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THE TEXAS RANGERS

The body of armed horsemen called the Texas Rangers was like no other cavalry in the world. The Ranger resembled the Rurale of Mexico in some respects, and he has often been called a Cossack, but the truth is that the Texas Ranger never had a counterpart, in any age or any country. The Ranger was not a soldier, nor a policeman, nor a guerrilla, but rather a combination of all three. As long ago as 1853, an officer of the United States Army described him as "bold and impetuous in action, yet wary and calculating, always impatient of restraint, sometimes unscrupulous and unmerciful. Ununiformed and undrilled, he performs his active duties thoroughly, but with little regard to order or system." More recent writers have compared the Texas Rangers to the Canadian Mounted Police, and the two organizations certainly have some characteristics in common. And yet there are important differences, as the Canadians have not been slow to point out.

There is an old story in Texas about the mayor who awoke to find his town a shambles—four men shot to death in one night, two Lynchings, bands of armed men milling about the streets, threatening death to all and sundry. He telegraphed the governor, asking that a company of Texas Rangers be sent at once "to put down a riot." A dusty little man, wearing two guns with the holsters tied down, got off the first train from Austin. The mayor, waiting at the station, was horrified. "What, only one Ranger?" he groaned. The Ranger regarded him without enthusiasm, and spat. "Only one riot, ain't they?" he retorted. This is only a story, of course. But no such story has been told, I think, of the Canadian Mounted, or the F. B. I., or the men of Scotland Yard, or any other force of policemen, anywhere in the world.

The Texas Rangers were organized in 1835, and got off to a flying start in the Texan Revolution against Mexico. We must remember that Texas was a colony of Spain until 1821, when the Republic of Mexico was established. Texas was a part of Mexico at the time, but American settlers had been coming into the territory for some years. Moses Austin, for example, established his famous colony as early as 1820, while the whole region was still under Spanish rule. The new Republic looked upon these Americans with great favor, since the Mexicans at first had a great respect for American methods. In 1825 the Mexican Republic passed laws to further encourage American immigration, and four years later it was discovered that there were more Americans in Texas than there were Mexicans and Indians combined. Not only this, but some of the Americans were a wild lot, who had already begun to talk of overthrowing the government and driving the Mexicans out of their own country.

Before the Texan Revolution, all Americans who took up land in Texas were forced to become Catholics—that was the Mexican law. The Americans who came to Texas were nearly all Protestants, and every one of these went through the Catholic ceremonies with his tongue in his cheek. The laws of Mexico prohibited slavery, but most of the Americans were slave-owners. Under one pretense or another, they brought
their slaves into Mexico, which outraged the Mexicans who did not believe in slavery, and did not like Negroes anyway. The Mexicans gradually came to look upon all Americans as undesirable citizens, just as Americans in the United States later regarded the Japanese. In 1830, the Mexican authorities forbade all further immigration from the United States, and statesmen began to talk about denying Mexican citizenship to persons of American ancestry, even though they were born in Mexico. From this time forward there was trouble all over Texas between the American emigrants and the officers of the Mexican Republic.

The Americans organized a sort of revolutionary underground, with secret committees in every village, just as their grandfathers had done in the revolution against Great Britain some 60 years previously. The whole country was full of minute-men and guerrilla fighters. When the Revolution began it was decided to organize these into three bodies—the Regular Army, the Militia, and the Texas Rangers. There were only three companies of Rangers, with 56 men in each company. These men were led by three captains and six lieutenants, and the whole force was commanded by a major. The enlisted men were paid $1.25 per day, and furnished their own horses and equipment. They carried no flag, and wore no special uniform. They worked independently of the Army and the Militia, and took no part in the fighting against the Mexicans. Their job was to fight off the Indians on the frontier. It was feared that the Comanches would take advantage of the conflict between Mexicans and Americans to pillage the whole country.

One of the earliest accounts of the Rangers in action that has come down to us is that written by Noah Smithwick, who served in the minor Indian skirmishes during the Revolution. The following extracts give a vivid picture of the Texas Rangers of that day. "Captain John J. Tumlinson was commissioned to raise a company on the Colorado, and early in January, 1836, he reported with 60 mounted men, myself included," is the way Smithwick starts off. "We were assigned to duty some thirty miles northwest of the present capital, that city not having been even projected then. The appointed rendezvous was Hornby's station on the Colorado, from which place we were to proceed at once to our post, taking with us such materials as were necessary to aid in the construction of a blockhouse. We were on hand at the appointed time. Just as we were preparing our supper, a young white woman, a complete stranger, her clothes hanging in shreds about her torn and bleeding body, dragged herself into camp and sank exhausted on the ground. The feeling of rest and relief on finding herself among friends able and willing to help her, so overcame her taxed strength that it was some time before she could give a coherent explanation of her situation. When she at length recovered, she told us that her name was Hibbons; that, in company with her husband, brother, and two small children, she was journeying overland to their home on the Guadalupe, when they were attacked by a band of Comanches. The two men were killed, the wagon plundered, and herself and children made prisoners; she being bound onto one of their mules and her little three-year-old boy on the other.

"The other child was a young babe, and the poor little creature, whose sufferings his mother could not allay, cried so continuously that at length one of the Indians snatched it from her and dashed its brains out against a tree.

"The scene of the attack being a lonely spot on the road, the cunning redskins knew that there was little risk of the outrage being discovered
until they were beyond the reach of pursuit. So, when a cold norther
met them at the crossing of the Colorado, they sought the shelter of a
cedar brake and lay by to wait for it to subside. Confident that Mrs.
Hibbons could not escape with her child, and trusting to her mother's love
to prevent her from leaving it, the Indians allowed her to lie unbound,
not even putting out guards. It was bitterly cold, and wrapping themselves
in their buffalo robes they were soon sound asleep. But there was no
sleep for Mrs. Hibbons. She knew, as did her captors, that there was
small hope of rescue from the discovery of her murdered relatives.
Realizing that the only hope lay in herself, she resolved to escape and to
rescue her child. There was no time to lose, as another day's travel
would take her far beyond reach of the settlements that it would be im-
possible for her to procure help before the savages reached their strong-
hold, so she waited until her captors were asleep. Then, summoning all
her courage, she carefully tucked the robe about her sleeping child and
stole away, leaving him at the mercy of the brutal barbarians."

Smithwick tells at some length of Mrs. Hibbon's difficulties in getting
back to the settlement. Finally it appears that she followed some milk-
cows, which led her late in the evening to the vicinity of the Rangers'
camp. As soon as she recovered her speech, the woman told the Ranger
captain all about her child, the band of Indians who had captured him,
the mule the boy was riding, the direction in which the Indians were
moving, and so on.

"Hastily dispatching our supper," writes Smithwick, "we were soon
in the saddle. As soon as it was light enough next morning our scouts
found the trail, fresh and well defined as if the marauders were exercising
neither haste nor caution in their retreat; having no doubt spent a good
portion of the previous day in a fruitless search for their escaped prisoner.
They did not seem alarmed as to the consequence of her escape, and it
was about 10 o'clock in the morning when we came upon them, just pre-
paring to break camp. Taken completely by surprise, they ran for shelter
in a cedar brake, leaving everything behind except such weapons as they
hastily snatched as they started. I was riding a fleet horse, which became
excited and carried me right in among the fleeing savages, one of whom
jumped behind a tree and fired at me with a musket, fortunately missing
his aim.

"Unable to control my horse, I jumped off him and gave chase to my
assailant on foot, knowing his gun was empty. I fired on him and had the
satisfaction of seeing him fall. My blood was up and, leaving him for
dead, I ran on, loading my rifle as I went, hoping to bring down another.
A limb knocked my hat off and one of my comrades, catching a glimpse
of me flying bareheaded through the brake on foot, mistook me for a
Comanche and raised his gun to check my flight; but another Ranger
dashed the gun aside in time to save me. The brave whom I shot lay flat
on the ground and loaded his gun, which he discharged at Captain Tum-
linson, narrowly missing him and killing his horse; when Conrad Rohrer
dashed up and, snatching the gun from the Indian's hand, dealt him a
blow on the head with it, crushing his skull.

