

TALL BULL'S HORSES

By

Barry Cole

Barry Cole

Email: barrybidd@btinternet.com

Copyright (c) 2014 This screenplay may not be used or reproduced
without the express written permission of the author.

FADE IN

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

An ocean of grass stretching as far as the eye can see. Above it a molten sun beats down from a cobalt blue sky.

A Sioux village is on the move. Their chief FOLLOWS THE ENEMY leads them. His weathered face is set in a frown and he wears a blanket across his broad shoulders to protect them from the mid-day sun. Stung out behind him are groups of squaws and small children. They have been walking for days and fatigue is etched into their faces. Camp-dogs pulling laden travois walk along beside them. Armed warriors guard the flanks.

Suddenly a warrior shouts out and points into the distance towards two approaching figures.

Follows the Enemy raises a hand. The people crowd about him, expectantly. All eyes are fixed on the two returning scouts running towards them.

(NOTE: All instances of the Sioux and Pawnee language will appear on screen in subtitles.)

SCOUT #1

We have found the river. (points behind him).. It is not far.

Joyful shouts erupt from the Sioux . We MOVE WITH them as they follow the two scouts.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The river wide and slow moving cuts through the barren land. Along its bank, groves of cottonwood trees offer welcome shade.

Families come together. The dogs are unburdened and tepees erected. A party of hunters wade cross the river and disappear into the low hills beyond.

EXT. RIVER/ENCAMPMENT - DAY - LATER

Tepees have sprung up among the trees. Squaws sit beside their cooking fires. Many of them have a sleepy baby cradled in their arms.

Warriors lounge about in small groups smoking their pipes and talking in low voices.

Young boys swim in the river, showing off to the young girls watching from the bank, who giggle at their antics.

Suddenly a dog scents the air and barks. Other dogs join in.

FAR BANK

The hunters come into view. Two of them have a dead antelope slung across their shoulders. They wade across the river.

ENCAMPMENT

Squaws crowd about them their skinning knives ready.

INT. TEPEE - NIGHT

In the centre of the tepee is a small fire. Seated around it are Follows the Enemy and three tribal elders.

Follows the Enemy puts a long stemmed pipe decorated with feathers to his lips and draws in a mouthful of smoke.

Exhaling, he passes it to TWO CROWS, the youngest of the elders.

Two Crows takes in a mouthful of smoke and passes the pipe on to the elder seated next to him.

When all of them have had their turn, Follows the Enemy lays the pipe down on the blanket in front of him.

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

We cannot cross the river.

3

TWO CROWS

Then how are we to find the buffalo?

TRIBAL ELDER #1

Two Crows is right we must cross
the river and go south until we
find them.

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

We all know that the land beyond
the river is Pawnee hunting ground.

TWO CROWS

Are the Sioux now afraid of a
few Pawnee?

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

It is we who are few.

TRIBAL ELDER #2

But if we cannot cross the river,
what are we to do?

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

The people are weary, we must let
them rest.

TRIBAL ELDER #2

For how long?

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

We will rest for four days.

TWO CROWS

The people are also hungry. In
four more days we could have
found the buffalo.

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

There is enough game here. We will
not go hungry.

TWO CROWS

Is Follows the enemy..

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

While our people rest we will send
three of our best hunters across the
river. They can journey south for two
days and if they find the buffalo then
we will cross the river.

Two of the elders nod their agreement.

TWO CROWS

And if they find no buffalo?

FOLLOWS THE ENEMY

Then we will follow the river. Even
the buffalo must drink.

Two Crows lowers his head. He can find no argument against
Follows the Enemy's logic.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Three warriors approach the river. The whole tribe throng the
bank, watching them. A heavy silence prevails.

TALL BULL, a lean, muscular boy of twelve with shoulder length
jet black hair, pushes his way to the front. Gripped in his
hand is a bow. A quiver of arrows hangs down his back.

Expectantly, he fixes his gaze on the three warriors.

WOODEN THIGH their leader, a short man with broad shoulders,
and armed with a lance and shield, spots him. He looks across
towards Follows the Enemy, questioningly.

Follows the Enemy nods his head in approval.

Wooden Thigh beckons the boy forward. A great cry goes up from
the Sioux. They are pleased that the Tall Bull has been allowed
to go with the hunters.

