

A Brief History of the Arizona Rangers

By Steve Utter, AZ Ranger and Historian (Tucson Company)

1890s. As the states around us became civilized AZ and NM became places for bad actors to escape to and get away from local and state law enforcement.

December 1887 BM took the job as Supervisor for the Aztec Cattle Company. The ranch was 1,008,000 acres alternate sections south of the Santa Fe tracks in northern Arizona. Alternating section belonged to the U.S. Government.

The Aztec, also known as Hash Knife because most of their stock came from the Hash Knife spread in Texas. For fortune years the ranch had not returned a profit. They ran about 50,000, cattle a couple of thousand horses and had about 80 ranch hands.

Most of the trouble came from rustling cattle by small spreads, internal thefts by cowboys, and others stealing the ranch blind.

Burt was a tough manager who cleaned up the Hash Knife and got noticed by the ranchers and cowmen of the territory.

1898

Big Ranchers push Gov Murphy for territory wide police force to control rustlers.

March 1901 T Gov Murphey gets auth for AZ Rangers.

Ranchers/T-Gov push BM to accept Capt. Job.

30 Aug 1901 Burt Mossman accepts and appointed 1st Capt. 30 Aug 1901.

6 Sept 1901 BM hires first Rangers am. Dayton Graham, Bert Grover and Tom Holland

6 Sept 1901 BM hires second two Rangers pm. Leonard Page and George E. Scarborough* (87)

13 Sep 1901 BM hires four more Rangers

Carlos Tafoya*, Fred Barefoot*, James Warren, Don Johnson.

Tafoya (97) first Ranger killed on duty 7 Oct 1901 after 33 days on duty.

18 Sept 1901 John Campbell, Richard Stanton

20 Sept 1901 Duane Hamblin

12 Oct 1901 Henry S. Gray

Oct 1901 John Frank Richardson (81)

1 Dec 1901 McDonald Robinson hired as a replacement for Carlos Tafoya.

Badge 13 became a favorite number of future rangers "And that number will be an unlucky number for a lot of outlaws, " said Burt Mossman (superstition or good luck charm)

Bisbee became the first HQ for the Rangers.

Mossman had a special arrangement with Colonel Randolph of the Souther Pacific RR and with the Santa Fe. Rangers and their horses were given free transportation anywhere over those lines. In an emergency a specially train would be thrown together and dispatched within an

hour to any part of the territory. These swift, silent tactics and surprise doubled the efficiency of the outfit.

7 Oct 1901 Carlos Tafoya killed in shoot-out with Smith Gang

Early in Oct 1901 Mossman was on a scouting to Solomonville only to find a telegram indicating Ranger Bill Maxwell was killed and Carlos Tafoya was critically wounded in shootout with the Bill Smith Gang who had robbed a UP Train in Utah and headed south with a bunch of stolen horses. Maxwell was not a ranger, rather a Deputy Sheriff for Apache County who had joined the posse chasing the Smith Gang. Maxwell was shot in the head and died instantly while Carlos was shot twice in the abdomen and died several hours later.

Before he died, Carlos handed a silver dollar to Henry Barrett and said Give this to my wife, it and my months wages will be all she will ever have. When Mossman heard the story he asked for the dollar, saying he wanted to do something special with it. Later, in a trip to Phoenix, Mossman told T-Gov Murphy the account of the killing and about the dollar and asked for a pension of \$45 per month for Carlos' widow.

The outlaws escaped and were never apprehended.

Rangers travelled incognito and used surprise to catch and break up gangs of rustlers and smugglers along the border and are very successful.

Background on the end of the first year:

Theodore Roosevelt had just become president in 1901

In August he appointed a new territorial governor for Arizona, Alexander Brodie

Cap M had offered his resignation in July with an end date of 31 August 1902

Thomas Rynning was designed as the replacement for Mossman

With less than a month to go Alvord and Stiles reported a meeting with Chacon had been arranged.

The last story of the first year: Augustine Chacon.

AC didn't kill anyone during Cap M's year as leader of the Rangers. But he had killed many in the times before, somewhere between ten and twenty-nine Americans.

The last mission:

Augustine Chacon was a thorn in the back-side of Cap Mossman that needed to be dealt with. He sought the help of William Stiles and Brut Alvord, both had worked both sides of the law in Tombstone and surrounding area. Alvord had worked with Sheriff John Slaughter and Stiles had been an police officer in Tombstone.

