

Wicarhpi Isnala **“Lone Star”**

By Rob Jackson

William Henry “Lone Star” Dietz was born near Cut Meat, on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. The actual year of his birth is in question. The date given on his headstone in Reading Pennsylvania is August 16, 1885, yet his enrollment papers from the Carlisle Indian School which are dated September 17, 1907, and now preserved in the National Archives, say he was born August 17, 1884.

According to Lone Star himself, in an interview with a *New York Sun* reporter in 1912, his father was a young German engineer and a member of a surveying party that was laying out a railroad line over the plains. The party was attacked and besieged by the Sioux Chief, Red Cloud. With the camp's provisions running low each day, his father took action.

“Alone, without arms, and with a few days rations, the engineer set towards the Indian camp. He was captured and taken before the chief. While his captors introduced him with mutterings, he stepped forward with outstretched hand toward the chief.”

“His plan worked. The chief met his captive with the trust the civil engineer displayed. A lodge was assigned to the white man and he took an Indian woman as his wife. Although United States troops put an end to the uprising and rescued the other engineers of the party, the young German remained with Chief Red Cloud's tribe and his Indian wife gave birth to two children. The second child, a boy, was named *Wicarhpi Isnala*, or Lone Star.”

When the boy was between two and three years old his father, who had become wealthy as a trader and agent between the two peoples, left the plains and returned East where he remarried to a former girlfriend. After five years away he returned to the reservation and retrieved his son and enrolled the now eight-year-old boy in grade school at Rice Lake, Wisconsin, under the name of William Henry Dietz. It was from here that he would graduate high school and in the fall of 1903, enroll as a special student in art at Macalaster College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He would also play on the college football team.

Lone Star's relationship to his mother's people was maintained through his maternal uncle, One Star, who he credited with teaching him the customs and traditions of Sioux culture. Uncle One Star, who lived on the Rosebud Reservation, also traveled for some time with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

Lone Star's artistic talents took him to St. Louis in the spring of 1904 where he collaborated with other students on the Indian Exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. And it was there, during that summer that he first crossed paths with his soon to be equally famous wife Angel DeCora, herself a direct descendent of the hereditary Chief of the Winnebago Nation.

But it was more than his proficiency in art that gained the attention of Chilocco Indian School Superintendent S.M. McCowan, who was in charge of that part of the 1904 Exposition. It was his athletic prowess that prompted McCowan to persuade Lone Star to enroll at Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma during the fall of that year. The school was expanding its football program to the interscholastic level and the superintendent thought the powerful Lone Star would help make the program a winner.

It was perhaps, through the antecedence of his artistically famous wife, that lead Lone Star to his own destiny of both art and football greatness at the renowned Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Teddy Roosevelt's ascendance to the Presidency brought the appointment of a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Francis E. Leupp brought about a distinct change in attitude at the Indian Schools. From Carlisle founder William Henry Pratt's theory of “kill the Indian, save the man” to Leupp's own policy of “let us not make the mistake in the process of absorbing them, of washing out of them all that is distinctly Indian.” So it was in 1906 that Leupp selected Angel DeCora to head up the new Department of Native Indian Art at Carlisle.

William Henry Dietz enrolled at Carlisle Indian School on September 17, 1907. As part of the School's “outing system” that placed every student in a yearly, part time occupational training, Lone Star spent a month and a half of middle winter at the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia. In July of 1908, before the anniversary of his first year on campus, he was married to his teacher Angel DeCora – twelve years his senior – and he resumed life as both student and assistant teacher in the Native Indian Art Department.

Lone Star's aptitude for art led him to do many of the cover designs for the school's different publications such as *The Arrow*, *The Indian Craftsman* and its successor *The Red Man*. He and his wife also collaborated

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on illustrations for Elaine Goodale Eastman's 1911 book, *Yellow Star: A Story of East and West*. Greatly talented, his art would steadfastly be one of the proud mainstays of his multifaceted life – "Of all things the Indian has been, he first of all has been an artist."

