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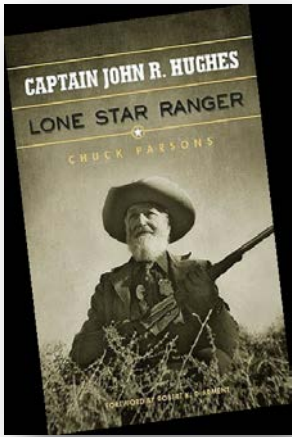
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Battling the Olguins

By Chuck Parsons

Excerpted from: *Captain John R. Hughes, Lone Star Ranger*.
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During late 1892 and the early months of 1893, Captain John R. Hughes daily scouted after fugitives and frequently arrested wanted men. Charges against these men included simple theft of miscellaneous goods, obtaining money under false pretensions, theft of a horse, aggravated assault, assault and battery, and theft of a saddle or theft of a horse and saddle. He probably considered much of the work routine. His scouts were of course not always successful. On January 17, 1893, Hughes and one other man scouted to Fort Davis "and other points" in search of one Marcos Justilla, charged with theft of a mare and a gun. After eight days scouting, they had to give up without having found him. They had covered over 200 miles in their unsuccessful hunt.

Ironically, on that same day, Captain Frank Jones penned a letter to Adjutant General Woodford H. Mabry praising his sergeant. Captain Jones noted that he was "very much of the opinion" that his company could do excellent service in El Paso, and that "it will be a new field and we will be more interested and can work with renewed energy." He praised Hughes, but recommended he be left at Alpine. "Sergt. Hughes should, in my opinion, be left at his present station. He is a fine officer and is in full accord with the best people in the Country and is very familiar with the entire section for several Counties along the Rio Grande." Further, "Hughes Knows the people and Country and can do better service than any one I can think of unless he was in the country for many months."

Later that same month, ex-Ranger Baz L. Outlaw entered the office of County Judge W. Van Sickle and discussed his situation. He had been dismissed from the service and now wanted to be reinstated either as a full Ranger or at least as a Special Ranger. He was aware of the conversation the judge had held with Captain Jones about adding him to the rolls again. Apparently, certain individuals had complained about Outlaw's character, but he would admit to only one fault, saying, "Where I was wrong only in one thing, and that was drinking too much Some times but not when I was on duty, for it never caused me to neglect any Business." He explained that any officer who "Ranges over Texas Several years" and used any vigilance, or activity, "makes many enemies among the criminal class of people." And it was this class of people who were

always eager to make some negative report against an officer “& especially if it be a Ranger.” Outlaw had gone before the county judge that very morning, January 26, and taken an oath, which was left on file at Van Sickle’s office, “not to drink liquor of any kind for the next five years & I intend to Stick to it for I realize that it has already injured me financially and otherwise.” His wish was granted, and Baz L. Outlaw became a Special Ranger assigned to Company D. Unfortunately, Baz L. Outlaw was unable to keep his pledge.

In February, Hughes and two others scouted via Cleveland’s Ranch to San Antonio Colony in search of stolen horses, but found none. They learned later the horses had already crossed the river into the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Later that same month, Hughes and an unidentified mounted inspector of customs spent five days searching for smuggled goods but only recovered one horse, some wine, and some mescal.

Meanwhile, former Ranger and ex-member of the Texas House of Representatives George Wythe Baylor was writing Adjutant General Mabry requesting that he send a squad of Rangers to Ysleta. Just the day before, two men had been killed while driving off stolen cattle within twelve miles of El Paso, and “theft of horses and cattle is nearly an every day matter [and that fact] would seem to emphasize very strongly the pressing need of some thing more than the [local] officers of the law to give protection to the citizens. . . .” Baylor reminded the adjutant general that the men who had killed Ranger Fusselman had not been caught, as local officers could not follow them. But Rangers “with their pack mule & 20 days rations would have Kept on the trail with out regard to State or national boundaries & captured or Killed the murderers.” Baylor further reminded the adjutant general that when he was in charge of a squad of Rangers, many outlaws were driven out of the state and “did not dare to come back.”

In March, the decision of where to send Sergeant Hughes was still pending. Captain Jones was inclined to send him to Ysleta in order to provide protection along the river, stating in a letter to Adjutant General Mabry that “the men who are with Hughes are all 30 years or more in age, and are tried and true, and that class of men are more needed in a small detachment than under my immediate control.” The problem of too few Rangers and too vast a territory was vexing for Captain Jones. His men had broken up a gang planning to attack the Southern Pacific Railroad, but a further concern was that Langtry, “one of the toughest places on the S.P.” line, continued to be a hotbed of trouble. Only two men were there to control the rougns and deal with cattle thieves. Mabry considered sending a squad of four men to El Paso County, but Captain Jones believed that “men will simply be murdered and will do no good.” The gang that was causing so much trouble numbered at least fifty, and the gang was well organized.

