



May 21, 1974  
**The Battle of the Upper Lodgegrass**  
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**(Retired Laramie Enforcement Specialist)**

Introduction of the story at the Game Division meeting in Thermopolis on May 10, 1980.

Before I get plumb carried away, I think I'd better explain just what it is I'm doing up here tonight. I'm here at the request of several people who haven't the faintest idea what I'm going to say. Ever since last night there has been a rumor going around, probably started by my wife, that I was going to recite a poem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Several years ago I did write a poem and made the mistake of going public with it. It was over a year before Toman and Repsis would speak to me. I may write poems for my own amusement but not for publication.

I did think of doing some sort of a humor angle, but then I remembered Ernie Wampler, used to be the Game Warden in Douglas. A few years ago Ernie got up at the Game Division meeting in Riverton and gave a sort of tongue in cheek paper about the Krupp steel works in Germany prior to World War II. The whole thing boiled down to an analysis of how much paper shuffling it took in the head office to produce a ton of steel. I'm sure some of you remember that. Do you also remember how after that, Ernie had to move as far from the Cheyenne office as he could get and grow a beard so no one would recognize him?

Bob Brown was right, some people in this outfit have plumb lost their sense of humor.

During the meeting today you all heard Rex Corsi and Doug Crowe lay some real hard data on us, complete with flip charts-facts-figures and conclusions. You also heard Clait Braun's extremely well prepared talk and slide presentation on ten years of countin' chicken feathers. I'm not knocking Clait's talk. He gave us some real good information, I enjoyed it, and I got a lot out of it. The point I'm trying to make is: What did the field enforcement officers do? We got up kind of at random and tried to tell a funny story on ourselves. Let me tell you, the enforcement officers are not being taken seriously by the other members of this department. They think we're a bunch of clowns. If you don't believe me, take a look at the latest salary adjustment.

We've got to get our act together and put something down on paper, so the rest of the world will know we are real professionals.

What I've tried to do is take an objective view of a law enforcement project. Only in this way can we pass on some of our skill to the young hands, and improve our operation in the future.

I almost scrapped this whole project once, but after looking at uncompleted portions of it, Backer and Repsis convinced me that the effort was well worthwhile. Getting the facts together was not too hard, but putting them in useable order was a real chore.

## The Battle of the Upper Lodgegrass

The life of a fish cop in the mountains and hills  
Is usually just work, not too many thrills  
But once in a lifetime, blind fortune will smirk  
And break the tranquility of Game and Fish work

It was early fall of Seventy-Eight  
We had an adventure I'd like to relate  
When they called out a strike force to the upper  
Lodgegrass  
To cut off the Indians as they came thru the Pass

The Dayton Game Warden, by a great stroke of luck  
Had found him a talkative Crow Indian Buck  
Who told of a plan to disrupt law and order  
A war party crossing the Wyoming border

Springfield and Bar Horse and some of their ilk  
Were planning to slaughter a bunch of our elk  
They weren't thinking small, ten warriors at least  
Would pack out enough for a big Indian feast

When Pete heard the tale he got excited then mad  
You'd have thought it's the only elk herd that we had  
He contacted his Sup and they hatched out a plan  
To foul up the hunt of the noble Red Man

The strike force concept is approved from up high  
It's tested, it works, let's give it a try  
We'll watch and we'll see what the savages do  
Then gather them up with a hand picked crew

They needed some men both hardy and brave  
The elk on the Big Horns they wanted to save  
Of the fifteen names, there were none that had peers  
Their experience totaled near 200 years  
The letters they sent filled brave men with dread  
They were short, to the point, here's what they said  
Bring rifles and riot guns, good hiking boots,  
Borrow a machine gun, make sure that it shoots

Bring horses and saddles or else if you like  
You might just consider a fast motor bike  
We'll sleep on the mountain, bring camping gear too  
On September Second we'll all rendezvous

Only one thing on this trip sounded fine  
And it was contained in one bottom line  
Groceries and horse feed all furnished free  
It was signed, Supervisor, District Three