But it's to football that Lone Star owes his legend. And it's at Carlisle that the legend of Lone Star truly begins. The 25-year-old Dietz strode onto Pop Warner's gridiron for the 1909 season. He would share the same backfield and block for Jim Thorpe. In 1911 he would be the team's captain and star defensive player at the tackle position. Warner would proclaim him the best tackle of all during his tenure coaching the team. In Lone Star's three years on the field the Indians combined for a record of 27-10-1, with the best of those years in 1911 at a mark of 11-1-0. The only loss that final season was to Syracuse by a single point. All told they rang up 298 points while allowing 49 for the opposition. In the game against Penn, Dietz scored the first touchdown on a twenty-yard run around end. Lone Star would remain a part of the team the next few years by staying on as an assistant coach from 1912 through 1914.

It was also in 1912 that he began teaching at the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia after the grid season had closed. The year prior in 1911, he and his wife had also become charter members of the Society of American Indians. All the while still maintaining the cover designs for *The Redman*. As yet another sideline, he found time to breed and raise Russian wolfhounds.

It was in 1914 that the rock solid foundations at Carlisle began cracking under the scope of congressional investigations over mismanagement of the lofty sums of money generated by the football program. Along with that came allegations from the players of verbal and physical abuse against Warner himself. Allegations submitted through affidavits from some of the team's key players including quarterback Gus Welch, who was the leading catalyst of the investigation. Also testifying at the hearings would be Lone Star's wife Angel DeCora.

With the end of the famed football program not far along, Warner would move on to the University of Pittsburgh and the artistic duo headed West. The Carlisle Indian School would eventually shut down in 1917, becoming an army medical center for the First World War. In 1915, Dietz attained the head-coaching job at Washington State College.

His wife resigned her post at Carlisle in December of that year and joined her husband in Pullman. But the union was not to last. The marriage had already been in decline before they left Carlisle and the two were divorced in Spokane, Washington on November 30, 1918. After returning to the East, Angel DeCora passed away in Northampton, Massachusetts after succumbing to the great influenza epidemic in 1919.

Lone Star took over the reins of a Washington State team that hadn't had a winning season in five previous years. The squad, still learning the nuances of Dietz's coaching, barely eked out a victory against an alumni squad, but opened the season with a 28-3 win over Oregon. They cruised to a 6-0 mark, scoring 190 points to a mere 10 for their opponents.

Following the team's November 16 victory, 17-0 over Whitman College, Dietz received a telegram from a WSC alumnus named William S. Keinholtz who was the director of vocational education in Los Angeles and also the chairman of The Tournament of Roses athletics committee.

He wrote, "Occasion offers splendid opportunity to obtain national recognition. Earnestly urge you come. Expenses for big squad assured. Quick action necessary. Get busy, consent to come and I will do the rest. Wire at my expense at once."

Leaving Pullman on Dec. 21 by train, Dietz and his team, now dubbed "The Warriors," arrived at their Hotel Maryland headquarters on Christmas Day. Here the enigmatic Lone Star went to work securing a role for himself and parts for his players at \$100 per man as extras in the movie *Tom Brown of Harvard*. They filmed in the mornings and practiced during the afternoon. A possible added strain on his failing marriage, there were rumors concerning the coach's familiarity with the film's female lead, Hazel Daly.

Tournament Park, along with its Roses Parade, was also the site of polo games and chariot races. And on January 1, 1916, it was the site of the Tournament of Roses East-West football game. The first of what was to become the continuous annual known as the Rose Bowl. A cold spell and three days of rain and some snow turned the field into a muddy quagmire that was somewhat alleviated by the trucking in of sawdust.

The match-up was Washington State College against the East's Brown University, led by All-American Fritz Pollard. Referee for the game was former University of Chicago standout Walter "Eckie" Eckersall. The ever-eccentric Lone Star led his players onto the field with himself garbed in a silk stovepipe hat, striped pants, Prince Albert cutaway coat, yellow gloves, spats and a walking stick.

The favored Bruins threatened to score twice in the first half and each time they were thwarted by the

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Washington State defense, including once from the four-yard-line. Dietz's team scored twice in the second half for a 14-0 victory and garnered 329 yards of offense as opposed to Brown's total of 103. Pollard was held to 47 yards on 3 carries.

Upon their return home, the winning team was carried from the train on the shoulders of the student body. The success of the first year coach led to offers from other schools including California and Wisconsin. But a sizable salary increase insured his eventual return to Pullman. Just not right away, or with the team.

