

Ranger captain shoots rough 'n' tough image

By Linda Heasty

A passing motorist found Trooper David Rucker lying on Highway 100. He was shot to death, after checking a driver's identification on a routine traffic stop.

Six miles away, a Los Fresnos Police Officer was involved in an exchange of gunfire with the same man who had killed Rucker.

Texas Ranger Bruce Casteel of Harlingen was called to investigate the murder.

"It is one thing when you investigate homicides and another when you look down and see your colleague, your friend lying there," recalled Casteel. "This was a very tough case for me—emotionally. But the teamwork involved eventually led to the suspect's execution."

Teamwork is a major theme for Casteel who was promoted on Aug. 6 to commander of the 105-Ranger force after 29 years of service with the Texas Department of Public Safety. He said this promotion was a very "humbling" experience and was due to teamwork by his fellow employees.

"When I made Ranger Sergeant in 1985, I was elated," Casteel said with a huge smile. "People keep asking me how does it feel to be in charge, and maybe it hasn't sunk in yet, but it doesn't feel that different."

Casteel was born in Tennessee and came to Texas while serving in the U.S. Army. He said he always respected and enjoyed being around police officers so he began his law enforcement career with the Killeen Police Department in 1963. In 1965, he became a deputy sheriff for Bell County.

"The Rangers were involved in many of the criminal investigations that I worked on while I was a deputy sheriff. I developed an admiration for them and that became my goal."

In 1967, he graduated from the DPS Training Academy with one ambition—to be a member of Texas' legendary law enforcement agency. "If you had told me then I would someday be sitting where I am now, I never would have believed you."

He served as a Highway Patrol Trooper in Bryan and Killeen and as a polygraph examiner in Austin and Waco before becoming a Ranger in 1973.

While stationed in Harlingen, Casteel experienced some very bizarre cases, recalled Ruby Casteel, his wife of 20 years. "Some of those cases he worked could have been made into TV movies,"

she said. "He was so intense while working those cases, and he always felt like he had to solve every case."

One particular homicide stood out in Mrs. Casteel's mind. The victim had been wearing a tape recorder due to a child custody fight, and when he was found in a drainage ditch two weeks after his death, the tape still worked. The entire murder was captured on the tape.

"Many people thought if it hadn't been for Bruce, some of those cases never would have been solved. He's not in this job for the power. He just wants to do what is right and fair."

Mrs. Casteel stopped for a moment and remembered, "There was this woman once who wrote a note thanking Bruce for taking care of her and helping her to the hospital after she watched her mother die. He can't even remember that. He remembers the big cases, but often forgets about the small ones where he really made a difference."

Now, Casteel sits on the other side of the desk. Instead of bringing cases to supervisors, cases are brought to him. It is easy to lose track of criminal investigations and the people behind them with all the paperwork involved.

