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**The Following Article was Originally Published in the  
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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Funded in part by grants from  
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

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## 19th Century Shining Star: James W. Guynn

*“The boys are well and anxious for a fight.”*

Photo courtesy of [Yorktown Post](#)

Little is known of the early years of James William Guynn. He was born in Alabama on September 17, 1840, the second son and third child of E. B. and Martha Guynn. Head of household E. B. Guynn was farming in Clarke County when census taker John A. Coate enumerated the family. It consisted of the parents and their eight children, ranging in age from one to fourteen years.<sup>1</sup>

parents and their eight children, ranging in age from one to fourteen years.<sup>1</sup>

When Guynn located in Texas is uncertain, but by the time the Civil War broke out, he was residing in Colorado County.<sup>2</sup> Guynn first joined up with the Texas State Troops. After discharge, he became part of Colonel R. M. Powell's 5th Texas Infantry. He was discharged from this unit due to rheumatism, but then on April 28, 1862, he was mustered into Company B of the 24th Texas Cavalry. He served there until the war ended and he achieved the rank of 2nd lieutenant.

On one furlough, Guynn married Miss Kittie Bridge, a young lady who was born in Columbus, Colorado County. They were joined together on November 17, 1864, and their marriage lasted their lifetimes.<sup>3</sup>

It is uncertain what occupation Guynn followed between his service as a Confederate soldier and his joining up with Captain Leander H. McNelly in the Washington County Volunteer Militia Company A in 1875.

Guynn served but a brief time under McNelly, but he certainly impressed his superiors. Possibly, McNelly and he knew each other prior to enlistment because Guynn began his brief “McNelly career” as a 2nd lieutenant. Having attained the rank of lieutenant as a Rebel soldier was also a factor.

Guynn's Ranger service record shows that he served from June 22 through August 31, 1875. This is a mere two months and nine days.

Guynn's first responsibility was to swear in a number of men in Colorado County and then join up with McNelly on the Rio Grande frontier. On June 22, he mustered in twenty-five recruits<sup>4</sup> who would march to the dangerous river area, known familiarly as the Nueces Strip. On June 30, the group took up the line of march for Camp Santa Maria. Guynn sent a valuable letter to the to the Colorado Citizen newspaper:

Ranger's Camp, near Santa Maria,  
July 25, 1875.

Editor Citizen:

Thinking it would not be amiss, I have concluded to write you a brief communication relative to our journey from Columbus hither. Leaving Columbus on June 30th, we made our first night's encampment at Mr. Isam Tooke's<sup>5</sup> farm near Oakland.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Tooke kindly permitted us to make use of his house for ourselves, and the use of his pasture grounds for our horses. Leaving the encampment at 4 o'clock next morning we traveled on our way rejoicing, our next encampment being Sweet Home.<sup>7</sup> The next morning, leaving the company in command of Sergeant Cox,<sup>8</sup> I proceeded to Cuero,<sup>9</sup> to lay in supplies. The company coming up, we continued our march for Goliad,<sup>10</sup> which city we duly invested at 8 o'clock, July 31. At this place we met several citizens of our place, among them J. Billis [?] Leyendecker.<sup>11</sup> Crossing the San Antonio river we visited the old Mission Church. It being Sunday we found it occupied by a venerable looking priest and a number of confessionals. The church and its surrounding bore unmistakable evidences of age and decay. From Goliad we took up our line of march for San Patricio,<sup>12</sup> on the Nueces river, traveling over a country destitute of grass and water [and] fuel and provisions for two days. We arrived at San Patricio July 6th, the company almost worn out. At this place we made a halt for rest for half a day, it raining incessantly during the whole time. Here we left one of the company, T.J. Romans,<sup>13</sup> who was not able to travel further on account of sickness. He was left at a private house, well cared for.

On our march from San Patricio we passed through Banquette[sic],<sup>14</sup> a miserable muddy village, twelve miles west of the former place. From thence we took up our march for Santa Gertrudus [sic],<sup>15</sup> or King's Ranch. Arriving there July 9th we found Capt. King, a gentleman of the highest standard. He came forward and made us every proffer of assistance, furnishing us with food for ourselves and horses, made your humble servant a present of a fine saddle horse for himself as well as four for the use of the company; besides changing horses with several of the company for their worn out and jaded ones, giving them the choice of his caballado. Too much praise cannot be given Capt. King for his open hearted generosity and kindness to us. The Captain has 86,000 acres of land under one fence for pasture grounds, beautifully improved. His residence is located up a high hill, commanding a view of the surrounding country for miles around.

