clash has most often been referred to as a massacre rather than a battle. Twenty-five soldiers died, and 37 were wounded, so some have argued it was *not* a one-sided affair. No matter what its label, it was a tragedy, undoubtedly one most of the participants did not want. Wounded Knee was also the last major fight between soldiers and Indians in the West.

Tensions had run high in the Dakotas during the fall of 1890. Certain Indian agents and white settlers felt threatened by the Ghost Dance, a religious movement that had blossomed at Pine Ridge and the other Sioux reservations. But

The iconic image of the Wounded Knee tragedy is this solitary photo of dead Minneconjou Chief Big Foot, whose body a photographer propped up in the snow.

HERITAGE AUCTION GALLERIES, DALLAS, TEXAS

there were additional sources of tension, including one overlooked by many historians—the American press. An examination of press coverage during the lead-up to Wounded Knee reveals hysteria and calls for genocide by many South Dakota newspapers. Only a few showed any understanding of the Sioux position. One major out-of-state paper, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, hearing about the



Indians' frustration with their treatment, ran a multi-deck headline on October 28, 1890, predicting a revenge attack:

TO WIPE OUT THE WHITES
WHAT THE INDIANS EXPECT OF
THE COMING MESSIAH
FEARS OF AN OUTBREAK
OLD SITTING BULL STIRRING UP
THE EXCITED REDSKINS

Illustrated American correspondent Warren K. Moorhead, who was at the Pine Ridge Agency, condemned such hyperbole directed toward the Sioux. He later wrote, "There were a number of newspapermen in the little log hotel at Pine Ridge, and they sent many sensational accounts to the Eastern papers." Could all that sensationalism have helped trigger the tragedy?

Of the 14 South Dakota newspapers published in 1890–91 and available for research, only two publications wholly ignored the Indian situation at Wounded Knee in their news and editorial pages. *The Dakota Farmers' Leader*, a Canton weekly published by A.E. Linn, did not mention Wounded Knee or any of its participants. Ironically, that paper's long



Newspapermen pose at Pine Ridge. From left: C.H. Cressey (*Omaha Bee*), William F. Kelley (*Nebraska State Journal*, Lincoln), Major John Burke of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, unidentified Indian, Gilbert E. Bailey (*Chicago Inter-Ocean*), Alfred Burkholder (*Chamberlain Gazette*, S.D., and *New York Herald*) and Charles W. Allen (*Chadron Democrat*, Neb.).

front-page motto read: "A Faithful LEADER in the Cause of Economy and Reform, the Defender of Truth and Justice, the Foe of Fraud and Corruption." *Conklins South Dakotan*, pitched as "A Home Journal Devoted Editorially to Dakota Issues and Interests," was a 16-page monthly from Watertown. Of three 1891 issues available, only the January edition made any mention of Indians. It reprinted a December 19 item from a Denver paper about a brief skirmish in the region.

Other papers criticized press coverage of the Sioux situation. On Christmas Day, the *Marshall County Sentinel*, published in Britton in the northeast corner of the state, cautioned readers with timely advice about the printed rumors concerning outbreaks between armed warriors and military troops:

The dispatches from the seat of war appearing in these columns are culled from the most reliable associated press

and special telegrams. It is well known that all are not literally true, but a newspaper, in order to give the news of the day, must print those it deems most truthful and strive to cull out those dispatches that are merely sensational. The reader must also exercise his own judgment in accepting those for absolute truth which appear to be particularly sensational.

South Dakota's *Daily Huronite* reprinted a bit of sarcasm on Pages 1 and 2 of its December 20 issue, five days after Indian police killed Sioux holy man Sitting Bull while trying to arrest him at his cabin on Standing Rock Reservation. One item reads: "An eastward paper questions the genuineness of the news of Sitting Bull's death. Never mind the news. The death is genuine." The second item reads:

"Give the bucks plenty to eat and take away their guns," is the sensible advice

given by the *New York World*. —*Huron Herald Democrat*

If that is to be one of the planks in the democratic platform, explanation is needed as to why we should "give" the lusty Indian bucks "plenty to eat." ...Why not give the "bucks" plenty of chance to work or starve, and to be peaceable or get killed, just like white folks?

