

# FBI Gunbattle Details Still Unclear

By Joel D. Weisman

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PINE RIDGE, S.D., June 28 —The fatal shooting of two FBI agents and an Indian in a gun battle on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is the latest confrontation in a continuing spiral of violence that exploded on the national scene during the 71-day siege at Wounded Knee in spring, 1973. As 300 law enforcement officials continued their search today for 16 Indian men the FBI says opened fire on the agents, the reason for the gun battle remains unclear.

While FBI says the agents were fired on first, spokesmen for the militant American Indian Movement say the FBI fired first.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in addition to threats, charges, countercharges, a few trials and indictments, this once-placid 4,335-square-mile reservation has seen:

- Its felony rate triple from 100 to more than 300 over the last four years, according to Bureau of Indian Affairs statistics.

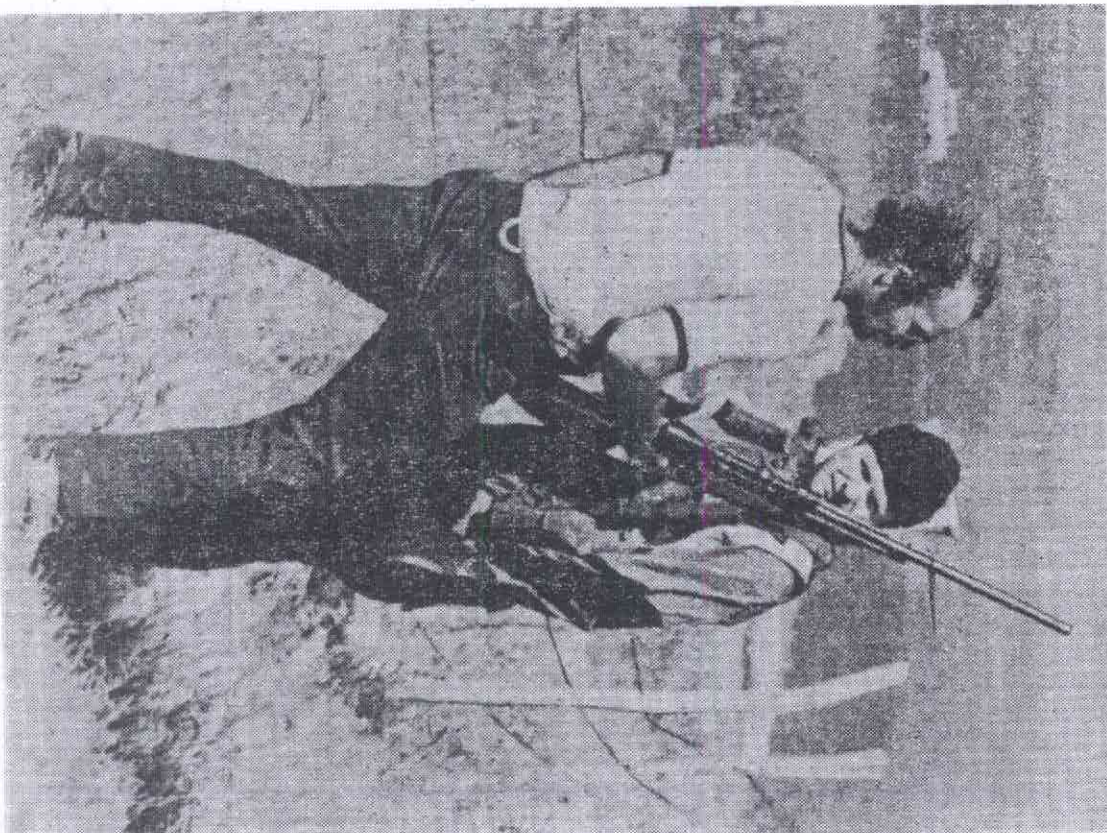
- Assaults on federal officers increase tenfold since 1970, according to the BIA.

- Hundreds of criminal attacks and retaliations among AIM sympathizers and other Indians go unreported, according to reservation residents.

"Since Wounded Knee, life has been a total nightmare," said Gladys Bissonette, 60, a Sioux who describes herself as an AIM sympathizer.

It was AIM that seized Wounded Knee protest what it considered government inequities, and poor tribal leadership under Richard Wilson, president of the Oglala Sioux tribal council.

Since the end of the siege Wilson has unleashed what he acknowledged in an interview is "a goon squad" of his fol-



Two FBI agents pause in a field near Oglala, S.D., during search for killers.

