DEATH SQUADS IN THE UNITED STATES: CONFESSIONS OF A GOVERNMENT TERRORIST

Ward Churchill

The reality is a continuum which connects Indian flesh sizzling over Puritan fires and Vietnamese flesh roasting under American napalm. The reality is the compulsion of a sick society to rid itself of men like Nat Turner and Crazy Horse, George Jackson and Richard Oaks, whose defiance uncovers the hypocrisy of a declaration affirming everyone's right to liberty and life. The reality is an overwhelming greed which began with the theft of a continent and continues with the merciless looting of every country on the face of the earth which lacks the strength to defend itself.

— Richard Lundstrom

During the first half of the 1970s, the American Indian Movement (AIM) came to the forefront of a drive to realize the rights of treaty-guaranteed national sovereignty on behalf of North America’s indigenous peoples. For the government and major corporate interests of the United States, this liberatory challenge represented a considerable threat. On the one hand, Indians possess clear legal and moral rights to the full exercise of self-determination; on the other hand, their reserved land base contains substantial quantities of critical mineral resources. More than half of all “domestic” U.S. uranium reserves lie within the boundaries of present-day Indian reservations, as do as much as a quarter of the high grade low sulphur coal, a fifth of the oil and natural gas, and major deposits of copper and other metals. Loss of internal colonial control over these items would confront U.S. elites with significant strategic and economic problems.

The United States government set out to liquidate AIM’s political effectiveness in order to maintain and reinforce the federal system of administering Indian Country. For a number of reasons, the crux of the conflict came to be situated on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation, home of the Oglala Lakota people, in what is now the state of South Dakota. Throughout the mid-70s, the FBI and a surrogate organization calling itself Guardians of the Oglala Nation (GOONs) conducted what amounted to low intensity warfare against AIM in this remote locale. The Bureau and its various apologists have consistently denied not only that a de facto counterinsurgency effort was mounted on Pine Ridge, but also that there was any direct relationship between the FBI and the GOONs. Those uttering claims to the contrary have been publicly dubbed "left wing McCarthyites," and accused of engaging in "innuendo" and attributing "guilt by association."2

Writer Peter Matthiessen, one of the more comprehensive and careful analysts of the "AIM-GOON Wars," has also been the target of two frivolous but massive and prolonged lawsuits, designed to suppress his 1983 book on the topic, In the Spirit of Crazy Horse. Matthiessen’s sins were allegedly a "defaming of the characters" of David Price, an agent heavily involved in the repression of AIM, and William "Wild Bill" Janklow, former attorney general and then governor of the state of South Dakota, who headed one of the many white vig-
ilante groups operating in the Pine Ridge area during the mid-70s. Both Price and Janklow, it appears, received substantial support from governmental and corporate quarters — as well as financing from such overtly right-wing entities as the Heritage Foundation — in keeping the Matthiessen study off the shelves for nearly a decade. As a consequence, it was not until the spring of 1991 that the American public was accorded an opportunity to read what this much celebrated author has to say about the events in question.

A major crack in the stone wall of F.B.I. official and quasi-official “plausible deniability” has now appeared, in the person of Duane Brewer, former second in command of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) police, and eventual head of the Highway Safety Program on Pine Ridge. Along with his superior in the BIA, Delmar Eastman, Brewer admits to having served as a primary commander of the reservation GOON squads and to having participated directly in many of the organization’s most virulently anti-AIM activities. In a 1987 interview given to independent filmmakers Michel Dubois and Kevin Barry McKiernan and later broadcast in a PBS documentary, Brewer sheds light on how the F.B.I. utilized the GOONs within a wider campaign to destroy AIM and “Indian militancy” in general. His statements should go far in establishing that the federal government has resorted to the employment of outright death squads as an integral aspect of its programs of domestic political and social repression.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST AIM: BACKGROUND

During the three year period from roughly mid-1973 through mid-1976, at least 69 members and supporters of AIM died violently on Pine Ridge (see accompanying list, “AIM Casualties on Pine Ridge, 1973-76”). Nearly 350 others suffered serious physical assaults, including gunshot wounds, stabbings, beatings administered with baseball bats and tire irons, having their cars rammed and run off the road at high speed, and their homes torched as they slept. Researchers have determined that the politically motivated death toll on Pine Ridge made the murder rate for the reservation 170 per 100,000 during the crucial period.

These figures do not include the “typical” high rate of fatalities experienced on Pine Ridge and most other American Indian reservations. Rather, the “murder rate of 170 per 100,000 — almost nine times that of Detroit — takes into account only deaths caused by the physical repression of Indian resistance.” Nowhere in North America has there been a comparable rate of homicide during the 20th century. To find counterparts, one must turn to contexts of U.S.-sponsored political repression in the Third World.

The political murder rate at Pine Ridge... was almost equivalent to that in Chile during the three years after a military coup supported by the United States deposed and killed President Salvador Allende... Based on Chile’s population of 10 million, the estimated fifty thousand persons killed in the three years of political repression in Chile at about the same time (1973-1976) roughly paralleled the murder rate at Pine Ridge.

Under the Major Crimes Act, murder on an Indian reservation falls under the jurisdiction of “federal authorities.” Since at least as early as 1953, this has meant the FBI. Not one of the murders of AIM people on Pine Ridge during the mid-70s was ever solved by the Bureau, despite the fact that in a number of instances the assailants were identified by one or more eyewitnesses. In many cases, investigations were never opened. When questioned about this apparent inactivity on the part of his personnel, George O’Clock, who until mid-1975 was the Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC) of the FBI’s Rapid City Resident Agency (whose jurisdiction includes Pine Ridge), pleaded “lack of manpower” as the reason. At the very moment he spoke, however, O’Clock was overseeing the highest ratio of

5. On the suits against Matthiessen and his publisher, Viking Press, see Churchill, Ward, “GOONs, G-Men, and AIM: At last the story will be told,” The Progressive, April 1990.

6. The documentary, entitled The Spirit of Crazy Horse, was produced by Michel Dubois and Kevin McKiernan, and first aired on December 18, 1990. The author is in possession of a 125 page transcription of the Brewer interview from which the televised excerpts were drawn.

7. These are minimum figures, derived from reports collected by researcher Candy Hamilton, who resided on Pine Ridge throughout the period at issue as an unpaid paralegal volunteer for the Wounded Knee Legal Offense/Defense Committee (WKLDCC).


9. Johansen and Maestas, op. cit., p. 84.

10. By comparison [with Pine Ridge], Detroit, the reputed “murder capital of the United States,” had a rate of 20.2 per 100,000 in 1974. The U.S. average rate was 9.7 per 100,000, with the average for large cities as follows: Chicago, 15.9; New York City, 16.3; Washington, D.C., 13.4; Los Angeles, 12.9; Seattle, 5.6; and Boston, 5.6. An estimated 20,000 persons were murdered in the United States in 1974. In a nation of 200 million persons, a murder rate comparable with that of Pine Ridge between 1973 and 1976 would have left 340,000 persons dead for political reasons in one year, 1.32 million in three. A similar rate for a city of 500,000 would have produced 850 political murders in a year, 2,550 in three. For a metropolitan of 5 million, the figures would have been 8,500 in one year and 25,500 in three. Johansen and Maestas, op. cit., p. 83. The authors rely on data from the FBI Uniform Crime Report, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1975.

11. Johansen and Maestas, op. cit., p. 84.


14. This is incorporated into official findings: “[W]hen Indians complain about the lack of investigation and prosecution on reservation crime, they are usually told the Federal government does not have the resources to handle the work.” See U.S. Department of Justice, Report of the Task Force on Indian Matters, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1975, pp. 42-3.

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agents to citizens over a sustained period enjoyed by any resident agency in the history of the Bureau. As O’Clock himself later put it, the normal compliment of personnel for Rapid City was four agents, three investigators plus the ASAC. During the anti-AIM campaign, however, things were different:

Most of the time before the 1970s, there were just four agents assigned to this resident agency and we covered the western half of South Dakota...which included the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Indian Reservations. Then, from 1972-73 to the time of my retirement, the resident agency almost tripled in size insofar as agents and FBI personnel were concerned. [Actually, by the summer of 1975, the resident agency had more than quadrupled]; there were probably eighteen agents assigned there. [After that], there were many, many more, at different times, thirty to forty agents working.

All told, O’Clock admits that between January of 1973 and the end of 1975, there were at least 2,500 different Bureau personnel temporarily assigned to his office. A peak number of “probably 350” was reached during July of 1975, with an average of “about 200 to 250” maintained for the six months from July 1 until December 31, 1975. Far from being a “lack of manpower,” O’Clock acknowledged that there were in fact “too many agents in the area [emphasis added]” to be effective, or even to be kept track of. Consequently, by August of 1975 O’Clock’s successor in Rapid City was actively reducing a 100 agent surplus in his roster. In other words, the Rapid City office was consistently overstaffed throughout the crucial three-year period. At times the entire western South Dakota region was absolutely saturated with FBI personnel. These personnel engaged in a virtual orgy of investigative and other activities while posted at Pine Ridge. For instance, while professing to be too shorthanded to assign agents to look into the killing and maiming of AIM members and supporters, O’Clock managed to find ample resources to investigate the victims. The Rapid City FBI office amassed some $16,000 in separate investigative file classifications with regard to AIM activities during the famous 1972 siege of Wounded Knee alone. This enormous expenditure of investigative energy made it possible for the FBI to file 562 federal charges against various AIM members during the second half of 1973. The result, after more than two years of trials, was a paltry 15 convictions—by far the lowest ratio of guilty verdicts to agent hours invested and charges filed in FBI history. All of the convictions were for such trivial offenses as “interference with a postal inspector in performance of his lawful duty.”

