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	ALBERTA
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	ALBERTA
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INTERVIEWER:	TONY SNOWSILL
INTERPRETER:	MERVYN WOLFLEG
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mark Wolfleg, born Bassano Coal Mine, 1920. Educated at residential school and later fought in Europe in WWII. Resides on Blackfoot Reserve, Alta.

- Blackfoot names
- Blackfoot ceremonies
- Experiences in WWII

This is an interview with Mark Wolfleg on the Blackfoot Reserve on January 24, 1983.

Tony: Mark, what is your Indian name?

Mark: My Indian name is Chief Cap.

Tony: How did you get your Indian name?

Mark: When I was a young boy, there was a famous Blackfoot by the name of Chief Cap who had killed an R.C.M.P. officer and the name was pretty well known. Because it was a name that was notorious in the Blackfoot country, as a young boy I took the name and started calling myself Chief Cap.

Tony: Where were you born Mark, and when?

Mark: I was born in the Eagle Moon (February) at the Bassano Coal Mine. It was in 1920.

Tony: What clan do you belong to?

Mark: Blackfoot. There is two clans that my family came from, one on my Dad's side and one on my mother's side, but we

associated mostly with the Hard Rope Clan.

Tony: What is the meaning of that and what is the meaning of the clan relationship in Blackfoot?

Mark: The origin of the name has been lost through the years but I would assume that the name came from the ability of that clan to have a specialty to have especially hard ropes than any other people. This is how clans got their names, by having a specialty such as having the toughest ropes around.

Tony: Could you tell us about your family, about your parents and anything you might know about your grandparents and anybody else that goes back even further.

Mark: My mother was a Blackfoot, from this band. But my dad was from the Blood. His dad's name was Sits Far and his brother's name was Red Crane who was very famous in their time.

Tony: What were they famous for?

Mark: They were noted for their war exploits. They were in the era of the Blackfoot nation when they would war against the Cree and the Crow to the east.

Tony: Can you tell us anything in detail about those exploits, about those things they did that made them well known?

Mark: I'll just relate one story, my name Chief Cap was a name I adopted, I took on as a young boy, as a hero, I took on that name. My real name is Aiming Back, Aiming at Each Other. One of the contemporaries of my father, my grandfather and his brother was another granduncle of mine, his Indian name was Holy Water. One of his exploits he came upon some Cree, a Cree warrior. They came upon his hill and in the surprise meeting out in the prairie, both aimed at each other without shooting. In those days you don't give a guy a second chance and this was kind of a strange and rare occasion when one didn't kill the other. For some reason they didn't shoot at each other. From that exploit I was given the name Aiming at Each Other. That is my real Indian name.

Tony: When did these people live?

Mark: These exploits would be around the early 1890s.

Tony: Mark, do you know anything about the creation of the Blackfoot or any stories about the creation of the Blackfoot?

Mark: I haven't directly heard or have knowledge of ever having heard any creation story. I can't talk about something I am not sure of. Unless I am sure of it, I won't relate it but as a young boy I may or may not have but at this point I don't have any knowledge.

Tony: Do you know how the Blackfoot came to be in their

traditional lands?

Mark: Before the signing of the treaty, a lot of Blackfoot travelled the various parts of the country where they frequented and lived. Most of our people lived around the Sceeter Creek area in High River where Hell River is now, in that general vicinity, but they came and lived at this present location after the signing of the treaty. Prior to that they had been living in various parts of the country.

Tony: Do you know anything about the way in which the tribe or nation was organized both politically and socially in those days? Has anybody told you of those things?

Mark: Would you phrase the question a little differently?

Tony: O.K. Before the treaty, how did the Blackfoot live and how did they relate to each other in the way that the people relate to each other today? Things would have been different.

Mark: In the old days a person gained respect and in a lot of cases became chief because of their war exploits. War became a means of acquiring a chieftainship.

Tony: Who were some, in the early days, can you tell us who were some of the important leaders? And I am talking about the days before Crowfoot and the treaty. Do you have any knowledge of those people?

Mark: It is hard for me to pinpoint any person that was of particular importance in those days. There were a lot of chiefs and none was prominent, that I could point to as being prominent than others. Crowfoot came to be daily used.

