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Managing Editors

**Robert Nieman** 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

**Byron A. Johnson** 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

**Byron A. Johnson** 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

**Pam S. Baird**



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## Captain Sam Walker



In the 180-year history of the Texas Rangers, there have been many shining stars, but none glowed any brighter than Samuel Hamilton Walker.

Walker's years of life were few. He was born in Prince George County, Maryland, in 1815 and was killed in Mexico on October 8, 1847. During those brief 32 years, he packed in 132 years of adventures. Wars, Indian battles, filibusters, and honors were all a part of his life. To top it off, he had one of the most famous pistols in history named after him.

Very little is known about Walker's early life. From surviving letters and reports, it appears that he was well educated. In 1832, while still a teenager, Walker ended up in Washington, DC. Four years later, in May 1836, he joined the army.

Over the next two years, he had two tours of duty in the Florida swamps fighting Chief Osceola's Seminoles. For "exceptional courage" shown in the Battle of Hacheeluski in January 1837, he was promoted to corporal. This may seem a small honor today, but in those early years of army history, it was the norm that promotions could, and usually did, take years.

Walker did his duty until he was mustered out of the Army in 1838. Single and still seeking adventure, he headed back to Florida, where he had a job waiting for him. An old Army buddy, George Gordon Meade of Gettysburg fame, had also left the service and was supervising the construction of the Alabama, Florida, and Georgia Railway. Walker remained in Florida until 1841, when he departed for Texas to become a legend.

Records indicate that Walker arrived in San Antonio in January 1842. He soon he joined the company of the man most would agree was the greatest Ranger of the pre-Civil War era, Captain John Coffee "Jack" Hays.

By 1842, the Texas Revolution was six years into history, but the wounds on

both Texas and Mexico were still bare and festering. Several Mexican invasions of Texas had occurred, most notably that by Raphael Vasquez in early March 1842. After plundering and looting San Antonio for two days, Vasquez had retreated to Mexico. Only President Sam Houston's calm hand prevented a war, but he could not alleviate the ever-growing hatred felt by both sides.

In September of the same year, not even Houston could keep a lid on the situation when the Frenchman Adrian Woll led a Mexican army into Texas and again captured San Antonio. For ten days, Woll infested the city. Houston placed Alexander Somervell at the head of the Texas Army, with two sets of orders to either (1) show restraint or (2) invade Mexico.

Sam Walker was not about to miss a fight, and he quickly signed on as a scout for Captain Jesse Billingsley. Billingsley's force joined up with Matthew "Old Paint" Caldwell, where Walker served with Jack Hays and Henry McCulloch. As Woll retreated back to Mexico, the Texans only had a few minor skirmishes with the invaders. The Rangers returned to San Antonio. For the next two months, they reorganized in what would become known as the [Alexander] Somervell Expedition. When they moved, they headed toward Mexico and peacefully reoccupied Laredo. The Texans stayed in Laredo only a short time before moving on down the Rio Grande to the town of Guerrero to resupply.

On December 18, 1842, General Somervell declared the expedition ended and ordered his 498 men back to San Antonio. One hundred eighty-nine of them refused to quit. They elected William Fisher their commander and continued with the invasion of Mexico. Jack Hays did not join them. He warned his comrades to abandon their foolish ideas, but they did not listen. Two of those who disregarded Hays' request were Sam Walker and W. A. A. "Big Foot" Wallace.

On December 23, the Texans invaded Mier, just south of the Rio Grande. They were unopposed. After demanding and receiving supplies, they returned to the north side of the border. On Christmas Day, some of Fisher's spies reported that 700 Mexican soldiers were in Mier. This was a fight worthy of the Texans. They re-crossed the river and attacked.

The Rangers were good, but even they couldn't handle the overwhelming force of this enemy. On the next day, December 26, they were forced to surrender.

Unfortunately, Sam Walker was not one of the Texans who surrendered. He had been the first Texan captured in the ill-fated expedition. The day before, he and fellow scout Patrick Lusk had been on a scouting expedition. Walker had come upon some Mexican soldiers and fired. He was attempting to crawl under a fence when a Mexican soldier grabbed him by his foot and held him tight until reinforcements arrived.

What followed would enrage Texans as nothing had since the Alamo and the Fannin Massacre during the Texas Revolution. It was the Lottery of Death. The Texans were marched to prison in Saltillo. On March 1, 1843, Santa Anna ordered all 176 prisoners lined up against a wall and shot. Fortunately, Governor Francisco Mexia refused to commit such an atrocity.

