

Elfego Baca and the "Frisco Shootout"

Elfego Baca was a gunman, lawman, lawyer, and politician in the closing days of the Wild West. His goal in life was to be a peace officer, He wanted, he said, "The outlaws to hear my steps a block away".

Southwest New Mexico at the time was still relatively a sparsely settled cattle ranching country. In 1884, at age 19, Baca stole some guns, bought a mail-order sheriff's badge, and more or less appointed himself deputy sheriff in Socorro County, New Mexico.

Cowboys roamed the land and did as they pleased. They might come into a town, drink at the saloon, harass the locals, and then shoot up the town out of boredom. Baca meant to put an end to that.

In October, 1884, in the town of Lower San Francisco Plaza, Elfego Baca arrested a drunken cowboy named Charlie McCarty. Baca flashed his badge at McCarty after deputizing himself as a peace officer, and took McCarty's gun. After Bill Milligan, the owner of the bar, refused to press charges, Baca took McCarty hostage.

McCarty's fellow cowboys attempted a peaceful negotiation of his release, but Baca refused and opened fire on the negotiator.

After deputies and justices of the peace were brought in from surrounding towns, Baca was forced to bring McCarty back to the Justice of the Peace for a trial and, in turn, was provided with assurances of Baca's safety. Justice of the Peace Ted White granted McCarty's freedom. After the verdict, Elfego Baca ran out of the courtroom still in possession of McCarty's gun.

Bert Hearne, a rancher from Spur Lake Ranch, was summoned to bring Baca back to the Justice for questioning in the murder of Jon Slaughter's foreman. After Baca refused to come out of the adobe jacal, Hearne broke down the door and ordered Baca to come out with his hands up. Not soon after that, shots volleyed from the jacal and hit Hearne in the stomach, resulting in his death.

In the ensuing standoff, the cowboys fired more than 4,000 shots into the house until the adobe building was full of holes. Incredibly, not one of the bullets struck Baca. (The floor of the home is said to have been slightly lower than the ground level, thus Baca was able to escape injury).

During the siege, Baca shot and killed four of his attackers and wounded eight others.

After about 33 hours, and roughly 1,000 rounds of open fire, the battle ended when Francisquito Naranjo convinced Baca to surrender. When they left, Baca walked out of the house unharmed.

In May 1885, Baca was charged with murder for the death of Jon Slaughter's foreman and Bert Hearne. He was jailed to await his trial. In August 1885, Baca was acquitted after the door of Armijo's house was entered as evidence. It had more than 400 bullet holes in it.