

A tribute to a First World War warrior

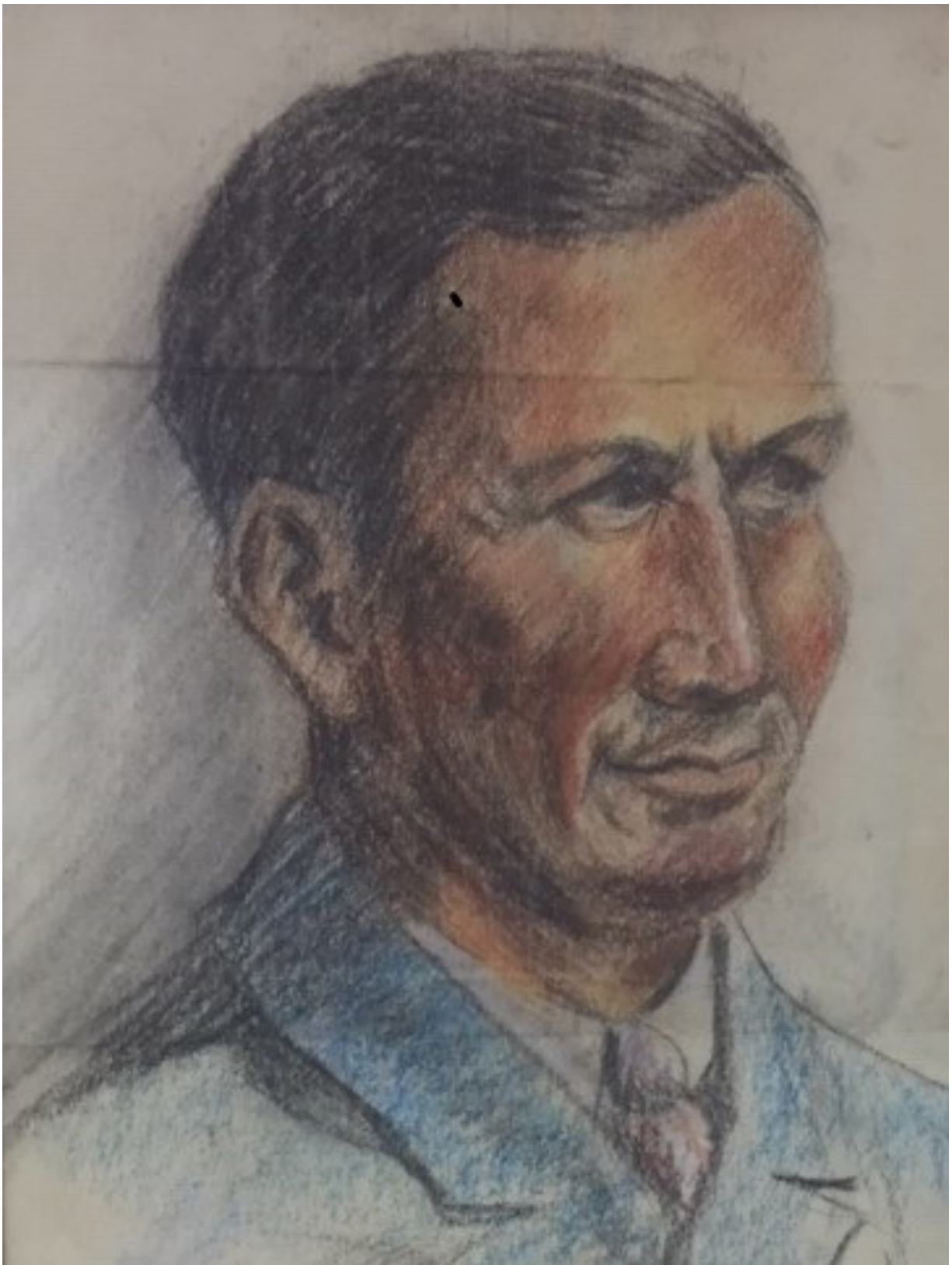


***“The Dirty Old Indian”* MY CANADIAN HERO**

He lived the beautiful image the world has of CANADA

By

TOM SINDLINGER



MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE

(ca. 1888 – 1964)

by

Mike Pisko, 1938

***“The Dirty Old Indian”* MY CANADIAN HERO**

High and unequivocal praise for Mike Mountain Horse,
an inspiring and courageous warrior
who was buried for four days and wounded three times in World War I.
He was elected a minor chief of his tribe and elected president of a Lethbridge railway union
an astonishing combination!

This story is set during a time when Indigenous People were referred to as Indians
and therefore that term is used for historical truth.

Additionally, ~~Canada’s Indians were governed, as they still are, by the “Indian Act”.~~
The *Act* is the source of flagrant institutionalized discrimination
that officially perpetuates the word Indian.

Published by

THE LETHBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving & promoting SW Alberta & Lethbridge history;
researching & enjoying history
Contact: lethbridgehistory.org/contact

and

2514537 ALBERTA SOCIETY

Creating, developing, producing, and publishing
literary and theatrical Alberta originals
Contact dirtyoldindiancanadianhero.org

First edition January 2024

FOREWORD

In late 2023, the Lethbridge Historical Society was approached by the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta to guide this booklet through the publishing process.

We were delighted to take on the challenge and are honoured to be a small part of this project.

Not only because the Lethbridge Historical Society takes seriously our role in publishing southern Alberta history so it is accessible to as many people as possible, but because the history of Mike Mountain Horse is a powerful and worthy story that deserves to be told, retold and shared.

Mike Mountain Horse's life of a leader, a soldier, a labourer, a union-worker, a family man and so much more is inspirational. It is no surprise that the decision was made to name a school in his honour as he is definitely a person who can encourage youth (and all of us) to strive and build a better community, a better world.

While this booklet was inspired by the personal memories and stories that exist within a family, it also has a deeper meaning. Indigenous histories and stories need to be told so we all know the truth of our communities and places. It is vital that we do this to help move our country forward.

On behalf of the Lethbridge Historical Society, I congratulate Tom Sindlinger for the creation of this booklet and look forward to seeing what other projects are inspired by this work.

Belinda Crowson
President, Lethbridge Historical Society, 2023

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THE LEGACY OF MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE

The inspiring message in Mike Mountain Horse’s legacy
is that together we can live
the beautiful image the world has of Canada:

*The heart
and soul
of CANADA*



*Embrace this Canadian home,
take it to your heart.*

*It is your home,
my home,
our home.*

*It is a home rich with
magnificent mountains
wild horses, and
hunting hawks*

*Our home represents our values,
tolerance and respect,
rights and responsibilities.*

*We share these riches and values,
then leave a little of ourselves
for future generations,
just as others before
did for us.*

*Embrace our Canadian home,
take it to your heart.*

*And its riches and values
will make your heart ...*

*Strong like a mountain ...
Spirited like a horse ... and
Soar like a hawk!*



ORIGIN OF THE TITLE “THE DIRTY OLD INDIAN”

Mike Mountain Horse was employed as a Wiper of coal-fired steam engines. He came home from work very dirty, his traditional striped, gray railway bib-overalls covered in coal dust. His face was covered too, but it was not noticeable as he was so dark skinned.



