



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 It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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



Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.

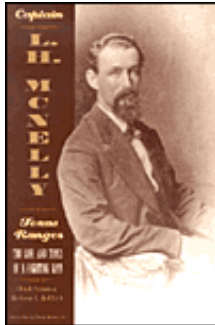

[Rangers Today](#)
[Visitor Info](#)
[History](#)
[Research Center](#)
[Hall of Fame](#)
[Student Help](#)
[Family History](#)
[News](#)

★ [Click Here for
A Complete Index
to All Back Issues](#)

★ [Dispatch Home](#)

★ [Visit our nonprofit
Museum Store!](#)

★ [Contact the Editor](#)



Captain L. H. McNelly, Texas Ranger: The Life and Times of a Fighting Man

by **Chuck Parsons and Marianne Elizabeth Hall Little**
Review by **Robert Nieman**

State House Press, PO Box 15247, Austin, Texas 78761. Forward by former Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe. 2001. Contents. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrated. P. 310. \$34.95. Hardcover.

No post-Civil War 19th century Texas Ranger has been written about more than Captain Leander H. McNelly. None has been as revered by his men (they called themselves Little McNellys), and none has been more controversial. Outside of Texas, he never reached the fame of other western lawmen such as Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok, Bat Masterson, Heck Thomas, to name just a few. But when his record is compared to theirs, none can walk in his shadow. Before being struck down by tuberculosis at only thirty-three, McNelly packed as much excitement and danger into his short life as did his more notable peers.

Parsons and Little have done a masterful job separating the controversy, myths, and legends that seems to have followed McNelly even during his own time. These stories comprise a list so long that no other historians have taken on the difficult task of separating truth from fiction.

As a young man, McNelly studied for the ministry and was only forced into the life of a warrior because of the War Between the States—or at least so says the legend. The facts, as pointed out by the authors, do not support that myth. Though undoubtedly a religious man, before the war McNelly led a peaceful life as a shepherd. Even though his young life did seem quiet and serene, without question the fire of a warrior was in his soul.

The authors trace McNelly's service in the Confederate Army from his enlistment in 1861 in the 5th Texas Cavalry through the New Mexico campaign until the end of the war. In the Battle of Galveston, McNelly helped capture the Union ship Harriet Lane and received the sword of the commander Captain Jonathan Wainwright, grandfather of the famed World War II General Wainwright—didn't he? Later in the war, he operated behind Union lines as a partisan Ranger in Louisiana. In this operation alone he covered himself in enough glory to have lasted most men a lifetime. Not McNelly, he was only getting started.



xAfter the war McNelly's served as a captain in the hated State Police of

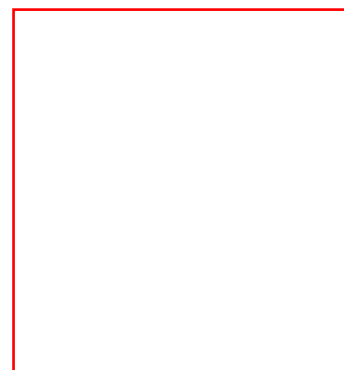
carpetbag governor E. J. Davis. For reasons explained in the book, McNelly, unlike any of the other captains, emerged with his reputation intact. When Davis was finally forced from office [almost literally at the point of a gun], the new administration knew that law and order had to be reestablished in Texas if the state was to survive. And like the phoenix of Greek mythology, the old guard of Texas was brought back from the ashes—the Texas Rangers. Two groups were formed: Major John Jones commanded the fabled Frontier Battalion and Captain Leander McNelly commanded the Washington County Mounted Volunteers in the area between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers — the famed Nueces Strip.

The McNelly legend assumed mythical portions on the border. The authors follow his intervention in the Taylor-Sutton Feud in DeWitt County and his actions on the Rio Grande. Here he rose to the status of a savior to many Anglos—and the Devil to many Mexicans. The book ends with his encounter with outlaw King Fisher and his termination by the State of Texas for reasons of health.

No library of the Texas Rangers in general, and Captain Leander McNelly and his Little McNellys in particular, would be complete without this extremely well researched and fully documented book. An absolute must.

§

Robert Nieman was born in McLeansboro, Illinois. He graduated from Martin High School in Martin, Tennessee, and attended the University of Tennessee at Martin. Robert and his wife Donna have lived in Longview since 1978. They have one daughter, Stacey, and one granddaughter, Madison. Together they operate their own business.



Robert's hobby is oral history and as such was given the high honor of being named the oral historian for the retired Texas Rangers.

Robert proudly serves on the board-of-directors of the Texas Ranger Association Foundation and the Texas Ranger Research Center.

Besides retired Texas Rangers, he has also recorded many hours with survivors of the terrible New London School Explosion of 1937 in which over 300 people—mostly children—were killed. He also proudly serves on the board of directors of the New London Museum.

[Top](#)

