

Deadshot

The Story of Dan Carr's run-in with Horse Thieves

July, 1908

On that bright morning in late July, Albert and Homer Carr rode their Horses slowly and quietly to the slaughterhouse outside Pierce—the butchering operation partly run by Bill Reed. They were not eager to be there, but their visit had a purpose. The night before, Ben Craig, who lived at Pierce, had ridden to the Carr ranch to tell Dan Carr, the boys' father, that some of the family's cattle had been stolen. Not only that, one had been butchered, and its carcass, with the ranch's brand intact, was hanging in the slaughterhouse.

Bill Reed was a man no one in town wanted to cross, and to this point no one had. His background was hazy, but he seemed a hard type. He was said to have been a lawman and was also said to have killed people without benefit of a badge. And his skill with a gun, whether rifle or handgun, was locally known to be unmatched.

The brothers decided that Homer Carr would stand guard at the slaughterhouse while Albert rode into Pierce to locate Reed.

Reed was not hard to find. He was at the City Hotel, his usual haunt, and he was not alone. Ever since coming to town two years before, Reed usually was seen in the company of some combination of three other men. One was his business partner, whom he called "Kid" Moore. The others were A. J. Sloan and Chester Rice, two cattlemen who worked the area and whose cattle often grazed around the prairie in the Pierce and Weippe area. On this day, Albert Carr spotted Reed and Rice walking out of the City Hotel. He dismounted and walked up to them.

Carr told him the story, that cattle had been stolen and that he had seen a branded hide at Reed's slaughterhouse. A signal seemed to pass between Reed and Rice. Silently, Rice mounted his horse and rode off to the slaughterhouse. There he found Homer Carr, on guard; rather than confront him, he decided to turn back.

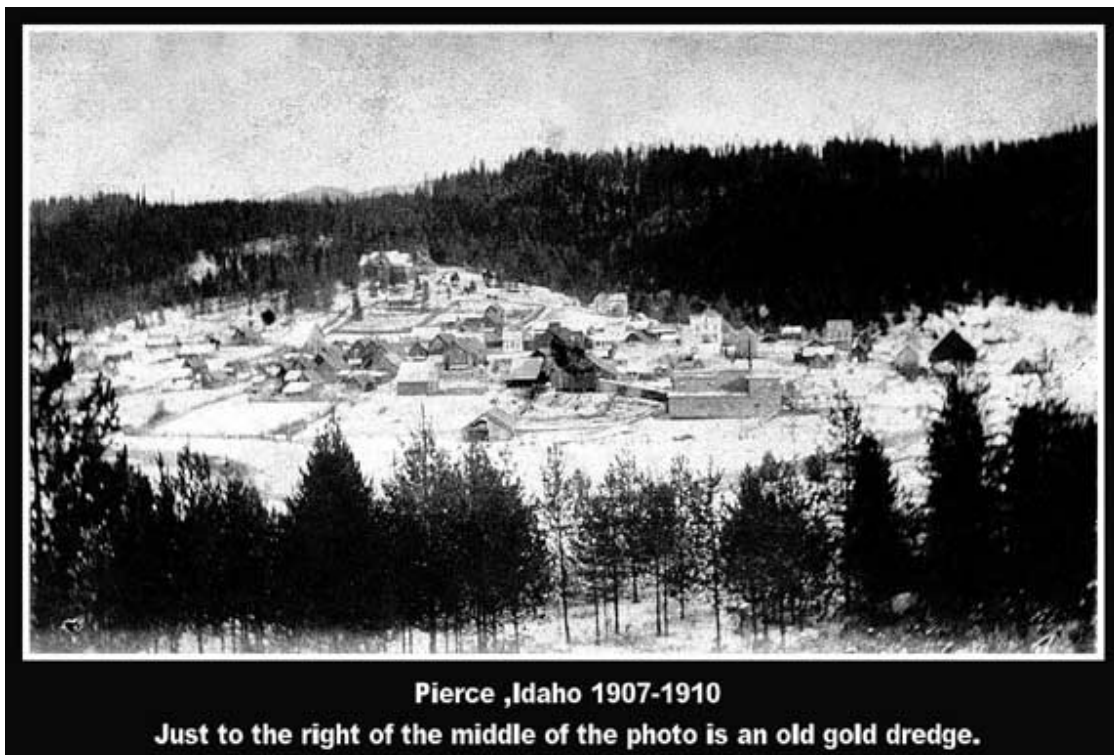


Photo of Pierce Idaho [from early 1900's]

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The town of Pierce, Idaho - Courtesy Clearwater Museum

Reed and the younger Carr were still talking. The older man didn't seem threatening as he was trying to calm Carr, suggesting that he was trying to find out what happened and that he didn't want to get into a big dispute. Reed was trying to establish himself as a meat vendor and a respectable businessman; he also did some work at the Salings Butcher Shop in Pierce. He wanted to put down roots here. He suggested that they all head back to the slaughterhouse and look at the goods.