**NO BEER
SOLD TO
INDIANS**

He was confident and was well liked by his fellow workers who elected him president of their labour union. To celebrate his election, they took him for celebratory beer, but he could not drink with them because it was against the law for Indians to go into beer parlours.

Mike had to sit alone in the corner of the beer parlour, the bartender turning a blind eye because the railway workers who brought Mike in were his regular customers, and the bartender wanted their business.

Mike took much pleasure many times describing the scene to me. Vigorously jabbing his finger into the air, he would mimic the non-Indians in the bar who would point at him and say, “look at that dirty old Indian”, that dirty old Indian being him, and every time, as though it was the first time he was telling it, he would laugh loudly.

Mike would laugh every time he told the story, because *he was dirty* *he was old* and *he was proud to be called an Indian*. He was saying he was confident and satisfied with the things he had done. That is enough for anyone.

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SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY

A story honouring a leader, patriot, and a visionary — MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE, Kainai warrior and Lethbridge leader.

LEADER

Elected a minor chief of his tribe, elected president of a non-Indian railway labour union, captain of Calgary Indian school soccer team, president of Residential school alumni association.

PATRIOT

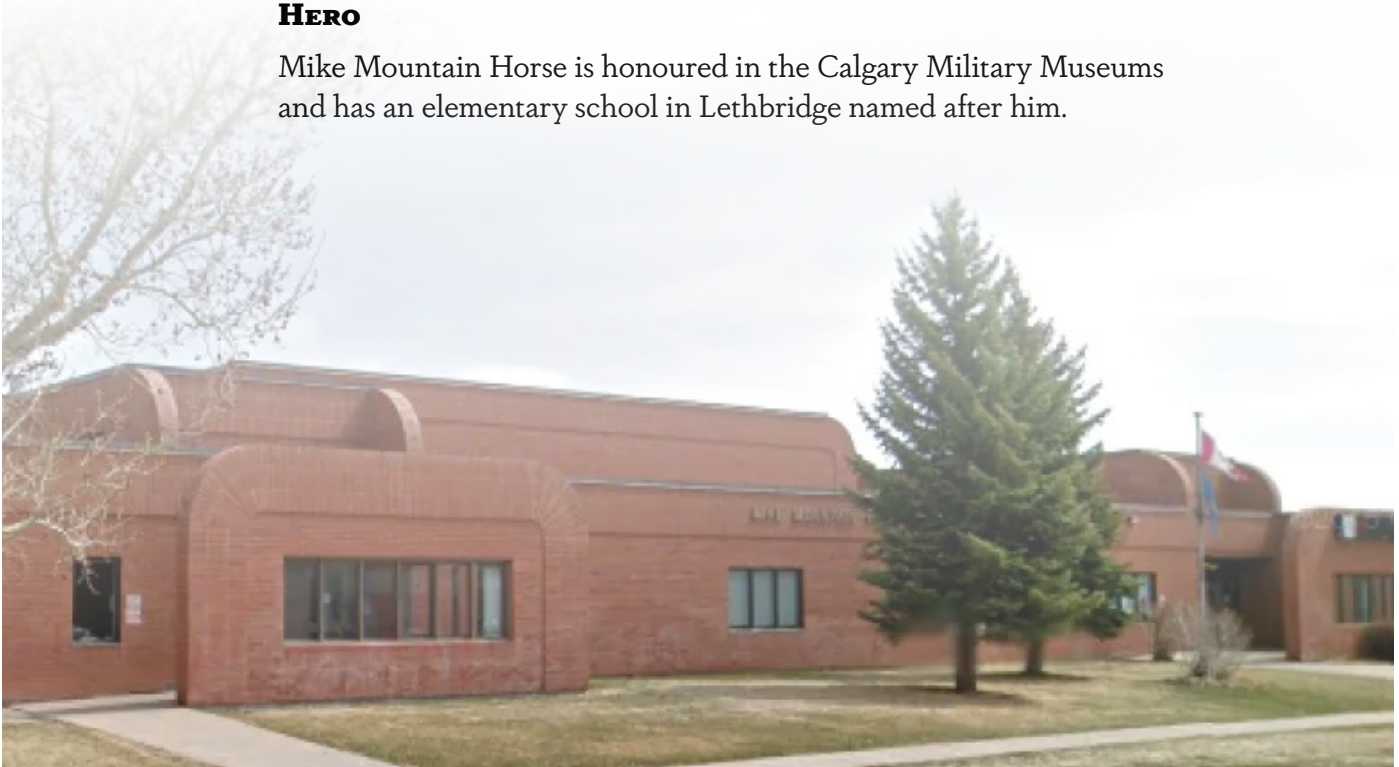
Decorated World War I warrior, wounded three times (once dangerously, “not expected to live”), buried for four days from a shell explosion.

VISIONARY

Formed the *Alberta All Indian Legion*; founder and president of the *Allied Tribes of Western Canada*, a precursor of the *National Indian Brotherhood* and eventually the current *Assembly of First Nations*.

HERO

Mike Mountain Horse is honoured in the Calgary Military Museums and has an elementary school in Lethbridge named after him.



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THE STORYTELLER

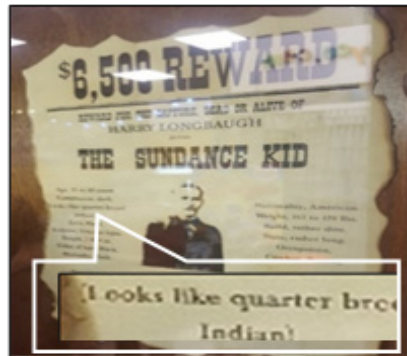
In the Crossroads Market in Calgary there is a reward poster for the capture of the Sundance Kid. He is described as having black eyes and Grecian features which is, I suppose, related to things Greek. The notable identifying descriptor, however, is the line that says he” LOOKS LIKE QUARTER BREED INDIAN”.

While the rendering of the Sundance Kid is rather nondescript, in visualizing what a quarter-breed Indian looks like, I refer to the picture of this author on the next page.

The author’s mother was half-breed and her mother, Mary Mountain Horse, was full-breed, daughter of Wolf Moccasin (aka Flying Chief aka Potaina aka Joe Healy) and Double Gun Woman. Mom said Wolf Moccasin was a scary looking dude but Double Gun Woman, who never cared much for English, was a very kind gentle woman.

This makes the author a quarter-breed, which is obvious from his Grecian features.

(Continued on the next page)



Wolf Moccasin and Double Gun Woman
(Provincial Archives of Alberta)





Tom Sindlinger lived the first twenty-three years of his life during the last twenty-three years life of his sociological grandfather Mike Mountain Horse; and his biological grandmother Mary Healy, from their unpainted clapboard house in the displaced persons' neighborhood of Lethbridge, to teepees just inside the Calgary Stampede main gate, to the Sun Dance at Belly Flats.

