

SPEAKER: Let's get into some of the feeling, if we can, of your experience at Wounded Knee. I know that you-- since we're talking about guns, you have some of the sounds that you recorded there of what it was like. And I think it would be good if I could get you to put your earphones on if we played some of this tape and you describe to us what we're hearing. This is tape made at Wounded Knee.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: This is a tape that was made during the last firefight. There were many firefights at Wounded Knee. And some of them were very heavy. The cracking sounds, which you hear at the beginning of the tape and throughout it, are sounds of gunfire that was directed at the part of the village that I was in.

Someone else was running the tape recorder at this time, and she is near the radios that were used by the Wounded Knee residents to communicate with their bunkers, as well as the fact that she's near the radio that's used by the federal government to contact its bunkers. And so the background echoey sound that you hear would be the federal radio called Red Arrow. And the call letters or the codename for the Central Command radio of Wounded Knee is Clearwater, named after Frank Clearwater who was killed by the government on the 17th of April.

SPEAKER: OK, you want to activate the machine?

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- 25 out of 6 was that, boss.

- I thought 25 out of 5.

- [INAUDIBLE]?

- [INAUDIBLE].

SPEAKER: What is that? Where is that gunfire coming from? Is that coming into the village?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: Yes, it is.

SPEAKER: From what, the Federal Marshals?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: From the Federal Marshals and the FBI and the BIA police surrounding Wounded Knee. At this point, we're inside the security building formerly the museum, the Wounded Knee Museum.

SPEAKER: It's hard to believe that-- to imagine that more people weren't injured or killed with the amount of gunfire that was reported.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: Those who had been in Vietnam, in the United States military service said that it was heavier than much of what they had seen, excluding mortar and rocket attack.

SPEAKER: This is what, mostly rifle fire?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Yes, it is. Some of it is machine gun fire, but most of that was directed toward the bunkers. And at this point, I wasn't in a bunker.

- We'll make it out to here, yeah?

- Yeah.

- Good.

- Hi, [INAUDIBLE] Hi, [INAUDIBLE] Is that [INAUDIBLE]?

- [INAUDIBLE]. Go ahead, agent.

- I stand forward, sir. I still don't have him.

- I brought him in.

- You want me to keep trying?

- Forward.

- Let's put [INAUDIBLE].

- Permission granted for the 79.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

79 is a gas grenade launcher.

- The feds have just granted permission for RB 40 use, the 79 gas grenade launcher against Little Bighorn.

- Where are they going to take that?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Little big--

- The firefighters are in full progress coming from all directions. All right. It is 9:00 AM in the morning.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

That's on the 27th of April. Little Bighorn is a bunker that was very close to one of the federal bunkers.

- They wanted to start. We wanted to stop.

- Yeah.

- Daytime. [INAUDIBLE] last night.

SPEAKER:

Clearwater to start.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Clearwater is the Wounded Knee command post stars.

- They've evacuated under fire.

- Yeah, they're taking pretty heavy fire. They got that initial ditch dug all the way out.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

They're gassing the Little Bighorn bunker now.

- Can you pinpoint that little church [INAUDIBLE] instead of taking direct fire from a sniper down around that little church in front of your position?

- The firing is going on in the distance on Little Bighorn bunker. They're about to use the M79 gas grenade launcher.

SPEAKER:

Kenneth Tilson, when he was on this program some weeks ago, described the feeling of being shot at in Wounded Knee. Could people walk around the streets of Wounded Knee or was it like someone was always having a gun on them every time they moved?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Well, the fire in the village was extremely heavy. You didn't walk anywhere. If you ran, you ran as you never ran before, very quickly. And most of the people had to stay indoors during the time because there was just a constant hail of bullets outside.

- Yeah, they're in the hospital.

SPEAKER:

What we're listening to now took place on April 27th, which was--

- About 30 yards short--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- Going towards the [INAUDIBLE]

- Take four. I'll try to elevate a little.

- That's too much burning.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

The federal radio is calling for fire to be directed. A few degrees went away, a few degrees another way.

