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## 21st Century Shining Star:

### Ray Coffman

**Ray Coffman** was born on January 15, 1951, the middle child of James and Billie Coffman. This rock-solid future Texas Ranger graduated from McAllen (Texas) High School after his father, a minister, took over a church in that city.

After graduation in 1969, Ray joined the Navy Reserve and spent the next two years on active duty. He was home-ported in Newport, Rhode Island, and spent his sea duty onboard the repair ship USS Cadmus. Third Class Petty Officer Coffman's job was repairing the gyrocompasses in interior communications. For their work on the fleet ships, Ray and his shipmates were awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation. When the Vietnam War started winding down in 1972, Ray received a two-month-early discharge.

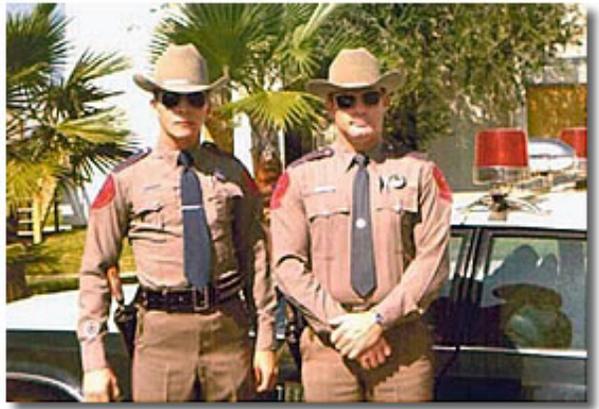
Ray's parents had moved to Benton Harbor, Michigan, while Ray was in the Navy. Mr. Coffman had accepted an appointment as the new minister of an independent church.

After his discharge, Ray joined his parents in Benton Harbor, Michigan, where they had moved after Mr. Coffman accepted an appointment as the new minister of an independent church. Ray enrolled in Lake Michigan College and also worked various jobs.

Even during this period, Ray's interest was in law enforcement and felt that Texas' Department of Public Safety was the premiere law enforcement agency in this country. After all, he would ask, "Who else can boast of having the legendary Texas Rangers?"

In October 1975, Ray was accepted into the Texas Department of Public Safety. For the next sixteen-and-a-half weeks, he attended class B-75 at the department's training facility in Austin. After graduation, this new Highway Patrolman was stationed in Brownsville, the most southern point in Texas. Brownsville is where Texas, Mexico, and the Gulf of Mexico all come together.

**Ray Coffman's first day as a Highway Patrolman. He is standing beside his best friend and partner Stan Guffey. Brownsville, Texas. March 8, 1976**



**Photo courtesy of Ray Coffman**

**Ray was proud to be a Highway Patrolman, but his heart was already in criminal investigation. After two years of traffic enforcement, he promoted to the DPS' Narcotic Service and stationed in the southeast Texas city of Beaumont.**

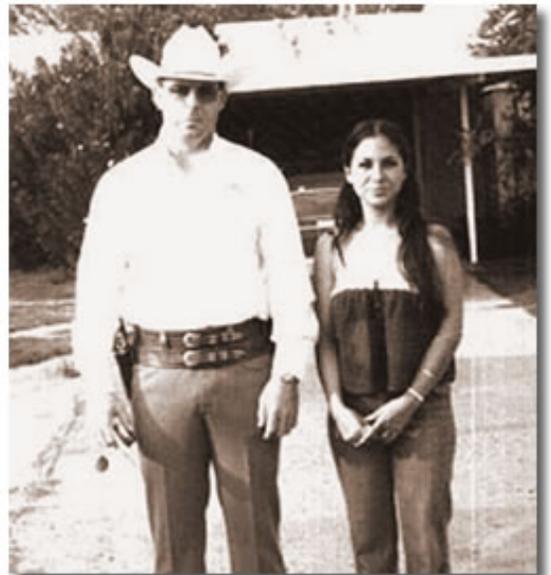
**Two-and-a-half years after joining the Narcotic Service, Ray promoted to lieutenant and again was stationed in South Texas—Laredo. He continued in that job until July 1, 1986, when he promoted again: he joined the Texas Rangers.**

**Promoted is the right word, even though Ray took a reduction in rank from lieutenant to Ranger private to join the Rangers. No matter what the rank reduction, any Ranger will tell you that the honor of wearing a Texas Ranger badge is a promotion.**

**Even though Ray's desire to be a Ranger started during his Highway Patrol days, he says that he has two very fond memories of the Highway Patrol.**

