



AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Dear Mr. President:

Leonard Peltier murdered two FBI Agents. He deserves no clemency/pardon.

June 26, 1975, was a hot dusty Thursday on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in southwestern South Dakota when two young FBI agents arrived from their office in Rapid City. It was about noon when Special Agents Ronald A. Williams, 27, and Jack R. Coler, 28, pulled into the Jumping Bull Compound area of the remote reservation seeking to arrest a young man in connection with the recent abduction and assault of two young ranchers in nearby Manderson, SD.

Spotting a red and white Chevrolet Suburban van in which they believed the fugitive suspect to be riding, the two agents pursued it toward an open grassy bowl-like area. Unknown to Special Agents Coler and Williams, one of the three men in the vehicle was Leonard Peltier, a violent man with a violent past, a fugitive wanted for attempted murder of an off-duty Milwaukee police officer. Knowing the two vehicles pursuing him were occupied by FBI agents and believing they were seeking to arrest him on the attempted murder case, Peltier and his two associates abruptly stopped their vehicle and began firing their rifles at the agents.

Out of the range of the agents' revolvers, Peltier and his friends continued firing. Other militants and radical members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) joined them in shooting at the disabled and trapped agents.

Surprised by the sudden violence, outmanned, outgunned and at an extreme tactical disadvantage, Coler and Williams were both wounded and defenseless within minutes. Coler sustained a severe wound, the force of the bullet nearly taking his right arm off. Williams, wounded in the left shoulder and right foot, removed his shirt during the hail of incoming rifle fire and fashioned a tourniquet around the arm of Coler, who had fallen unconscious. Coler, a former Los Angeles Police Department sergeant with two small sons, and Williams, an affable, friendly former FBI clerical employee, were at the mercy of Peltier and his associates. But there was to be no mercy that day for the law enforcement officers.

Not satisfied with the terrible injuries they had inflicted, Peltier and two other men walked down the hill toward the ambushed officers. Three shots were heard. Williams, kneeling and apparently surrendering, was shot in the face directly through his outstretched, shielding hand. He died instantly. Coler, still unconscious, was shot twice in the head at close range. He died instantly after the second shot. Before leaving the murder scene, Peltier and his criminal associates stole the two dead agents' handguns and the .308 rifle Coler was going after when shot.

The crime scene examination testified to the brutality of the ambush. Coler and Williams had little chance to defend themselves. They had fired only five shots. In contrast, over 125 bullet holes were found in their two cars.

The investigation quickly focused on Leonard Peltier as the executioner. The murder weapon was determined to be a .223 caliber rifle. Witnesses identified Peltier as the only person at the murder scene in possession of a weapon that would fire a .223-caliber bullet, his weapon being a .223-caliber AR-15 semi-automatic rifle. Witnesses later testified that Peltier had possessed this rifle before, during and after the ambush. The murder weapon, with others used in the attack, was hidden. AIM sympathizers later spirited it from the area.

In September 1975, a station wagon, heavily laden with weapons and explosives, caught fire and blew up on the Kansas Turnpike near Wichita. The murder weapon and Coler's stolen .308 rifle were recovered from the wreckage. One of the vehicle's occupants later testified that he had seen Peltier carrying the recovered .223-caliber rifle by the two FBI agents' cars on the day and at the time of their murder.

Following the June 26 murders, Leonard Peltier fled the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The FBI added him to its Ten Most Wanted list. Then, in November 1975, an Oregon State trooper stopped a recreational vehicle in

which Peltier was hiding. Peltier ran from the RV, fired at the officer and escaped. Coler's revolver, stolen when he was murdered, was found in a paper bag under the front seat of the RV. Peltier's thumbprint was on the bag.

When later arrested in Canada by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Peltier remarked that, had he known the officers were there to arrest him, he would have blown them out of their shoes. These are not the comments of an innocent man and portray the true character and violent nature of Leonard Peltier.

During his trial in the U.S. District Court in Fargo, ND, in April 1977, a jury convicted Peltier of the murders of Coler and Williams. A judge sentenced him to two consecutive life sentences. While incarcerated in the Lompoc, California Federal Prison, and with outside assistance, Peltier shot his way out of jail, using a smuggled semi-automatic .223-caliber rifle to make his escape. A fellow AIM member was killed by guards during the escape. Several days later, after assaulting a rancher and stealing his truck, Peltier was captured. He was tried and convicted of the escape and being a felon in possession of a firearm. Separate consecutive prison terms of two and five years were added to his two consecutive life sentences.

Peltier has since appealed his various convictions numerous times. Each time, the federal courts have upheld earlier court actions. The U.S. Supreme Court has twice denied Peltier petitions for certiorari, without comment. The record is clear. There are no new facts. The old facts have not changed and Peltier is guilty as charged.

Twice on national television, Peltier has admitted to firing at the two agents. He has openly stated that he feels no guilt or remorse for the murders. One has only to review his murderous misconduct when confronted by law enforcement officers to be convinced of that fact. Leonard Peltier has lived a life of crime. He has earned and deserves a lifetime of incarceration. Leonard Peltier is a murderer without compassion or feeling for his fellow-man. In turn, he deserves no compassion.

Mr. President, on occasion you have described this country's law enforcement officers as heroes and heroines. You have said that we must work together to ensure that hardened criminals who prey on the innocent receive punishment commensurate with the harm—physical, emotional and financial—that they have inflicted. We agree.

Peggy Coler, Special Agent Coler's widow, can't believe anyone would consider freeing Peltier, the man convicted of shooting her husband point-blank in the face while he lay unconscious. Her son, Ron, four years old when his dad died, can't understand how anyone could portray Peltier as the victim of this tragedy. Peggy and Ron Coler are against any thought of a pardon or commutation of Peltier's sentence. We agree.

Special Agent Ron William's mother, Ellen Williams, worries that Peltier's release into an unsuspecting society would only add to the list of grieving loved ones. She is convinced that Peltier will commit violent acts against others. We agree.

Mr. President, it's time for Leonard Peltier to pay up. Our judicial system is overwhelmed, overworked, and has spoken in this case, again and again. It's time to move on. Leonard Peltier is a vicious, violent, and cowardly criminal who hides behind legitimate Native American Issues. Leonard Peltier was never a leader in the Native American community. Peltier is simply a vicious thug and murderer with no respect or regard for human life, especially when law enforcement officers are involved. Our citizens, on and off the reservations, must be protected from predators such as Peltier. Our laws must be respected and obeyed or the penalty must be paid. The punishment must also fit the crime—and it does here.

Mr. President, since Leonard Peltier couldn't fool the federal courts, he is now trying to fool you and the public. He is shading and hiding the facts—and playing on sympathy. Don't let him get away with it, Mr. President. Sympathy is appropriate only for the dead heroes and their surviving families. Don't let their sacrifice be forgotten.

When law enforcement officers engaged in the dutiful conduct of their official responsibilities are ambushed, gunned down, and shot at point-blank range while they lay wounded, there is in that act an affront to society that is not diminished with the passage of time.

The Society of Former Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation
A professional non-governmental association representing over 8600 former FBI agents