The crew met in Sheridan for briefing and lunch  
I didn't make it, I missed a whole bunch  
The plot was laid out to trap the Red Man  
Stealth is the word, don't tip our hand

Don't let 'em know we brought in our forces  
Hide the camp well, especially the horses  
We'll fool the whole tribe, it we do it this way  
We'll parade up the highway at noon Saturday

Wishbone Backer from Hole in the Wall  
Rolled into camp with smile for all  
"This crew needs a backup so I'll sacrifice"  
"I've got three coolers that are all full of ice"

"I've brought my stove and a world of skill"  
"I'll tend the camp right here on the hill"  
"A fighting crew needs a lot more than just crackers"  
"So I'll be the cook and feed you Kak Knackers"

Rowdy Bill Eversole down from the Peaks  
Of the high Wind Rivers where he hides and seeks  
Was hurt by the choice of Wishbone for Cook  
Where cookin's concerned Rowdy authored the book

Rowdy kept his voice at a pleasant tone  
The stove was Wishbone's he might go home  
So Rowdy refrained from smart remarks  
He just went hunting thru the trees and parks

Rowdy found him a stove that was just the right size  
It took four men just to haul in this prize  
It was square on top and the bottom was round  
It must have weighed 300 pounds  
Bill's point was well taken, we now had two cooks  
Rowdy and Wishbone exchanged friendly looks  
Rowdy's stove was a dandy but it did have a flaw  
For lack of a stovepipe, the damn thing wouldn't draw

From Green River town came agent One Nine  
The idea of the trip to him sounded fine  
After working undercover in Sweetwater Country  
It'd just be a picnic huntin' Indians for bounty

Walt Bond arrived from District Seven  
He said the whole trip just sounded like heaven  
He strolled into camp with a smile on his lips  
Packin' two decks of cards and some cheap poker  
chips

From the town of Big Piney came Dallas and Chuck  
With horses and riot guns loaded with buck  
From Douglas came Pollard just lookin' for fun  
He'd managed to borrow a submachine gun

Up from the South came me and Paul Breed  
Our skill and experience we knew they'd need  
Paul'd sold his horses, but he borrowed 'm back  
We loaded both trucks with camp gear and tack

Paul left a day early, the horses to shoe  
Said he'd call when he learned what we're going to do  
The rest of the crew you might have guessed  
Was all local talent, District 3's best

Arzy and Schneidmiller rarin' to go  
Brought in three horses from Buffalo  
Repsis and Bashford came in haul'n bikes  
Cram brought a saddle and a horse that he likes

Shorma and Peterson were running the crew  
They bought the grub and said what we'd do  
One thing was confusing, about being in charge  
It surprised them 15 made a force quite this large

The camp was set up and the crew was moved in  
They scattered to explore, and start lookin' for sin  
When they came in at dark not a spirit was damp  
And after two drinks, ate all the groceries in camp

Rowdy and Wishbone had a conference with Pete  
Us cooks are in trouble if we don't get more meat  
We'll make it thru breakfast by skrimpin' and scrapin'  
We've five dozen eggs and ten pound of bacon  
After that we're in trouble, there may be a riot  
We'll make out a list, tomorrow you go and buy it  
Two days grub we will figure, then maybe with luck  
You can haul it all back only using one truck

Pete took the grub list and started back down  
I met him in Dayton at the west edge of town  
Pete filled me in on the campaign to date  
No action as yet, I wasn't too late

When we picked out the grub we were going to haul  
back  
I saw Pete stuffin' cabbage in a big paper sack  
When I made a remark about what I just saw  
Pete said "We need cabbage, Bill's makin' some  
slaw"

I kept my mouth shut, I was in District 3  
But buyin' real cabbage seemed dam strange to me  
We picked up a few items to fill out the load  
Then tied it all down and we both hit the road

Pete made a side trip for a load of hay  
I consulted my map and made my own way  
I gassed up at Burgess, the gal stared at my rig  
"You Game Wardens must be planning real big"