Another group of hard cases, although considerably fewer in number, was of great concern to Reeves County Sheriff George A. “Bud” Frazer, son of Reeves

County Judge George M. Frazer. Sheriff Frazer had served as a Ranger prior to becoming sheriff, first serving under Captain Sam McMurry on May 3–31, 1882, in Mitchell County and then under Capt. George W. Baylor from October 24, 1883, to February 19, 1884. He received an honorable discharge at Ysleta. In spite of his record as a Texas Ranger, Sheriff Frazer did not have great faith in his own abilities and now expressed his concerns to Governor James Stephen Hogg. He stressed that he had only three Rangers, courtesy of Captain Jones, but would like them to be retained for the “next four or six months.” Sheriff Frazer believed their presence was necessary “owing to the condition of affairs here—the number of hard cases—and amt of crime ...”

The hard cases causing Sheriff Frazer such trouble included the notorious James Brown Miller, his brother-in-law Emanuel “Mannie” Clements, and Martin Quilla Hardin, as well as various others of their clique. Miller had arrived in Pecos in 1891 and became deputy under Sheriff Frazer. Miller and his friends quickly became thorns in Sheriff Frazer’s side, however. Miller had married Mannie Clements’s sister, whose father, Emanuel Clements Sr., had lost his life in a saloon brawl. Clements was a cousin of John Wesley Hardin, who would be pardoned out of Huntsville State Prison in 1894. The exact relationship of Martin Q. Hardin to John Wesley Hardin is unknown, but the group of Miller, Clements, and Hardin were a formidable outfit of hard cases.

In 1892, Miller ran against Frazer for the office of sheriff but lost. Nevertheless, he attained the position of constable, allowing him to wear a badge and legally go armed. Miller then began to plot against Frazer. In May 1893, he intended to cause a disturbance at the train depot when Frazer returned from a business trip, and during the created “disturbance” and confusion, a shot would “accidentally” hit Frazer. A witness friendly to Frazer learned of the plot and informed the sheriff. Charges of conspiracy to murder were brought against Miller, Clements, and Hardin, specifying that on or about May 22, 1893, the trio plotted “with malice aforethought to then and there kill and murder G. A. Frazer.” The three were held briefly in jail and then released on bond to later stand trial. With the trio now on the loose, naturally Frazer became even more concerned for his safety, living under constant fear of assassination. The Frazer-Miller feud would smolder until late 1896. John R. Hughes found that the hard cases of Reeves County gave many lawmen “concern,” due to the “condition of affairs.”

Learning that Captain Hughes was to be sent to Ysleta, attorney and State Senator John M. Dean heard Shafter citizens express their concerns about his removal. Dean wrote:

Shafter is the most important place on the west side of the Pecos river for a detachment of rangers. . . . John R. Hughes is a splendid officer and he has had an excellent detachment with him at Shafter and I hope that if he is ordered elsewhere that you will replace him at Shafter with an equally efficient officer and detachment.

Dean did not know of anyone who could truly replace Hughes, but he apparently had enough faith in the Ranger service in general that any commander would satisfy him.

Captain Jones investigated the area personally. He intended to determine the best place for a permanent Ranger camp considering water, grass availability, and terrain. He determined that Ysleta would be best and that a squad of Rangers “will be more effective stationed at this place than anywhere else in the Valley.” At Ysleta, the command would be centrally located and could operate in both directions along the river.

Meanwhile, after suffering from his leg wound for almost four years, Frank L. Schmid of Company D died. Hughes learned of Schmid’s untimely death only after arriving in Ysleta, El Paso County, having been ordered there by the adjutant general. He and eight men had spent ten days on the road, traveling 250 miles. Ysleta, San Elizario, and El Paso would become home for Hughes for many years, well into the twentieth century. In addition to the common hard cases he knew he would have to deal with, Hughes as well as every other Ranger knew of the Olguins, also known as the “Bosque Gang.” They were the most notorious of the desperadoes in the contiguous corner of Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico. Parts of the area they inhabited were swamps or wetlands, hence the name the “Bosque Gang.” The region covered was a swamp-like area between Fort Fillmore, New Mexico and the San Elizario region south of El Paso. The primary headquarters of the gang was on an island in the Rio Grande, frequently termed “Pirate Island.” An El Paso newspaper commented on the Olguin gang’s territory, decrying “the nature and extent of the Island and Fort Fillmore bosques or swamps, and their capability of affording a safe hiding place for the horse and cattle thieves, smugglers and murderers who have so long infested the border. Between these two great jungles the distance is about thirty-three miles, and by avoiding the roads and keeping in the mesquite thicket along the foot of the mesa a man or a party of men might travel the whole distance without at any point being seen by a person fifty yards from the line of march.”

