



Fig. 1. Bear Chief's War Deed

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Bear Chief's War Deed Tipi



Fig. 1

In 1939, John Ewers published his master's thesis, a pioneer study entitled, *Plains Indian Painting: A Description of an Aboriginal American Art*. His thesis supervisor, Clark Wissler, suggested this field of research in 1933 (1939: VII). Frustrated in his search for meaning in the geometric art of Plains Indians, Wissler found that their pictorial painting held much potential for mythological, historical, and formalistic study.¹ In 1903 Wissler collected a very important Blackfoot (Piegan) painting, Bear Chief's monumental war deed tipi cover. He published a small section of the painting under the heading, "Heraldry and Picture Writing" (Wissler 1911: 37-38). Although Bear Chief's tipi cover has been in the American Museum of Natural History (50/4485) since its acquisition, Ewers apparently did not examine the painting in his classic 1939 study (1939: 67). However, he did intend to write "a complete revision" of *Plains Indian Painting*, and in his later correspondence expressed considerable interest in the tipi.² Indeed, the painting is rich in elements which address some of his key scholarly concerns including: the influence of European pictorial traditions on those of Plains Indians, the distinctions between regional, tribal, and individual painting styles, and tracing the lives of named artists. The present paper will examine Bear Chief's tipi cover with a view to further understanding features central to John Ewers's study of Plains Indian painting, a subject which he constantly revisited with great originality, passion, and intelligence throughout his long career.

Walter McClintock noted that the Blackfeet Sun Dance encampment of 1908 was composed of three hundred and fifty tipis, thirty of which were painted (1936: 3). All but two of the painted tipis were of the so-called spirit helper variety. These are typically characterized by a large central band containing pictures which were inspired by a dream or vision, and narrate the role of the spirit helper in creating the tipi. This section is usually framed by painted representations of the night sky above and the earth below. The upper section was usually painted red, with white disks on the two wind flaps representing constellations: the Lost Children (Pleiades) on one, and the Seven persons (Great Bear) on the other. The painted Maltese cross which often appeared at the back of the upper section is said by some to represent the Morning Star and by others the butterfly/moth, or sleep-bringer (McClintock 1935: 1; 1936a: 3; Taylor 1993: 55). The bottom band was usually red, with two rows of white disks. The latter stood for fallen stars. Such tipis were held sacred and generally acquired through ritual transfer.

The two painted tipis at the 1908 Piegan Sun Dance which did not display dream inspired imagery were decorated with pictorial narratives of war deeds. Such tipis were known to the Blackfeet as *KaXtomaykokaop*. This

term derives from the word *kaXtomisini* which "usually refers to 'war,' but its literal meaning refers to gambling, just like war exploits were referred to as 'gambling profits,' and in turn gambling was often spoken of as a form warfare" (Brasser 1992a: 714). The right to construct a war deed tipi was based upon public recognition of the outstanding military achievements of its future owner. As Wissler correspondingly noted, "the function of painted records was to objectify the deeds so as to receive irrefutable social recognition" (1911: 37). Generally, the exploits of the owner were prominently displayed on his war deed tipi, and were accompanied by the painted adventures of a number of his comrades-in-arms. In contrast, a war deed death lodge probably bore only the achievements of its deceased inhabitant.

The Blackfoot recognized a sequence of increasingly convincing signs whereby a war tipi could become sacred. Once this status was achieved, the conventional "frame designs" of dream or vision-inspired tipis might be added, and it would change hands through ritual transfer. The war song of the original owner was transferred as the song of the war lodge. The men whose deeds were depicted on the cover would participate in the ceremony by singing their war songs (Brasser 1992a: 717-19; McClintock 1936: 24). The sacredness of a war deed tipi might be further amplified by adding more motifs, the most popular being the Chief Design, *Ninai-kokaop*. The Chief Design features a painted male figure, about 1.2 m. (approx. 4 ft.) in height, most typically holding a pipe offered to the sun in one hand and a fan-shaped feather offering in the other. Sometimes a lifeline, kidneys, and joint marks were added.

The above figure is said to symbolize "the founder's dream in which the tipi originated" (McClintock 1936: 25; Wissler 1911: 41). According to elders interviewed by Hugh Dempsey in the 1950s and 60s, the Chief figure represents Seen From A far, the important chief who first introduced the war deed tipi to the Bloods.³ Ted Brasser, however, noted that "the Chief tipi design originated from a vision of a participant in the Sun Dance and according to knowledgeable elders, this Sun Dancer was the same individual who brought the first scalp lock suit" (1992a: 723). In Blackfoot mythology this person was Scarface. When this legendary figure returned to earth, he was given a face identical to Morning Star's, and so was named Mistaken Morning Star. They are said to travel in the sky together, one above the other (McClintock 1936: 3). This association may explain why the Chief Design is vertically aligned with the Morning Star at the back of the tipi. The mythological origin of the Chief Design also explains why "long after the Scalplock Suit had become a separate medicine bundle, its transfer still required the new owner to obtain a Chief-painted tipi first" (Brasser 1992: 726-



Fig. 2. White Quiver's allotment

27). Indeed, Bear Chief was photographed wearing leggings with extraordinarily long hair-locks (Beinecke Rare Book Library #39002037422475).

Bear Chief's tipi displays a number of elements noted above: Chief Design, red painted upper section with blue Maltese cross and conventional constellations on the wind flaps, and red lower band with a double row of fallen stars. Of primary concern to this study, however, are the war exploits depicted in the middle section. In a flattened position they occupy a broad u-shaped band measuring about 9.32 m. (30 ft. 7 in.) by 1.62 m. (5 ft. 4 in.). It contains well over five hundred humans and horses. Three basic colors were employed in their execution: yellow, red and blue. At some point most of the paint underwent a chemical change which caused the colors to darken and bleed. Another war deed tipi photographed by McClintock in 1905 seems to have suffered a similar fate (Beinecke Rare Book Library 39002037429207). When McClintock photographed Bear Chief's tipi in 1898 the painting was not yet affected (Beinecke Rare Book Library #39002037422673, Farr, 1984:72).

I produced the drawing for this study by tracing directly from the tipi cover (Fig.1). Due to the defective paint, it was often difficult to determine the shade and, in some cases, color of the original. At least two shades of red appear to have been employed, the more intense used to emphasize details like blood and tips of feathers. It is possible that several shades of blue were used as well. In selecting colors for the drawing, I attempted to establish a balance between the painting's present appearance and how it may have appeared when freshly painted.