The third item in *The Daily Huronite* asks, "What shall we do with our Indians?" A Black Hills paper replies, "Ever try whiskey?"

Although the *Huronite* published jokes about making a "good" Indian, it did serve as a forum for the Indian point of view. On December 23 the paper ran verbatim on Page 1 a resolution introduced in the U.S. House to investigate Sitting Bull's death. The next day, the paper challenged its readers: "What have the 'hostiles' done? It seems to be so far a white man's war." On December 26, the *Huronite* was even more explicit:

Local

Haven't the Indians good right in the Bad Lands? Are they off the reservation? Haven't they a right to dance? Is there any law against their carrying guns? Haven't they a right to look blue in these hard times? What is the whole United States army doing out in that section, anyway?

The *Daily Huronite* first made mention of the Wounded Knee fighting in a brief on Page 1 of its December 30 issue. Following a list of the dead and wounded soldiers was the unusually candid remark, "After the shooting began, Indians were shot down without discrimination." While the *Huronite's* approach to the Wounded Knee news story was hardly typical in South Dakota, its reporters were not alone in finding fault with the way soldiers handled things on December 29.

The *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, published every evening except Sunday, was not quite as condemning of the military action, but it covered Wounded Knee as thoroughly as any paper in the state. Its December stories were rather sensational accounts of armed Indians seeking revenge. The paper reported Sitting Bull's death and Chief Big Foot's capture. Its December 30 top story was a long eyewitness account of the shootings. Part of it reads:

The correspondent says the Indians [at Wounded Knee] must have been mad to have attacked the number of soldiers who were gathered about them, there being only 120 bucks. The treacherous deed, coming at the time it did, was a surprise, and the [correspondent] doubts if any of the Indians will be left alive

to tell the tale when the soldiers get through the day's work.

Names of the dead and wounded soldiers followed, but the paper did not list Indian casualties. A related story on the same page related the "discovery" of Big Foot. If not for the serious nature of the saga, it would seem comical:

As they came forward, Big Foot extended his hand in token of peace. "I am sick. My people here want peace," he said.

But Major [Samuel] Whiteside cut him short with: "I won't, nor will I have any parlaying at all; it is either unconditional surrender or fight. What is your answer?"

"We surrender," said the chief. "We would have done so before but we couldn't find you and couldn't find soldiers to surrender to."

TO SETTLE THE INDIAN TROUBLES



Send the Camera Fiends of the Eastern States to the Sioux Country by a Special Train.

Local and national reporters covered the tense Pine Ridge story, but their readership clamored for telling images as well as words.

Several sources report a medicine man performing the Ghost Dance before gunfire erupted at Wounded Knee. His role and identity remain in dispute. This body may be his.



That newspaper's coverage boosted tensions several days after the Wounded Knee confrontation. Two subheads for a January 2, 1891, front-page follow-up story read: **THE HOSTILES GATHERING THEIR FORCES FOR ANOTHER BATTLE** and **RED CLOUD AND LESSER CHIEFS HAVE JOINED THE WAR PARTY.** In truth, old Red Cloud, while once a formidable war leader, sought peace and never encouraged the Ghost Dance movement.

The *Yankton Press and Dakotan* published its first Wounded Knee editorial in the January 2, 1891, edition. Longer than average, it called for transfer of the Indians back East:

When the redskins are finally conquered, they will be disarmed as a matter of course, and judging from the past, a period of peace will follow; but it will take years to restore a feeling of security to the white settlers on the Nebraska and Dakota frontiers who have been alarmed by this outbreak,

if the Indians are permitted to roam at will. One of the best things to do to secure a permanent peace and give the settlers a feeling of perfect security would be to remove the Indians from their reservation altogether. As far as practicable, select small reservations for them back in the older states, scattering them a few hundred at each place, breaking up their relations. In this way, the frontiers would be rendered secure, settlement would rapidly advance, and the terrors of pioneering would lose much of their actual danger.... Remove them to the land of Penn and scatter them along the banks of the Ohio, where they will be convenient to those philanthropists who are anxious to lend them a helping hand.