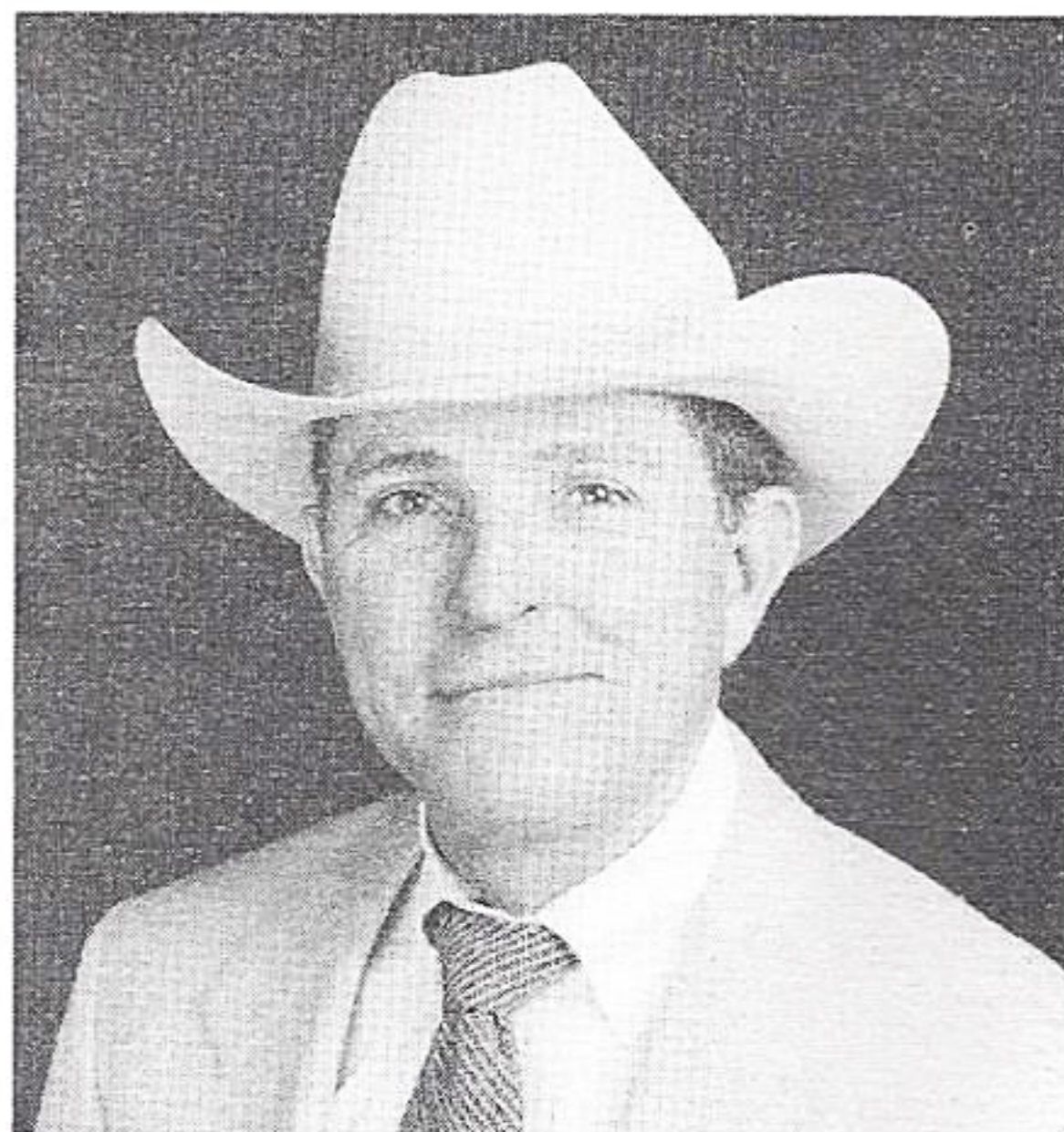
"I enjoyed investigating cases," he said, very matter-of-fact. "Some day when I'm sitting on my front porch telling Texas Ranger stories, I'll be talking about the years I spent investigating in the [Rio Grande] Valley."

Some of the cases he handled may have been interesting enough to make into a movie, but Casteel said only a small percentage of the day-to-day work would sell on television. The popularity of Chuck Norris' "Walker, Texas Ranger" has given the Rangers positive publicity and generated interest from both children and adults, Casteel said.

"I think Norris is a good guy who has the integrity and honesty it takes to be good at this job, but we probably wouldn't hire him as a Texas Ranger."

The Texas Rangers are one of the oldest law enforcement organizations on the North American continent. The Rangers were formed by Stephen F. Austin in 1823 to protect the frontier. Over the years, the Rangers have been compared to other world-famous law enforcement agencies, like the FBI, Scotland Yard, Interpol and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Getting into the Ranger Division involves dedication and discipline. These qualities instilled in Casteel carry over from the office to his home. Mrs. Casteel, a counselor at McNeil High School, is a



Bruce Casteel,
Senior Captain of the Texas Rangers

doll maker and enjoys attending arts and crafts shows. Casteel is always alongside her. "He is very supportive of everything I do."

Besides being active in his wife's hobby, he helps her with the housework. Mrs. Casteel recalled going to Sears to buy a new vacuum cleaner. "The lady at the store was trying to explain how the new vacuum worked. I guess I wasn't paying attention because she stopped and said, 'Ma'am you're not paying attention to me.' And I wasn't. 'I'm not paying attention because I don't do the vacuuming. He does,' I said pointing to Bruce."

Casteel is very helpful around the house, according to his wife. He helps with the cleaning and the cooking—things very out of character when you think of a Texas Ranger, she said while laughing.

On any given weekend, Casteel can be found playing golf, hunting, fishing, running, doing yardwork or going out to eat at local restaurants. "I like to eat at this place called Gumbo's that serves Cajun food, and I absolutely love the Salt Lick. Great place to go," Casteel says, with his eyes closed as if picturing barbeque.

The Texas Rangers provide 173 years of cowboy images—living off the land, chasing criminals, camp outs and camp fires, wild animals, guns.

Casteel might be found living off the land, but only if he is on a hunting trip with his friends. Casteel might be running, but only if he is exercising. Casteel might be grilling meat on a fire, but only for the weekend barbeque. Casteel might be carrying a gun, in fact he does; but in the other hand, you might find him toting a vacuum cleaner.

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