Tony: Do you know how the Blackfoot came to get horses?

Mark: The way that the Blackfoot got the horse was through their war parties and raids into the southern tribes in the United States, the Cree and the Sioux and the Crow mainly were the tribes where they acquired the horses from.

(Interruption in tape)

(Tape resumes)

So finally I got up in the boiler room and sat back and I was having a coffee break and he said, "Mark I want to tell you, you are different from the other employees here. I wanted to tell you you should come over to my area, we'll talk about some things I want to find out from you. So we went and had supper and he started to tell me about the things, the beliefs, and the things we do in our Indian ways. So up to, before, there was a few questions he asked and I gave him the answers. So then I told the worker, "Before I go any further, do you believe what I say? If you don't believe what I say, maybe you are coming just for curiosity. It happens so many times so if you are going to take this for curiosity, I won't talk." He was stuck for a minute and then he said, "Well Mark, that's the

first time anybody said that." I tell him, "Well this is the way I feel about my religious and everything. 'Cos I'm not selling out to anybody else just for curiosity." So that's why. I'm not trying to cut you out or anything...

Tony: I understand what you are saying. What I would like to say to you is one of the reasons that we are doing this is that we do believe those things and we think that they are very, very important and when I say that I may ask you questions that you should not answer it is only because I do not know enough but it is not for curiosity that I ask you, it is because I genuinely want to know and because I think that it is important

that other people know of these things in a way with which they can be treated with respect and dignity.

Mark: Another reason, I am not trying to tell you to tell them. I'll answer these questions you have for me but what I wanted to say because in the different tribes like that, the Peigans, the Bloods, the Blackfeet, we do the same things, like the holy smoke, the clans, the tobacco dance and the pipe. But it is a little, it is always different, these preparations that you go through. What I was thinking, if I started to say anything, the other tribes (if they hear it) they can say "This is the way that we do it." For instance this is one example. Now this holy smoke. In the Blackfoot custom the woman who puts up the Sundance lodge - what they call the holy woman - he cuts it up, before the smoke starts, and then they start cooking. But over there in the Peigans and the Bloods - 'cos I was over there - they started with the holy smoke. So right in there they take the ? in there, and they paint it. In a way what they do, it's like a black paint over. It's like a ? where they're going to cut it. Those are the different ways. The same with the horse. We had different ways. Those are some of the things. I am not afraid of what I know about my past and the way it goes but they've got different ways. The same with the horse. We had different ways. Those are some of the things. I am not afraid of what I know about my past and the way it goes but they've got different ways. In a lot of different tribes in the Confederacy, the ceremonials are different that are similar to what we have in the Blackfoot but the procedures are different so what's happening now is this fear is that if other tribes heard about how we did our ceremonies some of the younger people there that are learning how to do the different ceremonies or what have you, might start using our methods, procedures which would in turn kind of destroy their procedures and be lost forever. That is one of the dangers in any recording that is done. And in any interviews that have to do with this because then I would be infringing on that particular nation's sovereignty and these kind of ceremonies, and that is why I am reluctant to go that deep in describing procedures.

Tony: Right. I don't think it is necessary for this to go into the procedures. I understand that. The sorts of questions that we have really are things that, so that you don't do some of those things that you don't want to do. I am

thinking more of descriptions of the societies, the reasons for some of the ceremonies, why you have the ceremonies, rather than the procedures that go on in them. O.K. and what the meanings of the ceremonies are.

Mark: I understand that I will give a general description of but not the procedural description.

Tony: Could you describe the various societies that exist and what it is that they do?

Mark: The first society that young boys join, the young boys join the society and grow up in the society, even from an infant when they start to walk they join a society, and when they grow up into puberty then they transfer their membership to another younger person. These societies they are Prairie Chicken Society. The next society that these young people progress into would be the Crazy Dog Society. The Crazy Dog Society is a very honoured society, well respected. A lot of the members are very outgoing, gregarious people and their ceremonials are very colorful and now I will tell some more about the other societies. The reason for having the Crazy Dogs, the great Crazy Dogs were used at time of war, at times when the enemy dug themselves in where they couldn't get at them. In those days they had fox holes too, so the Crazy Dogs were the ones that kind of stormed these places and got them out so that they could get at them better. An analogy I use for this kind of warfare is the modern day highlanders in their role, in the war, like W.W.II.

