



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 It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.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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Armed & Ready at The White House

As told to Robert Nieman

In the early 1970s, the future captain of Waco's Company F Bob Mitchell and his wife Jerry, their friends Marvin and Loria Stetler, and artist Joe Grandee and his wife were at our nation's capitol. They were to present Grandee's original painting of a Texas Ranger legend, Captain Leander McNelly, to President Richard Nixon at the White House. Mitchell was Company F's sergeant at the time (this rank is now a lieutenant). Unfortunately, the President was visiting with Texas's former governor, John Connally, and the presentation was made to one of Nixon's staff.



After the ceremony, the staff gave the Mitchells and Stetlers a VIP tour of the White House. Meanwhile, the gate guards learned that the sergeant was a Texas Ranger. As the two couples were leaving the President's home, a humorous incident occurred that would be impossible with today's security levels. The guards asked to have their pictures taken with Sergeant Mitchell, and he readily agreed. As everyone was preparing to pose, Stetler said to the Ranger, "Take off you coat so they can see your guns!" Mitchell obligingly removed his jacket, and there was a 1911 Colt 45 on each hip.

To describe the looks on the guards' faces as panic would be an understatement. Turning to Mitchell, the guards pleaded, "Please don't tell anyone about this. We will lose our jobs." They had nothing to worry about.



Marvin Stetler, a former Special Texas Ranger, demonstrated his appreciation of Sergeant Mitchell and the service he and his Rangers performed for the citizens of Texas. He presented Mitchell with the Smith & Wesson 44 Magnum, a nickel-plated, engraved, Smith & Wesson Model 29 with a 4" barrel. ©2006, Courtesy of Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.



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Ben McCullough

By Robert Nieman

Like many early Texans, this future member of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame migrated to Texas from Tennessee. Born in Rutherford County (Murfreesboro) on November 11, 1811, the family did not stay in the Middle Tennessee city long. Until Ben and brother Henry came to Texas in late 1835, the McCullough family lived in various Tennessee areas, Alabama, and

North Carolina.

McCullough had planned to travel to Texas with Davy Crockett, but was delayed and did not arrive until after the fall of the Alamo. History had a larger role for this future Texas Ranger than to die in that famous fortress. Ben joined Sam Houston's ragtag army as it retreated before Santa Anna, heading for a swampy area southeast of present-day Houston. During the Battle of San Jacinto, he manned one of the Houston's two pieces of artillery known as the "Twin Sisters." McCullough's actions were so outstanding that Houston awarded him a battlefield promotion.

After the war, McCullough left the army and took up surveying around Gonzales. During this time, he met the legendary Texas Ranger, Captain John Coffee "Devil Jack" Hays. From then until the outbreak of the Mexican War, McCullough rode with Hays in many Indian fights and rose to the rank of first lieutenant.

At the start of the Mexican War, McCullough raised a company of troops to serve under Jack Hays's First Regiment of Texas Mounted Volunteers. Recognizing the scouting and tracking skills McCullough had honed as a Texas Ranger, the American army's commander, Zackary Taylor, named him chief of scouts. By the time the war ended, he had risen to the rank of major for his extraordinary service, especially at the Battles of Monterey and Buena Vista.

After the war, McCullough returned to Texas and to surveying. Soon, the California gold fever of 1849 gripped him. Joining thousands of other gold hunters from around the world, he was quickly on his way to California. By 1852, McCullough was headed back to Texas as the US Marshal for the Eastern District of Texas.

With the coming of the Civil War, McCullough offered his services to the Confederacy and was appointed a brigadier general. He was sent to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where his division joined General Earl Van Dorn's 16,000-man Army of the West as it moved north to a remote spot in the Ozark Mountains called Pea Ridge (or Elkhorn Tavern). Awaiting the division was General Samuel Curtis's 10,000-man Union Army of the Southwest.



During the ensuing two-day battle on March 6 and 7, 1862, the Confederates suffered a crushing defeat. Union casualties amounted to 1,349 while the Army of the West suffered approximately 4,600. Among the Confederate dead lay the one-time Texas Ranger, Brigadier General Ben McCullough. He died as he had fought as a Ranger—far out in front of his men. Today he rests among many of Texas's greatest heroes in the State Cemetery in Austin.

Dispatch

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