

# Tombstone by Tombstone

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## Sebastian Lamar "Bass" Outlaw

What would cause a young man from a good Georgia family, a future sergeant in the Texas Rangers and a feared man with a pistol become the only Texas Ranger that ever killed another Texas Ranger? The same thing that has befallen many a good man, that old demon rum and it took Bass Outlaw the same as it has so many others.

In 1932 Eugene Cunningham, one of the finest writers and historians of the old west, wrote a story about Outlaw in one of the most popular non-fiction westerns ever written, *Triggernometry: A Gallery of Gunfighters*. He titled Bass' story **The Little Wolf** and it was a perfect description of his subject because like a prairie wolf he was brave, wily and determined in battle. One of the things that make Cunningham's work so valuable, besides his research, is that he knew and had access to many of the people who were still alive that knew and associated with the people he wrote about. In this case, he had access to the famed Texas Ranger and lawman, Jim Gillett, and several other contemporaries of Outlaw.

It has been said that as a pistolero few men could match Bass in either speed or bravery. Unfortunately he had a bad temper, would hold a grudge forever and was constantly quarreling with those around him.

The Georgia native moved to Texas and in 1885 enlisted in Company E of the Texas Rangers. Two years later he was in D Company under the command of Captain Frank Jones. He must have had something going for him as he was promoted to corporal in 1890 and then to sergeant when Sergeant Fusselman was killed in a battle with Mexican horse thieves.

The promotion to sergeant made him the senior non-commissioned officer in the company and placed him in charge when Captain Jones had to go to El Paso on a business trip. The Company was camped outside Alpine, Texas, at the time and with the departure of the captain, Outlaw headed for town and the saloons. He began to drink and that was something that not one of the Texas Ranger Captains would allow. He ran into an old former Ranger from the Indian fighting days by the name of Abe Anglin. Outlaw and Anglin got into a card game and as the night went on Outlaw's losing and drinking were both steady. By midnight all the winnings were in front of Anglin, and Outlaw had been virtually cleaned out.

Anglin reached out to take in his winnings while Outlaw reached out with his left hand to take them away and put his right hand on his pistol. Anglin was unarmed but the old Indian fighter was not going to be intimidated. The argument between the two got hot and heavy and the bartender sent someone to fetch Sheriff Jim Gillett. Gillett was a famed lawman in the southwest having served six years with the Texas Rangers and several years as marshal in El Paso. Today he is a member of the Texas Rangers Hall of Fame.

When Gillett entered the saloon, the argument between Outlaw and Anglin was still hot and heavy. Gillett caught Outlaw by the shoulder using his left hand and keeping his gun hand free. He walked Outlaw into the street where he severely upbraided him for starting a ruckus in the saloon, but especially for being the acting commander of a company of Texas Rangers and being drunk while on duty. Outlaw was drunk enough to be in a foul mood, but not drunk enough to force a gunfight with this sheriff.

Outlaw returned to camp and when Captain Jones returned to Alpine a prominent citizen, not Gillett, told him all about the incident. He called Outlaw to his office and, after reminding him that he had been told that the next drinking incident would be his finish, ordered him to sit down and write out his resignation. After glaring at one another for a few moments, Outlaw wrote out his resignation letter and received a voucher for his earned pay. Then he left the office in a fury, but not so much at Jones as at Gillett who he was sure had ratted him out.

Outlaw took his voucher to J. D. Jackson, a local merchant that he considered a friend and to whom he was in debt. He asked Jackson to cash the voucher and keep what was owed him. He told Jackson it was his last paycheck, that he was fired and that he was going to kill Gillett for telling Jones about the affair in the saloon. Jackson assured Outlaw

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that Gillett was not the person who told Jones. Jackson could not give the name of the person who did tell, because that would sign that man's death warrant. Outlaw agreed that Jackson could go and confront Gillett with the question and if he denied it Outlaw would accept it. Rather than answer Jackson, Gillett went straight to Outlaw and told him he had no reason to tattle on him. He also told him, "... if you do start trouble around town, I'll know how to end it." With two such men involved there is no way to know how it would have ended. Perhaps two lives were saved.

