

# Wounded Knee retains scar of Indian dissent

By Ron Ruggless

Wounded Knee, S.D. — Crisp, dry thistles conceal metal beams that lie rusting in this South Dakota gulch. The mangled metal that was once a bustling crossroads trading post goes unnoticed by passing motorists.

As they zip by, wind whistling through the weeds goes unheard and Clive Gildersleeve, kicking one of a thousand flattened beer cans strewn among the ruins of his trading post and home, goes unseen.

Five years ago, the thistles were mown and the metal beams were a neat 100-by 40-foot trading post on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in southwest South Dakota.

Then, on Feb. 27, 1973, this quiet trading crossroads became a center of national attention.

Between 200 and 300 members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) converged on this village. The outcome was a 71-day siege of Wounded Knee.

### Could happen again

The people in and around Wounded Knee at the time say it was Indian unrest, political friction and outside influence that caused the siege. Today, they say it could happen again.

In the meantime, Gildersleeve and his wife, Agnes, who owned part of the trading post and lived in Wounded Knee, dig themselves out of economic rubble. They still speculate about why it happened to them.

"I still don't know why they would pick us," said Clive, sifting through tattered plaster board that was once his home.

Gildersleeve, 78, stares out of the frame of what used to be the north picture window toward what used to be the trading post, burnt during the siege.

"I guess we were too close to Pine Ridge (the reservation's government center 13 miles southeast of Wounded Knee). When AIM saw it couldn't take that, it came here."

It was a cold February night when more than 50 carloads of Indians and some whites drove into this hamlet.

The caravan of cars turned off the blacktop which runs 100 yards north of the trading post. The cars proceeded up a small hill to the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, where the siege began.

Behind the church, at the very crown of the hill, lie the remnants of a previous confrontation between the federal government and the Indians.

In a cement-bordered trench, about the length of two cars and the breadth of one, rest the bodies of at least 153 Oglala Sioux killed Dec. 29, 1890, by the U.S. 7th

