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The Massacre of the Blackfoot

By Dónal Thompson



History is written by the winners and the shameful history of the treatment of the North American Indians is no exception.

In 1870 A colonel Eugene Baker added another page to the annals of infamy when he ordered the killing of a peaceful tribe of Blackfoot Indians in North Montana.

Baker was a drinker and a sadist. He had been appointed to track down a Blackfoot warrior called Owl Child who was accused of the revenge killing of a settler who had cruelly whipped him.

On the morning of January 23rd 1870 Baker and his soldiers had come across and surrounded a winter settlement of a Blackfoot tribe. Joe Kipp, Baker's scout, saw that the designs on the Indians' tents showed them to be a peaceful part of the Blackfoot nation.

Baker didn't care. What was worse he had Kipp detained so he couldn't warn the innocent sleeping Indians about the callous Baker's imminent attack.

134 years ago that morning 37 men, 90 women and 50 children slept peacefully and innocently in their beds.

Then the evil Colonel Baker gave the order to attack and soldiers tried to burn them all alive.

Some prisoners were taken but when seen to be suffering from smallpox, they were turned out into the harsh Montana winter, with no food and no shelter. This brutal episode became known as the "Marias Massacre" - after the nearby river.

To be fair, many Americans were outraged by what happened. But Baker's superiors were supportive of the beast's actions. He never faced a court martial for behaviour that would have been condemned in any court of a civilised country of the time.



Long Standing Bear - Blackfoot Chief

The Blackfoot nation survived this and I am sure many other ignomies. Nowadays they have their own website <http://www.blackfoot.org/> where you can learn about their traditions and even buy a tipi (tent/home) for under \$800! Just the thing to survive an Iberian winter!

In modern times, with mass media hysteria and the global economy we sometimes forget the gentle heroism of relatively small communities and small nations. When the dominant culture turns it's considerable force to annihilating the small people, heroism can be the simple if painful act of surviving, bearing witness.

In the case of the Blackfoot that long standing heroism comes from a deep reservoir of spiritual strength.