Outlaw hung around town for a while, broke, nothing to do, going from saloon to saloon with something bothering him. He was remembering something and he couldn't get it out of his head. One day he went to Gillett and talked to him like there had never been any difference between them. He said, "Captain, I'm going out of town for a trip. I need a saddle-gun to carry. I sold mine when I got hard up and I wonder if you'd loan me that .44 carbine of yours. I'll take good care of it." That carbine was Gillett's most prized possession. It was an 1873 model Winchester number 13401 and the finest saddle-gun made at the time. Gillett had killed the notorious outlaw Dick Dublin with it and also had used it to kill a big Apache warrior. But he loaned it to Outlaw who used it to kill a deer with the last shot ever made with that Winchester.

Outlaw thought no one knew what was on his mind, but Gillett thought he knew even better than Outlaw knew. A few years back, Outlaw and Captain Jones had chased a group of train robbers from the point of the robbery southwest toward the Rio Grande River. The bandits caught sight of the Rangers, burned their camp and rode off hell-bent. Sheriff Gillett thought he knew the identity of the bandits and went on several scouts with the Rangers in search of them. They were never found. The money never showed up anywhere. The money bags were found near the camp, but instead of money they held sugar and coffee. So the rumors were that the money had been buried in the cane breaks near the camp. And this is what Outlaw was hunting for. He would go out and search for a while, come back and loaf around town, head out again on the search until he finally had to give it up and find a job.

Dick Ware was another famous former Texas Ranger. Ware was the Ranger who killed Sam Bass back at Round Rock. Now he was a United States Marshal and he hired Bass Outlaw as a deputy. In the meantime Captain Jones had been murdered by Mexican bandits near San Elizario, and Captain John R. Hughes was now commanding Company D of the Rangers. Captain Hughes made Outlaw a special Ranger.

Marshal Ware had to attend court in El Paso on April 4, 1894, and he took Outlaw and Deputy Bufe Cline with him. There had been a lot of hard work putting together the cases that Ware was taking to court. Cline had done all the tedious work and the job of serving the subpoenas was given to him as was the custom. The deputy who served the subpoenas was the one paid for it. This put Outlaw in a really foul mood. Ware's explanation did nothing to soothe the little fellow.

Outlaw ran into an acquaintance and another fellow out on the street and he aired his grievance to them. When it seemed as if Outlaw was about to go into the courthouse and shoot it out with Ware, they tried to talk him out of it and suggested he go to his room. That seemed to remind Outlaw of his favorite girl down at Tillie Howard's sporting house on Utah Street.

As the three passed the Bank Saloon they met John Selman, another noted shootist who would kill John Wesley Hardin within the next year. When the four of them reached Tillie's place she informed Outlaw that his favorite 'lady' was busy with another client and would not let him interrupt. Outlaw left the others in the parlor and marched around the house. Almost immediately a pistol shot was heard and a chain reaction was set off.

Selman immediately ran for the back of the house, Tillie was well aware of Bass' behavior when drinking and started blowing her police whistle as loudly as possible and Texas Ranger Private Joe McKidric and Constable Chavez jumped the fence into Tillie's backyard.

When McKidric saw that it was Outlaw shooting off his pistol aimlessly and that he was half-drunk, he was not too alarmed. He suggested that Outlaw go sleep it off and not

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disturb the peace again. Outlaw was in no humor for suggestions, instead he said, "You want something, do you?" He then shot the young Ranger in the head and then fired a round into the body before it could even fall.

The group that saw what happened was initially stunned at the sight of the young ranger being murdered. The first to recover was the old seasoned veteran Selman, who started to draw his weapon. Outlaw caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and turned and fired without time to aim. The first bullet caught Selman in the right leg. Outlaw was firing as fast as he could cock and pull the trigger. The second bullet caught Selman in the same leg. Now Selman had his pistol out and his round went through Outlaw's body about one inch above the heart. Outlaw managed to jump the fence and run about a block when Ranger McMahan from Company D arrested him.

McMahan seeing that he was seriously or fatally wounded helped him into the backroom of a nearby saloon. According to witnesses that gathered around the scene, Outlaw raised himself up and said, "Go gather my friends around me, for I know I must die." His self-diagnosis was correct, but his request for friends was just so much wasted breath.

Some claim he was buried in an unmarked grave in El Paso's famous Concordia Cemetery. But records at the Evergreen Alameda Cemetery in El Paso indicate that he was the third person buried there. That grave was probably unmarked for several years, but now has a marker.

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