Charles M. Robinson, III, is Professor of History at South Texas College in McAllen. A prolific author, his books include General Crook and the Western Frontier, Bad Hand: A Biography of General Ranald S. Mackenzie, A Good Year to Die: The Story of the Great Sioux War, Satanta: The Life and Death of a War Chief, and The Men Who Wear the Star: The Story of the Texas Rangers.

In this selection, Robinson discusses the Texas Rangers during the Captain Jack Hays era. Republic of Texas President Sam Houston lauded the fearless Indian fighter. "The frontier of our country would have been defenceless but for his gallantry and vigilance," Houston asserted. Robinson also recounts the importance of the new Colt's revolver, a weapon favored by Captain Hays.

Jack Hays was only one of several outstanding Ranger captains during the Republic, but he is the most famous because he was the type of frontiersman who inspires legends. Barely an adult when he rose to command, he nevertheless won the admiration of Sam Houston himself, who

"A Great Captain and a New Weapon" from The Men Who Wear the Star by Charles M. Robinson, III, copyright © 2000 by Charles M. Robinson, III. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.
observed, "The frontier of our country would have been defenceless but for his gallantry and vigilance united With fine capacity." Indeed, he was so widely known by reputation that people were surprised when they saw him for the first time. Pioneer John W. Lockhart, who met Hays in a hotel lobby in Washington-on-the-Brazos, said:

*I thought that my eyes had deceived me. Could that Small, Boyish Looking Youngster, not a particle of beard on his face, homely palefaced young man, be the veritable Jack Hays, the celebrated Indian fighter, the man whose name was sung with praise by all Texans? It could not be, I thought, but I soon found out that it was the veritable "Captain Jack."*

John Coffee Hays had the right credentials to achieve greatness in Texas. Like Sam Houston, he was a Tennessean, born on his family's plantation near Nashville on January 28, 1817. His father, Harmon Hays, was related to Andrew Jackson's wife, Rachel, and named his son for longtime family friend and Jackson protégé Col. John Coffee. The area's social life centered around the Hermitage, which the Jackets had built on land purchased from Harmon Hays. Here Jack and his brothers met the great men of the frontier and nation, including the up-and-coming Houston, who numbered Harmon among his friends.

Harmon Hays died when Jack was fifteen years old, and he was placed with a well-meaning uncle who urged him to try for West Point. Not liking the prospect of military regimentation, he left his uncle's home and worked his way westward over the next four years. He arrived in Texas shortly after the Battle of San Jacinto and, finding the new republic's rough-and-tumble army suited him better than the spit and polish of the American military, promptly enlisted as a scout and surveyor. After a stint in the army, he joined a Ranger company commanded by Henry Karnes, distinguishing himself in fights against Indians and Mexicans and developing a reputation for cool, daring leadership.

Besides being an outstanding leader, Hays more than any other individual is responsible for arming the Rangers with another great Texas legend—the Colt's revolver.

Hays achieved his reputation as a leader in the 1840s, a decade unusually rife with bloodshed, for the Texans were beset by both Comanches and Mexicans. Despite several peace treaties, Comanche raids had stepped up during the second half of the 1830s, and the number of captive women and children had grown.

Hostilities opened with a seemingly innocuous event. On January 9, 1840, three Comanches brought a Mexican captive to San Antonio, saying they had been delegated to negotiate a peace. Their message was passed on to Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston (later a noted Confederate general), who instructed Lt. Col. William S. Fisher of the First Infantry to meet with the Indians in San Antonio. If the Comanches brought their white captives, it would be considered a pledge of good faith, and they could depart unmolested after the treaty conference. If, however, they did not bring the captives, the chiefs would be detained as hostages.

The Comanches returned on March 19. The party consisted of sixty-five men, women, and children, but only one captive, fifteen-year-old Matilda Lockhart, who had been taken two
years earlier. She obviously had been tortured during much of her captivity; her nose was almost completely burned off, her hair had been singed to the scalp, and she was covered with fresh bruises and sores.

Twelve of the main chiefs were escorted into the “Council House,” as the old Spanish government house was sometimes known, while the other Indians passed the time in the courtyard. A quick conversation with Matilda Lockhart determined the other white prisoners were held at the main Comanche camp and would be brought in one or two at a time in hopes of large and continuous ransom payments.