The prisoners were then ordered to San Luis Potosi. By March 25, when they arrived at Rancho Salado, another order had arrived from Santa Anna. He ordered that every tenth man must be shot. This time, there would be no

## **Governor Mexia to stop the murders.**

**Who would die? One hundred fifty-nine white beans and seventeen black beans were placed in a jar. Each man dug his hand into the jar and brought out a bean. Anyone unfortunate enough to withdraw a black bean died. Walker and Big Foot Wallace both brought out a white bean and were spared. The leader of the Texans, William Fisher, also drew a white bean. However, Santa Anna would not hear of the Texas commander being spared, and he was shot.**

**For months, Walker and his fellow Texans were summarily beaten and worked, in some cases to death. On July 30, 1843, Walker escaped and managed to get on a ship headed for New Orleans. He arrived there in September.**

**Walker didn't stay long in the Crescent City. He wanted to get back to Texas and start settling scores south of the border. He repeated his vows of vengeance so often to his friends that he earned a new nickname, "Mad" Walker.**

**Walker would have to wait, however, before he could start extracting his vengeance. He rejoined Jack Hays and rode for the next two years, fighting Indians. It was during this time that he started down the road that would lead to his name being associated with one of the most famous handguns ever made—the Walker Colt.**

**Walker almost missed making that association. During one fight, a Comanche ran a lance through him. Though critically wounded, he recovered after several months and soon rejoined the Rangers. He was again wounded, though not as seriously. In fact, he was wounded so many times that his compadres soon hung another nickname on him: "Unlucky" Walker.**

**While Hays and his men rode out against the Comanches, they were armed with the five-shot Paterson Colt. Until Samuel Colt invented the revolver, the Rangers were at a decided disadvantage against the Indians. Ranger weapons were single-shot. While a Ranger was reloading, a well-trained Comanche could have five or six arrows in the air toward him.**

**The Paterson revolver was first used in the pivotal battle of Walker's Creek [not named after Sam Walker] on June 8, 1844. Walker participated, again under Jack Hays' command. This minor battle of Texas Rangers vs. Comanches may have been nothing but a little skirmish, but it was significant because of the new weapon. After this, war the world over would never be the same again. The Paterson changed warfare: now the pendulum swung in favor of the Rangers.**

**Of course, "Unlucky" Walker was wounded yet again in this battle, though not seriously. After recovering, he continued fighting Indians. On March 28, 1846, his Indian fighting days were over, however, and he was discharged from the Texas Rangers.**

**But his days as a Texas Ranger were far from over. In 1846, the United States and Mexico again went to war. Walker rode to Rio Grande to join General Zachary Taylor's army. Taylor was impressed enough with Walker that he authorized him to raise a company of Texas Rangers to serve in the federal forces as scouts for his army.**

**In the following months, Samuel Walker's deeds of daring made him a**

household word throughout America. The people of New Orleans were so impressed with the dashing Texas Ranger that they raised enough money to present Walker a magnificent horse named Tornado.

Walker gained his great fame doing what Texas Ranger commanders have done for 180 years—he led from the front. Sam Walker would be found where the fighting was the heaviest. His actions and those of his fellow Rangers, from the far South Texas battlefield of Palo Alto to the Mexican town of Monterrey, were so spectacular that all the Rangers covered themselves in glory. Walker himself rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. It was during the Mexican War that the rest of the world learned what Texas already knew: there were no fighting men in the world better than the Texas Rangers.

On October 2, 1846, Walker's days as an official Texas Ranger finally came to an end. The Ranger enlistments were completed and he left Mexico with Jack Hays. After arriving in San Antonio, the duo traveled to Galveston, where they were treated to a gala ball and a dinner in their honor. Shortly thereafter, they sailed for New Orleans, where their arrival "created a sensation throughout the city."

In New Orleans, the two future Texas Ranger Hall of Famers separated. Hays went to Mississippi and Walker headed for Washington, DC. Back on June 30, 1846, Walker had been appointed a captain of Mounted Riflemen in the United States Army. However, he was permitted to remain a Texas Ranger until his enlistment was completed on October 2.

With his appointment in the Army, Walker had to recruit, equip, and train his command. In pursuit of this goal, he spent the next six months in the east, raising money to buy arms and equipment for his men.

By the end of November, Walker was in New York City. Sam Colt, the bankrupt developer of the Colt Paterson revolver, heard that Walker was in the city looking to buy arms. Colt, never one to stand on principal if a dollar was to be made, contacted Walker. He found an enthusiastic potential buyer. Walker and Colt became fast friends.

But as great a revolution as the Paterson revolver was, it had many shortcomings. Chief among them were being fragile and very cumbersome to reload. Walker had several suggestions to improve Colt's pistol. However, the two men had a major problem—they didn't have a Paterson to look at. Colt had gone bankrupt, and he had not saved a single weapon. Walker had not brought a pistol with him.

