

Death Valley Daze and the Ambush

A Death Valley Scotty Tall Tale

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The whiskey jug was getting empty as the day wore on and the two men kept pulling on it. The sun was hot, beating relentlessly down on them, and the desert was dead of sound. Why Death Valley Scotty had sent them to this particular spot for the ambush made very little sense. It was miles from no where in the wash they called "Wingate." But what the heck, Scotty's old drinking buddy, Key, wasn't going to argue with him. And the drunk he brought along for company didn't care one way or the other.

It didn't matter. Sooner or later the wagon would come down the wash and the shooting would begin. It was simple plan and the more the man thought about it, the more he pulled on the whiskey jug. Scotty was late and the two drinkers were really tired of hiding behind the pile of rocks up on the side of the wash. They had a good view of the wash, and their field of fire was perfect. Their six-shooters were getting hot lying exposed to the sun. It was hell-fire past time for something to happen.

The reason for the ambush was complicated. It was typical of Death Valley Scotty to exaggerate the truth now and then. But this time he had really stretched things. He had a bunch of foreign investors convinced that he had a major gold mine located in the hills around Wingate Wash. Some say he had gone so far as to salt the mine with nuggets and other gold chips. Who knows? One thing for sure, these foreign investors were talking big money and they wanted to see the mine first.

Daniel E. Owen, a Boston mining engineer, was entrusted to represent the investors and accompany Scotty to the mine. It was a long trip out to Death Valley, but necessary. No money would change hands until the tremendous gold find could be validated by Mr. Owen. So Scotty laid his plan.

He knew he couldn't take Owen and his party to the mine....hell, there was no such massive gold find in all the Panamint mountain range put together. He had to scare them off; but he had to do it in such a way as to not raise suspicion.

So he had hired the two ambush men to act like outlaws -- crazed, wild and fast-on-the-trigger outlaws. He wanted them to descend upon the mining party and fire gun shots (wildly in the air) that would convince everyone to turn around and head for home! It was simple. The ambush men figured they'd throw in a few hair-raising screams as they fired off their six-shooters. But alas, things happened.

As Scotty and the mining party came lumbering down the wash in the old wagon pulled by a mule, the heat was enough to drive away a sane man. But this Owen guy was insistent on making it all the way to the mine. Scotty scanned the berm of the wash looking for his

"outlaws." Scotty's brother, Warner sat next to him on the front seat of the wagon. The Owen party rode in the back. No one expected what happened next.

By now the two ambush men were pretty far gone into the jug. They had not brought water, so the whiskey consumption acted even quicker than normal to get them higher than a buzzard. Both men wiped their sweaty hands on their breeches as they heard the wagon rolling over the rocks not far down the wash. Scotty never saw them until they jumped up from behind the rock escarpment and started blazing away. It was a fusillade of shots, screaming and mule braying!

Scotty felt rounds flying by his head and knew instantly that these two yard-birds were going to hurt somebody if they didn't cease firing. He didn't know they were drunk, but he sure as hell knew they were doing more than scaring the passengers. Suddenly Scotty's brother lurched to one side and began wailing in pain while clutching at his midsection. Scotty looked and couldn't believe it. His brother had been seriously hit in the groin area by a gun shot. He was bleeding profusely. Scotty knew the farce was up. He jumped up and yelled: "Stop, stop shooting, you fools! You've hit my brother!"

Well, it didn't take a genius to figure out at that moment that the ambush had been a hoax....as was the mine. Daniel Owen and his party saw Death Valley Scotty for what he was. No money was going to change hands. Oh, and Scotty's brother? Well, he made it back to civilization, but nearly lost his leg as part of the deal, and ended up suing Scotty and the whole group for damages and medical expenses. And the fate of Scotty? Well, for years he was still telling tales and convincing folks that he has other mines just as rich - - maybe worth investing in? Some say he still wonders the hills around Wingate Wash. Some say his gold is still undiscovered.

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