The paper's final coverage of the event comprised two front-page articles in the January 9 issue. One blamed the battle on missionaries and Indian protection societies. The other printed warnings

about Indian reprisals, including William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's reported dire caution: "Buffalo Bill takes a gloomy view of the future and says... a big battle is almost sure to occur within a few days." Although the *Yankton Press and Dakotan* certainly had done nothing to reduce tensions in South Dakota, another "big battle" did not follow.

The closest major city to Wounded Knee is Rapid City, South Dakota. In a December 16 front-page warning that trouble could soon break out on the reservation, *The Rapid City Daily Journal* boasted it had sent three reporters to the scene: "The party went well equipped and if called upon will no doubt render valuable services with gun as well as pen." Two days after the lopsided December 29 fight, the *Journal* ran a lead editorial criticizing other publications that had doubted a serious confrontation might occur:

Many people and many papers have for a month past been ridiculing the belief that the Sioux meant to fight. It is noteworthy that those who have had the most experience with Indians have been anxious. They have not been inclined to believe fears of trouble groundless.

And for the first time during this major event, the paper expressed the Indian viewpoint. A Page 2 article on January 4, 1891, explained:

All the Indians in the hostile camp are well armed and mounted and claim that the soldiers took the arms away from Big Foot's men and then massacred them, and they want them to come in and do the same with all the Indians in and around the agency.

Pierre, the state capital, published three newspapers that still are extant. The *Pierre Daily Capital* printed sensational

accounts in mid-December, with such headlines as WAR BEACONS BLAZING and INDIAN SCARE NEWS. At the same time, it ran a December 17 front-page story on the innocence of the dreaded Ghost Dance, relating Army Chaplain Orville J. Nave's speech back East, in which he said the dance was merely a religious ceremony, not a war dance.

The *Daily Capital* also covered Big Foot's capture and the subsequent escape of some warriors. Headlined AT LAST A BATTLE, a December 31 article shared Wounded Knee details. The next day, a front-page headline declared PANIC REIGNS SUPREME:

Panic reigns supreme between here [Rapid City] and the camp of the government troops on Wounded Knee creek, the scene of Monday's bloody battle with Big Foot's treacherous band. Settlers are fleeing in all directions to escape the impending massacre, and the roads are crowded with terror-stricken women and children.

The Free Press Co. published both the *Pierre Daily Free Press* and the *Pierre Weekly Free Press*. The December 18 *Weekly Free Press* offered a matter-of-fact solution to the Indian problem:

The general impression among frontiersmen here seems to be that the best way to handle the difficulty now is for the government to insist on having the Indians obey orders, stay on their reservations and quit the ghost dances, and to kill as many as may be necessary in order to enforce discipline.

A December 19 editorial in the *Daily Free Press* concluded: "It is hoped that nothing serious will come of it, but if the troops are compelled to fight it would be better that every hostile is wiped out and thus teach the Indians that it is wisdom to steer clear of such things in the future." Another *Daily Free Press* journalist in Pierre made a similar suggestion "to teach the savages a



Corporal Paul H. Weinert poses behind a Hotchkiss gun with his crew. He fired the artillery piece and withstood Winchester fire during the fight, earning a Medal of Honor.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOGRAPHY CENTER



These images of the burial of Big Foot's body lie behind the tent of Cloman's horse.



lesson which they won't soon forget." A December 23 editorial in the *Daily* predicted less action and fewer reporters with the onset of freezing weather:

When the mercury in the thermometer begins to settle down, there will be less heard from the seat of the Indian war, and the war correspondents sent out by the metropolitan sheets will wind up their reports in short order and go back. They can't paint things rosy enough to warm up the atmosphere when Dakota winter weather gets on a frolic.

