

SIoux MYSTIC WARRIORS



With little doubt, the fiercest warriors in the western United States and Indian wars were the Sioux of the northern midwest. They were held in awe by the United States Cavalry and even more so by other Indian Tribes. General Frederick W. Benteen called the Sioux "good shots, good riders, and the best fighters the sun ever shone on." Although terrorizing to the Whites, their horse-stealing and warring destroyed many other Indian Tribes. So dreadful were the Sioux that the Mandans, Rees, and Hidata Indians all appealed to the government for protection. The Whites were these tribe's enemies, but they were not to be feared nearly so much as the Sioux.

It is difficult for us to understand the Indian mentality. People in our culture look toward the future as a line of continuous progress. We believe new technological miracles will occur and, perhaps wishfully, that life will get better and better. To the Sioux, the future was not looked at in terms of material progress. The Sioux believed they would continue to live in the same manner, using the same methods as their ancestors. Material life was a gift of Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, and was not dependent on how industrious and progressive they were.

The domain of personal achievement for the Sioux was either in war or in magic. These two areas overlapped, and to be a great warrior one must also be *wakan* or spiritually powerful. War was not carried on so much to eliminate an enemy, as we do, but as an arena in which greatness could be achieved. A warrior might carry a harmless "coup stick" with which he would strike an enemy warrior and "count coup". Meticulous count was kept on coups, and it was more prestigious to count first coup on a warrior than to latter actually kill him. The greatest warriors of the tribes were those that had counted coup under the most dangerous situations. Crazy Horse, High Crane, White Bull and others were known to charge through enemy war parties armed with nothing but a coup stick. They depended on their magical charms to protect them.

Nearly all great Sioux warriors depended on magical charms or pre-battle rituals. The

Minniconjous Sioux High Crane wore the skin of a black-tailed deer into battle to make him bullet-proof. He wore the back skin on his back and tied the fore and hind leg skins to his arms and legs. The horns he tied with a red beaded string to his head. In the Fall of 1876 Sitting Bull and his Sioux came upon soldiers at Slim Buttes, Montana. The soldiers were standing in rows with their rifles and looked "like pine trees" they were so thick. Sitting Bull cried out, "Be careful now. These men are crack shots. Let High Crane go to them."

Sitting Bull and his men were about two hundred yards from the four hundred soldiers. High Crane went charging toward the soldiers and raced his horse back and forth in front of the lines. Hundreds of shots were fired but he could not be hit. This so awed the soldiers that they retreated. If one Sioux could not be hit at close range, how could they expect to fight a whole tribe! The Sioux looked at their magical charms perhaps much as we look at a newly-devised secret weapon today.

This may seem too improbable to be true, but Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled* (Vol. I, pp. 378-9) provides an occult explanation and another example. "The astral fluid can be compressed about a person so as to form an elastic shell, absolutely non-penetrable by any physical object, however great the velocity with which it travels. ...In India, Malabar, and some places of Central Africa, the conjurers will freely permit any traveler to fire his musket or revolver at them, without touching the weapon themselves or selecting the balls. In Laing's *Travels in Timmanreee, Kooranko and Soolima Countries*, occurs a description by an English traveler, the first white man to visit the tribe of the Soolimas, near the sources of the Dialliba, of a very curious scene. A body of picked soldiers fired upon a chief who had nothing to defend himself with but certain talismans. Although their muskets were properly loaded and aimed, not a ball could strike him. Salverte gives a similar case in his *Philosophy of Magic*: "In 1568 the Prince of Orange condemned a Spanish prisoner to be shot at Juliers. The soldiers tied him to a tree and fired, but he was invulnerable. The soldiers therefore stripped him, to see what armor he wore, but they found only an amulet. . . . This was taken from him, and death followed the first shot aimed at him." Those manic on drugs or alcohol may sometimes even produce this effect about them. On a "Cops" show on TV not too long ago, a man hyper-active on drugs jumped out of a building 30 or 40 feet above ground and then got up and ran away.

