WHEN
THE
SMOKE
CLEARS

Gunslingers and Gunfights of the Old West

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ALSO BY TOM RIZZO

FICTION

Last Stand at Bitter Creek
The Shoe Box
Tea & Apathy
NONFICTION

Tall Tales from the High Plains & Beyond:

Book One: The Unexpected and Other Stories
   Book Two: The LawKeepers
   Book Three: The LawBreakers

Reflections: Reality Checks & Timeless Tips

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Wyatt Earp, involved in various shootouts during his career, once told an interviewer that speed had nothing to do with success in a gun battle.

“Deliberation” was the key—taking the time to aim and pull the trigger once.

Inside When the Smoke Clears, you’ll find stories of thirteen gunfights that took place in the Old West. You will read about one few documented instances of two men facing each other in a quick-draw duel took place on July 21, 1865, in Springfield, Missouri, between Wild Bill Hickok and David Tutt.

Main Street shootouts, for the most part, were rare occurrences in the Old West. In most cases, if sharp-shooting gunmen found themselves in the same locale, they usually stay away from each other out of respect or fear—and took few risks.

Pure self-promotion accounted for most of the reputations among gunmen. Hickok, for example, helped create and perpetuate the myth of quick-draw gun battles in an interview with Harper’s New Monthly in which he bragged about killing hundreds of men. Other newspapers, however, contended the article was riddled with inaccuracies.

In a 1928 interview with author Stuart N. Lake, for the book Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal, Earp also mocked the image of a man holding a gun in each
hand, “held closely against his hips and both spitting smoke together.” He branded it as nothing more than “the picture of a fool or a fake.”

Gunfighters, who did wear two guns, never fired them at the same time, he told Lake. “Some men could shoot equally well with either hand, and in a gunplay might alternate their fire; others exhausted the loads from the gun on the right, or the left . . . then shifted the reserve weapon to the natural shooting hand . . .”

Although a few “of these so-called two-gun men” tried shooting both guns at once, Earp pointed out they “didn't last long in proficient company.” Earp also said the idea of notching a gun was nothing more than a myth. The pros, he said, never did such a thing.

“I never knew a man who amounted to anything to notch his gun with credits, as they were called, for men he had killed,” said Earp. “Outlaws, gunmen of the wild crew who killed for the sake of brag, followed this custom. I have worked with most of the noted peace officers . . . (who) have handled their weapons many times, but never knew any of them to carry a notched gun.”

The former lawman also expressed contempt for anyone would attempt to bluff another person with a gun.

“There was no such thing as a bluff,” Earp said, adding when a gunfighter reached for his forty-five, “every faculty he owned was keyed to shooting as speedily and as accurately as possible, to making his first shot the last of the fight.”

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Enjoy reading these stories about some of the gun battles that help shaped not only the myth and the reality of America’s Old West, but the reputation of the men who lived—and died—by the six-gun.

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ONE

Bad Day at Coffeyville

At mid-morning on Oct. 5, 1892, five men entered into Coffeyville, Kansas, and rode into the plaza at the center of town with the intention of making outlaw history with the simultaneous robbery of two banks.

Despite wearing false beards and wigs, the citizens of the town recognized members of the Dalton Gang. The Dalton family had lived in Coffeyville for a short period of time. In the preceding months, before traveling to Coffeyville, the Dalton brothers had robbed four trains in Indian Territory, making off with several thousand dollars.

Bob Dalton, considered the wildest of the brothers, always said he wanted his name to be long remembered by doing something that would outdo the escapades of Jesse James. His idea: rob two banks at the same time in broad daylight.

When members of the gang rode through the spacious plaza, dismounted, split up, and entered the two banks. Gratton Dalton went to the new C.M. Condon Bank along with Bill Powers and Dick Broadwell, while Bob and Emmett Dalton slipped inside the First National.

Threatened at gunpoint, three bank tellers inside the Condon bank filled a sack with money while the gang waited another ten minutes for a time lock on the vault to open.

A few curious citizens saw the outlaws pull their guns, prompting someone to yell out a warning the bank was being robbed. Bystanders quickly armed themselves with rifles and revolvers, and stood ready to stop any escape by the bandits. Less than a minute later, citizens of Coffeyville began firing through the plate-glass windows.

The three gang members fired back, but were overwhelmed by the intensity of the response. With no other way out of the bank, they ordered two bank employees to carry the sack of money to the front door, but another withering hail of gunfire forced them to retreat further inside the bank.

At First National, in the meantime, a similar scene took place. The two Dalton brothers used employees as shields but heavy gunfire drove them back inside.

When the two groups finally made their way to the street, the gunfire didn’t stop. Grat Dalton and Bill Powers were killed trying to take cover. Broadwell,
carrying a bullet in the back, sought refuge in a lumberyard. Taking advantage of the confusion, he mounted his horse and rode off, but couldn’t escape the bullets that followed him. His body was found about a half mile west of the city.

Bob and Emmett Dalton escaped from the First National, but Bob was killed a short time later. Emmett got shot when he tried to return on horseback to help brother Bob, who lay dying. When he reached down to grasp his brother’s hand, one of the townspeople fired both barrels of his shotgun into Emmett Dalton’s back. When the smoke cleared, Emmett Dalton lay severely wounded.

Not far from him was the moneybag he was carrying containing over twenty thousand dollars the gang had stolen.

The bad day at Coffeyville marked an unceremonious end for the Dalton gang. Their bodies were simply dumped in a pile in the town jail and, the next day, placed side-by-side on a hay wagon and photographed. Emmett Dalton, by the way, survived to serve a 14-year jail term.

One of the gang members who never made it into Coffeyville was the infamous Bill Doolin who, according to various accounts, sensed an impending danger in Coffeyville. Rather than accompany the others, Doolin slowed his horse to a stop just outside the town, pretending it had thrown a shoe, and explained he would get it replaced at a nearby ranch.

Doolin expressed discomfort with the plan from the beginning. Since the Dalton Gang enjoyed its most success robbing trains full-time, he didn’t think the sudden switch to bank robbery was a good idea.

Besides, the Daltons had moved to Coffeyville in 1886, and lived there for a short time. For this reason, Doolin found it amusing that gang members disguised themselves with false beards and wigs. He knew the disguises wouldn’t fool anyone.

One account says Doolin did head into Coffeyville after all, but hightailed it out when he saw his associates dead in the street. Yet another story suggests that Doolin and Bob Dalton parted ways before the robbery attempt after quibbling over how the money would be split.

Regardless of what actually happened, one fact was clear: Bill Doolin was alive. Bob Dalton was dead.

TWO

Elfego Baca’s Gunsmoke Justice

The 19-year old self-appointed lawman flattened his body against the sunken dirt floor of the jacal trying to avoid the withering firepower raking the flimsy walls of the adobe shack.
The gun battle between Elfego Baca, a five-foot-seven unassuming Hispanic, and an estimated eighty cowboys began on Monday, December 1, 1884, in the southwestern New Mexico village of Frisco—a legendary shootout that would last more than thirty hours.

The teen-ager had but a single dream growing up—to wear a badge. So he ordered one through the mail, got himself a few guns and, according to various accounts, named himself a deputy sheriff and offered his services to the law in Catron County.

The Hispanic settlement stood nestled in a pocket of untamed cattle ranching communities—places where cowhands sometimes stopped to take the edge off long and demanding trail drives by raising Cain in the saloons, gambling halls, and bordellos of settlements along the river called the Frisco Plazas.

Sheriff Pedro Sarracino, of Lower Frisco, told Baca about a cowboy named Charlie McCarthy who went on a shooting spree at a saloon in Upper Frisco Plaza. When Baca tried to get arrest warrants, the Justice of the Peace refused, fearing the potential havoc an estimated 150 cowboys could cause.

Baca, however, had no intention of backing down. He went to the saloon, disarmed McCarthy, and took him into custody. McCarthy rode for the John B. Slaughter ranch, a crew with a reputation of violence and intimidation.

When a large crowd demanded Baca release his prisoner, he fired into the crowd, hitting a horse. The animal fell on its owner, killing him. Trouble in Frisco was about to reach a boiling point.

The next day, about 80 ranch hands rode in with plans to force Baca to release McCarthy, either through peaceful means or by force. Baca stood his ground but the situation deteriorated to the point that Baca feared for his life. Dragging his prisoner with him, he took refuge in a small house and barricaded himself and his prisoner inside the structure.

The deadly assault, which began on Monday, December 1, dragged into Tuesday. The eighty cowhands launched a furious attack and fired more than four thousand rounds of bullets into the one-room house, fortified by thick logs and mud. When ammunition failed to force Baca and his prisoner out, the cowboys set fire to the roof. A portion of the roof collapsed and part of a wall gave way.

Baca hunkered down with even greater resolve. In the exchange of bullets, Baca killed four of the cowboys and wounded eight others, but escaped injury. Authorities intervened and guaranteed Baca's safety. He agreed to give himself and escorted McCarthy to the courthouse.

Baca spent about four months in jail, went on trial for murder twice, but won acquittal both times. During one of his trial, his attorney entered the door of the house into evidence. It was riddled with over 400 bullet holes. But the story of Elfego Baca didn't end in a courtroom.
Ten years later, he became a lawyer. Over the years, Baca served as Deputy U.S. Marshal, assistant District Attorney, school superintendent, and mayor of Socorro. In 1919, Baca became sheriff of Socorro County.

During an interview in the 1930s, he said, “I never wanted to kill anybody, but if a man had it in his mind to kill me, I made it my business to get him first.” Baca died in 1945, at the age of 84.

His exploits and achievement stand as a symbol for the difference a lone and sometimes powerless individual can make in battles for survival against overwhelming odds.

**THREE**

**The Legend of Blazer’s Mill**

The band of gunmen, known as the *Regulators*, rode into Blazer's Mills in Lincoln County, New Mexico, on a warm and sunny afternoon with a big appetite. Making their way around a sawmill and gristmill, the well-armed group guided their mounts to the top of a hill past a house and came to a halt in front of an office structure called the Agency Building. They dismounted and went inside to a small restaurant.

Three days earlier, several of the *Regulators* executed Sheriff William Brady and his deputy, George Hindman, in retaliation for the death of rancher John Tunstall, an event, which triggered the bloody Lincoln County War.

Led by constable Richard “Dick” Brewer, the Regulators included experienced gun hands—Billy the Kid, Charlie Bowdre, George and Frank Coe, Frank McNab, Henry Newton Brown, Doc Scurlock, and John Middleton. All of them were committed to hunting down anyone believed associated with Tunstall's murder.

On the same afternoon of April 4, 1878, a buffalo hunter by the name of Andrew L. Buckshot Roberts rode Blazer's Mill on his mule. Roberts headed for the post office where he hoped to pick up a check for the sale of his ranch. His plans were to leave the area, wanting no part of the Lincoln County War.

Not much was known about Buckshot Roberts. He got the nickname because he carried a load of buckshot in his right shoulder, which prevented him from raising his right arm above his pelvis. He was a quiet, secretive man who spoke little of his past.

It's believed he served as a Texas Ranger under the name of Bill Williams, fought in the American Civil War, and may have been a colleague of Buffalo Bill Cody.

The Regulators assumed Roberts, who had ranched in the area for a couple of years, was associated with the Dolan-Murphy Faction, the group responsible for Tunstall's death. The Regulators, legally deputized by a Justice of the Peace, had
been formed to serve warrants issued in connection with Tunstall's murder. One of the warrants named Roberts.

Only when Frank Coe approached him, did Buckshot Roberts realize he picked the wrong time to visit Blazer's Mill. The two men exchanged words outside the building where the restaurant stood. Coe told him about the warrant and tried to persuade him into surrendering. Roberts, however, had no intention to putting his life into the hands of what he considered a murderous mob, figuring he'd be a convenient target for the avenging gunmen.

Constable Brewer, in the meantime, grew weary of Coe's inability to coax Roberts into giving up, and sent several men to take the old rancher into custody by force. When Roberts glanced over Coe's shoulder and spotted the men coming his way, guns in hand, he lifted the Winchester and pointed it in their direction.

Two shots cracked the calm of the New Mexico afternoon. Roberts and Bowdre had fired at the same time. A bullet struck Roberts in the stomach, staggering him in pain. His shot, meanwhile, hit Bowdre's belt buckle, knocking the wind out of the gunman.

Despite the bleeding in his belly, Roberts squeezed off more shots at the Regulators, seriously wounding John Middleton. One of Roberts' .44 caliber bullets severed the trigger finger of George Coe's right hand. Another one grazed the leg of Doc Scurlock.

When the hammer fell on an empty chamber, Roberts ran for the Blazer home to take cover, and ducked into a doorway. That's when Billy the Kid raced from hiding to finish the job. But Roberts stepped out just as the Kid arrived and swung the barrel of the Winchester against the outlaw's head, knocking him out.

Inside the home, he found a single-shot rifle that belonged to Dr. Blazer, who owned the house, and used it to defend himself. Several Regulators tried to reason with him and urged him to give up. But no amount of cajoling worked. Roberts wasn't budging from his barricade.

An angry and frustrated Dick Brewer worked his way around to the side of the house, took cover behind a pile of logs, spotted Roberts inside and fired. The shot missed Roberts, thudding into a wall behind him.

Despite losing a lot of blood and copying with tremendous pain, Roberts waited for Brewer to show himself. When he did, Roberts took aim, and fired, sending a bullet into Brewer's eye, killing him.

The Regulators reeled in shock at the damage Roberts had inflicted. With their leader dead and others wounded, they made a decision to leave. After loading the injured onto a wagon, they left Blazer's Mill, wanting no further confrontation with Buckshot Roberts.

A doctor from nearby Fort Stanton heard about the shooting, rode to Blazer's Mill, but it was too late to treat Roberts, who died the following day. He and Brewer, ironically, were buried side-by-side at Blazer Cemetery in Mescalero, New Mexico.
Historians suggest that although Roberts sometimes worked for Dolan, and knew Murphy, he had nothing to do with the Tunstall's death or the start of the Lincoln County War. Roberts fell victim to a classic case of guilt-by-association. In fact, when the violence began he refused to choose a side and decided to sell his ranch so he could leave.

Despite losing his life, Buckshot Roberts' heroic last stand at Blazer's Mill found its way to the pages of Western legend and lore.

FOUR

The Dance Hall Blood Bath

Sunrise was still a few hours away when three Texas cowboys mingled among the crowd in Perry Tuttle's Dance Hall in Newton, Kansas, on a Sunday morning in August 1871, thirsty for only one thing: revenge.

Newton had replaced Abilene as the terminus of the Chisholm Trail. Tuttle's, like other saloons and gambling dens, accommodated its share of the lawless and the violent.

According to an Aug. 25, 1871, report in the Emporia News, Newton was “...largely inhabited by prostitutes, gamblers and whisky-sellers. Pistol shooting is the common amusement. All the frequenters of the saloons, gambling dens and houses of ill-fame are armed at all times, mostly with two pistols.”

Inside the dance hall, Billy Garrett, Jim Wilkerson, and Henry Kearns focused their attention on a Faro table where a man by the name of Mike McCluskie was seated. The trio had been friends with a career cowboy by the name of Bill Bailey, whom McCluskie had killed weeks earlier.

McCluskie, an Ohio Irishman, arrived in Newton as a night policeman with the Santa Fe Railroad. Prior to the August elections, he and Bailey were appointed special policemen to help maintain law and order during the voting.

Early in the month, however, Election Day politics ignited a deadly argument between the two men at the Red Front Saloon. During the August 11 fistfight, McCluskie shoved Bailey into the street, yanked a pistol, and shot him twice. Bailey died the next day. McCluskie fled town to avoid arrest.

A couple of days later, however, Bailey got word the shooting would likely be judged self-defense. When he returned, McCluskie explained he feared Bailey because the man had killed two others in previous gunfights.

On the night of August 19, McCluskie and his friend Jim Martin decided to do some gambling and headed to Tuttle's, located in the Hyde Park vicinity of Newton. Neither had any idea that Bailey's three friends were waiting to deliver a payback for his death. Among those in the smoky crowded dance hall was James Riley, an 18-year old dying from tuberculosis whom McCluskie befriended when he arrived in Newton. Riley was known as “McCluskie's Shadow” and would play a key role in one of the most violent shootouts to take place on the frontier.
Shortly after midnight, Hugh Anderson, the son of a wealthy Texas cattle rancher burst through the door, walked up to McCluskie, called him a coward, and shot him in the neck. McCluskie crumpled to the floor and tried to return fire but his gun jammed, and Anderson shot him several more times. Martin, McCluskie's friend, tried to intervene and that's when all hell broke loose. The three cowboys started firing.

One bullet struck Martin in the neck, and he stumbled out into the dusty street where he died on the steps of a dance hall across the street. In the midst of all the commotion, the teen-aged Riley pulled two Colt revolvers from his holster and opened fire in the dark dance hall. Visibility was so poor, that it's believed the bullets from Riley’s guns strike friend and foe, alike.

Witnesses say the kid killed four men and wounded three. Among the bodies were Garret, Kearns, and a bystander. Wilkerson and another customer were wounded, but survived. Anderson took two bullets in the leg.

In the aftermath, Anderson eventually left Kansas and returned to Texas to mend his wounds. But two years later, McCluskie’s brother, Arthur, tracked down Anderson. Neither survived the brutal encounter.

James Riley, the mysterious two-gun teen-age gunmen who delivered his own revenge, walked out of the dance hall early that Sunday morning. No one ever saw him again.

FIVE

A Sunday Afternoon Shootout

The lawman checked his pocket watch, slipped the arrest warrant from his pocket, and left Brown and Kinder’s Livery to confront a cattle rustler also suspected of murdering three Navajo Indians.