Once the fighting broke out, the *Daily Free Press* was late in giving details. On December 31, it noted: "At present writing no further news has been received from the battle. The presumption is that the small band of hostiles will be practically exterminated by the soldiers—who will be just as anxious now to make a good Indian as the ranchmen."

A consolidation of the *Daily Argus* (founded in 1880) and the *Leader* (established in 1881), the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader* covered Sitting Bull's death and Big Foot's flight. A December 26 editorial compared civil trouble in Ireland with the Sioux situation: "In the former case, the public sees a great deal of bad blood where it ought not to be, and in the latter, it sees little where some would doubtless have a salutary effect."

The *Argus-Leader* ran battle coverage identical to dispatches printed in the *Pierre Daily Capital*. A December 31 story with a Rushville, Neb., dateline carried this startling subhead: THE MADDENED SOLDIERS SPARED NEITHER AGE NOR SEX. Near the end of the article was this sentence: "The soldiers of the 7th killed all the women and children in Big Foot's band that they could get at."

A lengthy editorial on January 5, 1891, explained the *Argus-Leader* was "not an Indian worshiper," adding: "It recognizes the lazy, filthy, immoral and brutal habits of the Sioux. It believes that the rapid extinction of the Indians during the past century has been of great benefit to the American people, since it has removed an impediment to civi-

lization....But it believes that justice is above all other ends, and particularly justice to the weak. A treaty should be sacred....It is a national disgrace that this is not true of the treaty between the U.S. and the Indians."

One week later, another *Argus-Leader* editorial called for an end to the uprisings and took to task fellow publishers in South Dakota who had spewed hatred: "But the attitude of the press, particularly that of this state, is a much greater disgrace. The papers have been filled lately with bitter denunciations of the Indians, with bloodthirsty wishes for their massacre and with threats of confiscations and annihilation."

A rather comical but telling portrayal of the scene prior to Wounded Knee appeared in the *Aberdeen Daily News* on December 28: "The news today indicated that the Indian troubles are about to be brought to a close.... The whole body of braves, squaws and papooses... who have been enjoying several weeks' outing at the famous terrace of wall camps in the Bad Lands killing and smoking beef, stealing horses and engaging in other healthful and exciting pastimes, are now en route to the hospitable agency at Pine Ridge."

The weekly *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* printed a lengthy editorial after Sitting Bull's December 15 death. Editor L. Frank Baum, who would later write *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, penned it:

The proud spirit of the original owners of these vast prairies, inherited through centuries of fierce and bloody wars for their possession, lingered last in the bosom of Sitting Bull. With his fall, the nobility of the redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them. The whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they die than live

the miserable wretches that they are. History would forget these latter despicable beings and speak, in later ages of the glory, of these grand kings of forest and plain that Cooper loved to heroize.

We cannot honestly regret their extermination, but we at least do justice to the manly characteristics possessed, according to their lights and education, by the early redskins of America.

Following the Wounded Knee clash, another Baum editorial dated January 3, 1891, included this call for action:

The *PIONEER* has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extirmination [sic] of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries, we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are under incompetent commands.

Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble with the redskins as those have been in the past.

Although extreme in his view, the man who would conjure up Oz by the end of the century hardly stood alone in the less-than-noble, one-sided word fight against the natives of the West.

Coverage of Indian defiance began in the *Mitchell Daily Republican* as early as December 18. The paper, published far from the scene, ran several front-page stories about the battle but printed no editorials.

The *Marshall County Sentinel* predicted trouble with its December 11 headline: WAR IS CERTAIN. It covered the battle, reprinting reports and telegrams sent from the state to Washington, D.C.