"Beats heck out of me" I said with a smile  
"I'm supposed to work out of Cody awhile"  
The look I got back would've melted ice  
She made some remark about lying's not nice

The rough road to Red Springs gave time for deep  
thought  
But I still couldn't see how any Indian's 'd get caught  
If they know we're up here and I'm sure they soon will  
All they need to do, is stay on their own hill

Rowdy and Wishbone were holding down camp  
The pots were rattlin' but their spirits were damp

They talked about groceries, mostly meat  
Just wait 'till you see, these hound gutted troops eat

Pete came in with his load of hay  
It appeared he'd fed cattle all along the way  
The few bales he had left, we unloaded and stacked  
Then Wishbone looked in the grocery pack

Now I've heard sounds that filled me with fear  
I've even heard screams that would pierce you ear  
But I've never heard anything half as savage  
As Wishbone Bill when he found the cabbage  
Bill got so violent it made poor Pete wilt  
I'm sure he thought he was going to be kilt  
Wishbone explained but he wasn't polite  
How to read a grub list, and do it right

Cabbage looks great in a field purchase book  
When reviewed by DAFC's tightfisted look  
Cheyenne's convinced we eat slaw by the ton  
But in actual practice that isn't what's done

When Wishbone was sure that he had Pete's ear  
He said there's one thing I want to make clear  
Then he calmly explained, he shouted it twice  
"Cabbage means whiskey, you drink it with ice"

With a few choice words by Rowdy Bill  
Pete seemed ready to go over the hill  
But then he was saved, when a truck pulled in  
A rancher named Fuller got out with a grin

He introduced himself all around  
Took a cup of coffee and sat on the ground  
Then he looked around at our camp and our gear  
"What the hell are you guys doin' up here?"

Rowdy, Wishbone and Pete looked over my way  
"Who's going to talk?" "What'll we say?"  
Rowdy was first to find his voice  
We quickly decided he'd be a good choice

Rowdy explained it was Labor Day  
And a whole lot of folks 'll be comin' this way  
Some hunting grouse and some to fish  
Pick up a few violators is our only wish

"Selective enforcement" was the term Bill used  
"It helps if we keep the public confused"  
"It's good for our troops to move 'em around"  
"They get out of their rut and see some new ground"

We then changed the subject to cattle and feed  
Fuller said rain's what we really need  
The conversation was now our style  
We figured we'd keep this up quite a while

We discussed the weather and drought relief  
We expressed concern on the price of beef  
We discussed the faults of the whole human race  
Especially some livin' real near this place  
Fuller said "It's not easy to live off the land"  
If your nearest neighbor is an Indian band  
He acted like he was ready to go  
We knew there's still something he wanted to know

He wished us all well and the best of luck  
But then he turned back 'fore he got to his truck  
"What are you guys really doin' up here?"  
Rowdy said, "Bud, would you care for a beer?"

When the sun had set in our little park  
Our patrols slipped in under cover of dark  
Pickups were parked in a protective ring  
Safe against attack and that sort of thing

Picket pins checked and driven in tight  
Nobody likes to hunt horses at night  
Two dog fights and one runaway  
Seemed to conclude the events for the day

A fire was built up to ward off the cold  
The story of Pete and the grub list was told  
Pete took a ribbin', that's as far as it went  
There was cabbage stashed in every tent

The day's campaign was discussed and debriefed  
Not a man had been lost, which was sure a relief  
They'd scouted the country, each man had a plan  
But no signs were seen of the noble Red Man

Elk had been seen on the deep canyon floor  
Tomorrow we'd surely locate some more  
There'd been no hunt yet, that sure sounded fine  
And they'd even located the Montana state line

When Rowdy and Wishbone set out our supper  
The class of the food was definitely upper  
They laid out as much as I'd judge it'd take  
For a Mormon Reunion and an Irish Wake

There was no big rush when they hollered "Grub Pile"  
The boys ambled past in single file  
But in fifteen minutes, just as they'd feared  
Every last trace of the grub disappeared