"The other Indians made good their escape into the cedar brake,
where it was worse than useless to follow them; but we got all their
horses and other plunder and, to crown our success, we achieved the main
object of the expedition, which was the rescue of the little boy, though the
heedlessness of one of our men came near robbing us of our prize in a
shocking manner. The Indians, careful of the preservation of their little
captive—they intended to make a good Comanche of him—had wrapped him up warmly in a buffalo robe and tied him on his mule preparatory to their journey. When we rushed upon them they had no time to remove him, and the mule started to run. One of our men, not seeing that the rider was a child, gave chase and, putting his gun against the boy's back, pulling the trigger. Fortunately the gun missed fire. He tried again with like result. The third time his finger was on the trigger when one of the other boys, perceiving with horror the tragedy about enacted, knocked the gun up, it firing clear and sending a ball whistling over the head of the rescued child. Providence seemed to have interposed to save him.

"The boys held an inquest on the dead Indian and, deciding that the gunshot would have proved fatal, awarded me the scalp. I modestly waived my claim in favor of Rohrer, but he, generous soul, declared that according to all rules of the chase, the man who brought down the game was entitled to the pelt. So he scalped the savage, tying the loathsome trophy to my saddle, where I permitted it to remain, thinking it might afford the poor woman whose family its owner had helped to murder, some satisfaction to see that gory evidence that one of the wretches had paid the penalty of his crime." There was no need for Smithwick to pretend to be so squeamish about that scalp. There were many men in the Texas Rangers who scalped every Comanche they killed, and carried these grisly trophies about in a little "poke" made especially for that purpose.

The Indian troubles of this period did not amount to much, and the Texas Revolution was soon over. On March 2, 1836, the Texans declared themselves independent of Mexican rule. A few days later came the fall of the Alamo, where the great heroes of Texas lost their lives. On April 21, the revolutionists won the battle of San Jacinto and captured General Santa Anna. The Lone Star flag now floated over the free Republic of Texas, and General Sam Houston, the hero of San Jacinto, was the first President.

Captain Tumlinson's Rangers did not fight in the battle of San Jacinto, but Smithwick rode over the field sometime afterward. The ground was littered with Mexican dead and "all kinds of plunder." The buzzards and coyotes devoured the dead horses, but did not touch the human corpses; Smithwick reckoned that this was because the Mexicans ate so much red pepper in their highly seasoned food. After the bodies fell to pieces the cows came up and chewed the bones, and the old-timers claimed that this so affected the milk that it was unfit for human consumption!

Sam Houston was a very strange man, and all the books that have been written about him leave many puzzles still unsolved. As President of Texas he favored cutting down all military organizations as much as possible, and spared no effort to conciliate the Indians. This latter policy was to be expected, for he had lived with the Cherokees for several years, had married Indian women, learned several Indian dialects, and adopted many Indian customs which he held to be superior to those of the whites. Houston did not go so far as to abolish the Rangers, but ordered that each company should employ a group of friendly Indians—Shawnees, Cherokees or Delawares—to serve as scouts. He was all for guarding the Mexican frontier, but contended that Texans should make every possible concession where Indians were concerned.

The second President of Texas, Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar, assumed the office in 1838. Lamar was a warlike fellow, who regarded all Indians as a deadly menace to the new Republic of Texas. In his first message
to the congress he said that any policy of moderation or forbearance toward the redskins was a grave mistake; such methods had been tried in the United States and had invariably failed. Texans must learn from the errors and follies of their cousins in the North. "The white man and the red man cannot dwell in harmony together. Nature forbids it," said he. The only thing to do, according to Lamar, was to drive all the Indians out of Texas. "The proper policy is to push a rigorous war against them, pursuing them to their hiding places without mitigation or compassion, until they shall be made to feel that flight from our borders, without hope of return, is preferable to the scourges of war."

With this principle in mind, President Lamar not only built up the army as best he could, but induced congress to vote an appropriation of a million dollars for "the protection of the frontier." Most of the frontier was protected by Rangers, who could do the work for much less money than was required by the regular troops. A little later we hear for the first time of John C. Hays, a Ranger officer who later made a great reputation for himself. Hays was put in charge of a company of mounted gunmen, enlisted for a period of six months. These men were ordered to "scour the frontiers of their respective counties, protect them from incursions, and when concentrated in emergencies to be under the command of Captain Hays," who was stationed at Bexar.

Walter Prescott Webb, whose book *The Texas Rangers* contains practically all of the material now available, quotes many newspaper comments upon the Rangers' activity. "Before the Rangers came," according to one writer, "the settlers complained that the Indians killed their children, but now they complain that the Rangers kill their hogs." Doubtless there is some truth in these civilian complaints, but nobody has ever denied that the Texas Rangers did keep the Indians from overrunning the settlements.

The Rangers of this period had many minor skirmishes with the Indians, but no difficulty with the Mexicans—at all. Fortunately for the Texans, Mexico was torn by internal strife between the Centralist party and the revolutionary Federalists, and also involved in a dangerous controversy with France. Because of these difficulties, the Mexican government let the new Republic of Texas alone for a while, except to incite the Comanches to make war on the Americans whenever an opportunity presented itself.

In 1839, however, the Rangers uncovered a serious plot between the Mexicans and Indians to destroy the Republic. The discovery of the projected alliance was accidental, although some of the Rangers declared that they had been "workin' on the case" for months. The Rangers had killed three men near Austin, and captured 150 horses and 600 pounds of gunpowder. One of the men killed was a Mexican named Manuel Flores, and papers revealing the conspiracy were found on his body. There was no doubt that Flores had made a deal with the Cherokees and Comanches, by which these tribes were to launch a great attack on the whites in the fall of 1839, at the same time that a large body of Mexican regulars crossed the Rio Grande. The Indians who took part in this enterprise were to be awarded by large grants of land and booty, and Texas was to be kept intact for the Indians, to serve as a sort of buffer between Mexico and the United States.

The Cherokees had lived in Texas since 1820, and had never had any serious trouble with the whites. They were an agricultural people, very different from the warlike Comanches. But their lands were valuable, and
the Lamar government was committed to the general policy of driving all Indians out of the Republic. A group of Texans went to see Bowles, the Cherokee chiefman, and offered to pay a considerable sum of money if the whole tribe would leave the territory. Chief Bowles replied that if the decision were left to him he would do as the whites required, since he realized that the Cherokees were not strong enough to fight the Texans. But the tribe had voted to resist, and to die fighting rather than give up their homes. Bowles said that he was powerless to do anything, and that he would never desert his people.

So on July 15, 1839, the Rangers attacked, and most of the Cherokees were killed or scattered after a few hours of fighting. Chief Bowles met death bravely, along with his son and other relatives. The Indians’ homes were burned, and all their crops destroyed. Some stragglers escaped to join the Cherokee tribes in the United States, and perhaps a few drifted down into Mexico, but most of the Texas Cherokees were massacred. At the same time certain other less important tribes—Shawnees, Muscogees, Delawares and Seminoles—were driven out. This bloody business just about solved the Indian problem in the settled portion of Texas, but there still remained the savage Comanches on the western frontier. The Cherokees had always been a quiet people, much less violent and warlike than some of the whites who replaced them. But the Comanches were something else again.

Even the bloodthirsty Comanches, however, soon decided that it would be best to make a treaty with the whites. Their grand council sent three delegates into San Antonio to tell Colonel H. W. Karnes, chief of the Rangers, about this sudden desire for peace. Karnes assured them that if the Comanches would bring in all of the white prisoners they now held, he would call the proper officials to discuss a treaty, and this the chiefs consented to do. It appears that the Texans had no intention of playing fair with the Indians, and Karnes sent immediataely for three companies of regular troops, which were ordered to surround the council-house as soon as the Indians were safely inside.

When the Comanches appeared in San Antonio on March 19, 1840, the party included many famous war-chiefs and medicine men, but they brought only one prisoner—a little white girl named Matilda Lockhart. In the council-house the white officers inquired about the other prisoners known to be in Comanche hands, but a chief replied insolently that there was only the one, and the soldiers could take it or leave it. Meanwhile the regulars had surrounded the council-house, and the Indians were told that they would all be held as hostages pending the surrender of the other white prisoners. The chiefs were thunderstruck, not having anticipated any such treachery. They realized that there was no hope of escape. Nevertheless, they were in honor bound to fight, as no Comanche could possibly surrender in such circumstances. They sang a few words of their death-song, and then drew their knives to attack the whites. All of the chiefs were shot to death in a few moments, but they killed seven Texans and wounded a dozen more before they died. Thirty-five Comanches, including three woman and two little children, lay dead on the floor. Twenty-seven Indians, most of them wounded, were overpowerred and imprisoned.

