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Texas Ranger Capt. Bill McDonald. © Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX



"Just One Riot" not Withstanding

by Robert Nieman

Nothing else comes close: the most famous quote ever attributed to the Texas Rangers is "one riot, one Ranger." Legendary Captain Bill McDonald (left) is usually credited with the saying.

As the story goes, sometime during the 1890s there was going to be a prizefight in Dallas . . . or maybe it was West Texas . . . or possibly it was somewhere along the Rio Grande. We may not be sure of the exact location, but we are sure it was somewhere in Texas. Anyway, frantic citizens had put out a desperate plea for a company of Rangers to stop the fight. Imagine their shock when one solitary Ranger, often said to be McDonald, got off the train. Looking at the lone Ranger, the townsmen wanted to know when the rest of the company would arrive. Then came the legendary reply: "There's just one prizefight, isn't there?"



Rangers pride themselves in being able to take care of their business with minimal assistance, but they aren't too proud to ask for help when they need it. Since the Department of Public Safety was created in 1935, there have been four occasions in which it took the efforts of every Ranger in the state to resolve the situation.



Ranger Destroying Gaming Tables.

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In the late 1950s, the Gulf Coast was rampant with illegal gambling. From Beaumont to Galveston,

gambling dens ran wide open. Magnificent casinos such as the Balinese Room and the Hollywood Club, just to name a few, produced millions of dollars for the coffers of the city and county governments as well as many of their citizens. In 1957, Company A consisted of only nine men, and that included the captain and sergeant. This small unit was ordered to the coast to put a stop to the illegal activities. Though gambling regulation was generally unpopular with the local residents, nothing stopped Hall of Fame Ranger Captain Johnny Klevenhagen and his men from doing their duty. It wasn't the Rangers' job to pick and choose what was popular and what wasn't: their job was to enforce the law.



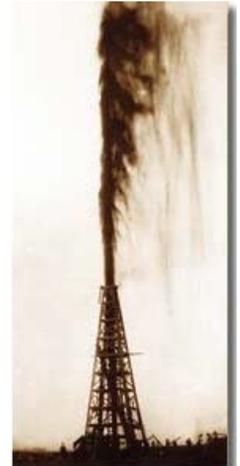
It wasn't an easy job. Rangers checked into Galveston's Buccaneer Hotel and didn't check out for three and a half years. Company A might have been able to handle the gamblers by themselves if that was all they had to worry about. However, besides performing their jobs in Galveston, they still had to fulfill their normal duties in their home territories, and those territories covered thousands of square miles. In order to fully carry out their obligation, the Rangers of Company A needed help. During the three and a half years of this assignment, almost every working Ranger in the state was in Galveston at one time or another. But in the end, the gamblers and their coastal gambling empire was in ruins.

Drilling on the Slant

The gamblers had just been defeated when a new crisis faced the Rangers. In 1962-63, every Ranger responded to what is known as the "slant-hole business." Kilgore was the center of the gigantic East Texas Oil Field. The price of oil was high and those high prices brought unscrupulous operators.

The method of the slant-holers was simple. The operators would buy or lease low-producing wells from one of the major oil companies. These wells no longer produced enough oil to be profitable to the major oil conglomerates, but low-overhead companies could still eke out a small return.

However, the crooks saw an easy way to make massive profits. They would bring in rework rigs to work over the old wells. Instead of reworking the wells, however, they would run a whipstock down the shaft and slant the hole toward a neighbor's high producing lease. Suddenly an old, worn-out well started



gushing forth oil just like it had in days of old. This was no small operation. There were hundreds of slant-hole wells operating. Naturally, when the owners of the leases that were being tapped realized what was going on, they didn't take it lying down. They complained loud and long to officials in Austin. The Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas production in Texas, was ordered to investigate.

The crooks didn't like the idea of going to jail, and they set about threatening everyone who tried to investigate any wells. The Railroad Commission's job was to investigate, not to fight—that's where the Rangers came in. Their job was two-fold: protect the commissioners from physical harm and prevent the slant-holers" from clogging the well holes. Strike!



In 1968, a strike went mad at Lone Star Steel in Lone Star, Texas. The conflict had gone on month after month, and it wasn't peaceful. Bombings, drive-by shootings, assaults, beatings, attempted murders, and finally murder were the order of the day. Lone Star, like Kilgore, is in Company B's territory and, as in Kilgore, almost ever Ranger in the state was there at one time or another before the strike ended. Rangers Investigate a Strike Bombing Ask any Ranger who was there, and a common reaction is a sad shake of the head at the memory of the experience. Every Ranger hated working a strike because they were in a lose-lose situation.

Management felt the Rangers showed favoritism to the strikers. Not so, countered the strikers. As far as they were concerned, just the opposite was true: Rangers clearly favored management. Thankfully, laws have changed and today Rangers do not work strikes unless a felony has been committed. As the ancient proverb says: "This too shall pass." The horrible Lone Star strike finally came to an end and passed into history.

