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## Ranger James Buchanan Gillett

By Robert Nieman

The name of Jim Gillett is well known today. In part, this is due to Gillett's Ranger efficiency, but it is also a result of his classic Ranger autobiography, *Six Years With the Texas Rangers, 1875 to 1881*, first published in 1921 in Austin and republished numerous times. Gillett also contributed occasionally to the popular periodical *Frontier Times*, edited by J. Marvin Hunter of Bandera. These writings tell us much about Gillett, but they also provide an intimate look at Ranger life during the 1870s and early 1880s.



Gillett was born in Austin, Texas, on November 4, 1856, the son of James S. and Elizabeth (Harper) Gillett. His father had organized a company to serve under Captain John C. Hays' Second Regiment, Texas Rangers, during the war with Mexico. James S. was later prominent in local politics, running unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor. He was appointed adjutant general under Governor Peter H. Bell. This background, as well as a better than average education, provided a framework for young Jim Gillett to consider his choice of careers.

Being an enthusiastic student did not appeal to young Gillett. By 1868, he quit school to enjoy the great outdoors. The family moved to Lampasas in 1872, and by 1873, Jim was working on a cattle ranch. With his father's death in 1874, Gillett located in Menard.

"[The Rangers] deeds of adventure and their open, attractive life along the frontier appealed to me, and I had conceived the desire to enlist in the battalion," Jim explained in his autobiography. On June 1, 1875, he joined Company D of the Frontier Battalion of Texas Rangers under Captain Daniel W. Roberts. "This was probably the happiest day of my life, for in joining the rangers I had realized one of my greatest ambitions." Each recruit had to provide his own horse, but the state furnished a Sharp's carbine, .50 caliber, and one Colt .45 pistol. A private's pay was \$40 per month.

In Gillett's first brush with Indians, he performed his work bravely, picking out one Indian and killing his horse. Ed Sieker killed the Indian and scalped him. There was a white boy, a captive of the Indians, who was recovered by the Ranger scout. This boy proved to be F. H. Lehman, who had been captured in Mason County. Years later, Lehman and Gillett renewed acquaintances in San Antonio at an Old-Time Trail Drivers' Association meeting.

Roberts' Company D was stationed in Mason County in the early days of the Mason County War, but it accomplished little during this time. Gillett was then assigned to Major John B. Jones' escort. This came at a time when the Frontier Battalion had to reduce its numbers, and Gillett felt fortunate in being allowed to remain. "My relief may be imagined when my name was read, for I had learned to love the ranger life and was loath to quit it." As a member of Jones' escort, Gillett traveled up and down the hue of companies from the Frio in South Texas to the San Saba in the Hill Country. Major Jones inspected each camp and learned of the efficiency of each of the captains. Gillett was able to see a great deal of the country as well as satisfy his desire for living in the great outdoors.

Sergeant N. O. Reynolds was assigned to Company E and was given the opportunity of choosing the men he wanted. Gillett was one of the thirty men chosen to serve and was mustered in on September 1, 1877. Among the first assignments given Company E was the duty of escorting the notorious John Wesley Hardin from Austin jail to Comanche to stand trial for murder.

The rangers were drawn up just outside the jail, and Henry Thomas and myself were ordered to enter the prison and escort Hardin out. Heavily shackled and handcuffed, the prisoner walked very slowly between us. The boy who had sold fish and game on the streets of Austin was now guarding the most desperate criminal in Texas; it was glory enough for me.

Reynolds' company escorted Hardin during the trial and appeal. Hardin was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to Huntsville for a term of twenty-five years.

The next important assignment for Reynolds' company was cleaning up Kimble County. Among the noted outlaws finding refuge there were the Dublin brothers, wanted for rustling as well as murder. Gillett was part of a scout unit sent to bring them in. In October 1877, he helped to capture Dell Dublin. In January 1878, Gillett, now a corporal, was in charge of another scout sent after the Dublins. He and his men decided to round up the Potter Ranch, a known hangout for fugitives. By chance, they discovered Dick Dublin. Called to surrender, Dublin chose to run. On foot, the fugitive almost escaped in heavy brush, but as Gillett described it:

As he ran, Dublin threw his hand back under his coat as though he were attempting to draw a pistol. I fired. The bullet struck the fugitive in the small of the back just over the right hip bone and passed out near his left collarbone. It killed him instantly.

