

He neither looked, dressed nor acted like a Ranger—he had neither horse nor six-gun, but—

The pilgrim was turning the muzzles of his guns this way and that



A 22-GUN RANGER WALKS

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

CAPTAIN JUDSON MURK, of the Lost Forks Ranger Camp, noticed a puffing of alkali dust, indicating a man walking on foot coming north from the Panhandle Trace. Not many men walked in the area of "Cap" Murk's jurisdiction, which was all of Texas south of No Man's Land. That was the section south of the terrain the surveyors and state forgot when they organized Texas, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico, leaving it jutting out from Indian Territory.

Murk's Texas domain altogether was about 40,000 square miles in area, and usually he had eight men—seven privates and a lieutenant—to keep peace, law and order throughout his jurisdiction. He now was two men short, due to sudden death and resignation. Captain Murk was

alone in the camp, feeling idle and lonesome.

This man on foot was peculiar. He was carrying something, first in one hand, then the other. He was walking right along, having stepped off the Panhandle stage where it stopped halfway between nowhere and what's-its-name, county seats with sheriffs and city marshals, with whom Murk had no truck, a Texas Ranger recognizing only Ranger authority.

Cussing softly to himself, looking around in hopes of seeing some lone horsemen coming to Lost Fork Ranger headquarters, Cap Murk sighed. He sure needed two extra men. Bad, mean scoundrels were coming into the Panhandle faster than seven men could root them out.

Murk had been worse off, thereabouts in his day. He'd patrolled 80,000 square miles with five

men for a spell. He wasn't exactly worrying, now. Austin ought to have sent him a man, or let him pick up one or two, himself. Anyhow, dad-blasted politicians!

This man walking came straight toward the clump of cottonwoods in which the Panhandle Camp was located. Long ago this had been the site of a ranch, but the buildings were practically all gone. In their place were the weather-beaten gray tents, room for a dozen or so men.

A Lone Star flagpole stuck up in front of the captain's tent. Murk had worn a circle around the pole base, tramping around and around, till he had a trench a foot or so deep. It helped him to think. But that was the only walking Cap Murk thought of doing.

This walking person was near enough to show he was toting a leather satchel. He was a tall, wiry man, nearly a foot taller than the captain, who was five feet, two inches tall in his riding boots. And this fellow wore a standard six-inch brim Nutria hat, but he had a white collar and a necktie. Furthermore, he wore laced shoes and store clothes—city store. Obviously, he was coming to the Ranger camp. Now what in thunder would a man on foot be coming toward Murk's headquarters for, anyhow?

When they finally stood face to face, Murk saw it was a well-tanned, well-toothed face, smooth-shaven and with blue eyes. His hair was sun-bleached, he wore a narrow belt and—no guns! The captain's curiosity increased. The scoundrel's coat flapped open with the wind and there was a small star filed out of a two-bit silver piece—a Lone Star! The insignia of the Texas Rangers! Captain Murk's hand dropped to the butt of his own gun—this false pretender needed killing!

Instead, this man handed the captain a sure enough significant rectangle of good-quality paper, partly printed and partly filled in with an inked pen. Murk's chin dropped, exposing the cud of chewing in his mouth. There was this fellow's appointment to the Texas Rangers, all in duo and unmistakable order—if it wasn't a forgery!

HERE was Jesse Lou Vannie, man-grown and a native son of Texas. He had been appointed a Ranger by the major commanding—at Austin, of course. All the details, description, signature and countersignature were all there! Here was a Texas Ranger walking, wearing a silver star

and no gun, much less guns, creating bulges or showing plain in holsters!

Captain Murk blinked, re-read the appointment, speechless! Didn't this man know a Ranger just naturally had to have a horse and at least one man-size gun? No use saying anything! Ever since Austin began to make appointments, some of the doggonedest fellows had showed up, wearing the literature of Texas Rangers, displaying the symbol—Oh, well!

"Last tent—furthest cot!" Cap Murk jerked a thumb, and for a wonder, the newcomer just picked up that leather satchel, dust rolled off it, and the Austin Ranger lifted his feet to the furthest shelter from Murk's own tent possible, without saying a word.

The captain grinned, seeing this Austin recruit stop at the half barrel into which spring water was running from a V-trough. He soused his head, and gulped down what seemed like a gallon of water. Probably the thirstiest thing a man can do in the Panhandle of Texas is walk. So, now, Murk had another Texas Ranger under his command. And he was sure one heck of a note!

"Influence, politics, ignorance—" Murk sighed.

Cap Murk had known he needed to expect something, but what? They sure had ideas about jokes, down at Austin. No matter how loud a man yelled out there in the Panhandle, the sound would never reach down to the east side of the Cedar Belt.

The captain never had been any hand to put his feelings down on paper. If he couldn't say it with tongue or gun, he didn't see any use of trying to spell it out in ink. He'd had specimens from Austin, but they'd all come in on horses—so-called. Nobody was further from the State Capital than Murk. He mostly had his own way, operating with what he swapped with other captains.

"I'd like to see Jesse Lou Vannie in the middle of a herd of high-country cows!" Murk rumbled as he grinned. "And him afoot!"

