

Chief Bear Ribs, an Oohenumpa chief, was a Yanktonnais of the Hunkpatina band by birth. He was born in 1812. He was fifty years old at the time of his death, in 1862. He married the daughter of Chief Wanbliota of the Oohenumpa band. Her name was Makalutawin. Later he took Wahatopawin for a wife; she was a sister of Makalutawin.

When Chief Wanbliota died in 1854, Bear Ribs was head chief in his father-in-law's place and from that time he made rulings for the band. He advocated peace with the United States. He established a home near the mouth of Bad River where West Fort Pierre was afterwards built. This was a good landing place for steamboats. Bear Ribs was a sensible and intelligent man. He wished to do what was best for his people. He united with the Sans Arcs and the Blackfeet, who gave up roaming around to farm and raise gardens along the river bottoms. Bear Ribs and his followers had met Father DeSmet, who often came to Pierre, and they became converts to the Catholic faith.

Most of the fur traders at Old Fort Pierre were of the Catholic religion, and this fact had a great deal of influence on the Indians. From this, the Society of Strong Hearts was formed. The leaders were Mad Bear, Four Bear, Swift Bird and nine others. This society was dedicated to the doing of good instead of evil, and to the righting of all wrongs so far as it was in their power. The hostiles nicknamed these men the Fool Soldiers.

At that time there was a disagreement and a divided opinion between the Indians. Some wanted to give up their hunting grounds as the government wanted them to do. The hostiles wished to hold the land in reserve, without any more treaties. They were satisfied with the treaty of 1851. The friendly Sioux lived near the fur trading posts. They had been receiving annuities from the government, in spite of the fact that the hostiles did not want to make any more treaties with the government in exchange for their large area of hunting grounds. The hostiles demanded of the friendly Sioux that they should not take any more annuities from the government. They said that if the Sioux accepted anything from the government, they would be considered enemies of their nation, and would be treated as such. Feeling ran so high against the friendlies and their taking of annuities that boats coming up the river with goods were waylaid and sunk, so the friendlies could not receive them.

Judge Samuel A. Latta of Leavenworth, Kansas, was appointed Indian agent for the upper river, as far as Fort Union. He made his rounds every year by boat, during his term of office. In 1862 Mr. Latta called the Brules, the Two Kettles, Tetons, Minneconwojus, Sans Arcs and some of the Yanktonnais bands together at Pierre to receive their annuities, in the latter part of May. There should have been more than six thousand at Pierre to receive the goods, but only a small fraction of that number appeared. Those Judge Latta found present were the friendly Blackfeet, Sans Arcs and the Oohenumpas. And they were afraid to take the articles brought up on the boat for issue.

The friendlies told Judge Latta that they could not take what the Great Father had sent, because the majority of the Indians were against making any more treaties, and were claiming that the government had not lived up to its promises in the treaty of 1851. The friendlies did not want to arouse the anger of the hostiles, as that would cost them their lives. In the face of this refusal, Latta ordered the boatmen to unload the goods on the bank, which they quickly did. This was a forced issue. Bear Ribs was the spokesman. He told Judge Latta that he had been a lifelong friend of the white men and the government, that he had always been obedient to their wishes and that to show his friendship he