When the dishes were washed and the camp settled  
down  
Back at the campfire the guys gathered 'round  
War stories were told, all of them true  
Of our collective adventures, and all we'd been thru  
Any poacher that challenged this hardy crew  
Was bitin' off more than he ever could chew  
Any Indian raid was doomed to fail  
The best they could hope for was a term in jail

Optimism sure was running high  
As we laughed and joked 'neath the Autumn sky  
Then a voice in the dark, grated like sand  
"You guys ever hear about Custer's Last Stand"

After a silence somebody said  
Maybe it's time we all went to bed  
Then to our ears came a mournful howl  
Is that really a coyote or a Crow on the prowl?

As first light appeared o'er a ridge to the East  
Preparations were made for another large feast  
From out of my pack a large griddle I took  
That's all that was needed to make me third cook

Wishbone suggested and Rowdy agreed  
The third cook's name was an urgent need  
Something fitting for verse and song  
For the rest of the trip I was "Come Along"

Thru a mountain of breakfast that crew did sail  
The meal wasn't eaten, it was kind of inhaled  
Horses were saddled, there was no more to say  
All were convinced today's the day

Only one thing, more groceries we'll need  
This time the list was entrusted to Breed  
The use of a code was considered too risky  
A collection was taken and labeled "For Whiskey"

With a long trip in mind, Bashford, Reppis and I  
Gassed up our bikes and looked at the sky  
The weather looked good for an all day ride  
We'd check the divide on the North and West side

We circled the Lodgegrass North, South and West  
Speculating how our trap might work best  
We can cut off the Indians of that there's no doubt  
But if they never come in, they don't have to get out

When we came in at dark I'd seen the whole plan  
But nary a glimpse of the pesky Red Man  
Paul had the groceries and it looked at least  
Like they'd last till the sun came up in the East  
After four days we began to have doubts  
Maybe those Redskins also have scouts  
They don't have to hunt the upper Lodgegrass  
They could poach our elk, just west of the pass

Shorma agreed to lead a brave troop  
Thru Cookstove Basin and make a big loop  
They'd scour the country for moccasin tracks  
"We'll see what happens behind our backs"

They came into camp three hours after dark  
Their dangerous patrol had turned into a lark  
They gutted their birds on a bale of hay  
Into Wishbone's kitchen and told of their day

The huntin' and fishin' sure wasn't for fun  
They had a good reason for what they had done  
They needed a cover while the country they'd scout  
Besides that our groceries were fast running out

They'd made their patrol over on the west side  
Searching each place where a savage could hide  
They'd caught a few trout from a fast flowing creek  
Even found a few chickens on which they could sneak

Bashford had charge of the double barrel gun  
But he wasn't quite sure how the damn thing was run  
Lin got hold of both triggers for a fast second shot  
He just tried it once and got decked on the spot

When I think of this trip and the time we had  
The danger we faced don't seem near so bad  
In fact the whole campaign was filled with things  
That when recalled, to my eye a twinkle brings

The day that Schneidmiller said he'd like  
To make one patrol on a motor bike  
Still bruised from a crash when he broke his brake  
Repsis said "Here's one John you can take"

It was plain to see on the first two hills  
John lacked the basic bike riding skills  
I'm sure he wished later that he hadn't heeded  
When Chuck said one brake was all that was needed

Each time he took off it was another wild ride  
Over logs and thru brush, down steep mountain sides  
John survived for a forty mile loop  
But when we got in he was all out of poop  
At dusk on the rim of the upper Lodgegrass  
As we waited for Indians to come through the pass  
Two blue grouse passed by one by one  
I sawed off their heads with my Smith 41

I was quite proud of the shots I just made  
If those Crows had seen that they'd call off this raid  
I figured once this story got out  
That I'd be the champ without any doubt

When Pete told the story later that night  
I had to admit his facts were right  
He was accurate enough as he told of the birds  
What bothered me was his choice of words

