



February 4, 2019

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

The Vice President  
The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Patrick M. Shanahan  
Acting Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

General Joseph F. Dunford Jr.  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Secretary and Mr. Chairman:

Last month, the President of the United States mentioned the Wounded Knee Massacre in a comment directed at a political opponent. This letter is not to explain the wrong done in invoking this horror. My United States Senators have already deemed the statement “inappropriate.”

Instead, I write to call on you to right a much graver wrong. I formally request the removal of the Medals of Honor awarded to 20 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment for their participation in the “Wounded Knee Massacre.”

Though this demand has been made previously, on behalf of the tens of millions of patriotic Americans who know what is right and just, I simply ask you use your authority to now, finally, correct this injustice.

The “Battle at Wounded Knee” on December 29, 1890 was no battle. It was a massacre.

United States soldiers murdered innocent women and children. Many of my ancestors were among the Lakota people murdered that chilling winter day. Those innocent Lakota people had committed no crime. They were making no war. Rather, they were seeking hope and refuge on the frozen Plains of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation while the United States continued to violate the Treaties of 1851 and 1868.

The 7th Cavalry, which was obligated by treaty to protect my ancestors, instead hunted my ancestors, surrounded them and gunned hundreds of them down. This included terrified women and children who fled – defenseless – through the snow, forever stained by their blood.

As told by Hugh McGinnis, “All this happened 74 years ago at Wounded Knee Creek, where soldiers of the 7th Cavalry massacred in cold blood Indian men, women and children. I am now 94, the last surviving member of Troop K, 7th Cavalry. The 74 years have never completely erased the ghastly horror of that scene and I still awake at night from nightmarish dreams of that massacre. The news that I am the only surviving member of the 7th Cavalry at that massacre brings back many memories to me.”

For this atrocity, 20 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment received the highest honor awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for exceptional “gallantry” in battle. The murderers of Wounded Knee committed no gallantry. They committed an atrocity that stains the honor of the United States Armed Services to this day.

In this time of duly heightened sensitivity to violence against women and children, in a political era where national leaders appear to be willing to bring front and center discussion of the history and current issues of America’s indigenous people, the Lakota people and all our Native American Indian brothers and sisters, the time is right to return to Wounded Knee. The time is right to hear the cries of my ancestors from that frozen and bloodied landscape.

No earthly power can bring my ancestors back to life. But the United States can stop honoring the men who butchered those defenseless Lakota women and children in cold blood.

Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Secretary and Mr. Chairman, remove the medals from the 20 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. Take back honor wrongly bestowed. Restore honor to the Medal of Honor itself, to the brave soldiers who have earned that Medal in real wars, against real enemies. Restore some measure of justice to my people who suffered and died at the hands of those dishonorable murderers.

Remove the 20 Medals of Honor issued to the perpetrators of the Wounded Knee Massacre and lead our great nation into a real conversation about doing right for the Americans who have been here since time immemorial.

Our Nation’s honor demands it.

Most respectfully,

*O.J. Semans*

O.J. Semans, United States Navy Veteran  
Co-Executive Director, Four Directions

cc: The Honorable John Thune  
The Honorable Mike Rounds