Associated Press

lowers "who do whatever is necessary to keep the peace and discourage outsiders like AIM leaders from coming here."

Caught between Wilson's warriors and AIM sympathizers, are law enforcement officials, including members of the FBI and the BIA.

"First we were hounding AIM people for illegal acts during Wounded Knee," said Bill Eastman, BIA special officer of the reservation. "Later, some AIM people need our protection from persons who want revenge fr Wounded Knee and the fact that some leaders like Banks and Means were acquitted of serious charges."

Denis Banks and Russell Means were acquitted in Sep-

tember, 1974, of three counts of assaulting federal officers, one count of theft and one of conspiracy. All the charges grew out of the Wounded Knee siege.

One of those concerned about protection is Mrs. Bissonette. On March 23 her niece, Jeanette, mother of six, was killed by a sniper's bullet. And when she returned from her niece's funeral, she found her 11-year-old grandson, Richard Eagle, dead from a gunshot wound recorded as "accidental homicide."

Jeanette's brother, Pedro, was killed in 1973 while allegedly assaulting a BIA agent.

"It seems that everyone who stood up at Wounded Knee is



now in danger (from non-AIM Indians)," said Mrs. Bissonette, "especially us full-bloods, who think the tribal nation—run by less bloods—are taken advantage of by whites." Full-bloods, make up 16 percent of the 12,000-member Ogala Sioux nation.

Tribal president Wilson blames the reservation's troubles on "outsiders." And this week he pushed through ratification of a tribal exclusion ordinance designed to limit outside Indians from settling on the reservation.

Wilson, however, called AIM "the direct cause for killing the FBI agents." They brought tension levels and violence to the highest point it's ever been, he asserted, adding

"AIM people even beat up our softball team recently."

Wilson neglected to say he was recently indicted for assault, a misdemeanor, for allegedly ordering 15 members of his "goon squad" to surround and "stomp" Roger Finzel, a Washington attorney, and members of his legal team, who had come to the reservation to prepare for a court case.

FBI spokesmen said some of the suspects in the agents' slaying have been tentatively identified, but they did not release their names or say whether any were believed to be members of AIM—something of an amorphous organization.

Although it has a national office in St. Paul, AIM distributes no membership cards or buttons. "Therefore our members are not known. It's not like a white service club," said Tim Tilsen, an AIM attorney.

"How do you know a Vietcong, a Black Panther? That's

how AIM is. They duck in and out of their identity," said BIA's Eastman.

Yet reservation residents said that many recent mugging, beating and other violence victims were known to at least hold sympathies with AIM, and that sympathizers have been targets of snipers and have been involved in auto crashes, with drivers apparently forced off winding roads.

AIM sympathizers claim they are "frozen out" of the tight employment market, for private as well as public jobs. "Wilson controls the jobs paid for by federal money here—because that money goes to the official tribal council," said GeGaldine Denise, a reservation resident.

The tension and conflict are not confined to intra-Indian situations.

AIM sympathizers also claim law enforcement officials harass and discriminate against them.

A special grand jury to deal with the wave of violence was empaneled in Rapid City last March, and, at the same time,

the FBI increased its complement of agents here.

"Since then we've been having people with subpoenas come here [to the hamlet where the shootout occurred] several times a week. They know the people they want aren't here, said Viola Nichols, who lives in the cluster of four homes. Her daughter, Kamook, is married to Banks.

FBI agents Jack R. Coler, and Ronald A. Williams, both 28 were killed Thursday when they came to the hamlet to serve subpoenas for persons charged with assault and kidnaping.

An Indian, Joe Roberts, also known as Joe Killright, 20, was also killed at the scene. FBI spokesmen said he was found wearing the jacket of one of the agents, with a rifle at his side and a handgun on his hip. Agents also found "substantial supplies of automatic weapons and ammunition," the spokesmen said.

Mark Tilsen, an AIM spokesman in Rapid City, however, said that when agents arrived at the hamlet, a shoving match ensued and the FBI opened fire, slaying Killright. The FBI has repeatedly denied this sequence and claims the Indians opened fire without provocation.

The Indians ultimately fled, driven off by tear gas, into a complex maze of valleys near the picturesque grass and clay buttes that overlook the hamlet—26 miles from Wounded Knee.

In the meantime, the massive search for the killers continues.

But, as FBI spokesman Tom Coll put it, "The longer the search continues, the more diminished the chances are that they are on the reserva-