

Tombstone by Tombstone

Davis K. Tutt

One of the great myths of the old west is the *mano a mano* gunfights between two men standing face-to-face, in the middle of Main Street, each waiting for the other to make the first move toward his gun. This is almost entirely Hollywood melodrama. The quickness of the draw was not the most important factor in a gunfight; accuracy was what normally determined the winner. That is not to say that they did not happen. One of the truly great old west historians, Bill O'Neal, says in his *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters*, "Of the 587 gunfights described in these pages, a mere handful satisfy the choreography of countless shootouts depicted in motion pictures, television series, and novels. One of the earliest man-to-man showdowns occurred on the town square of Springfield, Missouri, on July 21, 1865.

Davis Tutt was born in 1836 in Yellville, Marion County, Arkansas, to Hansford "Hamp" and Nancy Tutt. The Tutt family was one of wealth and political power in that part of Arkansas and Hamp even had visions of the governor's mansion in his head. From 1844 to 1850, a long and bloody family feud, known as the Tutt-Everett, was being fought. It was one of the most famous and deadliest feuds in the state. For the first few years the fights were mostly with fists and clubs. The first gunfight was on October 9, 1848, with one Everett being killed. Two days later the Everetts got revenge by killing two members of the King family who were Tutt supporters and wounding two other Tutt allies. The deadliest day of the feud occurred on July 4, 1849, when members of both clans met in downtown Yellville. When the ammunition ran out they went to hand-to-hand combat. When it was all over 10 people were dead. In September of 1850, Hamp was shot and killed from ambush as he walked along the road to the brick plant to check on the bricks he had ordered to build his new home. No arrests were ever made.

Little is known of Tutt's life before he joined the Confederate States Army in 1862. CSA records show that he enlisted for 12 months as a Private in Company A, 27th Arkansas Infantry. The 27th Arkansas participated in most of the principal battles fought in the Trans-Mississippi Department after September 1862, among which were the Battle of Prairie Grove, the Battle of Bayou Fourche, the Battle of Pleasant Hill, and the Battle of Jenkins Ferry. After his days in the Confederacy, Tutt and his family drifted into Missouri and settled in Springfield.

James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok served the Union during the Civil War and was a scout and wagon master in the early part of the war. There is a period of about one year when there is no record of his activities leading to the belief that he served as a spy against the Confederacy. In the later part of the war he worked in the Missouri area against the bushwhackers. After the war he also settled in the Springfield area.

Tombstone by Tombstone



Dave Tutt



Wild Bill Hickok

Tutt and Hickok both became well-known gamblers in the area, though Tutt was the better of the two. They were also both known to be ruffians. They became fairly close friends despite serving on opposite sides during the recent war. The two of them teamed up in January of 1865 to post a \$1,000 bond for a friend accused of grand larceny. Around the same time, Tutt was charged with stealing a horse and the court did nothing but order him to return the horse.

In the same month, Hickok was sent on another scouting expedition and supposedly ended up in Tutt's hometown of Yellville to spy on a Confederate Colonel by the name of Archibald S. Dobbin.

Post-war Springfield was a place of unease and unrest. It had been under Union control for most of the war, but Missouri as a state had been deeply divided and a significant number of Southern sympathizers lived in and around the area. Many complaints were filed against the Union officials citing "lawless and disorderly conduct on the part of the soldiers."

Tutt found himself arrested again and this time it was for resisting civil officers. On June 20, he was fined \$100 and placed in confinement until the fine and costs were paid. The next day his lawyers were able to get the verdict set aside and a new trial granted. Tutt went right back to gambling with Hickok.

By July of 1865, a friction that had been brewing between Tutt and Hickok was coming to a boil. As is so often the case, it seems to have begun over a woman. During the war, Hickok had a girlfriend named Susannah Moore. After they broke up, Tutt immediately began to court her. Hickok turned his attention to Tutt's sister and that upset Tutt and his mother, who did not take to Yankees of any kind.

The actual events on the fatal day of July 21 are told in differing ways, but they all boil down to a card game in an upstairs room of the Lyon House. Tutt probably was not in the card game as Hickok had reached the point where he refused to gamble with Tutt. Tutt took his revenge by trying to pick fights with Hickok and providing a bankroll for those who played against Hickok. On this particular day Hickok won about \$200 and Tutt insisted that Hickok pay him \$35 that he was owed. Hickok insisted it was only \$25. Tutt refused the lower amount and grabbed Hickok's Waltham watch and was going to hold it until he received his \$35. Hickok told him not to wear the watch in public

Tombstone by Tombstone

as everyone knew it was his watch and that Tutt's wearing of it would be embarrassing. Tutt informed him that he was going to wear it on the town square. Hickok replied, "If you do, I'll shoot you, and I warn you not to come across the square with it on."

Later that day Hickok went to the town square and people told him that Tutt was wearing the watch around town. Tutt's brother Lewis came by and Hickok told him to warn his brother not to come across the square. Lewis said that his brother could wear whatever he pleased. About that time, Tutt appeared at the southwest corner of the square and was walking toward Hickok. The crowd that had gathered around him began looking for safety. Hickok is supposed to have yelled, "Dave, don't come across here with that watch."

Both men reached for revolvers and it was reported that they both fired almost simultaneously. However, Hickok used his other arm for a prop and his round struck Tutt in the chest and he staggered into the courthouse doorway and died immediately.

Authorities were on the spot instantly and Hickok surrendered himself to military officers who turned him over to the sheriff. He was indicted for manslaughter and went to trial on August 4 where he pleaded self-defense and was acquitted. The verdict aroused mixed emotions as the jurors were all Union men. Some of the southern sympathizers and friends of Tutt threatened to lynch Hickok, but nothing happened. Hickok was called to Ft. Riley, Kansas, in January of 1866 and he was appointed a US Marshal and became a legend in his own time.

Tutt was originally buried in the Springfield City Cemetery. His brother Lewis disinterred his remains and moved them to the Maple Park Cemetery in Springfield.



Davis Tutt tombstone in Maple Park Cemetery Springfield, Missouri

Tombstone by Tombstone

Lewis Tutt was actually the half-brother of Davis Tutt and he was a former slave. He was the mulatto son of Hamp Tutt and was raised in servitude, but treated kindly by the family. When the Civil War broke out Hamp was long dead and Lewis, who had become proficient in agricultural pursuits, had charge of the farm. He remained on the farm throughout the war and would not leave his kindly, old mistress. After the war he established a home in Springfield where, according to the Pictorial and Genealogical Record of Greene County, Missouri, he was one of the leading colored men of Springfield. At the time, he was one of only two men of color who owned plots in the Maple Park Cemetery. It was in that plot that he buried Davis Tutt.

Source: Ozark Gunfights and Other Notorious Incidents, by Larry Wood; and **Marion County, Arkansas History** found on the Internet