Another society that my father was a member of, but I don't know too much about their activities, all I know is that my father was a member of this society, was the Black Police. These were the people that policed the Sundance when it was in progress. They kept the law and order. If there was a particular person that was disrupting the proceedings or the camp, the people would go to them and they would take care of them and they would tell them to keep the law and the order.

Tony: Why were they called the Black Police?

Mark: What I know of the origin of the name is that the word Black Police is a literal translation of them because they dressed in black.

Tony: Are there any other societies that you can describe?

Mark: The next society is referred to by the white people as the Beaver Bundle Society. Another word for them is Carriers of Water is the literal translation of the name we have for them in Blackfoot. They also have an encampment, like the Sundance, and they get together at springtime for the tobacco planting festival ceremony and it is during this ceremony that they also have the Dog Feast ceremony.

Tony: The Dog Feast ceremony? What is that?

Mark: The reason for having this ceremony is they boil meat all night long, its part of the ceremony, and the tripe and various other food that they had in those days. The reference to the water is because of the bundles, the bundles represented various waterfowl and water fauna.

Tony: Are you able to tell us about the Horn Society?

Mark: The Horn Society or as they are commonly referred to out of respect we call them the All Comrades or Friendship Group, is very high society of the Blackfoot, not just anyone can join the Horn Society. The usual way, a person that wants to join the Horn Society has to make a vow. A vow was the highest thing that a Blackfoot can make in the society, in the life of the Blackfoot. And it was the Horn Society that people made vows of supplication throughout the year at times of sickness or misfortune or hard times. They would make a vow, either to, for instance just a dance with one of the staffs of the Horn Society and it was from the power of the Horn Society that a lot of the religious life revolved around. They are a very highly regarded group of respected individuals of the band, the nation.

Just to add to my personal experience with the Horn Society, before I left for overseas in World War II, I came back to the reserve on leave and I went to my uncle Backfat and I told him that I was going to be going overseas to the war. So Backfat took me to an elder of the reserve, his name was Eagle Ribs and there made a vow on my behalf that I would come back safely. He vowed that when I came back that I would own one of the bundles, the rattle bundles in the Horn Society. When I came back safely from the war, that particular bundle had been taken over by somebody else, but there was one other bundle that was available, this was the Hook Lands bundle which I took and that was my first membership in their society. Another story coming from the Blood Reserve during World War I, one day we were in the trench warfare, two brothers from the Blood Reserve, before they made their attack, they had to jump out of the trenches and go hand to hand combat. These two brothers made a vow, each of them made a vow to take a membership in the Horn Society if they would get back safely. Both of them came back, one when he returned died of his wounds, but the other one lived till old age.

Tony: What does the Horn Society do in the ceremonial life of the Blackfeet? What part does it play?

Mark: ... people. By doing this they took upon themselves all of the hardships of the people on themselves. In effect they sacrificed themselves and their bodies for the people and this was done yearly. All the prayers and vows were made to them and they, when they did their dance, took those vows and various hardships and problems of the Blackfoot onto themselves and as a victory in overcoming the hardships they did their circle dance around in camp and on the outside. This was when they were most powerful and no one was allowed to cross their

path. It was the power of the people was strongest at that time and this was embodied in the Horn Society who were dancing for the people.

One story I will tell you, this was in the 1920s, the early 1920s, two R.C.M.P. officers (at that time they still rode around on their horses, horseback) had come to the camp encampment at the time that the Horn Society were doing their Circle dance. Some of the elders warned them not to cross, to wait until they had passed. But one officer didn't heed the warning, he went across whereas the other one stayed on the other side. On their way back to Gleichen, halfway, maybe three quarters of the way back, before they got to what is known as Susie's Slough, the officer that had gone across, he hadn't heeded the warning, his horse hit a badger hole and his horse had a broken leg and he himself had a broken leg whereas the other one was okay.

Tony: The Circle dance that you refer to, is that done at the time of the Sundance or is it done on another occasion?