He served as a Select Committee Member of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, \$17 billion dollars symbolizing the economic and political blooming of Alberta. It was a unique vantage point to a short-lived national political perturbation.

He was the only Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly at the time to vocally support the patriation of the CANADIAN CONSTITUTION and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Tom Sindlinger is an International Economic Analyst with a focus on marketing and transportation of natural resources, and governance.

He successfully completed 19 projects in 12 countries for both private and public entities.

The Alberta and The Lethbridge Sports Halls of Fame inducted him in recognition of his contribution to Alberta and Canadian championship basketball teams.

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SHORT FICTION BASED ON MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE

“The Dirty Old Indian” MY CANADIAN HERO

Only the top half of the medal could be seen. The ribbon attached to it floated on a thin layer of urine.

In the other corner of the backyard *Siksikasomitai* (a fictitious name) was preparing a new place for the outhouse.

His name was not Benjamin Gladstone. His name was *Siksikasomitai*, as given by his mother, but the English recruiting officer could not understand this. So, like hundreds of immigration officers who did not understand new arrivals to Canada, the World War I recruiting officer arbitrarily assigned him an English name and a birth date. The officer chose Gladstone after the officer’s favourite English Prime Minister, and his given name, Benjamin, after Gladstone’s rival Benjamin Disraeli. *Siksikasomitai* had no idea what a birthday was, but it did not matter because his residential school did not have birthdays.

This was *Siksikasomitai*’s introduction to the vagaries of non-Indian life “in a hurry”. He was no longer isolated from the real world by Reserve life — the *Indian Curtain*. The introduction was amplified by his first time on a train from the enlistment centre to the training camp in Calgary which today is marked on a hillside by white-washed rocks on the southwestern edge of the City. From this hillside, the army practised lobbing shells across the Elbow River onto the *Tsuut’ina Reserve*. To this day, the residents of the Reserve detonate unexploded shells that emerge above ground with the Spring thaw.

The young recruits at the camp, boisterously anticipating a romantic vision of wartime adventure and heroism, buddied-up and gave each other nicknames. To them, the nickname for Gladstone was obvious: “Happy Rock”, but to *Siksikasomitai* it didn’t mean anything, so he laughed along with his fellow recruits.

The nickname turned into a life-long wound that he deeply resented as it mocked his heritage — a resentment he never expressed until he was on his death bed.

From Calgary, *Siksikasomitai* was sent to Montreal where he and 1,500 other soldiers were packed into 3rd class below deck on a ship bound for South Hampton. The steamship, *Ascania*, was attacked by submarines but escaped due to its superior speed of thirteen knots over the submarine’s speed of just four knots. For *Siksikasomitai*, never crowded by more than those inside his family teepee, the ocean voyage side by side with 1,500 other bodies combined with the bone chilling fear from a submarine attack, the voyage was a life changer. However, the horror

of three years in the trenches in France would make the ocean crossing a pleasure cruise in comparison.

(On a subsequent sailing the *Ascania* ran aground and sank off the southwestern coast of Newfoundland. Strangely, there were no fatalities. That would be made up for in the carnage of the trenches in France.)

Siksikasomitai received three-weeks training (that is, marching, the purpose

FROM A TEEPEE BENEATH OLD CHIEF
MOUNTAIN TO TRAINS, SHIPS, AND TRENCH
WAFARE IT WAS MORE THAN JUST CULTURE
SHOCK, IT WAS ENORMOUS TRAUMA.

of which was to inculcate unquestioned obedience to orders) in England before being sent to France. It gave him a chance to settle from the ocean crossing, and to be shocked by the lifestyle of the English, although given his meagre free time his exposure was limited to that around his camp, and even that was limited by his obvious ethnic difference which would leave him on the periphery. His exposure was mostly to the “camp followers” who hung around “outside the barracks by the corner light”. Nevertheless, he and his fellow Indian soldiers were favoured customers of the camp followers who were, however, disappointed by Siksikasomitai because he had his pay assigned to his mother in Canada.

Siksikasomitai, a full-blooded Indian, fought and was wounded three times in battles at Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Amiens, and Cambrai. One of the wounds was categorized as “dangerously wounded”, which at the time was a euphemism for “not expected to live”.

For the first time in wars, tanks were used at Cambrai, creating mass fear in the enemy, just as Hannibal’s elephants had when they were first used in battles. The tanks were an innovation implemented by Winston Churchill while he served as the Minister of Munitions. Before becoming Minister, Churchill had been First Lord of The Admiralty but was fired because of the disastrous defeat at Gallipoli that he had orchestrated despite fierce Cabinet opposition.

The trip across the channel to France was short compared to the trip across the Atlantic. It took him directly to Vimy Ridge where Canadians suffered more than ten thousand casualties in taking an objective that French and British troops had several times failed to do. In preparing for the battle to take the Ridge, at different times the Canadian officers sent 60 raiding parties across no-man’s-land for the purpose of

gathering information, but their primary effect was terrorizing the enemy. For the enemy, the Canadians became the most feared of troops.

Much of the success of the Canadians in terrorizing the enemy was owed to the participation of Indians who would strip down and crawl into enemy trenches where they would scalp Germans, an action Canadian officers with a modicum of contrition would call “scouting”. *Siksikasomitai* was one of these raiders. During his service, his knife would dispatch three enemy in hand-to-hand combat. He recorded in a post-war book that he was carrying on the “warrior tradition” of his “People” by demonstrating that they were still warriors.

Indians were segregated in a way that today is considered racist. Most, if not all, of the over four thousand Indians who served in World War I were segregated into squads rather than being integrated with all the troops, much like the Black American experience in their military until post World War II when President Truman ordered desegregation of the service. The difference between Black and Indian military segregation was that Indians were given guns to point at the enemy. The American military was not as confident, given how Black people were treated in America, in which direction the guns would be pointed.

BURIED FOUR DAYS, ENEMY SOLDIERS
ATE THEIR LUNCH WHILE SITTING ON
THE DEBRIS COVERING MIKE.

After the war, *Siksikasomitai* recorded his war experiences on a calf robe. Using stickman characters, the robe had twelve drawings of his battle experiences. He used this to illustrate stories he told to school children. The story most liked by children was the one where he was buried for four days by an exploding shell while on one of his night-time raids. He was in an enemy trench when one of his own shell explosions buried him. While buried, enemy soldiers would eat their rations while sitting on the debris covering him.

However, teachers, feeling the details of his war battles were too graphic for young children, would caution him. For example, children did not need to know the details of his knife struggles with enemies or that he shot others in trenches, one of them a German officer who shot him first.

General Byng, the English commander, asked the general of the “colonial” troops (that is Canadians, among others) to bring to their next meeting “one of those Indian fellows” he was hearing so much about. He wanted to present a Distinguished Conduct Medal to *Siksikasomitai*.

The general, upon being introduced to *Siksikasomitai* at the medal presentation ceremony, perhaps thinking he was being cordial instead of perfunctory, flippantly asked “how ya doin chief”. *Siksikasomitai* considered the greeting and its tone to be disrespectful. He instantly reacted by dropping his salute and sauntered away.