Tall Bull and the hunters wade across the river. Only when they

have disappeared from sight do the watching Sioux drift away from the river bank.

SERIES OF SHOTS - TALL BULL AND THE HUNTERS JOURNEYING SOUTH

BEGIN SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Jogging across arid grassland.

B) Eating an evening meal.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. LOW HILLS - DAY

Twenty armed Pawnee warriors come into view over a low bluff. Leading them is STANDING THUNDER a tall powerfully build warrior. His head is shaven except for a single scalp lock and cradled in the crook of his arm is a massive war-club.

Moving in single file, the Pawnee war-party follows the contours of the bluff.

Suddenly Standing Thunder spots the Sioux hunters and stops. He points towards them with his arm.

His warriors gather around him, their eyes on the four Sioux moving away from them along a dry creek bed.

Standing Thunder signals to a small group of warriors and silently, they make their way towards the creek bed.

Standing Thunder leads the remaining warriors away.

EXT. DRY CREEK BED - DAY

Unsuspecting, Wooden Thigh and the Sioux hunters make their way along the creek bed. Without warning the sound of a war-cry shatters the silence.

6

Instinctively the Sioux hunters lift their heads and see

Standing Thunder and a line of Pawnee warriors on a low hill in front of them.

Wooden Thigh turns to Tall Bull.

WOODEN THIGH
Go back to the village. Hurry now.

Tall Bull continues to stare at the Pawnee's.

WOODEN THIGH
Go!

Tall Bull reluctantly turns and hurries away.

Behind him, Wooden Thigh and the two other Sioux warriors begin singing their death songs.

DRY CREEK BED

Tall Bull is running as fast as he can. Rounding a bend he suddenly stops in his track.

Up ahead of him are a group of Pawnee warriors blocking his path.

Tall Bull notches an arrow to his bow and shoots. A Pawnee warrior raises his shield. The arrow thuds into it.

The Pawnee warrior shrieks his war-cry and rushes forward.

Tall Bull reaches for another arrow but the Pawnee warrior is already upon him.

Raising his arm he strikes Tall Bull with his war-club.

Tall Bull falls onto the ground. Blood pours down his face from the deep wound.

The Pawnee warrior stands over him, menacing. He raises his war-club.

A second warrior grabs him by the arm and restrains him.

7

PAWNEE WARRIOR

No! He has a brave heart. Let him
live.

Obediently, the warrior lowers his war-club.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

Standing Thunder and his Pawnee warriors, in single file, jog effortlessly across the empty prairie.

Tall Bull brings up the rear. His hands are bound in front of him and he has a length of rawhide rope looped around his neck.

The raw wound running down his face has stopped bleeding.

Clutching the other end of the rawhide rope, a Pawnee warrior, leads him along like a dog.

Without warning the sound of gunfire shatters the silence and brings the war-party to a halt.

Standing Thunder lifts his head as though scenting the air. His warriors crowd around him, perplexed.

A moment and then:

Standing Thunder raises his war-club and rushes forward.

As one, the Pawnee war-party race after their war-chief.

EXT. HIGH GROUND OVERLOOKING A WIDE RIVER. DAY

From their vantage point Standing Thunder and his warriors gawk at the scene before them.

EXT. PAWNEE VILLAGE - DAY

The Pawnee village, a cluster of huts along the bank of the river is being attacked by Conquistador's.

8

FAR BANK

Four Conquistadors, armed with muskets fire on the village.

PAWNEE VILLAGE

A Pawnee warrior cries out, staggers and falls to the ground.

Other warriors, armed with bows, shoot off their arrows at the Conquistador's on the opposite bank.

FAR BANK

Five mounted Conquistador's walk their horses into the river.

EXT. HIGH GROUND OVERLOOKING THE RIVER - DAY

Standing Thunder shrieks his war-cry and charges towards the river and screaming their war-whoops the Pawnee war-party race after him.

Tall Bull, forgotten, drops to his knees and stares in awe at the scene before him.

RIVER

The five mounted Conquistador's urge their mounts across the slow moving river, the water barely reaches up to their horses bellies.

Sunlight reflects off their helmets and armour and the blades of their naked swords.

