GEORGE FIRST RIDER

George First Rider of the Blood Reserve was born in 1904. He had no formal schooling but became an accomplished horseman and worked for a time on the rodeo circuit. After working as a farmer he ended up in jail as a result of alcoholism and theft. He attributes his reform to his conversion to Christianity.

He prides himself on his ability as a storyteller and on his knowledge of Blood culture, particularly the holy societies many of which he joined as a young man.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Describes the Sundance ritual.

George First Rider: Okay, the story, the things that I am illustrating, I hope that whoever is going to listen to clearly understands what I am saying. There are a few of us at my age. There are some that don't talk very good and there are some that will not sing good. Myself, I beginning not to sing so good. I was educated in singing and how to put the words in the song, that is why I know everything so good and I was also educated in drumming, that is why I know how to drum. Some people are not educated and they don't word the songs right and they don't know the meaning of words. I use high Indian words on the tape and I interpret and tell the meaning of the words. I haven't given any illustration of the Holy Sundance Lodge.
I'm just giving informations of what the facial paintings are.

Now the strengthening of the bodies of the boys. We want them to be aggressive, that is why they are thrown in the snow bare and that is why they are dipped in water. This way we'll know who are good and healthy and brave. A man is travelling. He is travelling with his offering. He was going around with it crying for mercy. He didn't drink and didn't eat. Then he took his pipe and his offering. His offering is a reddish litter, a reddish litter. A buffalo calf, their color is yellow, a reddish yellow color. That is the kind of an offering he had. The crosspiece, and there is another crosspiece lower, the hide is tied to these. The front legs of the hide were tied to each end of the top crosspiece and the same with the hind legs. Its head is tied to the straight up part of the structure. The head is tied with sage grass and also on each of its front legs. There are no feathers and the inside of the hide was yellow ochred. The man went around with his offering crying for mercy.

The man did not go out to sleep in the wilderness, he went out crying for mercy. When he slept he saw a Sundance Lodge. He went to the people in his dream. A man told him, "Look at this man." As he looked the man was painted with white clay all over his body and some sage grass were tied to his ankles. Sage grass were tied on his wrists and two holes were punctured on his right shoulder and a rawhide thong was threaded through the holes and a shield was tied to the thongs. The shield was tied to his skin and two holes were punctured on each side of his chest and thongs were threaded through these holes and they were tied on to a long thong to the top of the centre lodge pole. Black ochre was painted around the man's face with red ochre on the chin. The sun was drawn on the right side and on the left side the sundogs were drawn and on the forehead was drawn the first quarter of the moon and the last quarter of the moon was drawn on the chin of the man. The whistle was coated with white clay; a long thong was tied to the whistle for wearing around the neck. After the man was tied up the singers prayed. The man hugged the centre pole. He said, "Today my vow is fulfilled so that I may be very old and to be successful and for me to become a chief is now fulfilled." Then he cried. The man was watching him. After the tortured man had cried, he was whooping, then he grabbed the thongs that were tied to the skin on his chest and tried pulling on them and he was whooping. As he jerked on the thongs the drummers sang.

TORTURE SONG - no lyrics.

The song is sung four times. He didn't dance to the Sundance Lodge songs, he danced to this one song. When the drummers started to sing the man raised his hands high and blew on his whistle -- Kchus, Kchus, Kchus, Kchus. He was just slowly leaning back. When he leaned far back his skin tore off on one side. When the skin broke on one side, one thong was still holding and it also broke off. The man fell on his back. As
he fell backwards he jumped up and grabbed his shield and tore
it off from his skin and threw away the shield. The other man
told him, "You will do the same as he did." When the tortured
man tore the shield from his skin he then again went up to the
centre pole and cried for mercy at it. He did this to give
himself strength and self-sacrificed himself to the sun because
he believed in the sun. The people of the past believed in the
sun. The people of the past claim that the sun created them.
They say the sun feeds us. All the various kinds of berries
are ripened by the sun and the sun also ripens the grass the
buffalo eats, the grass and the flowers. So that is what the
people say, that is why they sacrifice themselves to the sun,
that is how the self-torture originated.

