

## William "Bill" Doolin

The exact date of Doolin's birth has been lost over time and the date of his death, while not a true controversy, is listed as August 25th as often as August 24th, but the year is definitely 1896. At the age of 23, he left his sharecropping family in Arkansas and moved to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) and went to work as a cowboy on a ranch. After some scrapes with the law, he joined the notorious Dalton Gang, known as the "most cold-blooded gang in the west." The Daltons were led by brothers Bob, Grat, Emmett, and later Bill Dalton.

Over the next year Doolin rode with the Daltons as they robbed trains, depots, and banks in the Indian Territory. In October of 1892, the Daltons made a decision to rob two banks at the same time in Coffeyville. Not everyone, including Doolin, thought this to be a good idea as many of the members were known by citizens of Coffeyville and it was a risky proposition. Riding toward Coffeyville, Doolin claimed that his horse had come up lame and that he was going to a nearby ranch to replace it, saying he would catch up with the gang. Some historians claim it was just a way to get out of joining the gang in a robbery that he felt was doomed to failure. If so, he was right. The poorly planned, poorly executed attempt was recognized as a bank robbery by the local citizens and in a big shootout only Emmett Dalton escaped.



**Bill Doolin**

In 1893 Doolin married a preacher's daughter, but he was far from being reformed. He formed his own gang which became known as the "Wild Bunch" and included Charlie Pearce, "Red Buck" George Wightman, Little Bill Raidler, Bob Grounds, Tulsa Jack Blake, Little Dick West, Dynamite Dick, Arkansas Tom Jones, Bitter Creek George Newcomb, Alf Sohn, Ol Yantis and Bill Dalton who had never been a part of his brother's gang. For a period of time they were the most powerful gang in the southwest and terrorized southern Kansas and the Indian Territory.

In July of 1893, E. D. Nix was appointed U.S. Marshall for the Indian Territory under the jurisdiction of Judge Isaac Parker. Nix immediately put together a strong force of 100 deputies, including Bill Tilghman, Heck Thomas, and Chris Madsen. They were to bring law and order to the territory. In August of 1893, Nix learned that Doolin was in Ingalls, Indian Territory, and sent a deputy and a 13 man posse to capture him. Most historians consider it the biggest shoot out in southwest history and on September 1st three marshals were killed, two bystanders were killed and one wounded, three of the gang members were wounded and Arkansas Tom Jones was wounded and captured. Doolin was wounded but shot and killed Deputy Marshal Richard Speed and escaped with those gang members not killed.

Hearing that Doolin was in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Bill Tilghman was sent to arrest him and he did so. Unfortunately, the night before his trial was to begin, Doolin and several inmates escaped from the Guthrie, Oklahoma federal prison.

Heck Thomas received word that Doolin was hiding at his father-in-law's homestead near Lawson, Oklahoma. On the night of August 24 (or 25), 1896, Thomas and nine deputies, including his son Albert, surrounded the place and when Doolin came out of the barn Thomas called for him to surrender. Instead he shot at Thomas and the posse, in turn, shot and killed Doolin. The fatal shot was probably a shotgun blast from Heck Thomas. Once again controversy springs up and there are several versions of what happened in the shooting and whose shotgun killed him. The undertaker counted twenty buckshot wounds in his chest. One story says he died of natural causes and the posse shot him to collect the reward. By the end of 1898, all of the remaining former Wild Bunch gang was dead, killed in various shootouts with lawmen. Heck Thomas had tracked most of them; the remainder were tracked down and eliminated by lawmen Chris Madsen and Bill Tilghman, and other posses.



**Bill Doolin after the gunfight**

Doolin is buried in the Boothill section of Summit View Cemetery in Guthrie, Oklahoma along with two other members of his gang, Charlie Pearce and Little Dick West.