- This started way down there.

- They're firing at us.

- Is that all going on down?

- Yeah. [INAUDIBLE].

- Little Bighorn?

- Mm-hm.

- What the two [INAUDIBLE]?

- You can't see it because the tracers on the Bighorn. You can't see them very well.

- Well, that's about [INAUDIBLE].

- It's firing from out there.

- You see that red flag that's going there?

- Yeah.

- There's the gas again down the street.

- All right. It's going there.

- They're getting it right in there.

- I think the guy is trying to see that yellow truck up on the hill up there. Because right at their bunker, I saw him run out there when they gave him permission a few minutes after that. They get him on the corner there right beside the truck.

- They're trying another one.

- His closer to my window.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

There was a great communication problem at this point because the transistor radio batteries that were in the walkie talkies were very weak. And so communication with some of the bunkers is very poor.

SPEAKER:

We're listening to a tape recording made of a firefight between Federal Marshals and the people defending Wounded Knee South Dakota on April 27th shortly before the end.

- If you want to live dangerously, this is the place.

SPEAKER:

If you want to live dangerously, this is the place, that's what he said.

- They might reflect on it to slow it down.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Some of the armament was very heavy. A 30 caliber machine gun is capable of unloading 700 rounds per minute. An M60 machine gun is capable of 1,200 rounds per minute. And the Federal Marshals and FBI had many of these.

SPEAKER:

And yet the suggestion was made, Kevin, in the press that the government was going easy, that the government was not unloading massive firepower, and that the government was being very careful not to hurt anybody, so to speak. And I think that-- it didn't end. I thought it did. That the government was using restraint. And yet, this doesn't sound like restraint.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

No, it doesn't. There's a part coming up here on the tape with an attempt of a female medic to make it to one of the bunkers, where one of the Wounded Knee residents was injured. And I think this would indicate the kind of exchange that went on between Wounded Knee and Federal radio back and forth.

- Thank you.

- Hey, did that napalm do any good on that bunker over there?

- I've still got [INAUDIBLE]. What you want to know?

- OK.

- We got a room full of them, about 5,000 rounds, over.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Red arrow radio is calling one of the federal bunkers, telling them what the range is between a target and that bunker. The CBS people who came in were extremely surprised, as I think any newsman would be, to see the number of bullet holes in the Catholic Church, for example, because no one on the outside really was aware of the fact that so much firepower was directed into Wounded Knee.

- Did you-- yeah, wounded shot.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

They complained of having a drafty night sleeping in the church.

SPEAKER:

You had a snow storm at one point, didn't you?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Yes. We-- it snowed actually twice even after Easter time. So it was rather cold out there.

- Can I take them?

- You need what?

- Paper.

- What kind of paper?

- I ripped up my emotes. We'll stay together.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

We had come off a very heavy firefight the night before. And we're awakened just before 8:00 o'clock on this morning. I was personally awakened by a couple of bullets coming through the shack where I was staying. And one learns to get up running.

SPEAKER:

Yes.

- We're going to get it three times. The snipers are up there. They're going to get it from three ways.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

The snipers who are being talked about where FBI snipers who were out in these sod covered holes, much like the Japanese used, these sniper holes. They go into before dawn, and then just lift the lid up on after dawn.

- One or two people in Little Bighorn bunker have been hit. It's impossible to get a medic out because the firing is so heavy. The government forces monitoring the-- government forces monitoring Wounded Knee radio are aware that the people are hit.

- We managed to restrict fire to one man.

- They restrict their gunfire for the next three minutes to one man per RB.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

RB is roadblock.

- RB 4, the bunker, in front of RB 4, one of their peoples been hit. Be advised there are a couple of medics heading in that direction.

- Uh, 10-4.

- I'm hit again, but he was here in [INAUDIBLE].

- Bring it out of CP.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

CP is command post.

- This is Wounded Knee.

- The Wounded Knee apparently has a wounded party in a bunker in front of RB 4. They stated to us that they were going to send medics in and the man that went to that bunker was carrying a rifle. We will not recognize a medic carrying a rifle.

