The Death of Lonnie McFarlane

By : Steve Balsky

Here I am back in Western territory. Enjoy this tale of two cowpokes and a bank robbery gone wrong

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/Steve Balsky

Copyright © Steve Balsky, 2013
Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

The Death of Lonnie McFarlane

The Death of Lonnie McFarlane

I was very uncomfortable being in a suit. I was used to wearing a red checkered button shirt with cotton pants and my Calvary hat when I was riding. In court, the situation is slightly different.

â The court comes to order!â bellowed Judge Jules Wilsolm.

I had no lawyer to defend me. Couldnâ t afford one. Didnâ t need one. I figured it was pretty much an â open and shutâ case as far as that term goes.

â The court will proceed!â Wilsolm hollered, banging his gavel in the process. â Accused today is William (Wil) Murray of the armed robbery of the First National Bank of Douglas, Arizona at 11 0â clock a.m. on the day of our Lord the 27th August, 1890.â

A hush came over the crowd.

After swearing in, he continued, â So, Mr. Murray, do you understand why you are here today?â

â Yes your honor, I do,â I said, playing with my hands.

â Could you please remove your hat? This is a court of law boy, and you need show some respect.â

â Yesâ m I will,â I replied, removing my signature brown Civil War Cavalry hat. I nervously fingered the rims of my hat as his harangue continued.

â Mr. Murray, I understand you have no legal representation.â

â Sir, I do not,â I said with head bowed.

â You ever in the military?â

â Yes sir, 10th Cavalry Regiment.â

He cleared his throat and continued. â So, how do you plead, son?â

â I plead guilty as charged, your honor.â

I heard a few gasps emanate from the crowd.

The old manâ s eyebrows lifted. He smiled. â Well, that there is somethinâ new. I am so used to hearinâ people on the stand sayinâ theyâ s innocent I damn nearly fell off my chair! Good for you, son.â

â Sir,â I replied, head still bowed.

â Whyâ dja do it?â

â Needed the money, sir.â

â For what?â

â Livinâ .â

He coughed into a large white fist and continued. â Livinâ eh? 500 hundert dollars is a lot for just a livinâ . Iâ d say thatâ s a damn good fortune, that there is. You didnâ t kill anybody?â

â Sir, I did not.â

â What about youâ reâ ¦compatriot?â

â Sir?â

â Your partnerâ ¦whatâ s his name nowâ ¦â he idly scanned a few documents before him while squinting his eyes to make out the fine print. â Lonnie â Redâ McFarlane. What about him?â

â He done passed on, sir,â I replied. I rotated the hat between my fingers.

â You mean he ***died***?â he asked, eyes aimed below his spectacles.

â Yes sir, he died.â

â And you killed him?â

â Sir, I did not,â I replied.

The judge reclined in his chair, raised his eyebrows and said, â Do tell.â

So I did.

Lonnie and I each had our own horse, his a black Mustang, mine a white Appalooza. The wind was blazing through our hair and I struggled to keep that Calvary hat plain on my head as we tried to outrun the law.

The bullets whizzed past, some I even felt by my left earlobe, giving the eerie sensation that I was gonna die at any minute.

I dug my heels into my mareâ s side, hearing her wince with pain and pick up the speed as we approached the moving train.

The train from the Southwestern Railroad depot was just leaving the dock when we arrived. It was no time at all until our horses were able to hustle upon the side of the train, searching out the best car to jump aboard. Me carrying the sack of loot strapped to my side, Lonnie from what I could see amidst the chaos close behind, left hand reached over his torso and gripping his right abdomen.

I finally came to a car with the door slightly ajar. I knew there couldnâ t be anything of value in there apart from chicken feed or supplies of some sort so I steered my stallion close to the gate.

I reached as best I could to grasp the car handle, with a bullet narrowly missing the brim of my hat. My grubby fingers tried in vain to both steer the horse and reach out to grab the handle.

Finally when I got a decent grip, I pushed the door open and leapt off the horse into the car, rolling over in the process. Dollar bills rained out of sack I was carrying and I frantically ran around the car, gathering them up. I could feel the train was picking up speed and I didnâ t want Lonnie to be left behind.

I stuck my head out of the car, hand on my hat and there he was, the colour rapidly draining out of his face.

â Lonnie, give it a bit more, you can do it!â I screamed as his horse pushed every ounce of power closer and closer to that door.

