



SITTING BULL (1831–1890) was the greatest chief of the Lakota Nation. He was a master hunter and warrior, inspiring true loyalty and courage among the men of his tribe. But, above all, it was his wisdom as a leader—his “strong medicine”— that made Sitting Bull so very beloved among his people.

The Lakota tribes were accustomed to war. They had gained their prime hunting land by fighting other indians, and were always ready to defend it. Sitting Bull, like other war chiefs, was treated with great respect in his village. Without skilled hunter-warriors like him, life on the Great Plains would not be possible.

Chief Sitting Bull was a master of the four Lakota virtues: bravery, generosity, fortitude, and wisdom.

He could “speak with the animals,” foresee the future, shoot to kill with his bow, and ride any horse with ease. It is said that Lakota warriors were among the best archers ever to ride horseback. As leader of his lodge, Sitting Bull provided well for a large household, his five wives and five children would never go hungry or cold so long as the buffalo roamed.

In June of 1876, Wasichu soldiers attacked the Lakota camp. Sitting Bull had foreseen this battle and had prepared the other war chiefs for what was to come. With Crazy Horse in the lead, Sitting Bull—too weak from his Sun Dance to fight—watched as his vision came to pass, his warriors riding into battle with bravery and defeating the U.S. 7th Cavalry at Little Big Horn.

After the battle, life became difficult for the Lakota people. While the Army did not defeat the tribes on the battlefield, they did eliminate their food source—the buffalo. By 1881, the great herd, once over 50 miles wide, was almost gone. With no more food and the Army tracking them down, Sitting Bull led his loyal followers to Canada. After four bitter years with few buffalo to feed them, Sitting Bull was forced to give up the Old Ways, “come in” to the Reservation and surrender the Lakota way of life.



BACKGROUND:

Later, he married to five wives, Light Hair, Four Robes, Snow-on-Her, Seen-by-her-Nation, and Scarlet Woman. They lived on the great plains with their children, One Bull (adopted son), Crow Foot (son), Many Horses (daughter), Walks Looking (daughter), and another adopted daughter.

It was during the period between 1868-1876 that Sitting Bull developed into the most important of Native American chiefs.

When the United States army began to track down Sioux and others living off the reservation for extermination, Native Americans flocked to Sitting Bull's camp. Sitting Bull took an active role in encouraging this "unity camp". The Hunkpapa chief provided resources to sustain the new recruits. Native Americans were attracted to the camp not only for security but by its generosity. Over the course of the first half of 1876, Sitting Bull's camp continually expanded, as natives joined him for safety in numbers. It was this large camp which Custer found on June 25, 1876. Sitting Bull's leadership had attracted the warriors and families of the extensive village, estimated at more than 10,000 people.

After the defeat of Custer and his army in the Battle of Little Big Horn, the new American military forces pursued the Lakota, forcing many of the Native Americans to surrender. Sitting Bull refused to surrender and in May 1877 led his band across the border into Saskatchewan, Canada. He remained in exile for many years, refusing a pardon and the chance to return.

Hunger and cold eventually forced Sitting Bull, his family, and nearly 200 other Sioux in his band to return to the United States and surrender on July 19, 1881. Sitting Bull had his young son Crow Foot surrender his rifle to the commanding officer of Fort Buford. He told the soldiers that he wished to regard them and the white race as friends. Two weeks later, Sitting Bull and his band were transferred to Fort Yates, the military post located adjacent to the Standing Rock Agency.

In 1885, Sitting Bull was allowed to leave the reservation to join Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show as a Show Indian. He earned about \$50 a week for riding once around the arena, where he was a popular attraction. Sitting Bull stayed with the show for only four months before returning home. During that time, he had become something of a celebrity and a romanticized warrior. He earned a small fortune by charging for his autograph and picture, although he often gave his money away to the homeless and beggars.

After working as a performer, he returned to the Standing Rock Agency in South Dakota. Because of fears that he would use his influence to support the Ghost Dance movement, Indian Service agent James McLaughlin at Fort Yates ordered his arrest. As Lt. Bullhead ordered Sitting Bull to mount a horse, Sitting Bull refused to comply with orders and the police used force on him. The Sioux in the village were enraged. A Sioux man known as Catch-the-Bear shouldered his rifle and shot Lt. Bullhead who, in return, fired his revolver into the chest of Sitting Bull. Another police officer, Red Tomahawk, shot Sitting Bull in the head and the chief dropped to the ground.