Like a moth to a flame, the usually foppishly dressed Dietz was attracted to the fame and fancy of show business. A family trait gleaned from childhood summers with his Uncle One Star, the Wild West performer. Bitten by the acting bug, he stayed over in Los Angeles and portrayed Indians in two different American Motion Picture Corporation films, *The Torch* and *The Carving*. Gripped with the passion, he would go on to purchase a great deal of shares in the Washington Motion Picture Corporation in February of 1918. Located near Minnehaha Park in Spokane, he soon took over the role of production director of his new company and the studios specialized in the development of western movies.

Back on campus for the new fall campaign, he would pilot Washington State to a 4-2 posting before rebounding in 1917 with an unbeaten season.

A 0-0 tie with the 362 Army Infantry in Tacoma on opening day was the only blemish on the team's 1917 record. The next week's home opener against defending Rose Bowl champion Oregon brought a 26-3 victory. Oregon's only points, coming on a 53-yard field goal, would be the only points scored on Lone Star's squad that season. Posting a 6-0-1 mark for the grid year should have assured Washington State a second appearance in the Rose Bowl. But before the team played their final game against Washington, the match-up was determined by a somewhat political, yet mostly business decision. The Mare Island Marines football team, a famous military squad that had been drawing large crowds all year, was scheduled to play against the Camp Lewis team from Tacoma. Both teams were loaded with wartime talent from the different colleges. Hugo Bezdek was head coach of the Marines.

As evidenced by the suddenly talent rich service teams, the current world war had greatly depleted the major college grid teams. And, in the spring of 1918, Washington State College cancelled its athletic programs for the ensuing school year. In a show of his vast popularity, the student body petitioned the athletic council to retain the coach's services for the program's impending future. In turn Dietz pledged his return.

Anchored by his promise to return, the coach headed to New York to star in the vaudevillian play *Back to the Blanket*. He returned to Spokane in June of 1918 as part of a Liberty Loan rally and participated in the parade by riding in his movie company's float as "Bill the Kaiser." He also appeared in the company's film *Fools Gold*, which turned out to be less than a success.

With Washington State's football program in hibernation, Lone Star signed on as the new head coach of the Mare Island Marines. The team that intruded on his Rose Bowl aspirations the year before would be his ticket back to the big game. In another match-up of military service teams, the Marines finished the season at 11-0-0 and lined up to face the team from the Great Lakes Naval Academy.

The coach's second venture into bowl history however would not be as rewarding as the first encounter. The tandem of future NFL hall of famers Paddy Driscoll and George Halas put an end to the Marines quest for an undefeated season. Driscoll contributed 236 yards of total offense with his passing, rushing and return skills. He punted for an average of 43.5 and dropkicked a 30-yard field goal. Halas, the scoring recipient of Driscoll's aerials, nearly scored a third touchdown before his 77-yard return of an interception was halted at the three-yard line. Together they helped lead the way to a 17-0 Blue Jackets victory.

Dietz had been planning for his eventual coaching return to Washington State since November of 1918. In December, before the Rose Bowl, the school abruptly removed his name from the assignment. The reason was learned in February of 1919 when he was indicted by a grand jury in Spokane on a charge of false draft registration. Under the advise of his attorney, Lone Star had claimed exemption to the draft on the basis that he was a non-citizen Indian.

While later dining in a Spokane restaurant, the coach was confronted by one J.C. Argell who reprimanded him for his over indulgence in a wartime-rationed staple – sugar. The two men exchanged verbal barbs in a heated wrangle. When Argell later became head of the local draft board, he used the opportunity of his appointment to investigate Dietz's draft status. Using an old article from the Portland *Oregonian* that wrongly claimed that Lone Star wasn't truly an Indian, Argell promptly had the coach indicted for draft evasion. Despite the fact that documents from the Carlisle Indian School verified his Native American lineage, Lone Star, now in financial straits due to the failure of his film company and no longer on the coaching payroll, could not afford to properly defend himself. He was left no alternative but to plead no contest to the charges and resigned himself to the penalty of the court. Seeing the injustice at hand, the federal judge sentenced

him to only thirty days in the county jail.