A man who just died lately who actually went through the
self-torture, his name is Heavy Head. That's how his name is
in English, Heavy Head; his other name is Elk White. I joined
the Horn Society with this man (Heavy Head). I joined in with
him on the third time I joined in the Horn Society. We were
the nine Horn Society. Heavy Head owned the Swan Staff,
Running Bird owned the Staff with the Arm Band, I (First Rider)
owned the Associated Staff and I go on errands for Heavy Head
and Running Bird. Three of us were friends amongst the
members. Heavy Head told me a story. He said that it was
restricted for us not to go on the warpath any more. "I (Heavy
Head) said, 'I'll go through the self-torture at the Sundances
that I may not be caught while I am on the warpath and so that
I may bring back home a horse safely.' So we were on the
warpath; we headed for the Crow Indians. I was the spy. They
didn't even tie their horses. Our leader was Low Horn." Heavy
Head said, "I stole a roan-colored horse and as we fled Low
Horn turned around and charged back at the two outriders of the
Crows. He (Low Horn) killed one of them and wounded one rider.
The wounded rider didn't fall from its horse but turned around
and fled. Why I wear a tail feather headpiece, it's on account
of the Crow Indian that he (Low Horn) killed." That is what

Heavy Head said. "When we got home the Sundance Lodge was
about to be erected. I told the people what was to take place.
My friend and me both made our vows at the same time to go
through the self-torture." He (Heavy Head) and his friend, A
Forehead's... his friend's name is Punk but he called him A
Forehead. "We both made a vow at the same time to go through
the self-torture. The Sundance camps were on the northeast
side of the Belly Butte. That was the Riot Sundance. We went
through the self-torture at the time of the riot at the
Sundance." That is how he told the story to me. "I (Heavy
Head) said, 'Now I will go through the self-torture,' so I was
taken to the Sundance Lodge tipi. I had stripped myself
already," he (Heavy Head) said, "I didn't wear moccasins." Heavy
Head said, "Maybe they wore moccasins after. Their
moccasins are coated with white clay; me I didn't wear
moccasins at that time."

He (Heavy Head) said, "I was painted first before I went
through the self-torture. I was painted with white clay all
over my body and on my head, feet and on my hands." And around
his face was painted with black ochre at a finger width and
down to the tip of his nose, and above the black line on the
forehead the crescent of the moon was there and it was also on
his chin. On the side the sun was drawn and on the left cheek
bone the sundogs were drawn. They were drawn and with red
ochre. The red ochre represent the blood. Sage grass were
tied to his wrists. A person that is caught pulling tipi pegs
and he is tied to a travois, woman sage grass are tied to his
wrists. And a person that went through the self-torture, man
sage grass are tied around the person's wrists and ankles.
Sage grass were twisted and are tied around the person's head
for a crown.

When the person was ready, a knife was sharpened on a
sandstone. The edge of the knife was rough after it is
sharpened. A green willow was heated. It didn't burn but it
was drying up by the heat then it was planed on both sides and
then the willow was pressed against the skin on one side of the
chest of the man then the skin was cut with the rough-edged
knife. "It took quite a while to cut the skin open," he (Heavy
Head) said, "I thought my heart was being cut." Before his
skin was cut open they told him (Heavy Head), "How do you want
to have your skin cut? Do you want to have your skin cut, do
you want to have it cut thick or thin?" He (Heavy Head) said
somebody advised him to say, "Cut my skin open thick." Instead
of cutting your skin thick they will cut it open thin. If you
say, "Cut my skin thin," they will cut it open thick. He
(Heavy Head) said, "I told them, 'Cut my skin thick,' so they
cut it thin and then the thong was threaded through the holes
in my skin. The same thing was done to the other side of my
chest. The thong was threaded through the holes in my skin.
My chest was bloody. I laid face down and I (Heavy Head) told
them, 'Cut my skin in my back real thick.' My skin burned when
it was cut. After my skin was cut open my back, a thong was
threaded through the holes in my skin and a shield was tied to
the thong that was threaded through the holes in my skin."-

Heavy Head said, "The cutting of my skin took place in the Holy
Woman's tipi." Others that told stories said that a person
will have his skin cut open right in the Sundance Lodge. He
(Heavy Head) said, "Myself, my skin was cut open in the Holy
Woman's tipi," and he started dancing out from the tipi. The
human effigy maker* accompanied him in the dance. They danced
also to one song.