PAWNEE VILLAGE

The village is in uproar. Squaws, young and old, many clutching babies in their arms, flee in panic. Young children follow them like shadows.

A group of Pawnee warriors armed with clubs and spears rush towards the approaching enemy.

9

They spot Standing Thunder and his war-party racing to join them.

Heartened by their appearance, they send up a great cry.

FAR BANK

Three Conquistador's on horseback. One beckons urgently to a group of Foot Soldiers. He has witnessed with alarm the arrival of Standing Thunder and his warriors.

The Foot Soldiers, armed with lances and swords run towards him.

PAWNEE VILLAGE

Standing Thunder urges the Pawnee forward. Yelling their war-cries the warriors charge towards the rivers edge.

NEAR BANK

The five mounted Conquistador's ride out of the shallows and onto the river bank.

Instantly, Standing Thunder and his warriors fall upon them.

The five mounted Conquistador's spur their mounts into the mass of warriors.

The Pawnee warriors, fearful of these unknown creatures, and the flashing blades of the Conquistador's swords, are driven back.

A warrior falls to the ground and is immediately trampled under the hooves of the horses.

Standing Thunder, his war club raised charges at one of the horsemen.

He evades the Conquistador's sword thrust, grabs hold of the man's belt and attempts to pull him off his mount.

Emboldened, the Pawnee's re-new their attack.

10

Pawnee and Conquistador locked in battle. The crash of musket fire from across the river adds to the din.

MID STREAM

The three mounted Conquistador's ford the river. Standing on each side of them, with a foot thrust into a stirrup and a hand gripping the riders saddle, are two Foot Soldiers armed with lances and swords.

NEAR BANK

The Conquistador slashes at Standing Thunder with his sword. The blows strike the shield strapped to Standing Thunders back.

Standing Thunder, resolute, maintains his grip. The Conquistador clings to the pommel of his saddle. In desperation he drives his spurs into the horses flank.

A second Pawnee warrior rushes up and seizes hold of the Conquistador. The saddle girth snaps and the Conquistador, still clinging to his saddle, is dragged from his horse and onto the ground.

A great cry goes up from the Pawnee warriors.

The horse whinnies in terror. Free of its burden, it plunges forward.

Filled with fear, Pawnee warriors leap aside as it careers towards them.

The Conquistador struggles free. Standing Thunder raises his war-club and brings it down on the man's helmet. The Conquistador drops to his knees.

HIGH GROUND ABOVE THE RIVER

Tall Bull, watches spellbound as the horse, reins flapping, gallops towards him.

Transfixed, he holds his breath as it thunders past him, its hooves drumming the ground.

11

Coming to his senses Tall Bull works at the rawhide rope with his teeth and frees his hands.

Pulling the leash from around his neck he gets to his feet turns and runs away from the river.

Behind him the din of battle grows louder.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

Tall Bull jogs across the arid grassland. He stops for a moment and looks back over his shoulder. Satisfied he continues on his way.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY - LATER

Tall Bull pulls up, his chest heaving, he can run no further. He surveys the terrain for a place to rest.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

Tall Bull lies asleep on the ground.

The rays of the morning sun creep towards him like fingers and wake him with their warmth. Instantly he gets to his feet and looks about him.

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

The Conquistador's horse, head lowered, pulls at the grass.

Tall Bull spots it and stares in disbelief.

The horse, aware of his presence, continues grazing.

Tall Bull, drawn to it like a magnet, overcomes his fear and moves cautiously towards the horse.

The horse, uneasy whinnies and moves away.

12

Tall Bull stops and stands like a statue. He waits for a moment

then edges forward again, getting a little closer.

Once again, the horse moves away.

Undeterred, Tall Bull, circles around until he is downwind. Creeping closer he stops a dozen feet from the animal.

He waits a moment and then sprints forward.

The horse instinctively shies away. Tall Bull stretches out a hand and grabs its rein.

The horse, alarmed, bolts.

Tall Bull is dragged off his feet and the rein is wrenched from grasp. He watches disconsolately as the horse gallops away.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY - LATER

Tall Bull sits cross-legged on the ground. His gaze is focused on the horse, grazing some distance away.

The frown on his face suggests that he's deep in thought.