Leaving the Rancho with "three cheers" for Capt. King, we took up our line of march for Brownsville, the Captain having given us a guide as far as Reo Colourous [Rio Colorado]. We passed through sixty miles of sand, finding grass good, but no water except in an occasional salt lake, which was unfit for use. Nothing worth noting happened except it was the constant bombardment of rattle snakes by the entire company, as their dead carcasses left in our wake will testify. We arrived on the Rio Colorou [Rio Colorado], Monday, 13th, where I again left the company in charge of Sergeant Cox, proceeding to Brownsville, a distance of 35 miles, where I met Capt. L. H. McNelly, the commander of the Rangers.<sup>16</sup> The next morning the company came up and encamped one mile from town, where they were met by Capt. McNelly, who, after forming them into line, proceeded to lecture thusly: "Gentlemen, I make it a rule to allow no gambling in camps, no cursing, no drunkenness. If there are any here who can not abide by these rules, I will release him at once from

his obligation to the State. Whereupon five timid hearted ones wisely concluded to "return to their dwellings, a lonely return."<sup>17</sup> The remainder of the company, being more than satisfied with Capt. McNelly the condition of their obligation, &c., were ordered by him to take up a line of march for our present camp, 35 miles from Brownsville, where we met the old company, under command of Lt. T.C Robinson,<sup>18</sup> an officer of fine deportment and bearing. Our boys were met with the kindest advances by the members of the company and are well pleased with the officers, Capt. McNelly and Lieut. Robinson, in fact think them the beau ideal of officers and gentlemen.

A good many of the boys have attended the celebrated Spanish Fandangos, given by the Mexicans almost nightly. Capt. McNelly and myself being the only married men in camps, of course do not participate. We are camped about one and a half miles from the Rio Grande river, one mile above Santa Maria Lake on the banks of a lagoon where the Rio Grande used to run before it changed its channel. The country is inhabited principally by Mexicans. About the only farming done is in the culture of corn, which can be bought for seventy five cents per bushel. Cotton is raised to some extent. The valley gave unmistakable signs of fertility. We are expecting to have a fight with raiders soon, or as soon as they set foot on Texas soil. The boys are well, in good health and spirits, and anxious for a fight. I will write you again soon giving you a general description of the country, its inhabitants, their customs, accounts of our scouting expeditions, &c.

Respectfully, &c.  
J. W. Guynn,  
Lieutenant of Rangers.

This single letter was to be the last and possibly the only one from Lt. Guynn to the editor of the Citizen. This is disappointing for those interested in Texas Ranger history, as Guynn was obviously capable of observing nature as well as human characteristics and then put it all in writing.

On August 27, 1875, Guynn gave his resignation to McNelly and returned home to Columbus. you it had not been heard from[.] Will you pleas[e] Say what was done with it[?] I would be glad to hear from you. We know the details from a letter written to Adjutant General William Steele, McNelly's superior officer in Austin. The letter was dated September 8 and was written from Columbus:

On the 27th of August I tendered my resignation as 2nd Lieut. of Comp. A. Vol [unteer] Mil[itia] and gave it to Capt[.] L.H. McNelly to be for[warded] to you as the continued bad health of my family would not admit of my remaining longer, and for which I trust your having [received it and you] will approve and send[?] to me at this place.

Gent. I would like to inquire as to the voucher that I made out and approved by Capt. McNelly for the transportation of the men I carried from this County. The voucher was for[warded] from Brownsville about the 4th of August to you by Capt. McNelly. The Capt was to return to me the amt[.] on my arrival but the voucher was delaid [sic] by you and after it was Sent to

Respt your  
Obt Servt  
J. W. Guynn <sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine from existing records if Guynn ever did receive remuneration for his expenses in getting additional men to McNelly on the Rio Grande Frontier.

After the exciting life as a Ranger, Guynn settled in Columbus. By 1880, he was a 39-year-old dry goods salesman. By this time he had a wife Kittie, 32, and two children, both attending school: Bettie L., age 14, and Cassie H., age 12.<sup>20</sup>

Having survived the four years of the Civil War and then venturing into the dangerous Nueces Strip on the Rio Grande frontier, it is an irony of sorts that Guynn lost his life in a hunting accident. On June 27, 1882, he and companions I. W. Middlebrook, Henry Middleton, and J.J. Harrison went deer hunting. Guynn and Middleton were to drive deer towards Middlebrook and Harrison, who were posted on stands. The Colorado Citizen describes the accident:

The dogs started a couple of deer, when Mr. Guynn left his horse and ran to a point opposite, but out of sight of the stand of Harrison, who as the deer passed between himself and Guynn, fired, two stray shots taking effect upon Guynn, one of which penetrated his abdomen, inflicting a dangerous and painful wound.<sup>21</sup>

When Harrison had fired at the deer, he was about one hundred yards from Guynn. Both parties were placed in such a way that the brush and undergrowth prevented either from seeing the other.

