

# Dentist innocent in man's death

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A Mullins dentist was acquitted of murder this weekend after a jury agreed the shooting of a fellow duck hunter was an accident.

Bruce Bryant, 45, had faced up to life in prison if convicted of murder, possession of a firearm while in the commission of a violent crime and pointing a firearm.

A Marion County jury deliberated 3½ hours Saturday before reaching a verdict.

Bryant could not be reached for comment Monday. His attorney, state Rep. Morgan Martin, D-Conway, said Bryant was "obviously relieved" with the verdict.

"He has believed in his innocence from the beginning," Martin said.

James Theodore Thompson, 27, of Florence County suffered a shotgun blast to his chest on the night of Dec. 15 at Parker's Landing, nine miles off U.S. 378 in Marion County.

He died early the next morning in the emergency room of Conway Hospital.

The circumstances of the shooting involved a hunting trip, too much Lord Calvert whiskey and a steak dinner.

Bryant and a friend, Robert Mark Stanton of Hartsville, met Thompson and Thompson's friend Ansel McLamb while on a hunting trip. Bryant and Stanton invited Thompson and McLamb for supper in Bryant's camper.

The four drank Lord Calvert whiskey and played cards. Trouble started at the dinner table. There were two steaks, which were cut into four portions.

According to testimony, Thompson started sticking his fork at the other men's food.

Bryant pulled out a .25-caliber pistol, then threw Thompson and McLamb out of the camper. They walked out, protesting. Bryant grabbed a shotgun and went outside.

Stanton testified that Bryant intentionally shot Thompson, but Bryant and McLamb testified Stanton grabbed Bryant and the gun went off accidentally.