

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MARK WOLFLEG SR.2
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: BLACKFOOT RESERVE
ALBERTA
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ALBERTA
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INTERVIEWER: TONY SNOWSILL
INTERPRETER: MERVYN WOLFLEG
TRANSCRIBER: J. GREENWOOD
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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, Alberta.
-schooling on the Blackfoot reserve from 1926 -- day school and Old Sun Residential School
-Blackfoot interpretation of the terms of Treaty #7; also the roles of Crowfoot and a group of Metis in taking Treaty #7
-overseas experiences during World War II

Tony: There were spiritual things that happened to you and those events that you felt were worthy of keeping in your memory by naming your grandchildren after things that happened to you and people that you did some of these things with.

Mark: Well the things I did experience, they were in the combat in Italy because the name, the things that you do, just like this granddaughter of mine, MaryAnne, I call her that's Slowly Singing. Those are the things I heard just before we was on attack, the assault on the Hitler line on May 23, 1940. So I gave her that name. But, so those are some of the things the old warriors do and they have to experience, not the others to take the experience, what I take. Another one I had was in . We were going to another building, so I went across to the building, just before I got through the door they open up on me with a machine gun so I turned around, kind of a zigzag, went to another place, kind of a zigzag to the next building. So those I gave one to my grandchildren, call him , that's Running Across. Because in those things you had a narrow escape and when you give out the names

to your grandchildren or anybody else, you have to pray for him to hold that name and the experience that you did to have him good luck for the rest of his life.

Tony: You told us about the singing and that experience. Could you tell us about that again Mark?

Mark: Yes, I was in a slit trench, just before we were moving out with that big drive on Hitler, so I happened to fall asleep for a few hours and I heard somebody singing quite a ways up then it stopped. The I heard it again coming and I heard those songs, the Horn Society's song, the pipe bundle songs, and the Beaver Bundle, and I thought to myself, gee, I heard those songs before. So this is a second time. So the third time, just as if I was in a tipi there, sitting up in the back, just outside this people was singing. The third time they started singing. I could hear quite plainly what they said. So they stopped singing, it's always four things, in all life when the spirits want to do anything for, they always have four times, you do things like. So they stopped singing then they would start shouting so I woke up and I could still hear those songs that they were singing. I guess the spirits must have come to me just to guide me through the hardship that we were going through that day.

Tony: What were some of the details of that hardship? You were talking about some of the people that were killed before and how you avoided those things.

Mark: Well, before we start out at six o'clock when we start the attack, because we were the second wave of the attack. By the time we had gone maybe 50 to 100 yards, and that's when they start opening up, the Germans opening up with machine guns, all we could hear was the whistling sounds of the bullets going by and we lost some of our officers before we go up to the main attack. It just so happens some of us were lucky to cut through as far as we had to go because I remember we came into a little ridge, a little hill, just like a bank, and the officer, the corporal waved us to go. So we started going up on that ridge, and it just so happens I slipped, it is a kind of a sand. When I slipped back one of the 88 shells landed where I was going. So we got through with that. Then we were moving up to the lines, the main advancing lines.

Tony: Mark, you must have gone to residential school. Can you tell me everything that you can remember about going and how you felt about it and what went on in the school and how you were treated?

Mark: It was in 1926 when I first went to school. It was the Old Sun residential school. At the time I did not know any English. My parents only spoke Blackfoot so I didn't know or speak English. Before I went to school, my braids had to be cut off and for the first initial part of my schooling, we were all just being taught how to speak English before we got into the real subjects. And before I got into learning the

language, knew what the language was about, the school burned down. So for the next two years, I went to a day school. More like a church type day school. But I still did not know what the purpose of education was. The only thing I did was I just enjoyed the experience. The purpose of education was never clear to me. In 1929, the new school was built, the present Old Sun school was built, and it would have been about 4 years now that I was in grade 1 because of the school burning down and going to day school. Even at this time I still didn't know what education was all about, there was no purpose for it. I didn't know why people were educated, it was never explained to me. And it was especially hard on those that were raised traditionally, a traditional Blackfoot way with no English in the family. There were times that I envied others whose parents had learned to speak English. For us that were traditional, school was pretty harsh.

