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Bob Goss

by Robert Nieman

Picture made in March 1931 in downtown Kilgore, Texas. Bob Goss stands between Captain Tom Hickman and T.L. Heard.

March 8, 1978, marked the passing of a true Texas legend—Kilgore’s Bob Goss. During most of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, Goss was a Texas Ranger.

Largely forgotten today, he is well remembered by anyone who was in the oil fields of Texas in the early part of this century. He was best known as “Shadow” Goss because it was he who covered the famous Lone Wolf Gonzauillas’ backside. Given a choice, there were many who would have preferred to have Goss beside them going into danger than the more celebrated Lone Wolf.

Goss was born on July 28, 1898, in Honey Grove, Texas. It was on his parents’ farm along the banks of the Red River that he grew to manhood. In 1921, he married Juanita Brown, also from Honey Grove. Bob and Juanita had only one child, a daughter named Leola who died in infancy.

During these maturing years, Goss acquired a love of firearms and acquired the deadly ability to use them. Many who knew him quoted him as often saying, “You’re not serious about shooting until you’ve fired at least a million rounds.” These same people said that a million rounds would not begin to cover the actual shots.

Wes Whatley, himself an NRA and U.S. Army champion pistol shot, was a close friend of Goss and spent many an afternoon on the pistol range between Longview and Kilgore with the old Ranger. He did Goss’ reloading and kept a very detailed record of the number of bullets he prepared for the expert shootist. Between the years 1958 and 1965, when Goss was in his 60s, Whatley reloaded 140,850 rounds for him!

Like most Rangers of this era, Goss was in and out of the force numerous

times. He first joined on June 23, 1924. For the next twenty-plus years, he served in every oil boomtown in Texas. During those days, he earned his well deserved reputation as the deadliest gun in the Rangers. When not in the oil patch, Goss and Gonzauillas worked throughout East Texas. In Sherman, they helped restore order when that city experienced its lethal race riot in May 1930.



Bob Goss and Manuel Trazazas "Lonewolf" Gonzauillas

In 1931, Texas and Oklahoma jointly built a new bridge over the Red River at Denison. Regrettably, a privately owned toll bridge had recently been completed alongside the new bridge. The owners of the Toll Bridge Company asserted that the Texas Highway Commission had promised reimbursement for their bridge. When no money came forth, the company's owners went to court and secured an injunction preventing the opening of the free bridge.

The result was the so-called Bridge War. Following the orders of the court's injunction, Texas installed barricades at the Texas end of the bridge.

Oklahoma's colorful governor, "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, maintained that since the injunction was against the state of Texas, it did not apply to Oklahoma. He ordered the bridge opened and sent in the Oklahoma National Guard to enforce his decree. In response, Texas ordered Rangers J. P. Huddleston, W. H. Kirby, M. T. "Lone Wolf" Gonzauillas, and Bob Goss to insure the bridge remained closed. It did.

While there may have been hard feelings between the politicians, there was none between the Rangers and the National Guardsmen. The Rangers had little to do, so to help pass the time, they put in a lot of time with target practice, and the Guardsmen enjoyed watching the activities. One day, Adjutant-General Bill Sterling asked Goss set up some playing cards, take his .45, and shoot the marks out of the cards. Tiring of such easy shooting, Goss then shot the cards in half. It wasn't long until he became bored with this, too, and started shooting the cards in half holding his pistol upside down! Sterling told the onlookers, "Bob is a new man we are breaking in as a Ranger."

In 1934 through 1936, Goss left the Rangers and served as Kilgore's chief of police. Later in his career, he worked many years for the Texas Game Fish and Oyster Commission.

Maybe he isn't well known today, but in the Texas oil patches during the 1920s and 30s, few didn't know the name of Bob Goss, Texas Ranger.