Wissler noted that the tipi "was collected by the writer in 1903, bearing several hundred figures, representing sixty-six distinct deeds most of which were performed by seven Piegan then living" (1911: 37). He published a line drawing devoted to the deeds of Double Runner, a relatively small segment of the tipi cover, accompanied by explanations of the depicted events. These explanations could only have come from Piegan informants (ibid.: 37-38). Barely visible today, sometimes illegible, are penciled-in numbers ranging from one to sixty-six interspersed among the exploits on the tipi. No doubt these provided a key to written explanations for the events on the tipi. However, if such explanations exist today, they are not to be found among Wissler's papers, which are held by the American Museum of Natural History and Ball State University. In the event that a "translation" of the depictions may someday surface, the numbers in the accompanying illustrations are reproduced in bold typeface. In addition to numbers, the names of six warriors are inscribed in pencil on the tipi: "Bearchief" [Bear Chief], "Whitecuiver" [White Quiver], "Cold feet" [Cold Feet], "Flat tail" [Flat

Tail], "Orineater" [Iron Eater], and "Mountain Chief." Bear Chief's name is repeated fourteen times. These glosses are written in the hand of Wissler's gifted Piegan informant, David C. Duvall, and presumably identify the sections allotted to each of the warriors' exploits. Double Runner's section is not identified by a name gloss.⁴

In the present study, the paintings allotted to each warrior are first examined independently. Then the allotments are compared on the basis of their formal characteristics in an effort to learn more about the execution of the painting. The examination begins at the south side of the doorway, with White Quiver, and encircles the tipi in a clockwise direction. It should be cautioned that some guesswork was required to determine the boundaries of each allotment shown in the accompanying illustrations.

White Quiver lived from about 1858 to 1931. Ewers published a wonderful description of this extraordinary man, along with a photograph (1955: 191-193, Plate 11). White Quiver was a "tall man of marked physical stamina who could ride three days and nights without food while driving captured horses home from enemy camps." Ewers's elder informants of the 1940s recalled him as the most accomplished horse raider within memory. Rides at the Door noted that White Quiver had gone on a total of forty horse raids. Unlike most horse raiding expeditions, which went out on foot, White Quiver led his men to the enemy on horseback. Although horse raiding had virtually ended among the South Piegan around 1887, Ewers noted that White Quiver stood trial for capturing Crow horses in 1892 (1958: 302).

Featured among White Quiver's exploits on the tipi is a column of eighteen inverted, square u-shapes (Fig.2). McClintock stated that such motifs stood for the number times served as horse raid leader (1936: 24). To the right of the u-shapes is a column of seven ideograms which signify the capture of picketed horses. The blue crossed lines depict pickets, the red lines are tethers and the detached hands would be those of White Quiver. He is more completely shown as the Yellow figure on the lower right. His name is written above and his footprints encircle both columns, confirming that he performed the recorded deeds.

Surrounding the columns are White Quiver's pictorial narratives. These display some five distinct styles of delineating horses and six of humans. The more geometrically styled humans with triangular and rectangular torsos, and elongated horses with two legs ending in hooks, are indistinguishable from those found in Blackfoot paintings dating to the 1830s, whereas, the animated humans in profile, and horses in flying gallop, display a concern for anatomical accuracy associated with the European pictorial traditions. These variations suggest

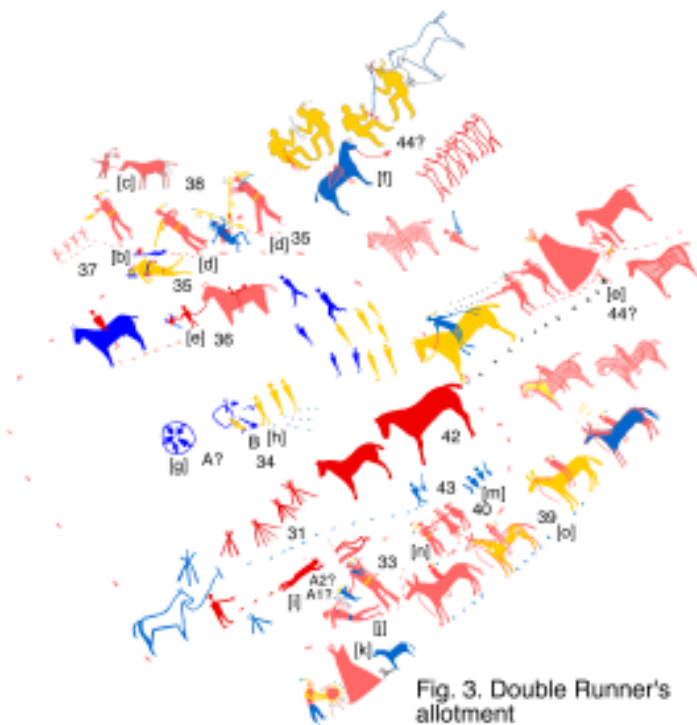


Fig. 3. Double Runner's allotment

that White Quiver's allotment was the result of a collaboration of around six different draftsmen.

White Quiver's exploits are found in several paintings, aside from Bear Chief's tipi. Ewers gave a detailed description of White Quiver's deeds which are recorded on two sections of the fifty-foot-long canvas mural commissioned by the Great Northern Railway around 1915 (Walton et al 1985: 225-27). White Quiver, recognizable

by the red feather attached to his hair, appears some twenty times. Each section is bordered on one side by a column of inverted square u-shapes, totaling twenty-one and twenty-six glyphs respectively. White Quiver stands at the lower right of one column, as he does on the Bear Chief tipi, except that in place of a name gloss above his head, there is glyph of a white quiver. The two or three artists who painted White quiver's section on the Great Northern mural do not appear to have lent their hand to Bear Chief's painted tipi. Around 1948 Richard Sanderville, a South Piegan, created a pictographic dedication in honor of White Quiver (Ewers 1983:59). Surrounding a photograph of White Quiver are various motifs which summarize his achievements. Prominent are twenty-two inverted square u-shapes and thirteen knife-cutting-the-halter motifs, much like those on Bear Chief's tipi.

Next to White Quiver's exploits on the tipi are those of Double Runner. I could learn little about this individual, except that he was born around 1849 (DeMarce 1980: 89) and owned the Soldiers Society pipe (Grinnell 1907: 223). Double Runner's exploits are shown in Figure 3. The boundaries of Double Runner's allotment are taken from Wissler's line drawing (1911: 37-38). The letters in square brackets on my illustration are not found on the original tipi, but key in to Wissler's description of Double Runner's deeds, as follows:

(b) Double Runner cut loose four horses; (c) Double Runner captures a Gros Ventre boy; (d) Double Runner and a companion encounter and kill two Gros Ventre, he taking a lance from one; (e) even while a boy Double Runner picked up a war-bonnet dropped by a fleeing Gros Ventre which in the system counts as a deed; (f) as a man he has two adventures with Crow Indians, taking a gun from one; (g) he, as leader, met five Flathead in a pit and killed them; (h) a Cree took shelter in some cherry bush in a hole, but Big Nose went in for him²; (i) not completely shown, but representing a Cree Indian killed while running off Piegan horses; (j) Double Runner, carrying a medicine pipe, he took a bow from a Gros Ventre and then killed him; (k) Double Runner took a shield and a horse from a Crow tipi, a dog barked and he was hotly pursued; (m) he killed two Gros Ventre and took two guns; (n) he captured a Gros Ventre woman and a boy; (o) he took four mules.



Fig. 4. Cold Feet's allotment

I added two horses to Figure 3 which are not found in Wissler's illustration, one at the lower left and the other on the lower right, as they evidently belong with Double Runner's exploits. I omitted

the horse and exploit at the top of Wissler's drawing because he identified these as part of Bear Chief's sequence. There are additional irregularities in Wissler's illustration. For example, two exploits are identified by the letter "e," but the explanation of the capture of a war-bonnet clearly applies to only one. There are three or four other events in Wissler's illustration not described in his text. These omissions suggest that he had encountered difficulties in connecting the translations of events to their corresponding passages in the painting.