The *Union County Courier* bore the motto "Independent in All Things—Neutral in Nothing." It lived up to that billing in its December 24 issue:

Red Cloud writes to Dr. Bland of the Indian Defense Association, making complaints against the government that the Indians are not receiving half

Reporter Teresa Howard Dean's Story

Not all reporters contributed to the tales of imminent danger from Indians on the warpath. *Chicago Herald* reporter Teresa Howard Dean wrote sarcastically of the newspapermen at Pine Ridge: "[They were] the only people at the reservation who seemed to be at all conscious of danger":

And they—those of them who were not familiar with the West—were in perfect sympathy with the sensational reports that they were sending out broadcast over the country. Most of them were posing as heroes of the wild West, and what time they were not engaged in rushing around for news and writing it up was devoted to having their photographs taken, or rather the photographs of their broad-brimmed hats and belts and revolvers and knives and high-topped boots. Of course these trappings were adorning themselves.

Dean particularly disdained one George C. Crager of *The [New York] World*. Crager claimed to have visited the Oglala hostile camp on January 17, 1891, negotiated for Maj. Gen. Nelson Miles and left the flag of his paper floating from a tepee, then ridden the 28 miles to the telegraph office at Rushville, killing his horse in the process. Dean quipped he might have done all this in his imagination, but she and Crager had arrived at Rushville on January 13, the day after the Oglalas had surrendered. As far as the council held January 17 to formalize the earlier agreement, it was attended by everyone in perfect safety.

Dean described how the reporters regularly had to wait, hat in hand, at the door of Miles' office, hoping the general would "favor them with some small parcel of news." She added: "One grain meant a whole column to them. They wrote the column whether they received the grain or not."

Nancy Peterson

rations, and that large numbers of the Indians are actually starving. If the government has contracted to feed these red whelps, it ought to give them enough to eat and not starve them, although they do not deserve a better fate.

The December 31 issue had no battle coverage. In its next issue, January 6, 1891, the *Courier* heralded its subjective slant on the news with the headline: 300 INDIANS KILLED; MANY BAD REDSKINS MADE GOOD IN A VERY FEW MOMENTS.

Watertown's *Public Opinion* offered this December 19 editorial from editor L.D. Lyon: "Sitting Bull is now a good Indian and has gone to join the ghost dancers on the happy hunting grounds. He died several years too late." Following the battle, the front page editorialized on January 2: "News from the Indian trouble causes a mingled feeling of joy and sadness—joy because 300 of the treacherous devils have been made to bite the dust; and sadness to think that so many brave soldiers were compelled to sacrifice their lives in the fight, lives more precious than the whole pack of copper-colored bucks who have gone on the warpath."

The *Brookings Register*, near the Minnesota border, usually repeated stories appearing elsewhere. On December 26, the *Register* spread rumors of war. On January 2, under the headline MORE GOOD INDIANS, the paper made brief mention of the fighting.

Catherine Weldon, a friend of Sitting Bull, made the following observation regarding newspaper coverage of the Indian situation prior to Wounded Knee: "All papers print the most dangerous lies, and I blame [Standing Rock agent] Major [James] McLaughlin for allowing it. If he had not started these stories, they would not have been published, although he positively knows they are untrue."

The unfounded rumors in South Dakota papers found credence among readers, who clamored for military protection. Warnings to readers by a few editors came too late; the rumors took on a life of their own. The December 17 *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on a chiding it overheard Adjutant General John C. Kelton giving reporters: "We will get those bucks into a corral pretty soon, and then I guess the Indian war you newspaper men are waging will be over."

Dr. Charles Eastman, an Indian doctor who tended to wounded Sioux after the fight, criticized the media in his memoir: "The press seized upon the opportunity to enlarge the strained situation and predict an 'Indian uprising.' The reporters were among us and managed to secure much 'news' that no one else ever heard of."

Left unreported in state newspapers was the fact Indians had neither killed any noncombatants nor committed any depredations off the reservation in the months leading up to the winter

battle. Nor had cavalry troops and the Sioux clashed prior to the massacre. Except for the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, South Dakota papers instead wrote or reprinted sensational stories, headlines and editorials to condemn the Indians and clamor for military action. Citizens statewide believed the printed rumors and sent anxious pleas for unwarranted Army protection. An overwhelming majority of editorial stances clamored for the making of "good" Indians—that is, good and dead.