RED CLOUD was a powerful Lakota chief who waged an effective fight against the Wasichu before the Battle of Little Big Horn.

The Lakota people were accustomed to war. As a young boy, Red Cloud joined the Oglala warriors as they battled nearby Crow and Pawnee camps. His people had gained their prime hunting land by fighting other tribes, and were always ready to defend it.

In 1866, the Wasichu began constructing forts along the Bozeman Trail—straight through Lakota hunting land. So Red Cloud led the tribes in attack after attack against the White Man, hoping to send the U.S. government a strong message: settlers must leave the Great Plains.

Red Cloud's efforts proved successful...but only in theory. The United States drew up a treaty banning the White Man from settling on the Lakota's land. But in reality, the government would not rest without claiming the gold-laden Black Hills as its own. This desire led Custer to attack the Lakota in the Little Big Horn Valley. To this day, no one knows why Red Cloud did not aid the tribes in battle that day. Some believe he was jealous of Sitting Bull's power, and stayed away out of spite.



After that fateful day at Little Big Horn, life became difficult for the Lakota people. While the Army did not defeat the tribes on the battlefield, they did eliminate their food source—the buffalo. By 1881, the great herd, once over 50 miles wide, was almost gone. Red Horse was forced to “come in” to the Reservation, but not without a fight. The chief demanded respect, and succeeded in pressuring the government to fire certain Reservation officials who treated the “Red Men” poorly. Red Cloud, refusing to support rebellion on the Reservation, lived to a ripe old age, unlike his long-time rival Sitting Bull.



QUEEN VICTORIA was ruler of the British Empire for over 60 years, from June 20, 1837, until her death on January 22, 1901. Sitting Bull called her "The Great Grandmother" and saw her as someone who could help his people as they fled the endless attacks of the U.S. Army, meant to punish the Lakota for their victory at the Battle of Little Big Horn.

Canada promised to be a safe haven for the tribes, a place where they could still live according to their own customs and beliefs. They named it "Great Grandmother's Land,"

after Sitting Bull heard that the British Queen—who ruled there—was herself a kindly woman.

In the winter of 1877, when the Lakota could no longer avoid the oncoming Army, Sitting Bull and a small band of his people finally crossed the border, or the "Medicine Road," seeking Queen Victoria's protection in Canada. She granted it, and there the remaining Lakota lived in peace for four difficult years.

But the slaughter of buffalo continued on the Great Plains, and soon food ran out for the Lakota in Canada, leaving Sitting Bull little choice but to re-cross the Medicine Road and "come in" to the Reservation. Abandoning the Old Ways, the chief headed for Fort Buford, Montana where he handed over his rifle, surrendering to the government on July 19, 1881.



At Standing Rock Reservation, Sitting Bull joined Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, where Queen Victoria saw him perform. According to legend, she thoroughly enjoyed the experience and requested a meeting with the Native people in Cody's show. The Queen is said to have told the Lakota that they were the "best-looking people she had ever seen." Their horse riding and hunting tricks were her favorite part of the performance. After the Queen's personal blessing that day, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show became the world's Number One entertainment attraction.



JAMES MCLAUGHLIN was an agent of the U.S. government sent to enforce order and keep peace on the Great Sioux Reservations.

With the buffalo all but gone, hunger and cold eventually forced Sitting Bull to abandon the Old Ways and surrender to the U.S. government at Fort Buford, Montana where he handed over his rifle on July 19, 1881.

McLaughlin was 41 when he first met Sitting Bull at the Standing Rock Reservation. Considering himself a “friend” to the Lakota, he believed the “red man” needed to be “tamed” by replacing Lakota beliefs, customs and language with Wasichu ways. When McLaughlin met Sitting Bull, he could not see the great Chief as an equal or even a full-fledged man. Instead, McLaughlin felt it was his duty to “help” the chief become a farmer, giving up his “savage” ways and learning to live like a white man.

McLaughlin insisted that those under his charge practice Christianity. He banned Lakota ceremonies and dances, introducing church services to “save” the Indians’ souls. McLaughlin built Christian day schools with the motto, “Kill the Indian to save the man,” and ordered Lakota children to attend.

