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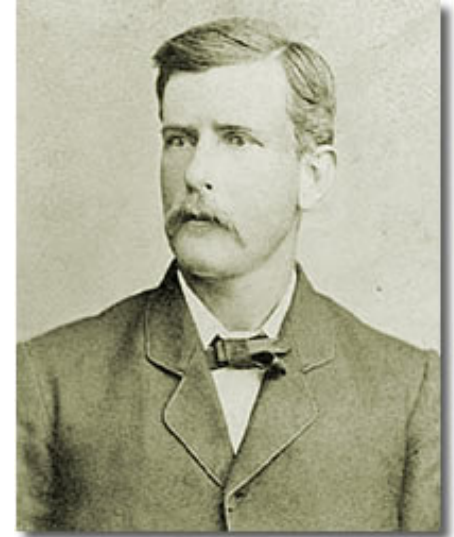
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## Charles Lilborn Nevill

by Chuck Parsons

*Although Charles Lilborn Nevill does not carry an entry in *The New Handbook of Texas*, he deserves special consideration for his contribution to the establishment of law and order in 19th-century Texas. He experienced exciting action on the frontier with outlaws and Indians and he also upheld the people's trust in political offices after his Ranger years.*



C. L. Nevill was born on April 6, 1855, in Carthage, Alabama, the son of Zachariah L. and Ann (Lewis) Nevill. In February 1858, the family relocated in Fayette County, Texas, where the future Ranger captain was raised.

Although Nevill's father intended that his young boy become a businessman like himself, the call for adventure was too strong. On May 25, 1874, young C. L. was in Blanco, Blanco County, where he was mustered into Captain Cicero Rufus Perry's Company D of the Frontier Battalion. He was not quite nineteen years of age, did not have the blessings of his father to leave home, and had only a butcher knife as a weapon. Apparently, he convinced Captain Perry of his sincerity and worth. He was allowed to enroll, obtaining a gun and horse on credit.

Over the next few years, Nevill would participate in scouts for marauding Indians, hunt for murderous fugitives, and pursue horse and cattle thieves. After serving under Captain Perry (May 25, 1874 - March 31, 1875), he continued under Captain Dan W. Roberts of Company D (September 1, 1875 - September 22, 1876) and then under J.M. Denton and Neal Coldwell of Company A (September 1, 1876 - August 31, 1877). He was then called to serve under Lieutenant N.O. Reynolds of Company E (September 1, 1877 - September 28, 1878). Reynolds had been given the command after arresting the Horrell clan in Lampasas County, and he was allowed to select the men he wanted. C. L. Nevill had been with Reynolds the night the Horrells were arrested. He had impressed his commander sufficiently enough that he was chosen to serve in the company, mustered in as a first sergeant.

Certainly Nevill's most exciting action during the months served under Reynolds was the pursuit and capture of noted outlaw Sam Bass. Rumor had reached the ear of Major John B. Jones that the Bass gang was planning to rob the bank at Round Rock, a few miles north of Austin. There were but a handful of Rangers in Austin, and Jones knew he needed additional help. He ordered Governor Coke's nephew, Ranger Corporal Vernon Coke Wilson, to mount up and get to Reynolds' company in Lampasas as fast as possible. The

orders were for Reynolds and a select squad to get to Round Rock to capture the Bass gang. Wilson sacrificed his horse to get to Lampasas, but on arriving there, he discovered that Reynolds had moved his camp to San Saba. Wilson then rode the stage there and found Reynolds' camp a mile from town. He finally delivered the orders.

Reynolds ordered Sergeant Nevill to select eight men with the best horses to prepare to ride to Round Rock. It was a wild trek through the night. Ranger J. B. Gillett, who made the ride and wrote of his experiences years later, recalled: "We left our camp on the San Saba River just at sunset and traveled in a fast trot and sometimes in a lope the entire night.... [People who witnessed knew] that hell was to pay somewhere.

