

Lances and Coup Sticks

Lances and Coup sticks were often carried in dances by some of the Plains Tribes and had an important part in certain ceremonies. Lances also formed a part of the insignia of certain Warrior Societies. The Coup stick was similar to the Lance except that it was without a flint or steel spear point. The Coup stick was used for touching an enemy in battle.

Among the Kiowa, a society known as the Kaitsenko, made up of the bravest warriors, carried a crooked lance wrapped with otter skin as one of their emblems. They also wore a broad buckskin sash which came together at the waist, from which a pendant hung to the ground. If a battle went against them, they would dismount and drive the lance through the sash into the ground, so that they were anchored in place. There they would stand and fight until they were killed, or until one of their fellow members withdrew the lance, and allowed their escape. Under the rules of The Society a warrior could free himself, but if he did, he would be dishonored and disgraced.

Nearly every Plains Tribe had a similar society and in most cases they bore names that meant "brave dogs", "old dogs", "crazy dogs" or something of the same nature. This caused them to be known as "dog soldiers" to the frontier army soldiers and frontiersmen, who knew and respected their bravery and fighting qualities.

The lances were nearly always decorated with beaver, otter, mink and weasel skins or with feathers of different birds arranged in various ways. Each kind of feather had a meaning to the lance-bearer. Thus, a Pawnee lance had a bunch of owl feathers at its top, which represented the North Star which watches over the people at night. The owls watched over the camp at night and warned the people of enemies prowling about. Crow feathers were attached first when the lance was made because the crows are always the first to find food and they helped the people find the buffalo. Swan feathers represented the thunderbird, which often brought thunderstorms to save the people, when the enemy was on the point of attacking. The point of this lance was made of flint, because that stone was believed to be related to the thunder and was supposed to be found wherever lightning strikes. Thus the flint-stone lance-head symbolized the power to strike an enemy, before he was aware of the danger.

To make a lance, cut a straight staff about $\frac{3}{4}$ to one (1) inch in diameter and from five (5) to six (6) feet long. Paint, carve or burn decorations on it. If you want to make a Feather Banner, prepare your feathers as for a war bonnet trail and attach them to a strip of cloth six (6) inches wide and a foot shorter than the length of your staff. The cloth is tied to the top of the staff and at intervals along its length. Lances of this style were popular with the Lakota tribes. A decoration of feather clusters is easier to make and requires fewer feathers. The clusters are made of four (4) feathers prepared with lacing loops as for use in a war bonnet. They are fastened in place by means of a thong passed through the loops and tied to a notch cut in the lance staff. Steamers of horsehair may be tied with the feathers. Another type of lance may be made by covering the lance stick with red flannel cloth, held in place by tacks and by a spiral wrapping of cord. The feather decorations are sewn direct to the flannel wrapping. Good luck!