Assembling his troops around the building, Colonel Fisher told the chiefs they would remain as hostages while the Comanche women, children, and warriors returned to their camp for the captives. Troops were brought into the room, and the chiefs drew knives and strung their bows. Fisher told the soldiers to fire if the Indians did not surrender calmly. At that moment, one chief stabbed a sentry and was shot. The others attacked the troops, who opened fire. Within moments all twelve chiefs were dead.

Hearing the commotion, the warriors and soldiers outside began fighting. Some Comanches headed toward the nearby San Antonio River, while others barricaded themselves into outbuildings around the Council House. When the shooting stopped, thirty chiefs and warriors, three women, and two children were dead, and twenty-seven women and children and two old men were prisoners. Among the Texans, seven soldiers and bystanders were killed and eight wounded.

During the weeks following the Council House Fight, an uneasy truce prevailed while the two sides negotiated and exchanged prisoners. The death of the twelve chiefs left the Comanches temporarily demoralized, and it took them time to recover. By early summer, however, they had retreated into the hills west of Austin and San Antonio and begun planning a revenge raid. They were encouraged by Gen. Valentín Canalizo, the Mexican commandant in Matamoros, near the mouth of the Rio Grande. As word of the Mexican involvement filtered north into Texas, Dr. Branch Archer, who succeeded Johnston as secretary of war, called up volunteer units against a potential raid. But when the weeks passed and nothing happened, the volunteers were mustered out and allowed to return home.

The Great Comanche Raid of August 1840 took the Texans completely by surprise. Mexican agents in Texas had kept in touch with the Indians and apparently convinced them to delay until the volunteers disbanded. On August 4, a war party consisting of about six hundred Comanches and Kiowas moved out of the hills and descended onto a relatively uninhabited area of the coastal plains. By the afternoon of August 6, they were spotted on the outskirts of Victoria, where the citizens prepared a defense. Avoiding the town itself, the Indians spent that day and the next in the immediate vicinity, stealing horses, burning and killing, and taking some women and children prisoner.

From Victoria, the raiders rode on to the small coastal settlement of Linnville. They struck that town on the morning of August 8, taking the citizens completely by surprise. Most fled in boats to the steamer Mustang, anchored in the bay. Those who didn’t make it were captured or killed. The refugees on the steamer spent the rest of the day watching as the Indians burned
and plundered the town. When they finally retreated, they carried several hundred horses and mules loaded with plunder taken from warehouses at the port.

Even before the sack of Linnville, the Texans were gathering their forces. Early reports of Indian movement had prompted two ad hoc Ranger units, under Capt. Adam Zumwalt and Ben McCulloch, to head out in pursuit. The two units came together on the morning of August 7. By noon they were joined by the old Indian-fighting Ranger John Tumlinson with sixty-five men from Victoria and Cuero, who, unaware of the raiding around Victoria, were returning from a scouting expedition.

As word of the attack on the towns spread, more soldiers, Rangers, and militia assembled, and Maj. Gen. Felix Huston assumed command. Guided by Tonkawa scouts under their veteran Chief Placido, the Texans moved inland and on August 12 intercepted the returning Comanches at Plum Creek, about twenty-seven miles southeast of Austin. Huston sent Ranger Robert Hall ahead with five men to reconnoiter. The Indians were strung out along the prairie, and to Hall the column "looked to be seven miles long." Skirting the column to the Comanche rear, the Texans could see warriors decked out in the plunder of Linnville.

Many of them put on cloth coats and buttoned them behind. Most of them had on stolen shoes and hats. They spread the calico over their horses, and tied hundreds of yards of ribbon in their horses' manes and to their tails.

By the condition of their fighting equipment and tribal regalia. Hall surmised they had been preparing for the raid for a long time.

At that moment, an officer and a private inexplicably blundered into the Indian line and were surrounded. The officer managed to break free and escape, but the private was killed in sight of the Rangers. Hall told his men to keep back a safe distance and fire whenever they had a target. The men obeyed, and they skirmished for about two miles until they got back to the main body of Texans, and the battle opened in earnest.

