

Leonard Peltier Interview

Editor's Note: *Smoke Signals* sought a direct interview with Leonard Peltier at the United States Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas, where, until June 30, he was serving two life terms for complicity in the 1975 murders of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Because we could not talk to Peltier directly, we submitted questions to his attorney, Barry Bachrach of the Boston, Massachusetts firm, Bowditch & Dewey, LLP. Bachrach reported that he took notes as Peltier responded to the questions. Bachrach later transcribed the notes and emailed the following answers to *Smoke Signals*. Of 14 questions, Peltier/Bachrach responded to seven, with Bachrach noting that they simply ran out of time to do more.

1) How frequently do you participate in anti-war efforts in this way?

I participate as often as requested. It is difficult getting my view out on issues while I am in prison. So, that is a limitation on my ability to get as involved as I would like on important issues.

2) Are there political or other prisoners with whom you've conversed over the years? Who? And would you describe some of the most memorable exchanges?

I have conversed with numerous political prisoners over the years, including, Mumia. My most memorable involve Yorje Von Kahl, since I have been incarcerated with him at Leavenworth. Ironically, we were both tried by the same prosecutor and before the same judge in the same court.

3) In a recent visit to Oregon, the Indian writer Sherman Alexi said, "Our politicians have never measured the quality of our country." Do you agree? And how would you measure the quality of our country?

I agree very much. I believe you measure the quality of the country by its actions showing respect for basic human rights and its actions in treating all people as one. That is what this country was supposedly founded upon, but it has not met its goal of achieving a high quality of life for all.

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4) Do you have access to the books or authors that interest you? Who/what do you read and who/what are you seeking access to?

I have access to books and read very much. I typically read non-fiction and keep abreast of the issues facing our people.

5) In your book, *Prison Writings*, there is a photograph of you standing by a window. What does your cell look like? Do you have a view outside? Tell me what you will about the physical attributes of the place.

I do not have an outside view. I view the world through cement and steel.

6) There is a significant challenge to the view that you are innocent of shooting the FBI agents at close range, and it comes from within the Indian community today, specifically, from Paul DeMain, editor of *News from Indian Country*. What is your reaction to DeMain's assertions?

I was there. I know I did not do it. Once the government was caught withholding and fabricating the ballistics evidence, it has admitted several times that it does not know who did the shooting. In 1995, Lynn Crooks admitted before the Parole Commission that the government did not have sufficient evidence to sustain a conviction that I shot the agents. If I were given a fair trial, the truth would come out that I did not shoot the agents.

7) Same question regarding DeMain's assessment of your relationship with Annie Mae Aquash and your culpability in her death. I've enclosed DeMain's "Aquash Murder Case Timeline" that provides context but no direct indictment. Kindly respond generally to this context.

With respect to Anna Mae, I unequivocally deny having anything to do with her death.

*Greetings My Young Sisters And Brothers
First Allow me to welcome all of you here today,
of salute you and the organizers for putting this day
Painum together. You should know that it takes alot of
Time, Love And hard work to organize one of these events.
When you leave here don't forget what you have learned
talk about it among your siblings and tell your friends
ask the organizers to do more of these kind of events
Participate by help them as they do their most important work*

"I would like to talk about the Continued Indian War(s) against Our Nation, some of you may have heard about the so called Indan Wars of our history's 'Past', I'm Here to tell you that these wars are not over, that these wars continue against our people(s) and Nations as I speak to you here today."