His tenure at Pullman over, he left the university with a three-year record of 17 wins, two losses, one tie and two unbeaten seasons. His teams scored 497 points and surrendered only 38 while accumulating an .875 winning percentage and shut out 16 of their 20 opponents. He would put in one more successful campaign with Mare Island in the fall of 1919.

No longer employed in the off-season at the Pennsylvania School of Industrial Art, the next whistle stop on the coaching train for Lone Star was in Indiana. It was there that he would get back onto the coaching circuit as the headman for the Boilermakers of Purdue in the fall of 1921. But back to coaching did not mean back to winning. His one year in West Lafayette brought a 1-6-0 record. The lone 3-0 victory against Northwestern on November 5th is recognized as the first ever homecoming game at Purdue.

When he left Indiana he wasn't alone. It was there that he met and married his new wife Doris Ohm, niece of the famous German physicist George S. Ohm.

The next two years brought him to consecutive winning seasons at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute (Louisiana Tech) with an overall record of 11-3-1. Included were wins of 100-0 over Clark College in 1922 and 66-7 at Northwestern State in 1923. Moving west, Lone Star took up the head coaching reins for the Cowboys at the University of Wyoming. He directed the team to just one winning season out of four with a combined total of 14-18-2.

During the downtime from coaching in the mid 1920's he lent himself to doing technical assistance on western movies in Hollywood and did a little acting too. He lent his assistance to Pop Warner at two Stanford Rose Bowls and drew the illustrations for Warner's 1927 book *Football for Coaches and Players*. He was a consultant to Knute Rockne. Damon Runyon would anoint him "the coach's coach." And in 1928 he stayed on in California as the head coach of a team of former college all-stars, the Los Angeles Town Club and led them to a perfect 10-0-0 record.

The years 1929 to 1932 brought Lone Star back to the Indian boarding school system. This time it would be in Lawrence, Kansas at the Haskell Institute. Compiling a four year record of 30-9-0, he coached some of the greatest Indian athletes of the era. Standouts such as Louis "Rabbit" Weller, a 5'5", 150 lb. back who had 13 touchdowns of 60 yards or longer and once made *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* for a 105-yard kickoff return. In a 1930 game against Duquesne – a time when coaching from the sidelines was not allowed – Dietz was actually accused by Dukes coach Elmer Layden of using his cigar to send smoke signals to his players.

After four successful seasons at Haskell, the professionals came calling for Coach Dietz. Boston Braves owner George Preston Marshall convinced Lone Star to coach his pro team in the National Football League starting with the 1933 season.

During Dietz's first year in Boston, Marshall moved the team into Fenway Park and renamed it the Redskins. Along with himself, the coach also brought some former Haskell players with him to the squad. Players such as Chief Johnson, Orien Crow and the better known Rabbit Weller. Famous for being a great defensive coach, Dietz had the two leading rushers in the league with Jim Musick and Cliff Battles, yet could only muster a break-even season with a 5-5-2 record. He followed that up with a 6-6-0 mark in 1934. Marshall replaced Lone Star with former Harvard standout Eddie Casey before the 1935 season and Dietz made his way to Temple University where he reunited with Pop Warner. He would spend the next two years compiling a fine unbeaten record of 13-0-1 as coach of the freshman team.

In 1937, Lone Star would begin the final leg of his coaching odyssey at tiny Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania, where he replaced Clarence "Biggie" Munn who was on his way to Syracuse. His 1937 Lions completed an undefeated season for the first time in school annals. His star back, Dick Riffle, went on to be named to the small college All-American team and later enjoyed a career in the NFL with the Eagles and Steelers. All told the coach led six campaigns for Albright, with three winning seasons and posted a 31-23-2 record. World War II unfortunately brought a halt to his security at Albright when the school shut down football operations in 1943. He would not be called back when the program resumed in 1946 and his coaching career quietly came to an end.

In 1942 Dietz went to New York and unsuccessfully headed up the Jackson and Company advertising firm. And from 1946 to 1952 he partnered the Liberty Academy of Art in Pittsburgh. It too was doomed to failure.

In 1956, all the members of the 1916 Rose Bowl teams were invited back to Pasadena as guests of the Tournament of Roses Committee for a 40th anniversary celebration of the game. Nearly all the living members of the two squads made the trip, including Lone Star Dietz. He was reported to be in remarkable physical condition, very witty and said to have "stole the show" during a TV appearance.