Nonetheless, O’Clock’s effort was not a failure, given the broader goals of the FBI. The effectiveness of the endeavor was well explained in 1974 by Colonel Volney Warner, a counterinsurgency warfare specialist and military advisor to the FBI on Pine Ridge. He observed that convictions were not the object of the effort. By simply filing charges, the Bureau was able to keep “many of AIM’s most militant leaders and followers under indictment, in jail or [with] warrants out for their arrest.” The movement’s financial resources were as a result necessarily diverted to legal defense efforts. By pursuing such tactics, Colonel Warner argued, the government could effectively neutralize AIM as a political force: “the government can win, even if no one goes to [prison].” Meanwhile, what the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights described as “a reign of terror” on Pine Ridge continued, unimpeded by interference from the FBI. Indeed, according to all indications, the Bureau not only encouraged, but actively aided and abetted it.

THE GOONS

The fact that the GOONs had a tangible relationship to the federal government has all along been clear, given that the group was formed in late 1972 through a federal BIA grant of $62,000 to then Pine Ridge Tribal President Dick Wilson to establish a “Tribal Ranger Group.” From 1973 onward, funding of GOON payrolls seems to have accrued from the Wilson administration’s misappropriation of block granted federal

15. Ibid., pp. 42-3.
17. Zigrossi is the FBI official who explained to investigative journalist David Weir and Lowell Bergman in 1978 that, in his view, the proper function of the Bureau on Indian reservations is to serve as a “colonial police force.” See Weir, David, and Lowell Bergman, “The Killing of Anna Mae Aquash,” Rolling Stone, April 7, 1977, p. 5.
21. Quoted from audio tape in Churchill, Ward, and Jim Van-
highway improvement monies (the “Rangers” were officially expanded to include a “Highway Safety Program” for this purpose). Most federal housing funds allocated to Pine Ridge during the two terms of Wilson’s presidency also appear to have been devoted to rewarding members of the GOON squad for services rendered. Many of Wilson’s relatives as well as perhaps one third of the BIA police force on the reservation were quickly rostered as GOONs. Wilson received quiet federal support in running Pine Ridge as a personal fiefdom as a quid pro quo for his cooperation in casting an appearance of legitimacy upon an illegal transfer of land to the federal government. The exchange required that the Sheep Mountain Gunner Range—a approximately one-eighth of the total reservation area—be ceded from Indian to federal ownership, in blatant violation of the federal treaty with the Lakota people. Although it was cloaked in official secrecy at the time, the motivation for this federal maneuver was the discovery of rich molybdenum and uranium deposits within the Gunner Range. Both are considered to be critical strategic minerals by the Pentagon; access to them is a matter of “National Security.” The GOONs were necessary to quell resistance among traditional grassroots Oglalas to any such illegal transaction. When AIM moved in at the request of the traditionalists, the GOONs shifted from intimidation tactics to outright death squad activities, thus pursuing not only their original objective but the broader federal goal of eliminating AIM as a viable political force as well. A number of studies have concluded that the GOONs were responsible for the bulk of the AIM fatalities on Pine Ridge. In those cases where witnesses identified the murderers, the culprits invariably turned out to be known members of the reservation GOON squad. Yet, in most instances, no formal FBI investigation resulted.

On the afternoon of March 21, 1975, Edith Eagle Hawk, her four-month-old daughter, and three-year-old grandson were killed when their car was forced into a deep ditch alongside Highway 44, between Scenic [South Dakota] and Rapid City. Edith Eagle Hawk was a defense (alibi) witness for AIM member Jerry Bear Shield, who was at the time accused of killing a GOON, William Jack Steele, on March 9 (charges against Bear Shield were later dropped when it was revealed Steele had probably died at the hands of GOON associates). The driver of the car which struck the Eagle Hawk vehicle—Albert Coomes, a white on-reservation rancher who was allowed by the Wilsonites to serve as an active GOON — also lost control of his car, went into the ditch and was killed. Eugene Eagle Hawk, who was badly injured but survived the crash, identified a second occupant of the Coomes car as being Mark Clifford, a prominent GOON. BIA and FBI reports on the matter fail to make mention of Clifford [who had survived and escaped the scene].

On other occasions, the Bureau investigated and


25. It is estimated that at least $200,000 in tribal housing funds were expended in 1973 and 1974 in acquiring house trailers utilized exclusively by members of the GOON squad and their families. See Brand, op. cit.

26. The per capita annual income on Pine Ridge during this period was a little over $1,000. Wilson assigned himself a pay increase from $5,500 to $15,500 per year, as well as a $30,000 annual “consultancy” with the tribe, within six months of taking office. His wife was hired as director of the Pine Ridge Head Start Program (which she shortly bankrupted) at $22,500 per year, his brother Jim as director of tribal planning (where he was able to identify and earmark funds for expenditure on the GOONs) at $25,000 per year plus a $15,000 consultancy, and his brother George as director of the tribal water works where he seems to have functioned mainly as a GOON recruiter at $25,000 per year. Wilson’s son Manny as well as several cousins and nephews were placed on the more covert sorts of retainer, serving as GOON “soldiers” pure and simple. See Editors, Voices From Wounded Knee, 1973, Akeusossie Notes, Mohawk Nation via Roosevelt, NY, 1974, p. 21; McCall, Cheryl, “Life on Pine Ridge Bleak,” Colorado Daily, May 16, 1975; and New York Times, April 22, 1975.

27. The percentage of BIA police who actually moonlighted as GOONs in the classic fashion of the Latin American death squads is somewhat nebulous. Speculations have ranged from 25 to 50%.

28. The area, located in the northern quadrant of Pine Ridge got its name when it was “borrowed” by the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 as a practice site for dive bombers and aerial gunners. By agreement, the government was to return the land to Oglala control at the end of World War II, but never did. Agitation among Oglalas to recover the gunnery range had become pronounced by 1972 but, unbeknownst to any of the Indians involved, a secret cooperative venture undertaken by NASA and the National Uranium Research and Evaluation Institute in 1970-71 had revealed through specialized satellite photography that the area contained a rich uranium deposit, intermingled with molybdenum (see Greis, J.P., Status of Mineral Resource Information on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, S.D., BIA Report No. 12, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C., 1976). The title transfer at issue was/is illegal under provision of the still-binding 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, a stipulation requiring three-quarters express consent of all adult male Lakotas before any lawful landcession may take place.

29. The traditions had formed the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO), headed by Pedro Bissonette, in 1972 as a means to pursue recovery of the gunnery range, continue broader land claims under the 1868 treaty, and resolve heirship problems effecting reservation property owned by Pine Ridge residents but administered “in trust” by the BIA. OSCRO naturally opposed the Wilson agenda, and became the primary initial target of GOON terrorism. The traditions then attempted to exercise their legal right of impeachment. The BIA responded by naming Wilson to head up his own impeachment proceedings and requesting a 60 member Special Operations Group of SWAT-trained U.S. Marshals — complete with flak vests and M-60 machine guns which they set up in sandbagged positions atop tribal buildings — to “maintain order” during the travesty. Immediately after continuing himself in office, Wilson proclaimed a reservation-wide ban on meetings of more than three people. It was at this point that AIM was called in to provide support and assistance.

sometimes charged the victims themselves or their associates with having perpetrated the violence directed against them (with attendant publicity to establish the "violence prone" characteristics of AIM).

On June 19, 1973, brothers (and AIM supporters) Clarence and Vernal Cross were sitting in their car by the side of the road near Pine Ridge [village] when they began receiving rifle fire. Clarence died of gunshot wounds. Vernal, severely injured (by a bullet through the throat) but alive, was charged by Delmar Eastman with the murder of his brother (charges were later dropped). Nine-year-old Mary Ann Little Bear, who was riding past the Cross car in a vehicle driven by her father at the time of the shooting, was struck in the face by a stray round, suffering a wound which cost her an eye. Witnesses named three GOONs — Francis Randall, John Hussman and Woody Richards — as the gunmen involved [but no investigation resulted].