Arizona Territory, wore a wide-brimmed hat to cover his flowing hair, a fringed buckskin jackets and silver-studded chaps. Strapped around his waist was a four-inch wide belt that carried two rows of ammunition for the revolver and rifle he carried.

He approached the small white frame house in the northeastern community of Holbrook a little after 4 p.m., on Sunday, September 4, 1887. He went to the front door, peeked through a window, and summoned Andy Blevins outside. Blevins also went by the alias Andy Cooper.

“Cooper, I want you.”
“What do you want with me?”

Owens told him about an old warrant accusing him of horse stealing.

When Owens took office the year before, it was a period of runaway lawlessness. After a few months in office, he found himself in the middle of the Pleasant Valley War, a conflict involving the Graham and Tewksbury families.
The Blevins clan allied itself with the Grahams, a family of cattlemen. The sheep-herding Tewksburys were part Indian. Historians suggest the range war might have involved racial prejudice. Owens tried to remain neutral but decided to serve the warrant when he learned Andy Blevins/Cooper bragged about killing John Tewksbury and another man.

The door opened by just a few inches and Blevins told Owens he needed time to think, but the sheriff rejected the request.

“I won't go,” said Blevins, raising a pistol.

Owens later told the *Apache County Critic* newspaper that he wedged the door open with his boot, poked the rifle through and fired, striking Blevins in the stomach. As Owens back pedaled to load another cartridge, John Blevins, a brother, opened another door and shot at him. The bullet missed and, instead, killed his brother's horse a few feet away.

The lawman fired back, hitting John Blevins in the right shoulder. A family friend by the name of Mose Roberts decided to get into the act and charged from the house, six-shooter blazing. Owens leaped to the side of a wagon and fired, killing Roberts.

Owens said a boy - 15-year old Sam Houston Blevins – “jumped out of the front of the house with a six-shooter in his hands. I shot him.”

The gunfight lasted about a minute. Owens fired only five shots, killing Andy Blevins, Sam Blevins, and Mose Roberts, and wounding John Blevins.

Owens, despite his courage and effectiveness, lost his bid for a second term as sheriff. He moved to Seligman, Arizona, and open a general store and saloon. In 1902, he married and the couple relocated to San Diego, California. Ten years later, they return to Arizona Territory to help celebrate statehood, February 14, 1912.

Sheriff Commodore Perry Owens died on May 28, 1919, at the age of 67. Owen’s house in Seligman, Arizona, still stands today.

SIX

Four Dead in Five Seconds

The slender, well-dressed lawman crossed the street to grab a late lunch at the Globe Restaurant when he saw a large band of heavily armed Mexicans riding into El Paso to attend an inquest into the deaths of two vaqueros, whose bodies were found near a ranch outside the city.

Marshal [Dallas Stoudenmire](#) glanced at his pocket watch: A little after 1 p.m., Thursday, April 14, 1881.

Tall, tough, and imposing, Stoudenmire had worn the marshal’s badge for only three days. His hiring came with expectations would clean up this tough Texas border town known for its taste for violence.
Given the situation, the 36-year old Stoudenmire was more than annoyed when Mayor Solomon Schutz granted an exception and allowed the Mexicans to enter the city limits with their firearms. He shrugged and ducked inside the Globe. Stoudenmire was El Paso’s sixth lawman in eight months. The dead vaqueros had come north searching for 30 head of cattle stolen from a ranch south of the border, but were never heard of again. El Paso County Constable Gus Krempkau offered help and, later in the day, their bodies were found near a ranch owned by John Hale, a well-known rustler. Tension crackled when the group made its way into tow. Tempers ran high between the Mexicans and the Anglos. Two American rustlers, known to associate with Hale, bragged publicly about killing the two young Mexicans. They were charged and arrested for the killings. Krempkau held an inquest and allowed the Mexicans to take their comrades’ bodies with them.

Among those mingling in the crowd were George Campbell, a former city marshal, and his rancher friend, John Hale. Campbell accused Krempkau of siding with the Mexicans. Seconds later, Hale—said to have been drunk—grabbed one of Campbell’s guns and shot the constable.

Inside the Globe, Stoudenmire finished his lunch and sat enjoying a drink when he heard the roar of a six-gun outside. He scrambled to his feet, knocked the chair over, and race through the doors, a gun in each hand. Stoudenmire, a crack shot, fired. The first shot went wild and killed an innocent Mexican bystander trying his best to get out of the line of fire. Hale, meanwhile, took cover behind a post in front of the saloon. But when he peeked out, Stoudenmire drilled him in the head. Campbell stepped out of the saloon where the argument began, waved his gun, and yelled, “Gentlemen, this is not my fight.” Although sprawled in the street and wounded, Krempkau squeezed off two shots, hitting Campbell in the toe and the wrist. About the same time, Stoudenmire whirled around and snapped off three shots, each of them hitting Campbell in the stomach.

When the smoke cleared, four men lay dead, including Krempkau. The incident was chronicled as the “Four Dead in Five Seconds” gun battle.

Less than a week after the shootout with Campbell and Hale, former deputy Bill Johnson tried to ambush Stoudenmire with a shotgun. The shot missed. Stoudenmire returned fire and killed Johnson. The Manning brothers, friends of Campbell and Hale, had put up the former deputy to the assassination attempt.

Over the next several months, Stoudenmire proved an effective lawman. Along the way, he killed six other men who resisted arrest. At six-four, he was an intimidating force. He wore twin Colts, and was deadly accurate with either hand. A drinking problem and a hair-trigger temper, however, plagued Stoudenmire.

City officials fired the marshal on May 27, 1882, but then reinstated him.
Stoudenmire, who a few months later became the owner of the Globe Restaurant, won appointment as US Deputy Marshal for territories in Western Texas and New Mexico.

Although Stoudenmire succeeded in taming El Paso, he made a lot of enemies along the way. The long-running feud with the Manning brothers continued until September 18, 1882, when James and Doc Manning killed the marshal.

A subsequent trial acquitted the Mannings of murder charges. Stoudenmire was buried in Alleyton. He was 36.

SEVEN

Bullets, Blood, and Bullion

When the Southern Pacific arrived at the train station in tiny Fairbank, Arizona, a few miles west of Tombstone, to offload some cargo on the night of February 15, 1900, several gunmen mingled in the awaiting crowd, pretending to be drunk.

Former deputy sheriffs Bill Stiles and Burt Alvord planned to rob the Wells Fargo express car that carried either the US Army payroll for soldiers at Fort Huachuca, or a shipment of gold and silver bullion. To help carry out the plan, the pair recruited Bob Brown (or Burns), George and Louis Owens, "Brave Juan" Tom Yoas and "Three Fingered' Jack" Dunlop.

Jeff Milton, a former lawman and accomplished Manhunter, worked at the time for the railroad as an express messenger. Aware of Milton's gun skills, Stiles and Alvord decided to rob the train on a night he wasn't working.

When the express door opened that night, however, Jeff Milton stepped forward into the Thursday night moonlight. Despite a day off, he agreed to take a friend's place as a substitute messenger.

The situation unfolded fast.

One of the gunmen in the crowd shouted at Milton to get his hands up. A shot rang out. Milton left his revolver on the desk several feet away, but his sawed-off shotgun stood just inside the doorway. Milton, however, hesitated using it for fear of hitting an innocent bystander. The delay cost him.

The next bullet shattered his left shoulder, sending him to the floor. In pain and losing blood, he crawled to the shotgun. He rolled to face the door just in time to see Three-Fingered Jack climbing into the railcar. Milton fired. Dunlap grasped his chest and dropped.

Yoas was close behind, but one of the buckshot pellets struck him in the leg or backside and he limped to his horse and galloped away.

The gunmen fired again, but Milton somehow managed to slide the metal door closed amid ricocheting bullets. Struggling from loss of blood, he fashioned
his own tourniquet. Growing weaker and in danger of passing out, he grabbed the key to the express box and hurled it behind some luggage just before the outlaws gained entrance to the express car.

The gunmen found Milton sprawled on the floor in a pool of blood. Figuring him for dead, they searched his pockets and the desk drawer, but couldn't locate the key. Frustrated and unable to find a way to open the express box, they had no choice but to leave.

They took the injured Dunlap with them, but a posse found the gang member abandoned in the road, a few miles from Tombstone. He died within the week, but not before revealing the names of his outlaw associates, who were later captured and sent to prison.

Although Milton lost the use of his arm, and was considered permanently disabled, he continued his law enforcement career.

Over the years, Milton had achieved an enviable record of public service. Before taking the job as shotgun messenger for Wells Fargo, he had worked as a Texas Ranger, a deputy sheriff, police chief, deputy US marshal, and US customs border patrol agent.

Four years after the shoot-out, he became an agent for the U.S. Immigration Service under the Chinese Exclusion Act, assigned to stop the smuggling of Chinese aliens through Arizona and California, a job he held until 1932.

Born Jefferson Davis Milton in Marianna, Florida, in 1861, on the family plantation, he was the son of Confederate Governor John Milton, who committed suicide after the Civil War.

At 16, he left for Texas where he lied about his age to make himself eligible to join the Texas Rangers.

Milton died in Tucson on May 7, 1947, at age 86, his body cremated and his ashes spread across the Arizona desert where he spent so much of his life.

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EIGHT

Small But Deadly

The braided thong of the blacksnake whip lashed across the arms and back of the young cowhand, ripping jagged lines of blood into his skin. Billy Standifer refused to buckle and endured the brutal punishment he would not forget.

While riding the range of the Ike Mullins Ranch in Tom Green County, Texas, in April 1879, Standifer attempted to stop a man named John Mahon from driving cattle across a pasture. In fact, he corralled a few head of Mahon’s cattle.

When Standifer refused to let him proceed, an angry Mahon grabbed a bullwhip from his saddlebag and dismounted.

The man with Mahon chambered a bullet into his Winchester and pointed it at Standifer while Mullins administered the severe beating.
After they left, a bleeding but furious Standifer rode to the house of the man who hired him and asked for his pay. Ike Mullins asked why.

“I'm quittin’ “ he told Mullins. “I gotta kill a man.”

Standifer tracked Mahan to a camp near Pony Creek where he spotted him on horseback. When Mahan saw Standifer, he pulled his six-gun and fired but the shot went wild.

Standifer fired back, drilling a bullet into the wrist of Mahan's gun hand. Moaning with pain, Mahan jerked his horse around and raced away. Standifer gave chase, firing numerous shots.

One of the bullets killed Mahan's horse. He leaped off and broke into a run. The next bullet slammed into his back and he died before hitting the ground.

Texas Rangers eventually caught up to Standifer and took him into custody for the Mahon killing, went to trial, but won an acquittal.

Born around 1853 in central Texas, J. William “Bill” Standifer stood only five-four and weighed no more than 140 pounds. Little Bill, as he was known, began working as a cowboy at age 14.

His shooting skills helped him land a job as a roundup foreman and range detective in the early 1880s. He established a reputation as a deadly gunman who would neither tolerate insults nor back down from an individual.

In November 1888, Standifer ran for sheriff of Crosby County, Texas, and won, and held the post for six years, through 1892. The years spent pursuing outlaws took a toll on the undersized Standifer and he found solace in the bottle.

After losing the next election, he found work at the Spur Ranch. Manager Fred Horsbrugh, who admired Standifer, got him appointed as a range detective for several large and wealthy cattle ranches in the Texas Panhandle.

While working for the Spur Ranch, he met John “Pink” Higgins, a gunman already known to Standifer. Both were from Lampasas, Texas, but they didn't get along.

On the morning of Wednesday, October 1, 1902, Higgins saw Standifer riding toward his house. He saddled his horse, slipped a Winchester into the scabbard and rode out to meet him.

When the men were within a hundred yards of each other, Standifer drew his gun and fired, killing Higgins' horse. Pink dropped to his knee, returned fire, and hit Standifer.

Higgins buried Standifer not far from the site of his last gun battle and the site came to be known as Standifer's Thicket.

NINE

Duel to the Death
In the late afternoon of July 21, 1865, a man wearing a pair of 1851 Navy Colts strapped to his waist, ivory handles turned forward, walked along a street in Springfield, Missouri, heading for the town square.

The flat broad-brimmed hat he wore cast a shadow across the gray eyes and long, droopy mustache that belonged to James Butler Hickok. Approaching the square from the south, he reached across his six-foot-three frame, pulled out one of the Colts, cocked it, and returned it to the holster.

Across the square, in the distance, stood gambler Davis Tutt, an ex-Confederate soldier. The two men exchanged bitter words the night before during a poker game at the Lyon House.

Tutt, at one point, claimed Hickok owed him money from a previous wager, and grabbed Hickok's prized gold-cased Waltham Repeater pocket watch as collateral.

He threatened to wear it in public to show that Hickok didn't pay his debts. Tutt's action enraged Hickok, and the two men continued arguing.

“Intend wearing it in the morning,” Tutt said.

“If you do, I'll shoot you, and I warn you not to come across the square with it on,” Hickok replied.

The two men stood in the town square sideways, separated by about seventy-five yards, the sun low in the sky.

“Dave, here I am. Don't you come across here with that watch,” Hickok again warned.

The two men drew. Each fired a single bullet at about the same time, according to witnesses. Tutt missed. Hickok didn't. The round from Hickok's pistol drilled into Tutt's ribs.

“Boys, I'm killed,” Tutt cried out, staggering around for a few seconds before he collapsed and died.

The confrontation between Hickok and Tutt represented one of the few-recorded instances on the American frontier involving a one-on-one duel to the death.

Hickok was charged with murder the next day, but authorizes changed the charge to manslaughter the next day, and the case went to trial. On August 6th, the jury deliberated about “an hour or two,” and acquitted him.

Better known as Wild Bill, he made his way to the plains of Kansas from Troy Grove, Illinois, where he was born in 1837. At age 20, he was elected constable of Monticello, Kansas, in 1855.

The so-called legend of Wild Bill Hickok got its start at Rock Creek Station, Nebraska, which served as a stop for overland stagecoaches and a Pony Express station. Originally owned by David McCanles, he sold it to Russell, Waddell, and Majors of the Pony Express.

The station had fallen on tough economic times—close to bankruptcy, in fact—and couldn't pay McCanles, who showed up at the station with his cousin James Wood and ranch hand James Gordon.
Wild Bill had just arrived in the middle of a heated argument between McCanles and Horace Wellman who operated the station.

Depending on which story is told, Wild Bill apparently stepped into the bitter exchange and ended up shooting and killing McCanles from inside the house. He also wounded Woods and Gordon. Wellman, or his wife, beat the wounded Woods to death with a hoe. A shotgun blast by Hickok, or Wellman, finished off Gordon.

During a subsequent trial, Hickok and Wellman pleaded self-defense. As employees of the Overland Stage Company, one of the most powerful companies west of the Mississippi, the two men had plenty of influential friends at their backs.

Hickok and Wellman were exonerated and, from that point, the legend grew thanks to an ambitious writer who exaggerated the story to the level and accuracy of a dime novel.

TEN

The Wrong Man

Marshal James B. Hickok sat in a boarding house at sundown enjoying his supper when rabble-rousing Texas cowboys began celebrating the end of the cattle season in the streets of Abilene, Kansas.

The Kansas Historical Society said that a few of the pranksters and party-goers even tried to get Wild Bill to join them, but he waved them off and sent them to the Novelty Theater to get a few drinks on his tab.

A couple of hours later, about 9 p.m. on October 5, 1871, Hickok and deputy Mike Williams stood talking in front of the theater when gunfire from around the corner interrupted their conversation. Wild Bill charged through the door of the Alamo Saloon, a short cut to Cedar Street where he heard the shooting. When he walked outside, Hickok demanded to know who fired the shots.

Gambler Phil Coe, who shared ownership of the Bull’s Head Tavern with Ben Thompson, said he fired a couple of shots at a dog. The two men had no use for each other. The bad blood flowing between them, some say, resulted from a dispute over a woman. Whatever reason, most people expected an inevitable showdown at some point.

What happened next differs in the retelling, depending on what source you read.

The historical society said Hickok ordered Coe arrested for shooting a gun within the city limits. Coe, however, turned his gun on Wild Bill.

Hickok, known for his speed and accuracy, drew his Colt Navy revolvers and fired first. Coe eventually died from his wounds a few days later.
According to another account, Coe—who once vowed to see Hickok dead *before the frost set in*—actually fired first, sending bullets Hickok’s way but both missed from about eight feet.

After Coe crumpled to the ground, Hickok saw a movement—an armed man pushing his way through the crowd toward him.

The hour was late, and visibility poor. Hickok apparently assumed the man was an accomplice of Coe, so he fired twice. Despite the darkness, both shots found their mark. But the victim was no accomplice of Coe.

The bullets Hickok squeezed off hit his friend and Special Deputy Marshal Mike Williams. Shocked and devastated at his mistake, a grieving Hickok lifted Williams into his arms and carried him into the Alamo where he placed him on a billiard table. Williams died minutes later.

Following the shootings, Abilene officials decided to end its association with the cattle trade. As a result, it no longer needed a high-priced lawman like Hickok and fired him a few days later.

Deputy Williams, it’s said, was the last person known that Wild Bill Hickok killed.

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**ELEVEN**

**A Case of Sweet Revenge**

Newspaper editor A. M. Conklin was in a joyful mood when he and his wife left church after the Christmas Eve service Socorro, New Mexico.

When the two of them walked down the church steps, a man stepped out of the darkness and pulled the woman away. Another man, hiding in the shadows, fired his gun and Conklin fell dead.