The clincher came later with a kind of grin  
If the Indians attack they are sure to win  
In a fire fight he's useless, he's blind as a louse  
Bob puts on thick glasses to shoot the heads off  
grouse

Later that evening mid stories of war  
Wishbone Bill took to the floor  
He said you know fellows it just ain't right  
We don't get credit for the battles we fight

What we need and I've given it thought  
Is campaign ribbons for the battles we fought  
There is many a chore we've been called to do  
And the men in this outfit have always come through

Ribbons for Farson and Cokeville are due  
For the winter Olympics of '72  
Saratoga and Lander so all can see  
We did it over in '73

How many new hands here in this clearing  
Never even heard of the airplane hearing  
When fifty four men in dress uniform  
Entered the Capital early one morn

We leaned on the wall and we sat on the floor  
I doubt if the place would have held any more  
The rookies don't know 'cause they weren't there  
What it's like to face a Governor's PO'd stare

This whole idea was seconded and moved  
Other events were discussed and approved  
It all sounded good until somebody said  
You'll never get it passed the head shed

After a week with no Indians about  
Pete figured somehow they must have found out  
So we all started home from where we'd been sent  
After voting to make this an annual event

Down off the mountain our job was done  
The campaign was over and I guess we won  
But as Pollard and Bashford drove into town  
The local cop red lighted them down

The cop appeared to have a lot to say  
About violating people's rights of way  
He talked of the folks you're apt to meet  
When driving wrong on a one way street

Even if you're dumb and don't know  
The arrow you saw shows which way to go  
"Arrow hell". Russ said with a grin  
"We never even saw an Indian"



**Bob Sexton**  
**(Retired Laramie Enforcement Specialist)**

#### **Ballad of the Silver Streak**

This story'll be told for years to come,  
When wardens gather to have their fun.  
It's about two lads that failed to see  
Why they were still classed as a Warden Trainee.

Tom and Chuck were the two brave lads  
And a Grumman canoe was what they had.  
They got it free from war surplus,  
They said, "There's nobody as lucky as us."

Three paddles came from a Gibson sale  
And two life jackets arrived in the mail.  
They took some advice from a friendly Greek,  
"Try it in a lake, not in the creek."

"There's a lake called Sloans in Cheyenne town,  
It's not too deep, an' you may not drown."  
So they went to the lake with the new canoe,  
The tourists lined up for a better view.

With Kozas, the coach, they went over their list,  
They read it all twice, there was nothin' they missed.  
The do's and don'ts they figured they knew,  
They thought they were ready to try their canoe.

The spectators claim "twas a wobbly start"  
But a hundred yards later they'd mastered the art.

Who's s'posed to paddle, and then on which side,  
Was just about all that they couldn't decide.

They crossed the lake twice, Tom said, "This is keen,"  
Then the Sloans Lake Ferry arrived on the scene.  
They sneered at the ferry, it's built like a scow,  
Christ, there's no numbers inscribed on the bow.

Now to uphold the law is a warden's first thought.  
That ferryboat captain just had to be caught.  
Chuck hollered "Let's get him" and Tom sure agreed,  
They dug in their paddles to build up some speed.

They took to the scow, their eyes all aflame,  
Just solving these crimes is the name of the game.  
The chase it was short, they caught up with the boat,  
To the awe of the crowd, they were both still afloat.

They pulled along side, hollered "Heave to,"  
The captain looked down, he said, "Who are you?"  
"The long arm of the law," brave Repsis replied,  
As he shifted his paddle and fell o'er the side.

The keel of the canoe appeared next in view,  
How deep Toman went, why nobody knew.  
As the captain steamed off, his head he did shake,  
You see a lot of queer people around the Sloans  
Lake.

When the boys finally surfaced they were filled with  
despair,  
Their quarry was gone that ferry weren't there.  
Then from the shore came the admiral's voice.  
"Give up on him boys, you've no other choice."

Then he advised them, "You just as well smile,  
These accidents happen every once in a while.  
As long as you're wet, why here's what we'll do,  
You just as well start on canoe lesson two."