- Red arrow, this is Wounded Knee.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: They're trying to reach federal radio now.

- Red Arrow, this is Wounded Knee.

- In heaven here.

- Red Arrow, this is Wonder Knee. Do you copy?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: The fellow who was injured at this point--

- Please advice that our medic, who's going down to that bunker, has a helmet on. And we have people all over the place that are trying to move around out there. And so it's normal that there would be guys moving in there with rifles. But the medic, you can clearly spot. She has a helmet on with a big cross on it.

- Supply is here with all the equipment.

- OK, we need number 16 down here at--

[STATIC]

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: At this point, they weren't answering. The injured party ironically is a World War II medal of Honor winner.

- We start taking fire.

- That's 10-4.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: He won the Congressional Medal of Honor under MacArthur in Asia 1945.

- Do you copy? The medic has made it down there to you, yeah?

- We here the radio back there.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: There calling the bunker.

- Little Bighorn, Little Bighorn, this is Clearwater.

- This is Little Bighorn. The [INAUDIBLE] caught that area.

- OK, we understand. She was under some gunfire coming down there. So hold on. She will be there shortly.

- I think maybe we're trying to work towards a ceasefire here or something, trying to cool this thing off. We're going to try not to fire here. So everybody just hold it down. Let's see if this thing won't stop.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: That's Wounded Knee.

- The medic is still trying to reach Little Bighorn. Red arrow reported that they were not going to honor any ceasefire on a medic with a gun. However, the medic is unarmed. She's a woman who's wearing a red hat with a white cross on it. The time now is 10:15. The government has just asked for an M79 gas grenade launcher to be put into Little Bighorn bunker.

- Into the firing. One man only.

- It's the [INAUDIBLE] over. [INAUDIBLE] over.

- [INAUDIBLE] targets.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: The government just said use the grenade launcher on that bunker, flush them out, and you'll have targets.

- That [INAUDIBLE]

[STATIC]

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: The man who was hit was hit once--

- We're in here at the gravel.

- It was back to RB 1 immediately.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: Once as he came out of the bunker, once as he tried to get back in. And he was hit in the back as he was in the bunker by a ricochet bullet.

- Are you receiving any fire?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: He stayed out there for three and a half hours before help could be gotten to him.

- RB 4, we don't know whether she's been hit or not, but she's pinned down in the ditch along the porcupine road.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: This is an attempt to reach Red Arrow.

- She's in the lake. And she's trying to assist one of the men in our position. And we would-- please advise that you take any fire, sniper fire, off of her. She is unarmed. She has only medical equipment with her. In front of RB 4 and she is a medic. She is unarmed. She only has medical supplies with her. Please relieve sniper fire that is aimed upon her.

- Should I go to 11? They were on 14.

- I did try it. I tried it on both in 11 and 14.

SPEAKER: Trouble with communications here.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: Very much so.

- It's about 11:30.

- There's nothing. It's about 12:30. The firing is starting up heavy again.

[END PLAYBACK]

SPEAKER: OK that gives us some of the distasteful flavor of that. I couldn't help but think, Kevin, of the number of times that people who have talked about Wounded Knee, going back to Ken Tilson's remarks on this program when he was here and others, about at least the analogy that they made in their minds between Vietnam and Wounded Knee.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN: Very much so. I think you could go back even to Vietnam under the French. The French fell in Vietnam. Their domination in Vietnam came to an end rather conclusively with the fall in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. And that was considered by the French and by military experts all over the world to be an impregnable fortress.

It fell because night after night men carried armament, ammunition, rifles, and war materials on their back over the mountains. And they would rest during the daytime, and they would hide, and they would travel again at night. And this is really what happened at Wounded Knee. There were nightly pack trains in and out, the guns and ammunition, the very food that we lived on, everything. Medical supplies that were cut off came in by pack train, by people carrying as much as 50 or 60 pounds on their back and trying to come through the government lines at night, which was no easy task.