Tony: When you say it was harsh, what sort of things did you find harsh?

Mark: What was hard about my early schooling was the explanations or instructions from the teachers. Those of us that understood English had no trouble but for the rest of us, we found it frustrating to try and figure out what was actually being said. We always had doubts of what the teacher was actually trying to explain to us. On top of that we could not ask questions to clarify what was being taught us because we could not speak English.

Tony: Apart from going into the classes, did you have to work as well? Did you have to work during the school day or was it just classes?

Mark: In the mornings, we were devoted to working. In the summer we did haying and fencing and worked in the barn tending to the livestock and what have you. In the afternoon was the only time that we had some lessons.

Christine: Did the parents want to send their children to school or did they have any choice?

Mark: It was up to the Superintendent, the Indian Agent, he decided everything for us. He was the one that kept the records and he was the one who came to the homes and instructed the parents that this girl or that boy has to go school now. He is of age now. He is the one who decided everything for our parents at that time. In those days, there was a lot of coercion on the part of the Indian Affairs, the Indian Agent especially, and when people were instructed that their child was supposed to go to school, it was also accompanied with a threat that if they didn't take them to school that the law would come into the picture and that they could end up in jail.

Tony: Was there much difference between the Anglican and the Catholic schools that you know of?

Mark: I don't know too much about the school, that the Long

Robes, which refer to the Roman Catholic people. At the time when I was ready to go to school, I was supposed to go to the Roman Catholic school but my father lived on the west end of the reserve so he approached the Indian Agent, Mr. Gooderham, permission for me to go to Old Sun school, Anglican school, in those days the travel was by horse and team so it was too far to go to school. That is the reason I don't know too much about the Roman Catholic school, the Long Robe school, but

from what my late wife has told me, she went to the R.C. school, most of their instruction was religious instruction. They seemed to have more of it than we had, we had some but from those stories she told me, they had more religious instruction than we had.

Tony: What was the difference between the schooling that you got in the white man's school or the education and traditional Blackfoot education? What were Blackfeet people taught by their own people?

Mark: Well, to answer, the schools that we went to, the white schools that we went to, were run by priests and in those days they were run mostly by the priests and their attitude towards us was they were very critical of our way of life, the fact that we were Indians and also some of the beliefs we held because of our Blackfoot culture. That is the thing that I can remember, that they were very critical.

Tony: Mark, do you know anything about the way in which Blackfeet children were taught by their parents before the residential schools, before they were sent into the white people's schools?

Mark: Before I went to school, the traditional training we had was based on respect. We were told at an early age, we were cautioned against listening and being respectful of other people. One example of this is if an elder came to visit our parents, out of respect we were told to play outside so we won't be in the way or make unnecessary noise because there must have been a purpose for the elder's visit. Another example is if we were going to go someplace we told our parents where we were going and when we would return so that they would not have to worry about us and they would know where we were and when they could expect us back. So a lot of this was based on listening and being obedient and out of this our respect for ourselves and our parents and others around us was instilled in us. Nowadays you try and give direction or any kind of trying to correct our younger people, they would not listen. In those days we were taught to heed and listen and stop. To listen when someone was talking to us.

Tony: Mark, do you know how the Blackfoot Confederacy started, when did it start and how and why?

Mark: I don't know.

Tony: Mark could you tell us what you know about taking treaty.