Earlier in the evening of December 1880, Conklin got into a confrontation with Abran and Onofre Baca. The brothers had been drinking and were causing a disturbance. Conklin requested they quiet down or leave. Offended, the brothers challenged Conklin to step outside. He refused. They left, but didn't go far.

A manhunt launched to track down the Baca brothers and bring them to justice dragged into the New Year. That's when a friend of Conklin, Texas Ranger James B. Gillett, got involved. He enlisted the help of George Lloyd to pursue the killers.

With a $500 reward offered for each of the brothers, the rangers tracked them to the Ysleta, Texas, home of their uncle, Jose Baca, who served as a county judge. When Gillett and Lloyd arrived, the judge offered a bribe of $1,000 to free his nephews.

“There was not enough money in El Paso County to buy me off,” Gillett wrote in his autobiography, *Six Years with the Texas Rangers, 1875-1881*. 
After taking custody of the killers, the rangers returned to New Mexico, but then realized only Abran was in custody. The second man was not Onofre. He was a cousin who had nothing to do with the Conklin shooting.

Thanks to an informant, Gillett learned Onofre Baca was working in a store in Zaragosa, Mexico.

Gillett faced a high-risk gamble in capturing. First, he would be violating international law once he and Jack Lloyd crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico, without authorization. Furthermore, Gillett knew from experience the danger involved. He and Lloyd would have only minutes to carry out the mission.

Once inside the store where Baca worked, Gillett said, “I shoved my pistol up against his head and ordered him to step lively.”

They left Zaragosa on a dead run.

A couple of miles away, a Mexican posse chased after them, guns blazing. But, the pursuit ended once the trio crossed the river into Texas. When they returned to camp, all hell broke loose because Gillett and Lloyd had taken the law into their own hands.

Gillett escorted Baca to Socorro, the site of the murder, and jailed the accused. Residents paid Gillett a $250 reward. Later, an angry mob stormed the jail, dragged Baca out, and lynched him.

The arrest and kidnap triggered protests by the Mexican government, which pressured Texas Governor Oran M. Roberts into forcing Gillett to resign.

After he left the Texas Rangers, Gillett served as deputy marshal of El Paso in June 1882, under infamous gunman Dallas Stoudenmire. Gillett became the new city marshal when Stoudenmire resigned after several incidents involving a hot temper and excessive drinking.

During his six years with the Texas Rangers, Gillett patrolled mostly the West Texas border region and was involved in a number of skirmishes involving Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche Indians. His battles with Indians and the frequent pursuits of little known outlaws helped contribute to his legendary status in the rangers.

When his law enforcement days came to an end, Gillett turned rancher and author. His memoir was condensed into a textbook in 1928 and used by students in at least seventeen states over a number of years.

He died of heart failure on June 11, 1937. Gillett is a member of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame.

**TWELVE**

**Daring Daylight Robbery**
Judge James Sandusky was crossing courthouse square in the early morning of February 13, 1866, when he saw about a dozen well-armed men, their breaths visible in the early morning chill, ride slowly past him.

He watched as three of the men break off from the group and move to what he later described as strategic positions in the square. The others fanned out in front of Clay County Savings Association.

According to several accounts, Frank James and Cole Younger dismounted and entered the bank. Jesse James, Frank's brother, was absent nursing a gunshot wound to the lung that he sustained just before the end of the Civil War.

Inside the bank, Frank James supposedly approached Greenup Bird, who stood behind the counter, and asked the cashier to change a large bill. Sliding his pistol from the holster, James raised it to Bird's face. Younger drew his own gun, crawled across the counter, and grabbed Bird's son, William, the only other person in the bank.

The two employees were then ordered them to fill a large grain sack with all the money in the bank. The Greenups poured silver and gold coins into the sack, along with the contents of a tin box that contained currency, bank notes, and bonds—estimated at between $57,000 and $62,000.

Before escaping, the gunmen pushed the Greenups into the green bank vault, and slammed the door shut. But the vault didn’t lock. Father and son shoved the door open, ran to the windows, and began yelling “Robbery!”

The gang raced to their horses, gave a Rebel yell, fired into the air several times, and galloped away in triumph because, up to then, no bank in the country had ever been hit in broad daylight during peacetime.

Members of the gang, which may have included Confederate guerrillas, were eager to write a new chapter in the battle pitting law against order in the American West. The getaway, however, didn't go as planned, and a teen-age bystander got killed.

Two young men walking down the street witnessed the commotion and turned to run, but gang member Archie Clement, a compulsive killer, shot down George Wymore, a college student, for no reason at all. Clement served as a Confederate guerrilla leader in the Civil War and established a reputation for brutality towards Union soldiers and pro-Union civilians in Missouri.

In addition to the brutal death of 19-year old Wymore, there were other ramifications to the daring, daylight robbery.

The state authorities believed it was Clement who led the raid and issued a reward for his capture. Later, however, the James Gang got most of the blame for the robbery, and similar ones at small town banks across Missouri in the months ahead.

“I think there were about ten men in the robbery. No one was recognized. I do not remember that they were disguised in any way. I do not think there was more than suspicion as to who the parties were.” –Judge Sandusky, talking about what he remembered of the robbery.
The day after the robbery, fresh snow fell and covered the tracks left by the bank robbers, preventing authorities from tracking them. Along with Confederate guerrillas, Kansas Redlegs were also implicated in the heist. The bank offered a $5,000 reward to anyone who recovered the money. The robbery triggered a far greater economic consequence than the money that was taken. Clay County Savings Association—now called the Jesse James Bank Museum—ended up closing its doors due to insufficient funds. Depositors received only 60-cents on the dollar.

An amusing story emerged about an incident that supposedly occurred in later years when Cole Younger and Frank James were traveling with a Wild West show using their names and outlaw fame as its main attraction. The two men were reportedly being chauffeured around a town on the tour, reminiscing about their past. Younger apparently suggested they stop at a bank to change some money. Frank paused for a moment, or so, and smiled.

“If Cole Younger and Frank James walk into a bank together, the first thing they’d do is slam the vault shut and start shooting.”

The pair decided to send their driver in to get change. Younger, in a memoir he wrote, saw himself more as a Confederate avenger than an outlaw. In fact, he admitted to only one crime: the bank robbery attempt at Northfield, Minnesota, in 1876.

On August 21, 1912, Younger declared that he had become a Christian and expressed regret about his criminal past. Frank James died February 18, 1915, and Younger died a little over a year later on March 21, 1916.

THIRTEEN

The Gunman No One Knew

On the night of January 22, 1880, two lawmen barged through the door of a variety hall in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and ordered the rowdy cowboys at the bar to hand over their guns. John Dorsey, T.J. House, William Randall, and James West spent the day raising hell in several saloons. Ignoring the town’s “no guns in town” rule, they carried their drunk and disorderly conduct to Close and Patterson’s Variety Hall where they consumed more booze, hurled shot glasses at the bartender, and taunted customers.

When someone alerted Marshal Joe Carson about the trouble, he and Deputy Marshal Dave Mather headed over to the saloon to put a stop to the trouble.
“Men, give up your guns,” Carson ordered.
The four responded with bullets. Carson was hit, collapsed, and died.
Mather, a reputed gunman with a murky past, drew his own revolver and fired back, killing Randall and wounding West and House. Dorsey managed to stay out of the line of fire and helped House outside and escaped.

Authorities captured them a couple of weeks later and locked them in jail to await trial. But Las Vegas citizens—impatient for justice—broke into their cells, dragged the two men out and lynched them.

City officials named Mather marshal, but he didn’t stay long, choosing to move on in light of questionable shooting incidents.

Mather, nicknamed Mysterious Dave, arrived in Las Vegas as part of the Dodge City Gang, a group of Kansas gunmen and gamblers who operated a 19th century Mafia-style organization.

Despite his reputation, the only substantiated account of a gun battle involving Mather was the one in which Marshal Carson got killed.

Mysterious Dave was born in Connecticut, August 10, 1851. After the death his parents, it’s believed he and a younger brother ran off to sea but jumped ship in New York City around 1869. They both headed West and then went their separate ways.

Mather never left a clear trail to follow so no one knew much about him. Historians point to a number of gaps in his personal history they are unable to close. The only verifiable information is that he served as lawman in Dodge City, Kansas, and Las Vegas, New Mexico. They also say he served as an associate to Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp on occasion.

Evidence does exist, however, that he worked the wrong side of the law in 1873. He, along with Dave Rudabaugh and Milton Yarberry, appeared on a warrant in connection with the murder and robbery of a prominent Arkansas rancher.

Mysterious Dave traveled to Dodge City in 1876 and worked as a lawman and as an outlaw and ended up in Las Vegas where the Dodge City Gang gained control of gambling and prostitution.

After leave Las Vegas following the Variety Hall shootout, Mather returned to Dodge City in 1883 and took a job as assistant town marshal. He also became owner, or co-owner, of Opera House Saloon.

When a new city government got elected in 1884, Thomas Nixon, a rival saloon operator, replaced Mather as deputy. The two had been feuding for months over a city ordinance governing dance halls. On the evening of July 18, 1884, Nixon shot at Mather, but missed him.

Authorities arrested Nixon for assault-with-intent-to-kill, but he posted bond of $800 and walked out. At the same time, Mather chose not to file a complaint. Three days later, however, Mather approached his rival from behind and pumped four slugs into his back. A jury acquitted him on grounds of self-defense.
Mather eventually left Dodge City, but true to his trademark, no one knew exactly what happened to him.

FOURTEEN

To Live and Die by the Gun

The ex-lawman stood outside the White Elephant saloon and gambling house in Fort Worth, Texas, on the night of February 8, 1887, glanced at his pocket watch and, in a loud voice, called for Luke Short to join him.

Short, a gunfighter, gambler, and bar owner, who managed the White Elephant, came outside about 8 p.m. Staying parallel of each other, the two men inched their way up the street about a block and stopped in front of the Shooting Gallery, a bar and brothel.

Tim Isaiah Courtright, born in Sangamon County, Illinois, in the spring of 1845 or 1848, spent most of his adult life living by the gun. He served as an infantryman in the Civil War, under General John Logan, and won praise for his bravery.

After the war, he worked for Logan as an Army scout, tagged with the nickname, Longhair, because he wore his hair in the style of other scouts. Courtright was also mistakenly referred to as Jim, although the name stuck.

Courtright—who wore twin six-shooters, butts forward—earned the reputation as a fast gun, supposedly faster than other well-known gunmen of the time. In 1870, he married Sarah Elizabeth Weeks. Three years later, they moved to the Fort Worth, Texas, area and tried to make a go of it farming, but failed.

When the couple moved to town, Courtright worked at various jobs, including a city jailer, deputy sheriff, deputy U.S. Marshal, private detective, and hired killer for his former Army commander, Black Jack Logan, who owned a ranch in New Mexico.

Courtright ran for city marshal in 1876, won by three votes, and handed responsibility for keeping the peace in Fort Worth's Hells Half Acre, the town's red-light district. He found himself in a number of confrontations and gunned down several men in his role of lawman.

As city marshal, he incurred the wrath of city officials and merchants because he tried to clean up the vice and crime rampant in Fort Worth. He was told to limit his job as city marshal to simply “keep the peace”—nothing more. The red light district provided an income stream that merchants didn't want to see ended.

In 1879, he ran for a fourth term but lost.

Courtright, already known as a fearless gunman, had an even darker side. He operated a protection racket, and pressured business owners in the Hells Half Acre district to pay for the service or risk make an enemy of Courtright.
It's believed - although specifics aren't clear – that Luke Short refused Courtright's attempt at extortion. Some accounts say the two men clashed over an attempt to gain control of the gambling interests in Fort Worth.

Although they were friends at one time, the relationship soured to a mutual dislike and, according to some historians, Courtright decided to make an example of Short.

Facing each other in front of the Shooting Gallery, the two men exchanged a few bitter words. Courtright, who had been drinking, made some comment about Short having a gun. But Short denied it and even opened his vest to show Courtright he had no gun.

“Don't you pull a gun on me,” Courtright warned in a loud voice, and drew a pistol from his right hip with his right hand. Somehow, the gun got tangled in his watch-chain—just enough of a delay to allow Short to pull his own gun and fire.

The bullet ripped off Courtright's thumb on his shooting hand. As he tried to shift the gun to his other hand, Short squeezed off four more shots, all of which hit the gunman. Bleeding and in shock, Longhair Jim Courtright fell backwards into the street, and died a short while later. Short went on trial for the shooting, but was exonerated after it was ruled justified self-defense.

**FIFTEEN**

**Last Man Standing**

Three men moved with caution as they made their way along a lonely, uneven trail in Rocky Canyon, high in the cold Sierra-Nevada Mountains, not knowing they were being watched.

Heading up the trio was Captain Jonathan R. Davis, a veteran of the Mexican-American War who fought in a number of battles before being wounded in action. After he left the service, he kept the honorary title of captain and headed to California to join the gold rush.

The two other prospectors accompanying Davis were James C. McDonald of Alabama, and Dr. Bolivar A. Sparks of Mississippi. All three were armed because of increased violence associated with the California Gold Rush. Davis carried two Colt revolvers and a Bowie knife. The other two men were armed with pistols.

It was a quiet Saturday, Dec. 19, 1854, when, without warning, fourteen men emerged from hiding and began firing. One of the bullets hit McDonald and he died on the spot. Bolivar yanked his pistol out and snapped off a couple of shots before he was wounded and fell to the ground.

Captain Davis, an expert marksman, drew his Colts and returned fire.

One by one, the attackers fell until several lay dead. When the hammers of Davis’ guns fell on empty chambers, he pulled out the Bowie knife to defend
himself. Wielding his Bowie with expert abandon, Davis charged. He stabbed one to death and sliced off another man's nose and right finger.

When the smoke cleared in the small, confined battleground, seven of the bandits were dead, four suffered wounds, and the three remaining ones ran off.

Three miners witnessed the battle from atop a nearby hill. By the time they reached the area to help, the gunfight was over. They found Davis dressing Sparks' wounds, as well as helping the wounded assailants. The dead men were buried in shallow graves.

“Though we counted 28 bullet-holes through Capt. Davis’ hat and clothes—17 through his hat, and 11 through his coat and shirt—he received but two very slight flesh wounds,” said one of the prospectors unknown to Davis.

A search of the dead bodies turned up a little less than $500 in gold and silver coin, gold dust and various pieces of jewelry. Later it was learned that gang, made up of men from several different countries, had robbed and killed six Chinese a couple of days earlier. They had also robbed and killed four Americans the previous day.

Despite extensive newspaper reports about what would be branded the deadliest small arms battle in American history, some editors considered the story a preposterous. Praise from a coroner’s jury, the account of the attack was met with criticism—as did the heroic feats of Davis. People couldn't believe one man could stage such a fight.

Davis invited the skeptics to travel back to the site and see the shallow graves, but no one took him up on the offer.

Several months later, Captain Davis, along with the brother-in-law of Dr. Sparks, who died from his wounds, and the three miners who witnessed the battle, appeared at the office of the Placerville, (Calif.) Mountain Democrat. After providing the newspaper with depositions, editors finally bought the story and gave Davis recognition for one of the most courageous feats in American history.

SIXTEEN

The Battle of Ingalls

Outlaw Roy Dougherty, keeping low, ran from the saloon to a nearby barn in Ingalls, Oklahoma, positioned himself up high, took aim and gunned down Deputy Marshal Thomas Hueston, who would die the next day.

Fourteen US Marshals had closed in on members Doolin-Dalton Gang, also known as the Wild Bunch. The furious confrontation, known as the Battle of Ingalls, took place in the afternoon of September 1, 1893.

A lot of blood was spilled in the battle that claimed the lives of three deputy marshals as well as a bystander.
Bill Doolin and his gang, several wounded, managed to escape with the exception of Dougherty, also known as Arkansas Tom Jones. During the 1890s, the gang became known as one of the most powerful in the southwest, terrorizing banks, trains, and stagecoaches throughout Arkansas, southern Kansas, and the Indian Territory.

Over a four-year period, Doolin's outlaws amassed an estimated $165,000 in stolen loot.

Arkansas stayed hidden until Deputy Marshal Jim Masterson hurled a stick of dynamite into the barn. The explosion stunned the shooter long enough for him to be taken into custody.

Daugherty was born in Missouri on New Year's Day, 1870. The family was strict in terms of religion and his two brothers became preachers. Once there he began also using the name Arkansas Tom Jones, telling people he was from Arkansas. He worked as a cowboy for several years and, along the way, met Bill Doolin, and joined his gang around 1892, participating in a number of robberies.

For his role in the Battle of Ingalls, the court sentenced Dougherty to a fifty-year sentence behind bars. His two preacher brothers intervened and Dougherty was paroled in 1910.

The outlaw ran a restaurant for a couple of years in Drumright, Oklahoma, but found the business boring, and took to the road, ending up in Hollywood where he hoped to act in Western films.

Dougherty actually got a role in a silent film, in 1915, called Passing of the Oklahoma Cowboys. The film was directed by noted Western lawman Bill Tilghman, and was aimed at depicting the end of outlaw gangs. Dougherty, the only survivor of the Doolin-Dalton Gang, played himself.

Despite his freedom, Dougherty could not live life on the straight-and-narrow. In 1917, he held up a bank in Neosho, Missouri, and was captured and sent to prison. He was released in 1921, but returned to the outlaw trail.

Shortly after being released, he robbed another bank, this one in Asbury, Missouri, and went on the run from the law again. Lawman tracked Dougherty to Joplin, Missouri, where he engaged in a gun battle, and was killed August 16, 1924. He was 54 years old.