Of his former players he said, "There never was a team with finer spirit – we were all for each other. Please remember that I didn't bring a man out with me from the East, though that was the custom those days, but took the squad just as I found it. I made a few position shifts and that was all. We emphasized how much depended on every man's doing the right job in his position, each helping the others, and that was the spirit in which we went through the season and played at the Rose Bowl."

"I always emphasized that we were playing football now, but that the same concentration and effort and teamwork in after (football) life would bring success. It's a source of happiness to me to see how well they have done."

On Thursday January 5, he returned to Spokane where he hadn't been since 1930 when his Haskell team beat Gonzaga 14-6. He was the guest of the city's Athletic Round Table at a dinner in his honor at the Davenport Hotel. The committee, which included another former Redskin head coach, Ray Flaherty, welcomed him by wearing silk hats and canes in commemoration of his attire for the 1916 game. His response was, "this town hasn't changed a bit." It was suggested that Dietz might be the right man to inject some vitality back into the Washington State program that was being vacated by outgoing coach Al Kircher. Dietz would not mention himself for the vacancy but it was thought by some in the assemblage that as an advisor, he would be the right choice.

The next stop for Lone Star on the reunion tour was in Pullman itself on January 6, where he was the guest of Washington State and appeared at halftime of the basketball game against Oregon State. At a luncheon given in his honor the following day, he spoke on the football history of Washington State College.

He expressed the sentiment that, "the greatest quality (of a coach) is that of being able to improve. The greatest need is that you believe in your players and that they believe in you." When broached on the subject of the current coaching vacancy on the Palouse, he simply commented by saying, "God has given me this splendid health I have. I don't know why, but I feel that I do have as much energy and determination as I ever had. I know that somewhere there must be one more important job waiting for me to do. I would like to do this among people I like and for an institution I love." It was not to be.

Having paid off his debts from the failed art school, Lone Star returned with his wife to Reading, Pennsylvania in 1957 financially broke and jobless. Among friends, he'd try to make a living by painting. He created mostly portraits, including one of himself. Many are stored at, or hang in the Halls of Albright College, including *The Pursuit of Knowledge* that was presented to the school by the class of 1959, and a portrait of his 1937 star back, Dick Riffle. The old coach would spend his final years living on public assistance at the Oakbrook Housing Project on McClellan Street in Reading.

William Henry "Lone Star" Dietz passed away at St. Joseph's Hospital from cancer on July 20, 1964. The local papers printed homage in expanded obituaries to the celebrated coach who died with a net worth of \$101.00 to his once famous name. Without the necessary funds for a burial, the coach who had wanted his ashes spread over the Rose Bowl had his remains instead placed in an urn and shelved at the Lutz Funeral Home. Years later, some representatives from Albright paid to have his remains buried in a plot in Schwarzwald Cemetery. His resting place is under a tree, near a wall along Oley Turnpike Road in a pauper's grave. The carving on his marker reads simply:

WILLIAM DIETZ
"LONE STAR"
August 16, 1885
July 20, 1964
COACH

The memory and legend of Lone Star still lives on today. He's been memorialized by his inductions into institutions such as the Rice Lake Sports Hall of Fame, The Indian Hall of Fame, and the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. His name has also been suggested for possible nomination to the College Football Hall of Fame. His persona lives on as a part of the many universities where he was a student, teacher and coach. Not to mention an early thread in the fabric of the Washington Redskins and the lore of the National Football League itself. And in the enduring canvas reflections of his artistic self. A man who was acquainted with Jim Thorpe, Walt Disney, Buffalo Bill, Knute Rockne, George Halas, Pop Warner and countless others.

It's even been suggested at a Cougar alumni gathering, that his remains be redirected from his present resting spot to a more befitting internment near the entrance to Martin Stadium in Pullman.

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Clasped in his hand at the time of his passing was a symbol of the enduring spirit of Lone Star himself that carried on throughout the trying harshness of his end days. It was a copy of a quotation; from the final page of the book he had helped his mentor Pop Warner to illustrate back in 1927. It read simply:

*When the game is pretty tough
Don't you ever holler "nuff"
Show the world you have the stuff
Keep a-goin.*