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## Review - Book Outlines Marshal's Life

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## Book Outlines Marshal's Life

— by *Dee Ann Ray*

"Tall, handsome, soft-spoken, and deadly with a gun." Care to read on? A reader can do so in Glenn Shirley's new book about Heck Thomas, one of Oklahoma's famed territorial marshals.

Legends have centered around the man Heck Thomas. Glenn Shirley has used as his resource material the diaries, journals, letters, and other sources of Heck Thomas' times.

The resulting book presents the true story of a genuine hero of the Western frontier, a man of integrity who made his lifework keeping the law.

When the Civil War ended, Heck Thomas was 18 years old. He became a policeman in Atlanta and thereafter worked in that capacity somewhere until long after the turn of the twentieth century.

He was an express manager in Texas and helped track down Sam Bass. He operated his own detective agency in Fort Worth; while in detective work, he tracked down and killed the notorious Lee gang.

From 1886 to 1892, he rode out of the court of the famous "hanging judge," Isaac Parker in Fort Smith; and from 1893 - 1900, he served under every United States marshal appointed to the Oklahoma Territory.

He became chief of police in Lawton the first time after the opening of the Kiowa-Comanche country; after several terms, he served as deputy United States marshal again for western district until his death.

Mostly, Thomas rode the prairie alone. He would round up men for whom he had warrants and bring them to whatever court in the territory was proper. His manhunts centered around the most dangerous of the outlaws, but he always gave them an opportunity to surrender and live. When he was forced to, he shot to kill.

He was not untouched by all this; he received wounds too. But his life on the prairie, sleeping night after night on the ground and living in the saddle with little time left for rest and relaxation, left him hardened and hard to kill. His body would later pay for the abuse it got by being racked with rheumatism.

In his later years, he had little to show for his heroic deeds; for he never profited at the expense of the public, and he never gathered in ill-gotten gains. He died as he had lived, a man of modest means.

Heck Thomas left behind a legacy of tales to stir men's blood and an untarnished record of courage and leadership as a fearless officer of the law. Some people remember him by saying, "He did more to Christianize the Indian nations than all the ministers who were sent there."

All of Glenn Shirley's books make good reading. He has a touch about his writing that adds zest to the reading and which makes the characters bigger than life.

An OU Press book, HECK THOMAS, FRONTIER MARSHAL is available through the offices of the Press for \$15.95 (1005 Asp Avenue; Norman, OK 73019). It will be money well-spent.