The Sioux placed great importance on dreams. An Indian's whole life might be lived so as to fulfill a dream. A medicine man usually chose his path because he had been directed to do so in a dream. Tribes often made plans and followed a course of action based on dreams received by their leaders. Elaborate and arduous rituals such as the Sun Dance were undertaken to receive a prophetic vision. Many warriors underwent "lamenting" to receive insight. The Sioux Black Elk described lamenting as "crying for a vision" and said it usually consisted of going into the wilderness alone for several days of praying and ritual to Wakan Tanka.

When he was only thirteen or fourteen, the great Sioux Warrior Crazy Horse undertook to have such a vision. He went off into the mountains to fast and pray without telling anyone. Constantly praying to Wakan Tanka, he did not sleep at night but kept himself awake by lying on sharp stones. He received no vision after two days and decided to give up, feeling he must be unworthy. On his way to find his horse he fainted and had a very powerful dream.

"A man on horseback rode out of the lake. The horse kept changing colors, and it floated above the ground, so light was it, the man too, who sat well forward on the horse. He wore plain leggings and a simple shirt. His face was unpainted and he had only a single feather in his long brown hair. He had a small brown stone tied behind his ear. He did not seem to speak, but Crazy Horse heard him none the less.

"The man told Crazy Horse never to wear a war bonnet, nor to tie up his horse's tail (it was the Sioux custom to tie up their ponies' tails in a knot), because the horse needed his tail when he jumped a stream and in summer time to brush flies. He said that before

going into battle Crazy Horse should pass some dust over his horse in lines and streaks, but should not paint the pony. And he should rub some of the dirt over his own hair and body. Then he would never be killed by a bullet or by an enemy. But he should never take anything for himself.

"All the while the man and horse were floating, brushing aside constant attacks from a shadowy enemy. But he rode straight through them, straight through the flying arrows and lead balls, which always disappeared before striking their target. Several times the man and horse were held back, it seemed by his own people coming up from behind and catching his arms, but he shook them off and rode on. A storm came up and on the man's cheek a little zigzag of lightning appeared and a few hail spots on his body. Then the storm passed, and the man's people closed in around him, grabbing and pulling, while overhead a hawk screamed. Then the dream faded and Crazy Horse was awake."

Crazy Horse was once wounded in battle just as he began to take a scalp. As his dream warned him never to take anything for himself, he never again took scalps. Before every battle he always prepared himself in the same way, and always dressed as the warrior was dressed in his vision. He wore a small stone behind his ear, and another stone on a string under his arm. He painted a zigzag line of red earth from his forehead to his chin. He painted spots on himself to represent hail and sprinkled dust on his horse. He undoubtedly was a terrifying sight.

Along with the great warrior Roman Nose, Crazy Horse also practiced "no-woman medicine" which was a vow of celibacy. Sioux Warriors were proud of their ability to channel their sexual energies into war and it was Sioux custom to be abstinent four or five days before battle. The most serious injury Crazy Horse ever incurred was within a day after he broke his no-woman medicine with Black Buffalo Woman. Crazy Horse was shot in the jaw by Black Buffalo Woman's angry husband. (In Sioux society there were no marriage vows and a woman was free to change husbands and live with whom she pleased. So technically Crazy Horse was in the right.)

No war party Crazy Horse led was ever defeated in battle in over twenty years of fighting against Soldiers and Indians. He would single-handedly charge columns of Crows, Arapahoes or Whites and ride among them taking coups. He had eight horses shot from beneath him and often found himself taking foot back to his own lines. While his Sioux were never defeated in battle, they were still being slowly starved to death by the soldiers. The huge buffalo herds were being killed off by the Whites and Sioux hunting lands were continually shrinking. In May, 1877 Crazy Horse was forced to surrender his people at Camp Robinson, South Dakota. He was promised good treatment, but the army could not stomach a free Crazy Horse. An order for his arrest and imprisonment came four months later. When Crazy Horse realized he was being led to a cell, he broke loose from the soldiers and grabbed a knife he'd kept concealed. It was too late, however, and two of his own Sioux grabbed his arms as he was bayoneted in the side by a soldier. True to his vision, he was never defeated in battle, but killed as his own people held his arms. A hawk screamed overhead as the great Crazy Horse died.

