

HISTORY

Point and Shoot

If you're going to have a gunfight, you might as well make it memorable — 127 years ago this month, the Earps et al. did just that.

IT TAKES LONGER TO TELL THE STORY than the event itself lasted. Gunfights are like that. In this case, the duel was done in 30 seconds, and by the time the smoke had cleared, three men were dead and two lay wounded.

One hundred and twenty-seven years ago this month, the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday took an October afternoon walk on the streets of Tombstone. It ended in the most famous shootout in Old West history — the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

Some say the face-off between the Clantons (Ike and Billy), who were joined by the McLaurys (Frank and Tom), and the Earps (Virgil, Morgan and Wyatt), who were joined by their friend Doc Holliday, started brewing seven months earlier, on March 15, 1881. That's when an attempted stagecoach robbery took place, leaving two people dead and no sign of the prime suspect.

Over the spring and summer, accusations, bribery and misinformation related to the robbery fueled the flames of the feud, and hostilities between the two groups increased. By October 25, the tension on the streets of Tombstone was palpable.

At midnight on the 25th, Ike Clanton and Holliday had a run-in, and after an all-night drinking binge, Ike was itching for a fight. By the morning of the 26th, he was shooting off his mouth and threatening to kill the Earps and Holliday.

Around noon that day, Virgil Earp, the town marshal, got wind of Clanton's threats and called on Morgan and Wyatt as backups, in case a fight was to break out. On the other side of town, around 2:30 in the afternoon, Ike's younger brother, Billy, and Tom's



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(Left to right) Tom McLaury, Frank McLaury and Billy Clanton

brother, Frank, rode into town to join ranks with Ike and Tom.

While the Clantons and McLaurys gathered in a vacant lot on Fremont Street — a block away from the O.K. Corral — the Earps and Holliday went looking for them. Witnesses reported that as the four men walked down Fremont Street, Morgan said to Holliday, "Let 'em have it."

The opposing men stood only 6 feet apart, and when the gunfire ended, Billy Clanton and Tom and Frank McLaury lay dead. Virgil and Morgan Earp were wounded, and Doc Holliday was grazed by a bullet. Ike had retreated when the shooting started.

The next day, the bodies of the three dead men were dressed in suits, laid out in caskets, and put on public display at the Ritter and Ream Funeral Parlor with a sign above them that read: "Murdered in the Streets of Tombstone. . ."

What led to the violent showdown has been debated by witnesses, historians and Wild West aficionados for more than a century. Some blame Ike Clanton, some blame Wyatt Earp, and some blame Doc Holliday. Regardless of who instigated things, their places are etched in history, and the legend lives on.

■ *Tombstone celebrates its colorful history during HellDorado Days (October 17-19), which includes a re-enactment of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. For information, visit tombstonevigilantes.com.*

— Sally Benford

50
years ago
in arizona highways

U.S. Route 70 once crossed the length of Arizona from east to west. Today, the interstates have taken over. Nonetheless, there's still a lot to see along the older roads, and that was the focus of our October 1958 issue, which looked at the points of interest along U.S. 70, from Duncan on the state's eastern border to Ehrenberg near the California state line.



THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

- On October 10, 1918, two dozen cases of Spanish influenza were reported in Tucson, prompting city and state officials to enact strict quarantine measures and close "all places of public gatherings," such as schools, churches and theaters.
- On October 12, 1940, Western film actor Tom Mix died when his 1937 Cord 812 Phaeton crashed at a construction site on State Route 79 near Florence. A historical marker now identifies the site of the crash.
- On October 16, 1931, Winnie Ruth Judd of Phoenix murdered her roommates and cut their bodies into pieces. She then stuffed the body parts into a shipping trunk, earning her the morbid nickname, "the Trunk Murderess."