**One of those highlights was Stan Guffey. Ray remembers Stan as a great partner and an even better friend. Ray and Stan were the best man at each other's wedding. Tragically, Stan Guffey was later killed rescuing two-year old Kara Lee Whitehead from a kidnapper. Guffey is one of only thirty Rangers to be enshrined in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame.**

**Ray's other fondest memory during his HP days is a woman named Olivia. She was the secretary to a Los Fresnos justice of the peace when Ray met her. They were married on June 2, 1979, and have two sons, Hunter and Logan.**



**Ranger Stan Guffey and Olivia Coffman, July 1979.**

**Photo courtesy of Ray Coffman**

**Stan Guffey and future Senior Ranger Captain Bruce Casteel were Ray's heroes, and it was through their encouragement that he became a Texas Ranger. When Ray was first accepted, he was stationed in his hometown of McAllen. After Guffey was killed, Ray transferred to his friend's former station in Brady. He stayed there for five years before transferring to Bryan. Though Ray enjoyed Bryan, his two sons missed Brady because it was where they had been born and raised.**

After three years in Bryan, the opportunity to transfer back to Brady became available, and Ray took the opening.

Ray served ten years of outstanding duty as a field Ranger. On October 1, 1996, he was promoted to lieutenant in Company F. Company F is the only Ranger company that has two lieutenants. Ray was stationed in Austin and Clete Buckaloo became the lieutenant in Waco. (Clete is now the captain of Company A in Houston.)

Ray proved to be as good an officer as he had been a field Ranger. No one doubted that it was only a matter of time before Ray became a captain. On September 1, 2001, that proved true.

On August 31, 2001, Ray's hero, Senior Ranger Captain Bruce Casteel retired. Company D's Captain, C. J. Havrda was promoted to Senior Ranger Captain, and Ray was promoted to fill C. J.'s captaincy in San Antonio.

**Note:** Click on the following names for "Shining Star" profiles of Bruce Casteel (Issue 2) and C.J. Havrda (Issue 7).

Following are a few cases from of Capt. Coffman's career.

When Ray promoted to lieutenant in the Narcotics Service, he was stationed in Laredo, but he didn't stay there long. A new narcotics office was needed in Harlingen (near McAllen), and with Ray's outstanding leadership ability, he was selected to lead the operation in this deep South Texas city.

Ray Coffman and wife Olivia  
in DPS office in Harlingen.  
Photo courtesy of Ray Coffman



In 1982, Florida law enforcement agencies were making things so hot for South American drug smugglers that they decided to try a new route. The Arizona State Police had a well-placed informant within the cartel who told the Arizona officials that a Colombian drug cartel was considering a test run from Columbia through Mexico and crossing into the United States at Brownsville. Brownsville was in Ray's area, and it was at this point that Arizona officials contacted him.

Ray had been furnished the name and phone number of the informant by the Arizona officials. Ray contacted him and found out that the drug movement was not only on "go," but was scheduled to cross into Texas within the week.

At the time, Ray had four narcotic investigators and two task force troopers (Highway Patrolmen) in his command. All of this force was involved in drug investigations, and the only man Ray could pull away to assist him was Sergeant George Olivo. Later, Trooper Steve Vestal was able to join them.

For the next four days and nights, Olivo, Ray, and later Vestal conducted surveillance on a known stash house in Brownsville. During the early morning hours of the fifth morning, things started happening.

Vestal, dressed in camos (camouflage clothing), was across the road in some

bushes near the stash house. Olivo and Ray manned mobile units about a block on each side of the house. Vestal saw the garage door open, and six people, dressed in camos, got into a pickup containing two inflatable rafts. When the truck left, Olivo and Ray followed.

Olivo and Ray followed the truck until it stopped near the mouth of the Rio Grande River at the Gulf of Mexico. The occupants unloaded the rafts and crossed the river. For about an hour, they met with some Columbians, who gave them seven duffel bags. They then loaded their new cargo into the rafts, re-crossed the Rio Grande, loaded the bags into the truck, and left. Ray and Olivo followed the Columbians back to the stash house and observed them unloading the duffel bags.

For several hours, Olivo and Ray sat and waited. Just before daylight, things started happening. The stash house's garage door opened and two vehicles drove out in opposite directions. A car carried four people, two Colombian men and two women. A pickup contained two Colombian men. Olivo pursued the car, and Ray took off after the pickup. After short chases, the Rangers apprehended both vehicles.



Ray Coffman and Sgt. George Olivo with seized property consisting of numerous weapons and 350 lbs. of drugs valued at \$2.8 million.

