



Sitting Bull was shot on December 15, 1890 at the age of 59, but his legacy lives on in his descendants.

## **NATIVE HISTORY SITTING BULL SHOT BY INDIAN POLICE - HIS LEGACY REMAINS**

This Date in Native History: On December 15, 1890, Sitting Bull, known as Tatanka Iyotake, was killed along the Grand River, near his birthplace in the Many Catches area of South Dakota, still only accessible on horseback. He was 59 years old. To his people, Sitting Bull was known as a Sun Dancer, a spiritual leader who came from a long line of spiritual people.

**“Sitting Bull was a chief. He was a charismatic leader and war leader, and he won the following**

**of his people,”** said LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, Standing Rock.

She said many people have mistakenly called him a **medicine man**, but, “In reality **he was a spiritual leader who gave of himself to pray for the people. He was a spiritual man, responsible for prayer.**”

Sitting Bull fought his first battle against the United States in 1863. “The Northern tribes were led by Sitting Bull and the Southern tribes were led by Crazy Horse,” Allard said. “They fought together against the United States Army.” When Sitting Bull reached middle age, Allard said it was his place to give directions to the younger warriors rather than fight.

In June of 1876, just a week before the Battle of Little Big Horn, there was a Sun Dance in which Sitting Bull was said to have danced for 36 consecutive hours. There, he had a vision of a war victory. Just a few days after the vision, the Lakota won the Battle of Rosebud and just a week after that George Armstrong Custer was killed at the Battle of Little Big Horn.

“The people from the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota and other tribes were gathered at Greasy Grass for the summer hunt,” Allard said. “It was a huge, huge camp. Things were changing, the United States was demanding that people stay on the reservation, but they were all gathered in traditional hunting grounds, and nobody could tell us what to do.”

Allard said there were so many people gathered at Greasy Grass, three-quarters of the men didn’t even go out and fight. “Sitting Bull went up to the hill and started praying,” she said. “He was at that age—he was not expected to fight. His job was to support and pray.”

Accused by the United States as being the most fierce of the Plains warriors, Sitting Bull fought only to practice Lakota ways without interference.

Ernie LaPointe is a great-grandson of Sitting Bull. “By kerosene lamp, my mother would tell stories of her grandfather. She never used his name, she told me names are *wakan* (sacred). Then she

told me who he was, and said from this day forth, do not give that name to your grandchildren. He gave his blood, sweat and tears for his people. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be here."

Some reports claim that Sitting Bull murdered Custer, but LaPointe said: "From the east to west, we had leaders who were compassionate. The history books, religious books, they always said we were so war-like. But when we fought each other, we counted coup, it was an embarrassment to get hit. Ever since I been alive, the Americans have been at war. Now they are at war with terrorists," LaPointe laughed, "They will never end that."

After Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull led his people to Canada where they stayed for four years until they were overcome by starvation.

Ephriam Dickson, a historian with the National Museum of the U.S. Army, has spent years working with tribal historians to accumulate information about the wars. Several years ago, he found nearly all of the reservation census records of the late summer and early fall of 1881, just after Sitting Bull had surrendered and was brought in as a prisoner of war.

"Included in the records was a speech by Sitting Bull that granted permission for this census to be taken," Dickson said.

***For the last few years I have been in the North, where there are plenty of buffalo, for the buffalo were my means of living. God made me to live on the flesh of the buffalo, so I thought I would stay out there as long as there were buffalo enough for us. But the Great Father sent for me several times, and although I did not know why he wanted me to come down, at last I consented to do so. I never, myself, made war against the children of the Great Father, and I never sought a fight with them. While I was looking for buffalo, they would attack and shoot at me, and of course I had to defend myself or else I should die. But all the blame is put on me. I have always thought that the Dakotas were all one body, and I wanted to make an agreement with them to come and settle down. While I have been in the North, here and there, a good many things have happened, and I have been blamed for them; but I know that I am innocent.***

Sitting Bull gave his age at the time of that speech as 43 years old and the census showed there were 40 families in his band.

Sitting Bull was allowed to return to his people at Standing Rock, but in 1890, as the Ghost Dance Movement began to sweep across Indian country, Sitting Bull was again blamed and arrested in fear of an uprising.

[History.com](http://www.history.com) reports that Sitting Bull was woken up at 6 a.m. by Indian police. A crowd gathered and as the young Lakota people taunted the police, a shot was fired hitting an officer. In response, Sitting Bull was shot twice—once in the chest and once in the head.

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"We remember him here in everything and everywhere," Allard said. "We do our best to remember this great man, this common man. He called himself a common man, which is the greatest man of all."

"After all these years, we still quote his words, we still remind the children, we still see his descendants here," Allard said. "We haven't ever had a tribal council without a descendent of Sitting Bull. He left us with a legacy, and because of him we still know who we are. Is that not amazing?"

Read more at <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/12/15/native-history-sitting-bull-shot-indian-police-his-legacy-remains-152717>

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