Could all that sensationalism in print have helped trigger the tragedy? The archived facts certainly point in that direction. Unscrupulous journalists often want to make news rather than merely report it. Such seemed to be the case in December 1890. South Dakota journalists may not have fired guns at Wounded Knee—just words—but some of them could be charged with inciting that bloody showdown with the Sioux. ww

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Lieutenant Edward W. Casey and his Cheyenne scouts plod through the snow after the fighting at Wounded Knee.

Out-of-State Papers More Objective

As expected, newspapers geographically removed from the hysteria of South Dakota were more objective in covering Wounded Knee. *The Washington Post* enjoyed proximity to the country's military headquarters. Dispatches from South Dakota and reports from Army leaders were readily available.

Charles O'Connell Nave's speech banning the Indian rituals appeared in the top left corner of Page 1 of the December 25 *Post*. Another front-page story on Christmas Day placed much of the disturbance in perspective: "There is no doubt that although the Indians are the principal aggressors, yet, since the arrival of the troops, the cowboys and ranchers have become very daring and are now themselves protecting the Indians instead of protecting their own herds. The department consequently has given orders to search closely all ranches and diners and make prisoners of any of them caught in the act of invading the Indian encampments."

Although the *Post* ran a few editorial jabs about Wounded Knee on December 21, it also published a lengthy call for investigation: "It is incredible that justice taken from him [Sis] is denied his victims of rebellion; we should fail to give him the food which we possessed him in compensation for them. If it is possible to grace that we should first starve him into submission and then kill him for spitting."

Closer to the action, the *Leavenworth Courier-Journal* printed anti-Indian sentiments as early as mid-December 16, predicting that the late Spring Bull's "throng of dancers will be 'good Indians' or prisoners." Alongside last racial slurs on its December 20 editorial page, the *Kennett daily democrat* praised some objectivity: "The Indians are... they are about to be swept from their last stronghold in this country, and 'tis natural for any people, whether savage or civilized, to love the land that was once their own and seek to regain it." Wounded Knee battle reports filled many news and editorial pages. On January 7, 1891, the *Courier-Journal* decried the slaughter of women and children: "This looks bad."

When we are told that not more than half of the victims were warriors, the mind revolts at the recital... There seems to be no question that it soon became a massacre, and that the soldiers in their fury considered neither age nor sex.

This is a discredit to the United States." On January 11, the editorial page posited the reactions of five other newspapers:

Kansas City Tribune—"The Indians have signed out the great bulk of government cattle at Pine Ridge. Had they been allowed to fill their stomachs three months ago, there would have been no trouble at all."

Washington Times—"The management of the Republican Administration has been exhibited on every occasion and a great variety of ways, but it was not until the Indian outbreak that its incompetency seemed likely to precipitate a series of bloodshed in our American domain."

Denver Republican—"The cost of the present unscrupulous Indian war will be more than would have led the nation to your side, were it not that the nation should be under control of the war department, and the agrarians should be abolished."

St. Louis Globe—"The whole Indian business should be ceased, the treaty and old systems of trading ceased with a people who are not treated as an independent nation, but practically confined to imprisonment in penitentiaries of war, should be abolished. The Indian should be put on the same footing as other alien and probably pursued for citizenship."

Washington Post—"I am glad you have taken these steps, and I am glad of any step that we can cheapen ourselves with that. I am glad to have been in the line of them, shooting from them, trying to duplicate anything from the war that a being, and we should pay the debt in a way that has been a great nation. Any other government could experience the Indians, but it ought to be the glory of this government to save them."

The New York Times said in a December 31 editorial: "It would be an abuse of language to describe as a battle the encounter that took place at Wounded Knee. The Indians were captured and were surrounded by four times that number of armed white soldiers... The worst that could have happened to these captive Indians against whom no accusations were charged was to undergo a short confinement, where they would have been better fed and lodged than they were before they were captured... All the authoritative accounts agree that these Indians were starved into revolt... We must feed the Indians and disarm them." R.H.



Papers both near to and far from the action soon realized Wounded Knee made outstanding copy.