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 May + June, 1943
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The Capture of "Hank" Smith

By Sam Moore -

The story of the trailing and capture of Henry (Hank) Smith, should really begin with May, 1892, when I was headquartering out at the old 101 ranch, ^{near Monarch} while on the lookout for rustlers for cattlemen of the tri-state area. I was then an independent stock detective, ~~made my home in Hot Springs.~~

R. M. Allen was the manager of the 101 ranch at that time, and his foreman was John Hoover. A band of rustlers were working that whole section of Wyoming, causing all kinds of trouble. They'd ride into a herd of cattle, cut out the mavericks and calves and brand them with the rustler's brand. This rustling was right at its ~~peak~~ ^{peak} while I was at the 101. Three big outfits were catching the worst of it--^{the} 101, the 76 in Johnson county near Buffalo, the Oglalla on Powder River, ~~near Gillette.~~

One day Allen cornered me and asked me what I thought I could do about it.

I told him that you couldn't expect ordinary cowpunchers earning from \$25 to \$35 per month to stand up against a bunch of rustlers, that if I ~~were to~~ ^{thought} fight a gang like that I'd get some men who could put up a ~~real~~ fight. A few good fights would soon cure the rustlers who were now just riding in and taking what they wanted.

Allen asked me ~~just~~ exactly how I'd do it and how much it would cost to clean out the rustlers for the three outfits.

"I would want 12 good men," I said, "men who could shoot and ride and handle other men--\$35 cowpunchers can't do this job. Then I'd deputize these men. They would have to be paid from \$100 to \$125 per month, their board and lodging, and be furnished horses. They would provide their own guns and saddles. As for me, I'd want \$500 per month *and be allowed to go from one outfit to another--*

"I'd take these men and put four of them with the cowpunchers on the 76, four on the 101 and four on the Oglalla." Then I said, "If another maverick is taken without a fight, it will not cost you a dollar."

~~He thought it was pretty high. But I told him that it wasn't high when compared to the stock they were losing.~~

Later, I had a wire from John Clay in Chicago to go to Cheyenne to talk over with Guthrie and ^{Techmacher} ~~Techmacher~~ the proposition I had made Allen.

Not long after that, you remember, George Wellman, while on his way to Buffalo to arrest some of the rustlers, was killed by one of the gang. Wellman, ^{for} man of the Hoe ranch, had been named a deputy United States marshal and was killed while acting in that capacity. That made the government want the man who killed him. Hank Smith was one of the men they wanted. Another of the gang, by the name of Champion--like Smith, a Texan--had been killed near Buffalo

At this time, Col. W. H. Parker, Deadwood, was lawyer for

seven of the biggest cattle companies in the country. He was a striking fellow, stood over six feet, and was known as the "silver tongued orator of the Black Hills." He was a personal friend of President Benjamin Harrison. Parker, thru my conferences with Allen, Guthrie and others on the rustling proposition, picked me as the man to go after Hank Smith, and to rush my appointment as a special agent of the department of justice went to Washington to see President Harrison. He came back with the appointment.

Jan. 10, 1893, I started from Cheyenne to get Hank Smith. The information that I had to work on was that Smith was supposed to be on a ranch near Gallup, N. M., that he and a companion named Jones had left Wyoming on a pair of horses--a bay and a grey, that Smith was dark complexioned, about 30 years old, weighed about 160, and that if I didn't shoot him first, he'd shoot me. All I had with me when I boarded the train was a small bag containing handcuffs and leg irons.

The ranch on which Smith was said to be stopping belonged to an old Mexican, a member of the territorial legislature. At Santa Fe I got in touch with the old Mexican and told him what I wanted. He said that Hank Smith was on his ranch about 30 miles south of Gallup and sent word to his foreman, man by the name of Brazil, to give me anything I wanted. I went right to Gallup and to

the old Mexican's ranch.

There Brazil told me that I was just 30 days too late, that Smith and Jones, riding the same bay and grey, had left the ranch. They were headed for Old Mexico and down thru to South America. They were leading a pack horse.

I went right back to Santa Fe and wired Washington;

"Hank Smith left here 30 days ago with companion on horseback bound for Old Mexico and South America. What shall I do?"