Guynn was taken into town immediately. In spite of the best medical care Columbus had to offer, Guynn did not survive. He died on the July 2, 1882. The following day, he was laid to rest by the Knights of Honor in the burial grounds on Mr. W. E. Bridge's farm. Services were conducted at both the family residence and at graveside by Rev. C. H. Howard of the Episcopal Church.<sup>22</sup>

Today, the mortal remains of James W. Guynn as well as those of several other family members rest in the Columbus Odd Fellows Cemetery. For Guynn, there are two markers. One reads simply: "James William Guynn/Sept. 17, 1840/July 2, 1882." The second is a veteran's marker which shows his service as "1st Lt. 24th Regiment Texas Cavalry of the Confederate States of America" and also gives his birth and death dates. His wife, Kittie Bridge Guynn (February 17, 1848-May 8, 1930), lies to his left. Her parents, William E. and Sarah Perry Bridge, are also in the plot.

Guynn's untimely passing marked a too-early death for a McNelly Ranger. Not only did his Columbus friends and relatives mourn his passing, but he was remembered by a Texas historian some time later. Wilburn Hill King, then adjutant general of the state, wrote:

[T]he necessity for more men in certain sections of the State became so urgent and powerful that in July, 1874, one company of volunteer militia from Washington County was mustered in for active service, in DeWitt and other counties in Southwest Texas, and latterly on the Rio Grande River. This company was commanded by Captain L.H. McNelly, with T.C. Robinson first and J. W. Guynn second lieutenants; and, though it was in service but two years, in that time McNelly and his officers and men proved so active, vigilant, daring, and successful, in dealing with lawless characters and with hostile Mexicans, as to secure a permanent good name for themselves and beneficial

results to the border, by their gallant and zealous performance of duty.<sup>23</sup>

It is remarkable that Adjutant General King, writing twenty years later, would remember the name of J. W. Guynn, who served for such a brief period, albeit as a lieutenant. There was obviously something about the man which King remembered or had learned about, but it has been lost in the written record.

### Notes

1 On November 18, 1850, B. Guynn was 40 and wife Martha was 35. Guynn is shown to be from South Carolina while Martha Guynn and all the children were born in Alabama. The children were: Morris, age 14; Jane, age 12; James, age 10; Aley, age 9; Jackson, age 7; Josiah, age 4; Abraham, age 3; and Martha, age 1.

- The Clarke County, Alabama, census, 254B

2 The family has not been located in the Montgomery County, Texas, 1860 census, which was enumerated July 12, 1860, by J. O. Gafford, 108A. There is a "J. Guynn," born in Alabama and living in Montgomery County, Texas. He is age 18 and a student. This may be James William Guynn. He is boarding with the family of J. M. Westmoreland, a 33-year-old farmer, also from Alabama. Neither Guynn nor the family has been located in the 1870 census.

3 Information on Guynn's pre-Texas Ranger period is from the "Widow's Application for Pension" of Kittie Bridge Guynn #14945. Abstracted by Kay Lee Wrage Gunn, Dallas, Texas.

4 On the McNelly Muster Roll, dated July 31, 1875, at Santa Maria, Texas, one of the privates mustered into McNelly's company by Guynn was EX Bridge, who probably was a relative of Guynn's wife. The September 10 Muster Roll shows Private Bridge was mustered out on September 10, 1875.

5 Isam Tooke was a 26-year-old "Farm Laborer" living in the household of Joseph C. and Bettie Kindred. Their post office was Oakland. - Colorado County, Texas, census, enumerated September 7, 1870 by J. H. Baldwin, 50A

Curiously, on the July 31, 1875, McNelly Muster Roll prepared at Santa Maria, Texas, there is listed a Private I. N. Took, mustered in on June 22. On the September 30 Muster Roll prepared at La Retama Ranch, Took is shown to have been mustered out on September 16, 1875. This is no doubt the same Took mentioned in Guynn's letter.

6 Oakland remains a small community in the southwest corner of Colorado County, about eight miles south of present-day Interstate 10.

7 Sweet Home is in Lavaca County, about thirty miles southeast of Oakland. The Lavaca River flows midway between these two villages.

8 The Muster and Pay Rolls of McNelly's Company lists Private W. H. Cox as enlisting on June 22 and being discharged on September 10, 1875. Possibly, Guynn used Cox as a sergeant during the period before joining McNelly, but in actuality, he was only a private.