Cold Feet's exploits follow those of Double Runner. Little could be learned about this individual, except that he is listed as one of the signatories of the treaty at Blackfeet agency of 1887 (Jackson 2000: 250), and that the Cold Feet country school in the Two Medicine area of the reservation was named in his honor (Pepion 2002).

His allotment, located at the back of the tipi, again displays a wide variety of styles of depiction (Fig. 4). At one end of the spectrum a corral, a rectangular building and human figures with overlapping limbs, show a concern for three dimensional space in the manner of European painting. A stencil was used in painting the yellow riflemen on the left hand side of Cold Feet's allotment. At the other extreme are conventionalized triangular and rectangular human figures, and other elements, such as: circular entrenchments, detached hands, scalp and trophy tallies, which reflect much earlier traditions in Blackfoot pictorial painting. Considering the small size of Cold Feet's allotment, and the probability that five or more draftsmen painted his exploits, participants must have literally worked shoulder to shoulder.

Cold Feet was the half brother of Flat Tail, and so it is perhaps more than coincidental that their allotments are side by side on the tipi. Flat Tail was a well known chief. McClintock noted that in 1905 this tall man was one of the four "Old-men Comrades" of the Brave Dogs Society (1937a: 21). In sham battles the older warriors generally enacted their war experiences on foot, while the younger generation performed theirs on horseback (McClintock 1937: 18). Indeed, McClintock took several photographs of Flat Tail enacting his war deeds with a stick between his legs to signify a horse (Beinecke Rare Book Library #39002037428852 and #39002037428878). These photographs likely record the sham battle which McClintock observed, between the Crows, led by Flat Tail, and the Blackfoot (1927: 8).

Flat Tail has the largest allotment on Bear Chief's tipi and it contains the most figures (Fig.5). There are some six formal variations in horses, suggesting six or more draftsmen helped illustrate his war history.⁶

The name inscribed on the next allotment, Orineater, is more correctly written Iron Eater. He was born around



1848. He had four wives and lived the latter part of his life near Heart Butte, on the reservation (DeMarce 1980: 136). His allotment is the smallest on the tipi and correspondingly displays fewer stylistic variations (Fig.6). Nonetheless, a minimum of three draftsmen appear to have depicted his deeds.

Having almost encircled the tipi, we come to Mountain Chief's allotment on the north side of the doorway (Fig.7). In 1941 John Ewers met Mountain Chief, who was then ninety-three years of age. In the same year Ewers commissioned Victor Pepion to paint the murals inside the entrance of the newly constructed Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation. In May of that year Pepion painted the war deeds of his grand uncle, Mountain Chief, on a buffalo hide. The painting was presumably commissioned, along with written explanations of the eleven events which it records, for the museum where it is preserved today. In the painting,

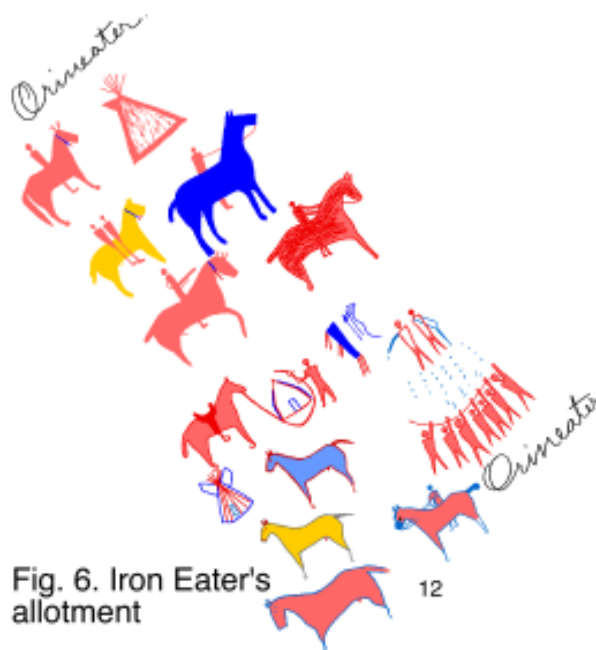


Fig. 6. Iron Eater's allotment

Mountain Chief characteristically appears in each event wearing a straight-up bonnet and holding a lance and shield. He is similarly rendered in event 8 on the Bear Chief tipi. This event likely corresponds to event 4 on the Pepon painting, which is described as “Mountain Chief killed Gros Ventre warrior in hand to hand fight with lances.” Photographs of Mountain Chief show him wearing his straight-up bonnet and holding his lance in Ewers (1986: 119) and lance and shield in Farr (1984: 72).

Twelve of Mountain Chief’s war exploits were depicted with accompanying explanations on one of the panels commissioned by the Great Northern Railway to decorate the Glacier Park Hotel, and is illustrated in McAdams (1919: 2).⁷ The sequence on the left of the panel may be correlated with events 5, 7 and 8 on the tipi in Mountain Chief’s section of Bear Chief’s tipi. The explanations for the sequence on the Glacier panel are as follows:

A large battle with the Sioux. The latter took refuge in a big hole or coulee, The fight lasted from sunrise to sunset and when it began to grow dark the few Sioux who were left attempted to run out to safety. Mountain Chief is seen chasing two of them. One he caught and taking his spear away from him, killed him with it. The other he caught by the hair and stabbed him in the head.

In event 8 the capture of the enemy lance is shown by a dash followed by a detached hand grasping the lance. Event 3 also shows one warrior grabbing another by the hair and stabbing him in the head. Mountain Chief described to Joseph Dixon a similar, if not identical, series of events which occurred in a great battle against the Cree at Fort Whoop-Up in 1870. The numbers in square brackets which I inserted in Dixon’s following text correlate with events shown in Figure 7:

As we rode down the hill slope [into the coulee], I began to sing my war song. I carried the shield in my hand and this song that I sung belonged to that shield. One of the medicine men dreamed that whoever held this shield would not be hit by bullets. While singing I put in the words; “My body will be lying in the plains.”I jumped off my horse and took my spear and stabbed one of the Crees between the shoulders. He had a spear and I took that away from him [8]. I jumped [on] my horse again, and just as I returned there was another Cree who raised his gun to fire at me. I ran over him, and he jumped up and grabbed my horse by the bridle. I swung my horses head around to protect myself and took the butt of my whip and knocked him down [6]. When I struck him he looked at me and I found that his nose had been cut off. I heard afterward that a bear had bitten his nose off. Afterward I knocked him down, I killed him..... When we got close together I took his arrows from him, and he grabbed me by the hair of the head. I saw him reach for his dagger, and just then

we clinched [7]. My war-bonnet had worked down on my neck, and when he stuck at me with his dagger it struck the war-bonnet, and I looked down and saw the handle sticking out, and grabbed it and killed the [him]. (Dixon 1913: 112)