The government was divided into a number of groups. The FBI monitored the perimeter, so did the Federal Marshals the BIA police, and then late in the occupation, the border patrol came. And they brought electronic sensing devices, they brought bloodhounds dogs. And they had the armored personnel carriers, and the Jeeps and at night constantly flares. Flares would shoot up and come down on parachutes as many as 1,000 a night.

SPEAKER:

You got in the first place by coming in at night through the government lines, didn't you? I mean, that was-- in fact, news CBS got in there toward the end that way, I believe. The CBS crew that reported, I think they were the only national group to report right toward the end of the occupation.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Yes, they were. I came in first on a press pass from the government.

SPEAKER:

I see.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

I came in that way for about a week, in and out. And then Wilson put up a roadblock outside the federal roadblocks. And so press passes were no longer issued. And so anyone who wanted to come in had to come in over the hills either from the North at Porcupine or Manderson, or from the South as CBS did from the Pine Ridge area.

SPEAKER:

Would those people with their camera equipment and everything we're walking or would they be driving Jeeps or what?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Well, CBS, early in the occupation, rented four-wheel drive vehicles and came up the Wounded Knee Creek bed. This became more difficult later on as the security on the outside tightened. But they finally would come in by driving up fairly close to the Federal roadblock during a time that Wilson's roadblocks were down, and then they would walk in.

And usually, they would be escorted out. Once they shot their film, they would go up to the Federal roadblock. And the time before the last time they were in, which was the final day, they were arrested, but they were simply escorted off the reservation. On the final day, they were arrested, and they were taken first to Pine Ridge, and then up to Rapid City.

SPEAKER:

Could I ask you in conclusion-- at the beginning here, we talked about one element of victory that you felt that the occupation of Wounded Knee brought was that these negotiations between the Federal government, representatives of the White House staff, and the traditional chiefs and headmen of the Oglala Sioux tribe, that these negotiations are taking place.

Whereas the government had previously refused to negotiate with anyone other than the political administration of the Oglala Sioux, Richard Wilson. So that was one element of victory. What other benefits for the Oglala people and for the country or for our society would you say came out of the Wounded Knee experience?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Well, I think the gains in Wounded Knee were immediate. And I think they were long ranging as well. The immediate gains were the fact that the government now will deal and negotiate with the traditionalists. There is a return to tribalism I think also the fact that this kind of action is being duplicated on reservations now throughout the country.

For example, in Wyoming, the Arapaho Indians have recalled all the leases to White ranches-- ranchers throughout the reservation. And this is one very touchy and very sticky thing on reservations, especially on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where 90% of the land is leased by White ranchers. They alone can get the Federal loans, which are needed to work the land and to buy livestock. Indians can't.

And so I think that leases are being pulled in all over the country. And Indians, again, are going to stop leasing lands and start working them themselves. And I think this will certainly help the unemployment rate on the Pine Ridge Reservation is in excess of 60% for employable males. And I think this is an immediate gain.

I think it's an immediate gain as well to have an outside agency independent of the government auditing the tribal books, auditing the-- there's a special team of accountants coming in to audit Richard Wilson's books. The FBI now is going to reverse its strategy, and by the terms of the agreement, remain on the reservation and investigate Wilson. There are a number of complaints that are being brought against him, and he is under surveillance. The FBI and the Marshals will stay. And one of them will be-- a minimum of one Marshal or FBI man will be in every BIA police car probably for six months or a year on the reservation.

I think the long range goals are even more important. I think that Indians all over the country know now that they don't have to stand alone, that when the government is oppressing them, that when they cannot live on a little bit of land that the government has allowed them to, that the American Indian Movement and other Indians will be there. And I think most important within the Indian culture itself is a real unification of the tribes.

At Wounded Knee, there were 64 tribes represented. And many feel that this is the coming to fruition, the coming to fulfillment of the old Sioux prophecy that the roots of the tree of unification were buried, but they were not dead. And sometime they would rise again and sometime they would again bring fruit. And the Sioux people believe that prophecy, which is theirs and a very sacred one, began to grow, that tree began to grow again in Unity at Wounded Knee.

