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Sgt. Max Womack

By Robert Nieman

Born October 1, 1929, in the West Texas oil town of Big Spring, Max Womack was the third child born to Ray and Louise McDavid Womack. His sister Dorothy preceded him. His brother Edwin died in infancy. Max's father worked in the oil fields. While Max was still an infant, his family moved to New London in the heart of the fabulously wealthy East Texas Oil Field. They stayed there until 1936, when Ray was transferred to the newest Texas oil field in Talco. It was in Talco that Max grew up. He graduated from Talco High School in 1946.

It had been in the middle of the 1936-37 school year when the Womacks moved to Talco. Max's sister Dorothy, who was several years older, did not want to leave New London School and her friends there. She persuaded her parents to allow her to live with some close family friends until school was out. On March 18, 1937, the school exploded when natural gas accumulated under the school building, killing more than three hundred people—mostly children—in the worst school disaster in American history. Thankfully, Dorothy was one of the survivors.

Though only seventeen years old, Max entered the Army after graduation. He was stationed in Japan for a year and a half with an engineering unit. After getting out of the Army, he attended North Texas Agricultural Junior College (now the University of Texas at Arlington) for a couple of years and then went to work in the oil patch for Humble Oil.

Max, however, had always wanted to be in law enforcement. Through the years, Max would often visit with Dorothy, who had married and lived in Henderson. Also living in Henderson was Errette Hale, who was not only a Highway Patrolman, but a friend Max had known most of his life. Max's parents had owned a small grocery store during their years in New London, and Errette had worked for them. Whenever he was visiting, Max would ride

with Errette and his partner Pat Spier. Spier would later become the director of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

In 1951, Max applied for admission into the Highway Patrol and was accepted. His first duty station was in Corpus Christi. In those days, Corpus Christi was part of the domain of the legendary Texas Ranger captain A. Y. Allee. The captain's son was a local Highway Patrol dispatcher and he rode around frequently with Max. Because of this friendship, Max got to know not only Captain Allee, but also most of the Rangers in South Texas. He knew he wanted to one day be a Ranger.

By the late 1960s, Max had transferred to Paris. This city, his wife Wanda's hometown, is near the Texas-Oklahoma border and is also close to his hometown of Talco. Almost from the time Max joined the Highway Patrol, he wanted to be a Texas Ranger. But then—like now—the competition was stiff. Consequently, in 1968, he decided to apply for an opening in the narcotics division. He was accepted and assigned a duty station in Houston, to the sorrow of his wife. She really didn't want to raise their children in Houston.

Ranger Frank Kemp of Paris had become a great friend of Max's, and he told him that a new duty station was going to be created in Atlanta, Texas, shortly. He said he would do all he could to try to get Max the appointment. Max therefore turned down the narcotics appointment. When the opening in Atlanta developed, Max applied for the position. He was promptly reminded that he had turned down narcotics appointment. Future Hall of Fame Captain Bob Crowder of Ranger Company B in Dallas spoke up: "I am the one who told him not to go in narcotics. I told him that this Ranger vacancy is going to come open and it'll be yours."

And that was that. In those days, the only review board that mattered was a Ranger captain saying he wanted you to be one of his men. On September 1, 1969, Max Womack became Texas' newest Ranger. Ironically, Captain Crowder had retired the day before, so Max never had the opportunity to work for the man to whom he owed so much.

To his peers, Max is one of the best-liked and most respected Rangers that ever wore the badge. The people of Texas were never shortchanged with Max's work ethic. From 1951, when he became a Highway Patrolman, until his retirement from the Texas Rangers on August 31, 1989, Max served the people of Texas with great honor and distinction. The people of Texas owe Max a great debt of gratitude.

Today, Max and Wanda still live in the Atlanta area, where they spend much of their time traveling and enjoying their grandchildren.

[Top](#)

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[Corporate Club](#)

[Museum Store](#)

[Exhibits/Artifacts](#)

[Benefactors](#)