Unfortunately for Gillett, the \$700 reward on Dublin could not be collected as it was for Dublin's arrest and conviction, not his death.

Perhaps Gillett's most memorable Ranger experience was in the pursuit of Sam Bass, the noted train robber. In late July 1878, the authorities learned that the Bass gang intended to rob the bank at Round Rock. Word was sent to Reynolds' command to get there as quickly as possible to stop the raid. Gillett was one of the party selected to ride to Round Rock. This was a long ride as the company was then stationed near San Saba. The squad arrived in Round Rock a few hours after the street fight was over. With the gun battle over and their horses exhausted from the long ride, Reynolds' men could do nothing. Gang member Sebe Barnes was dead in the street, killed by a shot from Ranger Dick Ware. Sam Bass was badly wounded and was in flight with Frank Jackson. On the early morning of July 20, Gillett and others of Reynolds'

company began searching for Bass. They found him not far from town, badly wounded and alone. Jackson had left him to his fate. Bass died on the 21st of July.

Gillett resigned from Ranger service at the end of February 1881. He had married Helen Baylor, daughter of Ranger Captain George W. Baylor, on February 10, 1881. However, the couple divorced on March 2, 1889, after bringing two children into the world.

In December 1881, Gillett was appointed assistant marshal of El Paso. In June 1882, he was appointed city marshal. In 1885, Gillett became manager of the Estado Land and Cattle Company, an office he held for six years. He then resigned to manage his own ranch.

On May 1, 1889, he married Mary Lou Chastain in San Marcos, Hays County. She was twenty-two, the daughter of Joseph T. and Martha Chastain of San Marcos. Where the couple met is not known. They eventually had seven children.

On November 4, 1890, Gillett was elected the third sheriff of Brewster County and served until November 8, 1892. His experience as a Ranger undoubtedly contributed to his success in this office.

Ranching next became Gillett's main interest. For a while he managed the G-4 ranch in Brewster County. At the turn of the century, Gillett was ranching south of Alpine on the 06 and Altuda spreads. In May 1904, he sold the Altuda and moved to Roswell, New Mexico, and sold the 06 ranch. Three years later, he decided he was not suited for this peaceful work. He sold his farm and returned to Texas, where he bought the Barrell Springs Ranch and began building a herd of registered Hereford cattle.

Gillett had served in Captain D. W. Roberts' Company D from June 1, 1875, to February 28, 1876; in Captain J. M. Denton's Company A from September 1, 1876, to August 31, 1877; and in N. O. Reynolds' Company E from September 1, 1877, to February 28, 1878, and September 1, 1879, to February 28, 1881. Perhaps his greatest honor was being named Captain of all Texas Rangers for life by Governor Ross S. Sterling. Gillett is the only person to have received such an honor.

Jim Gillett died in a hospital in Temple on June 11, 1937, of heart failure and is buried in Marfa. He was survived by his widow and five children. There is a state historical marker at his gravesite.

Several artifacts of Gillett's days as a Ranger are now housed in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.

The Sharp's .50-caliber carbine issued to him when he enlisted.

An 1873 Winchester carbine bought by him for \$40—a month's pay.

The knife he used in many encounters.

A solid gold badge given to him when he became city marshal of El Paso in June 1882.

In 1878, the State of Texas published A List of Fugitives From Justice, which



was distributed to Ranger companies. Gillett's copy is now in the Hall of Fame and Museum. Richard Dublin, who died resisting arrest at the hands of Gillett, is listed as a fugitive from Coryell County, wanted for murder and "supposed to be in Kimble County."

Beside the listing is Gillett's notation: "Killed by James B. Gillett - 2nd Corpral [sic] Co. E Texas Rangers on Pack Saddle creek, Kimble Co Texas January 18th 1877 [sic 1878] While resisting arrest." In numerous other places, Gillett has written the disposition of various other fugitives.

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