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# TEXAS RANGER DISPATCH Magazine

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## George W. Arrington



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Like some other Rangers of the nineteenth century, George Washington Arrington had a reason for changing his name. Arrington was born John Cromwell Orrick Jr. on 23 December 1844 at Greensboro, Alabama. He was the son of John C. and Mariah Arrington Orrick. His father died in 1848, and the widow Orrick married W.L. Williams, a dentist, in December 1849. Arrington's growing up was typical of the boys his age, but he received a superior education, entering Greensboro's Southern University in October of 1860. Teenager Orrick left the university when war was declared, as did many others.

Young Orrick first enlisted in the Confederate Army on 13 April 1861 as a private in Captain J.W. Williams' Company D of the 5th Regiment of Alabama. He was seventeen years old, 5' 5 1/2" tall, and light complexioned with black eyes and light hair, according to the record. His occupation was given as "student."

Two months later, the Confederacy claimed its first victory at Manassas, only twenty-five miles south of Washington, D.C. Orrick saw a great deal of action during the war, first at Manassas and later at Seven Days Battle, the Battle of Seven Pines, and Gettysburg.

He related to an early biographer that he was captured after Gettysburg but managed to escape by jumping off the train delivering prisoners. He served under Longstreet, Hampton, J.E.B. Stuart, and also Colonel John Singleton Mosby, the "Gray Ghost" of the Confederacy. Orrick remained in the Army throughout the war, heading home after his parole at Berryville, Clark County, Virginia on 29 April 1865.

For about two years, young Orrick worked for a merchant. After fighting in the war, however, he found this work boring. He and seven others rode to Mexico to join the ill-fated cause of Emperor Maximilian, but they arrived too late to join Maximilian's Army as mercenaries. They returned home to Greensboro.

On 13 June 1867, during the trying days of Reconstruction throughout the South, Orrick and Alex Webb, a recently appointed registrar for Hale and Greene Counties, got into an argument. During the course of the dispute, Webb called Orrick a liar. Orrick drew a pistol and fired three rounds, killing Webb instantly. As he fled the scene, Orrick was heard to say that he "would allow no damn negro to call him a damn liar." Orrick fled, leaving behind not only his boyhood home, but also his real name.

After a year spent eluding pursuers in several different states as well as spending time in Honduras, Central America, the now George Washington Arrington arrived in Galveston, Texas, in 1870. For the next several years, he worked a variety of jobs: in a sawmill, on the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, as a farmer in Collin County, and as a cowboy in Brown County. Finally, he quit to join the Frontier Battalion.

There is some confusion as to exactly when Arrington joined up with the Frontier Battalion. Existing service records show his earliest enlistment was on 1 June 1875 as a private in Lieutenant B.S. Foster's Company E. He earned thirty dollars a month. However, some of those service records are apparently now missing from the files. A letter from Adjutant General Henry Hutchins, dated 4 June 1917 and directed to the commissioner of pensions in Washington D.C., states that Arrington's name "appears on the muster rolls of the Frontier Battalion of Ranger Forces, from the 31st day of August, 1874, to the 31st day of August, 1876." He served under Foster all that time.

On 1 September 1876, Arrington was promoted to the rank of 1st Sergeant under Lt. J.M. Denton, now in Company A. Due to ill health, however, Denton soon had to resign. From 1 December 1876 until 28 February 1877, Arrington served under Captain Neal Coldwell of Company A. At this point, there is a three-month gap in the service records, from 1 March through 31 May 1877. The next documented service is shown to be from 1 June 1877 through 28 February 1878 as a sergeant in Coldwell's company. Was Arrington on leave for some unknown reason or is there simply a missing service record?

On Christmas Day 1877, Arrington was again promoted, now to 1st lieutenant of Company C. Apparently, he held the rank of sergeant in one company and lieutenant commanding in a different company, at least for the time from Christmas Day 1877 until 28 February 1878. During these two months and seven days, he received payment of \$167.50.

From 1 March 1878 through 30 April 1879, Arrington was lieutenant commanding of Company C with pay of \$75 per month. On 1 May 1879 until his resignation on 31 August 1882, he was captain of Company C, earning \$100 per month. His last muster was at Sweetwater in Wheeler County.

Although Arrington may not ever be the subject of a Hollywood western, his record shows that he was a firm, determined, disciplined man who understood his job and didn't hesitate to carry it out. Few men began their Ranger careers as a private and finished as a captain.