The FBI's main complicity in the bloodbath was to deliberately look the other way as the GOONs went about their grisly work. However, there is ample evidence that the Bureau's role was much more substantial. For instance, the FBI repeatedly shielded the GOONs from other governmental agencies in the area. During the siege of Wounded Knee, U.S. Marshals on the scene attempted to dismantle a GOON roadblock where an FBI man was continuously present, according to the Brewer interview. Chief U.S. Marshal Wayne Colburn had decided that the occupants of the roadblock were uncontrollable, and a menace to his own men. Richard G. Held, head of the FBI Internal Security Section flew to the site by helicopter to "straighten things out." Held, assigned to the reservation as a "consultant," informed the Chief U.S. Marshal that "the highest authority" had ordered that the GOON roadblock was to remain in place. Similarly, when several GOONs were arrested by Colburn's deputies after pointing weapons at both the chief marshal and U.S. Justice Department Solicitor General Kent Frizzell, the FBI again intervened, causing the men to be released prior to booking.32

More importantly, toward the end of the Wounded Knee siege Colburn was actively disarming the GOONs after it appeared that one of his men had been seriously wounded by a round fired by the GOONs. Those GOONs who were relieved of their hunting rifles and shotguns (which until then had comprised their typical weaponry) suddenly began to sport fully-automatic, government-issue M-16 assault rifles.33 A much improved inventory of explosive devices and an abundance of ammunition also appeared among the GOONs during this period. At about the same time, the GOONs experienced a marked upgrade in the quality of their communications gear. They received scanners and other electronic paraphernalia which allowed them to monitor federal police frequencies. Finally, it appears that the GOONs' operational intelligence underwent considerable improvement during the 71 days of the siege.

It is clear that the U.S. military provided no ordnance or other equipment directly to non-federal agencies during the siege of Wounded Knee. It is also clear that the U.S. Marshals, for reasons of their own, were genuinely attempting to reduce rather than enhance GOON weaponry while the siege was going on. In any event, Colburn withdrew his Marshals as rapidly as possible from Pine Ridge in the aftermath of Wounded Knee. This left the FBI as the only federal force on the reservation from 1973 until mid-1975. In that same time period — the period when the GOONs' activities became increasingly lethal — both the quantity and the quality of GOON firepower steadily increased. Many reservation residents believe (and several researchers have also concluded, by process of elimination) that the FBI not only equipped, but also provided field intelligence and other support to, the death squads operating on Pine Ridge from 1973 through 1976.34

31. Ibid., p. 185. This is hardly the only incident in which innocent bystanders were on the receiving end of GOON bullets. For instance, on February 7, 1974, a round fired by an unidentified GOON at AIM member Milo Goings in the reservation-adjacent hamlet of Whiteclay, Nebraska missed and struck nine-year-old Harold Weasel Bear in the face, blinding him in one eye. No FBI investigation was opened.

32. The altercation at "The Residents' Roadblock" (as Wilson called it), Held's part in it, and the FBI's intervention to obtain the GOONs' release is described in Voices From Wounded Knee, 1973, op. cit., p. 123. Colburn's motive for attempting to dismantle the roadblock is explained in a 1989 interview of former Solicitor General Kent Frizzell by NPR reporter Scott Slagle; Frizzell stated that he was riding in Colburn's car on April 23, 1973 when they stopped at the GOON position. A Wilsonite, apparently incensed at the Justice Department's efforts to negotiate a cease fire with AIM rather than unleashing the force necessary to kill the "militants" outright, proceeded to shove the muzzle of his weapon under Frizzell's chin and threatened to blow his head off. Colburn was forced to get out of the car and level his own weapon at the GOON, telling him to "go ahead and shoot Frizzell, and then I'm going to kill you," before the GOON backed off. Colburn then drove back to his command post in Pine Ridge village, assembled as many deputies as he could muster, and returned to the roadblock in a fury. In his own interview, Duane Brewer refers to a relative, BIA police officer/GOON Brian Brewer, leveling a weapon at Colburn himself during the subsequent confrontation. The marshal, Lloyd Grimm, was apparently hit in the lower back by a round which permanently paralyzed him from the waist down while facing the AIM perimeter at Wounded Knee. The bullet which struck him was not federal issue. This combination of factors has caused considerable speculation that he may have been hit by a round fired by a GOON from a position behind the federal lines. Concerning M-16s in the possession of GOONs during the Wounded Knee siege, consider the following excerpt from federal radio monitoring of radio traffic on the night of April 23, 1973: "Tribal Government [in a euphemism for the GOONs] Roadblock to Tribal Roving Patrol: How many M-16s you guys got? Where are the other guys? Tribal Patrol to Tribal Roadblock: We got eight M-16s and some men coming up on horseback..."

THE BREWER REVELATIONS

Although much of what might have been covered is not addressed in the existing interview with Duane Brewer, what is included is often quite explicit. For instance, he readily confirms the oft-levelled accusation that in order to be employed on Pine Ridge during the Wilson era, especially in the Tribal Rangers or Highway Safety Program, one was virtually required to serve simultaneously as a GOON. As Brewer explained:

If you were a GOON, supported Dick Wilson, and hated AIM, you had a pretty good chance of getting a job [underwritten with federal funds]. We had people from all over. Some of them you never had to ask to do anything. They were ready to do anything. A lot of them liked Dick Wilson and his ideas. And they thought that was pretty nice, a GOON squad. Hell, you don’t see that very often in this world. Of course, it is going on all over the nation now, and different presidents and leaders have their crew of people. And, you know, I guess that’s all, that’s politics. You have your certain followers. But, in them days, you had real dedicated people. They would hurt somebody for their leader if they had to. And if anybody tried to hurt him, [they] were too outnumbered to go messing around.

The GOONs were organized on a community-by-community basis into “crews” of about a dozen men, headed up by one or another of “ten to fifteen pretty hard core individuals” such as Chuck and Emile “Woody” Richards, and Wilson’s eldest son, Manny (Richard Jr.). Brewer’s crew—of which BIA police SWAT team commander Marvin Stolt, Manny Wilson and John Hussman served as operational lieutenants, and which at its high point in 1975 rostered at least 22 other individuals—functioned more-or-less exclusively on the western side of Pine Ridge. Chuck Richards’ group covered the northeastern quadrant of the reservation, Woody Richards’ the southeastern area. Ad hoc units were formed from time to time. Combined operations between standing units occurred in all areas, as needed.

The result of such organization was a relatively constant reservation-wide fire-force of “about 100 men,” with the capability of expanding to twice that number. The GOONs themselves were augmented, not only by the BIA police, but by non-Indian vigilante groups such as the “Bennett County Citizens’ Committee,” “Charles Mix County Rangers,” “Faith Chapter of the John Birch Society,” and other Bircher-oriented “ranchers associations” in South Dakota, Wyoming and Nebraska. At present, “maybe ten or so” of the hardest-core GOON squad members have buried much of their best weaponry, as well as ample stocks of ammunition and explosives, around the reservation. They stand ready, in Brewer’s view, to resume their role as a nucleus of GOON leadership “in case that’s ever needed again.” They are motivated, he says, “by a lot of hatred.”

Brewer recalls that he and his underlings had a “pretty good working relationship” with the federal agents during the GOONs’ formation period. This relationship emerged because his BIA police-GOON unit served as a sort of regional roving patrol, dispensing a bare-knuckled “law and order” against AIM on various reservations.

During the time I was an officer, we traveled all over the country following the Movement. We went to the Treaty Convention up at Fort Yates. We spent a lot of time in Rosebud. We went to Fort Totten when they [AIM] took the jail over. It was always Pine Ridge’s little crew that went. So, we kind of had a reputation. …[U]sually when they [the FBI] send you off like that . . . you don’t cut them [AIM] any slack. . . . you bust a few heads. . . . you don’t take any shit. . . . You haul ‘em in. You show them authority because there is no law and order. … I got to travel quite a bit when I was an officer. I enjoyed all of it. 36

Brewer’s unit was used as an inter-reservation fire brigade against AIM not merely because of their attitudes towards “radicalism” and the appropriateness of suppressing it through liberal applications of gratuitous violence. It was also a conscious federal policy capitalizing on those GOON attitudes, to equip them for this purpose.

[After a while] we had all the weaponry. We had fifteen AR-15s. We had long-range projectile smoke, [gas guns]. We had a [tear gas] fogger. We had everything. So, it was our squad that usually went. You get there, and you hear people say, “The Pine Riders are here.” So, of course, a

35. Chuck Richards is the eldest son in a clan so grotesquely violent it is collectively referred to on Pine Ridge as the “Manson Family.” Chuck, predictably, is known as “Charlie Manson.” He was also Dick Wilson’s son-in-law, before being sent to prison in 1978, presumably for holding a shotgun to the head of a tribal police officer during a post-GOON era altercation on the reservation. While incarcerated at the minimum security federal facility at Lompoc, California under an alias, he is believed to have been involved in an assassination plot against Northwest AIM leader Leonard Peltier, who had suddenly and unaccountably been transferred there directly from the “super-maximum” prison at Marion, Illinois. Richards’ younger brother Bennie, also a GOON, had by then become head of the BIA police on the Duck Valley Shoshoni Reservation, on the Nevada/Idaho border. He is suspected of involvement in the mass murder of AIM President John Trudell’s entire family — wife Tina, daughters Ricardoa Star (age five) and Sunshine Karma (age three), son Eli Changing Sun (age one), and mother-in-law Leah Hicks Manning — on the night of February 12, 1979.

36. Brewer’s reference to a “Treaty Convention up at Fort Yates,” on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, concerns the founding conference of the International Indian Treaty Council, AIM’s diplomatic arm, in June of 1974. “Pine Ridge’s little crew” was also on hand at Standing Rock on June 8, 1975, when AIM leader Russell Means was shot in the back and nearly killed by BIA police.
number of times we went to places, some officers busted heads. . . . We had some pretty cocky guys, I guess you might say.

