

CHIEF SITTING BULL

Sitting Bull, the great Hunkpapa Sioux Indian leader, was born on Grand River, South Dakota around 1834. He was the son of a sub-chief. As a youngster the boy – who's native name was Tatanka-yatanka – soon showed his prowess as a hunter. His entrance into the world of the warrior came at age 14, when he was apart of a raid against the Crow, lifelong enemies of the Sioux. He distinguished himself from the start, darting ahead of the older warriors and counting first coup on the enemy. As he grew into a man Sitting Bull realised that he had a special connection with the spirit world. After experiencing several mystic visions he came to an understanding that he would one day lead his people in a great victory.

By age 25 Sitting Bull had been made a leader of the Strong Hearts, an elite military society. By the time he had reached his early thirties he had risen to become chief of the Hunkpapa. It was a time when the encroachment of the white man was threatening to destroy the very fabric of Sioux society. Sitting Bull was determined to save his people. He led a series of raids along the Bozeman trail and, in 1866, made a direct attack on Fort Buford. He refused to sign the 1868 Treaty of Laramie although many other chiefs, including Red Cloud of the Oglalas, did and were confined to reservations. Sitting Bull's people, however, were still free to roam the ancestral hunting grounds. From 1869 through until 1876 he was on the warpath almost continuously.

The Black Hills Expedition of 1874 began a collision course between Sitting Bull and an extravagant U.S. Army General who rashly declared that he could decimate the entire Sioux nation with just his command. His name was George Armstrong Custer. Custer's expedition discovered gold. Within a year thousands of prospectors were swarming into the sacred Black Hills. The Government responded by sending out an offer to purchase the Black Hills for \$6 million. The offer was refused outright. So, the Government countered by simply ordering the Sioux out of the Black Hills and onto the reservations. Sitting Bull and most of the other Sioux leaders simply ignored the directive.

In March 1876 General George Crook set into the field with 10 Companies and two of infantry to round up the troublesome Indians. Sitting Bull countered by calling together the greatest amalgamation of Indian forces ever seen on the plains. He told the gathered tribes that they must stand together or die separately. By June they had gathered together on the banks of the Greasy Grass – Little Big Horn – in a massive village. They prepared to meet the enemy.

For Sitting Bull preparation meant the Sun [Dance](#). This gruelling ritual

involved receiving fifty gashes to each arm and then staring at the sun all day while performing a hypnotic dance. When the Sun went down the dance would continue all night until the participant fainted. In such a state Sitting Bull had a vision of soldiers falling into camp. It was a good omen. General Custer and his entire command were annihilated by The combined Indian force on June 25, 1876. Sitting Bull, the mastermind behind the Indian amalgamation, did not directly participate in the battle.

Now the Army was more determined than ever to hunt down the Sioux. As the great conglomeration broke up, Sitting Bull headed north with his people towards Canada. He was chased by General Nelson A. Miles, but just managed to make it across the border. They stayed in Canada until 1881. Here they lived in peace, reaching an understanding of co-existence with the Canadians. But rations began to deplete and, in desperation, in 1881 he led his small band of malnourished Hunkpapa across the border and back to Fort Buford where he surrendered.

For two years sitting Bull was held as a prisoner of war at Fort Randall. In 1883, he was moved to the Standing Rock Agency on the Missouri River. By now the white people had become fascinated with the 'slayer of Custer.' A tour of 15 American cities was organised in which the once great chief would scribble his name on photographs for the curious onlookers. In 1885 he went on the road with Buffalo Bill Cody.

In 1890 the Ghost Dance religion began to spread across the reservations. The authorities feared that it would lead to rebellion and moved to quash it. It was incorrectly reported that Sitting Bull was the 'high priest' of the movement, though he was not involved. It was decided to have him arrested. On December 14, 1890 a party of about 40 Sioux Reservation Police Officers surrounded the chief's cabin. They stormed the house and dragged Sitting Bull from his bed. Sitting Bull stood his ground, refusing to go with them. Sergeant Red Tomahawk drew his revolver and fired point blank at Sitting Bull's head. The great Sioux chief fell to the floor. He was dead, aged just 56.