With a swamped canoe and an April breeze,  
The average man would probably freeze.  
But for over an hour our heroes sweat blood,  
Hip deep in the water and knee deep in the mud.

To right the canoe wasn't too big a chore,  
They did that real easy and far from the shore.  
Now it's known that a Viking will never give up,  
But Chuck couldn't mount that slippery pup.

They tried from port and from starboard too,  
But it's tough to outsmart a clever canoe.  
It could dance like a rainbow or dive like a brown,  
Even roll like an otter with nary a sound.

Now Bill could see that his students were tough,  
But he figured by now they'd both had enough.

So he called an end to lesson two,  
And they waded ashore with their muddy canoe.

Now Tom and Chuck could stand the gaff,  
And the Cheyenne office could sure use a laugh,  
But nobody tries, to be the butt of jokes,  
Just to bring pleasure to all those folks.

An idea came on like a neon light,  
We'll master this thing but not in plain sight.  
It can't be too hard to paddle and turn,  
As long as there's no one to watch while you learn.

Just one chance remark that they both overheard  
And their thoughts left school like a high soaring bird.  
One warden's famous, you've heard his name too,  
He's skillful and fast with a river canoe.

In canoe rac'n circles he's known far and wide,  
He comes from Star Valley and his last name is Hyde.  
Now Duane only mentioned the time and the place  
He intended to enter a canoe river race.

Well he caught the boys' interest, I could tell by their  
looks,  
Their minds opened up like a couple of books.  
Their thoughts were plain for all to view,  
They remembered their war surplus canoe.

Hyde told them to think, a guy could go wrong,  
Sometimes canoeists don't live very long.  
It's 54 miles down the river North Platte,  
It's deep, wide and fast but it's practically flat.

Then a warden named Thomas made a statement or  
two,  
Of the race and of Hyde and his river canoe.  
His voice then it rose to almost a shout,  
Canoes is for Indians this year I stay out.

Well the race was discussed far into the night,  
Those rookies were anxious to figure it right.  
In the blinding glare of their barracks room,  
They made a decision that sealed their doom.

They figured the odds and went over the facts,  
They thought they could stand all the wardens' smart  
cracks.

They wanted to represent District 5,  
Keep track of their craft and stay alive.

It mattered not if they won or lost,  
Just finish that race whatever the cost.  
Tom said, "We won't win but who wants to lose?  
We'll go into training and stay off the booze."

They knew that endurance would be required  
To paddle for hours without gettin' tired.

Now Chuck wasn't sure just what it would take,  
But they needed more practice than just Packer's  
Lake.

They knew before sunup just what they would do,  
Next week's Saratoga and the damage fence crew.  
Saratoga's got water it runs thru the town,  
The same North Platte River that we have to go  
down.

Well the kids went home happy, for now they both  
knew,  
This year they'd enjoy that damage fence crew.  
They'd live at the motel with the river quite near,  
And practice canoeing while the others drank beer.

The twentieth of May was our target date,  
The crew all arrived but one rookie was late.  
When Tom made the scene, well the "Sup" couldn't  
speak,  
For lashed to his truck was that damned Silver Streak.

Now Dewey's a thinker, he don't lose his cool,  
But what in the hell did those guys learn at school?  
For many a year he's run a fence crew,  
But never before did we need a canoe.

The Chief was quite worried over what he just saw,  
He called them duck chasers, he mentioned  
Wreckstraw.  
The boys said don't worry it won't cost a dime,  
We're sure goin' to use it, but on our own time.

Now Bob Brown chanced to be standing by,  
And a look of interest came into his eye.  
Now Brown's been around for a year or two,  
In fact he once had his own canoe.

Well Bob told a story, repeated it twice,  
Just trying to offer some friendly advice.  
Bob told of his days as a gay young blade,  
And the first and last trip his canoe ever made.

A raid on the poachers he wanted to make,  
On an icy fast river somebody'd named Snake.  
He told of his partner by the name of Jess Stull,  
And a terror filled trip on an overturned hull.

