



"To see the world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour."

William Blake

Editor's note: *The following is an excerpt from Tragedy Strikes at Wounded Knee, written by Will H. Spindler. Spindler, author of several books depicting pioneer life in western Nebraska and South Dakota, and his wife, Lulu, spent 30 years teaching in Indian day schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.*

*This book is, according to the title page, "The full and true account of the Wounded Knee massacre of Dec. 29, 1890; and other true, authentic stories of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and Badlands areas of South Dakota, including the Sioux Indians' last great Sun Dance, Buffalo Dance, Sioux 'Omaha' Dance, etc." Spindler "knows this vast reservation and picturesque Badlands like an open book."*

*As this account begins, a Colonel Forsyth and some 470 troops have rounded up 106 warriors, women and children all belonging to Big Foot's band. Big Foot's band of Minneconjou Sioux were on their way to surrender themselves to the army at the Pine Ridge Agency when they were intercepted by Forsyth's troops. They were camped on Wounded Knee Creek, located 16 miles northeast of Pine Ridge.*

*Today, the Spindlers live in Gordon, where they spend their time writing and visiting with friends. I have known Spindler for some time, like him and his wife a lot, and encourage any student of Nebraska history to read his books. I offer this selection with the hopes that someday soldiers everywhere will realize the futility of their efforts and lay down their weapons forever.*

*The photos were taken of the massacre site and show it as it appears today.*

Dan Ladely

by Will H. Spindler

When I first arrived in the Gordon area of Sheridan County, Neb., as a teacher in a rural school located only three miles from the Pine Ridge reservation line in September of 1922, many of the old timers were still living who had received eye-witness accounts of the tragic Wounded Knee affair from army and civilian scouts and from the records of the grim engagement.

"Right around eight o'clock on the mornin' of December 29th," was the gist of these grisly but true accounts by the old timers, "Col. Forsyth issued orders to Big Foot's Injuns to hop out of their tipis an' fork over their shootin' irons. They come out all right without much fuss an' squatted down on the grass in front of the soldiers surroundin' 'em. Although it was after Christmas the weather was real warm an' nice—jest about like summer. . .

"After all the bucks was lined up outside their tipis, Forsyth ordered the first group of 20 to go back in their tipis an' fetch out their weapons. They done this all right without any bickerin', but come out again in a little while with only two old rusty guns.

"The officer suspicioned right off that them bucks was holdin' out on him, so he ordered part of the soldiers to go in an' search the tipis themselves. Well, after a purty thorough search these soldiers showed up with about 40 old guns, most of 'em old an' rusty an' not much good.

"Next thing on the program, Forsyth up an' orders his soldiers to search the blankets wore by the buck warriors. They'd already searched about 20 of 'em



*without thinkin' a single weapon, an' then all of a sudden the thing happened an' right to wunst all hell cut loose. . .*

*"What really happened is what the soldiers an' the Injuns don't agree on nowhere a-tall. The scouts an'*

*some of the soldiers who'd talk claim that old Yellow Bird, who was a medicine man an' an ornery old devil, kept eggin' the Injuns on to fight an' not give up their guns. Well, he finally scoops up both hands full of dust an' tosses it up in the air, and then right off a surly young buck jerks a rifle from under his blanket an' cuts loose an' shoots right into the soldiers.*

*"The Injuns tell a different story altogether. They claim that a soldier ordered an old buck with a rifle to toss his gun on the pile already collected. They claim this old man didn't have no ears—meanin' he was deafer'n a stone—an' when the soldier tried to jerk it from his hands it went off an' killed a soldier. That's the Injun's side of the story, but it shore sounds kinda fishy an' that ain't the way it happened a-tall accordin' to the scouts an' soldiers. . .*

*"With that there shot fired, all hell begin poppin' all to wunst. Although lots of them Injuns didn't have no guns, mostly the whole passel of 'em had knives an' war clubs. This made her a hand-to-hand tussle at close quarters, which made the fight all the more bloody an' wicked. . . Old Big Foot was one of the first bucks to get killed.*

*"It was 'Katy bar the door' right from the jump fer them redskins, an' don't yu fergit it. Of course the soldiers cut loose with their rifles when the shot come, an' at the first volley the four gatlin' (Hotchkiss) guns up on that big hill where the church an' buryin' ground now are cut loose and poured shells at the bucks an' right into the big crowd of*