Photo courtesy of Ray Coffman

The Brownsville Police Department was contacted and requested come to the crime scene to assist in transporting the prisoners to their police station. It took about two hours to secure a search warrant. Upon executing the warrant on the vehicles, Ray and his agents seized 350 pounds of pure cocaine worth \$2.8 million on the street. They also took possession of numerous Mac-10 and Uzi automatic weapons. At the time, this was the largest cocaine seizure in Texas history and the second largest in U.S. history.

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On December 12, 1995, Ray was contacted by the Brady Police Department to assist with a hostage situation at a local convenience store. When he arrived, he was told that the suspect was Dave Roberts, a McCulloch County Sheriff candidate and a former deputy sheriff. Ray knew both the candidate and his wife Lisa.

Roberts was holding his estranged wife at gunpoint and was threatening to kill her and then himself. According to the police department, they believed that Roberts had shot his wife in the head, pistol-whipped her, and then sexually assaulted her with the pistol.

When negotiations broke down with the local officers, Roberts asked to speak with Ray. Ray agreed and immediately entered the store. Roberts was standing inside the door leading to the cooler and was covered in blood—so much blood that he looked like he had been dipped in red paint. The whole time that they talked, Roberts kept his pistol pointed at Ray and would not allow the Ranger closer than three feet.

Ray asked Roberts if he could speak to Lisa. Roberts stated that he thought she might be dead. Saying that, he opened the cooler door slightly, and Ray could see the woman lying on the floor of what appeared to be a red room. He could hear her moaning, and he called out and identified himself. Ray related later that he thought Mrs. Roberts recognized his voice and started crying.

Roberts continued to point his gun at Ray the entire time he was in the store. Ray finally had enough and told the former deputy to either point his gun away from him or he would shoot him. (Ray had his pistol in his waistband in his back.) Roberts knew Ray well enough to know that he wasn't bluffing, and he lowered his weapon.

Even with gun down, Roberts was still considered armed. The negotiations continued for about thirty minutes. Realizing the hopelessness of his situation, Roberts finally gave up and handed his pistol to Ray.

As soon as Roberts was in custody, Ray rushed into the cooler to try to assist the wounded Lisa Roberts. The room was red, all right, but the color came from all the blood, which was everywhere.

Mrs. Roberts was near death. She had a fractured skull from her husband's severe beating and the .357-magnum bullet that had grazed her head when he shot her.

Mrs. Roberts was taken to a San Angelo hospital, where she was immediately taken into surgery to remove a large portion of her fractured skull. It took 157 stitches to sew up her head.

When Ray interviewed the doctor who unquestionably saved her life, he asked why the victim had not bled to death. The doctor theorized that the coldness in the cooler had slowed her blood loss.

Even though Mrs. Roberts survived to testify against her husband, her problems were far from over. Her skull had been crushed, and a considerable amount of splintered bone had been removed. Today, only skin is covering much of her brain. When speaking of Lisa Roberts, Ray now says, "I truly believe that Lisa is the toughest woman I have ever met."

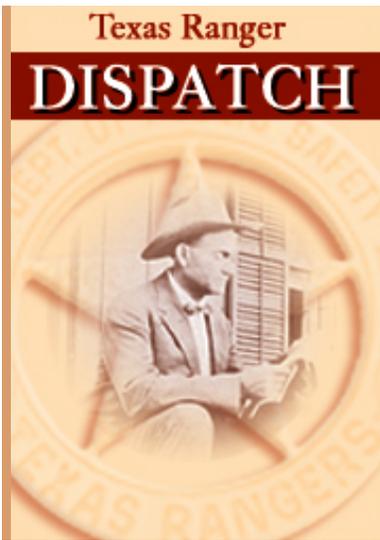
After the crisis ended, Ray asked Roberts why he had tried to kill Lisa. The former sheriff said that he was enraged by his wife's actions, which he felt were harming him politically. In his mind, she had ruined his chances of winning the sheriff's election.

There is an ironic footnote to this case. The engraved pistol that former Deputy Sheriff Dave Roberts had used to beat his wife had been presented to him by the Sheriff's Association for outstanding law enforcement. It was given to Roberts as the Officer of the Year for his efforts in rescuing an elderly lady from a burning house.

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Like most of the Rangers throughout the state, Ray Coffman was involved in two of the highest profile cases in Texas Ranger history.

During the Branch Davidian investigation, Ray and Ranger Calvin Cox were responsible for the crime-scene search and evidence recovery in the



“bunker.” They discovered more than 300 weapons, approximately 1 million rounds of ammunition, and the bodies of 43 women and children.

In the second case, Ray was sent to Fort Davis as a supervisor during the Republic of Texas standoff.

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Ray Coffman is considered by his superiors and peers to be one of the most solid and dependable men ever to wear the badge of a Texas Ranger.

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