BM recruited both Alvord and Stiles to help capture Augustine. BM put them on the Ranger payroll.

Alvord and Stiles arranged the meeting for Mossman with Chacon near the border for the supposed purpose of forming a gang to slip across the border and steal horses.

Alvord, Stiles and Mossman meet with Chacon near the border on the Mexican side some distance south of Naco, AZ.

Alvord lured Chacon to the meeting, Mossman and Stiles met them and spent a tense night selling the story of thoroughbred horses just waiting over the line to be taken. It was 3 Sept and a cold evening. Sitting around the fire smoking Mexican cigarettes, Mossman walked close to Chacon, asked for one. As he stooped to light it with a branch from the fire, Mossman dropped the twig back into the fire and drew his pistol. Stiles cuffed Chacon, gathered the horses and set off for the border.

They cut the border fence rode through and to the tracks where Mossman flagged a train, they boarded and the train made its way to Benson where chance would have it, Sheriff Jim "Hard Times" Parks, sheriff of Graham County was waiting at the depot.

Mossman turned Chacon over to Parks .

It had been five years since Chacon had escaped from Solomonville jail the night before he had been scheduled to hang.

BMs job was over. He got out of town and the state in case the Mexican Counsel-General wanted him arrested for kidnapping.

And at this point Thomas Harbo Rynning assumed the post as the second Captain of the Arizona Rangers, 1 September 1902.

Rynning was a second Lieutenant in the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cav, Spanish American War. Second Captain of Arizona Territorial Rangers, and 21 March 1907 was appointed by President Taft as the last Warden of the Yuma Territorial Prison, Yuma Arizona before moving it to Florence where , using his construction skills, used inmate labor to build Central Unit.

He expanded the rangers from 13 men to 26, helped quell riots in Morenci, and helped rid the territory of many of the gangs and slow the steady run of smugglers crossing the line. At Morenci 25 of the 26 Rangers were present and pictures of that meeting are famous throughout State. The missing Ranger was Jeff Kidder who had remained in Douglas

He moved Ranger HQ from Bisbee to Douglas which could use their presence, closer to the border where a lot of the crime was going on.

One of the first incidents was in the Cowboy Saloon, where Ranger William "Shorty" Webb warned by Lon Bass and Tom Hudspeth to stay out unless called for. Webb walked out. Bass and Hudspeth warned Rynning that Webb would be shot if he came back. Rynning replied "You'd better forget that killing talk. There'll be two sides to that play. And Webb is one of the fastest with a gun ever hit Douglas."

Later in February 1903 in a gunfight in that same saloon Ranger Webb killed Long Bass. Webb was tried in court and found innocent of wrongdoing.

The Cananea strike took place June 1st 1906 in the mining town of Cananea in Sonora Mexico. The strike was instigated due to poor working conditions and unequal pay between Mexican @ \$3 a day and American workers \$5 a day. Despite attempting change through an organized labor strike the workers were ultimately forced to return to work without their demands being met. The strike resulted in the deaths of approximately 33 workers, an additional 22 who were injured, and 50 more who were arrested. The strike proved to be emblematic of the growing unrest emerging under President Porfirio Diaz prior to the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution.

About half of the company police avoided involvement in the disturbance. Responding to a

Captain Thomas H. Rynning of the Arizona Rangers, entered Mexico against the orders of Joseph Henry Kibbey, Governor of Arizona Territory and the US department of War, who did not want to escalate tensions with Mexico.

The rangers promised to leave, but stalled until more federales and rurales arrived, ensuring that the strike was fully suppressed. Greene thanked the Americans and promised Rynning significant financial compensation, a pledge that was not fulfilled. Finally, the Arizona Rangers left by train back to the border and arrived at their home towns only 24 hours after they had left. The strike was officially declared over on June 6, 1906.

Sergeant Jeff Kiffer

On April 3, 1908, Kidder who had returned Naco Arizona to reenlist, went across the line to a cantina where he knew gun runners hung out. A gunfight erupted with Delores Quias and Tomas Amador, both local policemen, resulting in Kidder being wounded together with both Mexican policemen. The shooting brought two other policemen who fired at Kidder, hitting him through the stomach. Kidder was badly wounded, the bullet having passed through his intestines and exiting his back. Kidder, alone and outnumbered, returned fire on the two officers.

