



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

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Jim Ray



No Texas Ranger has reached a higher rank in the Texas Department of Public Service-Chief of Criminal Law Enforcement-than Jim Ray.

Jim was born on December 15, 1914, in Bullard, Texas. His full name is Jim Ray-not James- even though he signs his name *James M. Ray*. He does not really have a middle name or initial; he simply got tired of people always asking for them, so he gave himself the initial "M". It is an interesting story how he came to use "M". There was a wealthy, influential man named Morgan in Tyler who believed that no law officer would confront, let alone arrest him for anything. He did not know Jim Ray. A friend of Jim's, Jimmie Staton, knew both Jim and Morgan and thereafter whenever he saw Jim he would say, "Here comes James Morgan." Jim liked the name and he started signing his name, James M.

After graduating from Bullard High School in 1933, Jim started his college work at Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches and finished at East Texas State in Commerce. Earning a degree in business administration in 1940, he got a job-not in business-but as a teacher at Lindale (Texas) High School. Teaching was not his calling in life, however. For as long as he could remember he had wanted to be in law enforcement. Jim applied for admission into the Department of Safety and was accepted. On November 1, 1941, he entered the Texas Highway Patrol School at Camp Mabry in Austin. He completed his training on December 26 and was assigned to McKinney as a motorcycle patrolman.

He did not stay there long. The United States was in the middle of World War II and he entered the Army Air Corps in 1942 and was assigned to the 1128th Military Police. By early 1943, he found himself in New Guinea helping guard one of the few air bases still in American hands. Three weeks later he was reassigned to Brisbane, Australia, and OTS (Officers Training School).

Except for the two hitches in the Army during World War II and Korea, Jim served in the Department of Public Safety until his retirement in 1978. On VJ Day (Victory Over Japan) Jim was in the hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas, suffering from pneumonia, dysentery, malaria-and to top it off-a cancer on his lip. He was discharged from the Army on November 24, 1945, at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

Jim was not one to stay down. Before the end of the year he was back on his motorcycle in the Highway Patrol, this time stationed in Houston. The next four years would find him patrolling at duty stations in Livingston and Conroe. In 1949 he was stationed in Athens, Texas, where he stayed until his acceptance into the Rangers in 1956.

It seemed Jim was unable to stay anywhere for long. He was barely settled in Athens when he found himself back in the Army. America was involved in the Korean War and Jim was called back to active duty in 1950. He spent his entire time stationed at Smoky Hill Air Force Base in Salina, Kansas, until his discharge for the last time in 1952.

While Jim had been gone, things had improved in the Highway Patrol. Returning to active duty, he no longer had to ride a motorcycle; he was assigned a patrol car. By 1954, he was becoming bored with stopping speedsters and drunks and wanted to join the Rangers.

On April 15, 1957, he transferred from the Highway Patrol to the Texas Rangers and was stationed in Tyler. Jim and Red Arnold, who was the Ranger stationed in Mount Pleasant, were responsible for thirty counties. These ranged from the Trinity River on the west to the Oklahoma line on the north, then eastward all the way to the Louisiana line. With such a vast area to cover, they were involved in countless cases.

In the ensuing years Jim was involved in many exciting investigations. It was Jim who was in the second chase car behind Captains Jay Banks and Johnny Klevenhagen when Banks put an end to the murderous careers of Gene Paul Norris and his partner Carl Humphries. Norris was one of most vicious killers in Texas history.

In 1957 Jim, Red Arnold, and a couple of Special Rangers from the Highway Patrol found themselves facing hundreds of angry wildcat strikers at the Lone Star Steel Strike in Lone Star, Texas. Jim remarked, "That was hairy." But unlike the more deadly strike in the 1960s, this one ended with no one dead.

Jim's territory included the huge East Texas Oil Field centered in Kilgore. With so much money on the table, it is not surprising that less scrupulous operators were trying to steal some of this massive wealth. One of the ways to do this was to use the process of "slant-holing." Oil thieves developed a procedure of supposedly "working over" an unprofitable well by squeezing a few more barrels of oil out of the tired well. What they were actually doing was drilling a hole at an angle-slanted-into a nearby lease and stealing oil out of it.

In 1962, hundreds of slant-holes had been discovered and the Rangers were ordered in to put a stop to it. By the time they finished in 1963, nearly every Ranger in the state had been in Kilgore at one time or another. And the Rangers accomplished their job: the slant-hole operators were put out of business. For his tireless work on this major case, Jim was named Peace Officer of the Year in 1963 by the East Texas Peace Officers Association.



On December 1, 1967, Jim was promoted to sergeant and transferred to Company E in Midland. From then on his rise was meteoric. A few months later, September 16, 1968, he moved to Lubbock as the captain of Company C. He remained a captain for only a short time. On June 21, 1969, he assumed the duties of Chief of the CLE (Criminal Law Enforcement) division of the Department of Public Safety in Austin. He was named the number two law-enforcement officer in the state, answerable to the Director of Department of Public Safety. He was able to keep a hand in his beloved Rangers because at that time the Rangers were a division under the CLE.

Jim remained in this office until his retirement on May 31, 1978. When he retired, Jim and his wife Kathleen moved back to Bullard. Kathleen passed away in 1984. Today Jim still lives in Bullard on the family farm just a few miles from where he was born.

by Robert Nieman

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