The presentation ceremony was unceremoniously ended, the medal was handed to Canadian General Currie who put it into his pocket to give to *Siksikasomitai* at a more agreeable time. It went through time and many pockets before going into *Siksikasomitai*'s pocket when he was casually told he was now an Acting Sergeant.

After the War, *Siksikasomitai* wore the medal and his sergeant stripes on the train home where the soldiers in the car jeered him shout-ing “hey chief, where’s your feathers?”. The War over, military discipline ended, along with respect for the uniform and the Indian.

There was much respect however for *Siksikasomitai* when he returned to his Reserve. He was an honoured warrior and eventually elected a minor chief, but he had experienced modern life in the outside world, and he could not settle back into the primitive lifestyle of the Reserve. He left to live in a city, but he did not forget where he came from. It became obvious to him that his People were treated in a

way which allowed society to neglect the rights of Indians, especially regarding land ownership. Without consulting Indians, the Canadian Government was often seen re-classifying Indian land for non-Indian use and at times selling some of the land to non-Indians.

Siksikasomitai began writing letters to editors of newspapers denouncing these practices and demanding remedial actions. The points he made in the letters were confirmed and many were of legal authority and quality in their structure and arguments.

He did not go unnoticed, but he was inherently aware that letters to the editors lasted only until the next day’s newspapers. For meaningful change, Indians needed political power and that meant collective action, which he organized by calling for an assembly. Over two thousand Indians from western Canada gathered at a small town close to his Reserve. There they formed *The Allied Tribes of Western Canada*; *Siksikasomitai* was its first president. The alliance eventually evolved into a modern national political lobbying force.

More than fifty-seven newspaper articles around North America noted *Siksikasomitai*'s achievement: newspapers such as the Edmonton Journal, The Province (B.C.), The Los Angeles Star, The Desert News (Salt Lake City), The Miami Herald, and The North Bay Nugget (Thunder Bay), among others.

He used his leadership abilities in his non-native community as well. At the railway where he worked, he was elected president of the labour union. An astoundingly unique achievement for an indigenous person, anywhere in the world — a minor Chief (his native society) and a labour president (his functional society)! *Siksikasomitai* succeeded in the modern world while still maintaining his cultural heritage.

Siksikasomitai was employed as wiper of railway engines that were fueled by coal. He therefore came home from work very dirty, his traditional striped, gray-bibbed

overalls covered in coal dust. Well liked by his co-workers, they invited him for a beer after they had elected him president of their union. They went to a small beer parlour, but *Siksikasomitai* could not drink with them because it was against the law to sell beer to Indians. A big red sign at the entrance said, "NO BEER SOLD TO INDIANS". *Siksikasomitai* had to sit alone in a corner, the bartender turning a blind eye as the railway workers who brought *Siksikasomitai* were his regular customers, and he wanted their business.

Many times, *Siksikasomitai* took much pleasure describing the scene. Vigorously jabbing his finger into the air, he would mimic the patrons in the bar who would point and say about him, "look at that dirty old Indian", and every time as though it were the first time telling it, he would laugh loudly.

Siksikasomitai would laugh every time he told the story, because *he was dirty* *he was old* *and he was proud to be an Indian*.

Fame however, like magnets, attracts opposites, and *Siksikasomitai* got his share. A self-styled local historian without credentials of any kind proclaimed that *Siksikasomitai* did not earn a medal. He could not find *Siksikasomitai's* war records. A one-armed veteran came to *Siksikasomitai's* defence. The veteran, a lawyer, noted that there were no records of his own service, leaving him to wonder how he had lost his arm. In the fog of war, it is a wonder any record exists for anyone, especially in the muddy morass of World War I.

The local media, however, played up the no medal story. He was shunned by his tribe. *Siksikasomitai* felt he had disgraced his people. He could also see it in the eyes of his non-Indian friends as they looked away.

Siksikasomitai, the proud Indian, was no more

From the window of their unpainted unheated clapboard house in the displaced persons' section of town, *Siksikasomitai's* partner watched *Siksikasomitai* tip over the old outhouse and drag it to the new pit and then fill the old pit with dirt from the new one. Now the two-seater outhouse faced south, catching sunshine, and shielding occupants from the cold northerly winter winds. Next year's potatoes would grow larger because of the waste below the old outhouse, she thought, and they would be savoured by *Siksikasomitai* because of the medal buried in it.

Less than a year later, *Siksikasomitai* could see the "no-Indians" hospital across the street from the Indian hospital he was in. The divide between Indians and non-Indians lingered, as it had throughout his life, and he saw no signs of the divide ending. Indian life today, he thought, was not as good as it was 100 years ago, and unless the Indian Curtain were lifted, it would be even less 100 years

AN ASTONISHING ACHIEVEMENT:
ELECTED A MINOR CHIEF AND ALSO
ELECTED PRESIDENT OF A NON-INDIAN
RAILWAY LABOUR UNION.

in the future. Indians were an endangered species on the brink of becoming an extinct species, waiting to go extinct while hiding behind the Indian

Curtain. Reservations were a dead end, as Apartheid was in South Africa. As he had written in his book, the buffalo were never coming back.

After several days languishing in a hospital bed, he said goodbye to the world. Weakly raising his wrinkled arm, the white hospital gown sliding down to his shoulder, he defiantly gestured at the "no-Indians" hospital across the street.

One week later, he was buried. To this day, his grave is unmarked.



7

“THE DIRTY OLD INDIAN” MY CANADIAN HERO

7.1

Old Chief Mountain – always there

Mike Mountain Horse's story began and ended here — on land reigned by Old Chief Mountain. Modern maps call it just Chief Mountain, but Mike always called it Old Chief Mountain.

He was born and buried on Kainai land in the remote southwest corner of Alberta in view of Old Chief Mountain.

It was a good place to grow up and avoid the stress of a modern non-Indian “lifestyle in a hurry”.

There being no record of his birth or its location, the army arbitrarily assigned 1888. In the army's mind, close enough for Indian work.



Old Chief Mountain
(Source unknown)

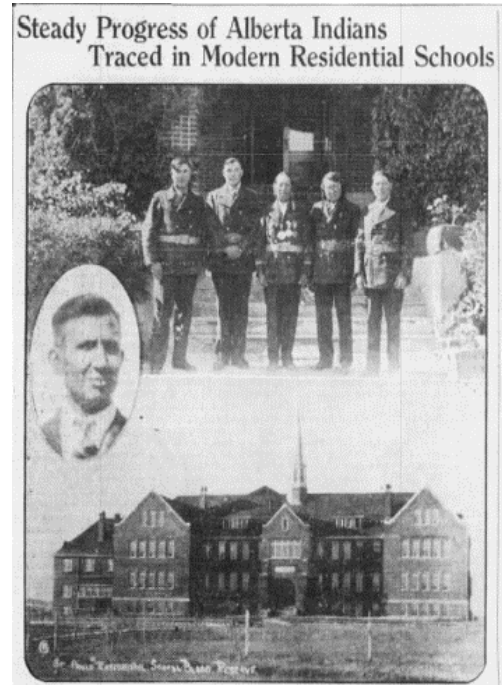
7.2

Mike’s residential school

Mike, at six years old, was in the first class of six boys to be “enrolled” (Mike’s word) in St Paul’s Residential School, about six kilometers north of Cardston, Alberta. I do not know how long he was there, but he left it with a favourable impression:

In a book he wrote “The missionaries worked hard for the welfare of the Indians on all the reserves A new era dawned We are not looking forward to the time the buffalo shall return. Nor are we anticipating a time when the white man shall disappear from the continent. But we are scanning the horizon for further chances of advancement and further opportunities of proving ourselves”

[MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE, MY PEOPLE THE BLOODS.]