Brewer contends that the FBI's support of the GOONs was motivated by the fact that they had a common cause—undermining AIM. In his words, "the FBI was with the GOONs" because "we was fighting in the same thing we wasn't supporting AIM." Asked whether this meant the FBI "looked the other way," when GOONs engaged in physical assaults upon AIM members, he replied somewhat disingenuously that "we never, ever done anything with them [agents] around, but they probably would have . . . So anything we could get away with, we would."37

I had a good relationship with them [the FBI] because I helped them a lot. . . . Yeah, we wasn't afraid [of being arrested] . . . I probably have maybe four or five FBI agents who are real good friends. They tried to get me into the FBI Academy, tried to help me out, to get me out of this place.

Intelligence with which to conduct the anti-AIM operations was no problem because "the agents would come to my house [and] give [us] all kinds of information and things. . . . they were probably giving [the GOONs] a lot more than they were supposed to. Which is good, hell, every little bit helps." Basically, "we could get information from them" whenever it was needed. Asked whether the FBI thought it was "okay to rough up AIM supporters," Brewer responded, "I imagine they did. . . I think they did. . . . They never did investigate any of them incidents [of GOON violence]." At another point, in response to a similar question, he replied that when the FBI brought information to his house, it was because "they wanted to see us go out and educate" AIM members and supporters; "I got the feeling they was hoping that I'd kick the shit out of somebody. Or have a war."

Brewer offered the concept of "butt kickin'" to explain the term "educate" in the context he was using it, and thus the sort of activities the FBI had tacitly endorsed. "We would educate them, like I said, we would kick their butt. Then they ain't going to come around and bug you any more." He went on to explain that the intended result of an "educational butt kickin'" was for the victim to "know that any time they move any part of their body it hurts 'em, [and] it could have been worse. I've educated a few who will never forget me."

I think ["education" occurs] when you . . . give them a severe beating and, like I said, you don't cut no slack. You beat their face, you beat their arms and legs, and work them over good. So, like I said, when they wake up the next day, every time they move they're going to think about you and decide whether they want to come back and mess with you again. . . . And, you know, you do it good enough and they're not going to be thinking about coming back for more of the pain. They're going to forget about it.

The GOONs' repertoire of "educational" techniques was often even more extreme. At one point, Brewer recounts how a GOON named Sonny Dion "beat this [AIM] guy up so bad and then he used a saw and was trying to saw this guy up." Other GOONs, apparently shocked at the extent to which Dion was "getting out of hand," intervened to prevent consummation of this macabre act. Brewer goes on to note that Dion was eventually "shipped out"—that is, he was charged by the BIA police and eventually sent to federal prison—not for his murderous assault upon the AIM member, but for turning his brutal attentions upon another GOON, Chauncey Folsom, shooting him six times in the back with a .22 caliber revolver (the victim lived).

For his part, Brewer points out, Folsom was a key player in a notorious event occurring on February 27, 1975 at the Pine Ridge airport. In this incident, some fifteen carloads of GOONs headed by Tribal President Dick Wilson himself surrounded an automobile occupied by Bernard Escamilla, an AIM member charged with several offenses during the Wounded Knee siege, his legal counsel, National Lawyers Guild attorney Roger Finzel, and two paralegal assistants, Eva Gordon and Kathi James.38 Wilson ordered the GOONs to "stomp" their quarry. Thereupon, Brewer admits, he personally led the charge, smashing the car's windshield. Other GOONs, whom Brewer does not identify, sliced open the top of the car (it was a convertible), dragged Finzel and Escamilla out and, according to a Rapid City Journal article published the following day, "stomped, kicked and pummelled [them] to the ground. [GOONs] took turns kicking and stomping, while one slashed Finzel's face with a knife, [also] cutting Eva Gordon's hand as she attempted to shield him." Folsom, who, as Brewer put it, "was a really huge guy," proceeded to "educate" Escamilla, a much smaller man, "beat him up real bad, and then just sort of dumped him in a ditch full of water. Things kind of got out of hand, I guess."

No federal charges were ever filed against Wilson or any of his GOONs in this matter, although Finzel and Gordon provided detailed and mutually supporting depositions, naming several of their assailants.39 Instead, the FBI busied itself administering polygraph ex-

37. In fact, FBI were "around," at least on some occasions. For example, on February 26, 1973, AIM leader Russell Means, accompanied by reservation residents Milo Goings and Pedro Bissonette, attempted to meet with Dick Wilson in a last ditch effort to avert the confrontation which became the siege of Wounded Knee only 24 hours later. For their trouble, they were assaulted in the parking lot of the tribal office building by five GOONs headed by Duane Brewer. At least two FBI agents were on hand as "observers." No further action was taken by the Bureau.

38. Finzel, Gordon and James were members of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee (WKLD/OC), a National Lawyers Guild project initiated during the 1973 Wounded Knee siege to provide legal counsel to AIM members and supporters. 39. Aside from Dick Wilson, the victims identified GOONs...
ammunitions to the victims (which they easily passed). Wilson, meanwhile, had conducted a press conference in which he claimed to know nothing about the incident other than that the violence had been caused by “Russell Means and a large group of followers, last seen heading east out of Pine Ridge” village.\(^{46}\) When they were nonetheless indicted by a federal grand jury, Wilson and his men quickly pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge in tribal court (the judges of which Wilson himself had appointed) and were assessed $10 fines. Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Clayton thereupon announced that no federal prosecutions would be initiated because any felony charges brought by his office would constitute “double jeopardy.” When asked by interviewers whether the whole thing hadn’t been whitewashed, as critics have long contended, Brewer replied: “Yeah, I guess maybe it was.”\(^ {41}\)

At one point the former GOON leader denies having personally killed anyone: “No, I never did. I never did kill anybody. Like I said, I might have smoked them up pretty bad where they thought they were gonna die. But I never did really kill them.” However, he also says, “I’ve come close, I think. . . . I’ve beat some people with clubs that I was worried wouldn’t live,” and “I worried the few times that I did kill somebody [emphasis added].” Further, he readily admits that the GOONs as a whole did regularly commit homicide.\(^ {42}\) Certain of these “incidents” concern the much rumored murder of at least thirteen individuals engaged in transporting supplies through GOON and federal lines during the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee.

I don’t know if they killed them on the spot. Because, like I said, there would be witnesses. More likely, they took them off by themselves. . . . I know that there was one group of guys [Woody Richards’ crew] that had that roadblock that done a guy in pretty bad just beatin’ him with a weapon. . . . [T]hey ended up really pistol whippin’ him and usin’ weapons on him . . . I’ve never heard of them ever taking a guy to the hospital as bad as he was beat up . . . He was probably killed somewhere.\(^ {43}\)

A customary GOON squad practice was to conduct drive-by shootings of the homes of movement people: “You know, if there was too many AIM members there, or something, maybe [the GOONs] would take a cruise by and shoot them up.” Often, Brewer recalls “we would set it up” so that drive-bys “would be blamed on AIM.”\(^ {44}\)

I know it was done quite a bit. Any time [AIM] gathered up. . . . [the GOONs hit] the AIM people. A lot of times we had a little war. Somebody would go by and they would open up. I guess the housing [project] that was really the one that was shot up the most was probably Cherry Hills. . . . [That’s where the majority of the AIM supporters lived so] it was shot up a lot. Them houses are a real mess.

Cherry Hill was not the only target: “I know [the GOONs] firebombed a house in Crazy Horse [housing project] once because one of the guys that lived there was an AIM supporter.” Brewer also acknowledges that it was GOONs who, on March 3, 1973, firebombed the home of journalist Aaron DeSersa and his wife, Betty, in order to “send a message” that they should suspend publication of an anti-Wilson tabloid based in the reservation village of Manderson. Betty DeSersa was badly burned in the ensuing blaze. Among other targets of GOON firebombings were the home of elderly traditional Oglala Lakota Chief Frank Fools Crow on March 5, 1973, and that of his assistant, Matthew King, on March 3. The home of AIM member Severt Young Bear, near the reservation hamlet of Porcupine, was shot up on at least six occasions and firebombed twice in little more than a year.\(^ {45}\)

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41. A further perspective has been offered in an interview by former WKLD/OC coordinator Ken Then: “Somebody had to tell Dick Wilson how to go about beating the rap on this one. He wasn’t smart enough to figure out the double jeopardy ploy all by himself. And you can bet that ‘somebody’ was in the U.S. Attorney’s office or the FBI.”

42. For instance, AIM supporter Phillip Little Crow was beaten to death as part of a GOON “educational seminar” on November 10, 1973; AIM supporter Jim Little was stumped to death by four GOONs on September 10, 1975; AIM member Hobart Horse was beaten, shot and run over repeatedly by a car on March 1, 1976. No one went to trial on any of these murders.

