



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

Frank Hamer, the Legendary Texas Ranger

The first shot from the lawmen who ambushed Bonnie and Clyde on May 23, 1934, hit Clyde Barrow in the head and killed him instantly. Led by storied Texas Ranger Frank Hamer, the posse fired more than 100 rounds at the two serial murderers. They riddled the Ford Deluxe V8 with 167 bullets; 17 hit Bonnie and 26 hit Clyde. One snapped his spine.



“I would have gotten sick,” the 50-year-old lawman said of seeing Bonnie Parker slumped forward, bloody head between her knees. “But when I thought about her crimes, I didn’t. I hated to shoot a woman — but I remembered the way in which Bonnie had taken part in the murder of nine peace officers. I remembered how she kicked the body of the highway patrolman at Grapevine and fired a bullet into his body as he lay on the ground.”

Before that murder on Easter Sunday north of Dallas, Bonnie and Clyde rampaged through the Midwest. They robbed banks and killed anyone who got in their way, and some who didn’t. They left 13 dead.

Hamer joined the hunt for the pair in February. Despite the fame he enjoyed because of it, he was a feared and revered lawman long before he tracked them down in Louisiana. And perhaps his last compelling deed, apropos of vote-fraud allegations in the 2020 presidential election, was pushing his way into a voting precinct in South Texas — packing a pistol — to help Coke Stevenson, a much-loved former Texas governor, prove that Lyndon Johnson stole the 1948 Democratic Senate primary. But though the crime was exposed, justice was never rendered.

Perhaps the lesson from Hamer’s life and events, applicable to the past three months, is that the more the things change, the more they stay the same. Lawmen such as Hamer can stop thieves and murderers who carry guns. But they’re powerless against crooked lawyers and machine politicians who carry briefcases — unless and until informed citizens restore sound government.

Shot 17 Times, Killed 53 Men

Yet to understand Hamer’s role in proving that fraud, one must recall that Texas whelped him when it was still young and wild, and that he began his career in the Rangers in 1906, 23 years before Wyatt Earp died.

Indeed, Earp was just 36 years old when Francis Augustus Hamer was born in 1884, three years after the Earps’ mythic gunfight at the O.K. Corral.



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

“Among his countless exploits, he played a prominent role in the so-called Bandit War of 1915, when Mexican revolutionaries surged across the border and raided in south Texas,” Hamer biographer John Boessenecker wrote at *True West* magazine.

That, though, nearly pales next to his other deeds. He killed a man in the feud between his wife and her former in-laws, and “in 1921, as a Texas Ranger captain, he and his men crossed the Mexican border and ambushed and killed the gang of Rafael Lopez, who had murdered five lawmen in Utah’s worst law enforcement tragedy. Captain Hamer then led the Rangers who tamed the oil boomtowns of Mexia and Borger, and investigated — and solved — some of the most sensational Texas murders of the 1920s.”

Lopez, known as “Red” and a former member of Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West show, was a particularly dangerous man. Aside from murdering the five Utah lawmen, in 1914, he and his gang derailed a train and killed 19 of 20 passengers. Hamer and his Rangers ran them to ground at the Rio Grande and killed them.

Yet Hamer didn’t just hunt outlaws. He also protected them, black or white, when mobs on a short fuse showed up with a long rope.

Reported Boessenecker:

Beginning in 1908, he saved 15 black men from certain death at the hands of lynch mobs in various towns and cities in east Texas. During the Roaring Twenties, Hamer led an unpopular fight against the Ku Klux Klan in Texas. In 1930, at the courthouse in Sherman in north Texas, Hamer and three of his Rangers held off a mob of 6,000 intent on lynching a black man who had raped a white woman. When the rioters burned down their own courthouse in order to kill the prisoner locked up inside, Frank Hamer became the first and only Texas Ranger to lose a prisoner to a lynch mob. He and his men barely escaped the raging inferno alive. Nonetheless, Hamer’s stubborn refusal to back down against massive odds, and his shooting of two of the Sherman mob leaders, constitute one of the greatest displays of raw courage in the history of American law enforcement.

He broke a dock strike in Houston by standing nose-to-nose with the biggest striker. “This strike is over,” Hamer warned.

During his career, Hamer was shot 17 times, and he killed at least 53 men. He always carried “Old Lucky,” the Colt .45, single-action revolver and a back-up piece. Hamer was involved in about a dozen gunfights, his son says. Other sources put the figure at more than four dozen.

Those details provide the means to understand the type of man he was: fearless, and not afraid to die — nor to kill when killing was necessary.

Bonnie and Clyde

So Texans picked the right man to lead the posse against Bonnie and Clyde, who were not, as Warren Beatty suggested in his 1967 film, heroes of any sort.