DANCE SONG: No lyrics.

They were made to dance to the Holy Sundance Lodge. The human
effigy maker took his position inside where he dances and Heavy
Head took his position by the centre pole. Heavy Head said,
"The long ropes of rawhide thongs were tied to the centre pole
and my friend, A Forehead, was on the opposite side." He
(Heavy Head) said, "The way my wounds burned at the time my
skin was cut, the burn never ceases. The ropes were threaded
through the holes that were cut in my skin." They were not the
ropes that we have now, the others are rawhide ropes. Heavy
Head was tied with the rawhide ropes, not with an ordinary rope. They are not the kind that we call apikch (rope). They are called apihs (rope); the others are called apihs (rope). He (Heavy Head) was tied with the ropes. He was not tied with a rope, he (Heavy Head) was tied with ropes. It is two ways, apihs, our rope nowadays, and the other one apihs. And if we call it in full we call it a real rope (rawhide rope), and the rope we have now is called the fabric rope. After they were tied, Heavy Head hugged the centre pole and prayed. After he got through praying he cried. He cried for mercy to the sun. After he was through crying for mercy to the sun he (Heavy Head) stepped backwards and raised his arm and he was whooping and he was rushed.

DANCE SONG - no lyrics

He (Heavy Head) danced four times. He (Heavy Head) leaned real far back. He said, "My skin was unable to break. The reason was, I slightly move forward at times. I did this because the agony was too much." While he (Heavy Head) was still leaning back a man by the name of Eagle Black took a stick -- it is called the crosspiece of a travois -- hit the thong with the stick and the skin broke. He (Heavy Head) said, "As he was going to hit the other thong I tried to hold him back." This was Eagle Black. As Heavy Head was trying to protect himself, Wolf Chief grabbed him by the hair and pulled him backwards and the other side broke too. The same thing was done to Punk; his other name is Red Tipi Poles. He was holding the man back keeping him from breaking the thongs loose and he was really crying. Heavy Head was crying too but he was crying for mercy to the Great Spirit. Eagle Black turned over Heavy Head on its face. Eagle Black counted a coup. He said, "We stole some horses at Hard Duck Neck. We fled and stopped to cook. While we were cooking the enemy charged. We got up and fled. We left our horses behind. One of the enemy riders got up to me and jumped off from his horse and I charged back at him and I stabbed him in the chest. I killed him so that I may cut this body." So his (Heavy Head) skin was cut where the wounds were and the shield was loose. Heavy Head's skin didn't break, it was cut and gunpowder was applied on the wounds. After they both went through the self-torture they went away from the camps. He (Heavy Head) said, "That is why we didn't know anything about the riot at the Sundance. I (Heavy Head) went down the river. I came to the old Agency which is situated by a cut bank that is called Whirling Wind." Heavy Head was on the west side of the river and when night came he slept by a
hill. Wolf Chief was the cause of the riot with the RCMP force. A war nearly broke out at that time. The Blood Indians in ambush, if the police force came they open fire on them.

Heavy Head's relatives started to search for him, calling for him, but his relatives didn't find him. Heavy Head woke up the next morning in agony. He started walking. The search party found him while he (Heavy Head) was walking on top of a hill by a schoolhouse which is situated on an island called Big Island. He rode home. They told him, "We are going to fight the white man." When they came home everything had settled down. He (Heavy Head) was treated on his wounds. He (Heavy Head) said, "My friends and others laughed at me for being treated on my wounds. In the past, men that went through the self-torture were never treated on their wounds. Their wounds will heal up without any treatment but I was treated on my wounds. And my friend really cried at the Sundance Lodge when he cried for mercy to the sun." Those two (Heavy Head and A Forehead) were the last two men that went through the self-torture and after that the self-torture was prohibited. A white woman saw them how they were tortured. The white woman fainted for seeing them how they were tortured and the police put a stop to it. So those were the last two men that went through the self-torture at the Sundance Lodge where they had the riot.