SEVENTEEN

A Deadly Morning Moon

In the early morning of August 25, 1896, under the light of a full moon, outlaw Bill Doolin left his sleeping wife and child in her parents’ farmhouse and began walking along the main road—a walk from which he would not return.

Hiding in the brush, not far from the house in Lawson, Oklahoma, were lawman Heck Thomas and four deputies.
Thomas glanced at his watch and noted the time at about 2 a.m., puzzled by Doolin’s sudden appearance. When the notorious gunman got a few steps closer, Thomas ordered him to halt and throw down the Winchester he carried.

Defiant, Doolin raised the rifle and squeezed off two random shots into the shadows in front of him. Members of the posse returned fire. One emptied his double-barreled shotgun at the gunman. At the same time, Heck Thomas took aim and pulled the trigger of his own Winchester.

Doolin moaned and staggered back from the force of the blasts and collapsed, his life nothing more than a memory.

A medical examination revealed Doolin suffered twenty buckshot wounds to the chest and four bullet wounds to the heart. It was also determined the ball from Thomas’ Winchester shattered the outlaw’s left arm.

Thomas had been tracking Doolin ever since receiving word the outlaw was possibly hiding at his in-laws’ Payne County home.

Earlier in the year, January 1896, Doolin found himself behind bars in Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory after being arrested by lawman Bill Tilghman at Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

But, he staged a daring escape a few months later, overpowering guards, and leading a dozen fellow prisoners to freedom.

On the night of his death, Doolin wore the same clothes as when he broke jail, but his physical changed. A heavy beard covered his face. He also lost a considerable amount of weight, said to be due to a sickness he contracted while serving jail time.

When the gunman rode into Oklahoma about twelve years earlier, he worked as a cowboy for a while before joining the Dalton Gang. Later, he organized other gangs of lawbreakers, one of which terrorized the territory for years.

According to historians, Doolin gunned down eight men during his career, staged three train robberies along with three bank hold-ups.

EIGHTEEN

The Trinidad Gunfight

A glaring sun filled Main Street in Trinidad, Colorado, on April 15, 1882, as two professional gamblers stood facing each other to settle a bitter dispute over gambling debts.

Frank Loving worked as a Faro dealer at the Bank Exchange Saloon. John Allen worked at the Imperial Saloon. The two knew each other from their days in Dodge City. The anger between the two men had been brewing for months, mostly over card games and house loans.
Three years earlier, Loving killed Levi Richardson at Dodge City's Long Branch Saloon in a gunfight over Richardson's affections toward the gambler's wife.

As Loving and Allen began walking toward each other, cooler heads prevailed and intervened to stop the showdown. But the argument was far from over.

Trinidad, at the time, was a prosperous community, thanks to the discovery of coal in 1872. It attracted a diverse cultural mix of families, many of them Europeans with mining experience.

Trinidad also proved a popular gathering place for several now-legendary characters, including Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Billy the Kid, and Clay Allison. Bat Masterson and his brother Jim served as town marshals for a time.

The enforced truce between Loving and Allen didn't last long. On the following evening, a Sunday, a man called “Cockeyed” Frank walked into the Imperial Saloon. When Allen spotted him, he pulled his gun and fired.

The pair exchanged gunfire but failed to hit each other. Allen decided to leave the saloon by a rear door.

Deputy Marshal Jim Masterson heard the shooting and hurried the Imperial and confiscated Loving's pistol. He went searching for Allen, but couldn't find him. When Masterson returned to the Imperial, he discovered Loving got his hands on two other guns. Again, Masterson disarmed Loving.

After the lawman left to find Allen, Loving slipped out the door and entered George Hammond's hardware store for another gun and ammo.

But he had no idea that Allen had followed him.

At the sound of gunfire, Masterson arrived at the hardware store to see Loving stumble out, mumbling, “Jim, I'm shot,” a bullet in the back. Allen had been hiding at the rear of the store when he was arrested by Marshal Lou Kreeger and taken to jail. Five days later, on April 21st, Loving died because the bullet couldn't be removed. He was 28.

Allen stood trial for murder in September 1882, but was found not guilty. He returned to Dodge City and, sometime later, became a preacher and traveling evangelist.

NINETEEN

The Sheriff and the Human Wildcat

One of the most feared bandits in California’s Sausalito Valley sat a table inside a low adobe structure trying to keep warm from a raw winter wind pushing through an open window.
Shadows from the flames of burning wood in a small, shallow fireplace danced across the face of Juan Soto, who sat surrounded by about a dozen gang members.

Around twilight, two lawmen walked through the doorway and came face-to-face with the man dubbed the Human Wildcat.

In January 1871, Alameda County Sheriff Harry Morse conducted a relentless manhunt for the brutal Soto, wanted for robbery and murder. Three days earlier, Soto and his men stormed another general store, this one in Sunol, looted the place, and killed a clerk.

Once inside the adobe hut, Morse drew his gun and ordered Deputy Tom Winchell to handcuff the bandit. Winchell, who never faced such odds, panicked and fled from the room when Soto's Mexican compatriots drew their own weapons.

A man and a woman behind Morse grabbed his arms, but he wrenched away as Soto, gun-in-hand, scrambled to his feet and ran out the front door.

In the growing darkness, Morse fired and the bullet drilled through Soto's hat. The outlaw turned and squeezed off four bullets at the sheriff. They all missed. Exasperated, he rushed Morse.

The sheriff broke into a run for his horse to retrieve his rifle and, on the way, snapped off a shot from his revolver that jammed Soto's gun. The outlaw ran back inside the building, grabbed several guns, and made it one of the tethered horses. But the horse bolted and Soto headed for cover on foot.

Morse slid the .44 caliber Winchester from his saddle sheath, aimed, and pulled the trigger. The bullet sliced through the air 150 yards and ripped into Soto's shoulder, knocking him to the ground. Wounded and bleeding, Soto struggled to his feet, screaming at Morse.

Wild with rage, the bandit charged across the meadow toward Morse. But the lawman calmly took aim. His next bullet struck Soto in the head and he fell to the ground, dead.

The news of Morse's courageous showdown with Soto traveled throughout California earning him praise “as one of the most daring and desperate acts that have ever been formed in the history of detective work on the Pacific Coast . . .”

Although Morse's persistence of tracking, capturing, or killing dangerous outlaws attracted the respect of fellow lawmen, his achievements often escaped widespread attention. Most of the publicity of the era went to his contemporaries—such men as Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, and Bat Masterson.

He retired as sheriff in 1878, and opened a detective agency in San Francisco. In 1883, he was credited with the arrest of Charles Bowles, better known as Black Bart, who robbed a number of stagecoaches.

Morse died of natural causes at 76 in 1912.
TWENTY

The Brother Masterson

In the summer of 1878, gunfire erupted outside the Comique Variety Hall in Dodge City, peppering the inside walls with bullets.

The .45-caliber slugs narrowly missed the two lawmen inside, sending them and others, including Bat Masterson, to the floor. Seconds later Wyatt Earp and Jim Masterson scrambled to their feet, ran outside, and exchanged shots with Texas cowboy George Hoy as he rode off.

One of the shots struck Hoy and he tumbled to the ground, a bullet wound in the arm. He died less than a month later. No one knew for sure which lawman fired what ended up being the fatal shot. Earp claimed he fired it.

Although Jim Masterson didn't dispute it, many believed it was he actually fired the shot that brought down Hoyt. People tended to underplay Masterson’s gun skills, but those who knew him respected his accuracy.

Jim Masterson was the lesser known of brothers Bat Masterson and Ed Masterson, but it never seemed to bother him. Although he never achieved the fame that Bat enjoyed, it's believed he was involved in a higher number of shootouts than his well-known sibling.

Another brother, Ed, had been killed in the line of duty a year earlier.

At the time of the Hoy shooting, James served as Assistant Marshal in Dodge City. He was promoted to marshal in 1879 after Charlie Bassett resigned.

During the two years he spent in Dodge, Masterson made several hundred arrests. However, he lost the job in 1881 with a change of government, packed up, and left for Trinidad, Colorado, where he worked as a deputy, and ended up investigating the Trinidad Gunfight.

James Masterson was the third of seven children, born in Iberville County, in Quebec Canada, on Sept. 18, 1855. In 1861, the family moved to the United States and spent time in New York state, and Illinois, before settling near Wichita, Kansas, in 1871. Several years later, he and his brothers left for America’s western frontier where they made livings as buffalo hunters before relocating in Dodge.

From Trinidad, Masterson moved on to Colfax County, New Mexico Territory, where he served as under-sheriff, in 1885.

Masterson was involved in various high-profile cases as a lawman. Four years later in New Mexico, he found himself taking an active part in the Gray County (Kansas) County Seat War—one of several lawmen who raided the Cimarron courthouse, which triggered a gunfight known as the Battle of Cimarron.

He ended up in Guthrie, Oklahoma and wore the badge of a deputy sheriff for Logan County. In 1893, he took an appointment of a U.S. Marshal and got involved in a shootout in Ingalls, Oklahoma, with the Doolin Gang.

Less than a year later, Jim Masterson was gone—dead from tuberculosis on March 31, 1895. He was 39, and buried in Wichita's Highland Cemetery.
According to his obituary, “Jim Masterson was a man who never went back on a friend, and never forgot an obligation.”

**TWENTY-ONE**

**After The Gunfight at the Ok Corral**

What is generally regarded as the most legendary gunfight in the history of the American West took place 131 years ago, on Oct. 26. Most everyone is familiar with the Gunfight at the OK Corral, which took place on a cold Wednesday afternoon, October 26, 1881, in Tombstone, Arizona. There are different perspectives about the shootout. But it remains surrounded by myth, misinformation, and mystery.

The gun battle took place on a vacant lot, behind the OK Corral, at the end of Fremont Street. The Earp brothers—accompanied by Doc Holliday—exchanged gunfire with the Clanton-McLaury gang. When the smoke cleared, Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers were dead, and Virgil and Morgan Earp, and Doc Holiday wounded. Ike Clanton and Billy Claiborne had made a run for it.

The gunfight only took about thirty seconds, and involved about the same number of bullets. Complications and confusing surround the history of what provoked the battle. It is as much a story about power and politics, as law and order.

While most stories focus on the gunfight itself, the aftermath of those involved is equally fascinating.

Three days after the shooting Ike Clanton filed murder charges against Wyatt Earp, his brothers, and Doc Holliday. Cochise County Sheriff John Behan, who said he saw the shootout, took them into custody, and they spent sixteen days behind bars. A month later, Judge Wells Spicer dismissed the murder charges. The judge and the Earps by the way, were related.

As a result of the Gunfight at the OK Corral, a number of men would die over the next few years. Among them:

- Morgan Earp. Took a bullet in the back while playing billiards on March 18, 1882. He was 30.
- Billy “the kid” Claiborne. Lost his life late the same year in a gunfight in Tombstone with gunman Frank Leslie. Claiborne was 22.
- Ike Clanton. Shot to death, June 1, 1887, while resisting arrest for stealing cattle. He was 40.
• Doc Holliday. Died of tuberculosis in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, on Nov. 8, 1886. He was 36.

• Virgil Earp. Ambushed on the streets of Tombstone in Dec. 1881, he lost the use of his left arm. Shortly after Morgan got killed, Virgil moved to California to work as a lawman until he died at 62 of pneumonia.

• Sheriff John Behan. Lost re-nomination by his own party for sheriff in the 1882 election, and never worked again behind a badge. He did of natural causes in Tucson, at age 67.

• Wyatt Earp. Traveled across the frontier working mostly as a gambler, gunslinger, lawman, saloonkeeper, and miner. He moved to Alaska during the gold rush, and operated a saloon in Nome until 1901. He finally settled in Los Angeles, where he collaborated on an account of his life – mostly fictional – that led to him being considered a popular hero. The book wasn’t published until 1931, two years after he died. He was 80.

Controversy continues even now over the Gunfight at the OK Corral, and remains the source of debate among historians.

TWENTY-TWO

The Outhouse Shootout

The citizens of Wichita, Kansas, watched as a detachment of soldiers from Fort Harker rode in on a Tuesday, February 28, 1871.

The twenty-five man military posse included U.S. Marshal Jack Bridges. In his pocket was a warrant for the arrest of John Ledford, known as Handsome Jack, although various newspapers later questioned the validity of the warrant.

Ledford was leader of the Star-Bar-Half-Moon Gang. The gang ruled Arkansas River Valley in the early days of Wichita. Ledford and his men robbed stagecoaches, stole horses, and even got involved with counterfeiting. Ledford and his men robbed a government wagon train during which several teamsters got killed.

An expert with a pistol, Ledford could fire with either hand, and with deadly precision. Most people feared him except for 16-year old Alice Harris, who came from one of Wichita's most prominent families. He met the young woman at father's tavern, the Buckhorn Tavern.,
According to the Wichita Eagle newspaper, Ledford got wounded once during a stagecoach robbery. Thinking he was dying, his gang kidnapped a doctor, and the young woman, and brought them to his bedside. While recuperating, he asked Harris to marry him. She accepted, but only on condition he give up the outlaw life.

Ledford agreed to give up a life of crime and decided to open a hotel, which he named Harris House after his new bride. Still hanging over Ledford's head was a $2,000 reward for him dead or alive. The lure of a pay-off was too much for Alice to resist and she later turned him in for the reward.

Bad blood already flowed between U.S. Marshal Bridges and Ledford. The two men got into a fistfight several months previous. Ledford got the better of the marshal and pistol-whipped him. Newspaper accounts say an outraged Bridges vowed to put a bullet in his adversary.

As the soldiers and Bridges neared the hotel, someone spotted Ledford leaving the hotel. The witness saw him sneaking into an outhouse behind a nearby saloon. When the detachment surrounded the privy Bridges ordered Ledford to surrender.

With no intention to comply, Handsome Jack swung the door open and stepped out with guns blazing. One of the bullets struck Bridges' arm. Soldiers returned fire, striking Ledford four times. He died less than an hour later at his home.

Bridges returned to his home in Maine to recuperate from his wounds. After healing, he headed to Colorado to resume his law enforcement career. Later, he returned to Kansas where he served as city marshal of Dodge City. But a cloud of sorts followed the lawman for the rest of his career.

Newspaper reports questioned his character because of the Ledford incident. Editorials suggested Bridges never had legal grounds to arrest the outlaw. Despite the allegations, Bridges continued working as a lawman until his death in 1915.

**TWENTY-THREE**

**A Reservation for Boothill**

On the night of November 14, 1882—a little over a year after the infamous shooting at the OK Corral—gunshots once again echoed through the streets of Tombstone.

Gunman Buckskin Frank Leslie got into a shoving match at the Oriental Saloon over politics, according to bartender E.H. Dean. But the core of the argument centered on Leslie’s refusal to call Claiborne Billy the Kid.

After the Kid’s death in the summer of 1881, Claiborne decided to assume the nickname. Exactly why is unclear. He claimed he killed three men who refused
to honor his demand, but newspaper reports account for the shooting of only one unidentified man.

Claiborne, considered arrogant by those who knew him, left Tombstone a year earlier under a bit of a cloud.

The Clantons and McLaurys recruited Claiborne to help even the odds in their ongoing dispute with the Earps. But Claiborne didn't quite uphold his end of the bargain when the two sides met in the confrontation known as Gunfight at the OK Corral.

On October 26, 1881, Claiborne followed Ike and Bill Clanton along a narrow lot a few doors from the rear entrance to the corral, flanked by Tom and Frank McLaury. When the group, known as the Cowboys, drew closer to the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday, shots rang out in the vacant lot at the end of Fremont Street.

Claiborne fired twice at Virgil Earp, missed, and then fled the gun battle with Ike Clanton to the safety of C.S. Fly’s photo studio. Claiborne tried downplaying his role in the gunfight, contending he wasn't armed at the time.

Although he ended up testifying at the OK Corral inquest, his reputation suffered because he left the scene of the shootout.

When he returned a year later, Claiborne insisted he be referred to as Billy the Kid. He and Leslie drank and argued for most of the day. And the words turned bitter. According to the bartender, an angry Claiborne threatened Leslie and then marched out of the saloon.

“The next I hear was a man came running in telling Mr. Leslie that Claiborne was outside with a rifle to kill him,” said bartender Dean.

Leslie left through a side door and spotted Claiborne with a Winchester. “Billy, don't shoot,” Leslie warned. “I don't want you to kill me, nor do I want to have to shoot you.”

Claiborne ignored the advice and fired from about fifteen feet away but missed. Leslie, with a reputation as a cold-blooded killer, drew his revolver and snapped off a couple of shots, hitting Claiborne at least once in the side.

Claiborne died within a half-hour. According to a statement made by Leslie, Claiborne raised the rifle and shot first. A witnessed backed up the story.

William Henry Bush, a local bootblack, told the Tombstone Epitaph. “I saw him raise the gun to shoot Mr. Leslie, and I seen the gun go off, the bullet striking the sidewalk.”

Authorities ruled the killing justified because Claiborne tried to ambush Leslie. Claiborne, the wannabe Billy the Kid, died in the streets of Tombstone at age 22. The simple epitaph on his grave marker in Row 2 of Tombstone Cemetery reads, W.M. Claiborne Shot by Frank Leslie 1882.
TWENTY-FOUR

Racist, Ruthless, and Unrepentant

On a cool day late in 1866, an intoxicated black state police officer rode along the streets of Evergreen, Texas, waving his gun and harassing local citizens. When he approached a man and his son, the lawman derided the father, causing the teen-ager to retaliate.

The officer served as a member of a state police force assembled by Texas Governor E.J. Davis after the Civil War. The organization consisted mostly of freed slaves—a move that infuriated Confederate Southerners.


