



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**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 It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

Byron A. Johnson 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird



Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.


[Rangers Today](#)
[Visitor Info](#)
[History](#)
[Research Center](#)
[Hall of Fame](#)
[Student Help](#)
[Family History](#)
[News](#)

★ [Click Here for
A Complete Index
to All Back Issues](#)

★ [Dispatch Home](#)

★ [Visit our nonprofit
Museum Store!](#)

★ [Contact the Editor](#)

20th Century Shining Star:

Selwyn Denson “Admiral of the Texas Navy”

by Robert Nieman

Born: November 30, 1909 – Died: May 5, 2001. A simple epitaph in a common form. But for the Texas Rangers, this epitaph meant the loss of one of the brightest shining stars of the twentieth century: Selwyn Hogan Denson; or as his personal card read, “Selwyn Denson—Admiral, Texas Navy”.



Selwyn left behind Lois, his wife of sixty-seven years; one daughter, Etta; and her husband Bobby Connell, also a retired Texas Ranger.

Selwyn was raised in Anderson County, Texas, and graduated from Palestine High School. After graduation, he went to work with a local 5 & 10-cent store for five dollars a week. As was common with Selwyn, he worked extremely hard and his stock quickly rose with the company. He was offered a promotion but would have to transfer to central Texas. He accepted the position and after several more moves, he finally ended up in Kerrville.

But in 1932, Selwyn found himself out of a job when the store he was working for folded. He returned to Palestine and went to work at a local filling station in a job he did not care much for. Soon he found work driving a truck hauling produce out of the Rio Grande Valley. In early 1937, he had an opportunity to move to El Paso and work for an uncle who had bought a service station and needed help.

He had no more than arrived in El Paso when he received a response to the application he had filled out with the newly formed Texas Department of Public Safety. He had been accepted into the Highway Patrol. On August 2, 1937, he reported to Austin to start seven weeks of training at the DPS Highway Patrol School.

On October 18, 1937, Selwyn completed his schooling and was stationed in Dallas. Two years later [June 1, 1939] he moved to nearby Terrell. In early 1941, an opening became available in Palestine and Selwyn jumped at the opportunity to return home. Unfortunately for him, he was destined to remain in Palestine only six months. With the entrance of the United States into World War II, the Army was drafting so many men that the Highway Patrol soon found itself extremely shorthanded and started having to spread itself thin to the point of breaking. Selwyn found himself stationed in Marshall, but at least he was still in East Texas. After only a few months in Marshall, however, patriotic duty called Selwyn and he resigned from the Highway

Patrol to join the United States Navy. He served his time in the Navy as a shore patrolman in the Texas port cities of Corpus Christi, Kingsville, and Galveston before discharging in 1946.

Selwyn was quickly reinstated to the Department of Public Safety on January 10, 1946. He returned to the Highway Patrol where he was again stationed in McKinney, not far from Dallas. However, when an opportunity arose to join the Texas Rangers, he jumped at the chance.

On September 17, 1947, Selwyn Denson became a Texas Ranger. He was stationed in Houston as a member of Captain Hardy Purvis' Company A. He served in Houston for only a couple of months before an opening developed in McKinney. He contacted his friend, the legendary Captain M T "Lone Wolf" Gonzauillas, who welcomed him into Company B.

During his years in McKinney-Greenville, Selwyn worked extremely hard and served the people of his area well. While in Greenville, he became a close friend of the greatest combat hero in America's history—movie star Audie Murphy. Murphy had been raised in the McKinney-Greenville area.

Selwyn remained with Company B in McKinney and then went to nearby Greenville when the duty station was moved there in 1948. In an interview, he was asked what it was like to work under a living legend (Lone Wolf Gonzauillas). He replied that Gonzauillas was the type of commander who let you alone to do your job—as long as you did it right. Selwyn felt it was a great privilege to have served under three Hall of Fame Captains: Lone Wolf Gonzauillas, Bob Crowder, and Jim Riddle.

In 1955, Selwyn was promoted to sergeant and shortly thereafter transferred to Company D in Corpus Christi under the renowned Captain Alfred Allee. In 1967, Selwyn had the opportunity to transfer to Company C in Lubbock where he would serve as sergeant for his old friend from his East Texas days, Captain Jim Ray.

On November 30, 1974, after thirty-seven years with the Highway Patrol and the Texas Rangers, Selwyn retired. He and wife Lois moved to Hilltop Lakes, Texas, near College Station, where Selwyn served as chief of security to the exclusive village. However, he had spent too many years in the excitement of the Texas Rangers and became bored with the peaceful work. He had an opportunity to serve as the bailiff in the local court in nearby Centerville. Though still not very exciting, at least in this job he was around his kind of people—lawmen. After finally retiring for good, Selwyn and Lois continued living in Hilltop Lakes.

As for the card with the name *Selwyn Denson, "Admiral, Texas Navy,"* written on it, Selwyn explained: "It was a political thing." The official document reads:

"The State of Texas, to all whom these presence shall come greetings. Know ye that Selwyn H. Denson is hereby commissioned Admiral in the Texas Navy. With all rights and privileges pertaining thereto and with the duty of assisting in the preservation of the history, boundaries, water resources and civil defenses of the state. In testimony whereof, I have here unto signed my name and cause the seal of the State to be affixed at the city of Austin this the day of September 20, A.D. 1989, Bill Clements, Governor."

Top