*wimmen an' kids collected in front of the tipis to watch the soldiers. Them gatlin' guns lobbed in two-pound explosive shells, too, at the speed of about 50 a minute, so yu can get some idee how they mowed down everything—includin' some of their own soldiers.*

*"The main fight lasted only a few minutes but she went hellity-larrup an' in them few minutes over 200 bucks, wimmen, an' kids an' around 60 soldiers laid dead an' wounded. That took the fight out of the rest of the Injuns, an' what few bucks was left an' the wimmen an' kids begin high-tailin' it up the main ravine an' branchin' off into other gullies along the way, the soldiers right after 'em an' mowin' 'em down as they run. The four gatlin' guns kept rippin' their shells up the ravine, too, an' it was one bloody mess if there ever was one. . . Yes, it was 'Katy bar the door' fer them Injuns right from the jump.*

*"What made them soldiers kill the wimmen an' kids like they did seems mighty hard to figger out. Of course a lot of 'em was killed in the excitement of wipin' out the warriors, as they was right there in the way, but seems like they jest deliberately killed a lot more of 'em as they was runnin' fer their lives up them ravines an' gullies, an' they had no excuse fer this.*

*"One mighty important thing yu got to remember though. Them soldiers belonged to the old Seventh Cavalry an' it was soldiers of the Seventh under Custer that got wiped out—close to 300 of 'em—on the Little Big Horn in Montana back in 1876. Naturally this didn't give 'em any love or sugar sweetness fer the Injuns an' there was plenty of bad blood between them an' the Injuns. . . Likely a lot of 'em had lost relatives an' buddies back there in '76, which shore didn't sweeten their tempers any when they finally got their chance at them redskins.*

*"Some of the scouts claim, too, that a lot of the officers an' soldiers was likkered up, but I wouldn't*

*know fer shore about that. Kinda looks like it could be though when yu consider everything—the way they lined up their soldiers in a hollow square—which was mighty dangerous if any fightin' busted out, as they was bound to kill some of their own men with crossfire—which they shore did, too. . .*

*"Another thing hard to figger out is why them Injuns cut loose an' started fightin' when their wimmen an' kids was with 'em. Usually they'll put up with a lot an' refuse altogether to fight when they're along. But this is one time when they shore broke the rule, an' it was mighty costly fer 'em. That old devil of a Yellow Bird must've made mighty powerful medicine to make 'em up an' tangle with them there soldiers when their wimmen an' kids was along an' when the odds against 'em was over four to one. . .*

*"One thing that happened after the fightin' was all over shore turned out strange an' sad. Some soldiers standin' around their gatlin' guns spotted an Injun wagon on a hill over a mile away drivin' along on a*



*walk. 'I'm going' to see how close I can come to them', one gunner speaks up an' takes good aim an' purty soon he cuts loose with his gatlin' gun. . .*

*"Well sir, he got 'em first crack out of the box an' it shore was Katy bar the door fer them old cusses in the wagon. The powerful shell blowed the wagon all to smithereens. . .*

*"Like I said before, the day of the battle was jest like summer. They gathered up the dead an' wounded soldiers an' the wounded Injuns an' took 'em in to Pine Ridge right off, but they jest left the dead Injuns lay right where they fell. Don't know why some Injuns didn't come back later in the day or even next day an' pick'em up, but guess they had all the tar scared out of 'em an' were afraid to come back. . . Then that night it turned colder'n blue blazes an' snowed some, an' finally it come a regular blizzard.*

*"They never buried them Injuns for three days an' when they went out to gather 'em up in lumber wagons they found 'em a bloody mess an' froze stiffer'n pokers there in the snow. Sure looked boogerish an' spooky. . . Lots of 'em was plumb naked, too, because a lot of whites an' some white civilians scouts come out to the battleground that same day after the fight or early the next mornin' to collect ghost shirts fer souvenirs.*

*"A long ditch had been dug on the same hill where the gatlin' guns had been planted an' where the Catholic church stands—jest a short ways to the north of where the Wounded Knee store now stands. Then the frozen bodies was unloaded out of the wagons an' dumped into the big trench jest like they was cordwood. . ."*

*While the foregoing statements from the old timers of the area may sound a bit far-fetched and fantastic, nevertheless they are true and authentic, and in most cases agree almost perfectly with the military records of the ill-fated Wounded Knee affair that now lies behind in history.*



Will & Lulu