They were, again, serial murderers who, Texans believed, needed killing. As Boessenecker wrote, Clyde came from family of criminals and Bonnie was no better:

Of seven Barrow children, five were convicted felons. According to myth, he was forced by the Depression into a life of crime, but in fact Clyde became a 13-year-old chicken thief in



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

1922, seven years before the Depression even hit Texas. He certainly led Bonnie Parker into a career of crime, but she followed willingly. In myth, she was an innocent girl who never fired a gun. In fact, during a bank holdup in Lucerne, Indiana, Bonnie fired at unarmed citizens. Following a bank robbery in Okabena, Minnesota, Bonnie, Clyde and his brother, Buck Barrow fired at citizens with shotguns and Browning automatic rifles, narrowly missing a school bus full of children. Bonnie shot at lawmen in gunfights at Joplin, Missouri, and Dexter, Iowa. She was, in the popular term of that era, a gun moll.

Hamer got the job, with orders to kill the pair, after they staged the Eastham Prison Farm break in January 1934. They killed a guard in a bloody shootout to spring a member of their gang. Other inmates also escaped, including Henry Methvin. Thus did Methvin join the pair of killers.

Hamer was a “consummate professional,” Boessenecker wrote, and joining forces with Dallas Deputy Sheriff Bob Alcorn and others, tracked the pair’s bank robberies through Texas, Oklahoma, and four towns in Iowa.

Along the way, Bonnie and Clyde and Methvin murdered at will.

Their end began when they murdered Texas Highway Patrolmen H.D. Murphy and Edward Bryant Wheeler in Grapevine on Easter Sunday, 1934. The three were parked on the side of the road awaiting a former member of Barrow’s gang to pass, Hamer said, when they ambushed the two patrolmen.

After gunning them down, Parker, so the story goes, rolled Murphy on his back with her foot, then shot him in the head. It “bounced like a rubber ball,” she laughed. That story from an eyewitness might have been false, for Methvin later said he and Clyde killed the two men, but whoever killed them, a week later, 60-year-old Calvin Campbell, a constable in Commerce, Oklahoma, became their next victim. Before Hamer stopped them, the gang murdered nine lawmen and four others across four states beginning in 1932.

To stop the gang, Hamer determined the killers’ nearly programmed pattern of eluding the law, which included way stations in Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and northern Louisiana, Methvin’s home.

After Methvin’s father, Ivy, offered to help Hamer catch the murderers, the aging Ranger only had to wait for the chance to bring them down from ambush.

Continued Boessenecker:

Clyde, driving by night at high speed in stolen autos, managed to evade a massive, multi-state dragnet. Soon after this, John Joyner, a friend of Ivy Methvin, contacted Sheriff Jordan and asked for a secret meeting with the elder Methvin. Jordan and his chief deputy, Prentiss Oakley, did so, and Methvin offered to give up Bonnie and Clyde in exchange for a Texas pardon for his son. Sheriff Jordan then contacted Louisiana FBI agent Leslie Kindell about the offer. The federal government had no authority to offer a Texas pardon, but Agent Kindell knew that Frank Hamer did. When Kindell, Hamer and Jordan met in Shreveport, Sheriff Jordan recalled, “Hamer agreed that a deal could be offered to the Methvin family. If Ivy Methvin would help capture Bonnie and Clyde, consideration would be given to Henry Methvin. While Hamer did not promise that all charges against Methvin would be dropped by the state of Texas, he came real close to saying that. Before the meeting was over, I came



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

to realize that was the offer that I was to make to Methvin. If he would help capture Bonnie and Clyde, Henry would not have to go back to prison.”

On May 22, Hamer and his men learned that Bonnie and Clyde would visit Ivy Methvin the next morning.

Ready with Old Lucky, a Colt Super .38 auto, and a Model 8 .35-caliber Remington, the Ranger and his posse opened fire on the two murderers on Louisiana Highway 154 outside Gibsland, about 45 miles east of Shreveport.



Means of escape: Bonnie and Clyde drove a Ford Deluxe V8. In the passenger seat is Bonnie. Clyde wrote to Henry Ford to say he always drove a Ford when he could steal one.

One-hundred-two days after Hamer began the hunt, Bonnie and Clyde were dead, their faces torn to pieces.

Their Ford Deluxe V8, Hamer said, was an “arsenal on wheels.” The posse recovered nine Colt semi-automatic pistols and one Colt double-action revolver, sawed-off 10- and 20-gauge shotguns, three .30-06 Browning automatic rifles, and more than 5,000 rounds of ammo.

Writing at *American Rifleman*, Jim Wilson reported that Hamer might have fired the shots that killed them both, a story he heard from two Rangers:

Hamer fired two quick shots with his Model 8 and then sat down and lit a Camel. Autopsy photos clearly show two head shots on the pair. While there is no way to document this tale, it is certainly within Hamer’s ability to have made those shots.

Other accounts say posse member Prentiss Oakley fired the shot that killed Barrow, but who killed him or Bonnie doesn’t much matter. That spring morning outside Gibsland, Hamer and his men brought the hunt to a bloody close. As for the Ford V8, Clyde greatly admired it, and so told Henry Ford. “While I still have got breath in my lungs I will tell you what a dandy car you make,” Clyde wrote to the automobile tycoon. “I have drove Fords exclusively when I could get away with one. For sustained speed and freedom from trouble the Ford has got every other car skinned and even if my business hasn’t been strictly legal it don’t hurt anything to tell you what a fine car you got in the V-8.”