43. The late Robert Burnette, at the time tribal president of the Rosebud Sioux, has recounted how, immediately after the Wounded Knee siege ended, “[Solicitor General] Kent Frazell . . . called me to request that I come to Wounded Knee with two FBI agents in an attempt to find eight graves that were around the perimeter. The activists who spoke of these graves believed they contained the bodies of Indians murdered by white ranchers or Wilson’s men [or both].” [see Burnette, Robert, with John Koster, The Road to Wounded Knee, Bantam Books, New York, 1974, p. 248]. The Akwesasne Notes book, Voices From Wounded Knee, 1973 (op. cit., p. 193) also contains an excerpt from the verbatim transcription of U.S. Marshal radio logs for the night in which it is reported that a GOON “roving patrol” had captured a group of 15 “hippies” attempting to backpack supplies into Wounded Knee. A BIA police unit dispatched by the marshals to take custody of the prisoners was fired upon by the GOONs and retreated. None of the prisoners was ever seen again. All told, the cumulative number of individuals believed by AIM to be missing as a result of their attempts to move in or out of Wounded Knee during the siege exceeds forty.

44. During the course of his interview, he drove reporters through the Cherry Hill Housing Project, where “a lot of AIM people used to live,” pointing out specific dwellings which had been shot up and/or firebombed by GOON patrols.

45. In late 1974, Young Bear requested that an AIM security unit be placed on his property in much the same fashion the Northwest AIM group subsequently established its defensive encampment at the request of the Jumping Bull family, near Oglala. As a result, GOON violence directed at Young Bear’s home “dropped off real fast,” as he remembers it.

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https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjll/vol3/iss1/6
Yet another noteworthy incident occurred on November 17, 1975, when BIA police officer GOON Jesse Trueblood shot up an “AIM house” belonging to Chester and Bernice Stone in Oglala, another reservation village. He seriously wounded all five occupants and permanently maimed two of them, an adult named Louis Tyon and three-year-old Johnny Mousseau. Trueblood himself was found dead in his patrol car shortly thereafter, shot in the back of the head with his own service revolver. The FBI, incredibly, listed the cause of death as “suicide.” Brewer concurs that the federal finding was absurd — “Jesse had a disability which prevented him from lifting his arms in such a way that he could’ve shot himself like that” — but says he has “no idea” who did the killing. It is commonly accepted around Oglala that Trueblood was murdered by a prominent GOON leader (not Brewer), who availed himself of the opportunity presented by the confusion attending the drive-by to settle a romantic dispute with his colleague.

When asked about the source of the increasingly sophisticated weaponry the GOONs came to possess, Brewer suggests repeatedly that the FBI armed his group — both directly and through indirect conduits — with items such as Thompson submachine guns and M-16s. “It looked like it was probably police stuff, [and] it was always cheap when we got it. It included more than ammunition and automatic weapons. [There were] plastic explosives, detonating cord, [and] fragmentation grenades,” as well as dynamite and blasting caps were given to the GOONs. He contends that certain of the less exotic — but nonetheless expensive — weapons used by the GOONs, such as .300 Weatherby rifles (ideal for sniping purposes), were provided at little or no charge by white vigilante groups. Some of the M-16s, he says, came from BIA police inventories provided by the federal government. Most of the rest of the hard-to-get gear came in clandestine fashion from FBI personnel and/or “black drug-gun dealers” in Rapid City motel rooms, usually at the local Holiday Inn.

[You’d go to their room with this big suitcase and they’d show you a bunch of weapons, grenades, detonating cord, blasting caps, whatever, and give you some. “Here, take this.” A couple guys I know of walked around with blasting caps in their shirt pockets.

In those instances where the “Black gun dealers” transferred weapons and explosives to the GOONs, agents were in the motel, monitoring the activity. When asked whether the agents were aware that the GOONs were in possession of such illegal paraphernalia, Brewer responded, “Sure.” As an illustration, he recounted an occasion when, with FBI agents in adjoining rooms, a GOON, “playing” with a newly-acquired weapon accidentally discharged it in the Holiday Inn, blowing a hole in the floor. The Bureau conducted no investigation, nor did they take any other action. Brewer also mentions repeatedly that he routinely showed FBI agents visiting his home the illegal weapons in his personal possession, and he often informed them how he planned to use the weapons. Such displays failed to evoke a negative response — never mind an arrest — from the agents. To the contrary, they customarily advised him to “be careful” as he went about his business.

At another point Brewer explains that after he engaged in a fist fight with AIM leader Russell Means, the FBI rewarded him with “a .357 magnum, 6-inch barrel... [worth] three hundred and some bucks, brand new. Real nice. I carried that a long time.” He also states categorically that the FBI supplied the GOONs with special types of “armor piercing ammunition,” which was “real expensive” and supposedly “restricted to law enforcement personnel,” so the gunmen could hit their AIM targets even if “they were in a brick building or something.” This led to a question concerning “the best way to hit a house,” to which the GOON leader responded:

Best way to hit it is probably just to... have your lookouts and when there is nobody around and it’s nice and quiet, have your... assault car with all the weapons in it. And do it from the road. Don’t cruise up to the house because then you got return fire. Then you got a war. The point of shooting up a house was just to prove that we didn’t approve of [AIM] gathering, you know, and we want[ed] them to know that we’re on our toes and watching them.

When asked why the Bureau might provide — or arrange provision of — so much costly [weaponry] to an irregular force like the GOONs, Brewer was unequivocal: “They just didn’t want them [AIM] people to survive... I think they was hoping that we would just kill them all, you know?”

The former “Head GOON” offers considerable perspective on the FBI’s “inability to cope” with the wave of violent death on Pine Ridge. Take, for example, one of the more mysterious homicides involved in the

46. It is worth noting that there were no African American gun dealers in Rapid City — or anywhere else in western South Dakota or adjoining areas of Wyoming and Nebraska — in those days, and still aren’t. The individuals in question were therefore necessarily “imported” from some considerable distance in order to conduct their clandestine commerce. If the whole thing were a profit-making venture on their part, this might be understandable. But Brewer says repeatedly that they provided weapons and munitions to the GOONs either free of charge or at extremely low cost. So, the question of why a group of Black men might undertake considerable effort and expense for no potential return in order to provide one group of Indians the means to slaughter another remains inexplicable on its face. This remains true unless one considers the probability that they were serving as go-betweens for some one else — say, a federal agency — and compensated accordingly. The scenario fits well with the remainder of Brewer’s commentary on arms transactions, and with the known means by which the Bureau armed the Secret Army Organization in southern California at about the same time. See Parenti, Michael, Democracy for the Few, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1982, p. 24.

47. This concerns the altercation outside the tribal office building in Pine Ridge village on February 26, 1973.
entire reign of terror on the reservation, that of Jeanette Bissonette — a not especially prominent activist — at about 1 a.m. on the morning of March 27, 1975. Careful observers suspected at the time that the victim was mistakenly killed by a GOON sniper who confused her car with a similar one driven by traditionalist leader and AIM supporter Ellen Moves Camp. The FBI, for reasons it has never adequately explained, insisted that the killing “must” have been done by “militants” and expended a great deal of investigative energy attempting to link Northwest AIM leader Leonard Peltier to the crime. However, Brewer frames the matter a bit differently.

I know there was [innocent] people killed during that time, like that Bissonette lady down . . . near Oglala. We didn’t do that type of stuff [ordinarily]. That was, must have been, a freak accident. They must have mistaken her for somebody else. I think that’s what happened. But, you know, the weapon we used to kill that woman was also a weapon [provided by the FBI].

He also provides an interesting interpretation of what the FBI described as the “justifiable homicide” of AIM supporter Pedro Bissonette (brother of Jeanette) at a police roadblock near Pine Ridge village on the night of October 17, 1973. Brewer suggests that the killer, BIA police officer/GOON Joe Clifford, may have been not so much politically motivated as he was enraged by the fact that Bissonette had undergone a stormy marriage to his sister: “They had a real fiery romance, I guess. And it didn’t end well. So maybe there was enough hatred [on the part of] this officer to, enough to end the guy’s life. . . . Maybe [Clifford] was worried that [Bissonette] was coming back to raise hell with his sister or something.” In either event, whether it was motivated politically or for a personal grudge, the killing plainly added up to murder rather than the “self-defense” explanation officially registered by the FBI, and confirmed by government contract coroner W.O. Brown.48

Concerning the murder of AIM supporter Byron DeSersa near the reservation hamlet of Wanblee on January 30, 1976, Brewer states that he did not participate directly, since the locale was outside his normal area of operations. On the other hand, he candidly acknowledges providing “some of the weapons” used by GOON leader Chuck Richards, Dick Wilson’s younger son, Billy, and others in committing the crime. Still, he holds his silence about the implications of two FBI agents arriving on the scene shortly after the murder, being informed by witnesses as to the identity of the killers (who were still assembled close at hand), and then making no arrests. Similarly, he stands mute with regard to the significance of Delmar Eastman’s subsequent dispatch of a BIA police unit, not to arrest DeSersa’s murderers, but to remove them safely from Wanblee when it became apparent that area residents might retaliate.49

On the matter of the execution-style slaying of AIM activist Anna Mae Aquash, whose body was found in a ravine near Wanblee on February 24, 1976, Brewer admits that there is strong evidence pointing to BIA police investigator (and GOON affiliate) Paul Herman as the killer. But, as Brewer puts it, the FBI couldn’t “tie him in” to the Aquash murder because the nature of her death failed to conform to Herman’s peculiar mode of killing.