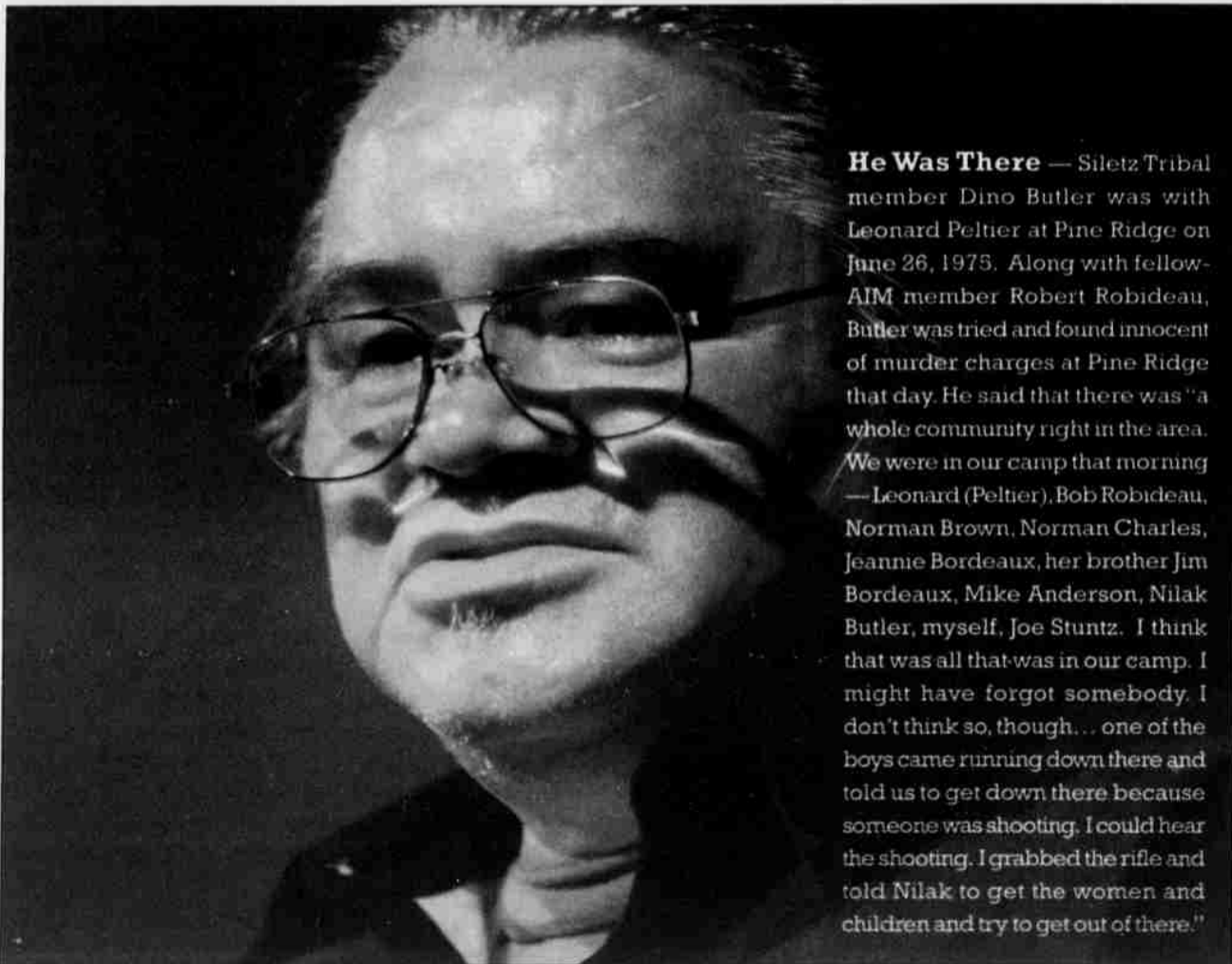
*...the act...
...the people...
...the majority of the American people are...
...the educational tool at your...
...today, I hope they have had some influence on you, I know
...people's struggles for survival it would make my sacrifice
all worth it. you take care.
And the spirit of Crazy Horse
Witakinye Oyasin
Leonard Peltier*

In His Own Words — Leonard Peltier wrote this letter of introduction for the conference. Siletz Tribal member Dino Butler presented the document.

She was a dear friend of mine. I sued Mr. Demain (sic) concerning his statements about my alleged culpability in her death. We resolved that suit with his issuing a letter that he had no evidence that I had any involvement in the death of Anna Mae. My attorney can give you a copy of that letter.

The questions not answered sought first hand observations about life in prison, about the legacy of AIM, and one from *Smoke Signals'* award-winning photographer and journalist Peta Tinda, who has since moved on from his work in Grand Ronde. Tinda's father, also an AIM member, gave Peltier a ride the day after the incident at Oglala. ■

Photo courtesy of www.turtletack.org



He Was There — Siletz Tribal member Dino Butler was with Leonard Peltier at Pine Ridge on June 26, 1975. Along with fellow- AIM member Robert Robideau, Butler was tried and found innocent of murder charges at Pine Ridge that day. He said that there was "a whole community right in the area. We were in our camp that morning — Leonard (Peltier), Bob Robideau, Norman Brown, Norman Charles, Jeannie Bordeaux, her brother Jim Bordeaux, Mike Anderson, Nilak Butler, myself, Joe Stuntz. I think that was all that was in our camp. I might have forgot somebody. I don't think so, though... one of the boys came running down there and told us to get down there because someone was shooting. I could hear the shooting. I grabbed the rifle and told Nilak to get the women and children and try to get out of there."

Photo by Toby McClary