Tall Bull gets to his feet and moves away. He wanders through the tall grass his eyes searching the vegetation.

Tall Bull finds the plant he is looking for. He crushes its leaves and stem with his hands and then applies the plants aromatic resin to his skin.

Tall Bull approaches the horse, cautiously.

The horse throws up its head and looks in his direction.

Tall Bull freezes, fearing it might run off.

The horse lowers his head and resumes its grazing.

Tall Bull watches it for a moment then, moves closer.

13

The horse, alert, scents the air.

Tall Bull, his heart pounding, walks forward slowly until he is standing beside it.

The horse trembles and paws nervously at the ground with its hoof.

Tall Bull runs a hand gently over its neck and along its back.

The horse stands motionless, accepting him.

Tall Bull, emboldened takes hold of the reins and leads the horse away.

Tall Bull walks the horse in a wide circle and stops.

Clutching the reins, he pulls himself up onto the horse's back.

The horse stands motionless.

Tall Bull sits astride the horse for a moment unsure of what to do.

He kicks hard with his heels into the horse's side. The horse lunges forward and Tall Bull is thrown off onto the ground.

The horse stops. Turns its head and looks down at him.

Tall Bull, unhurt, sits on the ground. Looking up he stares back at the horse. A moment then:

He gets to his feet, takes hold of the reins and pulls himself back onto the horse's back.

Gripping the horse's mane with his free hand, he kicks gently with his heels. Obediently, the horse walks forward.

Tall Bull, elated, looks about him in wonder. More sure of himself he kicks again with his heels.

14

The horse breaks into a trot. Tall Bull, exhilarated, clings onto its mane with both hands.

He kicks again and the horse lengthens its stride.

Tall Bull astride the horse, his hair streaming out behind him, gallops across the prairie.

Suddenly without warning a covey of partridges explode into the air.

The horse, startled, veers away and Tall Bull, still clutching the reins, is thrown to the ground.

He lands heavily and doesn't move. The reins and bridle lie on the ground beside him.

Free of its bridle and reins, the horse gallops away.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY - LATER

Tall Bull sits up, holds his head in his hands. A moment later he gets gingerly to his feet and looks about him. The horse has gone.

EXT. LOW HILLS - DAY

Tall Bull moves across the arid land, he is all in. Carried over his shoulder is the horse's bridle and reins.

HILLTOP

A group of Sioux warriors appear. With them is Wooden Thigh. They see Tall Bull and run towards him.

Tall Bull spots them. Exhausted, he sinks to his knees.

The Sioux warrior's crowd around him and Wooden Thigh examines the boy's wound.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY

15

Tall Bull leads the party of armed Sioux warriors south towards the river. Wooden Thigh walks beside him.

EXT. HIGH GROUND OVERLOOKING THE RIVER - DAY

The Sioux stand and survey the deserted Pawnee village.

Tall Bull leads them down to the rivers edge and shows them the hoof prints left by the Conquistador's horses.

The Sioux warriors scour the river bank.

A warrior shouts out and holds aloft his discovery, a broken length of sword blade.

Wooden Thigh examines it.

Tall Bull mimics the actions of the Conquistador horseman.

EXT. SIOUX ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Tall Bull is surrounded by a crowd of curious children. He shows off the horse's bridle and reins. He even allows some of them to touch it.

With a stick he draws an outline of the horse with him mounted on its back. Then throwing the stick away he races off, his hands gripping imaginary reins.

TALL BULL

See I am the wind. No one can
catch me on my magic beast.

With excited cries the children chase after him.

EXT. SIOUX EXCAMPMENT/HIGH GROUND- DAY

Tall Bull sits alone. Clasped in his hands are the bridle and reins. His melancholy gaze is focused on the low hills beyond the river. His thoughts are on the horse.

16

EXT. HIGH GROUND - SIOUX VILLAGE - DAY

A Sioux warrior sits motionless on the ground. His back is to us and we cannot see his face.

In the west the setting sun drops in the sky. His unflinching gaze is southwards.

A moment later he gets to his feet and turns so that we can see his face. The terrible scar left by the Pawnee war-club is plain to see. The warrior is Tall Bull.

INT. TEPEE - NIGHT

A young squaw squats beside a fire and stirs a pot of food suspended over it.

