

Anna Mae Aquash was a Native woman from Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, who became involved with the American Indian Movement during the seige of Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1973. She was dedicated to making life better for Native people and worked very hard with the leaders of AIM to try and do something about the injustices suffered by Native people everywhere. CW 248

The following article, written by Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, tells the story of what happened to Anna Mae when she refused to be intimidated by the FBI.

#### THE CASE OF ANNA MAE AQUASH

The body of Anna Mae Aquash was found February 24, 1976, near Highway 73 in a deserted area of Pine Ridge. FBI agent David Price, who had an official record of misconduct, was among the first law enforcement personnel on the scene.

Price knew Aquash well, and Aquash had told several friends that she feared Price because he had threatened her life. Price believed she was withholding information concerning the whereabouts of Butler, Robideau, and Peltier, all of whom were wanted at the time in connection with the Oglala firefight. Nonetheless, Price professed to be unable to identify the body.

W.O. Brown, a coroner retained by the FBI, subsequently determined that the unidentified corpse had died of "exposure". Brown was the same person who earlier determined that Killwright had died of a single gunshot wound to the head, despite evidence to the contrary. An FBI favorite, he had also been brought in from Nebraska to perform the autopsy on Bissonette.

Aquash's body was interred in a common grave on the reservation, with its hands severed. These were sent to the FBI laboratory in Washington, D.C., for "positive identification." On March 5, the bureau notified Aquash's family in Canada of her death "by natural causes." The family, immediately skeptical, contacted AIM attorneys in South Dakota, requesting exhumation of the body for a second autopsy. Under pressure, the FBI reluctantly filed for an exhumation.

The Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee chose Garry Peterson, resident pathologist at St. Paul (Minnesota) Hospital, to perform the second autopsy. An x-ray immediately revealed an object in Aquash's left temple which was found to be a .32 or .38 caliber bullet. Peterson found Aquash's death to have been caused by a handgun fired at point-blank range into the base of her skull.

No one has ever been charged in the Aquash murder. Agent Price has never been deposed on the matter. And the FBI has regularly put off questions on its handling of the affair. Given the appearance of bureau acquiescence--or outright complicity-- in the politically motivated liquidation of AIM members and supporters on and around Pine Ridge, a thorough investigation is warranted. Until all FBI documents relating to these and at least sixty-five other homicides occurring on the reservation between 1972 and 1976 have been divulged, no sense of truth can prevail.

We remember Anna Mae Aquash as a Warrior Woman whose life was a source of inspiration to Native women everywhere and whose death illustrates the enormity of the struggles we face as we strive to gain justice for our people.



Anna Mae and Nogeeshik Aquash after their traditional Sioux wedding ceremony at Wounded Knee, April 12, 1973 *K.B. McKiernan*