Some years before, the Rio Grande had changed its channel, causing this unusual land formation. Due to the unstable nature of the river, an imaginary line was established to mark the border between the two countries of Mexico

and the United States. In June 1893, the invisible line divided the island. In this instance, one could cross the river and still be in Texas, but crossing the imaginary line placed one in Mexico. The island was several miles long and had a population of about three hundred, mostly populated by a small community known as Tres Jacales. It was on this land that Captain Jones intended to challenge the Olguins on the June 30, 1893.

The Olguins were composed of an extensive family. At this point in time, the head of the family, Clato, was over ninety years old and perhaps going blind. His son Jesús María was in his mid-forties. Severio and Antonio, sons of Jesús María, were both young and now considered leaders among the thieves and murderers who infested the “neutral ground” along the Rio Grande. Only recently, Jesús María, his sons Severio, Sebastian, and an unidentified Mexican had all defied R. E. “Ed” Bryant, a deputy sheriff of El Paso County. Captain Jones’s father-in-law, George Wythe Baylor, later described them:

[They are] a hard set, the grandfather, Clato, his sons, Jesús María, Antonio (ex-convict) and Pedro Olguin. The sons of Jesús are Severio, Sebastian, Pecilliano, and two younger ones. All live on the Island on Texas soil, except the ex-convict, Antonio, who was sent to the penitentiary and escaped. [By reputation, the Olguins composed a] “gang of thieves, murderers, and smugglers that have for years infested an island that has been a sort of neutral ground.

On or about June 25 several of the Olguins “got on a drunk” in the village of Guadalupe in Mexico and killed one man and wounded three others, one of whom was expected to die.

The members of this gang and others created a reign of terror among many inhabitants of the greater El Paso area. Petitions went to the governor for Ranger protection. Finally in June 1893, Adjutant General King responded favorably to their pleas and sent Captain Jones to provide “protection from these border thieves and murderers.” One of the first things Jones did on arrival was to set up tents in Ysleta “for the avowed purpose of ridding the island below and the bosque above of the desperate characters that have for years infested them.”

On Thursday, June 29, Captain Jones and a squad of five men— Corporal Carl Kirchner, privates Edward D. Aten, T. F. Tucker, John W. Saunders, and El Paso County Deputy Sheriff R. E. “Ed” Bryant—left camp with warrants for certain members of the Olguin family. Jones believed that since the Olguins had recently been in more trouble, they would now seek refuge temporarily on the Rio Grande island. The evening of June 29, the Rangers camped on the east bank opposite La Quadrilla, five miles below San Elizario. The next morning, they were

in their saddles by 4:00 a.m. and rode straight across the island for the Olguin ranch, some five miles distant. Rounding up the ranch, they found old Clato Olguin, Jesús María's wife, two other women, and a boy. The old man was very surly, and the fugitives were aware of the scout, as their friends in Ysleta or San Elizario had apparently alerted them to what was coming. They had crossed over to the Mexican side to the house of Antonio Olguin.

According to Kirchner's official report, the Rangers then started "in the main road, which crosses backward and forward from our side to Mexico several times, the river being very crooked and being overgrown with chapparal [sic], it is difficult to determine which one is in Texas or Mexico." The Rangers searched several houses (whether these houses were in the little village of Tres Jacales or elsewhere is not clear in any of the reports). They got no results and were on their way back when they saw two mounted Mexicans approaching them. The pair turned their horses and ran, causing the Rangers to suspect they were the men they wanted. Within half a mile, Corporal Kirchner and Private Saunders overtook them and demanded their surrender. The two Rangers were well ahead of their companions as they had faster horses. Then from inside the building the Mexicans fired two shots at Kirchner and four shots at the others. One shot hit the magazine of Kirchner's Winchester, not ruining it but damaging it in such a way that he had to reload after each shot. The other Rangers, having now caught up with Kirchner and Saunders, dismounted to engage the men hidden in the adobe house. Immediately Captain Jones received a bullet in the thighbone, breaking it, but he continued to fight and shoot at his assailants.