The Rangers selected a young squaw, gave her a good pony, and told her to return home with the news of the massacre. Still under the influence of the Lamar point of view, the Texans thought they had done a glorious day’s work. They reasoned that the loss of all their best chiefs
would so terrify the Comanches that they would withdraw to the western wilderness, and never have the courage to attack the whites again.

Nothing happened for about six months, then a band 700 or 800 Comanches suddenly swooped down on some settlements near Linnville, on the Texas coast, and killed 27 persons before the Rangers could get to them. The Indians went about the destruction methodically, burning every house, destroying all wagons and equipments, killing all livestock which they could not take with them. They would have got clear away, probably, if they had not tried to carry off so much loot. When the savages left Linnville on the night of August 8, 1840, according to Webb, they were driving "between 2000 and 3000 horses and mules, many of them loaded with the plunder of Linnville.

The Rangers were on the road by this time, about 125 men commanded by Captain John J. Tumlinson and Captain Ben McCulloch. They made contact with the Indians near Victoria on August 9, but hesitated to attack so large a force. Reinforcements were coming in from all directions, though, and armed Texans were swarming everywhere like angry wasps. On the morning of August 12 a large force of militia and Rangers overtook the Comanches at Plum Creek. After some preliminary skirmishes the whites charged, killing about 80 warriors and scattering the rest. The white losses were very small, and a great many of the stolen horses were recovered. The battle of Plum Creek was regarded as a great victory for the Texans.

There were many able leaders among the early Rangers, but the first to attain national prominence was John C. Hays. Born in Tennessee in 1817, Jack Hays came to Texas in 1838. He set up as a surveyor for a time, and it is said that he undertook the practice of medicine in San Antonio, but in 1840 was appointed Captain of the Texas Rangers. Hays had been at the battle of Plum Creek, and fought Mexican bandits up and down the border in 1841. The Indian situation eased up a bit after the Comanches were defeated at Plum Creek, but the difficulties with the Mexicans became more and more serious.

A group of foolhardy Texas filibusters set out from Austin to storm the Mexican city of Santa Fe in 1841, but the expedition was a total failure. The Mexicans captured many of the party, executed a few, and threw the rest into prison in the interior of Mexico. In March, 1842, General Rafael Vasquez led a large Mexican force across the border and captured San Antonio. Captain Jack Hays was just outside the city with about 100 Rangers, but he could not fight the whole Mexican army. More Texans were coming to reinforce Hays, but before they arrived Vasquez withdrew from San Antonio and returned to Mexico.

In September, 1842, the Mexicans made another raid and captured San Antonio again. This time the Mexican leader was General Adrian Woll, who had about 1300 men, and a brass cannon which he used with great effect. Hays and his Rangers combined with the Texas militia and volunteers to drive the Mexicans out of San Antonio. As Woll retreated toward the border the Rangers followed, and some of them dashed in and captured the little cannon which the Mexicans were using to protect the rear of their column. Captain Hays was very conspicuous in this action, and Webb repeats the story that General Woll offered a $500 reward for any soldier who could bring him the head of the young Ranger.

A few weeks after General Woll's raid, some enraged Texans decided to invade Mexico. The invading force was commanded by General A. Somervell and consisted of some 800 men, including Hays' Rangers.
Somervell's troops were wild and completely undisciplined. At Laredo they fell to fighting among themselves, and about 200 men deserted in a body and started back toward San Antonio. The rest crossed the river and took several Mexican towns, but Somervell realized that it would be folly to lead such a mob against trained soldiers. He gave up the whole invasion idea, and ordered the troops to return to their homes. About half of his officers and men, including the Rangers under Major Hays and Captain Ben McCulloch, obeyed this order. But some 300 men laughed at General Somervell, and declared their intention of "cleaning up Mexico regardless."

Having chosen one Billy Fisher to lead them, these unorganized troops went roaring down to storm the town of Mier. The Mexican cavalry was waiting for them, and the poor Texans didn't have a chance. After a short but fierce battle they surrendered, and the Mexicans marched them down to Matamoros and later to Hacienda Salado, about 100 miles west of Monterey. At this place the Texans suddenly rose up and attacked the soldiers to guard them. Five of the boys were killed and several more wounded, but they captured many rifles and a huge store of ammunition, and chased their guards away into the wilderness. Once more with arms in their hands, the Texans started north through the desert toward the Rio Grande.

W. P. Webb, author of the best book on the Texas Rangers that has yet appeared, describes this part of the so-called Mier Expedition as follows: "It was a venture which had little prospect of success, for the region between Saltillo and the Rio Grande is a desert waste and no man among them knew the road. For a time they kept to the main highways, and should have continued to do so, depending upon their fighting ability to carry them through. They abandoned the road after they passed Saltillo, and were soon lost in a limitless desert, without food and without water. They were in a wild, rugged and arid country, fugitives, hunted like wolves. They threw away their arms to lighten their load, ate snakes and grasshoppers, burrowed in the earth for moist dirt to wet tongues swollen so they could not close their mouths. In their desperation for water, they drank their urine with effects too ghastly to be described. Finally the Mexicans located them, sent out the cavalry, and brought them in. Five died of starvation, four reached Texas, three were never heard of, and the remainder were recaptured and returned to Salado in irons."

The Mexican authorities first intended to shoot these prisoners, but finally decided that it would be more humane to decimate them—kill one man of every ten. An officer prepared a vessel containing 159 white beans and 17 black ones. Each prisoner was required to draw a bean from the pot held in such a way that he could not see into it, and those who drew the black beans were executed. Big Foot Wallace drew a white bean. "I noticed that the black beans were poured in on top," he explained, "so I dug deep as I could." Captain Ewen Cameron also drew a white bean, but he had been a ring-leader in the break for freedom, so the Mexicans shot him anyhow. All of these prisoners were shamefully abused, but nearly all of them escaped or were released later on. Many served in the Mexican War which broke out in 1846.

One of the most important things that ever happened to the Texas Rangers was the introduction of a new piece of equipment—the Colt revolving pistol. Not only were the Rangers the first body of men who ever carried revolvers into battle, but the first really successful revolver
was designed by Colonel Colt especially for use by the Texas Rangers. Samuel Colt had whittled out his first wooden model in 1831, and his first patent was dated 1836, but the earliest Colt six-shooter—a .34 caliber with a concealed trigger—was not a commercial success. Most men preferred to carry the single-shot horse pistols or derringers of the period. They regarded the newfangled weapon as tricky and unreliable, "likely to git a feller killed" as one early critic expressed it. The United States Army officers laughed at the suggestion that the revolving pistol should be adopted for military use; the U. S. cavalry was still armed with muzzle-loading smoothbore pistols at the time, and flintlocks at that, since General Winfield Scott thought the flintlock more trustworthy than the new percussion mechanism. Finally the Colt company went bankrupt, and a few hundred Colt revolvers gathered dust on the shelves of merchants in New York.

Just how the Colt revolver first came to Texas we do not know, but several dozen showed up there before 1837, and a few fell into the hands of the Texas Rangers. The Rangers regarded the new weapon as the greatest invention of all time, sent straight from heaven to save the Republic of Texas from her enemies. It is said that some of these men, who earned only $1.25 per day, were glad to pay $200 in gold for a Colt revolver in 1838.

Finally Captain Samuel H. Walker, of the Rangers, was sent to New York with instructions to interview Colonel Colt, and try to purchase firearms for the Texas Rangers. The following passage is from Roy C. McHenry's account of the matter, first printed in the American Rifleman: "The Ranger and the inventor met in the store of Samuel Hall, the leading gunsmith and arms dealer in the city at that time, and became great friends. The veteran Indian fighter told Colt that, while his pistols were the best arms of the sort that had been produced, they were too light and flimsy for the work demanded of them upon the frontier. Among other defects, it was all but impossible for a man on horseback, riding hell-for-leather, to load them, for the barrel had to be taken off to allow the empty cylinder to be replaced with a full one and the rider had to hold on to all three parts, the loss of any one of which rendered the arm useless. The Ranger went down to Paterson, N. J., with Colt and spent several days at the factory. About a month later, when he had returned to Austin, a new Colt, the Walker model, was put upon the market. It was a great improvement over any that had preceded it. The frame was much heavier and stronger. The grip was of a more convenient shape, coming more naturally to the hand to give a steady hold. The feature which must have appealed most to Captain Walker was a neat lever rammer, attached below the barrel, which accurately seated the bullets in the chamber without removing the cylinder."