They lost their canoe at the end of the ride,  
Ended up cold and wet on the river's west side.  
The canoe was recovered 'er Brown went to bed,  
Then he parked it forever in the Game and Fish shed.

We all took a look at this silvery boat,  
And asked if the river they meant to float,  
Then somebody offered this clever advice,  
That thing isn't safe 'less it's froze in the ice.

All thru that day the boys held up well,  
With the whole fence crew just givin' 'em hell.  
Some fence got built in spite of the fuss,  
By the two of them and the eight of us.

After supper the boys softly gave us the news  
As they emptied their pockets and took off their shoes.  
"You've got us to thinkin', your advice we will take,  
We won't try the river, we'll go to the lake."

A chill wind pushed the clouds thru the evening sky,  
There were waves on the lake but not very high.  
They came in at dark, dry and flushed with success,  
"To hell with you guys, now it's onward we'll press."

That very next evening they ran down an' ate,  
The river was waiting they wouldn't be late.  
They gulped down their supper without a shower,  
And then interrupted our cocktail hour.

They wanted somebody to drive Tom's truck,  
Just to drop them off and to pick them up.  
I thought that I'd volunteer for this chore,  
I'd see the whole thing and stay on the shore.

They said we'll start here and go 'round that ridge,  
You just pick us up down below the Pick Bridge.  
We're not going to hurry so you eat a steak,  
We figure this trip about an hour will take.

Well, Muchmore turned pale when he heard what they said,  
He stared at his drink then he just shook his head.  
Pete said, "Boys, I think you've been over matched,  
You sound like two eggs that haven't been hatched."

"Now lake water sits there with no place to go,  
But out in the river it's a whole different show.  
A river's plump busy moving trees an' logs,  
Cuttin' new channels an' drowning hogs."

Now Pete's tried the water in lakes, rivers and bars,  
And he showed the boys his canoe paddle scars.  
Then he told them a story reaching back in his mind,  
As he tried to remember the man and the time.

He was only remembered by a few of us  
As Laramie's first bird man, we all called him Gus.  
On the Laramie River he'd count all the ducks,  
Take less than a day, he'd bet a few bucks.

The Laramie River in the spring of the year  
Wanders around both far and near.  
It will water your meadow or fill up your ditch,  
But finding the channel's a son of a bitch.

Float below Highway 30 was the idea he had,  
The river still wanders but the channel's not bad.  
Well Pete dropped him off, Gus was set in his ways,  
He made it on in, but it took him three days.

Well the point that Pete was tryin' to make,  
Is that rivers are long they wind like a snake.  
Measure miles with your truck from point A to B,  
Then to figure the river multiply it by three.

While it's only a rifle shot up to that ridge,  
There's 20 miles of river from here to Pick Bridge.  
If you boys start now and you leave from the park,  
You won't make it out 'till three hours after dark.

Pete explained how to rig a line with a float,  
If you swamp on a log then you might find your boat.  
Now all this advice was good, it was true,  
But the boy's minds were made as to what they would do.

Like a Durham bull at a bastard calf,  
They stared at Pete then started to laugh.  
You fellows all sound like you've been old for years,  
All you come up with are worries and fears.

This half a day trip is for fisherman that float,  
We're going to steer and paddle our boat.  
We're sure not worried about hitting a log,  
We'll just paddle around like a Labrador dog.

Dewey was worried he'd be left in the lurch,  
With two of his crew drowned and the rest on the search.  
He said, it's all right to aim high and walk tall,  
'Till you know what you're doin' you better start small.

Just go to the bridge at the north end of town,  
If you still think it's fun, make another trip down.  
If you go 'round that bend an' get out of sight,  
We might have to look for you half of the night.

After some argument, to our surprise,  
The boys agreed to a compromise.  
I mentioned a place about four miles,  
I was sure there's enough river to wipe off their smiles.

They said okay, they were hot to trot,  
I drove Tom's truck to the jump-off spot.  
At the city park they started their tour,  
They gripped their paddles and pushed off from shore.

