



Horn, Tom (AKA: James Hicks), 1860-1903, U.S., lawman-outlaw.

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Tom Horn was a legendary western scout, Pinkerton detective, and range detective. When his luck ran out, he hired his gun to the highest bidder for murder and for this, he went to the gallows. Born in Memphis, Mo., on Nov. 21, 1860, Horn was raised on a farm. As a youth he liked the outdoors, but hated school and was often truant. His father, a strict disciplinarian, took the boy aside when he was fourteen and gave him such a severe whipping that Horn ran away from home, going west. He worked on the railroad, drove wagons for a freight company, and later became a stagecoach driver.

Horn was a scout for the army at age sixteen and was involved in many campaigns for more than a decade. In 1885, Horn replaced the celebrated Al Sieber as chief of scouts in the Southwest and he was involved in the historic Geronimo campaign in 1886. It was the intrepid Horn who, as chief of scouts, tracked Geronimo and his band to his hideout in the Sierra Gordo outside of Sonora, Mex. He rode into the Indian camp alone and negotiated Geronimo's surrender. Geronimo, with Horn guiding him and his tribe, crossed the border, officially surrendering, and ending the last great Indian war in America.

After quitting his post as chief of scouts, Horn wandered through the gold fields and then became a ranch hand. He proved himself to be a great cowboy, entering the rodeo at Globe, Ariz., in 1888 and winning the world's championship in steer roping. Horn joined the Pinkerton Detective Agency in 1890 and used his gun with lethal effectiveness. He worked out of the agency's Denver offices, chasing bank robbers and train thieves throughout Colorado and Wyoming. He was fearless (some said mad) and would face any outlaw or gunman. On one occasion, Horn rode into the outlaw hideout known as Hole-in-the-Wall and single-handedly captured the notorious Peg-Leg Watson (alias McCoy) who had recently robbed a mail train with others. Horn tracked Watson to a high mountain cabin and called out to him, telling the outlaw that he was coming for him.

Watson stepped from the cabin with two six-guns in his hands. He watched, open-mouthed, as Horn walked resolutely toward him across an open field, his Winchester carried limply at his side. Watson never fired a shot and Horn took him to jail without a struggle, bragging that Watson "didn't give me too much trouble." This feat

Horn's last killing was his undoing. He had perfected the art of long-distance murder, using powerful weapons that could bring down a target at a distance of hundreds of yards. On the morning of July 18, 1901, on the Powder River Road near Cheyenne, Wyo., Horn lay in wait for rancher Kels P. Nickell, who had been marked for death by competing ranchers. He had only seen Nickell once from a distance, so Horn did not recognize Willie Nickell, the rancher's tall 14-year-old son, who appeared that morning, driving his father's wagon out of the ranch yard. Willie wore his father's coat and hat and when he got down from the wagon to open a gate, Horn fired a shot that struck the boy. Willie Nickell staggered to his feet and tried to get back to the wagon but Horn fired another shot, striking him in the back of the head and killing him.

Though this killing was immediately attributed to Horn because of its method, no real proof could link him to the murder. Joe Lefors, one of the great lawmen of the West, resolved to uncover the truth and bring Horn to justice. He rode to Denver and there got Horn drunk in a small saloon. While using a crude listening device, Lefors' deputies hid in a back room while Horn talked about the Nickell killing, describing it in such detail that his words amounted to a confession. Lefors arrested Horn for the killing and returned him to Cheyenne where he was later tried and condemned to death. The wealthy cattleman, Coble, along with Glendolene Kimmel, a schoolteacher whose father was also a cattle baron and who was Horn's sweetheart, attempted to obtain a commutation for Horn, but public resentment against the hired killer was so intense that none was forthcoming.

Horn, realizing that he would soon face the hangman, broke out of the Cheyenne Jail with another prisoner, Jim McCloud. They leaped on Deputy Sheriff Richard Proctor, struggling for his gun in a hallway of the jail. Proctor squeezed off four shots, wounding McCloud, before he was overpowered. McCloud ran outside and leaped on the only available horse, riding wildly out of town. Horn fled on foot, followed by O.M. Eldrich, a citizen. Eldrich fired several shots at Horn, one of these grazing his head. As he struggled to work the jammed gun he had taken from Proctor, Eldrich and other residents charged up to Horn and knocked him to the ground. They began beating him with sticks and clubs until Proctor arrived and stopped them. Horn was restrained and returned to his cell, and McCloud was also recaptured and taken back to the Cheyenne Jail.

Horn resigned himself to his death, spending his last months writing his memoirs and weaving a rope that was later used to hang him. The hired killer mounted the gallows in Cheyenne on Nov. 20, 1903. His sweetheart, Kimmel, and his employer John Coble stood by as witnesses. Tom Horn looked down at them and then turned to the executioner, telling him to "hurry it up. I got nothing more to say." He was promptly hanged.