The Walker model Colt was the first really practical revolver ever made, the prototype of all the frontier six-shooters which have been evolved since. The trick disappearing trigger of the earlier Colt was replaced by an ordinary trigger, with a heavy brass guard to protect it. The barrel and cylinder were long and heavy, the frame very strong, the whole thing big enough to be used as a war-club. The caliber was stepped up from .34 to .47—which means that the bullet was an inch long and nearly half-an-inch in diameter. This is bigger than any revolver now made in the United States. Backed by a heavy charge of black powder, such a bullet has tremendous shocking power, and will knock a man off his feet even if he is not hit in a vital part. Even without the advantage
of six shots to be fired in a few seconds, the Walker Colt was the best short gun ever seen on the border up to that time. The Texans had always claimed that one Ranger was worth six Mexicans, and the new revolver made the boast good, so far as fire-power was concerned. The Colt revolver changed the whole pattern of border warfare. It is almost impossible to overestimate the influence of this weapon in the history of Texas.

In 1845 the Texans, for good and sufficient reasons, gave up their independence and attached themselves to the United States. It was no ordinary annexation, however. "The Republic of Texas," as Frank Dobie wrote some 90 years later, "entered the Union voluntarily to become a state, but in entering it retained sovereignty over its vast lands and reserved to itself various other rights not claimed by other states."

No sooner was Texas in the Union than the Texans raised a great clamor for Federal troops to protect their borders against a threatened Mexican invasion. The American army came both by land and by sea, with General Zachary Taylor in command. The Texans insisted that Taylor incorporate the Texas Rangers into the federal service, and he finally did accept several companies, but without much enthusiasm. The citizens of Texas regarded the Rio Grande as the border between Texas and Mexico, but the Mexicans claimed all territory south of the Nueces River. Taylor's men soon fell to fighting with Mexican troops in this disputed area, and it was thus that the Mexican War began in 1846.

Although the Rangers were, for the moment, a part of the United States Army, they did not make a very good military appearance. Samuel Reid, who served as a Ranger under Captain Ben McCulloch, describes the Ranger camp near Matamoros: "Here we constructed our tents—constructed, I say, because the government never furnished us, during our whole term of service, with a patch of canvas large enough to keep out one drop of rain, or shield us from a single ray of the scorching sun. Whether it was because they thought the Texas troops were accustomed to, and could endure, more hardships than any other troops in the field, I do not know. We were left to shift for ourselves, wholly unprovided with tents, camp equipage, or cooking utensils. The consequence was that whenever we were encamped for any length of time, we were obliged to construct rude shelters out of poles, cane rushes, or any other material which the vicinity afforded. And the Rangers' camp frequently looked more like a collection of huts in a Hottentot hamlet, or a group of rude wigwams in an Indian village, than the regular cantonment of volunteers in the service of the United States."

General Taylor appreciated the fighting qualities of the Rangers, but regarded them as dangerous and unmanageable to any sort of military discipline. "They are a lawless set," he wrote in an official report, "and I fear that they are, and will continue to be, too licentious to do much good." Just what Taylor meant by licentious is not clear to me, "but it Shore warn't no compliment," as a Ranger officer pointed out.

There were several men in the Rangers who had been prisoners of the Mexicans at the time of the ill-fated Mier Expedition. These fellows were accustomed to shoot down Mexican civilians on the slightest provocation, always claiming to have recognized the victims as jailors who had abused them during their captivity in 1842. "Our orders were very strict," wrote Samuel Reid, "not to molest any unarmed Mexican. If some of the most notorious of these villains were found shot, or hung up in the chaparral, the government was charitably bound to suppose that, tortured
by conscience for the many evil deeds they had committed, they had recklessly taken their own lives!"

There is no denying that many Rangers confiscated civilian property, especially food, liquor, women and saddle-horses. Webb, in his excellent book on the Texas Rangers, refers to a "celebration of July 4th, when two horse-buckets of whiskey slightly diluted with water and sweetened with loaf sugar were used to wash down a dinner of Mexican pigs and chickens which the Rangers had accidentally killed while firing salutes in honor of the day!"

When Taylor's army finally reached Monterey the Texas Rangers led the attack, as a matter of course. Yelling like Comanches, they ignored an order to dismount and rode headlong into a crack regiment of Mexican lancers under Colonel Najera. As Webb describes this encounter, "Mexican and Texan horse struck head on with terrific impact, and for a moment friend and foe were intermixed, fighting desperately with swords, knives, pistols and lances." The Mexicans soon withdrew, leaving Colonel Najera and more than a hundred of his lancers lying dead in the road. After several days of fighting the Mexican garrison asked for a truce, and were permitted to retire from the city with flags flying. These liberal terms of surrender so enraged the Rangers that most of them demanded to be discharged from the United States Army at once.

General Taylor and his officers grumbled a bit, but were glad to see the "white Comanches" start back toward Texas. "The departure of the Rangers," wrote Luther Giddings, "would have caused more regret than was generally felt, had it not been for the lawless and vindictive spirit some of them had displayed in the week that elapsed between the capitulation of the city and their discharge. We saw them turn their faces toward the blood-bought state they represented, with many good wishes, and the hope that all honest Mexicans were at a safe distance from their path."

After the Rangers left, General Taylor found himself considerably handicapped by the lack of experienced scouts and guides. Besides his other troubles, the old general's campaign did not meet with the approval of the War Department—perhaps because Taylor was an outspoken Whig and most of his superiors were Democrats. Several thousand of his best troops were taken from his command and given to General Winfield Scott, who was about to begin a march upon the City of Mexico. It is easy to understand that all this irritated General Zachary Taylor.

About this time Ben McCulloch turned up with a handful of Rangers. The men refused to enlist for the duration or even for a year, but offered to sign up for six months. This enraged Taylor almost to the point of apoplexy, but he needed scouts so desperately that he let the Rangers write their own ticket in defiance of army regulations. Instead of falling back upon Monterey as he was ordered to do, General Taylor pushed on toward Buena Vista, where he engaged a superior force of Mexicans under Santa Anna. The Mexicans were beaten very badly. It was a great victory which upset the whole plan of the Mexican campaign, and which elevated Zachary Taylor to the office of President of the United States. There is no doubt that Ben McCulloch and his Rangers played an important part in the victory at Buena Vista, but General Taylor could not stomach their light-hearted practice of killing civilians and non-combatants. He got rid of the Rangers as soon as he could, and refused to have any more of them attached to his command.

Samuel H. Walker, who had been a captain of the Rangers, was now
an officer in the United States Army, and accompanied General Winfield Scott's expedition. Scott landed his troops at Vera Cruz in March, 1847, and slowly advanced toward the Mexican capital, which he reached about the middle of September. Although Walker was no longer a Ranger, he still behaved like one. Regular army officers looked at him askance, because he seldom brought in any prisoners. It is said that some of the West Pointers in Scott's forces refused to eat in his presence, or to speak to him except in line of duty. They regarded him as an outlaw and a criminal, unfit to associate with officers and gentlemen. Captain Walker was killed at the head of his troop, as he led a charge on Mexican artillery at a place called Huamantla.

About the time of Walker's death, Colonel Jack Hays joined Scott's column with a whole regiment of Texas Rangers, and unlike Walker they refused to be commissioned or enlisted in the federal army. Not being soldiers, they could not be forced to wear uniforms. Each man carried whatever equipment he wanted, and wore any clothes which happened to appeal to him. Some affected long-tailed coats, some short jackets which were known as round-abouts. Many wore black leather caps, while others preferred the broadbrimmed Texas hats so popular in the cow-country. Most of the men were bearded, and many wore their hair down to the shoulders. Every man had a Sharps rifle, and two new Walker model six-shooters. Many carried a pair of the old army horse-pistols besides—four pistols altogether. No Ranger was without some sort of a sheath knife, and many had lassos of rawhide or horselhair tied to their saddles. They were a motley-looking lot, but the Mexicans feared a few of these diablos Tejanos more than whole armies of ordinary American soldiers.

When the Rangers got into Mexico City they killed civilians right and left. Webb tells of one Mexican who snatched a Ranger's handkerchief; the Ranger shot him dead, recovered the handkerchief, and strode on as if nothing had happened. Another Mexican threw a stone at some Rangers, who killed him instantly. Crowds of Mexican citizens broke and fled at the mere sight of a Ranger in the street, although they paid small attention to the uniformed American soldiers who patrolled the captured city. When a Ranger was found dead in an unsavory part of town, the Rangers went down there and killed more than 80 Mexicans—just shot them down at random, and left the bodies lying in the street. General Scott called Colonel Hays on the carpet over this, but Colonel Hays said loudly and flatly that nobody—nobody—could impose upon a Texas Ranger and live! General Scott said no more, but he arranged matters so that few Rangers were quartered in Mexico City thereafter.