SPEAKER:

The statement has been made by Indians and non-Indians that the American Indian people-- Russell Means quoted from a book, I remember up at Cass lake, that the American Indian people are a dying people as a culture and as a people. I take it that there is the faith, at least, that is not the case present in an action like Wounded Knee. Are you more optimistic about that than you were before you participated in that experience?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Very much so. I think Indians all over the country, especially younger Indians are saying the buck stops here. We will not tolerate the kind of institutional violence that White America has been putting to us for so many years. We are stopping here. And those at Wounded Knee were ready to give their lives for their people, ready to give their lives to make sure that of directed institutional violence would stop.

And the thing more than anything else, which kept people together on the inside, which made them have the courage and the faith really to withstand the onslaught at Wounded Knee, was the great spirituality within the village, the sweat lodges, the medicine bags that everyone wore around his neck, the flesh offerings that were given when an important mission was contemplated when runners went out at night to seek food.

SPEAKER:

What do flesh offerings mean? What does that refer to?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Flesh offerings are bits of skin, which are taken off one's arm or one's cheek. You may have seen little specks across a person's cheek. These are flesh offerings. They're given back to the great spirit, they're given back to Mother Earth really to show that the Indian is as he thinks of himself a very pitiful person and really only a very small part of a much larger plan in the universe than himself. In other words, it's not really a homocentric universe that he sees himself in. It's not a man-centered one. It's one which is spiritually-centered around Mother Earth and around grandfather, the great spirit.

SPEAKER:

That reminds me of a brilliant short sermon really that Russell Means delivered at the AIM convention last May about what Indianness means, which he put in a very non-racial context, that any man, any person can be an Indian. And then he added that there were White men-- using that again as a concept and not as a racial description, there were White men who were Indians.

And then they were Indians and they were Black men and there were Brown men who were White men, again, to use that concept. So that I think, again, speaks to the spiritual qualities or the character that Means was referring to, that to be an Indian, by that definition, is not to have a certain colored skin or certain traditions or something like that.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

Well, each day at the daily and nightly sweat lodges in Wounded Knee, the medicine men, Crow Dog and Black Elk, would welcome all races and all tribes. And it was something which really transcended the color of one's skin.

SPEAKER:

In conclusion, KEVIN MCKIERNAN, a lot of people were arrested when they came out of Wounded Knee and a lot of people are still in jail. And some of the AIM leaders I know have tremendous amounts of money against them in bail. Could you tell us something about that situation now?

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

When I left Rapid City a few days ago, the bond on those still in Rapid City and Sioux Falls jails totaled \$383,500. The bonds were enormously excessive. They were obviously politically inspired. The government had promised to make no recommendation for bail as per the agreement that was signed to stand down the arms, and yet they really did.

By the vigor of their arguments in court, they forced the bonds up. Russell Means is being held on \$125,000. Dennis Banks will be held probably on a higher bail if he is found. He is now underground. Carter camp was held on \$70,000. Stanley holder on \$100,000. And then there were many who were not in the leadership who were held on \$5,000 or \$10,000. The total amount, as I mentioned, was almost \$400,000.

At least travel expenses, they need some way to support themselves in terms just of basic foods and gas for their cars and so forth at Rapid City, but mostly, bail money is needed. And anyone who could help should send his contribution to the Wounded Knee Legal Defense Fund in care of the National Bank of South Dakota in Rapid City, South Dakota.

SPEAKER:

The National Bank of South Dakota at Rapid City. That's the address. And it's the Wounded Knee Defense Fund. There is a short piece in this morning's paper that also has the story of the Defense Fund in it too, so that if people want to look that up. By this morning's paper, I mean, this morning's Minneapolis Tribune. I shouldn't assume that everyone reads that, I guess.

Kevin McKiernan, thank you very much. And I'm hoping that as time goes on and you digest your experience there, that we'll have other programs from you on Wounded Knee. And maybe we can get you to comment on some of the developments that will take place in the coming months as well. Thank you much for being here today.

KEVIN MCKIERNAN:

I'm glad to be here.