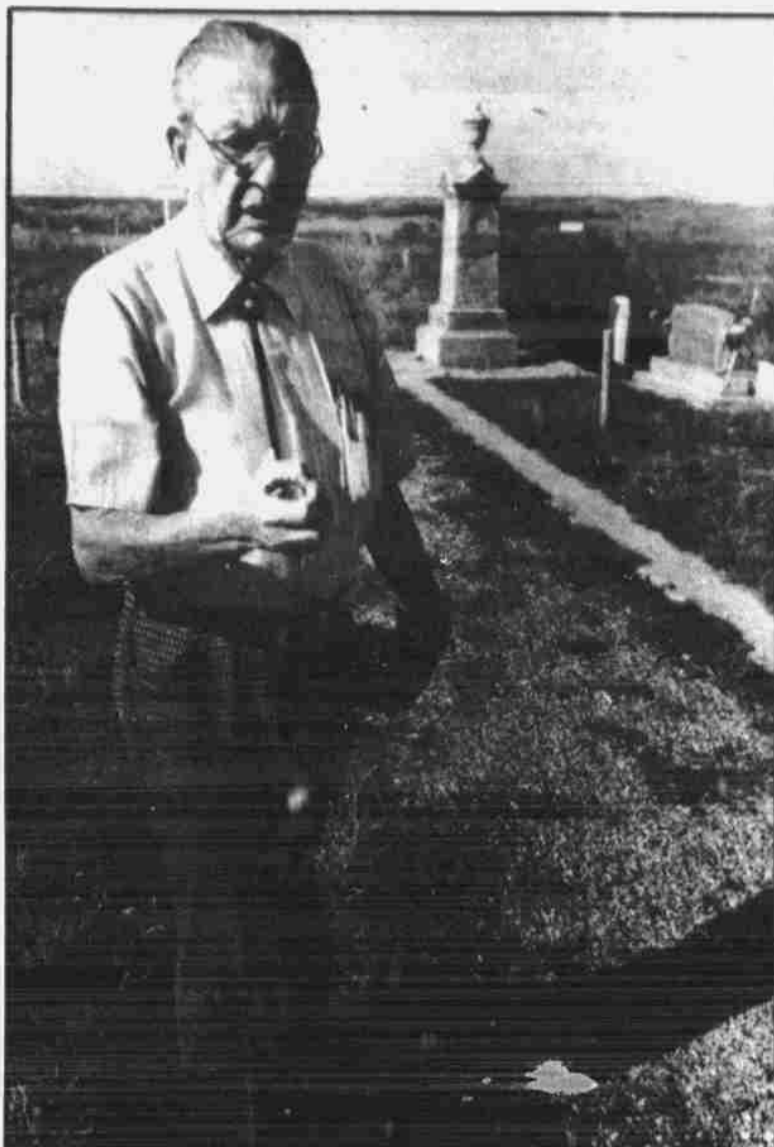


Photo by Ron Ruggless

Clive Gildersleeve lost his trading post in the takeover. The tall monument in the background marks the mass grave for 153 Sioux killed in 1890. The smaller stone marks the grave of Buddy LaMonte, killed in the 1973 uprising.

Cavalry. It was the last such episode of U.S. frontier history.

A little more than 83 years later, it was another confrontation between the federal government and the Indians. This time, though, the Indians seemed to have the upper hand.

The first of 11 hostages the group took was Father Paul Manhardt, missionary at the Sacred Heart Church.

"My first reaction was of great anger, but it was such an impossibility to explain or gain anything from anger that I remained silent," said Manhardt, who has been on sabbatical leave to Notre Dame University since Sept. 14.

### Trouble in the air

"I knew there was trouble in the air, but it had always been small enough that the tribe could handle it," said

Manhardt, who based his ministry to the reservation out of Wounded Knee.

"The problem was the use of land by the tribal council, which the council was renting to white ranchers," Manhardt said.

This spurred AIM interest, he said.

"When you boil it all down, it—as far as the tribe was concerned—was all the trouble the Indians could handle without the outside interference that came from the American Indian Movement.

"I was entirely surprised. It was something really unknown in the history of the tribe," said Manhardt, who had been on the reservation since 1952.

"In came the militaristic activists, and there went Wounded Knee."

The Gildersleeves had received a call from a missionary about the cars headed toward Wounded Knee, said Mrs. Gildersleeve, 73, a Chippewa from Minnesota.

"At 7:45, we could see from our picture window that the cars were coming. Before long, we saw that they had broken the locks on the trading post and were taking everything out of it.

"They would just load up their cars and drive off. There was no way we could stop them, so we just had to sit and watch.

"I spent hours phoning the police—everybody I could think of—but no one would come out to help us.

### 'Never dreamed'

"We never dreamed they would take us," Mrs. Gildersleeve said. "They came to the house across the street and took us over a few minutes later."

The Gildersleeves bought the trading post in 1929. Gildersleeve's parents had owned a quarter interest in the trading post at Porcupine, seven miles northeast of Wounded Knee.

"I grew up with the Indians," he said, "and I like them." He went to Indian schools on the reservation, usually as the only white child.

"I had never had trouble with the Indians. We have always treated each other with respect."

A lack of respect between the full-blooded Indians and the half-breeds seemed to precipitate some of the problems that caused the Wounded Knee takeover.

Richard Wilson, a half-breed, headed the 20-member Oglala Sioux Tribal Council at the time. AIM contended he was using his power corruptly.

It was a politically charged atmosphere. AIM wanted to impeach Wilson, Wilson wanted to squelch AIM.

Ramon Roubideaux, 52, a Rapid City lawyer and chief negotiator for the Indians during the takeover, said the tribal government was, and still is, smothered in bureaucracy.

"It is just as vicious and just as bad as the federal bureaucracy," said Roubideaux, a Rosebud Sioux.

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The author is a senior from Atkinson. He was a Daily Nebraskan reporter and copy editor for two years and an associate news editor for a year. This story was written as an assignment in the Depth Reporting class at the UNL School of Journalism.

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