[Herman] got sent off [to prison] shortly after that. He killed a young girl, burnt her with cigarette butts, just done a whole bunch of things. Anna Mae Aquash, she wasn’t done like that. She was shot. . . . if this guy was a maniac and burnt his victims with a cigarette and done things, why didn’t he do it to [Aquash]? . . . She wasn’t you know, sexually tortured, none of it, none of that stuff. Just a clean death.

The problem with such reasoning is striking. Although government contract coroner W.O. Brown — whose conclusions in this case Brewer apparently wished his interviewers to accept — failed to find evidence that Aquash had been tortured or sexually abused, he also “determined” that she had died of “exposure.”50 Independent pathologist Garry Peterson, retained by the victim’s family to perform a second autopsy, concluded immediately that her death had been caused by a “lead slug consistent with a .32 or .38 caliber handgun . . . fired pointblank into the base of the

48. The cause of death listed in both the police report and coroner’s report in the Pedro Bissonette slaying is also suspect. The time of the shooting reported by Clifford is 9:48 p.m., the time of the body’s arrival by ambulance at the Pine Ridge hospital (a few minutes distance from the shooting scene) is 10:10, making it appear that the victim died more or less instantly from gunshot wounds. Several eyewitnesses who happened on the roadblock, however, contend that Bissonette was shot at approximately 9 p.m. This would mean the victim was left on the ground for nearly an hour before an ambulance was called, and likely bled to death. Such a possibility may explain why Delmar Eastman, acting on instructions from USA Bill Clayton, ordered the body secretly removed from the Pine Ridge morgue at 3 a.m. on the morning after the killing, and taken to Scottsbluff, Nebraska, where the autopsy was performed by Brown. See Agents of Repression, op. cit., pp. 200-3, 206-11.

49. DeSersa was hit in the left thigh by a bullet fired from one of four carloads of GOONs pursuing his own vehicle in a high speed chase outside Wanblee. It severed the femoral artery and he bled to death in a ditch while the GOONs pursued his passengers through open fields. Charlie Winters, one of the assailants, was subsequently arrested for the crime by local police in nearby Martin, South Dakota. This led to a state (not federal) case in which not only Winters, but Chuck Richards, Billy Wilson and Dale Janis were charged. Despite the fact that DeSersa and his companions had been unarmed, charges were dismissed against Richards and Wilson on the basis of their having acted in “self-defense.” Winters and Janis were then allowed to plea bargain to second degree manslaughter and eventually served two years apiece. Neither the FBI nor the BIA police played any constructive role in obtaining even this minimal outcome.

50. Inexplicably, the FBI lab notes concerning Aquash (one of which is reproduced in The COINTELPRO Papers, op. cit., p. 291), refer to the cause of death as neither “natural” or “homicide,” but as “possible manslaughter.”
brain." Peterson also observed that the victim appeared to have been "beaten" and that there was "evidence of sexual contact" shortly before she was murdered. This weakens Brewer's contention that the Aquash murder was "out of character" with Paul Herman's lethal style. It says even more by implication about the FBI's position on the matter—announced even before its conclusion in the Herman investigation was officially reached— that the victim was "probably" killed by her "AIM associates," ostensibly because she was "suspected of being a government informant."51

At present, the FBI's investigation of AIM's possible involvement in the murder of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash is officially ongoing, which exempts the Bureau from legal requirements that it disclose relevant documents to researchers. Meanwhile, by its own admission, it never got around to interviewing coroner Brown as to how he arrived at his cause of death finding.52 Nor has it bothered to question two of its agents, Tom Green and William Wood, as to why they decided it was necessary to sever the victim's hands and ship them to the FBI fingerprint lab for post mortem identification purposes. In the alternative, they might have instructed Dr. Brown to conduct a much more conventional cranial x-ray, for purposes of identification by dental chart comparison (but, of course, this would have instantly disclosed the bullet lodged in the victim's skull).53 Finally, the Bureau's sleuths have failed to interrogate agent David Price, who, by several accounts, had threatened Aquash's life during a 1975 interrogation session.54

By the spring of 1975, the level of GOON violence on Pine Ridge was so pronounced—and the lack of FBI response so conspicuous—that local traditionalists requested that AIM undertake a policy of armed self-defense (in order that opposition to Wilson might continue). AIM responded by establishing defensive encampments on properties owned by traditionalists at various points around the reservation. Substantial evidence derived from FBI internal documents suggests that the Bureau seized upon this situation as affording the opportunity to provoke an incident spectacular enough to bring about public acceptance of another massive paramilitary invasion of Pine Ridge.55 Deployment of hundreds of agents in an extremely aggressive capacity, it was thought, would prove sufficient to finally break the backs of AIM and its supporters, already weakened by the war of attrition waged against them during the two years since Wounded Knee.

A camp set up by the Northwest AIM Group on the Jumping Bull family property, near Oglala, was selected as the target for the catalyzing confrontation. Two agents, Ron Williams and Jack Coler, were sent there during the late morning of June 26, 1975, and opened fire on several of the Indians they encountered. Almost immediately, the lead elements of a large and already-assembled force of more than a hundred agents, BIA SWAT personnel and GOONs attempted to force their way onto the property. From that point, things seem to have gone somewhat awry from the Bureau point of view. Many more AIM members were present than anticipated, and the government reinforcements beat a hasty retreat to the cover of roadside ditches while Coler and Williams were cut off from their expected support. In the extended firefight which followed, both agents were killed, as was an AIM member named Joe Stuntz Killsright. Despite the presence of perhaps 200 police personnel, GOONs and white vigilantes by mid-afternoon, the remaining AIM members escaped.56

Despite this undoubtedly unanticipated outcome, the Oglala firefight served its intended purpose for the FBI. Public endorsement of the sort of "crushing blow" desired by Bureau strategists inevitably resulted from Aquash's "unidentified" body in situ. He then, even more atypically, accompanied the body more than 100 miles to the morgue at the Pine Ridge hospital, and professed to be unable to recognize the victim in either location. Morgue photos of the body, observed by the author (who never met her), are clearly identifiable as being of Anna Mae Aquash. As Congress subsequently put it: "SA Price had had personal contact with Ms. Aquash in the past and assisted in photographing the body at the PHS morgue on February 25, 1976. SA Price's previous contacts with Ms. Aquash occurred when he interviewed her in connection with an FBI investigation in the early spring of 1975 and again in September 1975. [On the latter occasion] she was arrested by agents of the FBI, one of whom was SA Price" (see First Session on FBI Authorization (1981), op. cit., p. 278). Concerning death threats, see McKernan, Kevin, "Indian woman's death raises many troubling questions," Minneapolis Tribune, May 30, 1976, especially quotations from WKLD/OC researcher Candy Hamilton. Also see Churchill, Ward. "Who Killed Anna Mae?" Zen, December 1988.57

There is, for example, a report entitled "Law Enforcement on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation," dated June 6, 1975, which calls for "massive military assault forces." A later memorandum, excerpted into a press release entitled "RESMURS Press Coverage Clarification" (July 8, 1975), calls for "automatic and semiautomatic weapons" deployment among the assault forces, as well as "heavy equipment such as armored personnel carriers."

56. These events are covered extremely well in Matthiessen, op. cit., pp. —.

51. Indeed, the Bureau caused an article, headlined "FBI denies AIM implication that Aquash was informant," to appear in the March 11, 1976 edition of the Rapid City Journal. No one in AIM had implied that she was. Hence, the appearance is that the Bureau was deliberately attempting to create a public impression of its own. Bob Robideau, a member of the Northwest AIM Group, of which Aquash was also a part, states categorically that she was neither an informer nor suspected of being one. Rumors had been raised to that effect by FBI infiltrator provocateur Douglas Durham nearly a year earlier. These had, according to Robideau, been "checked out" by AIM Security, and she had been immediately "cleared." Former AIM leaders John Trudell and Dennis Banks concur with Robideau's assessment of the situation. On Durham, see Giese, Paula, "Profile of an Informer," Covert Action Information Bulletin, No. 24, Summer 1985.


53. See analysis by Aquash's attorney, Bruce Ellison, and former AIM leader John Trudell in Junior Mae. A Brave-Hearted Woman, op. cit. For excerpts from an independent researcher's interview with Brown, see Brand, op. cit., pp. 21-2.

54. Price was one of the agents who atypically gathered to view
the incident, especially after it had been "packaged" by Bureau propagandists. Hence, before nightfall on June 26, counterintelligence expert Richard G. Held — detached from his normal duties before the firefight and standing by in Minneapolis, ready to assume command of the Pine Ridge operation — was on site.57 With him were Norman Zigrossi — a young counterintelligence protégé; his son, Richard Wallace Held, head of the FBI's COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) Section in Los Angeles, and a number of other specialists in "political work."58 They "hit the ground moving," to borrow a phrase from the vernacular of their trade.

By the morning of June 27, SWAT teams imported from Chicago, Minneapolis, Milwaukee and Quaintico, Virginia were on the reservation, giving the Bureau a military-style presence. This force came complete with armored personnel carriers, Bell "Huey" helicopters and other Vietnam-type equipment of some 250 agents (as O'Clock mentioned above, this number had swelled to 350 by mid-July). For the next several months, this huge force conducted sweeps back and forth across Pine Ridge, abruptly kicking in doors to perform warrantless searches, making arbitrary arrests, and engaging in air assaults upon assorted centers of AIM resistance, all in the process of conducting what the FBI called its "RESMURS (for Reservation Murders) Investigation."59 Subjected to these sorts of official tactics, the AIM leadership reversed its position, quietly withdrawing from the reservation as an expedient to relieving the pressure imposed upon their traditional allies.