Mark: The Horn Society dance is restricted to the Sundance. That is the only time that they dance. They are part and parcel of the Sundance. They can't dance any old time. Just at the Sundance.

Tony: Can you tell us more about the Sundance? What is it's Blackfoot name and then the literal translation of that? What the significance of the Sundance is to the Blackfoot people and why the Sundance is done.

Mark: What I know of the Sundance or what we refer to as O-kan, came from the spirits and there are two kinds of Sundance. One is when someone makes a vow to have the lodge made, the Sundance lodge made, and that's when we refer to the Sundance as O-kan. If no one made the vow to make the Sundance Lodge, the Horn Society would still have to do their dance because there are people that have made vows to them. So in any case there would always be a Sundance, as long as people made vows to the Horn Society. But my understanding of the thing is that O-kan has a literal meaning of a dream vision or

close to that. Originally came as a gift to the Blackfoot from the spirits above us.

Tony: What is the meaning of sacred objects such as bundles and the pipe and the paint and the smudge? What do these things mean in the spiritual life of the Blackfeet?

Mark: The pipe was a very important article in the Blackfoot peoples' life. It was offered in order to get prayers from a holy man and most of the pipes were used in all ceremonies. It preceded the ceremony; it was part of the ceremony. So the pipe was a very important gift that the Blackfoot had. The Horn Society would approach potential members, society brothers, with the pipe and if a person accepted the pipe they had to join the society. Nowadays, I see a lot of people using pipes

even in pow-wows, dancing with them. That is not the respect that traditional people have for the pipe. It is a very sacred article and only used at times of prayer. The sweetgrass is also very important, it is the incense used as a purifier of the persons in a ceremony and preceded a lot of ceremonies also. It was used to purify the mind, body, and soul and articles being used in the ceremony. The smudge is used to paint the face at various times. It was mostly used at times when a person had a bad dream. They would go to an elder and tell him of this bad dream and after the dream was interpreted, the elder would paint the person to offset any bad luck or any bad thing that might be coming so that the person may be allowed to live through it without too much trouble or hardship. The bundles are another very important article. Various societies had them. They were well respected. When anyone entered a house and saw a bundle, that was the area to avoid. You didn't walk in front of them. You respected them. This was practised in the old days, this bundle signified a very sacred article and when seen in the house, you respected it and did not make too much noise or walked around in front of it unnecessarily.

Tony: You told us that the Sundance was a gift from the spirits. Are all ceremonies gifts from the spirits or are there ceremonies that you get in other ways?

Mark: From my experience, the Sundance came from the spirits above and that was the originator of a lot of the ceremonies. The Horn Society was from the buffalo spirit, had it's origins there. So the Horn Society and the Beaver Bundle Society were started as gifts from various spirits on earth. The Beaver Bundle Society came from the water spirits, especially the beaver. The story goes that a man spent a winter with the beaver and in return when he left them was given the ceremonials to go with the beaver bundle and this I believe is also a similar origin from the buffalo.

Tony: How do people get power and where does that power come from?

Mark: The power comes from the various spirits on earth, our word for getting power would be "acquiring a sun." Most of the powers came from animal beings. Their spirits bestowed a power on various worthy individuals. A comparison would be to the disciples of Jesus, the 12 disciples, when he went into heaven, he came back and bestowed power on these disciples. So in essence, the power that we derive from our animal brothers, the spirits, is like that. It is bestowed upon worthy individuals by them at various times and for the same purposes.

Tony: Are there particular places where you have to go to get power?

Mark: From the stories that my father told me, in the old days young men, especially bachelors, went out to various locations in the wilderness on a vision quest. The vision quest was undertaken to try and get pity or sympathy from various

spirits, animal spirits. Some were successful in getting the sympathy and the subsequent spirit as a power but others were not. This is what I know of the vision quest.

Tony: Do you know anything about the Medicine wheels, Mark?

Mark: The Medicine Wheel as I know was used as a way of finding out the path that warriors took, it foretold the direction that the warriors would take when people wanted to find out where the people were they would roll the wheel and it would go in that direction and they would follow it. This is also acquired through a vision. Later on after the warriors lives were over, the Medicine Wheel was used as a game of chance. A ceremonial was attached to it also.

