

Lakota man speaks about Native American persecution

By Robert Trishman
Capital Times Staff Writer

Penn State Harrisburg recently had a visit from a living treasure. Elder Sid Byrd, a member of the Lakota Native American tribe and a retired Presbyterian minister, came to campus to speak about the persecution Native Americans have faced in this country and his own personal experiences.

Byrd was born in Porcupine, South Dakota, which is on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. He attended a "normal" school in Genoa, Nebraska. Whites placed

many Native Americans in these schools that ignored the traditional practices of the different tribes.

Byrd was the minister on the reservation during the 71-day siege at Wounded Knee, when a group from the Oglala tribe, led by leaders of the American Indian Movement, took hold of the historical site in protest of mistreatment from the federal government and corruption within their own tribal government.

Byrd then related the story of the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. General George Armstrong Custer's former unit fought and killed 300 Native Americans in this battle; it was seen as revenge for

Custer's death at the hands of the Lakotas in 1876.

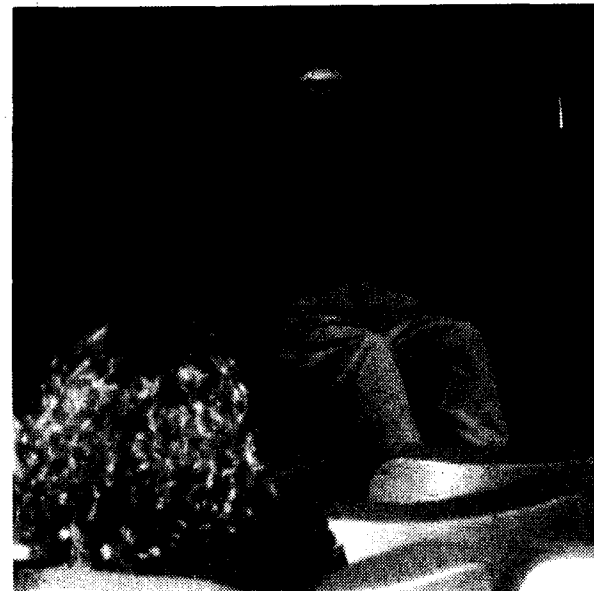
Byrd, who served in World War II, said that the U.S. government awarded 18 Congressional Medals of Honor to the troops that fought at Wounded Knee. He added that this was more Medals of Honor than were awarded for the troops that fought on D-Day in World War II. He said, "When the United States fought in World War II, it was called a 'just war.' When my people defended themselves, it was called an 'uprising.'"

"In the largest mass execution in United States history, 38 Lakotas were hanged after the trials following the revolt."

He told the story of the Sioux Uprising of 1862, another protest of mistreatment and broken promises by the government. In the largest mass execution in United States history, 38

Lakotas were hanged after the trials following the revolt. Byrd said, "There were terrible atrocities committed on both sides". He added that his great-grandfather fought in the uprising but was given a reprieve and not executed.

Byrd then sang a stirring and haunting Lakota hymn, which his ancestors sang at the uprising. The message of the hymn was "It's a good day to die", since they were fighting just to survive and defend their honor. He said that the history books called the hymn a "pagan death chant", when it was really a song of praise to God.



Sid Byrd talks to PSH students about the 71-day Siege at Wounded Knee

Byrd said of his people, "We are still struggling at this late date in this country for dignity." He also talked of the Trial of Standing Bear in 1879 when Indians finally received U.S. citizenship. He said, "We were the first in the land and the last to receive citizenship."

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