The firefight ultimately served much broader purposes as well. "Under the volatile circumstances caused by the deaths of Agents Coler and Williams," the Senate Select Committee on Government Operations (the so-called "Church Committee"), which had already issued the first subpoenas for a scheduled probe into the sorts of activities encompassed by the FBI's anti-AIM campaign, especially those on Pine Ridge, agreed to an "indefinite postponement" of its hearings.60 In actuality, this exploration of the Bureau's repressive behavior in what has been called its "post-COINTELPRO era" was simply and permanently shelved by the committee (or, in any event, it still has not started 16 years later). And, a few days after the firefight, the U.S. Department of Interior felt the time was "appropriate" for Dick Wilson to finally sign the instrument transferring title of the Sheep Mountain Gunnery Range to the National Forest Service.61

The Bureau and its supporters have always contended that no government plan to provoke a confrontation existed. The presence of large numbers of GOONs and BIA police in close proximity to the remote location in which the firefight occurred was, they say, the sheerest of coincidences, proving nothing at all. AIM, FBI media liaison Tom Coll initially claimed, was "the group with the plan," having "lured" the agents into a "carefully prepared ambush" where they were "fired upon with automatic weapons" from a "sophisti-
cated bunker complex," "riddled with fifteen to twenty bullets" apiece, "dragged from their cars" and "striped" and — in one version — "scalped." Coll even quoted Williams' last words, having the dead agent plead for his life, begging his "cold-blooded executioners" to "please remember my wife and children before you do this."62

After FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley finally admitted that none of this was true, the Bureau switched to the story that it maintains to this day: Coler and Williams were merely attempting to serve a "routine warrant" on a 19-year-old AIM member named Jimmy Eagle and ended up being brutally murdered for their trouble.63 Duane Brewer tells a rather different story.

57. Concerning Held's prepositioning in Minneapolis, see June 27, 1975 memorandum, Gebhart to O'Connell, reproduced at p. 267 of The COINTELPRO Papers, op. cit.
58. Concerning Richard Wallace Held's involvement in the RESMURS operation from its first moments, and his eventual presence on Pine Ridge — both of which he and the Bureau have denied — see the documents reproduced at pp. 268-70 of The COINTELPRO Papers, op. cit.
59. One result of these tactics was the death of an elderly man named James Brings Yellow, who was startled into a fatal heart attack when a team of agents headed by J. Gary Adams suddenly kicked in his door on July 10, 1975. Air assaults included a raid on the property of AIM member Selo Black Crow, near Wanblee, on July 8 (50 agents involved), and another on the property of AIM spiritual leader Leonard Crow Dog on September 5, 1975 (100 agents involved).
60. The Senate Select Committee had issued a subpoena to FBI agent provocateur Douglass Durham, to begin hearings as of mid-July 1975. The proceedings were called off on July 3 by a letter from committee staff member Patrick Shae to Attorney General Edward S. Levi stating in part: "[W]e will hold in abeyance any action in view of the killing of the Agents at Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota."
61. The preliminary document was signed by Wilson on June 29, 1975. Another, improved version was signed on January 2, 1976, shortly before Wilson left office. Congress then duly concurred the arrangement as Public Law 90-468. When the legiti-macy of this measure was subsequently challenged on the basis of treaty requirements, P.L. 90-468 was amended so that surface rights might revert to the Lakotas at any time they determined by referendum to recover them (thus neatly reversing the treaty stipulations, but leaving subsurface (i.e., mineral) rights under permanent federal ownership. See Huber, Jacqueline, et al., The Gunnery Range Report, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Office of the President, Pine Ridge, S.D., 1981.
63. FBI Director Kelley "corrected misimpressions" at a press conference conducted at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles on July 1, 1975, an event timed to coincide with the funerals of Williams and Coler. The major problems with the Bureau's replacement story are that the warrant allegedly being served on Jimmy Eagle is dated July 7, nearly two weeks after the firefight (and, for that matter, a week after Kelley's press conference), and is for the petty theft of a pair of used cowboy boots rather than "kidnapping and assault" as the Bureau originally informed the press. Even taken at face value, the scenario places the FBI in a posture of assigning two agents the weighty task of pursuing an teenaged member of AIM accused of stealing some old boots at a time when the Bureau was professing to be too shorthanded to
The thing that we were [supposed] to do was use CB radios, have people... positioned in different places, on hills and things. And we was going to have an assault vehicle go to about three houses that we figured they was at, and shoot them up... We would do the shooting, shoot the place up and make our run and go to Rapid City. Stay up over night, party around and then come back the next day, you know. Not be in the area when it happened. But, like I said, we had three or four different plans that we was going to use. [B]ut our intentions never were to go right down into that place [the Jumping Bull property]. That was just one of the places that we was going to hit. We could have hit them from the road, you know...

One alternative plan was for Brewer's GOONs to shoot up some of the Jumping Bull houses, precipitating a return of fire from the few AIM members expected to be gathered there. A force of FBI agents and a BIA SWAT team would then use this as a pretext to arrest everyone on the property, and we [the GOONs] could cover for them on the way back. We had three different plans, I guess. We sat down there at the creek I don't know how many times and went over that. As it happened, however, Coler and Williams were sent in to get things rolling, but "we never really knew they had accomplished this at the Jumping Bull place with all these warriors down there. And that's when they killed them agents." Asked why he and his men hadn't responded to Williams' radioed pleas to "get on the high ground" adjacent to the Jumping Bull property and provide covering fire while he and his partner withdrew, Brewer explained:

If we could have got ourselves into that position where we went to the top of that hill, they [AIM] would have had us before we got out of the, got to the highway, the way they were set up. That would have been a losing battle there.

It is beyond the scope of this article to recapitulate all of the circumstances under which Northwest AIM leader Leonard Peltier was brought to trial in 1977 and convicted of two counts of first degree murder in the deaths of Williams and Coler. This happened after an all-white jury in Cedar Rapids, Iowa had acquitted his codefendants, Bob Robideau and Darelle "Dino" Butler, both of whom openly acknowledged at trial to shooting at the agents, by reason of their having plainly acted in self-defense. Tellingly, Judge Gerald Heaney, head of the three-member panel of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals which last reviewed Peltier's case, appeared on national television in 1989 to admit he was "deeply troubled" during his own investigation of the matter. The reason for the judge's discomfort? "[I]t became increasingly apparent to me that the FBI was at least as much to blame for what happened as Peltier." More recently, Heaney has joined Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye and other members of Congress in signing a petition to George Bush requesting that Peltier be pardoned.

DEATH SQUADS IN THE UNITED STATES

At one point toward the end of his interview, Brewer was asked how he justified the sorts of things that he had been involved in as a GOON. Almost pessively, he acknowledged that, "Well, you really can't. There really isn't no justification for it... It's just what we done at the time, and there's no way you can go back and change what's already done." Exactly. And no number of evasions, withheld documents, denials, or other lies on the part of the FBI and its friends will make the truth of what the Bureau did to AIM and its supporters any less true. The Federal Bureau of Investigation played much the same role on Pine Ridge during the mid-70s that the CIA has played vis à vis Roberto D'Aubisson's hit teams in El Salvador throughout the 1980s. The GOONs, for their part, fulfilled exactly the same requirements on the reservation that other death squads have played throughout Latin America over the past four decades and more. Structurally, the forms and functions assumed by all parties to such comparisons...
are essentially the same.67

The FBI's employment of outright death squads to accomplish the repression of AIM may be the most extreme example of its kind in modern U.S. history. It is nonetheless hardly isolated or unique in principle. To the contrary, ample evidence exists that the Bureau has been experimenting with and perfecting this technique of domestic counterinsurgency for nearly thirty years. There can be little question at this point that the Ku Klux Klan, riddled with FBI agents provocateurs such as Gary Thomas Rowe and overlapped as it was with local police forces in the Deep South, was used by the FBI during the early-60s against the civil rights movement in much the same fashion as the GOONs were later used against AIM.68 The same analysis can be applied with regard to the Klan, in alliance with other neo-nazis, murdering five members of the Communist Workers Party in Greensboro, North Carolina in November of 1979.69

Certainly, the special unit of State's Attorney's Police which assassinated Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago on December 4, 1969 was functioning as a death squad under at least nominal Bureau control.70 Similarly, Chicago was afflicted with a neo-nazi/policeman/FBI/military intelligence amalgamation known as the "Legion of Justice" during the first half of the 1970s.71 No less striking is the combination, evident during the late-60s and described at length by provocateur Louis Tackwood in The Glass House Tapes, of state and local police red squads with the Bureau's Los Angeles COINTELPRO Section and area vigilante groups, for purposes of physically destroying the "California Left." As Tackwood and other Bureau-sponsored infiltrators of dissident organizations have stated, often and categorically, assassination of "key activists" is a standard part of the tactical methodology utilized by America's political police.72