By 1890, McLaughlin began to fear Sitting Bull as a popular leader and a threat to the peace. He ordered the arrest of the chief, “dead or alive.” As Lakota policemen dragged Sitting Bull from his bed, others fired shots—until 11 of the chief’s family and followers lay dead alongside their murdered leader.





MAJOR JAMES WALSH became a Canadian North West Mounted Police officer after years of service in the Canadian army. A stubborn, strong-willed man, Walsh was also fair and honorable with a strong sense of justice. His duty as a North West Mountie was to keep the peace, upholding laws against killing, stealing or injuring anyone in the wild, wide-open and uncivilized Canadian northwest.

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull refused to “come in” to the Reservation. Chased by the U.S. Cavalry, he led his band across the border to Canada in May 1877, where he remained in exile for four long years, refusing a pardon and the chance to return.

When the Chief sought safety in Canada, he came under the authority of the North West Mounted Police and their commander in the territory—Major Walsh. Calling the chief “Bull,” Walsh earned his friendship and trust by lending the Lakota his help whenever possible. Finally, Sitting Bull had found a Wasichu he could trust.

The Major described the Lakota as “the most noble, moral, hospitable and tractable Red Men I have ever come in contact with. The character of their women would do credit to any nation. As a people they are affectionate, and family ties among them are stronger than they are among white people.”

With the Buffalo all but gone, hunger and cold eventually forced Sitting Bull to abandon the Old Ways and return South. The Chief, his family and a few remaining warriors said a last goodbye to Major Walsh. Then, re-crossing the Medicine Road, Sitting Bull headed for Fort Buford, Montana where he handed over his rifle, surrendering to the government on July 19, 1881.





WILLIAM FREDERICK "BUFFALO BILL" CODY was a legendary hero of the "Wild West." While a young man, he worked for the U.S. Army as a scout, soldier and messenger. During his Army service he met his future wife, Louisa, who could not have known at the time that her sweetheart would become an American icon.

Cody soon found he was a talented performer, playing the role of the fictional "Buffalo Bill," a well-known hero from short novels popular at the time. In 1883, he found his true claim to fame—organizing "Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show"—and took the nation by storm. The outdoor entertainment included a buffalo hunt and "Indian attack," plus a reenactment of the infamous Battle of Little Big Horn. Viewers found the extravagant costumes and real-life "Red Men" exciting, and the show soon gained nation-wide popularity.

With Sitting Bull now on the Reservation, Cody finally convinced him to join the Wild West Show, where the Chief dazzled crowds with his horse riding and hunting skills. The show soon traveled across the Atlantic Ocean—where it was performed for packed audiences across Europe.



Although the Wild West Show made a large profit, Cody lost all his earnings to foolish investment schemes. He died in 1917—but his name and show would be remembered fondly for generations to come.



BULL HEAD was the Lakota policeman who shot and killed Sitting Bull outside of the chief's home on December 15, 1890.

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull refused to surrender and "come in" to the Reservation. In May 1877, he led his band across the border into Canada where he remained for four long years, refusing a pardon and the chance to return. As Wasichu destroyed the buffalo herds, in keeping with their belief in "Manifest Destiny," it became harder and harder for the tribes to live in the Old Ways.

Many Lakota, like Bull Head, believed it would be best for their people to accept the ways of the Wasichu and life on the Reservation. Some of them, called Metal Breasts, kept the "peace" for the U.S. government. Bull Head became one of these Lakota police officers, enforcing the laws of the white man.

Hunger and cold eventually forced Sitting Bull, his family, and a few remaining warriors to return South. They surrendered to the U.S. Army on July 19, 1881 at Fort Buford, Montana. As the years passed, many Lakota became increasingly unhappy with life on the Reservation. The government feared Sitting Bull's popularity with his people, so Agent, James McLaughlin sent Lieutenant Bull Head and other Metal Breasts to arrest the great chief that winter day in 1890. As Bull Head and his Lakota police dragged Sitting Bull from his bed, an angry crowd surrounded them. Shots rang out and, as Bull Head fell, wounded by a bullet in the tussle, he fired one last time—into Sitting Bull's chest. A fierce battle followed in which 11 more Lakota were killed, including Crow's Foot, Sitting Bull's youngest son.