Although certain details such as tribal attribution are contradictory, the three versions of Mountain Chief’s adventures are mutually informative and fairly consistent. For many years George Bull Child made a living by selling his hide paintings to tourists, including two renditions of Mountain Chief’s Glacier Park hotel panel (Ray 1972: 21; Sotheby’s May 24, 1924: #215). A tipi liner collected by Bob Scriver, presently in the collection of the Provincial Museum of Alberta, further illustrates the complexities of using pictorial narratives as a source for historically accurate information. Soon after making his acquisition, on February 12, 1988, Scriver took the tipi liner to a Piegan elder, Mike Swims Under, hoping to learn about its pictographic content. Swims Under had seen the painting before and knew that it had belonged to Mountain Chief. However, his explanations were primarily based on a general knowledge of war exploit painting, rather than on specific knowledge of the events depicted. For example, he only identified the tribal affiliation of the enemy once—a Crow—in an event which closely resembles the head stabbing incident on Bear Chief’s tipi. Nonetheless, Swims Under’s explanation of one event adds to our knowledge of the Bear Chief painting: “Mountain Chief is now on the black horse and he, Mountain Chief, is shot in the leg, his black horse too. From that day on Mountain Chief walked with a limp.” No doubt, this also describes the event depicted in the upper left corner of Mountain Chief’s section of Bear Chief’s tipi. In addition, it corresponds to an event on Mountain Chief’s Glacier Park panel described as, “...a fight with Crees in the Sweet Grass Hills. Above is shown Mountain Chief mounted on a beautiful black mare. This horse is shot from under him by the chief of the Crees, but Mountain Chief managed to get away safely.”⁸

Bear Chief was born in 1857, the son of *Siekaii*, or Mink. According to McClintock he was born into the Don’t Laugh band (1937: 12), whereas Grinnell thought that he belonged to the Fat Roasters and lived on Two Medicine Creek.⁹ Schultz noted that in the Blackfoot language his name is *Nina Okaiyu* and should more properly be translated in English as Chief Bear.¹⁰ Richard Sanderville noted that Bear Chief was made a chief in 1886,¹¹ and in another instance stated that Bear Chief was made chief in 1894 and remained so until his death in 1910.¹² Perhaps these dates reflect his appointment to band chief and later promotion to head chief.

In any event, Bear Chief appears in photographs of three delegations of Blackfeet sent east to negotiate tribal

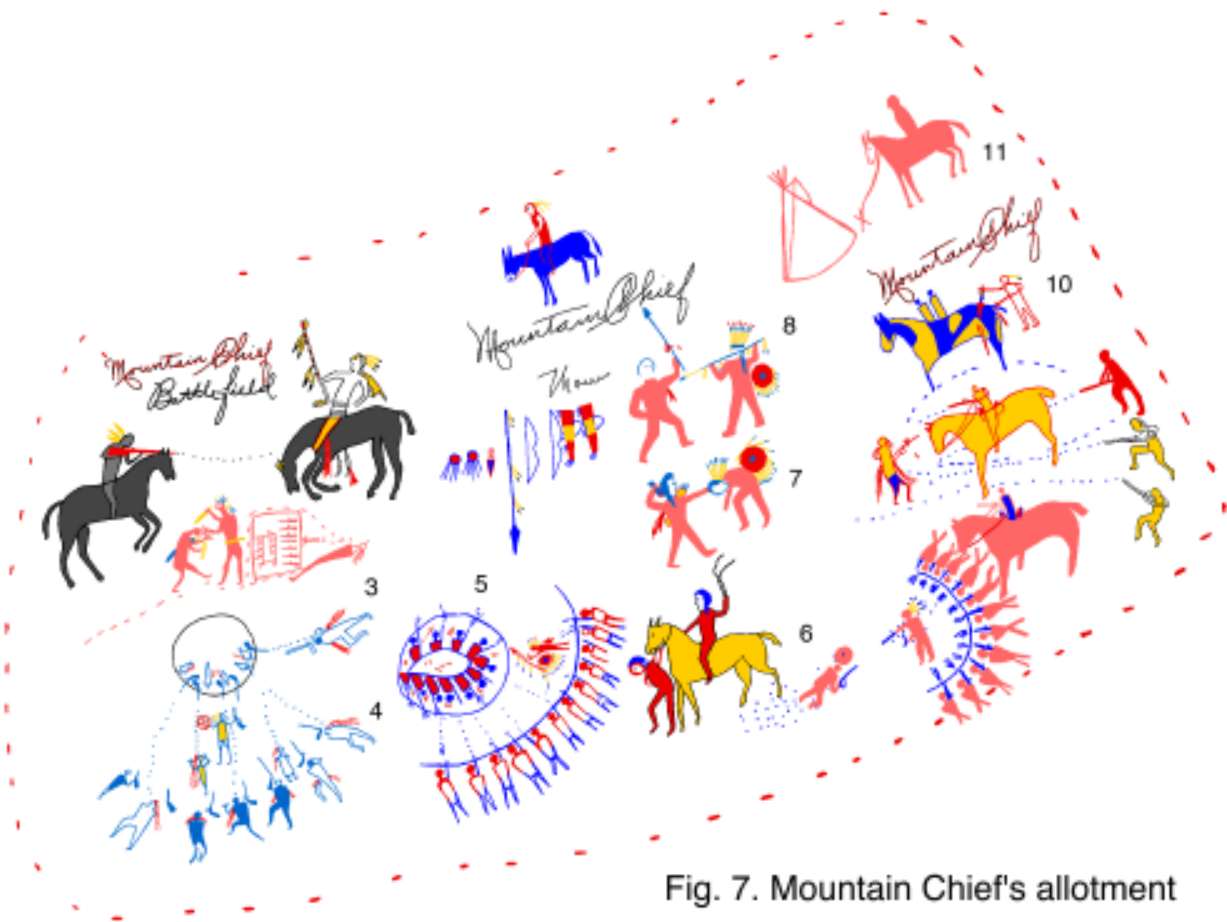


Fig. 7. Mountain Chief's allotment

matters in 1891, 1892, and 1903 (see Farr 1984: 64, 37, 65).¹³ In the two later photographs Bear Chief is dressed in stylish European clothing, while almost all the other delegation members are in traditional Blackfeet regalia. In contrast, Bear Chief wore his Blackfeet regalia when he travelled to New York in March of 1896. Bear Chief, White Antelope Woman, and her twenty-month-old daughter, reconstructed a small Blackfeet buffalo hunting camp in the *Forest and Stream* exhibit at the Sportsmen's Exposition in Madison Square Garden.¹⁴ The display was organized by George Bird Grinnell. The "Camp of the Red Hunter" was the highlight of the exhibition and during the week of the show Bear Chief "was the best known man in New York" (Anonymous 1896). The *Forest and Stream* article features a photo-multigraph (of five positions in one sitting) of Bear Chief posed in his weasel tail fringed hide shirt. The same shirt was acquired by a visitor to the exposition, German industrialist Alexander Ferdinand Flinsch, and donated to the Museum Fur Volkerkunde, l/c Berlin in 1924 (cat. no. IVB 12473).¹⁵

The contrast between these photographs indicate Bear

Chief's special ability to advantageously straddle Blackfeet and European traditions. As the *Forest and Stream* article notes: "For many years now he has been the most industrious man on his reservation; and now he is one of the wealthiest. It is he who raises the best crops, it is he who has the fattest cattle, his horses are fastest, and his success in this respect has not been without its influence on his fellow tribesman. They have seen that as of old he was successful in war, so now he is successful in peace, and so strongly have they been impressed by this that they elected him head council chief of the [South] Piegan tribe of the Blackfoot nation." While Bear Chief's success hinged on the assimilation of certain features of European culture, it was also clear that he maintained an active role in traditional Blackfeet life. About a dozen photographs taken by McClintock on the Blackfeet Reservation between 1898 and 1908 confirm Bear Chief's frequent participation in traditional events (Beinecke Rare Book Library, McClintock 1937: 12, see also Glenbow Archives photograph NA-1461-43 by Forsyth).