I was finally able to grasp his left arm and mustered the strength to hoist his 220 pound frame into the car. He shrieked in pain as he rolled on the floor, his face a mask of torture. Bullets whizzed by outside the car as I frantically pulled the door closed.

I knew the lawmen were way too far behind to get to us. Maybe at the next station, but that was a ways awayâ ¦. Morenci, Arizona a distance of 166 miles. I planned on getting off a lot sooner than that.

I looked over at Lonnie. His nickname of â Redâ was earned by the mass of wild red hair that now was protruding from all angles. His breathing was labored and he just stared up at the roof of the car, hand still firmly covering his lower right abdomen.

â Hey, hey there now, â I said, kneeling down beside him, voice lowered. â Youâ ll be alright.â

I could see the crimson fluid seeping out between his fingers.

He mustered a shallow laugh. â No I wonâ t Wil. I is dyinâ here.â

I threw my hat off to the corner of the dimly lit car and said, â Oh no, ya ainâ t! Iâ ll.. Iâ ll take you to a doctor when we get off this here train, heâ ll patch yaâ ll up and then we can high-tail it to El Paso.â

The sweat beads were forming abundantly on his brow. â Doctor? Shit Wil, I ainâ t seeinâ no doctor,â he wheezed. He managed a cough and I could make out bloody bubbles come from between his lips. â â Sides, they gonna tell the law â bout us for certain.â

â Aw, no they wonâ t,â I started. â Doctorâ s gotta keep that stuff private, dont'cha know? Like the preachers.â

I reached into the bag of loot and ruffled through the crumpled bills. A wide grin was plastered all over my face, making my moustache bend at an odd angle.

â Red, we got ourselves here four or five hundred dollars, I figure. Shit, we is rich!â

He smiled and turned to me. â You sure is right about that Wil. We is rich.â

I got to my feet and started pacing along the racing car trying to figure out what my next move was going to be. There was no way Red was gonna make it. No way. I couldnâ t possibly manage the money and this huge lummox that was shot in the belly. I was gonna have to leave him. I had no other choice.

I glanced over at him. He was now passed out, forehead glistening. His hand had dropped from his belly and I could see that red pool expanding across his midsection in sharp contrast to his white shirt. Thankfully I could see he was still breathing.

I mentally tried to calculate just where we were right about now and when I was gonna have to exit. Time went on and I figured we had been in the cab for just over an hour. Red was still out cold and the bleeding hadnâ t let up.

I reached into the bag and grabbed a fistful of dollar bills. About $ 100 Iâ d say. I stuffed them into the breast pocket of Lonnieâ s white shirt and whispered into his right ear, â I didnâ t forget about you, old man.â I double checked his chest to see that he was still breathing. I then gathered up my hat in the corner of the car and firmly placed it on my head.

With that, I hauled open the car door and the wind hit me like jackhammer. I braced my hand over my hat with the bag looped over my arm and I leapt for my destiny outside the speeding train.

â So, you left your partner for broke?â The Judge queried.

â Yessir I did,â I replied.

He nodded and idly made some notes on a pad that I was not privy to see.

He cleared his throat and continued, â So you made your way to the El Paso border and was picked up in La Guna, Texas?â

â Yes,â I nodded in agreement.

Judge Wilsolm shifted in his seat and continued.

â So, you left a dying man, that was your partner in crime no less and made your way to the border so you could be free?â

I looked him straight into his grey eyes and replied, â Sir, I did. No other choice.â

He nodded solemnly and said the last words I was expecting, â What if I told you that no body was ever found on that there train?â

â Sir?â

His eyes narrowed as he viewed me beneath his spectacles. â You heard me boy. No body was found on that train in any car at anytime. I have here a sworn statement from the engineer, Patrick Dochetry that such

was the case.â

He made it, I thought.

The sonofabitch made it.

He took my money and heâ s out there riding and heâ s gonna bust me from the clink when he can.

â I donâ t know nothinâ about that sir,â I replied in the court.

Judge Wilsolm made some notes and then proclaimed, â William Murray, I hereby sentence you to two years in Yuma prison, Yuma, Arizona. Eligibility for parole in 6 months.â He banged his gavel and that was that.

I was escorted off by two guards, but I was smiling. Old Red, he never forgot about a friend. He knew I had to do what I had to do and would have respected it. I love him as I love my mama and he knows it. Some day in the next six months heâ s gonna save me. Either that or Iâ m gonna die trying.

FIN

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2013-05-24 05:39:28