Colt was anxious to adopt whatever suggestions Walker wanted. He knew that Walker's prestige with the Rangers and the Army could very well put him back in business in a big way. Colt agreed to modify his pistol with Walker's suggestions, and Walker would try and get the government to buy them. Both men kept their ends of the bargain.

What the two men brought to life was the legendary Walker Colt, the most powerful handgun in the world until the introduction of the 44-Magnum deep in the 20th century. The Walker was a magnificent piece of work. Fully loaded, the monster pistol weighed almost five pounds. Unlike the Paterson, which fired five shots, the Walker would fire six times.

Walker returned to Washington and secured an appointment with President James Polk. Hearing Walker explain the new pistol that Colt could produce,

the President and Walker went to the office of William Marcy, the Secretary of War. President Polk ordered him to purchase the weapons. Marcy passed the purchase order for 1,000 Walkers at twenty-five dollars each to Lieutenant Colonel George Talcott, the Ordnance Chief.

While Colt was producing the pistols, Walker raised his company of men, gave them some training, and departed for Mexico. He arrived at Vera Cruz, Mexico, on May 10, 1847. On June 26, the first batch of revolvers was sent to Walker at Vera Cruz. However, it took a long time for shipments to travel from the northeast United States to Vera Cruz, Mexico, and it would be months before the weapons arrived.

After a month at Vera Cruz, Walker and his men moved inland to Perote Castle. Perote Castle held no fond memories for Sam Walker. It was here that he and his comrades were imprisoned during the ill-fated Mier Expedition. It was also from here that Walker and some of his fellow prisoners had tunneled out of the prison and made their escapes.

A legend, possibly a myth, has been passed down from this era. The story goes that Walker and his fellow Mier prisoners were forced by their captives to erect a flagpole. According to the legend, Walker swore that one day a Texas flag would fly from this same pole. Other stories say it was an American flag, but since this was a Texas expedition manned by Texans, it would seem strange that Walker would vow to raise an American flag. Either way, the story continues that when Walker had planted the pole, he placed an American coin--a dime--under the flagpole's base. The first thing Walker did when he arrived at Perote was retrieve the coin.

Whether the story is true or not, Walker had no trouble remembering his vow of vengeance when he looked at his former prison. It was a vow that would have to wait, however. For the next four months, Walker and his men worked overtime keeping General Winfield Scott's supply line open, lest the American army starve. The men never went hungry.

Walker and his men operated as Texas Rangers against the Mexican guerrillas, who were working to keep the American army's supply line severed. Even though they were officially listed in the United States Army, that was as far as it went. Walker, his men, and their contemporaries always referred to themselves Texas Rangers.

Throughout these months, Walker and his men fought without the great pistol named after him. On October 4, only four days before his death, Walker finally received two of the soon legendary pistols.

General Joseph Lane was moving his command to Puebla, where Santa Anna waited with 4,000 men. Lane stopped in Perote. He conferred with Walker and decided to attack the Mexican forces. Walker and his Rangers would lead the assault. The Rangers would have it no other way. Later, many of those who knew him best said that Walker was obsessed with capturing the Mexican dictator.

Even though instructed by Lane to stay within support distance of his force about three miles from Puebla, Walker ordered his men to draw sabers and charge. Walker's men hit the Mexican Army a full forty-five minutes before Lane's main force could join the battle. But by then it really didn't matter. The enemy was beaten.

But Texas Ranger Sam Walker never knew. He was dead by the time the battle was over. His life ended as he was moving through a churchyard and a bullet snuffed out his life. There are conflicting reports as to the fatal wound. One says that he was shot through the head and another claims he was shot in the back, with the bullet passing through the left shoulder and passing above the heart. Either way, his death was immediate.

Walker's body was returned to San Antonio for burial. Twenty years later, on April 21, 1856, San Jacinto Day, his body was exhumed and reinterred in the Odd Fellow Cemetery beside another great Texas Ranger, Richard Gillespie.

At the time of his death, Walker's fame was nationwide. His passing was news in every major newspaper in America. In 1846, there was even a Broadway play, *The Campaign on the Rio Grande, or, Triumphs in Mexico*, whose main character was Sam Walker.

In 1846, the Texas legislature formed Walker County. It was named for Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, not Sam Walker. When the Civil War started, however, there was a major problem: Robert J. Walker was a Unionist. This would never do in a Confederate Texas. In 1863, the Texas legislature decreed that the name of the county "should be named to honor the memory of Captain Samuel H. Walker, of the Texas Ranger Service."

Late in his life, Walker traveled to Washington and New York City. He kept his date with destiny and Sam Colt as an officer of the United States Army. He may have been a member of the United States Army at his death, but he and his peers considered this shining star a Texas Ranger.

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