Mark: The only thing I know of the treaty, was what I heard from my grandparents, my grand-aunts and uncles. What I heard them say about when they mentioned the treaty was that they did not really understand, the Blackfoot at the time they did not understand what the concept of the treaty was. The only thing, the only way they could describe was that Crowfoot would be making a treaty with the Queen. He had been camped across the river from where the treaty was signed. The Confederacy tribes had gathered and there was also the Metis were there. There were two bands of them, and my grand-aunts and uncles say that one band of Metis had also signed a treaty. The only other thing I heard was, everyone waited for Crowfoot, he was the one that all the tribes waited for. Then they heard that the message came that Crowfoot had decided to take the treaty. Our Blackfoot word for signing the treaty is "take". That means that we accepted the money that was being passed out at the time. So our word for signing the treaty is "take". So we decided to take what was being given as treaty payment. The same terminology is used also for the one band of Metis, they decided to take the treaty too. The thing that was never discussed among the old people, the articles of the treaty. It was just that Crowfoot was going to make a treaty with the Queen. There was no discussion of articles and what really was in the treaty. The only thing that the elders had spoke about at the time was the surface of the land was being given up, the land that we were giving up, only the surface was being given up, not that what was underneath the ground. That is the only thing that is discussed when articles or terms of the treaty are discussed among the elders.

Tony: When you say that the surface of the ground was being given up, how was it being given up, what did the Blackfoot people understand that was going to be done with it? What was below the surface that the Blackfoot people understood that they were keeping?

Mark: What I am referring to in the land - I'm getting ahead of myself now - is when the Blackfoot surrendered part of the original treaty land.

Tony: In the things that were told to you about the, I am going back to Crowfoot now, that time, the things that were passed on to you, that you were told, what did the Blackfeet believe they were giving up when they took the treaty? What did they think actually was happening?

Mark: At the time of the treaty, before the treaty, there was

a man that the Blackfoot referred to as "Be-da-be-gwun" which translated means Tall White Man. I believe the official's name was Baker. He brought the idea of the treaty to the Blackfoot. At the time he promised, one of the promises he made to the people was that as a result of the treaty, the Queen, the crown will take care of your people. Your subsistence will be from the crown and he was the one that made the promise for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows. He was the man that made this promise. And that was how long the Queen would look after the Blackfoot. A year passed and this man came back to the Blackfoot country and some of the Chiefs questioned his promise. They asked him why haven't you and the Queen and those we signed the treaty with, how come they haven't kept the promises that were made? His answer was that the reason why we made those promises was because at the time you were very warlike and we had to promise you something to calm you down and that was the only way we could get you to sign the treaty.

Tony: What did the Blackfoot think that they were going to get from the treaty apart from just being looked after, what was their understanding of being looked after? What did that mean to them?

Mark: The promises that were made to the Blackfoot was that the people would be cared for, medicine would be given to them to care for their health needs and the other thing that the subsistence of the Blackfoot would also be taken care of, food and what have you to keep them alive.

Tony: What happened to the Metis people that took treaty with the Blackfeet?

Mark: There is not too much known of what happened to the Metis that signed or who they were. The stories that I have heard, a general story that everybody seems to share, is that when they signed the treaty, afterwards these Metis sold their tract of land that was given to them.

PROPER NAME INDEX

PROPER NAME	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
CROWFOOT	IH-014A	WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6
GOODERHAM, MR. (INDIAN AGENT)		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	4

INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
EDUCATION				
-attitudes toward	IH-014A	WOLFLEGSR.2	7	3
EDUCATION				
-residential schools		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	3,4
EDUCATION				
-secular		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	5
EDUCATION				
-and cultural suppression		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	4
EDUCATION				
-traditional		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	5
INDIAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF				
-paternalism		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	4
METIS				
		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6,7
MISSIONARIES				
-as agents of assimilation		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	5
NAMES (PERSONAL)				
-origins of		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	2
TREATY #7				
-and Crowfoot		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6
TREATY #7				
-interpretation of		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6,7
TREATY #7				
-and the Metis		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6,7
TREATY #7				
-taking of		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	6
VALUES				
-respect		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	5
WORLD WAR II				
-overseas experiences		WOLFLEGSR.2	7	2