

“EVERY OFFICER IN THE TOWN WAS THROWING LEAD AFTER US...”

By ANDY ADAMS

Excerpted from *The Log of a Cowboy*.

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[Ed. note: In this passage, Andy and his friends have just completed their cattle drive and are ready to have some fun in Dodge City. A more experienced cowhand tries to give them some insight into the talents of the Dodge City police force - probably the most effective city police force in western history.]

Before the rig left us in the morning, McNulta, who was thoroughly familiar with Dodge...in friendly and fatherly spirit, seeing that many of us were youngsters, had given us an earnest talk and plenty of good advice.

“I’ve been in Dodge every summer since ‘77,” said the old cowman, “and I can give you boys some points. Dodge is one town where the average bad man of the West not only finds his equal, but finds himself badly handicapped. The buffalo hunters and range men have protested against the iron rule of Dodge’s peace officers, and nearly every protest has cost human life. Don’t ever get the impression that you can ride your horses into a saloon, or shoot out the lights in Dodge; it may go somewhere else, but it don’t go there. So I want to warn you to behave yourselves. You can wear your six-shooters into town, but you’d better leave them at the first place you stop, hotel, livery, or business house. And when you leave town, call for your pistols, but don’t ride out shooting; omit that. Most cowboys think it’s an infringement on their rights to give up shooting in town, and if it is, it stands, for your six-shooters are no match for Winchesters and buckshot; and Dodge’s officers are as game a set of men as ever faced danger.”

Nearly a generation has passed since McNulta...gave our outfit this advice...and in setting down this record, I have only to scan the roster of the peace officials of Dodge City to admit its correctness. Among the names that graced the official rosters, during the brief span of the trail days, were the brothers Ed, Jim, and "Bat" Masterson, Wyatt Earp, Jack Bridges, "Doc" Holliday, Charles Bassett, William Tillman, "Shotgun" Collis, Joshua Webb, Mayor A.B. Webster, and "Mysterious" Dave Mather. The puppets of no romance ever written can compare with these officers in fearlessness.

[As you might have guessed, Adams and his friends did not follow the above advice. One young cow hand had been "insulted" by a "bouncer" in a saloon and decided on the way out of town to get a measure of revenge. The other cattlemen are going to support their friend - of course...]

We circled round the town to a vacant lot within a block of the rear of the dance hall. Honeyman was left to hold the horses; then, taking off our belts and hanging them on the pommels of our saddles, we secreted our six-shooters inside the waistbands of our trousers. The hall was still crowded with the revelers when we entered, a few at a time, Quince Forrest and Priest being the last to arrive. Forrest had changed hats with The Rebel, who always wore a black one, and as the bouncer circulated around, Quince stepped squarely in front of him. There was no waste of words, but a gun-barrel flashed in the lamplight, and the bouncer, struck with the six-shooter, fell like a beef. Before the bewildered spectators could raise a hand, five six-shooters were turned into the ceiling. The lights went out at the first fire, and amidst the rush of men and the screaming of women, we reached the outside, and within a minute were in our saddles. All would have gone well had we returned by the same route and avoided the town; but after crossing the railroad track, anger and pride having not been properly satisfied, we must ride through the town.

On entering the main street, leading north and opposite the bridge on the river, somebody of our party in the rear turned his gun loose into the air. The Rebel and I were riding in the lead, and at the clattering of hoofs and shooting behind us, our horses started on the run, the shooting by this time having become general. At the second street crossing, I noticed a rope of fire belching from a Winchester in the doorway of a store building. There was no doubt in my mind but we were the object of ...that carbine, and as we reached the next cross street, a man kneeling in the shadow of a building opened fire on us with a six-shooter. Priest reined in his horse, and not having wasted cartridges in the open-air shooting, returned the compliment until he emptied his gun. By this time every officer in the town was throwing lead after us, some of which cried a little too close for comfort. When there was no longer any shooting on our flanks, we turned into a cross street and soon left the lead behind us.

[Fortunately, other than a cowboy's horse, no one died during this incident. Now you know why they call it the Wild West!]