The most prominent testimonial to Bear Chief's success

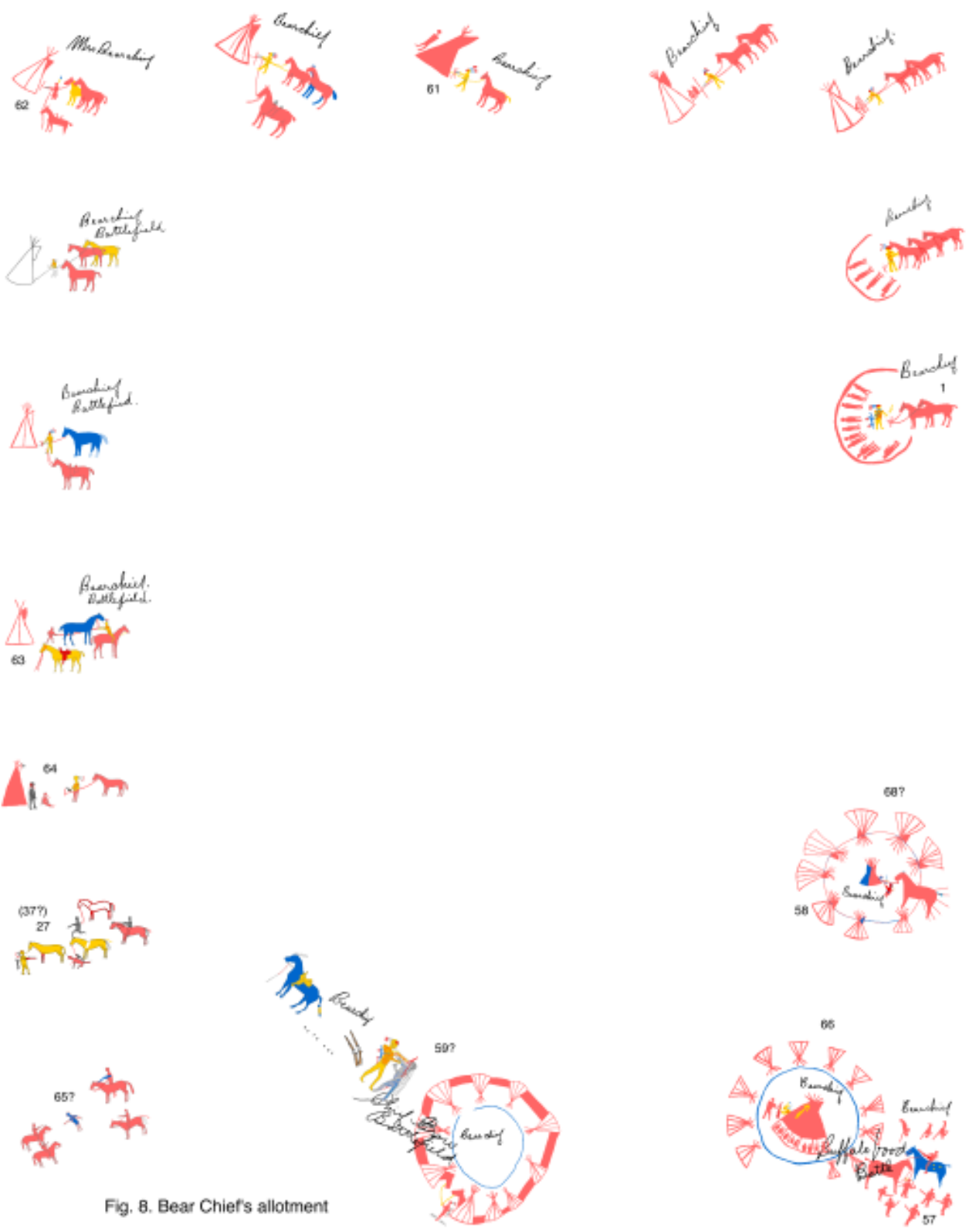


Fig. 8. Bear Chief's allotment

in traditional Blackfoot terms is perhaps his war deed tipi. Bear Chief's war events, encircling the tipi at eye level, are illustrated in the same order around the margin of this page (Fig.8). Wissler recorded only one exploit, "65?," "Bear chief on foot surprised by Assiniboine Indians but he escaped" (1911: 37). Most of his remaining adventures involve the capture of horses tethered to their owners' tipis. Prized buffalo runners and war horses were picketed at night close to the tipi to the north of the doorway. Tipis were invariably set up facing east and the bed of the master was to the right on entering, thus the horse was picketed very closely to him. It was correct technique to cut rather than untie the rope. This taunted the former owner and ensured that he knew the horse was stolen. It was also perhaps more difficult to untie the rope, particularly if it was stiff with cold or slippery from water (Smith 1943: 103-4). These details are accurately reflected in Bear Chief's vignettes.

There are additional records of Bear Chief's exploits. The "Indian camp" at the Sportsmen's Show featured a sweat lodge over which was draped a painted robe covered with war deeds of "either Bear Chief or his side partner, Double Runner." Interest in the robe was so great that it became the focus of an impromptu conference, with Bear Chief explaining the depicted events and James Willard Schultz interpreting. *Forest and Stream* (April 4, 1896) gives an apparently accurate description of this event. The article notes that Bear Chief recited ten exploits before an impatient reporter asked how many men he had killed in his lifetime. Although he gave the reporter his answer, "twenty-one men," Bear Chief had been offended by the interruption and refused to recite further war deeds, adding that anyway the war days are over and the Indians must now follow the road of the white man. I encountered only one of the ten events described in *Forest and Stream* and the *New York Times* (March 19, 1896) which may be connected to Bear Chief's depictions on his tipi. The latter paper notes that at the age of seventeen Bear Chief was caught attempting to capture Sitting Bull's horses, and was held hostage for two days in the Sioux chief's "red and blue" tipi. This is perhaps the event depicted on the left side of the doorway of Bear Chief's tipi. The *Field and Stream* article states, "One paper (the *Press*) gave over half a page of drawings from Bear Chief's robe, and a story describing the same." At the time of writing I was unable to locate this article.¹⁶

The name "Mrs. Bearchief" is inscribed on event 62, which shows a woman capturing horses. Ewers met Bear Chief's wife, Elk Hollering in the Water (Annie), in the early 1940s when she was a very old woman. He described her as of "very slight build" and one of three married Blackfoot women known to accompany their husbands on

the war path (1955: 190). Ewers's photograph of her may be found in Taylor (2000: 43).