The early monthly returns fail to mention Arrington by name. This is not

unusual because only the names of sergeants, corporals, or captains were usually identified. By early 1877, however, Arrington's name appears frequently in the scouting reports. On 7 February, Sergeant Arrington was in charge of a nine-man detail to hunt up John R. Burlison, who was charged with murder in Frio County. The report exhibits no heroics, only the results: "made arrest at 2 a.m. - delivered prisoner on 11th to sheriff." On 5 April, Arrington and an eleven-man scout were sent out to arrest horse thieves near Pendencia Creek (?). Sam Williams was arrested for possession of stolen stock. Eleven oxen were confiscated as well as five horses, and all were turned over to the sheriff of Maverick County. In May, Arrington arrested Rol Dublin for theft, Lou Walton for "driving cattle without owner's consent," as well as Abe Taylor on suspicion. Johnny Golden was arrested and charged with an assault to kill in Travis County.

Although this may not seem like a great deal of work in the time period, remember that Arrington was on horseback making these scouts. Much of his time was spent traveling from his camp to the fugitive's suspected location. There were few times that a Ranger used the railroad to traverse vast distances.

In August, Arrington was in charge of a nineteen-man squad to scout Eagle Pass. He was with Lt. Lee Hall of the State Troops. They arrested Bill Bruton for murder, Frank Taylor for theft, one Hart, alias J.W. Hardin. The criminals were confined in the jail at Eagle Pass. All told, Arrington and his group logged in 230 miles.

During his years as a Ranger, Arrington no doubt rode thousands of miles in pursuit of fugitives or following Indian trails, which oftentimes were lost due to rain or other reasons. One of his more spectacular arrests came in July 1878. He and a squad of nine men were sent to Erath and Comanche Counties to arrest a group of men charged with the murder of the "old man Mackey and Jack McDonald." On 17 July, Arrington and his men brought in ten outlaws from Erath and six from Comanche. All were delivered to the sheriff of Comanche County.

Even in the late 1870s, Indians were a possible menace. As far as the record shows, Arrington rarely engaged hostiles in combat, but he was constantly aware of their possible presence.

In the winter of 1878, there was less scouting done, due to the bad weather. However, Arrington and Lt. John B. Armstrong did scout through Stephens and Palo Pinto Counties in search of fugitive Z. Ables, charged with murder in DeWitt County. He was arrested on 26 November, and Armstrong delivered him to the sheriff. There was less activity in the following month of December, as Arrington made only two arrests. From Camp Loma Vista in Throckmorton County, Arrington wrote in his monthly report: "The weather for the last 15 days has been very bad. It snows & sleets." He continued, "Between 800 & 900 Comanche indians from the Ft. Sill reservation are in the Pease river country 100 miles north of this place. are camped in bunches of 40 or 50. so far have stolen very little stock."

In September 1879, Arrington established the first Ranger camp in the Panhandle, Camp Roberts in Crosby County. Arrington's major contribution to Frontier Battalion lore is the hardship march of December 1879 and January 1880. Indians used the vast Texas Panhandle to lose themselves after raiding parties. This part of Texas was little known by white men. Arrington took his Rangers into this harsh area intending to locate the Indian watering holes, also known as the Lost Lakes. If he could find these oases, he could

intercept the hostiles, thus breaking the backs of Comanche and Apache raiding parties. Although his men suffered intensely from the elements, Arrington found his targets. His efforts resulted in the vast land being opened up for ranchers.

Arrington wrote out his resignation on 1 June 1882, and it was to take effect on 31 August. His career as a Texas Ranger ended on Sweetwater Creek in Wheeler County. He turned the command over to Sergeant John Hoffar, who was now to enforce the law with Corporal Charles Shaw and seventeen privates. One of the privates was Albert C. Grimes, who would later become a captain of Company C.

Following his Ranger service, Arrington was elected as sheriff of Wheeler County and fourteen attached counties. He served from 7 November 1882 until his resignation on 4 November 1890, having been elected four consecutive terms to that office. When Hemphill County Sheriff Tom McGee was murdered in office, Arrington was appointed as acting sheriff on 30 November 30 1894, six days after McGee's murder. He served in that position until 3 November 1896.



Arrington and Wheeler County officials in the middle 1880s. Standing from left: Joe Mason, Arrington, C.B. Willingham. Seated from left: N.F. Locke, Emanuel Dubbs, J.J. Long. *Courtesy Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.*

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Arrington owned his own ranch and also became manager of the 250,000-acre Rocking Chair Rancho, appointed to that responsibility on 14 July 1893. He ran 12,000 cattle on that foreign-owned spread.

Arrington married Miss Sarah C. Burnette on 18 October 1883. The couple made their home in Canadian, Texas, and raised a large family.

The "Iron-Handed Man of the Panhandle" died 31 March 1923. He is buried in Old Mobeetie Cemetery in Mobeetie, Texas.