

Return of Cultural Artifact to Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa

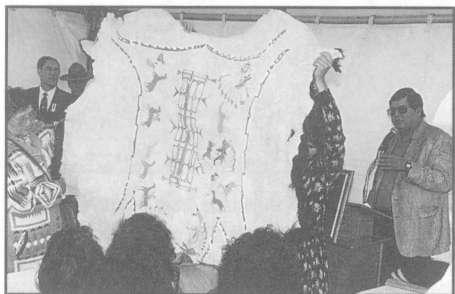
by Dr. William Beahen, RCMP Historian

On September 22, 1995, there were many speeches, mostly in the Blackfoot language, but the depth of the emotion was not lost on the visitors at the Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa Reserve. We were gathered to celebrate the return of a painted buffalo skin by Chief Crop Eared Wolf to his tribe, after an absence of more than a century. For decades, this revered cultural artifact had been on display in the RCMP Museum in Regina and recently, its return had been requested by Chief Roy Fox on behalf of his people. This buffalo hide covered with colourful pictures portrays the brave deeds of Crop Eared Wolf as a young warrior, before the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police on the Prairies.

The atmosphere at the Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa Reserve near Cardston, Alberta, was festive and welcoming, for September 22 is a significant day in the history of the Blood Tribe as well as in Canadian history. On that date, 118 years previously, the Canadian Government had signed Treaty No. 7 with the Blackfoot Confederacy, establishing the legal basis for orderly development of the south-west-

ern frontier. On that day, NWMP officials had been in attendance as well as representatives of the Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa, the largest tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy. More than a century later, members of the Blood Tribe and the Mounted Police were gathered again to celebrate and renew their historic relationship.

A cold prairie wind blew across the open area outside the tribal council offices where the ceremony was being held. However, organizers had prepared for this eventuality and a nylon shelter had been erected to protect guests from the familiar frigid gusts. Chief Roy Fox and the members of his council hosted the celebration with about 150 tribe members in attendance. The Solicitor General, the Honourable Herb Gray, lead the delegation from the RCMP with Assistant Commissioner Wayne Eaton, Commanding Officer of "K" Division (Alberta), representing Commissioner J.P.R. Murray, for whom a previous commitment had prevented from attending in person. Senator Joyce Fairbairn, of Lethbridge, attended the event in a dual role as representative of the government and Honourary Chief of the Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa.



New painted buffalo skin.

In welcoming the participants, Chief Roy Fox stressed the importance of this occasion for the Bloods as well as for him personally. Crop Eared Wolf, the wise and revered Head Chief of the Blood Tribe from 1900 to 1913, had instilled in the Bloods both an appreciation of their cultural heritage and a determination never to alienate the ancestral lands of the Reserve. As a