There was no mistake about the hide. It was clearly marked with the Carr ranch's distinctive "76" brand.

Reed insisted he had nothing to do with stealing any cattle and that he simply slaughtered and butchered what was brought in for him. The Carrs shot back that even if it wasn't Reed, it was probably those other three he ran with—Moore, Rice, and Sloan. Rice and Sloan owned and grazed cattle in the area, and Moore fed cattle for owners around the region. They could easily swipe a few from another operator.

Reed dismissed the idea. When a liveryman named Emmet Barrows showed up, Reed told him to haul the meat from the disputed animal back to the butcher shop he ran at Pierce—it would spoil otherwise; the Carrs, he said, could have the hide. The Carrs insisted it all stay where it was, so their father could come by and inspect it.

Reed then demanded the Carrs produce a legal warrant, if they had one. They didn't. Reed then pulled his gun on them, repeating that the hide was theirs, but the meat was headed to the butcher's shop in Pierce.

Dan Carr sought out law enforcement, thin at Pierce and even at the nearest town, Orofino, because the sheriff and prosecutors were based almost eighty miles away at Lewiston. He swore out complaints against the four Reed, Moore, Rice, and Sloan—on a charge of grand larceny of a two-year-old cow, and insisted they be arrested. A court hearing was held two days later, on the last day of July, at which Sloan and Rice appeared and pleaded not guilty, but Reed and Moore did not. A few days later, Reed surrendered himself to a constable named Miles Cochran at Orofino, where he was allowed to stay free on condition he show at the next court hearing.

The prosecutor, Daniel Needham, then filed the case in Lewiston, demanding the trial be held there. This was a red flag; Reed's honed gunman instincts told him this was a setup and a trap, and he decided to bolt. Reed held the local constable at bay with his gun and tied him up to win a head start.

He met up with Moore, Rice, and Sloan, outside of town and on the run. Reed recalled saying: "Boys, we're all outlaws now. There are warrants out for all of us. So we better hightail it out of here."

Soon they saw Constable Cochran firing at them. Like swatting a mosquito, they stopped and fired back, and soon Cochran, who had no other assistance, turned back to Orofino. Again, they seemed in the clear and continued.

Before long a larger posse materialized. The Carr brothers, Albert and Homer, and their father, Dan, were deputized with instructions to bring the four to justice "dead or alive," and they soon rounded up more help. Hearing that Reed and the others were on the road not far from the Carr ranch, they took a shortcut through the woods and pulled up out of sight. Dan Carr explored down the road, finally deciding on an ambush near a watering trough called Carr Springs, commonly used by travelers. There they waited.

He did not have to wait long. Soon, Reed and his three friends rode their horses into the clearing and to the trough, to water them for the next stage of the trip. Reed was behind the others, keeping a close watch on the scene, but he failed to observe the ambushers. The Carrs waited until Reed had pulled his horse up to the water, and then let loose with fire.

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One of the first shots hit Reed in his right arm, knocking his rifle off into the grass. The horses reared and whinnied, and all but Reed's, which still was mounted, started to run at random. Carr fired again, bullets catching Sloan and Kid Moore.

Dan emerged from the forest, thinking the shooting was done, or if not, that he could finish it now.

Reed had just gotten his horse under control, whipped off his bandanna and tied it around his arm, and dismounted behind the horse. Carr tried to aim at him. But Reed began to demonstrate just why he was so respected as a gunman. His own severe wound barely slowing him, he now reached around for a second rifle, pulled it up, and fired. He inflicted a shallow flesh wound on Carr, who now started to back up and head for shelter. Reed gave him none. Reed fired again, sending him sprawling to the ground, and then shot him yet again to finish the work. Four shots, no misses, with his right arm incapacitated.

And then he surveyed the damage. Kid Moore, his partner-likely his brother-had been shot to death. Sloan was injured in his neck, but the wound was manageable. It was more manageable than Reed's own; his arm was going to require a physician's help soon.

The three remaining horsemen, Sloan, Reed, and Rice took off on a side road, but after little more than a mile, Reed could travel no further. He became delirious and then lost consciousness. The other two, thinking he was dying, left him there and took off for a cabin Rice owned in the forests above Orofino.

They probably thought that was a little-known location, but it was known well enough for another sheriff's posse, this one headed up directly by law enforcement officials, to find it and stake it out. When they caught Sloan and Rice there, peacefully, the two described where they had left Reed.

Reed later told that he continued to walk through the mountains to a remote cabin where the residents tried to help mend him, but where he was soon found by the police. About a week after starting their flight, Reed was checked into the five-year-old St. Joseph's Hospital at Lewiston.