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

Fine the car might have been. It just wasn't bulletproof or invisible, traits that would have been needed to escape Hamer's group.

“Git!”

Yet even a man as fearsome as Hamer couldn't protect Coke Stevenson from the likes of election thief Lyndon Baines Johnson.

In the Democratic primary of 1948 on July 24, though Stevenson bested Johnson by more than 70,000 votes, neither candidate received a majority of the more than one million cast. Stevenson polled 477,077, Johnson 405,617. Their closest competitor, George Peddy, failed to surpass 240,000.

Stevenson managed only 39.68 percent of the vote. And so the two met again in a runoff on Saturday, August 28.

A popular former governor, Stevenson was ahead of Johnson by more than 20,000 votes before precincts in San Antonio began reporting. But those would likely vote for Stevenson, too. In the election on July 24, a month before the runoff, he had beaten Johnson by 11,000 votes there, reported Robert Caro in *Means of Ascent*, the second of his four-volume opus on the 36th president.

Somehow, Johnson turned that deficit around. That *somehow*, of course, was stuffing ballot boxes.

As more precincts reported results, Stevenson's lead dwindled to less than 1,000 votes, and while more uncounted votes magically appeared, by Tuesday, election officials had declared Stevenson the victor by a slim 349 votes.

Yet the counting still wasn't finished. More and more counties in the Rio Grande Valley reported “new votes” for Johnson, which cut his deficit to 157.

That still wasn't enough to defeat Stevenson.

At 12:30 p.m. on Friday, September 3, Jim Wells County called in a 200-vote change that gave Johnson 494,191 to Stevenson's 494,104.

“Out of 988,295 votes,” Caro reported, Johnson “had won by 87, less than one hundredth of one percent.”

Stevenson wasn't fooled. A man who taught himself bookkeeping by campfire light and caught rustlers with fast-friend Hamer, the former governor traveled to Alice, Texas, about 51 miles west of Corpus Christi, to check vote tallies. Hamer, then 64, and two lawyers went along.

As Caro recounted the story, after they met at their hotel, Hamer told the men to remove their suit jackets so no one would think they were armed; he removed his own so everyone would know that he was armed:

Coke Stevenson and Frank Hamer walked side-by-side, two tall, broad-shouldered, erect, silent men — two living legends of Texas, in fact — two men out of another, vanishing age, another, vanishing code, marching down a street in a dusty Texas town to find out for themselves and prove to the world how Lyndon Johnson had gotten the 200 crucial votes.

Even in 1948, one of the lawyers told Caro, “Everywhere you turned there were people with guns on.”



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

Five of the local election chief's pistoleros stood in their path on the street, and another of the band stood in the door of the bank where the precinct's election records were kept. But the 64-year-old Hamer, Caro wrote, "didn't even slow down."



Ever the same: Former Texas Governor Coke Stevenson lost the 1948 Democratic Senate primary in a runoff against future President Lyndon Johnson, who stuffed a ballot box in Alice, Texas. Texas Ranger Frank Hamer accompanied Stevenson to Alice to stop the fraud. The Democratic Party gave Johnson the victory despite the fraud.

"Git!" Hamer firmly told the first group. They cleared a path.

"Fall back!" he commanded the men who blocked the bank's door. Hamer was ready to draw.

Inside the bank, Stevenson forced a top party official to turn over the election records. They proved that Johnson's lackeys rigged the vote. Looking at the poll list, Caro reported, they found that the last 200 names were written in alphabetical order — in the same handwriting and the same color ink.

In reporting the final tally for the precinct's reported 965 votes, one of Stevenson's attorneys said "it was evident from looking ... that the 9 had been changed."

Said the attorney:

It previously had been a 7.... The 7 had been worked over in pen and ink from a 7 around to a 9.... An additional loop [had been added] to the 7 to make a 9 out of it.

Yet the incontestable evidence uncovered by Hamer and Stevenson didn't matter. A ruling from Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black halted the trial and investigation of the fraud just minutes before the vote boxes whose contents would have proved the tampering of the count were to be opened in court. Johnson went on to become not only U.S. senator, but later vice president and president.

Though then, like now, fraud was discounted out of hand, years later the participants in the fraud admitted in interviews to doing it.

Afterward, a Mexican-American in the precinct explained something to Stevenson's attorneys: "People live longer down here if they keep their mouths shut."



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

Retirement, Reservation Canceled

Three years before the trip to Alice, Hamer's son, U.S. Marine Pvt. Billy Hamer, was killed in action on Iwo Jima. In 1949, the 65-year-old Hamer retired for good to Austin.

Four years later he suffered a stroke, and then he died in 1955. He was 71.

What 17 bullets couldn't do, a more prosaic yet relentless foe did, slowly killing the last of the great Texas Rangers, a 19th-century man whose career, as Boessenecker wrote, "saw him transition from a horseback Ranger into a motorized gangbuster of the 1930s."

On May 16, 1934, a week before the ambush on Louisiana Route 154, the *Dallas Journal* published a cartoon featuring an electric chair, the words "Bonnie and Clyde," and one more: "Reserved."

Francis Augustus Hamer canceled the reservation.



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 18, 2021

Published in the February 1, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 03

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.