The answer ran like this:

"Follow him as long as you can get any trace of him and bring him back dead or alive to Cheyenne."

And with that wire I started a one-man manhunt that lasted night and day for four months until, on April 27, I delivered Smith in Cheyenne.

If Smith and Jones were headed for Old Mexico, I knew that they would cross over at El Paso, Texas. So I headed for there, inquiring of sheriffs and Mexicans as I went along for any information of two men riding a bay and a grey and leading a pack horse. I traveled any way I could--have this Mexican take me a distance, then ride with someone else, next take the stage. I never missed a lead, even though some of them took me on some pretty wild goose chases. At Socorro, for instance, an old stage driver told me that he had seen two men heading, on horseback, toward the Texas border leading a pack burro. My thought was that Smith and Jones might have needed cash and swapped the horse for a burro with

a little to boot. I followed the trail on and on to Midland, Texas, There were the men, all right, but one of them was an ex-street car conductor and was still wearing part of his uniform.

At El Paso I found that my men had reached there first and had crossed into Mexico. I wired the sheriff at Vernon, Texas, Smith's old home, and told him to wire me at El Paso if he got any word of Smith. I boarded the train at El Paso for Chihuahua, because I found that the only way they could go south was over this route. But at Chihuahua there was no trace of them. Two strangers on this trail with a pack horse and riding a bay and a grey would never be missed by the natives. I knew they must be behind me, and rushed back to El Paso to pick up the trail.

There was a wire waiting for me in El Paso from the Vernon sheriff. It seems that Hank Smith's brother Jake had wired Hank at El Paso to come back to Vernon because a court in session there had dismissed certain charges against Hank. That meant Hank was on his way to Vernon. Back across Texas I tore--Vernon is near the Oklahoma line. By this time it was April, but for the first time I was positive that I was on the trail of my man. *To be continued next issue, Deer County*

At Vernon, The sheriff told me that he hadn't seen Hank Smith, but pointed out the brother, Jake, a man about 15 years older than Hank. The sheriff warned me: "Don't let Jake know what you're after, or he'll shoot you like a rattlesnake."

I made arrangements with the sheriff to hire a man to go out to Jake's place--about 11 miles from Vernon--to keep watch nights for

Hank. It was my idea that Hank might hide out in the brakes along the Red river in the daytime and come into his brother's for the night. In the meantime, I stayed in town, played pin pool with Jake and kept him just drunk enough to want to stay on and play pin pool. We played three nights, and those three nights the man on watch out at Jake's place didn't see a thing.

During the day I had struck up an acquaintance with one of the men on the jury. He lived just a mile from Jake's place and I arranged to ride out with him and do some watching of my own. I stayed at his house thru the day and then at night watched the Smith place. And I didn't see a thing.

About five miles from the juror's farm was the Champion place, home of the rustler in Hank's gang who had been killed in Johnson county. I thought Hank might be hiding there. I watched there a couple of nights. Saw nothing.

Next I went to Henrietta to see a married sister of Hank, thinking he might be there. She knew nothing about him. Then I went back to Vernon and told the sheriff I might as well pull out for home. At train time I told him not to bother to go to the station with me, I had just the little bag with the handcuffs and legirons and the train didn't stop long.

I got on the train, all right, but I swung off the other side of the car and into the caboose of a freight on the next track headed west for Quanah. Here I met Captain MacDonald of the Texas

Rangers. He was at Quanah supervising the loading of three cars of mules and was ready to board the freight to go down to New Orleans with the shipment. I told him the hunt I was on and that I needed a little help. He said there was nothing he'd like better than to go after a man like that but that he had to go on with his shipment. He said, however, that I could have the help of the Ranger who was with him and sent to Childress for another man. This last Ranger to arrive, Red Tom O'Hare, is the one I remember. I got mounts for the three of us and we started back to Vernon and Jake Smith's place.

We hung around Smith's place a couple of nights, saw nothing. Spent another night or two around the Champion place. Nothing there. We stated back across the post oak ridges for Quanah. We were pretty hungry when we came, about the middle of the day, to a little farm in the timber--cabin and farm buildings. An old Irishman came to the door, and^I asked him if he could give us a bite to eat.