Bearing this out, the Secret Army Organization (SAO) developed under aegis of the FBI in southern California during the early-70s; its express purpose, among other things, was to liquidate "radical leaders."73 On another front, there was the death squad formed by the Portland, Maine police (with apparent cooperation from the local FBI resident agency) during the same period as a means of "coming to grips" with the area's anti-war and prison rights movements. Then again, there is the example of the consortium in Puerto Rico — consisting of a special police unit tightly interlocked with the island's FBI field office, the CIA, U.S. military intelligence units, and right-wing Cuban exile groups — which was responsible for scores of bombings and beatings over the years. Attributable to this entity are, at the very least, the execution-style murders of labor leader Juan Caballero in the island's El Yunque rain forest in 1977, and of independentista activists Arnaudo Dario Rosado and Carlos Soto Arrivi near the mountain village of Cerro Maravilla on July 25, 1978.74

This pattern of activities should be coupled to the fact that not one FBI agent has ever served so much as a minute of jail time because of the conduct involved. These realities must serve to inform and temper the understandings of activists and scholars alike, the former in terms of their appreciation of what they are up against as they struggle to achieve positive social change in the U.S.; the latter in terms of the paradigms by which they attempt to shed light on the nature of power dynamics in America. In either case, it is plain enough that there is no longer any excuse for the generalized self-delusion among American progressives that such things are "anomalous" within the context of the contemporary United States. True death squads are not only possible in the U.S., they have been a relatively common phenomenon for some time. It is already well past the point where we should have gotten the government's message, and begun to conduct ourselves accordingly.

70. For the most comprehensive accessible examination of the Hampton-Clark assassinations, see Agents of Repression, op. cit., pp. 64-77, 397-404. For officially acknowledged (sanitized) context, see U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, The FBI's Cover Program to Destroy the Black Panther Party, 94th Congress, 2d Session, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976.
AIM CASUALTIES ON PINE RIDGE, 1973-1976

In our books, *Agents of Repression* (South End Press, 1988) and *The COINTELPRO Papers* (South End Press, 1990) Jim Vander Wall and I have used the figure 69 as the minimum number of AIM members and supporters murdered on the Pine Ridge Reservation from mid-1973 through mid-1976. This has provoked claims on the parts of various FBI apologists that we “exaggerate” the gravity of the situation. Our first response to such critics is that it ultimately matters little in terms of the implications at issue whether the number of AIM casualties was in the upper 40s — as the Bureau itself has admitted — or the upper 60s, as we contend. Our second response is the following itemized list of casualties, including the names of the victims, the dates and causes of their deaths (where known), and, so far as is possible, the status of FBI investigations (if any) into their murders. Our third response is that, as we’ve said all along, even this itemization is undoubtedly incomplete. We therefore request any individuals having knowledge of murders other than those listed — or who are aware of the names of any of the individuals killed while packing supplies into Wounded Knee — to contact us with this information.

04/17/73 Frank Clearwater — AIM member killed by heavy machine gun round at Wounded Knee. No investigation.

04/23/73 Between eight and twelve individuals (names unknown) packing supplies into Wounded Knee were intercepted by GOONs and vigilantes. None were ever heard from again. Former Rosebud Tribal President Robert Burnette and U.S. Justice Department Solicitor General Robert Frizzell conducted unsuccessful search for mass grave after Wounded Knee siege. No further investigation.

04/27/73 Buddy Lamont — AIM member hit by M-16 fire at Wounded Knee. Bled to death while pinned down by fire. No investigation.

06/19/73 Clarence Cross — AIM supporter shot to death in ambush by GOONs. Although assailants were identified by eyewitnesses, brother Vernal Cross — wounded in ambush — was briefly charged with crime. No further investigation.

07/14/73 Priscilla White Plume — AIM supporter killed at Manderson by GOONs. No investigation.

07/30/73 Julius Bad Heart Bull — AIM supporter killed at Oglala by “person or persons unknown.” No investigation.

09/23/73 Philip Black Elk — AIM supporter killed when his house exploded. No investigation.

09/22/73 Melvin Spider — AIM member killed at Porcupine, S.D. No investigation.

10/05/73 Aloysius Long Soldier — AIM member killed at Kyle, S.D. by GOONs. No investigation.

10/10/73 Phillip Little Crow — AIM supporter beaten to death by GOONs at Pine Ridge. No investigation.

10/17/73 Pedro Busonette — OSCRO organizer and AIM supporter assassinated by BIA Police/GOONs. Body removed from Pine Ridge jurisdiction prior to autopsy by government contract coroner. No further investigation.

11/20/73 Allison Fast Horse — AIM supporter shot to death near Pine Ridge by “unknown assailants.” No investigation.

01/17/74 Edward Means, Jr. — AIM member found dead in Pine Ridge alley, beaten. No investigation.

02/18/74 Edward Standing Soldier — AIM member killed near Pine Ridge by “party or parties unknown.” No investigation.

02/27/74 Lorinda Red Paint — AIM supporter killed at Oglala by “unknown assailants.” No investigation.

04/19/74 Roseine Roark — AIM supporter killed at Porcupine by “unknown assailants.” Investigation opened, still “pending.”

09/07/74 Dennis LeCompte — AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

09/11/74 Jackson Washington Cult — AIM member killed at Parmalee by “unknown individuals.” Investigation still “ongoing.”

09/16/74 Robert Reddy — AIM member killed at Kyle by gunshot. No investigation.


11/30/74 Elaine Wagner — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by “person or persons unknown.” No investigation.

12/25/74 Floyd S. Binias — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

12/28/74 Yvette Lorraine Lone Hill — AIM supporter killed at Kyle by “unknown party or parties.” No investigation.

01/05/73 Leon L. Swift Bird — AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. Investigation still “ongoing.”

03/01/73 Martin Montileaux — killed in a Scenic, S.D. bar. AIM leader Richard Marshall later framed for his murder. Russell Means also charged and acquitted.

03/20/75 Stacy Coittier — shot to death in an ambush at Manderson. No investigation.

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Edith Eagle Hawk and her two children — AIM supporter killed in automobile accident after being run off the road by a white vigilante. Albert Coomes was also killed in the accident. GOON Mark Clifford identified as having also been in Coomes car, escaped. Investigation closed without questioning of Clifford.

Jeanette Bissone — AIM supporter killed by sniper in Pine Ridge. Unsuccessful attempt to link AIM members to murder; no other investigation.

Richard Eagle — grandson of AIM supporter Gladys Bissone killed while playing with loaded gun kept in the house as protection from GOON attacks.

Hilda R. Good Buffalo — AIM supporter stabbed to death at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

Jancita Eagle Deer — AIM member beaten and run over with automobile. Last seen in the company of FBI agent provocateur Douglass Durham. No investigation.

Ben Sitting Up — AIM member killed at Wamblee by “unknown assailants.” No investigation.

Kenneth Little — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. Investigation still “pending.”

Leah Spotted Elk — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

Joseph Suntz Killright — AIM member killed by FBI sniper during Oglala firefight. No investigation.

James Brings Yellow — heart attack caused by FBI air assault on his home. No investigation.

Andrew Paul Stewart — nephew of AIM spiritual leader, Leonard Crow Dog, killed by GOONs on Pine Ridge. No investigation.

Randy Hunter — AIM supporter killed at Kyle by “party or parties unknown.” Investigation still “ongoing.”

Howard Blue Bird — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

fcisJim Little — AIM supporter stomped to death by GOONs in Oglala. No investigation.

Olivia Binias — AIM supporter killed in Porcupine by “person or persons unknown.” Investigation still “open.”

Janice Black Bear — AIM supporter killed at Manderson by GOONs. No investigation.

Michelle Tobacco — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by “unknown assailants.” Investigation still “ongoing.”

Carl Plenty Arrows, Sr. — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by “unknown persons.” No investigation.

Frank LaPointe — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.


Lydia Cut Grass — AIM member killed at Wounded Knee by GOONs. No investigation.

Byron DeSersa — OSCRO organizer and AIM supporter assassinated by GOONs in Wanblee. Arrests by local authorities result in two GOONs — Dale Janis and Charlie Winters — serving two years of five year state sentences for “manslaughter.” Charges dropped against two GOON leaders, Manny Wilson and Chuck Richards, on the basis of “self-defense” despite DeSersa having been unarmed when shot to death.

Lena R. Slow Bear — AIM supporter killed at Oglala by GOONs. No investigation.

Hobart Horse — AIM member beaten, shot and repeated run over with automobile at Sharp’s Corners. No investigation.

Cleveland Reddest — AIM member killed at Kyle by “person or persons unknown.” No investigation.

Betty Jo DuBray — AIM supporter beaten to death at Martin, S.D. No investigation.

Marvan Two Two — AIM supporter shot to death at Pine Ridge. No investigation.

Julia Pretty Hips — AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by “unknown assailants.” No investigation.

Sam Afraid of Bear — AIM supporter shot to death at Pine Ridge. Investigation “ongoing.”

Kevin Hill — AIM supporter killed at Oglala by “party or parties unknown.” Investigation still “open.”

Betty Means — AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by GOONs. No investigation.

Sandra Wounded Foot — AIM supporter killed at Sharp’s Corners by “unknown assailants.” No investigation.

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SHATTER (From the Habitat)

artist: Jane Zweibel