At the end of the war General Santa Anna was allowed to leave the country under a safe-conduct supplied by General Scott as a part of the terms of surrender. He came along the road in a carriage with his wife and daughter, accompanied by a Mexican guard of honor. The Rangers at Jalapa heard about this, and rushed down to the highway with pistols drawn, declaring that they were going to kill Santa Anna. The army officers present were horrified, but the Rangers cared nothing for their opinions and would take no orders from anybody. Finally a surgeon named John S. Ford—the "Rip" Ford of Texas tradition—convinced his fellow-Texans that the civilized world would regard such a killing as murder, and the State of Texas would be disgraced everywhere.
and forever. Reluctantly the Rangers agreed to let Santa Anna live, and the army officers breathed a little easier.

Ford watched Santa Anna's carriage pass the Rangers' and years later he wrote: "The old warrior's face blanched a little at the sight of his enemies of long standing. He might have thought of bitter recollections these bronzed and fearless men had garnered up from the past, and how easy it would be for them to strike for revenge and for retribution. He sat erect, not a muscle of his face moved. If his hour had come he seemed resolved to meet it as a soldier should.

"The ununiformed representatives of Texas stood motionless and silent—not even a whisper disturbed the air. The carriage rolled on, the Mexican guard of honor passed by in good order. There were no salutations, no ungraceful marks. The Texans broke ranks, and returned to camp." General Santa Anna had many times faced death in battle, but it is doubtful if he ever had a narrower escape. Had it not been for the sudden eloquence of "Rip" Ford, a fellow Texan whom the Rangers knew and trusted, Santa Anna would certainly have died that day at Jalapa.

For many years after Texas became a part of the United States, there was trouble between the Texans and the federal authorities over the Indian question. The people of Texas believed that the Texas Rangers were the best Indian fighters in the world. "We are now citizens of the United States," said a representative Texan, "and we call upon our Government to protect us against the savages. If the Government will raise a big force of Texas Rangers, and pay them out of the federal treasury, they will settle the Indian question in a very few years."

But the United States officers had seen the Texas Rangers in action, and they regarded the Rangers as little less ferocious than the Comanches. Besides, the government already had a well-established Indian policy, and a system of Indian control in force all over the United States. Texas was no different from any other state, from the government point of view. So Washington sent Indian agents into Texas to deal peacefully with the savages, and established regular army posts here and there to put down any Indian rebellions which might occur. The Texans watched all this with contempt. The way to deal with Comanches, they said, was to kill Comanches, and the Texas Rangers were the boys to do the job.

As a matter of fact, for some 10 years after the Mexican War the Rangers did very little fighting. They were called up only in emergencies, and enlisted for very brief periods. The State would raise two or three companies of Rangers whenever the Indians took the warpath, and then call upon the federal government to pay them. The federal officers paid only for emergency service, and in a very niggardly and grudging fashion. The government could not keep Rangers on the payroll without admitting that the Indian agents had failed in their task, and that the United States troops were not competent to keep the Indians in order. And this, naturally, the federal officers were unwilling to do.

In 1858, Hardin B. Runnels was elected governor of Texas, mainly on the strength of his promise to protect the frontiers and put down the Comanches at any cost. Texas had lost confidence in the United States government, at least so far as the Indian question was concerned. Governor Runnels increased the number of Rangers as far as possible, and put "Rip" Ford in command of the entire force. Ford was an experienced Ranger, an old-time doctor who had served in the Mexican War. It had been his duty to make out death certificates for those who fell in battle. Many of these men were Ford's personal friends, and he thought it
proper to write some pious sentiment such as "Rest in Peace" on each man's certificate. In the course of time this was shortened to the initials "R. I. P.", and it was thus that Major John S. Ford became known all over Texas as "Rip" Ford.

Governor Runnels told Major Rip Ford to lead the Rangers and kill hostile Indians, and to disregard the Indian agents or other federal officers if they tried to interfere with him. "I impress upon you the necessity of action and energy," said the governor. "Follow any and all trails of hostile or suspected hostile Indians that you may discover. Over-take and chastise them, if unfriendly. It is hoped that the most summary punishment will be inflicted upon the enemy." Ford started out with 100 Rangers, 15 pack-mules, two wagons and an ambulance. Later he was joined by about 90 friendly Indians under Captain Shapley Ross.

On May, 12, 1858, this force attacked a Comanche village on the Canadian River. There were more than 300 warriors at this place, led by a chief called Iron Jacket because he wore an old Spanish coat-of-mail which his ancestors had taken from some early explorer. Iron Jacket's garment had served him well as a protection against arrows, but the Rangers riddled him with rifle-bullets as soon as they came within range. A sergeant named Cotter wrote to Governor Runnels: "I am sending you a small piece of the Comanche chief's coat of mail, it covered his body and each piece lapped over like shingles on a roof. It is all I could get, as it was eagerly taken and divided by the boys." The battle lasted nearly all day, and the Rangers killed 76 Comanches. They took only 18 prisoners, and these were women and children. Two Rangers were killed in the fight, and three or four slightly wounded.

The defeat of Iron Jacket was followed by several other engagements of the same type, and the southern Comanches were pretty well subdued for the time being. Some of them were shut up on reservations, and the Indian frontier was gradually pushed back into the wilderness. There were still hostile Comanches in Texas, of course, but no more big war-parties raided the settlements. The savages moved about furtively in small bands, and spared no effort to keep out of the way of the Rangers.

In 1859 the so-called Cortinas War was precipitated by Juan Nepomuceno Cortinas, a Mexican of good family who lived near Brownsville, on the Texas side. Brownsville was then a town of about 3,000 population, built around old Fort Brown on the bank of the Rio Grande, just opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros. The whole trouble began when Robert Shears, city marshal at Brownsville, arrested a drunken Mexican for some trifling offence. The marshal's needless brutality in making the arrest annoyed Cortinas, and Shears cursed him when he protested. Thereupon Cortinas drew a pistol and shot the officer in the shoulder, disabling him. Then he took the poor Mexican up behind his saddle and rode out of town, wildly applauded by the Mexicans, who were always pleased to see one of the hated Gringos get the worst of an argument. Thus it was that "Cheno" Cortinas was looked upon for the moment as a sort of hero, a champion of his down-trodden people.

After this exploit Cortinas kept out of sight for about three months, then suddenly he appeared in Brownsville at 3 o'clock in the morning, with a hundred Mexicans yelling at his heels. These riders captured the town in a few minutes, killed several Americans, turned all the Mexican prisoners out of jail, and hoisted a Mexican flag over the Fort. They carried off some of ammunition and military supplies, but there was no indiscriminate looting. However, it was so obvious that these outlaws
could have sacked and burned the town if they wished, that the American residents were horrified. An army officer in Brownsville wrote to Colonel Robert E. Lee: "Thus was a city of between 2,000 and 3,000 inhabitants occupied by a band of armed bandits, a thing till now unheard of in the United States." Unable to get help from the United States Army, the citizens of Brownsville appealed to the military post in Matamoros, and for several days the American city of Brownsville was patrolled and guarded by Mexican regulars from across the Rio Grande!

Comtinás had at first merely wished to get better treatment for the Mexicans in Brownsville and kill a few of his personal enemies, but now recruits began to join him in considerable numbers, shouting "Viva Cheno Cortinas! Death to the Gringos!" and the like. Several rich Mexicans presented him with large sums of money for campaign expenses. Soon Cortinas was almost persuaded that he really should raise a great army to fight the Americans and "restore the glory and justice" of his people. A few skirmishes with guerrillas and home guards gave his men confidence, and they swaggered about in fine fettle for some time—until Major Ford rode into Brownsville with a company of Texas Rangers.

Ford had about 300 men under his command, and 198 of them were Rangers, the others being militiamen or United States troops. With this force he pursued the Cortinas band, which was burning and sacking ranches along the border. They had quite a battle at Rio Grande City, where 60 Mexicans were killed and sixteen Rangers wounded. The settlers who had clamored for the Rangers were not satisfied by any means. Some of them said that the Rangers stole more goods and destroyed more property than the bandits. One rancher claimed that the Rangers used his fences for firewood, stole his pigs and goats, and ate up 50 barrels of sweet potatoes which he had stored for the Winter. "I estimate the value of the property taken by the Cortinas at $200, and the value of that destroyed by the Rangers at fully $1,000," he wrote.