On the River Street Bridge in the center of town,  
The crew all stood 'round to watch 'em come down.  
They didn't wait long to get 'em a peek,  
Straight through a bush came the Silver Streak.

High on the bridge Dewey uttered a prayer,  
They didn't look safe whirling 'round out there.  
Sideways under the bridge like a drunken otter,  
We sprinkled their heads with holy water.

At the highway bridge I stopped and looked back  
At a crossways canoe speeding down the track.  
As I started on north I'd a horrible thought,  
I know where I'm going, do the boys know the spot?

When I got to the place I drove up on a bluff,  
I could see a long stretch of river I thought was  
enough  
To wave the boys over so they'd hit the right bank,  
If they got this far before they sank.

I waited an hour, then started to fret,  
They've had lots of time but they're not in sight yet.  
Then a radio call came thru the air,  
The voyagers are found, maybe you can guess  
where.

Two wet pedestrians, there they are,  
Just walking past the Trail Inn Bar.  
Pete picked them up wet to their skins,  
Carrying one paddle and two sheepish grins.

We search for the canoe until the last light,  
Then heard their story far into the night.  
They figure they'd learned to handle their craft  
By paddling fore and steering aft.

They'd learned to judge the current and breeze,  
While making new channels thru the willow trees.  
Then they faced a decision that was tough to make,  
The river had split, which channel to take?

They voted for east then decided on west,  
Then changed their minds on which looked best.  
That river runs steady and water won't wait,  
They did make a choice but they made it too late.

Thru some more willows plumb out of control,  
Their craft had developed a dangerous roll.  
It weaved and it rocked, then straightened a bit,  
Chuck gripped his paddle and muttered, "Oh shit!"

For dead ahead was a sunken stump  
Which the Silver Streak hit with a thump.  
The bow of the boat went up t'ward the sky,  
Tom's taking on water but Chuck was still dry.

Nobody was sure exactly what followed  
Except that they both in the river had wallowed.  
How Chuck got to shore he never knew,  
He still had his paddle but no canoe.

With a paddle in one hand and a grip on the boat,  
Tom headed down river not exactly afloat.  
When he started to think of what he should do,  
Number one was turn loose of the God-damn canoe.

Being up the creek without a paddle  
Is worse than a horse without a saddle.  
But down the river without a canoe,  
The paddle alone just simply won't do.

Tom chucked his paddle, he's still drifting down,  
Just wondering how long that it takes to drown.  
Too shallow to swim an' too swift to stand,  
He somehow managed to make it to land.

Then the boys tried to figure the cost of their ride,  
Two paddles, one boat and a whole lot of pride.  
When they thought of the crew just waitin' in town,  
They wanted to jump back in the river an' drown.

They finally decided they'd best be bold,  
Besides that riverbank was getting damn cold.  
They picked up their paddle and started their hike  
To face the music, that, they weren't goin' to like.

There isn't much of this story to tell  
Except the next day Tom and Chuck caught more  
hell.

Chuck borrowed money for a bandage and pills.  
He left for security some wet dollar bills.

To find the canoe we called an air search,  
And soon it was found sitting high on a perch.  
A half a day's work with a cable and hook  
To get the boat back was all that it took.

The aluminum canoe had lost some of its shine,  
It had aged a lot with the passage of time.  
It didn't appear to be badly bent  
Although the port side had collected a dent.

Well the boys went to work to forget their canoe,  
The crew kept right at 'em until the whole town knew.  
The gal from the paper came around to look,  
She took their picture and wrote in her book.

The boys acted tongue-tied, she couldn't hear what  
they said,  
Chuck's been out in the sun 'cause he's sure turned  
red.

She said it's odd how those heroes act,  
We all chipped in and gave her the facts.

We all went home Friday for a weekend break,  
Not knowing what course the action would take.  
But we all sure were pleased at the first of the week,  
Tom and Chuck came to work, there was no Silver  
Streak.