

It was a long day on the most impoverished, challenging reservation in America. Beautiful clear blue sky and about 75 degrees. The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota has long had the distinction of being the **poorest county** in the United States. It is home to the Oglala Lakota People. Yet from this reservation and others just like it come the highest rates of military service of any demographic in the country. With over 60% unemployment and a complete lack of adequate housing, hundreds of proud veterans and their families live there.

Today we had the honor of visiting with Ted Big Crow as we awaited the delivery of 128 new twin mattresses we got out of Houston Texas. I met Ted at the Fort Meade Veterans Administration Hospital two years ago at a BBQ we hosted for veterans there.

Ted is a USMC Vietnam Veteran. The truck was a bit late as Ted waited for a new bed. He enlisted (VOLUNTEERED) to go into the Marines in May of 1966 when he graduated from High School in the village of Pine Ridge. In January of 1967 he was sent to Vietnam. He told me about being shot in the leg and staying in country. When he was healthy he went back to his unit in the field. A true warrior of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe.



It was a bit of an emotional discussion at times. He told me of going out on patrols and being ambushed. One time there were six Marines on a patrol, three of them got killed. Then another time his bunker got hit and he sustained shrapnel in his leg. He got stitched up and stayed with his unit. He spent a total of 21 months in country in combat. He jokingly said he liked the “combat pay.”

After leaving Vietnam he came home for a month, then was stationed in Iwakuni Japan for another 18 months before he got out of the Marines. He remembers being sprayed at least 8 times with **Agent Orange**. He has struggled with several things since then. Both of his kidneys shut down ten years ago and he got a transplant. He has had internal organ issues for years. He suffers from severe joint pain all the time. The doctors think it is all **Agent Orange** connected. He has had both legs amputated at the knees. He is wheelchair bound. Yet he smiled and spoke with great pride of his military experiences.

Ted is just one of the hundreds of Native American Veterans we serve.

I was very happy he would be getting a new bed. He showed me a picture of all of his medals from Vietnam. He has a total of 18 medals to include Purple Heart with one star—Wounded Twice.

We distributed beds to the veterans' homeless shelter in Pine Ridge. We distributed beds to homes in Wounded Knee and Manderson. One of our wonderful board members helped with the distributions—Brandy Maxcy.



Then it was time to deliver some food items to other homebound veterans around the reservation. We stopped to check in on Bernice. You might remember her from other stories. She was very sad. One of her neighbors who helped her out a lot had committed suicide the night before. A 23-year-old young Lakota woman hung herself. I had no answers for her. All I could do was hug her.

It seems we do not go two weeks without hearing of another suicide on one of the many reservations we serve. Pine Ridge has one of the highest rates of suicide in the entire nation. Many of them are veterans suffering from PTSD. I do not know all the answers. 22 veterans a day complete suicide. It breaks my heart every time I hear of them.

Then on the way back to Rapid City we stopped to give two hitchhikers a ride. One was Robert Little Dog and the other Linda Never Misses A Shot. Robert is the nephew of another Vietnam Veteran we have helped in the past with emergency firewood—Tim Little Dog, US Army Vietnam Veteran. Hitchhiking is the most popular mode of travel around the reservation. We always stop to give rides when we pass them.

We ended our deliveries of beds at the Nutrition Center in Manderson close to the mass grave from the **Wounded Knee Massacre from 1890**. One of our favorite people **Geraldine Thunder Hawk** delivers beds to veterans for us there.



Then on our way home we got to see the buffalo in the Badlands National Park. The work we do is important. It is only possible with your continued donations. Thanks.