When the officer pointed the weapon at him, Bill Longley reacted without hesitation, ripping out his own and fired, killing the policeman.

During Reconstruction, Longley developed a deep, simmering hatred of Northerners and ex-slaves. After the shooting in Evergreen, he went on the run, joining a small gang that spent its time terrorizing and killing former slaves and anyone they considered Yankee sympathizers.

The killings continued year-after-year, gunning down men and women. Gender didn't matter. Longley emerged with a reputation as one of the most ruthless killers on the frontier.

Although arrested several time, he always managed to escape. Between 1873 and 1876, Longley killed four more men before heading for Louisiana. The law caught up to him in the Bayou State and returned him to Texas to stand trial for one of the murders he previously committed.

The jury deliberated less than two hours before sentencing him to hang. In his cell, Longley began writing letters to newspapers about his life story. He also wrote the governor seeking clemency, pointing out that John Wesley Hardin got only 25 years for killing 40 people. He wanted to know why he faced execution for killing 32.

The governor never bothered to respond.

Just before his walk to the gallows, Longley repented and admitted to killing only eight people—not the 32 he bragged about, as though the revised number would help in his salvation.

“I deserved this fate,” he said in a final goodbye. “It is a debt I have owed for a wild and reckless life … so long, everybody!”

The hangman slipped the black cap over the prisoner's face, adjusted the rope around his neck, and said, "All ready."

At 2:37 on October 11, 1878, the trap door of the gallows gave way and the doomed man fell eight feet. But the executioner allowed too much slack in the rope and Longley hit the ground with both feet, still living and still breathing.
As the crowd of more than four thousand fell silent, the hangmen readjusted the rope. This time, after dangling for a little over eleven minutes, 27-year old Wild Bill Longley choked to death.

TWENTY-FIVE

A Reputation for Violence

The town marshal, a small, quiet man with a no-nonsense reputation, approached his friend on the sidewalk outside the opera house in Palestine, Texas, to arrest him for a misdemeanor. Seconds later, the friendship ended in an exchange of gunfire.

Earlier in the evening, Tom O'Donnell, the night bartender at the Buckhorn saloon, took part in a bitter argument with his father-in-law.

The man’s angry wife demanded Marshal Christopher Columbus Rogers arrest O'Donnell.

“Tom,” said the sheriff, “give me your gun. Let's head over to the office and you can post bail and get this thing straightened out.”

“I give no man my gun,” O'Donnell said and told Rogers he'd have to take it off him if he was man enough.

When Rogers made a move toward him, an outraged O'Donnell pulled the gun and began firing.

One of the bullets slammed into Rogers' right forearm, snapping a bone, just as he cleared the Colt from his armpit holster.

When his arm went limp, he switched the gun to his left hand and fired, killing O'Donnell.

Despite what appeared clear-cut self-defense, witnesses accused Rogers of cold-blooded murder, resulting in suspension. Officials also stripped him of the right to carry a weapon pending trial for murder.

Rogers—known as “C. C.”—lived most of his life as either a lawman or gunman.

Born in 1846 the son of the sheriff in Anderson County, Texas, he joined the Confederate Army at 15, and served as a guard at Camp Ford, a Confederate Prisoner-of-War camp in Tyler.

After the war, he traveled to Palestine and worked as a printer for the Trinity Advocate newspaper.

Rogers vehemently opposed the conditions of Reconstruction, especially martial law and the carpetbagger rule. He didn’t hesitate to use violence to express his views. In 1872, he tangled with Palestine Marshal Dan Cary and killed him in a gunfight, although no one knew what triggered the violence.
He left town, moved to Tyler and opened a saloon. But things soon turned sour and he shot and killed Mose Remington, a business rival. A Smith County jury exonerated him on the grounds of self-defense.

When Palestine decided to elect a new marshal in the spring of 1873, Rogers ran unopposed and won. He served as the face of the law in the violent railroad town until 1888, proving himself an effective law enforcer.

Granted a change of venue in the trial for the O'Donnell killing, the proceedings took place in Athens. But the failed to reach a consensus, with eleven favoring conviction and one for acquittal.

While awaiting a second trial, Rogers walked into Robertson's Saloon on the afternoon of July 26, 1888, his broken arm still cradled in a sling. He was not armed.

Witnesses say Rogers started arguing with a young locomotive engineer by the name of Bill Young over the testimony by two witnesses in the first murder trial. Rogers apparently lost his temper and slugged Young with the broken arm. Young retaliated by stabbing Rogers several times.

The one-time gunman and lawman died on the barroom floor at the age 42.

TWENTY-SIX

Redemption

Dave Tucker, nervous and gun in-hand, stood at the front door to the First Joseph Bank of Wallowa County, Oregon, while two colleagues slipped inside to rob the place.

Tucker worked as a sheepherder, not a bank robber, but he couldn’t resist the lure of pocketing enough cash to buy a farm and marry the girl he loved.

Local saloonkeeper John Martin came up with the scheme to rob the bank, but he wanted no money from the heist. He hatched the idea out of pure revenge—payback for losing a lawsuit against one of the bank’s prominent stockholders.

Martin ran the idea past Cy Fitzhugh and James Brown, professional gunmen who rode into the valley in the spring to shear sheep and hide from authorities pursuing them for a previous hold up.

While working, they met Tucker and the three of them often frequented Martin’s saloon. Reluctant at first, the 25-year old Tucker finally agreed to participate after listening to what sounded like a foolproof plan.

On October 1, 1896, the afternoon of the robbery, Martin and confidant Ben Ownsby walked into the bank as customers. Fitzhugh and Brown entered the bank about three, faces blackened and covered with bandanas.

A minute or two later, cashier J.C. McCully stepped out of the bank vault, head down, glancing at his pocket watch. When he looked up, he found himself staring into the barrel of a large shotgun held by a man wearing a black mask.
“Throw up your hands,” ordered Fitzhugh, his eyes dark and penetrating. When McCully raised his hands, another masked man armed with a revolver climbed over the railing and disarmed him.

“My greatest fear was that with his gun cocked and the man’s finger on the trigger that he might accidentally pull it off—in which case I would have been a goner,” McCully wrote in a letter to his mother the following day.

On a normal day, McCully would have been at his own store working, but he agreed to cover for the regular cashier, away on vacation.

Fitzhugh kept McCully in his gun sights while Brown scooped up about $2,000 in cash, far below the $8,000 expected to be on hand because of a recently completed wool sales transaction.

Someone spotted Tucker and sounded a warning, prompting several residents to converge on the bank.

Fitzhugh and Brown left the bank, keeping McCully and other customers between them and the armed residents. Fred Wagner took aim and fired at Tucker. The bullet from the Winchester severed Tucker’s trigger finger and knocked the pistol from his hand.

Brown, carrying the stolen loot, took the second bullet and he fell to the street dead. Fitzhugh saw Brown fall, retrieved the gunnysack full of money, made it to his horse in a hail of bullets and escaped, never to be seen again.

Tucker received a seven-year sentence in the penitentiary but left early for good behavior. Authorities arrested Ownsby and Martin. Ownsby pleaded guilty and followed Tucker under a seven-year sentence. Martin, however, went to trial and won an acquittal.

When Tucker left prison, he returned to Wallowa County to work as a sheepherder. He later bought a ranch, built up his assets and became a respected member of the community, serving as a director on the school board and various companies.

He eventually bought into the First National Bank of Joseph, and elected vice president.

Dave Tucker never made excuses for his behavior, but remained repentant throughout his lifetime. Two years before he died in the 1950s, he wrote, “I don’t feel that I have ever fully atoned for what I did. I have tried hard, but it was a terrible thing. It was a crushing blow to my poor old dad and mother, but they stayed by me.”

Tucker, who was 80 when he wrote those words, happened to hold the notes for $5,000 in loans he secured for Wallowa County residents, a huge amount of money at the time.

The former bank robber turned successful businessman decided to forgive the debt and wrote: “I figure I owe the world something yet, and I have just forgotten about these loans. I have done my best to make up for my mistakes.”

Harley Tucker, his son, went on to achieve fame as a livestock contractor and rodeo producer.
TWENTY-SEVEN

The Sweetwater Shootout

The soldier playing cards at Lady Gay Saloon in Sweetwater, Texas, rose from his chair in disgust, threw his hand down, and stormed out the door. Another player, Bat Masterson, watched him leave, not knowing the two would meet again before the night ended.

Corporal Melvin A. King of the 4th Cavalry at a nearby Army post struggled with the cards before leaving the game. The more he lost, the more he drank. During his military career, King developed a serious drinking problem that led to a history of bad behavior. When sober, he often won praises as a good soldier and an accomplished wrangler.

Once the game ended on the night of January 24, 1876, Bat Masterson left the table and joined in conversation with black-haired and blue-eyed Mollie Brennan, a well known soiled dove.

At this point, the specifics of what happened vary from storyteller-to-storyteller. Sweetwater didn't have a newspaper. No official accounts of the tragic incident exist. One version suggests King was angry over the cards Masterson dealt him.

Another account tells about Corporal King being sweet on Mollie. Whether she knew how he felt isn't clear. At the same time, the 23-year old Masterson became friendly with Brennan and got permission from the owner of the Lady Gay to entertain her after the place closed.

Just after midnight, someone pounded at the locked door of the Lady Gay. Masterson, perhaps thinking it was friend looking for an after-hours drink, opened the door only to be confronted with a raging Melvin King brandishing his six-gun.

King barged through the door. The woman screamed at him and stepped in front of Bat. King fired and the bullet tore into Mollie Brennan's stomach. She died minutes later.

Either the same bullet or a different one drilled into Bat's pelvis. Somehow, he managed to draw his gun before collapsing and return fire, the bullet striking King in the heart. A local doctor examined Bat, but gave him little chance of surviving. Bat's friends, however, sent to the army post for a physician who removed the slug and nursed him back to health. Eight weeks later, he got back in the saddle.

Masterson, a frequent visitor to Sweetwater, had the reputation of an excellent marksman but only for his buffalo hunting accomplishments. He emerged from the Sweetwater Shootout with the unenviable reputation of a gunman, a reputation spent the rest of his life trying to downplay. Despite the
stories crediting with gunning down many others, Melvin King turned out to be Masterson’s only victim.

Masterson left Texas for Dodge City, Kansas, where he served as a deputy marshal for Wyatt Earp. He eventually ended up in New York City in the early 1900s where he worked as US Deputy Marshal, and sports editor of The Morning Telegraph.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Frontier Hit Man

Two men stood alone in the shadows outside a boarding house. Neither spoke. One of them handed several folded greenbacks to the other and left. Red Buck Weightman didn't bother to count the money. Anyone who dared cheat him would end up dead.

George “Red Buck” Weightman stuffed the money in his pocket, turned and walked into the shadows, richer by fifty-dollars—the fee he charged as a ruthless killer-for-hire. He liked killing so much he sometimes bragged about the men he sent to the grave.

Weightman, it’s believed, was born around 1850 somewhere in Texas. Others point to Tennessee as his birthplace. In 1880, he made his living as horse thief around Texas and then made his way into Oklahoma. In 1889, U.S. Deputy Marshal Heck Thomas corralled Weightman for stealing horses. He served three years before being released and headed back to Oklahoma.

After several years of drifting and building a reputation as a stone-cold killer, he joined the Doolin-Dalton Gang in the early 1890s, a gang that later became Bill Doolin’s Wild Bunch. The gang maintained a base of operations in Indian County and raised havoc throughout the Oklahoma Territory.

They also drifted into Missouri, Arkansas, and Kansas during the same decade, robbing merchants and trains and killing lawman along the way.

Weightman’s thirst for killing, however, even became too much for Bill Doolin to tolerate. After a train robbery near Dover, Oklahoma Territory, in early April 1895, Weightman stole a horse from a farmer—an old preacher—and shot the man in cold blood. According to author Bill O’Neil, in his Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters, Doolin became outraged and banished the killer from the gang.

Weightman then formed his outlaw band of fugitives from Texas—including Joe Beckham and Elmer “Kid” Lewis, and a Texas lawman by the name of George Miller. The gang rustled cattle and terrorized merchants throughout western Oklahoma and north Texas until the Texas Rangers caught up with the outlaws.
Weightman and the others managed to escape after a shootout. But authorities refused to give up the chase. In February or March 1896, they tracked Red Buck to his hideout at Arapaho Oklahoma and killed him in a gun battle.

TWENTY-NINE

Bat Masterson’s Last Gunfight

A restless and tense Bat Masterson stared out the window of the train that pulled into Dodge City, Kansas, in the late morning of April 16, 1881. In his pocket, he carried a telegram warning that his younger brother Jim's life was in danger because of a bitter business relationship.

Jim Masterson, along with A.J. Peacock, owned the Lady Gay Saloon and Dance Hall. Peacock's brother-in-law, Al Updegraff, worked at the saloon as a bartender, but Masterson wanted him fired for being dishonest and a drunk.

His partner Peacock, however, refused. The dispute deteriorated into a series of threat, which prompted the telegram.

Bat Masterson was no stranger to Dodge City. He once served as the town's sheriff and operated saloons and gambling houses.

Seething with anger during the journey from Tombstone, Masterson wasted no time in stepping off the train before it stopped. It was just before noon when he spotted Peacock and Updegraff in the crowded street and pushed his way through to confront them. Guns drawn, Masterson ducked under a railway bed, and Peacock and Updegraff took cover near the city jail.

Gunshots filled the air with some people, in support of one side or the other, joined in the shooting.

One of the bullets missed Masterson but wounded a bystander. Another bullet punctured Updegraff’s right lung. In a matter of seconds, the sheriff and the mayor came running armed with shotguns and managed to stop the shootout.

Mayor A.B. Webster arrested Bat Masterson. When efforts to identify the actual shooter failed, the mayor fined Masterson eight-dollars and released him. He left town the same evening.

Updegraff and the bystander later recovered from their wounds. For the 27-year old Masterson, it was his last gunfight.

After leaving Dodge City, he spent several years working as a lawman, saloon owner, and boxing promoter. He worked as a newspaper columnist for twenty years in New York City until he suffered a heart attack and died at his desk, October 25, 1921.

The sheet of paper in his typewriter contained his last words: "There are those who argue that everything breaks even in this old dump of a world of ours. I suppose these ginks who argue that way hold that because the rich man gets ice in
the summer and the poor man gets it in the winter things are breaking even for both. Maybe so, but I'll swear I can't see it that way."

THIRTY

Fastest Gun in the West

Red-faced and frustrated, the man slouched in the chair and watched the grinning teenager across from him gather the pot from yet another winning poker hand.

The game, which took place sometime between Christmas Day 1869 and January 5th of the New Year, dragged on for most of the day at a gambling hall in Towash, Texas. The four players occupying seats at the table included 16-year old John Wesley Hardin. The others were an Arkansas outlaw names Jim Bradley (also known as Benjamin B. Bradley), and two other men—all at least twice Hardin's age.

Luck favored Hardin who entered the game with the money he won from a horse race. Bradley, who harbored a reputation as the town bully, couldn't stomach Hardin's streak of luck, barked an angry warning.

“You win another hand, and I'll cut your liver, kid.”

What happened at this point differs, depending on the storyteller. One version says Hardin stood up, excused himself, and headed for his hotel room where he strapped on a pair of six guns.

According to another account, all three of his poker-playing partners pulled their guns and demanded Hardin turn over his own gun along with the money he won from them. Hardin—who reportedly didn’t even have his boots on at the time—supposedly ran for a window and escaped.

Whatever the case, Hardin and Bradley went hunting for each other and ended up on the main street of the west-central Hill Country cow town. The two men walked toward each other. Witnesses say Bradley cursed Hardin, pulled his gun and fired. The bullet missed. Hardin drew both his pistols and squeezed the triggers at the same time, hitting Bradley in the head and chest, killing him.

Onlookers said Hardin had holsters sewn into his vest, so the butts of his six-shooters pointed inward across his chest. Hardin maintained it gave him a distinct advantage in a gunfight. He practiced the fasts-draw daily.

After the shootout, witnesses began spreading the word hailing John Wesley Hardin as the fastest gun in the west. By the time of the Bradley shooting, young Hardin had already killed four other men.

The people of Navarro County thought of Hardin as somewhat of a hero. They justified the killings of the first four because the victims were Yankees.
THIRTY-ONE

The Honorable Dalton

On a sunny and cold Tuesday, November 27, 1887, two lawmen rode into the Cherokee Nation, tracking a horse thief named Dave Smith to his camp near the Arkansas River—a journey that would end in a bloody ambush.

When U.S. Deputy Marshal Frank Dalton and Deputy J.R. Cole reached the camp, they dismounted and approached a tent, not anticipating any trouble. Inside the tent with Smith were outlaws William Towerly and Lee Dixon, along with Dixon's wife.

Smith watched the two lawmen walk toward him, raised his rifle, and pulled the trigger, hitting Dalton in the chest. Deputy Cole took a bullet in the side but returned fire, killing Smith and Dixon's wife, and wounding Dixon.

Thinking Dalton was dead the bleeding Cole made a run for it and escaped. A newspaper story at the time reported that Towerly came out of the tent, stood over Dalton and coldly pumped two bullets into the lawman's head—although there's no way to confirm that version of the events.

Later, after a posse recovered Dalton's body, an obituary in the Fort Smith Elevator, Dec. 2, 1887, read:

"Frank Dalton was a fearless and efficient officer and an honest up right an, highly esteemed by all who knew him for his many good qualities of head and heart. He was twenty-eight years of age, unmarried and his home being with his Mother of Chelsea, Cherokee Nation... "

During his brief career as a lawman, Frank Dalton developed a reputation as a man of unsurpassed courage. Over a three-year period, Marshal Dalton engaged in several shootouts while making high-profile arrests.