Cortinas was next encountered at LaBolsa, where he recruited about 400 men. In this fight the Texans had the assistance of the steamboat Ranchero, which swung about in the river so that her deck guns could be fired at the Mexicans. The Rangers drove the bandits from the field, and burned the buildings at LaBolsa. It is said that Cortinas himself was the last to retreat, after 29 of his men had been killed and a great many wounded. Ford remarked bitterly that his best riflemen had been ordered to kill Cortinas, and would certainly have done so except for the bad light—it was too dark for them to see the sights on their Sharps buffalo-guns!

Meanwhile Colonel Robert E. Lee, of the United States Army, had been put in charge of all the federal troops in Texas. One of his first official acts was to investigate the Cortinas War. Colonel Lee came to the border himself, and looked over the ground after talking with Major Ford and other Texas men. He reported that the whole country was laid waste, nearly all the buildings between Brownsville and Rio Grande City being destroyed. "Those spared by Cortinas have been burned by the Texans," he wrote in his official report. The damage claims filed by American citizens amounted to more than $300,000, to say nothing of the Mexican property stolen and destroyed.

Although several prominent Texans had sworn publicly to kill Cortinas with their bare hands, nothing of the sort happened. "Cheno" Cortinas was never captured. After the defeat at LaBolsa he withdrew into the interior of Mexico, where he prospered mightily, and became a
very rich man. Some years later he was commissioned a brigadier-
general in the Mexican army, where he served with some distinction.
Finally he became governor of Tamaulipas, and there are some good stories
about the difficulties of a governor who was completely illiterate. He
learned to write his name, in order to sign official papers, but was never
able to read, and held that this accomplishment was of no advantage to
a statesman. Cortinas died peacefully at an advanced age, full of wealth
and honors.

The great Sam Houston, first President of the Republic in 1836, was
elected Governor of the State in 1859. He was old now, but he knew
more about Texas politics than any man alive, and he still dreamed big
dreams. The Cortinas War ended just about the time of his inauguration,
and everything was quiet on the Mexican border. The Indians had been
driven out of the eastern part of the state, but bands of Comanches still
harried the settlers along Red River. Houston knew perfectly well that
the federal troops were not much good in Indian warfare, and lost no
time in building up a strong force of Rangers. He recruited more than
1,000 men within a few months, which was the largest number of Texas
Rangers ever brought together up to that time. Houston demanded that
the federal government furnish 1,000 Sharps rifles, 3,000 Colt revolvers,
and about 2,000 Army muskets, remarking that $100,000 worth of firearms
was a small price to pay for the safety of the best people on God’s earth.

In his reports to the federal authorities Houston made the Indian
depredations appear much more serious than they really were, but he d’id
not put the Rangers where they could take any vigorous action against
the Indians. He was anxious to raise a large force of Rangers, but was
still friendly to the Indians. Many Texans believed that Houston intended
to use the Rangers against Mexico rather than to put down the Comanches.
The officials at Washington seemed puzzled by Houston’s procedure, and
some of the Texans who had elected him said that the Hero of San Jacinto
must be losing his mind.

Houston’s real purpose, according to some historians, was to invade
Mexico with a great force of Rangers, and add a big slice of Mexican
territory to the State of Texas. “What he had in mind,” writes W. P.
Webb, “was the boldest and most daring filibustering expedition that his
fertile brain ever conceived, namely, to lead 10,000 Texas Rangers, sup-
ported by Indians and Mexicans, into Mexico, establish a protectorate
with himself in the leading role, and incidentally perhaps so dazzle the
Americans that they would forget their factional quarrel over slavery
and come to his support. At one stroke he would save the Union, expand
the national domain, and perhaps receive as his just reward the Presidency
of the United States.”

This plan, as we read it today, seems fantastic almost to the point of
insanity. “But to Houston,” as Webb says, “the scheme was no chimera.
He had every reason to believe that he could repeat what he had once
done. He was a leader in the Revolution which freed Texas from Mexico
in 1836. He was influential in annexing Texas to the Union, an act which
led to the Mexican War and the acquisition of all the Southwest, an
area greater than Mexico. Houston had already held every high political
office save one within the gift of the people; he had been governor of two
states, twice President of the Republic he had helped to create, member
of the United States senate. Such were his rewards for San Jacinto, the
capture of Santa Anna, and the emancipation of Texas. If the conquest
of a part of Mexico gave him these honors, why should not the conquest
of all of it send him to the White House?"

At one time Houston did his best to inveigle Colonel Robert E. Lee into the scheme to "pacify" Mexico, but Lee would have no part of the project unless it was fully backed by the United States government. It appears that Houston found other supporters, however, and even persuaded a parcel of English bankers, who held large blocks of the much-depreciated Mexican bonds, to furnish the money needed for the expedition. Houston hinted, to very high officials of the United States, that he would not hesitate to resign as governor, and even renounce his American citizenship if necessary, in order that the United States government should not be involved in the matter.

It was a great scheme, and it might have succeeded if Houston could have tried it a few years earlier. But it was 1861 before he was ready to move against Mexico, and the great opportunity was gone forever. When the Civil War broke out, and Texas joined the Confederacy, the whole thing collapsed like a house of cards. Many men who had been Rangers served with distinction in the Confederate Army, but as an organized force the Texas Rangers were out for the duration, and took no part in the War Between the States. The Indians were so astounded by the spectacle of vast armies of whites fighting each other that they withdrew into the wilderness, apparently believing that the Great War would end in the extermination of the entire white race. The Mexicans seemed to share these sentiments, in a measure. At any rate, the whole border was left practically unprotected, but there was very little trouble with either Indians or Mexicans in Texas during the Civil War.

After the Confederacy was beaten in 1865, Texas was occupied by the United States Army for several years, and Texans were not allowed to recruit bodies of armed men for any purpose. Naturally, under these conditions, there were no Texas Rangers. In 1870 a carpetbag governor named Davis, elected by the Negro vote since ex-Confederates were not allowed the franchise, organized a body of State Police. They were savage and lawless men, who had most of the Rangers' faults and none of their virtues. The Rangers always had public opinion behind them, while the police were hated and despised by everybody. Some of the police were Northerners, and many were Negroes. The head of the organization, Adjutant-General James Davidson, ran off with $34,000 of the state's money. When the legislature became Democratic again, in 1873, an act repealing the State Police law was passed over the governor's veto, and in 1874 they reorganized the Texas Rangers.

One section of the Rangers under Captain L. H. McNelly went into Dewitt county, where there had been an outbreak of an old feud between the Taylor and the Sutton families. The Rangers stayed in Dewitt county for about six months, but McNelly himself admitted that he "wasn't able to do much." In 1875 McNelly's Rangers were sent to the Southwestern border. Bands of disguised Texans were crossing the river and stealing cattle from the Mexicans, and gangs of Mexicans were not slow in returning these calls. A lot of cowmen on both sides were killed, and many houses burned. "There was hell to pay, and no pitch hot," as one prominent Brownsville man expressed it. McNelly was ordered to kill all bandits caught North of the Rio Grande, and to take no prisoners. McNelly was just the man for this business, and he killed a great many cattle-thieves. Most of them were Mexicans.

Captain McNelly behaved as if he were determined to bring on a war with Mexico. With 30 men he rode many miles into Mexico to recover
some stolen cattle, and attacked more than 300 Mexican soldiers on their own soil. Then he retreated to the Mexican bank of the river, and when his pursuers rode up he ambushed them and killed their leader, General Juan Flores. The United States troops across the river could see the battle, and one company under Captain Randlett crossed over, to save the Rangers from annihilation. His superiors ordered Randlett to withdraw, which he did, but McNelly and his men stayed on the Mexican side all night, facing a large force of Mexicans. Next day under a flag of truce the Mexicans agreed to return some stolen cattle, and the Rangers returned triumphantly to their own side of the river.

McNelly was in very poor health by the Summer of 1876, but retained sufficient energy to capture the famous outlaw King Fisher and nine of his men. He recovered a herd of stolen cattle at the same time. The civil authorities were so intimidated by King Fisher that they released the robbers, and even allowed them to take the cattle away, but this was not McNelly's fault. Fisher's gang of 150 desperadoes ruled the country in the vicinity of Eagle Pass, and murdered anybody who interfered with them. McNelly would doubtless have cleaned up the King Fisher country if he had lived, but he died in 1877.

