

S.D. Area Is Swept For Agents' Killers

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From News Dispatches

PINE RIDGE, S.D., June 27 —The FBI brought in aircraft and an armored personnel carrier today to make a "systematic search" of the sprawling Pine Ridge Indian Reservation for suspects in what was described as an "ambush" slaying of two FBI agents.

Authorities blocked the road leading to the ramshackle house where shooting incidents Thursday left the two agents and one Indian dead. Some 100 to 150 federal agents were searching the wooded hills near the house.

FBI spokesman Thomas Coll said the bureau brought in an armored personnel carrier, several National Guard jeeps, a helicopter and a light airplane to use in the search.

The armored vehicle was considered necessary "to protect agents in case they get caught in gunfire," he said. No National Guardsmen were in-

involved in the search, he added.

Coll would not elaborate on what he meant by a systematic search of the reservation.

In addition to searching the wooded area near the house, agents interviewed reservation residents in an effort to learn how many people had been in the house and who they were.

One of the agents managed to get off a radio distress call before his death, and Bureau of Indian Affairs officers rushed to the house. But the estimated 20 to 30 persons in the house were able to flee, apparently through a ravine into the hills. No arrests were made.

The reservation measures 3,150 square miles, mostly dusty prairie, and is bigger than the state of Delaware. Still, an FBI spokesman in Minneapolis vowed: "We'll do whatever we feel is necessary to find

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S.D. Reservation Is Combed For Killers of 2 FBI Agents

FBI, From AI

the people responsible for these murders."

The old one-story house sits near a dirt road, 12 miles northwest of the village of Pine Ridge and three miles from the small village of Ogjala. It is in a fairly remote settlement of six houses, separated from wooded hills by about a half-mile of grassland.

The FBI and an Indian spokesman disagree about what happened at the house. The FBI spokesman in Minneapolis gave this account:

Agents Jack R. Coler and Ronald A. Williams, both 28, drove to the house with warrants charging four men with kidnaping, robbery and assault with a deadly weapon. "Someone opened fire on them. They were apparently

wounded," the spokesman said.

He said the agents apparently got back in their car and one managed to radio for help. Then, he said, "they were dragged from the car, and 15 to 20 shots were pumped into them."

Many of the shots were fired into the agents' heads and Special FBI Agent Joseph Trimbach said at the scene: "We do not know if they were alive when they were shot in the head."

South Dakota Attorney General William Janklow said, "It looked like an execution. They were riddled with bullets." And Gov. Richard Kneip said information given him by authorities indicated agents were injured into an ambush. "The Indians had bunkers—trenches," said an FBI spokesman.

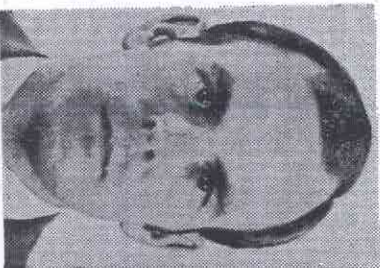
A third agent came under fire about a mile away after he responded to the call for help, but he escaped injury, said the FBI spokesman in Minneapolis.

The BIA officers who responded a little later returned fire at the house but were pinned down for four hours until FBI reinforcements could reach the scene, the spokesman said.

The dead Indian was found when agents searched the house after the occupants had fled, the spokesman said. A jacket belonging to one of the slain agents was found on the Indian's body.

The dead man was identified by a woman who claimed to be his sister as Joe Roberts, about 20, of Seattle, Wash. A spokesman for the American Indian Movement, however, identified him as Little Joe Killisright, 18, of the reservation.

AIM leader Russell Means said in Bismarck, N.D., that he had talked by phone with Indians on the score and was told that the agents walked into the house and pushed the Indians around. He said he was told a scuffle ensued and an agent drew a gun and shot the Indian.



JACK R. COLER

FBI agents slain in shooting on S.D. reservation



RONALD A. WILLIAMS

A spokesman for the Denver FBI office and Wounded Knee Legal Offense-Defense Committee in Rapid City, S.D., said he had been told the same story. He also said he fears a dragnet on the reservation, with authorities arresting Indians at random.

An AIM spokesman said about 30 persons were in the house, gathered from all over the country to protect Indian leader Dennis Banks, who is due to stand trial soon for a 1973 riot at nearby Custer, S.D.

The shooting scene is about 12 miles from Wounded Knee, the hamlet in which two Indians were killed during a 71-day occupation by Indian militants in 1973. Wounded Knee was also the site of one of the last confrontations of the Indian wars in which hundreds of Sioux were killed by U.S. Army troops.

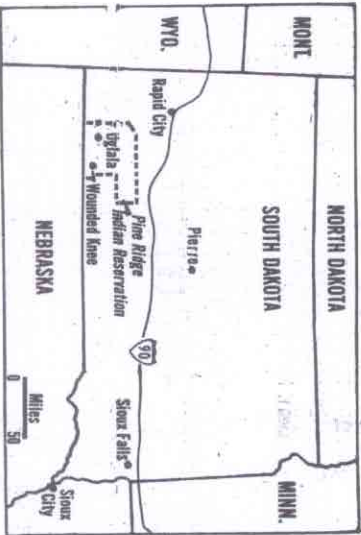
The FBI spokesman in Minneapolis declined to say how many bureau agents were on the reservation but said the two slain agents were originally from the Los Angeles area. Coler worked out of the Denver FBI office and was on special assignment to the reservation, Williams worked for the Rapid City office.

The FBI spokesman said they were carrying warrants for Teddy Paul Foutter, Herman Thunder Hawk, Robert Horse and James Eagle, all from the reservation. He said the charges stemmed from an incident in which a man and his son were held against their will on the reservation for several hours before being released Monday night.

The warrants were issued by a U.S. magistrate. Foutter was arrested Thursday at his home, away from the shooting scene.

Since the Wounded Knee occupation, the Ogjala Sioux of the reservation have been riven by dissension between followers of AIM and of AIM's arch enemy, tribal chairman Dick Wilson.

During the Wounded Knee occupation, two persons were killed—one Indian and one man who said he was an Indian—and an FBI agent was paralyzed from the waist down from a gunshot wound.



The Washington Post
Dotted line shows the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, which is being searched for killers of two FBI agents.