The cautious General Huston ordered the Texans to dismount, form into line, and open fire, but the bullets glanced off the tough rawhide of the Comanche shields. Seeing this, veteran fighters waited until the Indians wheeled about on their ponies, then shot them as they turned. As their losses mounted, the Comanches began pulling back out of range. Pressed by Ben McCulloch and Edward Burleson, Huston ordered a charge.

The sudden Texas assault startled the Comanches, but some fought back. A load of buckshot hit Ranger Nelson Lee near his elbow. He dropped his reins and his uncontrolled horse carried him straight into the Indians. Other members of his company rode after him and rescued him.

Hall took a bullet in his thigh. "It made a terrible wound and the blood ran until it sloshed out of my boots." He fell off his horse, but managed to stagger to his feet just as an Indian rode up. Hall raised his rifle, but the Indian threw up his hands and shouted, "Tonkaway!"—identifying himself as one of old Placido's scouts.

The Comanches were routed, and the Texans chased them until their horses gave out. In the confusion, the Comanches left behind their plunder and captives. Some of the captives were
recovered alive, but several had been killed when the Comanches realized they were defeated. One woman was seriously wounded but saved from death because her steel corset had deflected her captor’s arrow. A considerable amount of Mexican equipment was found, indicating the Comanches had been supplied from that quarter.

Two months later, on October 14, an ad hoc Ranger company under Capt. John Moore with Lipan scouts attacked a large Comanche camp on the upper Colorado River. The Indians were completely routed, bringing public demand for more campaigns. These were the last major expeditions for the time being, however. The Republic was completely penniless.

Jack Hays was in the Battle of Plum Creek, although not a key participant; the day really belonged to veteran Rangers Ben McCulloch and Ed Burleson. Nevertheless, Hays had already earned a solid reputation with a military expedition against Laredo under Col. Eurastus “Deaf” Smith in 1837, returned on two separate occasions in 1839 with Ranger expeditions of his own, and was in several Indian fights with Henry Karnes’s Rangers. His prestige was such that when the Texas Congress reorganized the frontier defense forces in January 1841, the twenty-three-year-old Hays was appointed to command one of three new Ranger companies. Records of these units are sketchy, but apparently Hays and the other two captains, John Price and Antonio Pérez, were responsible for enlistment of the men.

Nelson Lee, who had recovered sufficiently from his buckshot wound to join Hays’s company, recalled:

_He was a slim, slight, smooth-faced boy … and looking younger than he was in fact. In his manners he was unassuming in the extreme, a stripling of few words, whose quiet demeanor stretched quite to the verge of modesty. Nevertheless, it was this youngster whom the tall, huge-framed brawny-armed campaigners hailed unanimously as their chief and leader when they assembled together in their uncouth garb in the grand plaza of Bexar [San Antonio] … for young as he was, he had already exhibited abundant evidence that, though a lamb in peace, he was a lion in war…. _

Hays’s calculated aggressiveness inspired frontiersmen to say an enemy fled “as if Jack Hays, himself, were after them.”

Yet to say he was a daring youth amid grizzled pioneers does injustice to his men. The frontier drew people from all walks of life, and Hays’s Rangers were no exception. One of the company, Benjamin Highsmith, remembered many of them as “men of education and refinement. Around the campfire at night it was not uncommon to hear men quoting from the most popular poets and authors, and talking learnedly on ancient and modern history.”

In addition to Highsmith, who had carried messages out of the Alamo for Travis, Hays’s Rangers at various times included such men as Samuel Walker, who, while not an intellectual, would help design the first purely military Colt’s revolver; Ben McCulloch; P. H. Bell, a future governor of Texas; and Creed Taylor, around whom would one day center the most vicious blood feud in Texas history. As Rangers, however, they were young men looking for excitement.

“Discipline is almost wholly lacking,” a visiting German naturalist observed, “but this lack is made up for by the unconditional devotion to the leader, who by example leads all in the
privations and hardships they usually endure. No one is punished. The coward or incompetent must face the disgrace of dismissal. A uniform is not prescribed and everyone dresses to suit his taste and needs."

Creed Taylor remembered that before one fight, "[w]e dismounted and tightened up our saddle girths belts and etc, and while doing this I was struck with the spirit of dare-devil levity that seemed to have siezed every man."