The Sioux High Black Wolf believed he was bullet-proof unless he put metal in his mouth on the day of a battle. He was killed in battle moments after he mistakenly put a bullet in his mouth while reloading his six-shooter. Evidence indicates that the Sioux's charms actually did work, and when a charm or vow was broken, the warrior lost his protection. The charms themselves, perhaps, were not the important thing, but that they enabled the warrior to enter a certain state of mind. Crazy Horse was nearly killed when he broke his no-woman vow with Black Buffalo Woman and wounded when he broke his vow by taking a scalp. The only great Sioux that was not known to depend on charms was Sitting Bull, and it is said he gained his power from the many Sun Dances he went through. He must not have followed Crazy Horse's total no-woman vow, as he had nine wives during his life.

Sitting Bull would frequently make a vow to Wakan Tanka to do a Sun Dance if some endeavor of his or the tribe's was successful. In the fall of 1875 he made a vow to do a Sun Dance if he was successful in some horse stealing from the Sleta Indians. In the summer of '76 he made good on his vow by sacrificing one hundred pieces of flesh to Wakan Tanka. Jumping Bull agreed to do the cutting and took fifty pieces of flesh from each of Sitting Bull's arms with a knife point. Sitting Bull then danced and stared at the sun for the next day and a half until he passed out. When he passed out, he had a vision. In the vision he saw White soldiers falling from the sky into the Sioux camp and heard a voice say "I give you these because they have no ears." - meaning that the Whites did not listen to Wakan Tanka, perhaps, or that they did not have any spirituality.

Sitting Bull's vision occurred in June of 1876. He told his Sioux that soon they would be victorious in battle, but that they must not take any White scalps or possessions. Two weeks later Custer's two hundred men attacked Sitting Bull's camp on the Little Big Horn and were totally wiped out. Reno's one hundred seventy-five men were also nearly destroyed in this battle. The Sioux plundered and stripped the soldiers' bodies. Sitting Bull told them: "Because you have taken the spoils, henceforth you will covet the white man's goods, you will be at his mercy, you will starve at his hands. The soldiers will crush you."

The most amazing feat was performed by Sitting Bull in the summer of 1872. In late summer Sitting Bull had a number of skirmishes with Colonel D.S. Stanley and his troops, who were guarding the Northern Pacific Railroad. Sitting Bull was 41 years old at this time, and some of the young warriors were coming to question his authority. Crazy Horse was in on this fight, and was only carrying a lance. They met with the soldiers in the valley of the Yellowstone, below Arrow (O'Fallen) Creek. Immediately the soldiers came out to fight. For some time the young warriors dashed back and forth across the lines, daring the soldiers to hit them. Some were killed.

Sitting Bull was weary of the fighting. To him it was "just shooting" with the same stunts being pulled by the young warriors as he had always seen in his twenty-seven years on the war-path. The young Sioux were saying that Sitting Bull was getting "mouthy". He was always free and frank with his advice and some of the young were resenting it. Soon they would be saying he was a has-been or even a coward. He decided to do something different that would put the question of his bravery and power at rest forever.

Sitting Bull put down his gun and quiver, took his tobacco pouch and pipe and began walking toward the firing soldiers. Bullets kicked the ground all about him. He kept walking toward the soldiers as if out taking a peaceful stroll. About a hundred yards in front of the Indians, he sat down and began filling his pipe with tobacco. He got out his flint and steel and lit the pipe. After a few quiet puffs, he turned back to his astonished men and said "Any Indians who wish to smoke with me, come on!"

His nephew White Bull could not turn down a dare, so he came running out, as did the Sioux Gets-The-Best-Of-Them and two Cheyennes. They passed the pipe from right to left, as always. In an interview in the 1920's White Bull related how "We others wasted no time. Our hearts beat rapidly, and we smoked as fast as we could. All around us the bullets were kicking up the dust, and we could hear bullets whining overhead. But Sitting Bull was not afraid. He just sat there quietly, looking around as if he were at home in his tent, and smoked peacefully."

After the pipe was smoked out, Sitting Bull got out the little sharp stick he used for cleaning his pipe, cleaned the ashes and put everything back in his tobacco bag. He got up slowly and sauntered back while White Bull and the others raced back to the Sioux lines. Sitting Bull got on his horse and said "That's enough!" and all the Indians rode off.

- M.R.J.

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