About a month after Dalton's death, Deputy William Moody and Deputy U.S. Marshal Ed Stokely caught up with Towerly and killed him in a gunfight.

Ironically, Frank Dalton's younger brothers—Bob, Emmett, and Grat—also worked as lawmen for a while. But all that changed in 1890 when they took off their badges to carve their own place in American frontier history as members of the infamous Dalton Gang.

U. S. Deputy Marshal Dalton is buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Coffeyville, Kansas. Four years later, brothers Bob and Grat would join their elder brother in the same cemetery after being gunned down during a bank robbery attempt in Coffeyville, where the family once lived.
THIRTY-TWO

Fast and Deadly

On a rain-soaked summer night in 1880, two men left Deadwood, South Dakota, and headed for Rockerville, about fifty miles away. One of the men, D. Boone May, sat hunched over wearing a rubber poncho with his Winchester propped up between his knees.

Next to him sat Ambrose Bierce, manager of the Black Hills Placer Mining Company. Bierce carried $30,000 in company money stuffed in his pockets and hired May to serve as shotgun messenger.

Although a journalist by trade, Bierce went to work for the troubled mining enterprise as a favor to a friend who served as the company's lawyer.

May worked for the Cheyenne and Black Hills stage line. The company hired him and other sharpshooters as stagecoach guards in hopes of putting a stop to a series of robberies by road agents.

The journey to Rockerville took the two men across a rocky trail scarcely visible in the steady drizzle. Several miles into the trip, May and Bierce heard the sound of a horse gaining on them from behind, and then heard a voice call out in the black rainy night.

"Throw your hands up," yelled the rider.

Bierce coaxed the team to a halt and reached for his revolver. May wasted no time and pushed himself backward across the seat, landed upright with the rifle, and fired, striking the road agent in the chest.

Astonished by the incident, Bierce later wrote about May's actions, and described them as "the quickest movement that I had ever seen in anything but a cat…"

When May took the job as a shotgun messenger, he had been under indictment for shooting and killing a prisoner who tried to escape his custody. He turned himself in, eventually stood trial, and won an acquittal.

"Lean, dark-haired, and quiet, with unusual eyes of yellow, green and gray," the gunman grew up in Missouri. Born in 1852, Daniel Boone May was the seventh of nine children. About eight years later, the family moved to Kansas.

He and his brothers grew up helping their father farm. May learned how to shoot and hunt early in life and knew the importance of making every shot count. In 1876, May and two of his older brothers traveled to Cheyenne and opened a freight business.

Because of their success, May bought a ranch between the Platte River and Deadwood, then part of the Dakota Territory. A year later, the Cheyenne and Black Hills stage line hired him for the job of shotgun messenger.

May also worked as the manager of a stage station. In a timeframe of five years, he killed at least eight robbers and took plenty of others into custody.
Throughout his career, authorities arrested him several times on various charges. In each instance, May proved his innocence.

When the Black Hills gold rush slowed, May traveled to South America and worked as a guard at a gold mine in Chile, but left the mine in 1891 after getting into trouble.

According to Ambrose Bierce, the sharp-eyed shootist died in South America of yellow fever.

THIRTY-THREE

Trouble in Medicine Lodge

In the early morning of April 30, 1884, four men rode along the rain-soaked streets of Medicine Lodge, Kansas, but no one paid much attention because a heavy storm kept most folks inside.

The group, which included well-respected Caldwell, Kansas, Marshal Henry Newton Brown, hitched their horses to a coal shed and headed for the front door of the Medicine Valley Bank.

Inside the bank, chief cashier George Geppert glanced at his watch and finished tallying the monthly accounts while bank President E.W. Payne sat at his desk reviewing some paperwork. Just before the scheduled bank opening at 9 a.m., assistant cashier Frank Chapin left for the post office.

Minutes later, three of the strangers entered the bank. The fourth stayed with the horses. One stayed by the door. Another walked straight to the cashier's window. The third made his way to the door at the rear of the office.

The man at the cashier's window pulled a gun and pointed it at Geppert demanding he "Get 'em up."

Geppert, nervous and frightened, did as ordered.

Bank President Payne ignored the threat and grabbed his revolver, but failed to get off a shot, and the gunmen opened fire. Payne caught a bullet in the right shoulder blade, which possibly grazed his spine. He fell to the floor bleeding and would later die. Two of the bullets slammed into Geppert. Despite the severe wounds, the cashier crawled to the bank safe and managed to lock it before he died.

Fearing the gunshots alerted the townspeople, the bandits left the bank empty-handed, raced to their horses, and headed for the Gyp Hills where fresh horses awaited. In addition to Marshal Brown, members of the gang included deputy Ben Wheeler, John Wesley and Billy Smith.

Unknown to the bandits, a dozen or so cowboys stood inside the livery barn waiting for the rain to stop. When they heard the gunshots and spotted the outlaws leaving, they gave chase. The makeshift posse trapped the four men in a box
canyon. After a two-hour gunfight, the bandits gave up and the posse took them back to Medicine Lodge and locked them behind bars.

Angry citizens, upset over the double killings at the bank, milled around outside the jail demanding the men be hanged. Later that same night, an unruly crowd of armed men rushed the jail and overpowered the sheriff and a deputy. When the cells opened, Brown and the others made a run for it. But Brown's run to freedom ended in a volley of bullets and he fell into the dirt dead. The mob dragged Wheeler, Smith, and Wesley to an Elm tree east of town and lynched them.

It marked an inglorious end for Brown, who earned praise as an effective lawman. In December 1882, Caldwell officials had promoted him to marshal and presented him with a "gold-mounted and handsomely engraved" Winchester rifle with a silver plate bearing the inscription, "for valuable services rendered."

A little more than a month before the attempted robbery in Medicine Lodge, the 26-year old Brown married and bought a house. After paying for the house and furnishing it, he found himself over a thousand dollars in debt.

When he realized the $125 a month he earned from the city of Caldwell couldn't pay the bills, he figured out a way to supplement his income.

On the night of the lynching, Brown wrote a letter to his wife, perhaps realizing he wouldn't see the morning sunrise. According to the Caldwell Journal, Brown wrote:

Darling Wife: I am in jail here . . . I will send you all of my things and you can sell them, but keep the Winchester. This is hard for me to write this letter but, it was all for you, my sweet wife, and for the love I have for you. H. N. Brown

THIRTY-FOUR

The Payback

In late morning, April 28, 1881, Deputy U.S. Marshal Bob Olinger sat back in the chair outside the cell on the top floor of the Lincoln County, New Mexico, courthouse cradling a ten-gauge double-barreled shotgun packed with eighteen buckshot in each barrel.

Flashing a sardonic smile, he aimed the deadly weapon at the prisoner known as Billy the Kid.

Sheriff Pat Garrett and his posse, several months before, captured the young outlaw in connection with the killing of Lincoln County Sheriff William Brady. A jury convicted the Kid of murder in April and sentenced him to hang—the only conviction every obtained against those involved in the Lincoln County War.

Garrett transported the prisoner to and placed him under 24-hour guard. The lawman warned Olinger and Deputy James Bell to stay vigilant and watch
their prisoner every moment of his captivity because, if given a chance, Billy the Kid would try to escape and kill them in the process.

Olinger assured Garrett the Kid had no chance of escaping.

After Garrett had left, Olinger bullied Billy every chance he got, constantly terrorizing him by beating him or insulting him. He often threatened the Kid with his shotgun. Billy told a friend that Olinger's abuse "used to work me up until I could hardly contain myself."

Olinger, a big man with broad shoulders, stood six feet weighed about 240 pounds. Most folks who knew the lawman considered him a bully with a reputation for being sadistic and dangerous because of his quick gun and hair-trigger temper.

Born Charles Robert "Bob" Olinger in 1841—in Ohio or Indiana—eventually he joined his brother John Wallace Olinger in Seven Rivers, New Mexico, in 1876, where both became members of the Seven Rivers Warriors, a gang of rustlers.

Both brothers battled on the Murphy-Dolan-Riley side in the Lincoln County War. This association brought Olinger into a parallel confrontation with Billy the Kid, who had killed Olinger's close friend Bob Beckwith during the Lincoln County battle.

Even though he served as a deputy U.S. marshal, historian Jay Robert Nash wrote that Olinger was "better suited to fighting range wars than upholding the peace."

On a Thursday afternoon, with Garrett away on business, Olinger escorted several prisoners from the courthouse to the Wortley Hotel for a meal. He left his shotgun behind with Bell, who had established an amicable relationship with Billy.

Confined by leg irons and handcuffs, the Kid asked Bell to escort him to the outhouse at the back of the courthouse. When they returned, Billy made his move to escape.

Although details remain sketchy, the Kid somehow managed to get hold of a gun and kill Bell. Olinger heard the blast and hurried back to the courthouse. Billy, meanwhile, retrieved Olinger's shotgun and took up a position at a window overlooking the courtyard.

When Olinger came into view, Billy aimed the deputy's shotgun, called out, "Hello, Bob," and fired both barrels, killing him. According to one account, Billy smashed Olinger's shotgun against a porch railing and threw the pieces at the deputy's corpse.

Olinger, gunned down at 40, was buried in an unmarked grave at Fort Stanton Cemetery in Lincoln County.
THIRTY-FIVE

Champion of the Plains

On the morning of a cold and rainy April 9, 1892, gunshots raked across the cabin walls of the KC ranch forcing 35-year old Nate Champion to stay hunkered down, trying to remain alive, wondering how he became the target of a small army of cattlemen and hired guns who wanted him dead.

Champion leased the small Johnson County, Wyoming, ranch to accommodate his modest herd of 200 head of cattle. Although he had no way of knowing, Champion had a price on his head the moment he won election as the foreman for the upcoming May 1892 Spring Roundup of the newly formed Northern Wyoming Farmers & Stock Growers Association.

Small stock growers formed the organization to counter the monopolistic Wyoming Stock Growers Association. Ironically, Champion had not even attended the organizational meeting that elected him.

Wyoming cattle ranchers suffered heavy losses the previous two winters and weren't about to allow a group of small rogue cattlemen further impact their bottom lines. Members of the WSGA considered the smaller group a threat because they staked claims on public land already occupied by association members who wanted to preserve the open range concept.

The cattle barons concluded, without proof, that local ranchers were expanding their livestock by rustling mavericks—unbranded range cattle—from the larger herds and decided to take action.

WSGA members knew how to wield their wealth and influence, and didn't hesitate to bribe lawmen and politicians to see things their way. Stories of small ranchers being lynched and intimidated began to emerge. According to one account, gunmen collected $50 for each dead "rustler."

Inside the bullet-riddled cabin with Champion were business partner Nick Ray and two trappers, who had stayed the night. The four had no way of knowing the WSGA had hired Deputy U.S. Marshal Frank Canton and a group of Texas gunmen to carry out its plan.

A force of 50 men, known as the Regulators and led by Major Frank Wolcott, boarded a train in Cheyenne, traveled to Casper, and then to Johnson County. From there, the small army headed for the KC ranch and surrounded Champion's cabin.

To assure secrecy, they cut the telegraph lines out of Buffalo, the county seat.

Early that morning, the two trappers stepped outside to draw water from the Powder River and were quietly taken into custody. Minutes later, Ray (also known as Rae) left the cabin and Regulators gunned him down.

Champion stepped into the doorway firing his Winchester and managed to drag Ray back inside. Champion, a good shot, managed to hold off the gunmen for
a short time. He tried tending to Ray's injuries, but his business partner had lost too much blood from too many bullets and didn't have long to live.

Champion held out for several hours. He killed four of the Regulators and wounded several others. Somehow, he had the wherewithal to make entries into a pocket journal during the gun battle.

"Me and Nick was getting breakfast when the attack took place," he wrote.

"Boys, I feel pretty lonesome just now. I wish tree was someone here with me so we could watch all sides at once."

Champion left some notes for friends while trying to avoid getting killed. And, then, he made his last entries.

"Well, they have just got through shelling the house like hail."

"I hear them splitting wood. I guess they are going to fire the house tonight. I think I will make a break when night comes, if alive. Shooting again. It's not night yet.

"The house is all fire. Goodbye, boys, if I never see you again."

With the house ablaze, Champion slipped the journal into his pocket and made a break for it out the back door, running with a revolver in one hand and a knife in the other.

Four Regulators fired simultaneously. Champion crumpled to the ground. Officials later said they recovered 28 bullets from his body. The gunmen removed the entries from the diary, which named some of the attackers. They also pinned a note on his bullet-riddled chest: "Cattle Thieves Beware."

A sheriff's posse of about 200-strong tracked the invaders to the TA Ranch on Crazy Woman Creek and, for two days, exchanged gunshots. One of them, however, escaped and contacted the acting governor of Wyoming, Amos W. Barber, who saved Regulators through political maneuvering.

No one ever faced prosecution for the death of Nate Champion, one of the first victims of the Johnson County War. The courageous rancher entered the Wyoming Cowboy Hall of Fame in 2014.

THIRTY-SIX

A Deadly Confrontation

The bad blood between former Pinal County, Arizona, Sheriff John Peter Gabriel and his one-time deputy, Josephus Phy, bubbled over on the last day of May 1888 when they traded angry words at John Keating's Tunnel Saloon in the mining boomsntown of Florence.

The tension between the two seasoned law officers had been building for a couple of years. Gabriel won the sheriff's post in 1883 and hired the 39-year old Phy to serve as his deputy.
Although close friends, both men were ill tempered. Their political views and personalities often veered in different directions, which created even deeper animosity.

An arrangement had been in place for Phy to become sheriff after Gabriel's retirement, but a couple of events put them in each other's crosshairs. Gabriel fired Phy after the deputy administered a severe beating to a suspect he took into custody.

One historian suggested that Gabriel seethed with anger over the attention Phy paid to Gabriel's young wife. Getting booted from the deputy post left Phy angry, seeking payback.

Gabriel decided to leave office after three years behind the badge and travel into the Dripping Springs Mountains to work a mine. In 1888, he returned to Florence and the inevitable showdown with Phy.

On the night of the confrontation, Gabriel stood at the bar in the Tunnel Saloon enjoying a nightcap. Just before midnight, Phy charged in and confronted the man who once hired him.

Both had been doing their share of drinking. Before the harsh words ended, each drew their revolvers and began firing at close range. Three of the bullets from Gabriel's .45 struck Phy three times. Gabriel suffered wounds the groin, chest, and his lung. He lost the other lung in a shootout several years earlier.

In all, the two men exchanged eleven shots. Severely wounded, Phy stumbled out of the saloon backward and collapsed on the walkway. He lived for a few more hours but died sometime after midnight.

Gabriel left the saloon bleeding, stepped over his one-time associate, and staggered along the street to the front of the OK livery stable before he finally buckled to the ground. A local physician by the name of Dr. Harvey tried to help Gabriel, but the lawman refused, angry because Harvey attended to Phy first.

Another doctor, from the Sacaton Indian Agency, arrived about four a.m. and painted a bleak picture and told Gabriel he'd probably die within 24 hours. But, Gabriel survived and stood trial. Authorities ruled the shooting self-defense and dropped the charges.

The gritty former lawman lived for another ten years and died on Aug. 6, 1898.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Retribution in Laramie

Despite a warning from Deputy Marshal Steve Long, the eight men continued trading punches in a full-scale street brawl in Laramie, Wyoming. Long, angry his command was ignored, drew his gun, and began firing.
Seconds later, on a Tuesday afternoon, October 22, 1867, five men lay in the dirt, dead.

"Big" Steve Long, as he was known, traveled into the Dakota Territory with his half-brothers, Ace and Con Moyer, and opened a block-long tent saloon in Laramie, named Bell of the West. Locals called it the Bucket of Blood.

Few details are available about Long's past. It's believed he fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, but possibly under a different name. He drifted into Wyoming in the mid-1860s.

As Laramie's first marshal, Long—who stood six-feet-six—established a reputation as a man of violence. Rather than arrest anyone, he preferred to intimidate them with physical force—or outright shoot them. But, he didn't limit his abusive behavior to only matters of law enforcement.

Long, along with his half-brothers, used strong-arm tactics to force several area ranchers to sign over the deeds of their properties to them.

The ones who refused were later gunned down, with Long claiming he killed the men because they attempted to draw on him. If the victim had no gun at the time of the shooting, Long made sure one was found on the dead man. And, there were never any witnesses.

By October 1868, Long had killed thirteen men. He was also suspected of killing another seven, although no concrete evidence existed to link him to the murders.

Laramie's first Mayor M. C. Brown and the entire town government called it quits in May 1868, after only three weeks in office, frustrated by threats from the three half-brothers. He deemed Laramie "ungovernable."

On October 18, 1868, Long tried to rob Rollie "Hard Luck" Harrison, but the local prospector refused to back down and drew his gun to defend himself. The shootout cost Harrison his life, but he had wounded Long, who fled the scene.

When Long sought refuge with his fiancé and told her what happened, she later slipped away and told Sheriff Nathaniel Kimball Boswell, who organized a small posse.

The men finally cornered Long and his half-brothers at the saloon on October 28, took them into custody, and dragged them to an unfinished cabin behind the Frontier Hotel, where they rigged a makeshift gallows.

Long asked if he could be allowed to remove his boots because, "My mother always said I'd die with my boots on."

The marshal's campaign of terror came to an end when all three were hanged from the rafters of the cabin.