When the new company organized, Hays's salary was set at $75 a month, later raised to $150. The men were listed at $30 a month, although at first no one was paid because the Republic was in the process of stabilizing its badly inflated currency. It was not a terribly critical problem, however, because the militia acts that governed the Rangers initially allowed only fifteen men. They furnished their own arms, horses, and equipment. The government supplied ammunition and, officially at least, provisions. In reality, the Rangers in the field were cut off from supply and so lived by hunting or on provisions seized from Mexican trains. As a long arm, most carried single-shot muzzle-loading Jaeger rifles across the pommels of their saddles. Hays and a handful of others carried Col. Samuel Colt's revolver.

Colt was not the first to invent a multishot revolving firearm, and he undoubtedly was inspired after seeing British attempts. Nevertheless, the Colt handgun, patented on February 25, 1836, was the first practical revolver, and by the end of that year, Colt was producing revolving pistols and rifles in his newly established factory in Paterson, New Jersey. The handguns included a pocket model in .28 caliber, and two .31-caliber belt models. The No. 5 (actually the fourth model produced) was a holster pistol in .36 caliber. Colt's Patent No. 5 had a total production of a thousand, many of which went to Texas, and for that reason it is known as the Texas Paterson.

By almost any later standard, the Texas Paterson was a crude, clumsy weapon. It was a cap-and-ball arm, with the five chambers in the cylinder charged from the front, the powder and ball being loaded separately. Each chamber had a nipple in the rear for a percussion cap that, when struck by the hammer, flashed directly into the chamber and ignited the powder charge. Once the chambers were loaded, they were sealed with grease, so that the powder blast from one would not ignite the others and cause the cylinder to explode in the hand of the user. The trigger normally folded into the frame and popped out when the gun was cocked; there was no trigger guard. The single-action mechanism required the hammer to be pulled back manually in order to turn the cylinder and cock the gun.

Yet for all its faults, the Texas Paterson was revolutionary. It fired five times before it was empty, compared to other contemporary handguns that had to be reloaded after each shot. And it was wonderfully uncomplicated, with only three basic components—frame, cylinder, and barrel. When it was empty, one simply removed the barrel, charged the chambers in the cylinder simultaneously from a five-spool powder flask, inserted the bullets, sealed the chambers, capped each nipple, replaced the barrel, and resumed firing. Paterson boxed sets often included an extra cylinder, doubling the amount of firepower before reloading. For its time, it was a brutally efficient weapon, and on the frontier, it could be used with devastating effect. J. W. Wilbarger, who was familiar with the arm, later wrote, "With these improved fire arms in
their hands, then unknown to the Indians and Mexicans... one ranger was a fair match for five or six Mexicans or Indians."

Oddly enough, the advantages of the Colt's Patent Revolver were not immediately evident in Texas. The War of Independence had left the country penniless and enormously in debt. Given Houston's peace policy and his aversion to a standing army, such weapons as remained after the war were deemed sufficient for the Republic's needs. But President Lamar's decision to take the offensive against the Indians and maintain a state of preparedness against Mexico required new arms purchases from abroad.

In the spring of 1839, Lamar received a visit from an old friend, John Fuller, owner of a successful Washington, D.C., hotel. Before embarking on his trip, Fuller had obtained several samples of the company's products, including the No. 5 pistol. Upon arriving in Texas, Fuller demonstrated the arms to Col. George W. Hockley of Texas's Bureau of Ordnance. A conservative officer who preferred the old-fashioned single-shot flintlock pistols and muskets, Hockley was unimpressed. The expanding Texas Navy, however, was delighted with the Colt's revolver, and on April 29, 1839, Navy captain Edward Moore, on a procuring mission to the United States, was instructed to negotiate purchase of 180 of these handguns for use by naval boarding and landing parties. According to Moore, "The Colt's pistols used by the Texas Rangers before annexation were all supplied from the Navy, after they had been in constant use by that arm of the service for upwards of four years..."

Thus Colt's Texas Paterson revolver, ancestor of the gun that became synonymous with the American West, originally went west as navy surplus!

Jack Hays apparently obtained his first Colt's revolver in 1839, not long after it appeared in Texas. He may have purchased it through David K. Torrey, a prominent Waco trader, who wrote him from New York about Colt's "beautiful pattern of belt pistol." At the time, Colt's revolvers were almost unknown outside government circles, scarce, and very expensive for private citizens on the frontier, so several years would pass before they became commonplace among either citizens or Rangers.