Some men made a vow after to go through the self-torture but there were some that will report anybody that goes through the self-torture so there was never any more self-torture and today the self-torture has extinct. Heavy Head is the man that I (First Rider) know that went through the self-torture. He (Heavy Head) told me how his skin was cut open and how he was painted and what I heard from the old people they claim that the self-torture originated from a vision. A person will transfer the self-torture to another man but if the man that he transferred the self-torture to is not successful in life and remains poor the man that transferred the self-torture will transfer the self-torture again to another person. And if the new recipient is successful with what is transferred to him he will have the rights to transfer the self-torture. So that is how there were so many self-tortures. The people traced back all the men that went through the self-torture and found that the men that went through the self-torture did not live long because they offer themselves to the sun.

The effigy makers will see a facial painting on the centre pole. They will see a man on the centre pole with its face painted and they will paint their faces just like the man that they saw on the lodge centre pole. There are compartments all around the inside of a Cree Sundance Lodge and in each of these compartments each dancer will sit in. Even women will dance. This is called the Cree effigy making and the dancers will have their paints ready in front of them for changing their facial paintings. Mirrors just came lately. Before that there are two dancers. When one gets a vision he will tell his partner, "Paint my face like this," and when he gets up to dance he will
have his face painted different. Those are the ones that will not eat for four nights and four days; they spend four days in the lodge.

The effigy makers are the ones that saw the offering in a vision, a buffalo calf skin or whatever it will be. The buffalo calf skin is painted yellow. When it was painted yellow a circular frame is attached to the frame structure for the painted hide. The buffalo calf skin is painted yellow, or it might be an ordinary calf skin. It is painted yellow and the sundogs are drawn on it too and the sun. That is the offering. The calf skin offering is tied to the top of the centre pole. A circular frame is attached on top of the frame for the hide. Seven sticks are tied to this circular frame. The sticks are tied together at the bottom spreading out to the top. The seven sticks are also tied to the top of the frame. A proud Indian will attach eagle feathers (tail) to each one of the seven sticks. Lately it differed. As long as an offering has wing feathers on it it doesn't matter. Before, people will use eagle tail feathers, seven eagle tail feathers. Other people's offerings, the tail feathers will be bound with quills; that is their offering. The offering is not just taken to the Holy Lodge. The Horns will go around the camps to gather up the offerings and to take them to the Sundance Lodge. The offerings will be tied to the poles, so the Holy Woman's shawl will also be tied to the poles. A person will make an offering with an eagle. He'll just spread out the eagle on a hill and offer it to the sun. He will rely on the offering in the future.

When a person is old he will be invited to a Group Smoking ceremony. Four old men that made many offerings are the ones that sing about the hide that has drawings on it. When singing starts, an old man will say, "How come you don't know me? I am the one that gave you a painted hide at a certain place. It had paintings on it and tied to a frame with tail feathers attached up on top. It was tied to the centre pole for the sponsorer of the Holy Lodge." The singer will sing about the offerings that he made; he will call the sponsorers of Holy Lodge. The Group Smoking originated from the offerings; people will use them at Groups Smokings. A young man is not qualified yet to sing about his offerings. People will sing about their offerings when they are old; this is just like confessing the properties that they gave away for nothing. The old people that participated in the Holy Sundance Lodge will retire at this stage; that is when they come to the Group Smoking stage. So's the Holy Woman. She will retire at this stage after she is not eligible to sponsor a Sundance.

The Holy Woman will sing about the Sundance Lodges that she sponsored. That is why there are Sundance necklaces all over. We sing about the sacred bundles that were transferred; we sing about them at Group Smoking ceremonies. This is from the Sundance Lodge. So I end my story.
NOTE: The informant gave more information about the self-tortures and the offerings in the Sundance Lodge than the Sundance Lodge.

INDEX

INDEX TERM           IH NUMBER       DOC NAME   DISC #      PAGE #

CEREMONIES
-Sundance (Blackfoot) IH-AA.072       SNDCE LDGE   54          2-8