His stepdaughter was eight years in the same residential school. She became a Royal Registered Nurse who served in World War II.

Another stepdaughter was in the same residential school for a year and a half until the good Reverend at the time took her out to live with him “to help care for his ailing wife”. This stepdaughter’s cousin, who was in residential school with her before her transfer, said upon reflection, “I often wondered about that and what arrangements were made to allow that to happen”.

Calgary Herald, Dec 26. 1936
(Mike is the insert)

7.3

Mike and the Senator



One of Mike's classmates at the residential school was James Gladstone. James Gladstone became a highly successful rancher and then a Canadian Senator. He was the grandfather of Jimmy Gladstone, Stampede and world calf roping champion. As well as the author's playmate, he was the author's basketball teammate.



James Gladstone is circled in the pictures on the left.

TOP: Mike is at the right (1911 in Mike's book MY PEOPLE THE BLOODS)

The person circled in both images is Senator James Gladstone, Kainai

7.4

“Look at that Indian run!”

The earliest newspaper article of fifty-seven I found about Mike Mountain Horse referred to him as Mike Dearfoot. The article was titled *Dearfoot vs. Marsh, August 27, 1910* (Calgary Herald).

Mike was running against John D. Marsh, a professional runner, “considered at the top of runners in Canada Said to be the holder of the world’s professional Marathon record”, Marsh had recently won the *Tacoma Marathon* where his nearest competitor was more than two miles behind.

Mike led Marsh until the 10th mile of a 15-mile race only to end just one sixth of mile behind at the finish line.

The newspaper account of the race said “*The crowd lustily cheered the Indian*”.

To put this into perspective, Marsh, a world-class professional runner, trained and ran competitively. Mike Mountain Horse probably had no coaching or training, or experience.

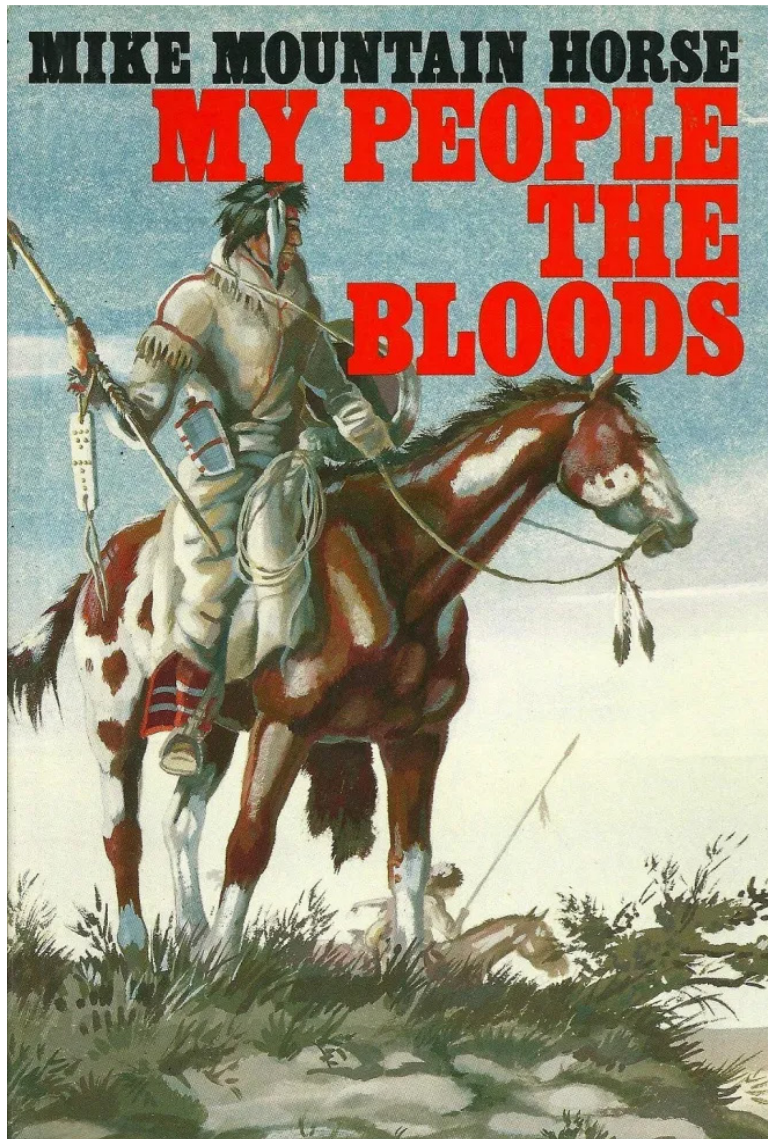
I can’t imagine why Mike was chosen to race a world-class marathoner; or that he had run such a distance before or that he even had running shoes. Amazing!



In Mike’s book *MY PEOPLE THE BLOODS*

7.5

Scouting for the Mounted Police



Painting by Gerald Tailfeathers

After residential school, Mike went to an all-Indian school in Calgary to learn carpentry. How that went I don't know – I never saw a hammer or saw in his house

For awhile, he was a scout and interpreter for the Royal North West Mounted Police in Fort Macleod.

While a scout, he was tracking an escaped convict in the Porcupine Hills, just west of Granum. Having lost the trail, he reined up and backtracked, racing right over a coyote burrow where the escapee was hiding. He tied him up and marched him back to the Fort.

7.6

Killing the Reverend

After being gassed three times in The First World War, Mike’s older brother was diagnosed as being unable to return to action and sent back to CANADA, which made his tribe happy. They planned a big celebration for his return.

However, he made it back only as far as Montreal where he died from complications of the gassing. He was only days from home. When his coffin arrived in Fort McLeod it was taken to the local church where so many people were expected that tickets for the funeral had to be issued.

From there, it was in the back of a one-horse buckboard to Kainai, Mike’s mother and father on the front seat and Mike and his brother Joe in the back beside Albert in his coffin. It was 1915 and Albert was only 22 years old.

Mike’s mother blamed the Reverend Samuel Henry Middleton for encouraging Albert to go to war, “for King and country”. With a hunting knife she stalked the reverend, determined to kill him. She was close to succeeding but intervention by Mike saved the reverend.