With or without Colt's revolvers, the Rangers still had to contend with Indians. The Comanches had begun to recover from the shock of Plum Creek and were moving back down toward the settlements. By the summer of 1841, they once again were raiding ranches and driving off cattle in the vicinity of San Antonio. On June 24, Hays led an expedition that struck a trail that led northwest to Uvalde Canyon. The command consisted of Hays's own company, now made up of sixteen Texans, and a company of twenty tejano Rangers under a captain identified as "Flores" but who probably was Antonio Pérez.

About two miles from the entrance to the canyon, they encountered a raiding party of ten Indians bound for San Antonio. The Rangers charged, pushing the Indians into a thicket. The Comanches gave ground grudgingly, forcing the Rangers to fight the distance. The thicket was too dense for a charge, so Hays had it surrounded while he and two others slipped in. Fighting broke out, and a fourth Ranger joined. Eight of the Indians were killed, and a wounded warrior and woman were captured. A Ranger named Miller was slightly wounded.
Hays reckoned that the main Comanche camp was within striking range, but when he followed
the trail he realized it was farther than he had thought. His horses were becoming jaded, so he
returned to San Antonio.

Still determined to find the main camp, Hays took a company of fifty Rangers and ten Lipan
scouts under the war chief Flacco and headed back toward Uvalde Canyon. The Comanches,
meanwhile, had retreated westward, deep into the Hill Country, “where the white men had
never before made a track.”

As the Rangers and Lipans neared the camp, they ran into a Comanche hunting party, which
turned about and rushed back to alert the others. Taking twenty-five of his best riders on fast
horses, Hays chased them eight miles, catching the main band as the women were packing to
flee. About a hundred warriors rode out to block the Rangers and lead them away from the
camp, and a running fight ensued for about ninety minutes. Hays’s exhausted horses finally
forced him to abandon the chase. Several Rangers were wounded. Hays could not determine
Indian losses, because they recovered their dead and wounded.

The search for the Comanche camp had taken the Rangers so far west of the line of settlement
that they were completely out of provisions. On their return trip, they slaughtered and ate
their worn-out horses. Nevertheless, the expedition had carried the Texans into an area the
Comanches had previously believed secure, and they abandoned their depredations around
San Antonio.

Part of Hays’s success in these early expeditions was attributable to his skill as a tracker who
could find an enemy trail that was almost invisible. John W. Lockhart observed:

*In the dry and rocky portions of West Texas a squad of fifteen or twenty Indians could go
through the country without leaving much sign, consequently a trailer was considered a
very effective man. This faculty Captain Hays had to a very marked degree, it almost
amounted to instinct with him; he could ride along at a good pace and see the signs
where other men could see nothing, hence his great tact in overhauling and finishing
Indians. It is said that often he would dismount and observe the small pebbles, and by
noticing the slightest displacement made by the horses, could, in a moment, tell in what
direction they had gone.*

In the field, Hays would halt his men a couple of hours before sunset, preferably near fresh
water. Some were sent to hunt game for supper, while others tended the horses and built fires.
After dark, when they had finished eating, they mounted up and rode until they found a
secluded spot for camp. The object was to get far away from their cooking fire, whose telltale
curl of smoke could be seen for miles. Two hours before dawn, they were in the saddle again.
“Thus we passed day after day, and night after night, scouring in all directions the wide plains
of Texas,” Nelson Lee wrote.

Given the historical record of Hays’s daring and audacity, it is not surprising that he inspired
legend as well. The most famous story concerns a single-handed stand against a band of
Comanches atop Enchanted Rock near Fredericksburg, some seventy miles west of Austin.
The story first appeared in Samuel C. Reid’s *The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch’s Texas*
Rangers, published in Philadelphia in 1847. It was among the Hays exploits that Reid picked up around Ranger camps during the Mexican War.

According to Reid, the incident occurred about 1841 or 1842, when Hays and his men were attacked by Indians near the base of the “hill.” Separated from his men, Hays retreated “to the top of the hill. Reaching the ‘Enchanted Rock,’ he there intrenched himself, and determined to sell his life dearly, for he had scarcely a gleam of hope left to escape.”