He next attempted unsuccessfully to make it back across the border. Kidder walked into the night attempting to reach the border several hundred yards away. Several Mexican policemen and civilians stood between him and the border at this point and began firing. Kidder continued to return fire until his ammunition was expended, at which point he surrendered. Naco Police Chief Victoriano Amador, who had been wounded by Kidder, jumped on him together with several of his policemen. The police beat Kidder as they dragged him about fifty yards toward the local jail where he was hit on the head with a pistol, resulting in a skull fracture. Kidder was held in jail that night without medical attention.

Talk about Kidder's dog, Jipp.

The following day, American officials led by Ranger Captain Wheeler persuaded local officials to release Kidder into a private residence for medical care. Dr. Francis Eppes Shine arrived from Bisbee, Arizona to attend him. However, by that point there was little hope that Kidder could survive although he was able to speak and to relay his own version of the events.

Deputy US Marshal John Foster entered into Naco and visited Kidder during this time, along with several others having authority to do so. Kidder died on April 5, 1908. At first, local authorities refused to allow Kidder's body to be removed to American soil. To prevent an international incident, General Torres intervened and ordered Kidder's body returned to the Americans. His body was sent to his mother in Los Angeles, California, where he was buried.

Captain Harry Wheeler

With nearly four years of service with the Rangers, Harry Wheeler had been a private, a sergeant, and a lieutenant, second in command of the Rangers. In March 1907 when Captain Rynning was promoted to Warden of the Yuma Territorial Prison Harry Wheeler was made Captain of the Rangers. He would hold the position until February 1909, when the legislature overrode the governor's veto and disbanded the Rangers.

Wheeler resigned as sheriff of Cochise County in March 1918 to enlist in the Army at the rank

in December 1918, after being called back to Arizona for further court action based on the Bisbee Deportation.

On May 15, 1918, the U.S. Department of Justice ordered the arrest of 21 Phelps Dodge executives, Calumet and Arizona Co. executives, and several Bisbee and Cochise County elected leaders and law enforcement officers. The arrestees included Walter Douglas, and would have included Sheriff Wheeler if he had not been serving in France with the American Expeditionary Force during World War I.

A pre-trial motion by the defense resulted in a federal district court releasing the 21 men on the grounds that no federal laws had been violated. The Justice Department appealed. But in *United States v. Wheeler*, 254 U.S. 281 (1920), Chief Justice Edward Douglass White ruled for an 8-to-1 majority that no federal law protected the freedom of movement for individuals. Protecting citizens' right to movement was a state function, White argued, and had to be enforced solely in state court.

Wheeler ran for Cochise County sheriff again in 1922 but was defeated in the Democratic primary. He settled in the Bisbee area. There he died from pneumonia in December 1925.[5]

End Note

In 1965 one of the modern day Rangers was visiting Washington D.C. and stopped in the office of Senator Carl Hayden. The Senator welcomed him and then proceeded to tell him a story:

When he was the Sheriff of Maricopa County he was in Bisbee and met the former captain of the Arizona Rangers. The train was coming into Bisbee and there was a drunk on the train waving a revolver around and threatening passengers. When the train arrived in Bisbee the conductor warned the drunk to stay on the train and not threaten people with his gun. The drunk ignored the warning and got off the train. Sheriff Hayden and Harry Wheeler were walking down the street past the train depot when the drunk wandered out waving his gun around. Wheeler and Hayden had their backs to the station when the drunk fired his weapon at the pair striking Wheeler in the heel of his boot. Before the drunk could fire a second shot, Wheeler spun around, drew his revolver and shot the drunk twice, hitting him squarely in the chest. Sheriff Hayden said that it was the fastest bit of gun play he had ever witnessed.

Wheeler said he was not the fastest draw in the Rangers. The fastest would have been Jeff Kidder and the most accurate were Wheeler and Tom Rynning.

Jeff Kidder practiced so much with his revolver he wore out the gun's mechanism and had to send it back to the factory to have it refurbished. It is also said that Kidder was faster using his thumb to cock the gun than other Rangers were using their other hand to fan the gun.