Tony: Do you know anything about the things that are called Medicine wheels that are out in the fields that are stones that are placed around?

Mark: The Medicine Wheels that you refer to are ancient and I have been able to see one. The one that I know of is on the west, just outside of the western borders of the reserve near Carseland. Some people went out there a few years back but I didn't have the chance to go out there so I can't comment on it.

Tony: Mark, I would like to ask you now about your experiences in the army. A big change. First of all, why did you join the army in World War II? What was the reason that you joined the army?

Mark: At the time of World War, a lot of the people were being conscripted. At the time I was working at the mines, at the east end of the reserve, and I had gone up to Calgary for shopping and the next day I was still there, and I was walking up 8th Ave. heading west and I looked across the street and I saw a sign that, a recruitment sign. So out of curiosity, I went across, went upstairs in a three story building on the top floor and I came in and there was a sergeant there and he was really glad to see me and really friendly so he asked me if I wanted to sign up so just on impulse I said, "Yeah, I came to sign up." I came just by chance. It wasn't a conscious decision.

Tony: How did being in the army affect you? By that I mean, there were things that you were accustomed to before the war living here on the reserve and you led a certain kind of life. Then going into the army, you went overseas and all sorts of things happened. You have had all sorts of experiences which I would like you to tell us about but what I would like to know now is how much the experience of being in the army changed you and the way that you looked at things. Did it make a difference to you?

Mark: When I first joined the army, when I first joined, enlisted, I did not really know what it was all about, the war and everything, but slowly I began to change. I noticed a

change in my thinking, the life was very different from what I knew and back home in the Indian way of life, my outlook was a lot different then and it changed radically, especially when I went overseas. My outlook on life became more harsh, a harder outlook. There was anger in my life that wasn't there before and through all of the experiences I experienced over there, when I came back, I had become a much angry person, a person that got angry a lot faster whereas before I never had the experience of experiencing anger. I was more easy going then but through the years I got over this. Especially when I got into the spiritual life more and more. I became more kindly to the elders and the youngsters because these were the ones that I saw suffer the most in the war, the older people and the children. So I became more closer to them, became more kindly to them. And I guess I could say that while I was there, I walked among death and this brought the anger into my life when I came back. Since then I've gotten over this path and gotten the spiritual way of life back into my Indian way of thinking.

Tony: What sort of things made the changes in your way of thinking and the way that you looked at the world when you were in the army? What were the things that created the anger for you and what were some of the experiences you had while you were in the army that were important to you?

Mark: Remembering my experiences in the war, I remember those of us that survived and those of us that didn't. These are the memories I have about the war. The other memories I have, that I also was the cause of some people not surviving but in that situation I could do nothing about. That is what I was there for. Seeing war does not bring out any outstanding experiences. It is all lonesome and that is what war is, it is lonesome, so I cannot really see what was very outstanding and none of the experiences stand out as being outstanding, it was all lonesome, loneliness.

Tony: When you came back after the war, Mark, did you notice many changes in the reserve or did you feel different when you came back here? Did you feel differently about things on the reserve when you came back?

Mark: The only feeling I have about coming back is that I was too happy to get back home so I didn't notice any changes. I was just glad to be back among my relatives.

Tony: How were you treated as a veteran by the government and was the fact that you were a veteran change your thinking about the government?

Mark: As a veteran when I came back to my land, the Indian Superintendent, the Indian agent at the time, his name was Gooderham, had already arranged everything for us. He had told Ottawa officials that we, the Indian veterans, did not need any help, that everything was being taken care of, taken care of us. And so that benefits that I would have gotten from the government, I did not receive as was also the case with a lot

of veterans. When this happened, I thought about the times when I was in the front, in the front lines. At that time, nobody emphasized that we were treaty. Nobody mentioned, okay, because you are treaty, you can walk five miles behind the lines, we were right there with everybody else. So the emphasis was only told to us after we came back from the front lines. We fought the war for Canada.

(The last remaining part of the tape is very difficult to transcribe because of the low tone of Mark's voice. He is very difficult to hear.)

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