For almost an hour, he held them off by bluff, the mere act of raising his rifle enough to keep the Indians under cover. Finally, they grew bolder, and started to rush his position. Hays discharged his rifle, “and then seizing his five-shooter, he fell them on all sides.” After three more hours, his men finally made their way through the horde of warriors and rescued their leader.

“This,” said the Texian, who told us the story, “was one of ‘Jack’s’ most narrow escapes, and he considers it one of the tightest little places that he ever was in. The Indians who had believed for a long time that he bore a charmed life, were then more than ever convinced of the fact.”

Reid himself obviously never saw Enchanted Rock, because he described it as “forming the apex of a high, round hill, very rugged and difficult of ascent. In the center there is a hollow, in the shape of a bowl, and sufficiently large to allow a small party of men to lie in it, thus forming a small fort, the projecting and elevated sides serving as a protection.” In fact, Enchanted Rock is the hill itself, a giant granite dome, formed by a volcanic upheaval about a billion years ago, and one of the oldest geological features of North America. Eons of rain and wear have pitted the top with shallow depressions ranging from a few inches to hundreds of feet across, but scarcely deep enough to protect a man against attackers. But the slopes of the rock are broken by riffs and caves that could shelter a man in a fight. Thus, like many legends, the Enchanted Rock Fight probably was based on an actual event that was embroidered in Ranger camps over the passage of time. Whatever the case, it illustrates the nerve and imagination that made Hays the great captain of the 1840s.

While Hays and his men dealt with Indians, the government struggled to keep afloat. Lamar’s term expired, and on December 13, 1841, Sam Houston resumed the presidency with the finances in shambles. Nine days later, Dr. Anson Jones, the brilliant, Machiavellian secretary of state, bluntly told the cabinet, “The country is absolutely without present means of any kind; her resources are large, though prospective, but her credit is utterly prostrate.” The government’s entire annual revenue, he continued, would not be sufficient to pay even the interest on the national debt.

To reduce the pressure on the administration, Jones proposed a virtual shutdown of the country’s military, and a corresponding overhaul of priorities.

Our policy, as regards Mexico, should be to act strictly on the defensive. So soon as she finds we are willing to let her alone, she will let us alone.

The navy should be put in ordinary; and no troops kept in commission, except a few Rangers on the frontiers.
The Indians should be conciliated by every means in our power. It is much cheaper and more humane to purchase their friendship than to fight them. A small sum will be sufficient for the former; the latter would require millions.

By a steady, uniform, firm, undeviating adherence to this policy for two or three years, Texas may and will recover from her present utter prostration. It is the stern law of necessity which requires it, and she must yield to it, or perish!

Jones concluded with a direct attack against the national preoccupation with adventure, stating bluntly that Texas “cannot afford to raise another crop of 'Heroes.'”

Houston proposed drastic cuts in the national budget. The navy, cruising the Bay of Campeche to support insurgents in Yucatán, was to be brought home and laid up. New peace emissaries would be sent to the Indians. Government departments would be consolidated, and many positions established under Lamar would be eliminated. Inflated paper money would be recalled, and replaced with a strictly controlled currency.

The president believed if the Texas Congress adopted his recommendations he might “yet save the country.” Nevertheless he was uneasy about troubles on the Indian frontier, and the Mexican attitude plainly worried him. The Santa Fe Expedition had infuriated Mexico, as did the Texas Navy’s presence in the Bay of Campeche. More than anything else, however, the Mexicans were enraged because some of the “cowboy” gangs of the Nueces Strip had joined an ill-fated effort by rebel leader Antonio Canales to establish an independent republic of Mexican states along the Rio Grande. Despite Jones’s wait-and-see position, on December 29 Houston wrote his wife, “Our chance ... for invasion by Mexico is greater than it has been since 1836.”

Houston’s fears were realized. In March 1842, the Mexican general Rafael Vásquez invaded Texas and occupied San Antonio. The city was largely deserted, because Rangers had shadowed the invading force and the citizens were more or less prepared for evacuation. After two days of plundering, Vásquez freed three of Hays’s Rangers whom he had captured and started back for Mexico.