Mike’s mother and the Reverend
(Glenbow Archives)

7.7

The Cowboys and Indians regiment



Army recruiters in south Alberta looked for cowboys and Indians – because they could ride horses which was very important in an army that was still not fully mechanized. Those thus recruited were colloquially referred to as the Cowboys and Indians regiment.

Mike enlisted at Fort McLeod six months after his brother Albert's death. Albert had said in a letter that he was going "to fight for my King and country", which was standard English rubbish for the era and had nothing to do with the reason Mike went to war. However, some have speculated that Mike enlisted for revenge.

It's not hard to sense the emotion Mike's mother had when she rode in the same buckboard used to carry the dead Albert home to take Mike and her third and last son Joe to enlist in Fort McLeod.

Mike Foxhead with Friends.
(Glenbow Archives, NA-5-16)

7.8

Major culture shock

From a buckboard to a train at Fort Macleod to Calgary for training at Signal Hill where the army practised lobbing shells across the Elbow River onto the Tsuut’ina Reserve. A century later in Spring thaws, the Tsuut’ina still find unexploded shells surfacing on their land.



A longer train ride to Quebec to board a large troop transport to Liverpool. What was Mike thinking, riding a train for the first time, seeing an ocean when the largest body of water he had seen before was Waterton Lake.



From Montreal they were packed into 3rd class below deck on a ship bound for South Hampton. The steamship, *Ascania*, was attacked by submarines but escaped due to its superior speed of thirteen knots over the submarine’s speed of just four knots. For Mike Mountain Horse, never crowded by more than those inside his family teepee, the ocean voyage side by side with 1,500 others combined with the bone chilling fear from a submarine attack, the voyage was a life changer. However, the horror of three years in the trench-es in France would make the ocean crossing a pleasure cruise in comparison.

(On a subsequent sailing the Ascania ran aground and sank off the southwestern coast of Newfoundland. Strangely, there were no fatalities. That would be made up for in the carnage of the trenches in France.)

Second contingent of Lethbridge recruits at the Lethbridge train station as they prepare to leave, 1914.
(Galt Museum & Archives, 20131017002)

Ascania off Newfoundland
(Shipwrecks of the Cunard Line
www.cunardshipwrecks.com/wrecks/ascania_1)

7.9

Buried for four days by an enemy shell

Mike was a natural leader. He soon became leader of a machine gun section which he led behind enemy lines. A shell explosion covered him there for four days before advancing comrades found him. In the meantime, his debris covered body served as a seat for enemy soldiers eating lunch.

Back in the ranks, he led the capture of enemies in a building, who, except for the captain, surrendered. The captain, who was shooting at Mike, died by a shot from Mike.

The captain was the first of three soldiers killed by Mike. The other two were in hand-to-hand combat. During one fight Mike was bayoneted, one of three different wounds he suffered in the War. One of the wounds was labelled “dangerous”, which at the times was a euphemism for “not expected to survive”.

Twelve of Mike’s battles are illustrated on story robes in the *The Military Museums* in Calgary and the *Medicine Hat Esplanade*. The robe was on display at one time in Ottawa.



Mike's Story-Robe in The Military Museums in Calgary, August 5, 2022

7.10

Sloughing off the English General



Mike Mountain Horse is circled. (Glenbow Archives)

The feats of Mike and other Indians became well known, especially with the Germans because the Indians would strip down at night and crawl into the German trenches and scalp the enemy soldiers.

General Byng, the English commander, asked the general of the “colonial” troops (that is Canadians, among others) to bring to their next meeting “one of those Indian fellows” he was hearing so much about. He wanted to present a Distinguished Conduct Medal to Mike Mountain Horse.

The general, upon being introduced to Mike at the medal presentation ceremony, perhaps thinking he was being friendly instead of official, flippantly asked “how ya doin chief”. Mike considered the greeting and its tone to be disrespectful. He instinctively reacted by dropping his salute and sauntering away.

The presentation ceremony was unceremoniously ended, the medal was handed to Canadian General Currie who put it into his pocket to give to Mike at a more agreeable time. It went through time and many pockets before going into Mike’s pocket when he was casually told he was now an Acting Sergeant.

7.11

The War over, just an Indian once again



The War over, Mike experienced the immediate end to the camaraderie under fire in the trenches. In the trenches, everyone huddled together in terror.

On the train home, his comrades ignored his medal and sergeant stripes by jeering him by yelling “hey chief, where’s your feathers”.

First World War soldiers entraining at Lethbridge, 1914.
Galt Museum & Archives, 19871218000

7.12

The amazing leader

Mike Mountain Horse was a leader. In school, he was an honour student and captain of the soccer team. In the army, he was a trainer and leader of machine gun teams. He was demobilized as an Acting Sergeant.

Recognizing the treaty transgressions of the Canadian Government, he wrote letters to newspapers asking for local understanding and support. He founded the first all-Indian Legion in Canada. Seeing the need for political action, Mike called for an assembly of western Canadian Indians. Over two thousand Indians gathered in Fort Macleod and formed *The Allied Tribes of Western Canada*. They chose him as their president. The Allied Tribes morphed over in time into the *National Indian Brotherhood* and eventually the current *Assembly of First Nations*.

He earned a pension for his long-time employment for the railway in Lethbridge. While working there, he was elected the president of the *Stationary Firemen and Oilers Union*.

Mike’s Tribe, the Kainai, elected him a minor chief.

A minor chief and a union president — an amazing achievement — an Indigenous person succeeding in his Tribe and in a non-Indian labour union.



7.13

The public Indian – a leader



Calgary Herald, October 24, 1953

“One of the most popular figures in Lethbridge during the 1930s”, said one of more than 50 newspaper articles about Mike Mountain Horse that appeared in papers across Alberta, Canada, and far into the United States. For example:

Edmonton Journal
Saskatchewan Daily Star
Winnipeg Evening Tribune
Montreal Gazette
Los Angeles Star
Salt Lake City Desert News
Long Beach Press Telegram
The Miami Herald
Phoenix Star

Mike wrote articles for the *Lethbridge Herald* and a few magazines. Schools invited him to talk to the students. Saturday mornings, he would tell stories to children at the Lethbridge Library. He would often travel to Calgary to visit veterans in the Colonel Belcher Hospital, taking them candy.

He was a founder and president of the *All-Indian Legion* in Alberta, the first in Canada. He was a founder of the *Allied Tribes of Western Canada*, precursor to the *National Indian Brotherhood* and now the current *Assembly of First Nations*.

He was elected a minor chief of the Kainai Nation and elected president of a railway workers union in Lethbridge.’

An elementary school in Lethbridge honors him with the name *Mike Mountain Horse School*.

7.14


Calgary MILITARY MUSEUM honours Mike

Mike Mountain Horse was honoured in 2017 by *The Military Museums* in Calgary. Along with exhibiting his Story Robe, his military service was described:

“he was at the battle of Vimy Ridge [the Birth of a Nation], Hill 70, Cambrai, and Amiens.”