McNelly was probably the greatest leader the Texas Rangers ever had, but several of those who succeeded him were able men. When McNelly dropped out because of his illness, Lee Hall and John B. Armstrong took command of the Rangers. Both of these men had served under McNelly in the old days. Armstrong's most spectacular exploit was the capture of John Wesley Hardin, a famous Texas bad-man who had murdered some 30 white men, and God only knows how many Negroes and Mexicans. Hardin was the son of a Methodist minister, and one of the toughest characters who ever lived in Texas. He was not a robber or a bandit, but just a cheap gambler with a mania for killing people. Armstrong followed Hardin for a long time, and finally caught up with him on a train. Hardin's long-barreled pistol caught in his suspenders as he tried to draw—"in his effort to jerk it out he almost pulled his breeches off over his head", according to Webb's account. It is difficult to see how a man could pull his breeches off in this fashion, but some mishap certainly spoiled Hardin's draw. Armstrong struck the killer on the head with his six-shooter, which knocked him unconscious for more than an hour.

Four of Hardin's friends were with him on the train, and they protested the capture. Armstrong killed one of them and disarmed the others. Then he put the handcuffs on Hardin. Several hours later a large party of outlaws tried to rescue the killer, but Armstrong stuck his cocked revolver against Hardin's back. If the crowd did not "quieten down" at once, said the Ranger, Hardin would certainly be killed, and "a lot of other people might get hurt too." Armstrong had three six-shooters in his belt and one in his hand—24 shots altogether. Hardin was cursing at the top of his voice, but he made a negative sign to his friends in the crowd, and they reluctantly gave up the idea of a rescue.

The jury at Austin found Hardin guilty of second-degree murder, and the judge gave him 25 years in the penitentiary. In prison he studied law, and when Governor Hogg pardoned him in 1893 he set up as an attorney. But the murderous frenzy with which Hardin was afflicted was too strong to be resisted. It was not long until he again took up killing people as a pastime, and he was shot to death in El Paso in 1895.

Another famous Ranger officer was Major John B. Jones, of Corsicana. Jones was a spruce little man, quiet, tactful, highly intelligent.
well educated at a college in South Carolina. He had served through the Civil War as a captain in the 15th Texas Infantry, and nobody ever doubted his courage or his fighting ability, but he was not a spectacular warrior of the McNelly school. As W. P. Webb puts it: “Major Jones differed from all other commanders of the Texas Rangers in that he had a broad conception of his duty to guard the whole frontier from Red River to the Nueces. His point of view was that of a commanding general rather than that of a captain. In this he differed from McNelly, Ford, McCulloch and even from Jack Hays; these were captains only, but Jones was a general.”

Major Jones took part in many minor Indian troubles, where he acquitted himself well enough, but his first real trial came in connection with the so-called Salt War. Most of the people on both sides of the Rio Grande obtained their salt from the Guadalupe salt-lakes, about 100 miles east of El Paso. These deposits were north of the River, of course, and had been discovered during the Civil War. At first the salt was free to anybody who came for it, but in 1868 a company was formed in El Paso to claim the land, and then make people pay a small fee for every load of salt they removed. This company, headed by W. W. Mills, was called the Salt Ring. Opposing Mills and his followers was another group, led by A. J. Fountain. This latter group was known as the Anti-Salt Ring, and stood for public ownership of the Guadalupe deposits.

The Mexican part of the population lined up with Fountain, and elected him to the state senate. The Mexican vote was largely controlled by the parish priest, Padre Antonio Borajo, and Don Louis Cardis—both of these men being Mexicans of Italian ancestry. Before the Fountain salt bill could be put through, the Mexicans fell out with Senator Fountain. Padre Borajo and Cardis entered into some obscure agreement with one C. H. Howard, and later quarreled with him also. Finally Howard murdered Cardis, and fled to New Mexico, leaving El Paso county overrun with armed mobs, before which the civil authorities were helpless. Some Texans feared that the Mexicans were about to kill every American in the place.

Learning that Mexicans were hauling salt from the Guadalupe lakes, which he now claimed as the property of his father-in-law, Howard returned to El Paso. He was captured by a mob and shot to death with two other Americans. The mob was by this time looting stores and houses on the Texas side of the river, and hauling the plunder into Mexico. Several Mexicans said openly that it would be a good idea to kill all the Americans on the border, but the mob hesitated to do this. When the Rangers arrived in El Paso they shot a few Mexicans, and the leaders of the mob retired to the south side of the river. Taus ended the riot known as the Salt War, which cost the State of Texas $31,000. It was decided to establish a permanent army post at El Paso, in order to prevent such outbreaks in the future. One must remember that $31,000 was a lot of money in those days.

Major Jones’ coup came with the undoing of Sam Bass the train robber—probably the most famous outlaw that Texas ever knew. Sam Bass was to Texas what Jesse James is to the Middle West, and is still celebrated in song and story. Sam’s criminal career began when he went North with a herd of cattle, and fell in with some tough characters in the Black Hills country. At Big Springs, Nebraska, he and some other bravos held up a Union Pacific passenger train, and got away with more than $60,000 in gold. That was in 1877, and Sam brought his share of the money back to Denton county, Texas. After a brief resting period, he and
his friends stopped four trains in less than four months, all within 20 miles of Dallas.

Texas was accustomed to riots and murders and cattle-rustling, but this epidemic of train-robbery frightened substantial citizens all over the state. In some localities people hesitated to entrust their valuables in the express companies and even lost confidence in the United States mail. All trains bristled with armed guards, and a report that the Bass gang was about to take up bank-robbery caused disastrous runs on several small banks. Wealthy ranchers rode into town and drew their money out of the bank, believing that it would be safer buried in the ground somewhere. The newspapers played up the picturesque Bass gang all over the country, and Denton county was full of city reporters for weeks on end. The big rewards offered for the bandits brought a great swarm of Pinkerton men and other private detectives, besides the regular operators hired by the railroads and the express company. Sam Bass never had more than five or six men in his gang, but many Texans believed that there must be at least 100 of the outlaws, some of them business men and politicians in very high places. It is no wonder that the local officers became a little jittery.

On April 12, 1878, Major Jones was ordered to take his Rangers into Denton county and clean out the Bass gang. Unable to catch the active members of the band, he arrested Jim Murphy, who had harbored the outlaw on several occasions. Murphy did not enjoy life in the jail at Tyler, but he had no friends to go his bail. After several weeks, Major Jones persuaded him to turn traitor. The plan was that Jones should get somebody to put up Murphy's bond, and then Murphy could join the outlaws. The next time that Sam pulled a robbery, Murphy could tip off the Rangers beforehand, and they would hide at the scene of the crime and catch the robbers in the act. In return for this treachery, the case against Murphy would be dropped, and he would share in the cash rewards.

Murphy was released according to schedule, but the Bass gang was in hiding, and it was three weeks before he could get in touch with them. Even after he did so, several of the outlaws suspected that something was wrong, and watched him so carefully that he was unable to communicate with the Rangers. While Murphy was riding with the Bass gang, there was always the danger that he might be shot down by some sheriff or detective, since these gentry did not know that Murphy was a traitor—they supposed that he had jumped his bond and turned outlaw in dead earnest. Finally, however, Murphy managed to post a letter to Jones, telling him that Bass and his followers were about to rob a bank in the little town of Round Rock.

It was in the afternoon of July 19, 1878, that the bandits rode into Round Rock. There were only four of them—Sam Bass, Seaborn Barnes, Frank Jackson and Jim Murphy. The town was full of Rangers, but they were careful to keep out of sight. Jim Murphy, knowing what was about to happen, rode well to the rear, ready to slip away at a moment's notice. The other three went into a little store next to the bank, where they were buying some tobacco when two deputy sheriffs blundered into the place. One of these men struck at Barnes, and instantly four sixshooters went into action. Both officers were shot down, one killed instantly and the other permanently disabled. A bullet smashed the right hand of Sam Bass, making it impossible for him to use his pistol.
Barnes and Jackson were not hurt, and Jim Murphy was several blocks away by this time, and still going.