The regalia which Bear Chief took on the war path is fairly consistent throughout his allotment. Generally, a set of three feathers decorate his head. Ewers learned that Bear Chief wore in his hair the same war medicine as White Quiver—a feather borrowed from Under Bull's "Arapaho pipe" medicine bundle. (1955: table six). In addition, the Peabody Yale Museum holds a war charm of this type (cat. no. 1316) which is described by its collector, G.B. Grinnell, as once belonging to Bear Chief. It is composed of three eagle feathers, each fastened to a porcupine quill-wrapped stick, and has a small cylindrical painted rawhide storage container. This is likely the one shown in Bear Chief's depictions. Another item, a decorated animal pelt, is shown in four events. He wears what appears to be the same pelt in several photographs taken by McClintock (Beinecke 39002037422467 and 39002037296010). Most prominent is Bear Chief's shirt with red painted dots, which appears in no less than ten of his adventures. The shirt is most likely the one Big Plume transferred to Bear Chief, his brother-in-law, in 1880.¹⁷ Big Nose (Three Suns) initiated the transfer on Bear Chief's behalf by offering the medicine pipe to Big Plume. According to Sanderville, Big Plume was sixteen when he originally made the shirt. Since the 1901 reservation census states Big Plume was born in 1826,¹⁸ this would have occurred in 1842. Ewers discussed the shirt in detail with his Piegan informant, Chewing Black Bones, who was told by Big Plume that the shirt replicated the "skin shirt, with holes in it, painted red" as it first appeared in his dream.¹⁹ Sanderville stated that Bear Chief wore the shirt on horse raids against the Crow, Cree, Gros Ventre, and Sioux, and that he always brought home horses.²⁰ Chewing Black Bones considered that the shirt was particularly useful because it made Bear Chief invisible to his enemies, in whose camps he came to capture horses.²¹ Adam White Man told Ewers that before going into a fight Bear Chief put on the shirt and sang the power song: "All other Indians are babies."²²

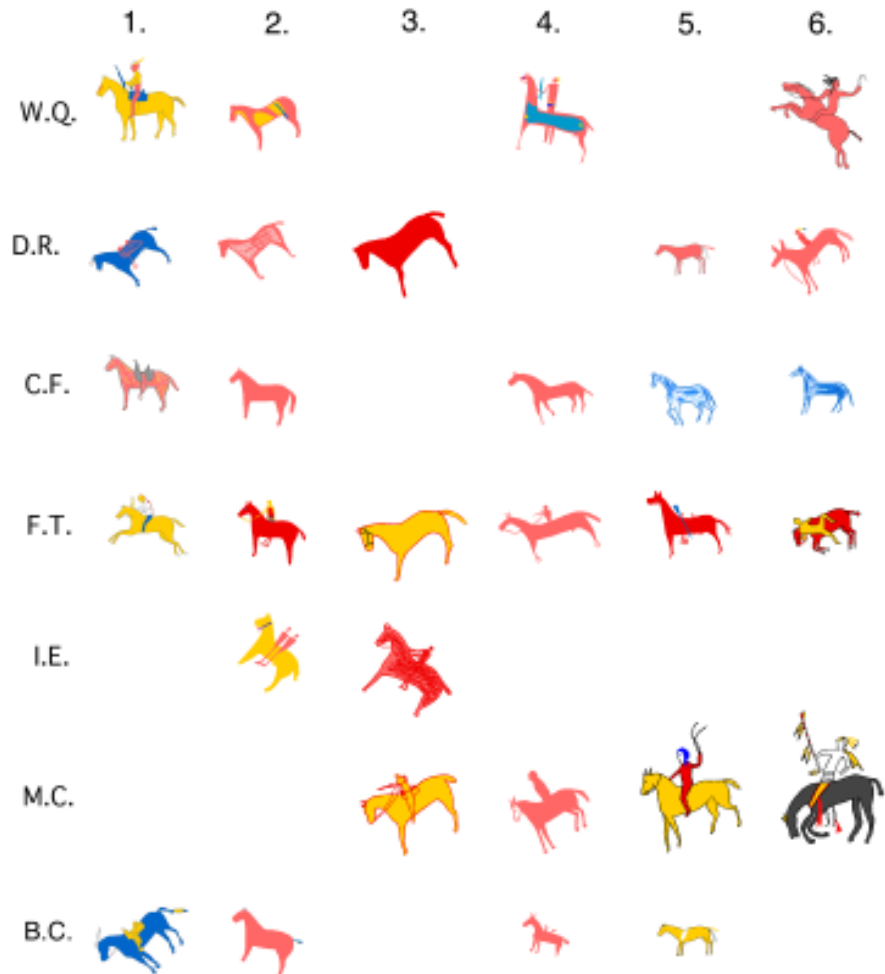
Chewing Black Bones stated that Bear Chief's good friend Grinnell offered five hundred dollars to Bear Chief for the shirt. Bear Chief refused. Grinnell then offered to write to Washington to get the papers necessary to make Bear Chief a chief. With this Bear Chief acquiesced.²³ There are two Blackfoot perforated shirts at the American Museum of Natural History in New York which came from Grinnell; however, only one has the characteristic red dots (cat no. 50.2/2840).²⁴ In the photograph taken by McClintock entitled, "Bear Chief scalping the enemy," Bear Chief wears a perforated shirt, but it appears to be another version of the Big Plume shirt, one which has balanced crosses on the sleeves (Beinecke

39002037296010). This would suggest that Bear Chief had sold his shirt to Grinnell before the photograph was taken, some time between 1898 and 1908.

Ewers noted that there were no less than five versions of the Big Plume/Bear Chief shirt,²⁵ and that these were “far from identical.”²⁶ He illustrated a photograph of Mad Plume wearing a version of the shirt which bears circles of (red?) paint and balanced crosses on sleeves, a hybrid between the AMNH example and that worn by Bear Chief in the photograph (1958: 277). In describing the shirt Chewing Black Bones said to Ewers, “I don’t mean to be disrespectful, but I call this the Lord’s shirt” and he went on to say that the man wearing the shirt in Big Plume’s dream was a white man who identified himself as the Lord.²⁷ Based on Chewing Black Bones’s description Ewers considered the shirt to exemplify a trend for northern Plains Indian warriors to draw upon Christian religious powers for their war medicine (1958: 192). In this regard, he mentioned several times that the shirt bore crosses. However, no crosses are mentioned in the typescript interview with Chewing Black Bones, nor are they depicted on the AMNH shirt. The absence of crosses and the fact that red circles are the most salient feature on Bear Chief’s depictions of the shirt suggest that the meaning of Chewing Black Bones’s explanation bears rethinking.²⁸

With regard to his depicted exploits, Bear Chief or one of his draftsmen, was far more adept at utilizing European pictorial conventions than any of the other painters on the tipi. He uses a pencil to prepare a fine lined under drawing. He pays considerable attention to anatomical details of horses. The features of the two grappling warriors in episode 59? are very carefully observed and realistically animated. The draftsman frequently overlaps forms and places figures on different levels of the picture plane, in order to give an impression of three-dimensional space.

