

FAO the Keeper

The 'Leonard Peltier' case is referenced during the short briefing given to the player characters by their superior officer in Phoenix to illustrate the sensitivities of the federal authorities around 'native-American affairs'.

The following is a very brief summary for those (like me) who may never have heard of the case until they read the scenario. It has been gleaned from about 15 minutes research on the internet, and from sites which, it must be said, are mainly 'pro Peltier'. The summary is merely intended to provide some further detail should the players request it – naturally it is not intended to be a comment on the rights and wrongs of the case and Keepers looking for further information are encouraged to research the case themselves.

The Case of Leonard Peltier

Leonard Peltier was born on September 12th 1944 on the Anishinabe (Chippewa) Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. He came from a large family of 13 brothers and sisters. He grew up in poverty, and his early life was impacted by controversial U.S. government policies aimed to assimilate Native Peoples.

During the sixties and early seventies he became increasingly involved in 'native-American' community and political issues and he eventually joined the Denver Colorado chapter of the American Indian Movement (AIM).

On February 27, 1973, members of AIM, together with a number of local and traditional Native Americans began their seventy-two day occupation of Wounded Knee (site of the last battle between American Indians and government forces in 1890). Their goal was to protest alleged injustices against their tribes, violations of the many treaties, and alleged current abuses and repression of their people. The United States government responded forcefully against the protesters, using methods since characterised as 'militaristic'. In the end, various officials promised hearings on local conditions and treaty violations. These hearings were never convened. The use of 'military style' force by the U.S. government was later ruled unlawful.

The following three-year period witnessed a severe deterioration in government / native-American relations and allegations of harassment, aggressive surveillance, the fabrication of trumped up charges and indifference to (and even complicity in) politically motivated murders were laid at the door of the federal authorities. Tensions were extremely high.

On June 26, 1975 two FBI agents, Mr. Jack Coler and Mr. Ron Williams, entered the Jumping Bull Ranch on the Pine Ridge reservation, South Dakota. They allegedly sought to arrest a suspect spotted in a red pick-up which had entered the ranch. A large number of AIM supporters, including Leonard Peltier, were camping on the property at the time. Many non-AIM persons were present as well. A shoot out began, causing panic and confusion throughout the camp, and many shots were exchanged. When the skirmish ended, the two FBI agents were dead. They had been wounded, and someone had shot them at close range through their heads.

Peltier and two others were subsequently charged with the murder of the two agents. Peltier had fled to Canada and was subsequently extradited, convicted and imprisoned – and he remains incarcerated to this day. Controversy rages over his conviction; about the legality of his extradition, the quality of the evidence used in his trial and whether his continued imprisonment is motivated by politics and/or 'institutional revenge' on the part of the authorities. Peltier's case has been championed by advocates of the rights of the native-American community and by organisations like Amnesty International and his case remains an enduring symbol of the turbulent history of the government's handling of 'native-American' issues .