-McNelly Muster Roll prepared on September 30, 1875 at La Retama Ranch

9 Cuero is in central DeWitt County and grew in size and population when the

tracks of the Gully Western Texas and Pacific Railway were completed in January 1873. City government was organized in the summer of 1873 and incorporated in 1875. Cuero replaced the town of Clinton as county seat in 1876. - Craig H. Roell, "Cuero, Texas" in *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, Vol. 2, 1996), 432-33. Hereafter referred to as *New Handbook*

10 Goliad is in Goliad County, some thirty miles due south of Cuero. It is one of the oldest Spanish colonial municipalities in the state. Established in 1749, it became the county seat in 1836. - Jere Robison Turner, "Goliad, Texas" in *New Handbook*, Vol. 3, 205-06.

11 I have been unable to learn more about Leyendecker.

12 San Patricio, some sixty miles southwest of Goliad, became the county seat of San Patricio County on March 17, 1836, eleven days after the fall of the Alamo. It was incorporated in 1853 and grew in size over the next two decades due to increased ranching and farming in the area. Once almost a ghost town it now has a population of about 400. - Keith Guthrie, "San Patricio, Texas" in *New Handbook*, Vol. 5, 870-71.

13 I have been unable to learn anything further about Romans, who was left behind. There is no service record for him in the Adjutant General files at the Texas State Archives.

14 "Banquette" is today spelled "Banquete."

15 "Santa Gertrudis" is the correct spelling. Richard King and Gideon K. Lewis established a cattle camp on the Santa Gertrudis Creek in Nueces County. They purchased the land in 1853 when they bought the Spanish Land Grant, Rincon de Santa Gertrudis, of 15,500 acres. In 1860, Mifflin Kenedy bought an interest in the ranch, and it became known as R-King and Company. King and Kenedy dissolved their partnership in 1868. The holdings then became known as the King Ranch. - John Ashton and Edgar P. Sneed, "King Ranch" in *New Handbook*. Vol. 3. 1111-112

16 At Brownsville, on the 13th, Guynn sent a telegram to the Colorado Citizen stating that his company had arrived there that morning "all well, and ready for a fight." - *The Colorado Citizen*, July 15, 1875

17 This section concerning McNelly's attitude towards drinking and gambling in camp was reprinted in the *Bastrop Advertiser* in the August 21, 1875, issue. The "five timid hearted ones" were V. Byars, J. B. Carter, L. R. Carter, E. D. Howland, and C. Perry. McNelly's Muster & Pay Roll prepared at Santa Maria on July 31, 1875, shows these five were dishonorably discharged on July 14 with the comment, "Could not comply with Company rules." The five had all been mustered in on June 22, so they had served briefly but never saw action with McNelly. No service records remain in the Adjutant General's Files at the Texas State Archives to give additional information, nor have they been found in the 1870 census.

18 T. C. Robinson was a native of Virginia who had come to Texas following troubles with the law as well as involvement in a personal feud with Jesse E. Mitchell, brother of a young girl Robinson was in love with. After working for a while as a cowboy and then as a type-setter in the office of the *Daily Democratic Statesman* in Austin, Robinson joined McNelly's troop in July 1874 as a sergeant under the alias of T. Chandlers. Highly educated for the

times, he soon became invaluable to McNelly as one who could handle the company's paperwork. Robinson was made lieutenant on October 1, 1874. When he left in April 1876, he returned to Virginia to claim his love, "Pidgie" E. Mitchell. In an exchange of gunfire described by many newspapers as a duel, Robinson was killed by the girl's brother, Jesse E. Mitchell. Before and during his years as a Ranger, Robinson wrote many letters published in Austin newspapers, allowing us to have a valuable picture of life in Texas in the mid-1870s. It was perhaps Robinson who sent the following item regarding the new recruits: "Capt. McNelly has received a reinforcement of twenty-six men—splendid looking scalp hunters." This appeared in the Daily Democratic Statesman of July 28.

19 This document is preserved in the Texas State Library, Austin.

20 Tenth United States Census: Colorado County, Texas, enumerated June 3-4, 1880, 332B.

-Colorado Citizen, June 29, 1882

21 Colorado Citizen, June 29, 1882. 22 Ibid., July 6, 1882.

23 W. H. King, "The Texas Ranger Service and History of the Rangers With Observations on Their Value as a Police Protection" in Dudley G. Wooten's A Comprehensive History of Texas 1865-1897, (Dallas: William G. Scarfi 1897), 350.

#### Acknowledgments

Numerous individuals have assisted in the preparation of this brief work on J. W. Guynn: especially Donaly E. Brice & Stephanie Shunick, both indefatigable researchers of the Texas State Library & Archives, Austin, Texas; Bill Stein, librarian, Nesbitt Memorial Library, Columbus, Texas; and Kay Gunn, Dallas, Texas.

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