“..... buried alive 4 long days before he was discovered”

“Mike Mountain Horse was demobilized as an acting sergeant and was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal.”



MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE

Mike Mountain Horse (Miistatisomital), a member of the Kainai (Blood) First Nation, was born in 1888 on the Kainai Reserve in Southern Alberta. At the age of 6 Mike was sent to Anglican residential school on the Reserve.

Before the war, Mike Mountain Horse worked as a police scout and interpreter for the Royal North West Mounted Police in Fort MacLeod. Mountain Horse enlisted in May 1916 at the age of 26 after his younger brother, Albert, died on his way home from service overseas. He was one of over 4000 aboriginal soldiers to serve from Canada, also including Henry Norwest, whose story can be seen elsewhere in the museum.

Mike enlisted in the 191st Battalion, but transferred to the machine gun section of the 50th Battalion. During Mountain Horse's two years of service, he was at the battle of Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Cambrai, and Amiens.

On 21 August 1917 during the Battle for Hill 70, Corporal Mountain Horse led the machine gun section of his battalion to an old building behind the German defences. There he secured their objective but was injured and subsequently buried alive when a German shell damaged the structure; it was 4 long days before he was discovered.

Mike Mountain Horse was demobilized as an acting sergeant and was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal. He also had a Kainai warrior's story robe created—both commemorate his exemplary service.

THE MILITARY MUSEUMS
Calgary, November 2021

WAR STORIES
1917



7.14

No beer sold to Indians

After being exposed to the outside world, returning to the culture of the reserve was harder than leaving it. Mike eventually settled in Lethbridge.



NO BEER
SOLD TO
INDIANS

He was confident and well liked by his fellow workers in the railyard who elected him president of their union. After his election he went with them to a small beer parlour. But he could not sit with them because it was against the law for Indians to go into beer parlours or to buy liquor.

Mike had to sit alone in the corner of the beer parlour, the bartender turning a blind eye because the railway workers who brought Mike in were his regular customers, and the bartender wanted their business.

Mike took much pleasure, many times, describing the scene. Jabbing his finger with vigour into the air, he would mimic the non-Indians in the bar who would point at him and say, “look at that dirty old Indian”, that dirty old Indian being him, and every time, as though it was the first time he was telling it, he would laugh loudly.

Mike would laugh every time he told the story, because *he was dirty he was old and he was a proud Indian.* He was saying he was proud of himself and the things he had done. That is enough for anyone.

7.15

Saying goodbye to Mike

Mike Mountain Horse had several names — *Captured Three Guns*, *Mike Deerfoot*, *Eagle Flying*, *Crow Flag*. Mountain Horse was his father’s name.

The last time I was with Mike, he was sitting on the edge of a high bed in a three-story hospital on the north-east edge of Cardston, across the street from the “no-Indian hospital”. He was happy, smiling, his dark skin highlighted by the white of his hospital gown. Still telling stories, he said that “his people” now called him *Mike Crossing Many Rivers* because of his full and eventful life.

As I looked at him one more time, he seemed to have a glow about him and an amused look as though he had just told the “dirty old Indian” story one more time.

Two weeks later I was at his burial.



Blood Indian Hospital, Cardston
(Canada’s Historic Places, Santé Canada/Health Canada)

7.16

Mike's unmarked grave



In 1964, Mike was buried in this cemetery (St Paul Anglican, north of Cardston). There were fewer than two dozen attending. There wasn't an honour guard as most veterans had.

At Mary Mountain Horse's funeral (1956) in Lethbridge there were two ministers leading a full Anglican church. She had six regular pall bearers and six honorary, all twelve of whom were white. They were there for Mike.

Mike's funeral was on a winter day, sunny with a brisk wind from the north. It was cold, one of those prairie winter days when there was little snow on the ground. Not good for the snow cover needed for moisture in the

soil for spring planting, and not good for whoever had to dig this grave's frozen earth. There was no green carpet covering the light beige coloured soil piled alongside the grave.

As I stood at the head of his burial casket, I gazed across the prairie to Old Chief Mountain and wished that I could be like Mike.

Mike's cemetery

(Photo taken in 2020 from the same spot I had stood at his burial in 1964. Mike's wooden grave marker, like those around his, had over the years rotted and fallen)

8

Credits

The cover picture is from the *Glenbow Archives*.

The painting of Mike Mountain Horse inside the cover is by Mike Pisko, a Lethbridge artist.

The photos of Mike Mountain Horse are from his book *MY PEOPLE THE BLOODS* or the *Glenbow Archives* in Calgary.

The portrait on Mike Mountain Horse’s book is by Gerald Tailfeathers of Kainai.

***With thanks,
and apologies
to those
obscured by
the fog of the
internet***

The poem titled *The Legacy of Mike Mountain Horse* is by the Author and was written while in awe of the huge World War II memorial in Kyiv, Ukraine.

The photo of Mike’s unmarked grave is by the Author.

The photo of Mike’s Story Robe is by the Author.

Twenty-eight books and fifty-seven newspaper articles.

Uncredited illustrations are from the internet fog.

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Articles

(Note: CH is Calgary Herald; LH is Lethbridge Herald)

1. 1910 CH Aug 27, *Dearfoot vs Marsh* [Foot racing]
2. 1917 Calgary Daily Herald, August 31, [Mike dangerously wounded]
3. 1917 The Gazette, Montreal September 13, *Casualty list names five more local soldiers* [Mike wounded again]
4. 1917 The Macleod News Sept 6, Heavy Toll of Macleod Heroes
5. 1918 The Macleod News (Fort Macleod) Feb 21 [While still in hospital Mike wants back in trenches]
6. 1918 CH Oct 26, *Alberta Indian Women Whose Sons Are Fighting* [Mike's mother has three sons in the War]
7. 1918 CH Sept 30 [W. A. sends Parcels to Indian Soldiers]
8. 1921 Calgary Daily Herald Aug 27 [Types of Blood Indians]
9. 1922 CH Feb 15 [Blood Indians Show Interest in Education]
10. 1924 CH Dec 12, *The Piegan Indian Lease* [Mike argues against legality of leases]
11. 1925 The Herald, Miami, Florida, August 1, *Indians Plan Powwow* [Mike organizes “The Allied Tribes of Western Canada”]
12. 1925 Winnipeg Evening Tribune Jul 9 [3,000 Indians endorse Mike's Allied Tribes of Western Canada]
13. 1925 The Calgary Albertan, Feb 18, *Red Men to Show Palefaces How to Stage a Celebration* [Indians protest non-Indian compliance of Treaty Seven, the signing of which was attended by Mike's father]
14. 1925 CH Apr 1, *Indians to Participate* [Mike gets support for Allied Tribes of Western Canada]
15. 1925 Calgary Albertan Feb 18 [Mike organizes North American Powwow]
16. 1925 Saskatoon Daily Star Jun 20, *Redskins gather for big Powwow* [Mike Master of Ceremonies for 2,000 Indians]
17. 1926 Los Angeles times May2, *Discards Tomahawk for Rotary badge* [Mike is secretary of The Allied Tribes of Western Canada]
18. 1931 CH Jun 24, *Blood Graduates and St. Paul's Old Boys Meet in Jubilee Games* [Mike spoke about the early history of St Pauls]
19. 1931 Edmonton Journal, *Walsh becomes “Heap Big Chief of Blood Tribe”* [Mike serves as interpreter for ceremony]
20. 1934 The Province, Aug 31
21. 1935 Lethbridge Herald Jul 16, *Opening of Lethbridge Golden Jubilee Celebrations* [Mike Mountain Horse speak(s) over CJOC]
22. 1936 CH Dec 26, *Redman Writes Western Saga* [Indian history set right by Mike]
23. 1937 LH Mar 12, *Lions Hear of Indian Life From Mike Mountain Horse* [Mike the public speaker]
24. 1937 CH Apr 3, The Beaver Pipe Legend
25. 1937 The Edmonton Bulletin May 19, *Indian Thriller* [Mike enthalls children]
26. 1937 CH Jul 22, *Lethbridge Rodeo Proves Success* [Mike the public Indian]
27. 1938 CH Feb 1, *His Honour Made “Chief Leader” at St Paul's reunion* [250 attend St Paul reunion, notably Mike Mountain Horse]
28. 1939 CH Apr 11
29. 1938 Star-Phoenix Feb 23