George W. Baylor, Captain Jones's father-in-law, provided additional details about the last fight of his son-in-law, although slightly in disagreement with what Kirchner reported. As Baylor wrote, it was Captain Jones and Private Tucker in the lead who met the two Mexicans who then "wheeled and ran back." After some three or four hundred yards, Kirchner, Aten, and Saunders passed Jones and Tucker "and ran on the Mexicans." Jesús María Olguin fell from his horse and ran, finding sanctuary in the adobe house of Antonio Olguin. The other rider threw up his hands. The little settlement had but four adobe houses, three of them on the right side of the road about fifty yards apart, and one house on the left. As Kirchner passed one of the buildings, someone fired at him from inside, the bullet hitting his weapon, disabling it in part so he could only fire one shot and then reload. Bullets flew close to Saunders as well as Aten, and they both returned fire. Now it was a situation of the Rangers being in the open and their assailants behind adobe walls, both inside the houses and from behind the walls connecting them. The house had a porthole allowing the shootists the advantage. Baylor continued:

The Mexicans would open the door & fire and two Mexicans on the right & left of the house would rise from behind an adobe wall & fire also. The

door would then close. Kirchner, Saunders & Aten whirled and came back, dismounted & Bryan[t] came up back of & within 15 or feet of Capt Jones & Tucker, and every time the door was opened, and a volley be fired Capt Jones and the men would return it.

In the second volley, a bullet hit Captain Jones's thigh, breaking his leg causing him to fall. He managed to straighten his wounded leg in front of him and fired two or three more shots. In great pain, Captain Jones continued to fire, leaning forward, and shooting at the Mexican who fired at him. Then he was hit again, the ball knocking him flat. Tucker saw him fall and asked, "Captain, are you hurt?" Captain Jones replied, "Yes, shot all to pieces." In spite of his leg wound and all the confusion, the captain continued to fire his pistol, emptying it, and managing to hit two of his targets. Now a Mexican from behind an adobe wall rose up and fired again at the captain, this time a fatal shot. Jones managed to utter. "Boys, I am killed," and collapsed.

Tucker, close to his captain when he was hit, stayed with him, intending to take the body back to Texas. He later explained that when the fight started, Jones probably did not realize he had crossed the imaginary line and was in Mexico. Now Deputy Bryant told him, "We had better get across the line, we are in Mexico." They were within a mile or so from the plaza of Tres Jacales (Three Shacks) and knew that there would soon be a force of Mexicans coming to investigate. Young Lujan, a youth who had accompanied the scout in an effort to try to recover a stolen horse, informed the Rangers a courier had gone to nearby Guadalupe for soldiers.

The Rangers had to leave Jones's body where it fell, and Tucker was now in command of the squad. The concern became whether reinforcements for the Olguins would arrive to finish them all off. When the firing stopped, the Rangers rode up the road to Tres Jacales. Bryant asked a Mexican to take care of the captain's body, which he promised to do but said they could not deliver the body to the Rangers on the United States side as it was against their laws.

The Rangers had lost their captain, but two of the Olguins were injured. A bullet had gone through the right hand of Jesús María Olguin, and two bullets had grazed his head. His son Severio "had his arm broken near the body."

There was nothing more for the Rangers to do other than return to Texas. At San Elizario, Corporal Kirchner sent a telegram to General Mabry, writing, "Have just had fight with Mexican outlaws near line of Mexico[.] Capt Jones killed[.] we

were overpowered and have just come in for reinforcements[.] only had six men[.]”

A second telegram to Mabry expressed his concern as he wrote, “I Expect trouble here[.] can you send sergeant Hughes and outfit up tonight[?] the railway co[mpany] will furnish transportation free[.]”

Kirchner must have also quickly informed George W. Baylor of the death of his son-in-law. Telegraphing Mabry, Baylor said, “Corporal Kirchner reports Capt Frank Jones Killed by Mexicans on the Island near Tresjacaes [sic] —can you send Sergt Hughes and squad here at once[?]”

Kirchner, besides informing his superiors of the tragedy, now resolved to recover Jones’s body. El Paso County sheriff Frank B. Simmons quickly called for volunteers to go across and recover not only the body but also Jones’s personal effects as well. Superintendent Martin of the Southern Pacific provided Simmons with a special train: a coach for the men and a stock car for their horses. Within two hours, additional men volunteered, many of them friends of the Rangers and heading to the scene “to avenge the death of their friend and to capture the body of the fallen man from the keeping of the pirates and cutthroats that took it.” Members joining Sheriff Simmons’s command included officer Albert C. Ross, Deputy Sheriff J. C. Jones, Frank McMurry, Peyton F. Edwards Jr., Will Davis, Thomas A. Bendy, Paul Logan, and George A. Scarborough. There were also reporters: J. D. Ponder, and Fred Stevenson “of the afternoon papers” and Thomas O’Keeffe of the *El Paso Times*. Ranger R. B. Chastain later joined them, and attorney T. T. Teel also was with the group.