Throughout the spring and summer, fear mounted over the prospect that Vásquez’s incursion was only a prelude. By August, the Texans in San Antonio were unable to obtain ammunition locally, because it had all been sold to Mexicans. Ranger William A. A. Wallace, called “Big Foot” because his feet were outsized even for his six-foot-two-inch, 240-pound frame, told Hays he had seen “at least a dozen strange Mexicans in town ... who did not live there.” Because Wallace knew virtually every tejano, this was ominous.

Hays sent Wallace and another Ranger to Austin to obtain ammunition. Upon arriving, they found the capital in an uproar over an Indian raid and were pressed into service to hunt down the marauders. When they finally headed back to San Antonio, they encountered a couple of Hays’s men, who told them the city was occupied by a large Mexican expeditionary force under Gen. Adrian Woll.

Woll’s invasion caught San Antonio completely off-guard. Hays and most of the Rangers were on a scouting expedition, and those who had remained in town barely escaped the Mexican
cavalry. The Mexicans found the district court in session, and judge and attorneys were among the prisoners marched in chains back to Mexico. Besides the immediate blow to the legal system in San Antonio, the threat of a repeated invasion canceled courts in at least four other western counties over the next several months. Austin was only sixty miles to the north, and Houston, who despised Lamar's artificial capital almost as much as he despised Lamar himself, used the invasion as an excuse to relocate the government to Washington-on-the-Brazos. It remained there for over two years until returning permanently to Austin.

Woll held San Antonio until September 20, when he started back toward Mexico. In November a force of 750 Rangers and militia under Gen. Alexander Somervell marched toward Laredo on a retaliatory raid. They occupied the town on December 8, then continued down the Rio Grande, and on December 19, the force was ordered to return to Gonzales. A retaliatory blow—however minor—had been struck in Laredo, and as Jones had warned, Texas could not afford more heroes.

Hays and many of the other ranking Rangers joined Somervell in obeying the order. But some three hundred men, including prominent Rangers Big Foot Wallace and Samuel Walker, refused. Organizing themselves into a separate command under Col. William Fisher, they started toward Mier, southwest of the Rio Grande, about ten miles from the present city of Roma, Texas. The ensuing debacle, known to history as the Mier Expedition, was an act of sheer mutiny not involving Rangers in any sort of legitimate capacity. However, the roster included former and future Rangers, and the fate of the expedition had a far-reaching impact on Texan-Mexican relations. For those reasons, some discussion is in order.

The three hundred Texans seized Mier, but soon found themselves surrounded and vastly outnumbered by Mexican regular troops. After a desperate battle on the town square, the survivors surrendered and were marched south into the Mexican interior. At Hacienda Salado, south of Saltillo, they overpowered their guards and escaped. Some died in the wastes of northern Mexico, and others simply disappeared. A scant handful, including Ranger Nelson Lee, managed to reach Texas and safety. The remainder, unfamiliar with the country, were rounded up and returned to Salado, where Santa Anna ordered them decimated by firing squad. There being 176 prisoners, a jar was filled with 159 white beans and seventeen black beans. A white bean meant life; a black one death.

The drawing was in alphabetical order, and when it reached W, Big Foot Wallace found only a few beans left on the bottom of the jar. His hand, which was as outsized as his feet, barely fit in the neck, and he had to feel around for a bean with two fingers. It was white. When he gave it to the Mexican officer supervising the drawing, the latter grasped his hand and called the other officers to come look at its size. Wallace would remember the man because of that incident.

The men who had drawn the black beans were shot immediately after the lottery, and an eighteenth man, Capt. Ewen Cameron, was later shot near Mexico City on special orders of Santa Anna because Cameron had led the initial break at Hacienda Salado. The remainder, including Wallace and Sam Walker, joined Woll's prisoners from San Antonio in the grim fortress of Perote on the road between Mexico City and Veracruz.

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While the San Antonio and Mier prisoners sat in Perote, waiting repatriation and nursing their hatred toward Mexico and all things Mexican, life at home returned to normal. Texans are a resilient people, and Houston, eager to reestablish some semblance of peace, confined his efforts against Mexico to diplomacy. As early as September 14, 1842, with Woll in San Antonio, the president had written Jack Hays:

_The situation of our frontier is very unhappy in its influence upon the prosperity of individuals, as well as upon the general interests, settlement and growth of our country. To remedy existing evils is a matter of primary importance to our situation. You are so situated [in San Antonio] that you can determine what course will be proper and safe to pursue. I have thought that advantage might result to us if trade were opened to San Antonio and to such other points as would be safe. In 1838 we had friendly relations and commerce with Mexico, so far as the frontiers were concerned, and had it not been for the cow boys and Canales and his gang, we would never have had any further troubles._

Hays himself appears to have been willing enough to comply. He realized that his Rangers were primarily scouts and mounted riflemen, more adept at fighting Indians and keeping an eye on Mexican movements than provoking an open conflict with Mexico. Most of his efforts continued around his Indian expeditions.

