



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 It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

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Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

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Texas Ranger – Rumrunner?!?!

Think “bootlegger,” and most would envision tommy-guns blazing away on the streets of Chicago or New York. All too often, this would be an accurate picture. Equally accurate, however, would be ships—rumrunners—blazing away at one another on the open seas of the Atlantic or an inland river.

America was thirsty for beer and whiskey during Prohibition. With gargantuan profits ready for the taking, men like Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, and Dutch Schultz made themselves available to quench that thirst.

Though not as well known as the above hoodlums, Frank Costello became the “Boss of Bosses” of the Mafia by no accident. He was also the king of the rumrunners.

Frank Costello



Many bootleggers, most notably Costello, started buying foreign whiskey and shipping it to the twelve-mile limit, which was outside the authority of the Coast Guard. At this point, they would transfer their cargo to speedy boats that could usually outrun Coast Guard cutters. They were also well enough armed that many times they could outgun them, too.

However, there were times when the rumrunners would try to deceive the Coast Guard rather than try to fight or outrun them.



One day in broad daylight, the *Texas Ranger* sailed into the harbor at Haverstraw, New York, and passed several Coast Guard installations without causing any concern. All of this changed when an officer, who was thumbing through a shipping news bulletin, read that the *Texas Ranger* was supposed to be in the Gulf of Mexico. He sounded the alarm.



When the crew of the *Texas Ranger* realized they had been discovered, they abandoned ship and rowed to shore. There they found the local police waiting for them.

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Rum Running Ship in Open Seas

Photo: U.S. Coast Guard

The rumrunner was loaded with \$500,000 of illegal alcohol—and this was Depression Era money. It was the largest haul the Coast Guard made during Prohibition. It turned out that the *Texas Ranger* was really the *Hollywood*. It had been disguised to look like the legitimate *Texas Ranger*, which was in the Gulf of Mexico.

Crates of Liquor Stacked on Deck of Rum Runner

Photo: U.S. Coast Guard



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