In spite of their efforts, Reynolds and his men arrived too late to take part in the street fight that destroyed the Bass gang. Deputy Sheriffs A. W. Grimes and Maurice Moore, not realizing who Bass was, attempted to disarm him. Bass resisted, and the gunfight in Round Rock began as members of the Bass gang went against Major John B. Jones and Rangers Richard C. Ware and George Herold. Grimes was killed, as was gang member Seaborn Barnes, who was shot dead by Ware. Moore and Bass were wounded. Gang member Frank Jackson helped Bass to mount, and the pair galloped out of town, Bass having received another wound.

About two hours later, Reynolds and his group arrived in Round Rock. With darkness coming and their horses exhausted, Reynolds wisely made camp after reporting to Major Jones. At first light the next morning, Sergeant Nevill and the others from Reynolds' squad followed the trail of blood from Round Rock. When a wounded man was spotted leaning against a tree, Nevill approached with pistol drawn and ordered him to hold up his hands. Bass was too badly wounded to do anything but surrender. Realizing the seriousness of the man's wounds, Nevill ordered a wagon and doctor brought to care for Bass. Dr. C. P. Cochran did what he could for the dying man, but informed him there was little time left. Bass died the afternoon of July 21, 1878, on his twenty-seventh birthday. Reynolds, Nevill, and the other Rangers returned to camp in San Saba.

Reynolds resigned his commission in late 1879, and Sergeant Nevill was selected to replace him. He assumed command on September 1, 1879. Nevill served with the Frontier Battalion until August 31, 1882. His career had started in the beautiful Hill Country, but he was now assigned to far West Texas in Presidio County. The most noted adventure Nevill experienced there was with Captain George W. Baylor, captain of Company A, against a group of Mescalero Apaches. It began when a small band attacked the Overland stage in Quitman Canyon, between Eagle Springs and the Rio Grande in January 1881. On the 21st, Nevill and his nine men left camp to scout for the marauders. Eight days later, Nevill's group, along with Baylor and his eleven men and three Pueblo Indian trackers, struck the Indians at sunrise on the summit of the Diablos, overlooking the Salt Lakes. The band of twenty was hit hard by the Rangers: twelve were killed and a squaw and two children were captured. This engagement proved to be the last fight between Rangers and Indians on Texas soil.

Later that year, Nevill served as escort to the Gano surveying party on a boat trip down the Rio Grande. Here he almost lost his life, perhaps in greater danger from drowning than in any Indian fight. On December 23, 1881, the boat he was in overturned. Nevill later wrote of this experience: "I barely escaped drowning as I had on my pistol and belts, coats and boots. I lost my Field Glass and 300 rounds of ammunition.

Within months of leaving the service, Nevill was again in the role of lawman. On November 7, 1882, he was elected sheriff of Presidio County. He was reelected on November 4, 1884; again on November 2, 1886; and served until November 6, 1888. That was a total of six years in a wild part of the country. For a while, Nevill and former Ranger James B. Gillett became partners and embarked in the cattle business.



Perhaps the spirit of adventure that had drawn Nevill to the Ranger service as a teenager was satisfied, because Nevill now relocated to San Antonio. Instead of a mundane job, Nevill was now attracted to public service. He was a back-tax collector for five years. In 1900, he was chosen to serve as chief deputy district clerk under Nat Lewis. He was then elected deputy sheriff under John Tobin and served two terms. In 1904, he was elected clerk of district court for districts 37, 45, and 57. All of these districts had their jurisdiction in San Antonio and Bexar County.

Nevill married Miss Sarah "Sallie" Ellen Crosson on January 4, 1883, and they were parents of nine children: Alice, George, Guy, Charles, Kathryn, Ella Mae, Harvey, Tobin, and Sally Francis.

Nevill died unexpectedly of apoplexy in his sleep on June 14, 1906, in his home in San Antonio. He was survived by his parents, his wife, and eight children. He is buried in San Antonio City Cemetery Number Six. The grave is marked by an imposing headstone.

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