THIRTY-EIGHT
The Bulletproof Deacon of Death
A long-running feud between Sheriff Bud Frazer and "Deacon Jim" Miller reached the boiling point when two stood face-to-face on a Pecos, Texas, street, April 12, 1894.

About a year after being elected Reeves County sheriff in 1890, Frazer had hired J.B Miller as deputy about a year later—a decision he would later regret.

Most of the people in Pecos liked Miller. He wore a badge, went to church with regular frequency with his wife and child, and even read aloud from the Bible. But, things weren't as they seemed.

Behind Miller's polite demeanor lurked a stone-cold killer with a sinister stare and hair-trigger temper. Deacon Jim always dressed in a long black coat, no matter what the weather. Sheriff Frazer soon learned why.

Knowing Miller's reputation with a shotgun, Frazier had no intention of giving him a fighting chance when they met. The two men felt only disdain as they faced each other just outside the hotel that Miller owned.

With only a few feet separating them, the sheriff drew his .44 and squeezed off four shots. At least three hit Miller in the chest. Another pierced his right arm.

When Deacon Jim went down, Frazer knew the man was dead. He turned and walked away. Hours later, Frazer expressed shock when he learned Miller suffered only minor wounds.

Under the long frock coat, Deacon Jim wore a metal plate that absorbed the shock and killing power of the bullets—possibly the first known use in the Wild West of what would later be called a bulletproof vest.

Frazier left Pecos to distance himself from Miller. But Killer Miller wasn't the kind to forget a man who tried to kill him.

A couple of years later, he tracked Frazer to Toyah, Texas, where the former lawman worked as a stable hand. Miller shoved a shotgun into Frazer's face and killed him.

Born in Arkansas in 1861, Deadly Deacon Jim Miller was orphaned early and sent to live with his grandparents in Texas. It didn't take long before Miller began building his reputation as a gunman.

He once claimed that, at age eight, he killed his grandparents. But authorities refused to consider an eight-year old the prime suspect in a double-murder. Some people believed Miller copped to the killings as a way of creating an aura about himself as an adult.

Miller's taste for killing emerged for real in his teenage years. At 19, Miller went to live with his sister, Georgia, and her husband, John Thomas Coop, but killed his brother-in-law after an argument.

This time, the law took him seriously, arrested him, and eventually sentenced him to life in prison. A legal technicality, however, won him his freedom. Miller then decided to become a killer-for-hire and even advertised his skills, charging $150 per kill.

With a shotgun his weapon of choice, Miller preferred shooting from ambush, building a reputation as a backshooter.
His victims included lawmen, cattle ranchers, and political figures, even suspected in the death of famed Sheriff Pat Garrett, who killed Billy the Kid.

Miller's actual body count remains a mystery. Various accounts put the number at eight. Killer Jim, another of his nicknames, claimed about 50. His last victim was Gus Bobbit, a popular rancher, and former Deputy U.S. Marshal.

Three men—Jesse West, Berry Burrell, and Joseph Allen—paid Miller $1,700 to assassinate the lawman. But Bobbit lived long enough to finger his killer. Authorities took all four to custody and put them behind bars in Ada, Oklahoma.

Up to that point, law enforcement had little success convicting Miller for his crimes because expert legal counsel, usually paid for by the wealthy clients who hired him, always managed to evade justice.

A mob, however, vowed to no level of legal maneuvering would save Miller's hide. Rather than chance a court appearance, the mob attacked the jail, broke into it, and dragged Miller and the three other outlaws to a nearby barn and lynched them.

Just before being hanged, Miller reportedly shouted: “Let ‘er rip!”

Deacon Jim Miller: Dead at 48. During his lifetime, Miller worked as a deputy sheriff, a city marshal, and Texas Ranger. He was also a gambler, a swindler, and one of the deadliest professional killers in Texas.

**THIRTY-NINE**

**The Man from Helldorado**

Two masked gunmen kicked in the door of the Tombstone Mining and Milling Company office in Charleston, Arizona, late in the evening on March 25, 1882, but left bars of silver bullion and cash in the office vault when the heist went wrong.

The robbery attempt went bad from the moment Billy Grounds and Zwing Hunt stepped through the door. One of the four men inside the office tried to retrieve a revolver, causing one of the bandits to fire.

In the commotion, a bullet struck mining engineer M. Robert Peel, who fell to the floor with a bullet in his heart. Panicked, Grounds and Hunt scrambled out the door without taking any money.

When news of the killing reached Cochise County Deputy Sheriff Billy Breakenridge, he deputized three men to pursue the outlaws.

On the following day, the posse managed to track the pair to the Chandler Ranch, about ten miles outside Tombstone. The lawmen hid their horses and closed in on the cabin where the men holed up.
One of the officers, John C. Gillespie, broke from the posse and ran toward the front door and ordered the gunmen out. The cabin door swung open, but the only things that came out were bullets.

Seconds later, Gillespie lay dead in the dirt and two other deputies named Allen and Young sustained bullet wounds.

Breakenridge took cover behind a tree, aimed his shotgun at the front door, and fired one barrel. Buckshot tore through the doorway and slammed into Billy Grounds' face and neck, sending him to the floor.

Hunt decided to make a break for it out the back door, but Breakenridge and the wounded Allen both fired. The outlaw staggered forward a few steps and collapsed with a punctured lung.

Although authorities thought Hunt stood on death's doorstep, he showed signs of life and ended up in the hospital. He later escaped from the Tombstone medical facility with the help of his brother. Both men disappeared.

William Milton Breakenridge, born on Christmas Day in 1846 in Watertown, Wisconsin, left home at age sixteen, joined the Army and, at one point, served under Colonel John Chivington during the Sand Creek Massacre.

After leaving the army, he ended up in Phoenix and served as a Maricopa County deputy sheriff.

A year or so later, the lawman drifted into Tombstone and took the same job for Sheriff John Behan at the time of the OK Corral gunfight between the Earps and the Cowboys. Historians say Breakenridge, like Behan, belonged to the anti-Earp faction, sympathetic to the Cowboys.

Breakenridge earned a reputation as one of the most courteous and modest lawmen in the Arizona Territory. During his lifetime, he held numerous occupations—including teamster, railroader, newsboy, teamster, laborer, telegraph messenger, railroad detective.

He also became an author in 1928 with the publication of *Helldorado: Bringing the Law to the Mesquite*. The memoir, ghostwritten by William McLeod Raine, featured his memoirs of life in Tombstone and on the frontier.

In the book, he portrays Wyatt Earp as a thief, pimp, killer, and crooked gambler. Earp and his wife branded it as biased and fiction.

The book, however, attracted a large readership and considered such a success that Tombstone residents, in 1929, created an annual October celebration called *Helldorado Days*, commemorating the gunfight at the OK Corral, an event that continues even today.

Breakenridge died of a heart attack in Tucson in January 1931, at the age of 84.
Sixteen-year-old Rose Dunn peered out the window of the ranch house and into the darkness awaiting the arrival George "Bittercreek" Newcomb. Love filled the air, but danger lurked in the shadows. Newcomb and Charley Pierce, members of the Wild Bunch, were on the run, $5,000 in rewards posted for each of them—tempting targets for bounty hunters.

The two outlaws made their way along the dark trail bordering the Cimarron River and reached the Dunn place on the night of May 2, 1895, Newcomb eager to resume his romantic relationship with Rose.

Tired from the long, hard ride, they stabled their horses and headed for the boarding house, a walk they would never complete.

Hiding in the shadows, the Dunn brothers waited—Bee, Calvin, Dal, George, and Bill. A few feet from the door of the boarding house, two shotguns exploded in the black night. Newcomb and Pierce staggered from the impact and fell to the ground dead.

The Dunns apparently considered the reward money too tempting to pass up. In addition to operating the ranch and boarding house, the Dunns owned a local meat market. The brothers pursued other ventures, but mostly illegal ones. No one knew whether Rose Dunn, also known as Rose of the Cimarron, helped plot the ambush. She later denied betraying Newcomb, and her brothers defended her and said they kept Rose in the dark so she wouldn’t tip-off Newcomb.

The next morning, the well-known bounty hunters placed the bodies of Newcomb and Pierce into a wagon, took them to Guthrie, and claimed the reward with no questions asked.

When rumors began circulating the Dunn brothers may have been behind a series of local crimes that involved cattle rustling, robbery, and several killings, Deputy U.S. Marshal Frank Canton decided to investigate, especially after once arresting Bill Dunn.

After learning about Canton's interest in the family's activities, Dunn decided he'd killed the lawman and rode to Pawnee to confront him. Canton, born Josiah Horner in September 1849, drifted around the frontier as a gunslinger and an outlaw. Most considered him a crack shot. Over the years, he developed a reputation as someone cool in the heat of confrontation.

On the afternoon of November 6, 1896, Canton left a restaurant and headed back to his office. Dunn spotted him, slipped his revolver out, and fired twice. The ambush failed. Canton pulled his handgun and snapped off two shots. Dunn collapsed dead in the streets of Pawnee. Courts ruled the shooting self-defense.
About a year later, Rose Dunn married and moved to New Mexico. Her husband Charles Noble died in 1930. Ten years later, she remarried to Richard Fleming. The two made their home in Lewis County, Washington, until her death in 1953. She was 76.

**FORTY-ONE**

**To Live by the Gun**

Storekeeper E.H. Townsend and his family worked from sunup to sundown stocking shelves and scrubbing the place clean. They prepared to call it a day when the door opened and three men walked into the Blaine County general store in Todd, Oklahoma.

Townsend, who also served as Todd's postmaster, didn't recognize the men. He smiled and extended a warm greeting but all he got in return were cold stares. Without warning, the three drew their revolvers and warned Townsend and family to put their hands up and stay put.

What started out as a quiet Thursday evening in March 1894 would come to a tragic end in less than a few minutes.

Zip Wyatt, the leader of the trio, stepped around the counter and rifled the money drawer. Townsend, who worked hard to build a successful business, wasn't about to allow Wyatt or anyone else to simply walk out the door with the day's earnings.

Catching the group off-guard, he raced to the door to prevent the robbers from leaving.

One of the gunmen fired, striking Townsend in the wrist. But the wound didn't stop him. He grabbed a nearby metal bar and swung it around, knocking Wyatt to the floor. The other two men both squeezed off shots at the same time, killing Townsend with wife and children looking on.

Historians say Wyatt turned bad after his brother Nim—known as Six-Shooter Jack—got killed in a bar in Texline, Texas.

Nathaniel Ellsworth Wyatt, believed born in Indiana in 1864 or 1868, launched his lengthy crime spree by shooting up the town of Mulhall, Oklahoma, on June 3, 1891, and wounding two citizens.

When authorities issued a warrant for his arrest, he fled to Kansas and Kiowa County. Deputy Sheriff Andrew Balfour picked up Wyatt's trail and tracked him to Pryor's Grove, Kansas, on July 4th.

When he tried to make an arrest, Wyatt shot him in the stomach. Balfour, suffering from a severe wound, managed to return fire and hit Wyatt twice in the hand, but the wounds weren't serious. Wyatt escaped and Balfour died, leaving a wife and six children.
With a $1,000 reward on his head, Wyatt made his way back to Indiana to lie low for a while. Authorities returned him to Oklahoma, but he managed to escape twice from jail in Guthrie.

Wyatt resumed his life of crime under the aliases Zip, Wild Charlie, and Dick Yaeger. He held up merchants, post offices, and trains, never hesitating to use his gun.

Some contend Wyatt may have killed as many as eleven people. Less than a month after robbing and killing E.H. Townsend in Todd, Wyatt struck again and killed Dewey County Treasurer Fred Hoffman.

Wyatt formed a new gang along with outlaw Ike Black and staged another series of robberies and killings.

During a shootout with lawmen on August 1, 1895, Black was killed. Wyatt, although wounded, slipped away yet again.

Three days later, a posse cornered him at Skeleton Creek and engaged in another shootout. Wyatt went down with a gut-shot and a shattered pelvis. He hung on until after midnight on September 7 and died.

One account says his sister showed up to gather his personal belongings but refused to claim the body. The sheriff denied her request. The city put Wyatt in a pauper's grave south of Enid, dead at age 32.

**FORTY-TWO**

**Dangerous Dan Tucker**

Just after sundown in late November 1881, a lawman by the name of Dan Tucker walked along the main street of Deming, New Mexico, gripping a double-barreled shotgun and wearing a Colt on his hip, hat pulled low, eyes scanning right and left.

Tucker, the city marshal of Shakespeare, New Mexico, about sixty miles to east, traveled to Deming to deal with an outlaw gang that gained the upper hand in the small community.

Soon after his arrival, Tucker delivered a strong message that lawlessness would no longer be tolerated. Gang members learned firsthand why the visiting lawman's shooting skills earned him the nickname Dangerous Dan.

C.M. Chase, a newspaper reporter visiting Deming to write about the new railroad junction, said a few days after Tucker's arrival, three of the outlaws were dead, two others wounded. By the following February, the gang moved on.

According to the Southwest Sentinel of Silver City, "Everything is quiet in Deming."

Tucker never ranked in name-recognition with some of the more well known gunmen of the Old West, says historian Leon C. Metz. He described
Tucker as "...a better lawman, and more dangerous than such redoubtable characters as Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok."

Born in Canada in 1849, Tucker eventually drifted into Grant County, New Mexico, where Sheriff Harvey Whitehill hired him as a deputy in 1875. Three years later, he became Silver City's first town marshal.

During his first year on the job, in November 1878, Tucker took a bullet during a shootout with outlaw Caprio Rodriguez, who tried to resist arrest. But when the smoke settled, Rodriguez lay dead in the street.

In 1880, Tucker moved to the tough mining camp of Shakespeare and within a year managed to establish law and order, rounding up more than a dozen members of a cowboy gang.

In September, he shot and killed a cattle rustler named Jake Bond. A couple of months later, just before leaving for Deming, he put a fatal bullet in a man who rode his horse into a local hotel dining room.

The same month, he arrested outlaws Sandy King and "Russian Bill" Tattenbaum, who were hanged from the rafters inside the Grant House at Shakespeare by a band of local vigilantes.

In addition serving as town marshal, Tucker also worse the bad of a deputy U.S. marshal, a livestock inspector, and a railway agent.

"For a time—50 years or so—Silver City was the stage for Wild West drama of the first order, with a cast of colorful players numbering in the hundreds. They were not actors, though, and the set was not a sham. There was nothing counterfeit about the people or the place," wrote Bob Alexander, author of Dangerous Dan Tucker: New Mexico's Deadly Lawman.

Tucker, according to various accounts, found himself in the middle of about a dozen gun battles. He didn't go in for a lot of chitchat and rarely asked questions of the men he pursued, preferring a shoot-first-ask-questions-later approach.

Tucker once admitted to the Silver City Enterprise that "in the course of his duty as deputy sheriff, he has been obliged to kill eight men in this county, besides several in Lincoln and Dona Ana counties," adding that he personally escorted four others to the gallows.

He once opened a restaurant and saloon in Deming in 1884 but called it quits a year later and accepted an appointment as Deputy U. S. Marshal for the region.

Three years later Tucker turned in his badge and left for California.

He made a return visit to Grant County in 1892. But, for reasons unknown, the legendary and all-but-forgotten lawman vanished. No one ever saw or heard from him again.

Where he went from Grant County remains a mystery. And, when, how, and where he died also remains unknown.
About The Author

Tom Rizzo blames the Durango Kid, Randolph Scott, Tim Holt, and Paladin for triggering his lifelong obsession with the American Frontier—and for convincing him that outlaws must face justice, no matter how many guns they carry or how great the odds.

Tom is a storyteller, blogger, and speaker. He writes novels, short stories, and nonfiction. His post-Civil War action-adventure novel, Last Stand At Bitter Creek ranked among the finalists for the 2013 Western Fictioneers' Peacemaker Award for Best First Novel, which has been revised and re-edited.

A former journalist, he worked as a news broadcaster, spent several years with the Associated Press, and worked as a freelance writer creating everything from magazine articles to advertising and promotional material for a broad range of businesses. During his writing journey, he met a colorful cast of characters who inspired him to consider telling stories of his own.

Tom grew up in Central Ohio, lived in Great Britain for several years, and now calls the West Valley area of Phoenix, Arizona, home. He is a member of Western Writers of America, Wild West History Association, and Western Fictioneers.

Learn more about Tom at www.TomRizzo.com where writes a blog about Frontier America, and also interviews veteran and emerging storytellers from various genre. Connect with him:

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On the following pages are excerpts from Tom’s other works: his debut novel Last Stand at Bitter Creek, which has been revised, re-edited, and re-introduced, and a sample of his three-volume package, Tall Tales from the High Plains & Beyond features dozens of quick-read stories about the Old West, crafted with a fictional technique that eases readers into the middle of the action. Each tale takes less that five minutes to read.
Chapter 1

Elk County, Pennsylvania
The Union Army officer considered indiscriminate killing distasteful and not a part of his moral makeup, but expediency—and reward—often dictated the course of events, even when his mission involved ambushing soldiers of the same army he served and fought for. He sat astride a black quarter horse, waiting for the soldier riding toward him.

“They're headed our way, Sir,” said the approaching rider.

“How long?”

“Half an hour or so, I'm guessing. You'll be able to see 'em down where the road kinda curves,” he said, pointing his finger.

The colonel swiveled in the saddle and scanned the timberland behind him where his handpicked band of cavalrmen had positioned themselves along the hillside bordering the winding ravine below.

“Head up top, with the others,” he told the soldier. “Let's get this over and done with and move out of here.”

He had forged his reputation on the ability to surprise the enemy, a tactic at which his men excelled, a tactic that served as the linchpin for most of their victories. The men waited, the snare in place, their backs against the sun.
The only difference today was the quarry. He glanced down at the trail awaiting the small convoy his men had been shadowing. Soon, soldiers of the same Union army would find themselves trapped.