"Shure, and I can," the old fellow answered. "Take your horses down to the corncrib and feed them while I rustle up some grub."

At the corncrib I told the Rangers, "I'm going to tell this old mickey who I am and what I'm after and see if he knows anything about Smith or where he is."

"Hank Smith?" he yelled when I told him. "B'Jasus, I do know where he is. He and the fellow with him are up in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) about 190 miles from here, staying with a couple old schoolmates of Smith on their homestead. Went up a week, ten days ago."

We went right to Mangum, spent the night, got fresh horses and

the directions to the homestead and set out. The house on the homestead was a dugout in a fenced pasture of about 40 acres. We could see the two horses we were looking for hitched near the dugout. As we rode up over a small rise, two men came out of the house, got on the horses and rode away, in the opposite direction from which we were coming. They seemed to be in no great rush, just trotted off. We opened the gate and took out after them. They crossed a creek ahead of us, but the point at which we came up to the bank was too steep to cross, so I called out to them--perhaps 100 yards away-- "Wait a minute. I want to talk to you." They stopped. I left Red Tom at the high point of the bank and the other Ranger and I rode down to the crossing a few rods down and crossed.

We rode up to them. They did nothing. I got off my horse, went over to Smith and asked him for ^{which he had in an overcoat pocket.} his six shooter, I slipped his Winchester from its saddle holster. Then I told Jones to throw me the gun and holster he had strapped around his waist, and took his saddle Winchester. After making the men dismount to be searched, we all remounted and started back to Mangum.

Not a sign of trouble. I couldn't understand it. I had been warned again and again that this man would shoot me if I didn't shoot him first. But he hadn't so much as tried to make a break for it when he had a chance or made a move toward his gun.

I was riding ahead with Smith--Jones and the Rangers were riding behind. Finally I said to Smith, "How does it happen you didn't

Put up a fight. I was expecting almost anything from you. 2

"I thought you were all Rangers," he grinned. "They shoot first and ask their questions afterward."

We rode into Mangum as peacefully as you please. But perhaps part of the peacefulness was due to Red Tom. Every now and then he would let out a yell, "There goes Smith" and he'd start shooting on the dead run, putting every bullet in some target, right where he wanted it. Such shooting would keep any rustler peaceful.

We spent the night at Mangum and the next day rode on to Quanah where Hank and I boarded the train for Cheyenne. The Rangers took Jones with them. He was wanted in Texas on some charge.

After the train was under way I told Smith, who was handcuffed, "We're in for a long ride. You'll be a lot more comfortable without those cuffs. If you'll behave yourself I'll take them off. But remember, one move to get away, and I'll shoot to kill."

We had no sign of trouble all the way up to Cheyenne. In fact, he was an interesting companion. He had been all over the world and had plenty of things to tell. His spirits stayed high until we were a few miles out of Cheyenne. We were getting in at 3 o'clock in the morning.

"Why are you so down in the mouth?" I asked him.

"I'm being brought back for a killing. There may be a mob at the station, and I have just a few minutes to live."

I told him that nobody knew we were coming in on this train but the sheriff. "Chances are ~~that there will be nobody on that~~

the only ones on the platform will be the sheriff and the deputies he has with him," I assured him. "The platform at Cheyenne is big and well-lighted. When our train stops out here before it hits the main line from Omaha, I'll look out and if the platform is crowded we'll slip off out here."

There wasn't a soul to be seen on the platform but the agent, so we rode into the station. And do you know that even the sheriff wasn't there?

I⁺ was about seven blocks up to the courthouse, and I thought I'd take Smith up alone. But the agent offered to go up with me. Just as we got to the iron gates of the courtyard here came the sheriff-- just a puffing--he had overslept.

Smith was freed--couldn't hold him on the charge. After that he was thought to be cattle rustling in the Cheyenne Reservation, south of Lemmon. Cattlemen ~~####~~ ~~is~~ there sent for me to come up to catch him. But I told them that I had caught him once and that was enough for me.

After that I heard--no proof, of course--that he went to Canada, fought in the Boer war and came back a major. After that he joined the Canadian Mounted Police.

(As told by Sam Moses to igw March 27, 1943)