Fig. 9. Horse comparison



His depictions remind us of the apparent ease with which Bear Chief assimilated Euro American culture. Despite the promise which life seemed to hold for him, things quickly unraveled for Bear Chief after his trip to New York. According to Grinnell, during that visit James Willard Schultz “got Young Bear Chief into the way of drinking. He went back to the reservation, took to drink, dissipated all his property, and finally died from drink.”²⁹

Having reviewed all the allotments, we may now consider certain historical data which add to our understanding of the forces which shaped the painting of Bear Chief’s tipi. Blackfoot war deed tipis were as observed as early as 1841 (Dempsey 1977: 67). According to Blood tradition, a few years prior to this date one of their principal chiefs, Seen From Afar, became the first to paint a war deed tipi (Brasser 1992a: 716). The rights to Seen From Afar’s tipi were passed on to some five

successive owners, ending with Fred Spotted Bull, who left the tipi to his wife Suzette Eagle Ribs. She erected the tipi for the last time at a Blood Sun Dance in the 1960s.³⁰ The Seen From Afar tipi was repainted several times, by different sets of draftsmen, some of whom added new exploits. Accordingly, the tipi underwent stylistic changes with each renewal.

Among the Siksika the war tipi of Boy Chief, later owned by Cyril Olds, was decorated with a wide variety of exploits including: intertribal raiding in the nomadic days, capturing goods and animals from Europeans after settlement on reserves, fighting in Europe in the World Wars, and rodeo adventures in Australia (Brasser 1992a: 720). These examples suggest that a transferable war deed tipi may accumulate a variety of pictorial styles and simultaneously reflect several phases in the history of Blackfoot warfare.

In 1929 Yellow Fly, a Blackfoot, noted that a painted war tipi "may contain contributions from fifteen to twenty different warriors. . . . An Indian will purchase the title to a war deed design. He will then build a new tepee. He allots a certain space on the tepee to a certain warrior. This warrior's accomplishments in warfare will be depicted in the space allotted to him. The owner of the tepee allots another space to another warrior. This is continued until every available space around the tipi is used" (1929). Brasser learned that the new owner of a war tipi would invite a number of war veterans to a feast and discuss his plan to paint the tipi with war exploits. Each of the guests would sing their own war songs, then arrange themselves outside the tipi. They prayed together, then each recounted four exploits. The enemy's tipi must somehow have played a role in all of these accounts.³¹ At the conclusion of each account the warrior hit the tipi, as if striking a coup. Then they, or their hired artist, were given paint to illustrate their war deeds on the tipi cover. In contrast to other tribes, Blackfoot and Sarcee war tipis were painted while erect, the illustrations covering only the area conveniently within reach of the painters. Each time an owner renewed his tipi cover he invited warriors to paint their exploits, resulting in a change of pictures (1992a: 715).

Wissler noted about Bear Chief's tipi, "The drawing was done by a number of individuals; in some cases, by the hero of the exploits, but often by a young man under his immediate direction. This is obvious in the varying degree in execution and conventionality. . ." (1911: 39) The question we may now ask is how the various artists orchestrated their efforts as they worked their way around the tipi.

Six or seven large areas of the tipi cover were marked out, apparently before painting began, by lines of red dashes, blue dashes in one case, and solid blue in another.

These boundaries, visible in the accompanying illustrations, were perhaps preparatory, rough layouts of the distribution of allotments on the tipi. In some cases the exploits of a given warrior seem to be well contained by their borders, while others like those of Flat Tail and Double Runner overrun or ignore, their boundaries.

An analysis of the styles of depiction on the tipi allows us to roughly determine how many draftsmen participated in the painting, and how they divided their work over the surface of the tipi. Toward this end, I studied horses on the tipi, allotment by allotment, and examples thought to be representative of particular draftsmen were identified and charted (Fig. 9). Each horizontal row of horses represents an allotment identified by the warrior's initials. Each horse along the row was determined to be representative of a different artist's work. This determination took into account that a given artist may vary his work considerably: alternating between four legged and two legged horses, sometimes terminating legs with hooks and sometimes not, varying the appearance of the tail, etc. The vertical rows illustrate how the artists' work is distributed over the entire painting. Each of the first three rows is thought to be the work of a single artist. The horse type typically found in Bear Chief's section, in vertical row one, is also found in significant numbers in at least four other allotments. It appears that this artist specialized in drawing horses. He carefully observed anatomical features, represented a variety of poses, and always executed with a delicate sense of form and line. The draftsman represented in the second row painted horses in six allotments. His horses are much less detailed, generally having a cookie cutter appearance, while varying the shape of the tail and sometimes terminating legs with hooks. Although there are several examples in rows four to six which may be attributed to the same draftsman, for the most part, each of the horses appears to have been painted by a different artist. This chart suggests that the horses on the tipi were painted by at least thirteen different draftsmen. A similar analysis suggests that human figures were painted by at least fifteen different painters. My estimation of the number of different artists based on the variety of human and horse styles concurs with Yellow Fly's report that fifteen to twenty men would get together and paint a war deed tipi.

The distribution of humans and horses indicates that the process of painting involved a high degree of cooperation between numerous draftsmen working in close proximity. For example, Flat Tail's allotment, measuring some 4.5 m. x 1.2 m. (15 ft. x 4 ft.), appears to have been executed by a minimum of six painters. At least five artists painted Cold Feet's smaller allotment of 1.2 m. x 1.2 m. (4 ft. x 4 ft.). It was not uncommon for two or more men to work together on a single exploit, or for one man to delineate a horse and another to draw its rider. It is also

clear that a number of draftsmen work extensively over much of the tipi cover.

Personal achievement was no doubt a dominant feature of Plains Indian society, particularly as it related to warfare. The study of war exploit painting generally focuses on personal items such as robes and shirts. Such items tend to memorialize, be executed and worn by a single individual. These studies are inclined to overlook the collective or cooperative efforts in warfare and war paintings. Early in his career John Ewers recognized that studies of aspects of offensive warfare, such as individualistic coup counting, have overshadowed the importance of defensive warfare and group cooperation needed to build and defend entrenchments and war lodges (1944: 191). In some respects, the execution of Bear Chief's war deed tipi is analogous to such collaborative war efforts. However, Bear Chief's allotment is highly distinctive, both in style and content, in relation to the rest of the tipi. Furthermore, his exploits are prominently located at eye level, completely encircling the tipi, immediately above the events of the other participants. In combination this data indicates that the primary reason for painting the tipi was, to re-quote Wissler, to "receive irrefutable social recognition" for Bear Chief's accomplishments while, at the same time, conferring upon a larger community of men a certain rapport or collective status.

Endnotes

¹ American Museum of Natural History, New York, Anthropology Department, Wissler to Boas, August 19, 1903.

² Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Anthropology Department: Ewers to Dewdney, August 24, 1970; Ewers to Brownstone, February 22, 1993; July 7, 1989, and February 19, 1986.

³ Accession Files, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Ethnology Department, H.A. Dempsey, undated note.

