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## Ranger Flores' Chiefs Special

By David V. Stroud

*Gun photos courtesy of David V. Stroud*

If you have read my previous articles, you are more than aware that my interest in weapons is concerned more with history than shooting. As a 1968 history major with a GI Bill wallet, I began collecting Civil War Colts and Remingtons while viewing—and wishing I could afford—the few examples offered with presentation-inscribed back straps. Over the years, my interest expanded to include western gunfighters, outlaws, lawmen, and Texas Rangers. Except for exchanging the GI Bill for a teacher's paycheck, nothing has changed.

Therefore, when I am provided the opportunity to purchase a weapon with a *known* historical association—and *if* I can afford it—I buy it. Such was the case a few years ago with Texas Ranger George W. Chapman's Winchester Model 7<sup>1</sup> and Robert G. "Bob" Goss' church-wearing Smith & Wesson (a future article). More recently, I purchased Sergeant William Rodolfo "Rudy" Flores' back-up and off-duty, nickel-finished, two-inch barrel, .38 Chiefs Special.<sup>2</sup>

Sergeant Flores was born in Galveston, Texas, and graduated from Ball High School. He has been a Texas peace officer since 1982, having previously served with the Galveston County Sheriff's Office, Galveston Police Department, and Texas Department of Public Safety as trooper and sergeant. He holds a TCLEOSE certification as a master peace officer, instructor, firearms instructor and special investigator. Rudy regularly instructs in crime-scene and criminal investigations at local police academies, sheriff's offices, and police departments. He has been accepted in state and federal courts as an expert in bloodstain-pattern analysis. Rudy is one of seven who developed



**Sergeant Rudy Flores**

*Photo: Texas Ranger Hall of Fame  
& Museum*

<sup>1</sup> Dispatch, Spring 2004.

<sup>2</sup> William Rodolfo Flores, 08/02/2006. email.

an advanced crime scene investigation program for the Texas Rangers, and he currently teaches the course. He does this while completing “year 22 of a 23-year plan to get a 4-year degree in criminal justice” and then a master’s degree at Sam Houston. <sup>1</sup>

In 1949, with off-duty lawmen and suit-wearing deactivates in mind, C.R. Hellstrom, of Smith & Wesson, requested his engineers design a small-frame, five-shot revolver capable of firing the more powerful .38 Special cartridge. The new J-frame revolvers (larger than the I but smaller than the K) made its public debut on October 24, 1950, at the Conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Colorado Springs. The gathered chiefs were asked to vote on an appropriate name for the J frame, and the winner was “.38 Chiefs Special.” <sup>2</sup>

The original Chiefs were available with nickel or blue finish and a two-inch barrel with round butts. Because many lawmen expressed interest in a longer barrel, three-inch barreled Chiefs were added to Smith & Wesson’s inventory on December 6, 1950. However, even with longer barrels, large-handed shooters found the small revolvers difficult to handle. To help solve the problem, square-butt Chiefs were added to Smith & Wesson’s inventory on October 14, 1952.

They began with serial number 21,342 of the Chiefs Special series. In 1957, Model Number 36 was assigned to the Chiefs, and that stamping began with serial number 125,000. <sup>3</sup>

Since then, the spring, cylinder-stop plunger, screw lock in front of the trigger guard, and large-side plate screw have been eliminated. The hammer’s base changed from a ball socket to a slot-and-pin using a fork-type mainspring strip. Finally, the thump piece to open the cylinder was contoured. Regardless of the changes, the name *Chiefs Special* has never appeared on the J Frame Revolver. T. <sup>4</sup>



The featured revolver is stamped *Smith & Wesson* on the left of the two-inch barrel and *.38 S & W Spl* on the right. The left side of the frame is marked *S & W* over the trademark and *registered US Patent Office* below. The frame’s right side bears *MADE IN USA / MACAS REGISTRADAS / Smith & Wesson / Springfield. Mass.* The Chiefs

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1 Ibid., 08/24/2006.

2 Roy G. Jinks, *History of Smith & Wesson* (North Hollywood, California: Beinfeld Publishing, Inc., 1992), 225.

3 Ibid., 225-226.

4 Ibid.



Special "was shipped on July 8, 1980, and delivered to Bill Story Law Enforcement Co., Oklahoma City, OK." <sup>1</sup>

When Rudy Flores purchased the Chiefs Special from a deputy with the Anderson County Sheriff's Office in 2001, it was outfitted with rubber grips. He therefore obtained the DPS Authorization to Carry Other Than Issued Firearm from his firearm instructor and district commander on October 24, 2001. Flores replaced the rubber grips with stags he bought the same year from retired State Trooper Tom Ball in Cherokee County.

As for the weapon, I have always been particularly fond of revolvers. I often carried that one as an off-duty weapon or as an "in addition" weapon (a secondary weapon while on duty). I like the reliability of a revolver and would either clip it to my belt with a snap-on holster I made or slip it into an easily accessible pocket.

When off-duty, Flores carried it in an ankle holster he has now owned for over twenty years. <sup>2</sup>

Once Sergeant Flores learned that I had added the revolver to my collection, he went the extra mile and provided some personal information about the Smith & Wesson .38 Special that I have used in this article. He also added, "I hope you enjoy owning the revolver as much as I did." <sup>3</sup>

I'm sure I will.

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1 Roy G. Jinks, Office of Smith & Wesson's, 08/29/2006. historical letter.

2 Flores, 08/02/2006 and 08/24/06.

3 Ibid., 06/16/2005.