30. 1940 CH Nov 16 {Mike addresses school children}
31. 1942 LH Jan 27, *Mike Mountain Horse Gives Talk On Indian Lore*
32. 1942 Lethbridge Herald, Feb 14, *Victory Loan Rally* [Indians appreciate their fair treatment]
33. 1944 LH May 10, *Stores to Close Victoria Day* [Mike is the "star attraction"]
34. 1944 LH Jan 28, *This Open Winter* [Mike is historical resource]
35. 1951 Lethbridge Herald Oct 24, *Indians Had No Labor Trouble* [Mike, president of local union]
36. 1953 Lethbridge Herald May 13
37. 1953 Lethbridge Herald, June 19, *Mike Mountain Horse* [receives railway service award]
38. 1953 North Bay Nugget Aug 17, *Mike Mountain Horse: Honoured Indian* [earns fame while advancing in a white man's civilization]
39. 1953 The Sault Star (Sault St. Marie) Aug 13, *Indian Made Way in World of White Man*
40. 1953 Star-Phoenix Aug 19, *Chief Mike Mountain Horse Famed Among White Brothers*
41. 1953 LH Nov 19, *Mike Mountain Horse Retires* [A long and colorful career]
42. 1953 The Lethbridge herald
43. 1953 CH Oct 23, *Indian Chief Thanks Army For Birthday* [no records existed for Mike's birth, so the army gave him November 11, 1988]
44. 1953 LH Nov 19, *Chief Mike Mountain Horse Retires*
45. 1953 Calgary Herald, October 24, *Children Used Buffalo Ribs for Sleigh Ride*
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47. 1955 Lethbridge Herald Feb 4
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50. 1960 CH Feb 19
51. 1967 Press-Telegram (Long Beach California) May 19
52. 1979 CH, Jul 14, *Books in Review* [Mike's book "My People the Bloods"]
53. 1982 Star-Phoenix Dec 24
54. 2003, James Dempsey, *A warrior's robe*, The Free Library by Farlex.
55. 2017 CH April 5 [Mike's military history enshrined in Calgary Military Museums]
56. 2017 CH Jun 3, [movie actor inspired by Mike Mountain Horse]
57. 2014 CH Jun 27, *First Nations on the front lines* [Mike Mountain Horse became a household name]
58. 2017 CH Jul 14, *Looking beyond the past to grasp Indigenous issues* [Mike refused to be a victim]

Wow.

—*Food court janitor*

Your story is beautifully woven.
I love the straightforward simplicity
of the [title's] dual meaning.

—*Performing artist*

Fantastic title! It makes you think.

—*Museum curator*

That is one awesome and interesting story.

—*Former police chief*

This is an amazing story, beautifully written, and
it brought tears to my eyes.

—*Teacher*

Poignant, heartfelt.

—*Senior Citizen*

This so very interesting. WOW.

—*Young Indigenous mother*

Mike Mountain Horse's example is a
commendable way an Indigenous person
dealt with the racism toward him.

—*Mount Royal University
honour graduate, sociology*

Relating and discussing a racial incident is not
racism. Openly talking about these kinds of things
is the first step to solving them.

—*Former Israeli combat paratrooper*

The title is not racist because they are Mike's words.

—*Young missionary in Southeast Asia*

The title could be changed to
"The Unkempt Indigenous Person"

—*Female non-Indian athlete with
Indigenous teammates*

The audience LOVED it, as did I!

—*U of C lecturer*

Wonderful presentation.

—*President national service organization*

Lovely ... such an important note in our history ...
which should be honoured.

—*International photographer*

Wow, I bet there is a story here to tell!

—*Young soldier*

Abrasive and courageous.

—*Former Treaty 7 Chief*

Extremely powerful heart wrenching story
that needs to be told.

—*Southern Alberta cattleman*

I was very drawn into the narrative.

Wonderful work.

—*Grandson of soldier in Mike's CANADIAN
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE 1917*

Clearly a fascinating man.

—*National theatre director*

What a great tribute. I'd love to see the play.

—*Western Canada university blogger*

The poem at the end could be the lyrics for a ballad.

—*Southern Alberta philanthropist*

The vast majority of people have heard enough of
indigenous demands and need a rest.

—*A prominent Lethbridge leader*

I really really like it. It's a cool story.

—*Indigenous welder at Fort McMurray*

You got it right!

—*A Black Canadian*

How can it be said it wasn't
when it can't be said what it was.

—*Art gallery board member*

Fantastic ... [the] message is critically
important at this moment.

—*Olympic gold medalist*

Significant and meaningful

—*Calgary developer*

People were like wow!

—*Documentary producer*

**“TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT,
WE MUST CLEARLY SEE THE PAST.”**

(THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, July 9, 2023)

WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT “THE DIRTY OLD INDIAN”

You’ve got to be kidding. You’re actually going to say that!

—Alberta play director

It’s about time somebody said it.

—National Indigenous leader

Amazing and inspiring story.

I am thankful that I read it.

—Ontario Indigenous woman

**The manuscript is explosive and will no doubt
cause a huge stir. I agree with all you have said.**

—Kainai Elder

We get it!

—Two Alberta Indigenous women

**A standing ovation at Southern Alberta
Council on Public Affairs**

—Board member

**Mike’s approach to Indigenous relations
is necessary in today’s political reality.**

—Alberta Senior who heard Mike speak in 1943

**You have an important message ... you really have
an excellent book here with important Alberta history and
social and political issues. It could be adopted as a textbook.**

—Former university professor

**You’ve provided a narrative that runs counter to the mainstream,
hobbled as it is by its own easy biases and assumptions.**

—Former senior Alberta Legislature reporter

The poem closing the story is profound, it is beautiful!

—Literary agent

(Continued inside back cover)