The three robbers came out into the street to find the whole place swarming with Rangers, and bullets flying everywhere. Major Jones himself rushed up the street, firing his revolver. Just as the outlaws reached their horses, Seab Barnes was shot through the head and instantly killed. Bass got a bullet in the body, but managed to mount his horse and ride away. Jackson was apparently unhurt. The two outlaws were pursued by dozens of horsemen, but when night fell they were still at large. Jackson got clear away, and was never captured. But Sam Bass was found next morning, mortally wounded, about three miles out of the village. He was brought into town and given the best medical treatment available. Major Jones sat beside him for hours, trying to learn something about other members of the gang, but Bass only smiled. "If a man knows something," said the outlaw, "he ought to die with it in him." And Sam Bass did die the following morning, on his 27th birthday.

In the 1880's the big cattle outfits kept moving into western Texas, followed by the small farmers and the railroad workers. It was in the West that the last brushes with hostile Indians occurred, and it was there that many small bands of outlaws and cattle-thieves were put out of business by the Rangers. The first Ranger captain to work in the Panhandle was George W. Arrington, who had served with Maximilian in Mexico. He rode three years with the Rangers under Major Jones before being commissioned a captain. One of Arrington's weaknesses was his inability to get along with the regular troops, who were often found protecting the Indians against the Rangers and the cattlemen. Captain Arrington defied the United States Army officers on many occasions, and even wrote threatening letters to Colonel Davidson, who commanded the 10th Cavalry at Fort Elliott.

Charles Goodnight was one of the first big cattlemen in the Panhandle, and was beset by hostile Indians as well as white cattle-thieves. Like most Texans of that day, he had no confidence in the United States Army. He said that if the Rangers did not protect him, he would recruit a private army of his own, build a fort on his ranch, and fight all comers. Arrington visited Goodnight in the Palo Dura, and talked with the other ranchers in the vicinity. Finally he recommended that a permanent Ranger station be established on Catfish Creek, in Crosby county. This post was called Camp Roberts, and was the first Ranger camp ever set up in that part of Texas. Captain Arrington, who put down disorder with an iron hand, was not a popular officer, and it is said that he walked in constant fear of assassination. But it was Captain Arrington and his men who first brought law into the Texas Panhandle.

The Indian troubles in Texas ended forever in the early 80's, and the work of the Rangers was radically changed. No longer did they patrol a more or less imaginary line, supposed to separate red savagery and white civilization. From 1881 forward the Rangers were sent out in couples, or in small parties, with orders to take over when some local difficulty was too much for the city or county peace-officers to handle. The Rangers really functioned as state police—though God help the man who used that term in the presence of a Texas Ranger!

One cause of trouble during this period was the conflict between the big cattlemen and the farmers who began to protect their property with barbwire fences. The old-time cattlemen believed in free range. The
fences interferred with their business, so they cut the wires as fast as the farmers could string them. In 1884 the "fence-cutter wars" had killed so many men that the governor of Texas called a special session of the legislature, and made it a felony to cut a wire fence.

John Nance Garner, later Vice-President of the United States, was at that time a judge in Uvalde county. What follows is part of a letter he wrote to General W. H. Marbury: "I write at the request of several prominent citizens to inform you of violations of the law in this county and ask for your assistance. Francis Smith & Co., some weeks ago, fenced their pasture on the Nueces River with a splendid four-wire fence. It had only been up three weeks when one entire side was cut between every post. They rebuilt it at once, and in less than ten days it was cut again. They rebuilt it again and last Friday night it was cut a third time. What we want is about three good Rangers to come here and catch these law-breakers."

One of the most amusing chapters in Texas history has to do with wire-cutting, and it is recorded in a series of letters written in 1888 by Ira Aten, a sergeant in the Texas Rangers. Sergeant Aten and another Ranger were sent into Navarro county disguised as casual laborers, to ferret out a gang of fence-cutters who had been operating there. The two Rangers stuck it out for three months, working all day and watching fence at night, but were unable to catch anybody in the act. Then Sergeant Aten devised his famous "dynamite boom," which was a charge of giant powder buried under the fence, arranged so as to explode when the wires were cut. He wrote a detailed description of the contraption to his superior officers, who immediately ordered him to give up the whole project and return to Austin at once. This was doubtless the result that Aten desired. Five of Sergeant Aten's letters are printed in W. P. Webb's book on the Texas Rangers; these letters alone are worth the price of the book. It is regrettable that the letters are too long for reproduction here.

In the early 90's there were a few skirmishes between Mexican cattle-thieves and Rangers, and the latter did not hesitate to cross into Mexico when circumstances seemed to warrant such action. Captain Frank Jones led one such expedition, of which Sergeant Aten of "dynamite boom" fame was also a member. Captain Jones was killed in the fight on Mexican soil, and the other Rangers were forced to retreat by a company of Mexican soldiers coming out from Guadalupe.

Times were changing fast, and the Rangers were often called upon for police duty which would have been beneath a Ranger's dignity in the old days. In 1896, for example, nearly all the Rangers in Texas were suddenly ordered to El Paso. No crime had been committed at El Paso, but Bob Fitzimmons and Pete Maher had come there to engage in a prize fight, and some busybody had discovered that prize-fighting was against the law. The two pugilists were in El Paso, together with a great number of sporting men and gamblers from all parts of the United States, but they made no attempt to defy the Rangers. Bat Masterson, famous gunfighter from Kansas, was among those present. Webb repeats a story that Masterson lost his temper in a restaurant and made as if to strike a Chinese waiter. Captain Bill McDonald, of the Texas Rangers, was standing by, and he protested mildly against any disturbance in the crowded dining-room. Bat Masterson eyed him coldly. "Maybe you'd like to take it up," he said. McDonald stood with his feet
apart, his knees bent a little. “I’ve done took it up,” he drawled. And the great Bat Masterson said no more.

There was no Fitzimmons-Maher fight in El Paso, or in Texas. The promoters wanted to move on into New Mexico, but New Mexico was a territory in those days, and the federal officers would not permit the fight to be staged there. Next they proposed to cross the Rio Grande and hold the bout in Juarez, but the governor of Chihuahua, who patronized bullfights every Sunday, would have no brutal prize-fighting in his bailiwick. Finally the pugilists’ party got on the train and went east to Langtry, Texas, and then across the border into Coahuilla, where the match was allowed to proceed.

Another time the health officers along the Rio Grande tried to fight smallpox by vaccination and quarantine, but the Mexicans did not believe in these measures, and made a great uproar about the matter. The Rangers were called to put down the riot, which they did after a regular battle in which at least two Mexicans were killed and several Rangers wounded, Captain John Rogers being shot through the shoulder. Many a Mexican was vaccinated while a Ranger stood at the physician’s side with a six-shooter in his hand. It was harsh treatment, but it finally stopped the epidemics of smallpox on the Border.

In 1901 the Rangers were reorganized under a new law, and the force reduced to 80 men. But they were still Texas Rangers. Each man furnished his own horse and equipment, he was clad in ordinary civilian clothes, and he wore no badge. Since there were so few Rangers at this time, it was not uncommon for one man to be sent out to keep order at an election, or quell a riot, or prevent a lynching, or bring order to some wild oil-boom town. If a Ranger was ordered to a town which had no calaboose, he took along a gunny-sack full of handcuffs. When he arrested a man he simply handcuffed the prisoner to a fence or hitching post in the street, and went on about his business. When a Ranger had patrolled a tough town all night, it was not unusual to find two or three men lying dead in the street, and five or six more handcuffed to posts in conspicuous places.

When Brownsville was raided by Negro soldiers in 1905, it was the Rangers under Captain McDonald who restored order, although the Army officers got most of the credit in the newspapers. During World War I, when the German agents were arming Mexican bandits and stirring up teapot revolutions along the Rio Grande, the Texas Rangers again showed their willingness to “tackle hell with one bucket of water.” Before the War was over the legislature increased the force to nearly 1,000 men, and they did good work against German spies, draft evaders, saboteurs and subversive agents generally.

It was the Prohibition era that brought the downfall of the Texas Rangers. When they were ordered to make war on bootleggers and moonshiners, many of the best men resigned at once. Those who remained made a sincere effort to enforce the law, and a lot of people were killed. It seems certain that some of them were innocent people. For the first time in the history of Texas, the respectable citizens of the state lost confidence in the Texas Rangers. Such a storm of criticism arose that the legislature staged an official investigation, and came very near abolishing the Rangers then and there. Finally they compromised by reducing the force to four companies of 15 men each, with one sergeant and a captain—68 men altogether. This was in 1919, and the Texas Rangers never amounted to much after that date.