* * *

Lieutenant Castleton rode point, leading two wagons equipped with false bottoms fortified by iron support frames that carried their hidden cargo along a rocky ravine trail surrounded by rugged and untamed woodland. Flanked by towering black maples, the trail they followed for several hours narrowed and gave way to a sharp bend. As he slowed the wagons to negotiate the curve, the guide riding beside him raised a hand in a signal to stop.

“We have company, Lieutenant,” said the guide, motioning to the tree line above them. “You expecting a special escort or something?”

Castleton looked up and raised a hand to his forehead to shield his eyes from the sunlight. Union soldiers on horseback—he couldn’t tell how many—fanned out along both sides of the gorge. A supplemental military escort made no sense, since it would call unnecessary attention to the expedition. Eight soldiers seemed sufficient for this assignment. He turned in the saddle, ordered his men to wait, and then called out to the soldiers flanking the ridge above him.

“Who’s in charge up there?” he called out.

No one answered.

Seconds later, he heard the rhythmic clicks of cartridges racked into the chambers of carbines and a chill crawled along his spine.

“Hold your fire!” said the lieutenant. “We’re Union! Hold your fi—”

Both sides of the steep ridge exploded. Castleton yanked back on the reins, trying to steer his horse out of the line of fire, but the gunshots spooked the animal and it jerked sideways, bucking him out of the saddle. A volley of bullets ripped into the earth beside him as he landed and rolled into thick foliage, taking cover behind a piece of rotted timber. Three of his men sprawled face down in the dirt, bleeding. Another screamed as he toppled from the nearest wagon, holding his stomach, hands soaked in blood.

Castleton burrowed against the ground, wishing he could disappear into it as the men above rained down more gunfire. Bullets ripped through tree limbs, scattering leaves that danced in the air before fluttering to earth. Baffled and frightened, he glimpsed the boots of another soldier running past him, cowered at the sound of more gunshots, and then saw the trooper spin like a tangled marionette before collapsing.

Somehow, he had to get away from this killing ground. He slipped the gun from his holster, crawled out of the bushes, and pushed himself along the ground, inching closer to one of the wagons where he could take cover. The crack of another gunshot startled him, just before hot metal drilled into his thigh. The impact slammed him face down, and he choked out blood. Dizzy, disoriented, and battling off nausea, he hugged the ground, holding his breath, trying to stay motionless.
Seconds later, a stillness fell across the bullet-riddled ravine, the odor of gunpowder in the air. He heard what sounded like horses and wagons moving through the foliage, their hooves crunching against twigs and dead leaves. There were voices. Maybe help was near.

“Get everything out of those wagons. Don’t waste a minute. I want us out of here by nightfall.” The man spoke with authority, someone accustomed to taking charge.

“You two,” said the same man, “search their pockets, satchels, saddlebags. You know the drill by now.”

Perspiration soaked Castleton's woolen collar, making him want to scratch. His thigh felt as if a metal band had been tightened around it. He craved water; just a taste, a few drops. Anything... Seconds later, he sensed the presence of someone standing over him, so close he could sniff the man's stale breath.

“Sergeant Kincaid.”

“Yes, Sir?”

“Tell me, Sergeant, do dead men breathe?”

“Don't think so, Sir,” said the second voice, followed by a soft snicker.

Castleton kept his eyes closed and, for some reason, remembered his mother once telling him as a child, What you can't see can't hurt you. “Make sure everyone here is dead.”

Castleton froze and his eyes snapped open. An inch from his face he saw a mud-splattered military boot. Then he heard the sound of a hammer being cocked, followed by a distant click...

Chapter 2

“I need you to handle one last assignment—a routine, but important, surveillance,” said Colonel Spencer Harrington, pressing the fingers of both hands together in front of his chin. “Consider it a personal favor. I’m sure you can wrap it up in a week or two.”

Grant Bonner, sitting across the table from the colonel, frowned. With the end of the war in sight, he had decided it was the right time to resign as a spy for the Union Army.

“I’ve already done my last job, Colonel,” he said, “and almost got myself killed in the process. “From what you told me, I'm not convinced an inexperienced corporal would have actually pulled the trigger.”

“With all due respect, Sir, you weren't there.”

His previous undercover mission had taken him to Richmond, the heart of the Confederacy, to spy on one of the South's major munitions plants. And he almost botched the operation when a young, frightened, and nervous soldier on
guard duty corralled him at gunpoint. Only Bonner's experience, coupled with a
dose of quick thinking, enabled him to escape.

“In any event, you survived,” said Harrington, “and I do need you for
something of critical importance.”

The two men sat inside a wooden hut, on a bone-cold and gray February
morning, at a campsite near the Ohio-Pennsylvania border. Bonner felt his hopes
sink. He wanted out. Another assignment was out of the question. After this last
escapade, he was losing confidence in his own ability. But, out of respect for
Harrington—who recruited him—he would at least listen.

“What's the objective?” Bonner asked, trying to conceal his frustration.
Three long years interrogating slaves, military deserters, and prisoners-of-war had
taken its toll. On different occasions, he had infiltrated southern society posing as
a newspaper reporter, clergyman, cook, and handyman. He had no desire to return
to a life where he spent much of the time looking over his shoulder, worrying
about being exposed as a spy.

“The objective is a who. Colonel Marcus Steele.”

“Kind of late in the day to be chasing after Confederates, don't you think?”

Harrington, chief of intelligence operations, sipped coffee from a simple
army-issue tin cup, and raised his eyebrows.

“He isn't Confederate.”

“One of our own?” Despite Bonner's initial reluctance, Harrington
succeeded in arousing his curiosity. He wondered why such a high-ranking Union
officer had attracted the agency's attention.

“All I'm asking is you keep an eye on him. Monitor his movements. Make
note of anyone he meets with. But, and this is important, don't engage him. It's
vital we not raise his suspicions in any way.”

“Who is he, and what's he done?”

“A couple of years ago, a squad of Union soldiers got ambushed and killed.
Cold-blooded murder. But we don't believe the Rebs had anything to do with it.
We think Steele orchestrated the ambush, leading a band of renegade Union
soldiers under his command.”

“Sounds more like a band of yellow-dog cowards.”

“The soldiers were escorting two wagons carrying a shipment of gold—
military pay—to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia.”

“Why didn't they use the train? It would have been faster, and safer.”

“From my understanding, there was some worry about Confederate
guerillas.”

“How much gold?”

“Two million dollars.”

Astonished by the amount, Bonner felt himself being drawn deeper into the
case, despite his intent to resign. It wouldn't hurt to listen, he decided.

“Who knew about the gold?” Bonner asked.
“Besides the president, a few bureaucrats, some military brass, and the lieutenant heading-up the convoy.”

“Why not just arrest Steele?” Bonner said; it seemed such an obvious solution.

“No proof. The army called in Pinkerton detectives, but they turned up nothing after more than a year of investigating. About the only thing we did learn was that Steele and his men happened to be the only Union squad in the area at the time.”

“Awfully slim evidence,” said Bonner, puzzled by the sudden renewed interest in the case. “And this seems like more than a routine surveillance.”

“Perhaps I understated it,” said Harrington, and shrugged.

“Anything more I should know?”

Bonner watched as Harrington drummed his fingers against the tabletop, frowned, and then shook his head, as if dismissing whatever he had been thinking.

“Just keep an eye on him.”

“Where is he now?”

“He and his men are heading to a demobilization camp outside Cincinnati. We want you to join up with the unit in a few days, and see what you can find out.”

Harrington stood up, a silent and not-so-subtle message: discussion over. The stiff canvas around them snapped and fluttered as gusts of wind whipped across the valley where they were bivouacked.

“Can you at least tell me something about him?”

“A strategic genius,” Harrington said in quick reply, and sat back down.

“His war record caught the eye of General Sherman, who appointed him to his own command staff—at least before he went rogue. A dangerous man surrounded by those who are loyal beyond question. Which will make your job that much more difficult.”

“Any particular cover I should use?”

“Since this mission involves our own army, no need for the usual phony identities and backgrounders. Find yourself a uniform and the shoulder boards for a first lieutenant.”

Grant stood up, rubbing the back of his neck.

“It's hard to understand why someone of his caliber would kill his own kind, and steal all that gold. What's he got up his sleeve?”

“Questions we're hoping to answer,” Harrington said.
Tall Tales From The High Plains & Beyond
Book One: The Unexplained And Other Stories

ONE

Cavern of the Skulls
A strong wind swept across the towering picturesque mountain, causing a sudden drop in temperature, deepening concern among the three prospectors who watched the October sky darken to an iron gray.

“Blizzard coming,” warned one of the three, trying to outshout the howling wind that whipped across the Colorado mountain pass.

As the swirling winds began buffeting them, S.J. Harkman, H.A. Melton, and E.J. Oliver realized they didn’t have much time to find shelter from the approaching 1880-winter storm. They were about two miles north of what today is known as Dead Man Camp, but it would be impossible to make it even that far under these conditions.

Huddled under on a ledge at the mouth of a canyon, one of the men spotted a crevice in the sheer granite wall. The trio made their way under the overhanging rock, found the gap, and squeezed through it, thankful for finding shelter and safety from the bitter weather. Once inside, they ignited torches to get their bearings and found they were standing in a narrow corridor with several passageways branching off it.

From the roar of the wind on the other side of the wall, they knew this would be their safe harbor until the weather abated, so they decided to spend the time exploring. As a precaution, they left one of the torches behind to mark the entrance, hoping it would burn long enough to help guide their return.

They agreed on which passage to follow, and moved deeper into the mountain until the trail opened into a large, vault-like chamber. The flickering
flames cast eerie shadows on the walls as each of them separated. Then, Melton stumbled over something on the earthen floor.

“Bones,” he said, looking down and seeing a skeleton.

“More over here,” said Oliver, who lowered his torch revealing the bones of five more skeletons.

A careful search of the area produced no clues as to the identities of the victims. The three of them dubbed the chamber, Dead Man Cave. The discovery was troubling, the concern reflected in their faces. Melton lifted his torch and noticed shelves had been carved into stonewalls, each of them supporting several odd-shaped stones. When he retrieved one, he was surprised by its weight.

Only when he began scraping away the surface grime did he and partners realize the stones were actually crude bars of gold. The other shelves, in fact, were filled with the same kind of objects. Tempering their excitement, they discussed the discovery, decided how to proceed, and waited for the storm to play itself out. Unlike the others who perished in the cave, they knew the way out.

Slipping five of the gold bars into their packs, they backtracked to the entrance, where the torch they left still burned. The storm had ended, leaving several inches of new-fallen snow along the mountain trail, but they managed to negotiate their way to Silver Cliff, in the Wet Mountain Valley where they took the gold stones to an appraiser.

After a few tests, he valued them at $900 each. The news was exhilarating. And, the future held the promise of greater riches and a dramatic change in lifestyle. The news of their discovery leaked out, and the prospectors became instant - but reluctant - celebrities, according to a reported in the Denver Post. Despite public pressure, the prospectors refused to divulge the location of the cave.

The three of them, however, drew up plans for a return trip to the secret treasure site as soon as the weather improved. In the Spring, when the snow melted, and flowers began to bloom, the small expedition headed back, excited by the potential of great riches awaiting them. And, then, the unthinkable happened. Neither Melton, nor Oliver, nor Harkman were able to locate the entrance to the remote cavern. The entire area looked different. The terrain had changed. They conducted repeated searches—sometimes bordering on panic and desperation—to find the narrow crevice that originally led them to the secret chamber. But all attempts failed. By them and others.

The Fairplay Flume, a weekly newspaper, wrote: “The men slipped off in the spring. But they never found the Dead Man Cave. . . . They went back frequently. Many others went back frequently. Nobody found anything.”

As far as anyone knows, the gold bars of Dead Man’s Cave still await discovery, still gathering dirt on the shelves inside a dark, mysterious, hidden cavern, littered with the bones of skeletons.
ONE
Tin Star: Men Behind the Badge

The sheriff sat at his desk fiddling with a tin can, cutting, and bending the metal to create a temporary badge that would identify him as the law.

Since the county never needed a sheriff before, no badge was available to wear by the man citizens just elected. The new lawman sometimes had second thoughts about the extent of his new duties and responsibilities. Enforcing the law was only part of the job. He also served as jailer and tax collector, and served warrants, subpoenas, and jury summons.

For the most part, the small and isolated early settlements across the frontier did a good job of self-policing. The majority of those looking to establish a new life and career in the West were honest and law-abiding. Most were friendly, hard working, and trusting—willing to give someone the benefit of the doubt.

Growth brought new challenges, including maintaining a peaceful community. Frontier families rarely secured their homes or businesses with locks. Businesses often granted credit without seeking collateral. Western communities took their time establishing a law enforcement arm, but with good reason.

Many settlers who founded the towns were immigrants who previously encountered police abuse and harassment. They harbored a natural distrust for the law. These citizens became the enforcers and often formed vigilante committees.
The need emerged for a formal entity to deal with issues of crime at the local level. The men who wore the badges had to be diligent when it came to enforcing the law. Any communication about crimes and criminals was almost non-existent. The telegraph helped, but not every community had the service. The U. S. mail provided lawmen with descriptions of criminals, their names and last known locations. Word-of-mouth helped, as did a crude likeness on a wanted poster. But, information traveled at a snail's pace and often was unreliable and outdated.

The most effective kind of sheriff took a proactive role in the enforcement of frontier justice. A good lawman monitored the arrival of strangers in their towns. He kept tabs on who they were, where they were staying, and why they were visiting.

Sometimes, of course, the town’s sheriffs just happened to be criminals themselves. A few changed, went straight, and did their best to uphold the law, and were good at their jobs. Others used their position for financial and political gain, and influence. It's no wonder some lawmen crossed to the dark side. The post of sheriff, although high in responsibility and visibility, proved a low-paying job.

As a general rule, some counties provided an annual salary of around $200, plus a percentage of any fees they collected. The fee system differed from territory-to-territory but, on average, generally reflected this schedule:

- Serving a warrant: $1
- Summoning a juror: $.50
- Summoning the grand jury: $5
- Summoning witnesses: $.50
- Attending court: $1.50
- Calling each witness in court: $.05
- Committing prisoners to jail: $1
- Daily support of prisoners: $.25
- Executing a death warrant: $15
- Travel allowance: $.05 a mile
- Reasonable expenses for other services not specified.

Sheriffs also functioned as the ex-officio tax assessor and collector. The many duties, low pay, and the risks involved often prompted good men to turn bad for the opportunity of more lucrative paydays.

The types of crimes lawmen dealt with were too widespread for just one person. The situation provided the perfect opportunity for the advent of bounty hunters. These individuals were in the hunt for the pay-off of reward money. Enterprising individuals created profit-minded private companies to help fill the gap, too, such as the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.

Little glamor was associated with role of sheriff. In reality, they spent much of their time serving subpoenas, and issuing summons. Lawmen were also
responsible for seizing property as directed by civil rulings. And, they often had to issue summons for a coroner’s jury. And, in some instances, they faced life-and-death situations.

Much of their daily work was mundane. As lawmen became more visible, daily life for the town's citizens improved for the better. Citizens began to recognize the need for a legitimate, organized enforcement process, leading to a more peaceful way of life.

Tall Tales From The High Plains & Beyond
Book Three: The Lawbreakers

ONE
A Tarnished Star

When the westbound Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Express rolled into a small cattle station in Coolidge, Kansas, on September 29, 1883, sometime around 2 a.m., three men boarded, guns drawn.

The leader, holding a pistol in each hand, shoved one of them into John Hilton's chest and ordered him to stop the train. Hilton, a family man with a wife and four children hesitated a few seconds. The delay cost him his life. Without saying a word, the gunman pulled the trigger, sending a bullet into Hilton's heart. The bandit turned to the fireman, George Fadel, and shot him in the mouth or the neck with the other gun.

Well Fargo Express Manager Samuel Peterson spotted the gang approaching the express car and began shooting. The two sides exchanged about
fifteen shots in a brief gun battle. Peterson sustained a slight wound but his aggressive action succeeded in driving the masked men away empty-handed.

Deputy Sheriff Dave Mather of Dodge City—also referred to as “Mysterious Dave”—assembled a posse and arrived in Coolidge to organize a search for the gunmen. Fadel, the train's fireman, managed to recover from his wound but wasn't much help in identifying the outlaws since they wore masks. Mather and his men eventually rounded up four suspects and put them behind bars in Dodge City.

Authorities tentatively identified the man they thought to be the one who killed the engineer as Lon Chambers. A former lawman, Chambers spent most of his career riding the Texas Panhandle as a cattle detective during the late 1870s. In 1881, he drifted into New Mexico where he joined Pat Garrett's posse to track down Billy the Kid and his gang. A couple of years after riding with Garrett, Chambers decided to take off the badge, form his own gang, and ride the outlaw trail.

No one knew the exact reason why Chambers switched sides. The decision most likely pivoted on crime being more lucrative than law enforcement. Little is known about the exploits of Chamber and his gang.

The attempted train robbery at Coolidge stood as its most daring caper. Although Wells Fargo wouldn't confirm it, rumors indicated the express car safe carried $30,000. In Dodge City, Chambers and the others went on trial. But no one could provide hard evidence this particular group was responsible for the holdup. As a result, all four were released.

After that point, Lon Chambers vanished. His name never became associated with another crime. He simply dropped out of sight—at least from the pages of history. Sadly, the cold-blooded outlaw who put an end to the life of engineer John Hilton got away with murder.

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