The news of the death of the Ranger captain spread rapidly. From Alpine, Special Ranger Baz L. Outlaw contacted Mabry, telegraphing, “Capt Jones was killed near Ysleta by thieves today[.] will go up on first train [and] do all I can to capture murderers.” Hughes was also at Alpine and telegraphed Mabry the same day, “I will go to San Elizario by first train.” Now Kirchner telegraphed further news to Mabry that the fight had taken place in Mexico and that he had recovered the body of Captain Jones and secured the arrest of the men who had killed him. Baylor also informed Mabry of the news of recovering Jones’s body, reporting, “The Mexican authorities have Shown every courtesy in their power in given [sic, giving] us the body of our dead Ranger & promise to return the Gun, pistol, watch, money & horse left at the scene of the fight.”

Sheriff Simmons did not realize that Kirchner had recovered the body and anticipated trouble in attempting to do so. He met with the *jefe político* of Juarez, Lieutenant Colonel Rafael García Martínez, and together they headed for

the scene of the tragedy, intending to recover the remains. Colonel Martínez had an escort of soldiers and, by chance, this group met three of the Olguins, who were intending to sneak around Juarez to hide out in the upper bosques. Sheriff Simmons recognized who they were, and Colonel Martínez ordered his escort to arrest them. Mexican officials delivered the prisoners to the military prison at Juarez. They were Jesús María Olguin, his son Severio, and another son, Antonio.

Hughes arrived at San Elizario at 9:30 the morning of July 1 and found Corporal Kirchner had left word for him to go on to Ysleta as there had been arrangements for the recovery of Jones's body. At 2:00 p.m., Kirchner arrived at Ysleta with the body. The Masons of the El Paso Lodge No. 130, A. F. and A. M. laid Captain Jones to rest at 6:00 p.m. that evening with full Masonic honors. His brother, Judge William Kenner Jones of Del Rio, as well as John R. Hughes attended. Mrs. Jones, prostrate, was unable to attend. Special Ranger Baz L. Outlaw arrived too late from Alpine to assist in recovering the body but perhaps attended the funeral with the seven men he brought with him. He doubted the widow Jones would recover from the shock of her husband's death. Perhaps the other Rangers of Company D attended as well, their thoughts on the tragic death of their captain but also wondering who would replace him.

Hughes wrote to Adjutant General Mabry, "I found that Corpl. Kirchner had done good work in getting the body and securing the arrest of three of the criminals on the Mexican side of the river." As yet, Jones's personal effects—his arms, watch, and money—as well as the horse and saddle of Private Tucker were still in the hands of the Mexican officials. They were to be delivered to Juarez, and Hughes, Kirchner, and Tucker would "try to get them back." Hughes continued sharing his observations with his superior, noting that El Paso County was "in a very bad condition [and] the depridations [sic] of the 'Bosque gang' as they are called have not been interfered with for so long that they think they can do as they please and can not be arrested." That of course would be work to do for Captain Jones's replacement, who would also have to complete the June monthly return for Company D.

In the official records of Ranger scouts and activities, summaries of the death of a Ranger were recorded. The clerk who summarized scouts in the adjutant general's official operations ledger wrote in red ink, that on June 29:

Capt Jones & 5 men Scout to Pirate Island with writs to arrest Jesus & Severino [sic] Olguin[.] Camped for the night 7 miles below Tres Jacales Mexico. No arrest. On returning Scouted up old river. Saw two Mexicans wheel & run. Capt. Jones & party gave chase[.] apt Jones & party followed them to Tres Jacales not knowing that he was in Mexico. The fugitives took refuge in a house & fired upon the pursuers, and Capt Jones was killed.

In the margin is written, again in red ink, "Capt. Jones Killed." In the same margin, but in pencil, it is recorded, "1 Horse wounded of a Ranger." Adjutant General Mabry now had the difficult task of selecting the man who would replace Frank Jones as captain of Company D. To add even more excitement in the lives of the law-abiding of the area—and perhaps more particularly to Sergeant Hughes—was the announcement in the *El Paso Times* that U.S. Deputy Marshal Ben Williams of Las Cruces, New Mexico, was in El Paso the night of July 5. He was described as "the officer who recently shot and captured Geronimo Parra, one of the Bosque gang who killed young Fusselman . . ."