Bill Reed was born in San Antonio, Texas. His parents died young, and he was raised on a remote Texas ranch. He said that he shot to death a man-who happened to be his schoolteacher when he was only thirteen, and then fled to South America. On his return, he said, charges were dropped, and he became first a Texas Ranger because of his great skill with a firearm, and then an entertainer in cowboy shows. No one has disputed his stint as a Texas Ranger, because somewhere in his early life, he picked up an extraordinary skill with guns.

Still, there was no whiff of celebrity about him when he and Kid Moore, who is believed to have been his brother (though Reed seems not to have specifically confirmed this), rode into northern Idaho in 1905, two more drifters on the lookout for work.

Moore was content working at odd jobs, mainly helping out some of the area ranchers delivering feed for the cattle grazing on and around the Weippe Prairie. Reed, however, seems to have had in mind a more stable existence. He wanted to put down roots, run some cattle of his own, maybe even set up a business in town. He built a small cabin for himself at Summit, a few miles uphill from Pierce, and began scouting opportunities.

Over the next few years, they started to appear. He and Kid Moore became friends with Sloan and Rice, who also were newcomers and established cattlemen. Reed started work in slaughtering and meat preparation. He spent a good deal of time at the Pierce City Hotel, and not only because the accommodations suited him: The proprietors did as well.

The place was run by Mary Warren, whose husband, Aaron, was sickly and, when he was well, was often out of town on business. Reed and Mrs. Warren were widely assumed to have had an affair, a turn of discussion that doubtless affected what people in town believed, or were willing to believe, about Bill Reed.

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When he was released from St. Joseph's, he returned to the City Hotel. Several months after he had mostly recovered from his injuries in the summer of 1908, tended to by Mary Warren, Reed was finally put on trial. He was bailed out of jail by Mary Warren. At first the charges were attempted murder, for all the shots he had fired on his way to escape. Those charges were dropped. Dan Carr survived the four bullets Reed had fired, but eventually Carr was charged with murder. Two young girls, who had been headed home and were off in the distance when the shooting happened, testified that Carr had opened fire first and that Reed was acting in self-defense. The cattle rustling charges remained, and those alone would be serious enough to put Reed away for years.

Once again, however, he was fortunate. A group of Nez Perce Indians attended the proceedings and said that the previous summer they had bought several cows from the Carrs and sold them to Reed for butchering. They weren't sure about the white and red cow in question, the one whose branded hide had been found in the slaughterhouse, but thought it was likely one of theirs.

Reed was acquitted. Just after the trial, Reed would later say, the prosecutor described him as a "dead shot." That became the name that stuck. Deadshot Reed is how he became known to several generations of Idahoans living in or visiting the backcountry, one of those figures the locals never tired of talking about.

Reed stayed in the Pierce area for another year, working cattle with Sloan and building some financial reserve. Then, in July of 1909, Reed took off for Spokane to elope-not with Mary Warren, but rather with her daughter, Bessie. The official records note her age at eighteen, but other accounts list her as young as thirteen. After a quick return trip to Pierce, they took off for British Columbia, then for Dallas, Oregon, but neither suited.

Reed finally found his homestead back in Idaho, more than a hundred miles south of the Pierce area, well east of McCall on the Salmon River's south fork, some miles outside of a remote settlement called Knox. After the couple's arrival there in 1914, they stayed for the rest of their lives. They raised fourteen children, all but two surviving infancy, and a small herd of cattle; did a little farming; worked a mining claim for a time; and generally lived mainly a subsistence life.

Deadshot Reed may have been deep in the backcountry, but he had neighbors. The nearest, perhaps a half-mile away, was a German immigrant named George Krassel. He was fiercely proud of his old country, and throughout the World War I period he would loudly proclaim its virtues, irritating Reed no end. The two became increasingly annoyed with each other.

One day in June 1919, as the arguments had gotten ever hotter, Krassel showed up on Reed's property. Reed, recovering from a flu that had kept him indoors, was walking around behind the house at the time. As Bessie Reed, inside the house, looked out into the front yard, she thought she saw Krassel carrying a rifle. She grabbed a pistol and handed it to one of the children, who gave it to her father with a message about who was in front. Armed with gun and information, Reed slipped around the side of the house to confront Krassel, who was still on his horse.

As Reed told it, Krassel pulled up his rifle and fired at Reed, but missed. Within a second Reed pulled the pistol from his waistband, fired, and shot Krassel through the heart. The German collapsed on the ground.

An inquiry concluded that Reed had shot him in self-defense and the matter went to rest.

Reed stayed at the ranch on the south fork until the mid-fifties, when he and Bessie moved to a small farm near the town of Sweet. He died there in 1958.