Beyond the fire two small children are fast asleep in a nest of furs.

The tepee flap is drawn back and Tall Bull enters. She looks up at him and smiles.

Tall Bull, expressionless, sits beside her. She fills a bowl from the pot and hands it to him then watches in silence as he eats.

INT. TEPEE - NIGHT - LATER

Tall Bull and the young squaw lie side by side in a bed of furs. She sleeps peacefully Tall Bull's sleep is fitful.

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - DAY (DREAM)

Tall Bull the man stands alone in the middle of a vast prairie. The sound of hoof beats carry to him, muffled at first but growing louder.

Tall Bull shades his eyes, stares ahead and sees the Conquistador's horse galloping towards him.

The horse pulls up a short distance from him, snorts and paws at the ground with its hoof.

Tall Bull approaches it. The horse moves away and stops.

Tall Bull walks towards it. Again the horse moves away.

Tall Bull runs forward. The horse skips away, always keeping the same distance between them.

Tall Bull, frustrated, sprints towards the horse. But the horse is too quick for him and he cannot close the gap.

Tall Bull falls to his knees. The horse whinnies, turns and moves away.

Tall Bull gets to his feet and follows after it.

The horse breaks into a trot.

Tall Bull breaks into a run.

The horse breaks into a gallop. The distance between them increases.

Tall Bull runs as fast as he can but the horse is getting away. He drops to his knees and screams out.

INT. TEPEE - NIGHT

Tall Bull sits bolt upright, instantly awake. Beside him the young squaw stirs, then lies still. Tall Bull lays back, tries to make sense of the dream. Moments later he slips out of bed.

Silently he collects up his bow and quiver of arrows and a beaded carry-all, pulls back the tepee flap and steps outside.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

18

Tall Bull wades across the river the water barely reaching his

waist.

Standing on the far bank he looks downstream towards a grove of cottonwood trees.

He freezes when he sees a horse walk out from the trees and begin drinking from the river.

Cautiously, Tall Bull opens the carry-all and takes out the Conquistador's horses bridle and reins.

Moving slowly he walks towards the horse.

The horse sees him and lifts its head.

Tall Bull stops and lowers his head.

The horse observes him for a moment and then resumes drinking.

Tall Bull moves closer. Close enough to see the faded imprints of a man's hand, in ochre, on the horses shoulder and flank.

The horse, unsure of him, tenses.

Tall Bull closes on it swiftly. He grabs a handful of its mane in one hand and swings up onto it back.

The horse, alarmed, plunges into the river.

Tall Bull clings on.

The horse reaches mid-stream and flounders in the deeper water.

Tall Bull seizes the opportunity. He slips the bridle over its head then, pulls back on the reins.

The horse's struggles subside, it accepts its rider.

Tall Bull kicks it towards the far bank.

19

When the horse reaches dry land it whinnies.

ACROSS THE RIVER

Responding to the stallions call, four mares and a colt gallop out from the grove of cottonwood trees and splash across the river to join the stallion.

Tall Bull, elated lets out a great cry of joy.

With the small herd gathered around him, Tall Bull kicks his heels into the stallion's flanks and walks away from the river. The four mares and the colt follow behind him like obedient children.

EXT HIGH GROUND OVERLOOKING THE SIOUX VILLAGE - DAY

The sun rises above the hills, a fire in the sky.

Tall Bull sits astride the stallion gazing down on the sleeping village. The mares and colt stand close by.

He kicks the stallion's flanks with his heels.

The stallion whinnies and breaks into a gallop. The mares and colt race after him their hooves drumming on the ground.

EXT. SIOUX VILLAGE - DAY

A dog barks. Then others take up the call.

Moments later, armed warriors spill from the tepees.

Tall Bull gallops his horses in a circle around the village.

The Sioux warriors stare in wonderment as he races past.

Now squaws and children appear and soon the whole village are watching in amazement as Tall Bull continues to circle the village.

Tall Bull spots his family. He waves at them.

20

His squaw, a child on her hip, waves back. Standing beside her is their eldest child, a boy of three. He stares in wonder at

his father and the strange beast that he is riding.

A great shout goes up from the people. The story Tall Bull had told them all those years ago was true and now he has returned with a wondrous gift from the Great Spirit.

THE END