⁴ Another tipi photographed by McClintock on the Piegan Reservation at the 1908 Sundance (#39002037429207 Beinecke Rare Book Library) bears several visible name glosses, but only one is fully legible. Below the long eared horse to the right of the empty hand of the "chief" figure at the back of the tipi is the name "Cold Feet." Unlike the names written on Bear Chief's tipi, these were intended to identify warriors primarily within the context of the Piegan community.

⁵ Big Nose was an important head chief of the south Piegans. As a boy he was named Bear Chief, then he became known as Three Suns, and was named Big Nose in his old age. His father was also named Bear Chief, like the owner of the tipi under discussion (Eagle Calf and Heavy Breast c. 1920: 17). Big Nose was considerably older than the other warriors noted on Bear Chief's tipi. In 1893-94, at the age of about seventy, Big Nose gave an elk hide with his painted war exploits, along with detailed explanations of the depicted events, to the Indian Agent, Captain L.W. Cooke. This item is currently held by the Minnesota

Historical Society (#8151), and Big Nose's explanations were published by Schultz (1962: 264-270). The younger Bear Chief is mentioned in Big Nose's most recent exploit, which occurred in 1881. See Ewers (1958: 285-86) for further information on Big Nose.

⁶ Brassler noted that in the 1970s Mrs. Flat Tail had the rights to a war tipi (1992a: 720).

⁷ Eagle Calf and Heavy Breast (c. 1920: 6) published explanations said to correspond to two panels devoted to Mountain Chief exploits. McAdams (1919: 2) published both explanations with illustrations of the two panels; however, it is clear that both explanations apply only to the lower illustration. This suggests that only one of the Glacier Park panels related to Mountain Chief.

⁸ There is a painted elk skin said to have been executed by Mountain Chief in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian (22/1878). However, it bears no discernible resemblance, in either form or content, to the above mentioned Mountain Chief documents. Additionally, among the Duvall papers is an illustration of the Bear Dance drawn by Big Brave (Mountain Chief). Interestingly, this drawing with its triangular figures in a circle could easily be mistaken for an entrenched battle in an early war painting.

⁹ Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, MS 5, Folder 95-6. See also Grinnell papers, Southwest Museum, "Notes on Photographs of Piegan Chiefs Sent Me By C.B. Griffin", March 11, 1924.

¹⁰ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, James W. Schultz to Madge H. Walters, May 30, 1945.

¹¹ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Richard Sanderville to Madge Walters, June 1, 1945.

¹² Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Richard Sanderville to Madge Walters, n.d.

¹³ The captions in Farr identify Bear Chief as "Little Bear" in the 1891 photograph; "young Bear Chief" in the 1892 photograph; and "Little Bear Chief" in the 1903 photograph.

¹⁴ William Jackson, the interpreter during the New York visit, was White Antelope's husband.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Peter Bolz of the Museum Fur Volkerkunde Berlin for bringing this shirt to light, and for providing a copy of the brochure on Bear Chief's camp. Although the text is taken from the earlier mentioned *Forest and Stream* article, the photographs in the brochure are different. Bear Chief posed in a capote, with belted knife, cloth leggings and moccasins.

¹⁶ Apparently, only the New York City Library holds issues of the *Press* from the period under consideration. The library kindly searched copies dating from March 13 to April 4, 1896, without turning up the article. Another missing hide painting of interest finds reference among Grinnell's papers. Along with a letter thanking Grinnell for getting rid of a corrupt Indian Agent, Bear Chief forwarded a goat hide on which he, Many Tail Feathers and Yellow Wolf painted their war exploits. Grinnell Papers, Southwest Museum, #390, Bear Chief to Grinnell, June 30, 1889.

¹⁷ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File

1938.202 Walters, Richard Sanderville to Madge Walters, June 1, 1945.

¹⁸ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

¹⁹ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

²⁰ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Richard Sanderville to Madge Walters, August 15, 1940.

²¹ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

²² Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Adam White Man to Ewers, September 7, 1951.

²³ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

²⁴ Grinnell noted that the shirt has two bullet holes showing where Bear Chief was wounded. I found no holes in the shirt that would have resulted from bullet wounds. He also stated that after owners of this type of shirt grew too old for war they sold them to younger warriors. Grinnell estimated in the early 1900s that Bear Chief's shirt was over a hundred years old. The other shirt was used in battle for many years by Tail Feathers Coming In Sight Over the Hills. Grinnell acquired it from his son, Black Collar. Grinnell Papers, Southwest Museum, MS 5, Folder 95-6.

²⁵ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

²⁶ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, John Ewers to Charles Norton, October 8, 1957.

²⁷ Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department, Accession File 1938.202 Walters, Ewers's interview with Chewing Black Bones, September 5, 1951.

²⁸ James Willard Schultz died in 1947 when he had half finished an adventure story based on the theft of Bear Chief's war shirt by Assiniboine raiders. Wilbur Betts wrote the second half of the book and published it under the title *Bear Chief's War Shirt* in 1983. The dust cover describes this book as a fictionalized account, while noting that the theft of the shirt is a "historic fact." In the first half of the book Schultz gave several details concerning the shirt: the perforations made the wearer impregnable to enemy weapons, Bear Chief had never been injured in his seven fights wearing the shirt, in his origin vision Bear Chief saw a "shadowy old man" wearing the shirt, Bear Chief was instructed in the vision to put a red quillwork sun symbol on the front, a blue morning star symbol on the back and a fringe of weasel skins; the right sleeve had a patch darker than the rest of the shirt (1983: 5, 11). The AMNH shirt has perforations and weasel fringe, but not the dark patch or the quillwork symbols. Bett's fictionalized account concerning the shirt in the second half of the book appears to draw heavily on Ewers's description (1958: 192) and the archival correspondence in the Denver Art Museum (Accession File 1938:202). He invented the story

that Bear Chief sacrificed the original shirt at a Sun Dance, and commissioned Big Plume, a Christian, to make a new version which featured crosses in place of the sun and morning star symbols. Bett completes his story by stating that his version of Bear Chief's eventually went to the Denver Art Museum (Acc No 1938:202). However, Chewing Black Bones explained to Ewers that the Denver Art Museum shirt was made by Three Calf in the 1930s. Chewing Black Bones added that the shirt was made under his guidance, and that apparently Schultz was aware of these origins.

²⁹ Grinnell Papers, Southwest Museum, "Notes on Photographs of Piegan Chiefs Sent Me By C.B. Griffin", March 11, 1924.

³⁰ Glenbow Museum, Ethnology Department, accession records, Hugh Dempsey May 14, 1992, and Dempsey, no date. Over the next winter the upper section became wet and rotted out, but the section with war records remained intact. In 1967 Suzette Eagle Ribs gave the tipi to her brother-in-law, Hugh Dempsey, in return for helping her paint a restored version on a new cover. Dempsey deposited the tipi in the Glenbow Museum.

³¹ This emphasis on enemy tipis perhaps explains the appearance of so many depictions by Bear Chief on his own tipi, of the capture of enemy horses tethered to tipis. In contrast, the events on Bear Chief's robe, which he provided for the press at the Sportmen's Show, were predominantly about killing the enemy.

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