Between these expeditions the Rangers passed their time amusing themselves with the social and sporting life of San Antonio. Their profession was dangerous, and about half of all Rangers were killed every year. The life expectancy of the average Ranger upon joining the service was two years, and they intended to make the most of their leisure time. Cockfighting was a major event in San Antonio on Sundays. After church everyone, including the priest, joined in the sport. Most nights, the _tejanos_ held dances and the Rangers attended. Hays himself “was sometimes seen whirling around with some fair señorita.”

Economics still plagued Texas, and eventually the Ranger companies authorized under the 1841 defense acts were disbanded. Houston, however, was certain the Texas Congress would authorize a new peacekeeping force, and when Hays called on him in January 1844, the president suggested he arm his men from the Texas Navy’s supply of Colt’s revolvers. From his own experience, Hays knew the value of the weapon. After getting an order from the secretary of war, he went to the naval depot at Galveston, where he drew the revolvers, extra cylinders and bullet molds, and other accessories. The Colt’s revolver’s time had come.

As anticipated, the Texas Congress approved a new defense act, designating Hays by name to command a Ranger company of forty privates and one lieutenant. They were to be enlisted for four months, although this could be extended by presidential order in an emergency. And, thanks to Houston’s foresight, they were armed with revolvers. As a frontier weapon, the Colt’s had its baptism of fire on June 8, 1844, after reports arrived in San Antonio of Indian depredations along the Guadalupe River northwest of the city. Hays, who was now a major, took fifteen of his new Rangers, including Sam Walker, who had returned to Texas following his release from Perote. They hunted for the Indians as far as the Pedernales River west of Austin and, finding
nothing, were returning home when they discovered the Comanches had crossed their trail and were following them.

A small group of warriors taunted the Rangers, retreating when the Texans started toward them. Surmising this was a decoy party trying to lead him into a trap, Hays ordered his men to take cover in a stand of timber. As the Rangers neared the woods, however, the main band of Comanches emerged from the trees. Hays estimated “some sixty-five or seventy warriors . . . led by two especially brave and daring chiefs.”

The Rangers charged, and after a vicious hand-to-hand fight, the Indians slowly began falling back. One of the chiefs, however, started exhorting the warriors, raising himself up in his saddle and gesturing to hit the Rangers one more time.

“Any man who has a load, kill that chief,” Hays ordered.

“I’ll do it,” Richard Addison (Ad) Gillespie answered, and, taking careful aim with his long rifle, he shot the chief out of his saddle.

The Indians charged a second time. The Rangers used their revolvers, “two cylinders and both loaded,” one survivor recalled.

“The repeating pistols, the ‘five shooters’ made great havoc among [the Indians],” Indian Superintendent Thomas Western reported to Houston, “some 30 or more were the killed and wounded, finally they fell back carrying off their dead and wounded and encamped in sight, where they remained, the belligerent camps in sight of each other. . . .”

Sam Walker was badly wounded—at first the Rangers feared mortally—and Gillespie was severely injured. Hays was afraid to move them, so he sent one of his men into San Antonio for help. The Indians were too badly battered to travel far, and the two camps glared at each other across the prairie until Ben McCulloch arrived with twelve more men. The Indians departed, and the Rangers remained in place until Walker and Gillespie were well enough to be moved.

Walker recovered from his wounds and drew a sketch of the fight showing a small band of pistol-packing Rangers chasing a horde of Indians. He sent the sketch to Sam Colt, who had artist W. L. Ormsby engrave it on the cylinders of the heavy .44-caliber six-shooters introduced in 1847. Ormsby’s imaginative interpretation erroneously depicts the Rangers as uniformed soldiers, but this does not detract from the cold, functional beauty of the weapon.