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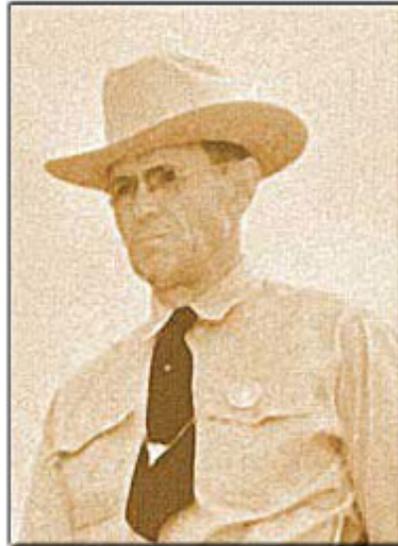

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20th Century Shining Star:

Capt. Bob Crowder

by Robert Nieman

Of the hundreds who have worn the badge of a Texas Ranger, only thirty are enshrined in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame. None are more deserving than Robert Austin Crowder —Bob to his friends, Captain to his men.

Bob was born in the rural Rusk County, Texas, community of Minden on January 29, 1901. His childhood was one of nearly total poverty. This was years before Rusk

County would almost drown in a sea of oil during the East Texas Oil Boom of 1931. The boom would not have helped the family farm, however: Minden is located in southern Rusk County, and the oil field was miles to the north.

Bob was still an infant of fifteen months when his mother died. Shortly thereafter, his father was struck down with pneumonia that almost completely curtailed his ability to work. Being the youngest of three brothers, Bob lived for several of his earliest years with a nearby aunt. By the age of nine, he was doing a man's work at a neighboring farm for the princely sum of eight dollars a month, plus room and board. He sent seven of the eight dollars to his father. Bob later moved up when he went to work at another farm for the breathtaking sum of thirteen dollars a month!

As time went on, Bob had regular crop duties on his own half-share plots of land. When he was thirteen years old, he grew five acres of sugar cane that he thought was going to enrich his finances by five hundred dollars. It was during this period when he learned the golden rule: he who has the gold makes the rules. The property owner of his sugar crop acres forced the youngster to settle his five-hundred-dollar share for thirty dollars. After this, Bob gave up farming forever. For the next several years, he worked at everything from road gang to freight hauler.

In 1920, Bob and one of his brothers went to Colorado hoping to find work, but were unable to do so. One day in Denver, Bob's brother suddenly said, "Let's join the Marines." Crowder thought that was a good idea and joined up, but his brother backed out at the last minute.

As he would later tell his Rangers, Bob was a Marine through and through by the time he finished boot camp—even though that he absolutely hated his drill sergeant. Ironically, he himself was a drill sergeant a few years later. He said that the greatest lesson he learned in that position was that it is better and

easier to lead people than drive them. He applied this to the rest of his life.

After three years in the Marines, Bob decided it was time to move on. However, he found civilian life tough. He tried a variety of jobs, but discovered nothing to his liking. Then came 1925, when a door opened that would culminate with his induction into the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame.

Bob was driving for American Express and was so desperate to find any change of employment that he applied for a job with the Dallas Police Department. The DPD liked what they saw, and Bob was a Dallas policeman shortly thereafter. Training in those days was non-existent. The first time Bob ever rode a motorcycle in his life was on the job as a policeman.

Bob served the citizens to the best of his ability until January 30, 1930. On that date, his application to the newly formed Texas Highway Patrol was accepted. He reported for training at Camp Mabry in Austin, completing it on April 1. His first duty station was in Texarkana.

In those days, there were very few patrolmen. This meant that the areas of responsibility were huge, even by Texas standards. Bob and his partner E. H. Bruce covered a region larger than the state of Delaware! Remember, this was long before paved roads were prominent: most were either dirt or gravel. The only thing bigger than the two men's territory was their work schedule—seven days a week. The pay was a \$150 a month until 1933, when it was cut to \$130.

Bob worked hard, and that fact was soon recognized. In November 1931, he was promoted to sergeant and transferred to Camp Mabry in Austin as an instructor. He was a natural choice because he had been an excellent patrolman and also a Marine drill instructor.

Unfortunately for Bob, the Highway Patrol was in a high state of flux. The adjutant general's office was being phased out to be replaced by the Texas Department of Public Safety. The sergeant's rank that Bob carried was eliminated, and he was once again a private, with the corresponding pay cut. As the reorganization continued, he was moved from Austin to Fort Worth to Mineral Wells to Wichita Falls. In 1937, the Great Depression was still in full throttle and, as in the rest of the world, jobs were being cut in the DPS.

By 1937, Bob had pretty well resigned himself to the fact that his future with the department was nearing an end. When he got a message that he was to call operator 13 in Austin, Bob was sure the axe had fallen. He was right: the axe was falling, but not in the way he anticipated.

On the other end of the phone line was Manuel "Lone Wolf" Gonzauillas. The Lone Wolf was in charge of the DPS' newly formed Bureau of Intelligence. He asked Bob if he would like to work for him. That was the easiest question Bob had ever been asked. "Hell, yes," was his immediate response. The next morning, he was stationed in Tyler as a member of the Bureau of Intelligence.

For the next two years, there were not enough hours in the day. The hard work paid off, and Bob transferred to the Texas Rangers in January 1939. Just as he had while in the Bureau of Investigation, he worked tirelessly. His philosophy was really quite simple: "This business of going to work at 8:00 and getting off at 5:00? You can't do it."

In 1940, Gonzauillas and the captain of Company B, Royal Phillips, swapped positions. Phillips became the head of the Bureau of Investigation, and

Gonzaullas took over command of Company B as its captain. One of the many things that made Gonzaullas one of the greatest Rangers ever was his ability to pick the right man for the right job. He wasted no time in promoting Bob Crowder to be his sergeant (now a lieutenant). For the next seven years, they made one of the best captain-sergeant teams in the history of the Rangers.

When Manny Gault retired as the captain of Company C in Lubbock in December 1947, Bob was named that company's new captain. He remained in Lubbock until 1951, when Gonzaullas retired. He then transferred back to Dallas and the command of Company B. In 1956, he was named the acting chief of the Texas Rangers. In 1957, he promoted again when he was named the commander of the Department of Public Safety's Region V in Lubbock. A corresponding rank of major came with the promotion.

Bob's heart, however, was still that of a Texas Ranger. Even though it meant busting back from major to captain in pay, Bob could not return to the Rangers fast enough when he heard of the retirement of Jay Banks, [<http://www.texasranger.org/dispatch/13/pages/Banks.htm>] his successor as commander of Company B. In 1960, Bob was again at the helm of Company B, a position he would hold until he retired in 1969.

Regrettably, Bob Crowder was unable to enjoy his retirement long. He died of a heart attack on November 26, 1972.

[Click here for Bob Crowder's Hall of Fame profile.](#)

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