That was a thought. Given orders, a Ranger just naturally headed for the scene and occasion. The officer in command just said: "Go get!" and the Ranger went—pronto. Not to head out, forthwith, meant the exercise of a Ranger Captain's ability to blister with language.

"A Texas Ranger—no guns, no horse, wearin' a white collar!" Cap Murk shook his head. He was seething with the feelings of a perfectly competent field worker, genuine business promoter, when

somebody higher up plays a dirty, despicable, insulting joke on him.

Putt Bangdy came riding along the stageroad. There was a curl of dust smoking up behind him big enough for a territorial governor. Putt had been down into Greer County, after the mail.

Mail to Captain Murk's Ranger squad consisted mostly of notices or rewards offered for men wanted from as little as \$50 to as much as \$25,000 or so. Sometimes newspaper clippings were included in envelopes with dodgers from sheriffs and other lawmen. The clippings gave details about fugitives who might try to cross the Murk camp squad's territory.

Sure enough, Bangdy brought sixty-odd live reward notices and some scores of casuals from off yonder, back east and north. Murk never would get used to being asked to pick up lost runaway boys, or city gangsters wearing patent leather dancing shoes, riding bicycles.

Among the important dodgers, Captain Murk came upon five that were of real interest to a Texas Ranger officer. They didn't need more than the names, with a string of alias casual misleading designations:

MOSEY JACK, alias Mick Burley.

CUPFULL, alias Budin Cosalle.

JUD the CANARY, alias Wall Picket.

THE BARBEO WIRE TWINS, alias Pat and
Kit Crawding.

They were genuine problems, not only across Texas pasture, but through the mineral, homestead, Fur Belt, railroad and banking lands west of the old Forest Belt Line. According to a news clipping pasted to the reward notice for Mosey Jack, these pals had come down out of the Missouri Basin, following the foothills of the Rocky Mountain Divide, on their way into western Kansas, angling toward the Rio Grande by way of the Indian Territory and Texas Panhandles.

"Look out for these men!" the general notice fair-warned. "They shoot on suspicion and where one is, the others are close by."

The newspaper clipping printed the fair-warning. It listed about seventeen assorted attacks on large sums in small bundles—stage, train, and bank robberies. The outlaws had terrorized a hundred communities, and the individual reward notices read: "DEAD or ALIVE," with guarantees

of some rewards indicated, from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per.

Captain Murk looked through the reward notices he had accumulated during his sojourn at the Lost Forks headquarters. The stack was about 24 inches high, assorted out into various kinds of crimes and criminals. The "General Westerns" was three inches thick, and the Mosey Jack Outlaw Band bunch was nearly an inch thick.

"Hi-i, Vannie!" Murk turned and yelled.

VANNIE appeared instantly, stepping into his pants. He had them buttoned and his handsome embossed leather belt drawn tight, when he stood before the captain. He was barefooted. His prompt attention pleased the captain, in spite of his prejudice.

"These fellers'll prob'ly short cut 'cross No Man's land, an' head by the Canadian over to the Rio," Murk said, "Yuh better get out there an' head 'em off!"

"Yes, sir!" Jesse Lou Vannie answered respectfully, turned and dog-trotted back to his tent.

Within a few minutes he was out, wearing socks, hunting boots, a loose woolen Hickory shirt, and carrying a small canvas bag by a strap over his right shoulder. Murk blinked. He might have known Austin had wished a flat-heel onto him. Still, he felt surprised. Even Texas politicians get like that, sometimes.

Ranger Vannie went to the cook-tent and when he emerged, the lunch bag was bulging. Simble, the cook, came out and watched this man go out of camp on foot with a lunch bag to tote his grub. Two other Rangers besides Murk watched.

This new recruit was going out with no visible means of self-defense, much less of offense. He was walking. The alkali dust he scuffled at intervals was visible long after Ranger Vannie was diminished in perspective to a mere agitation in the far-flung mirage of the Lost Forks betweenland.

"Five miles—on foot! A Texas Ranger!" the captain breathed his statement. He took off his hat and stamped it into the soft ground at the foot of the Lone Star flag pole. He picked it up, shook the alkali out of it, and pulled it down to his ears.

"Ah, Cap'n, don' that feller know a Ranger has to supply his own hoss?" Simble inquired respectfully.

"Simble, I shore don't know! What'd he take for eats—cookies?" the ranger captain answered.

"No, suh, jerked beef, mos'ly. Tin cup, plate, table ware," the cook explained, "cold bread, can of butter, smoked salmon. Yas, suh, some cookies—chinked in around."

"Got a gun, Simble?"

"A gun, suh? No, suh—Jes' one of them twenty-twos—snake gun, suh."

"An' I got a twenty-two gunman wished on me!" Murk walked around the Lone Star flagpole, clockwise and counterclockwise. "Doggone! I feel like I ain't in my right mind! How come I turned down city marshal in Sheffield, an' Llano City, an' them places?"

Captain Murk had worn quite a rut around that flagpole, his high, sharp heels hooking in. Of course, he was just showing off. At the same time he had to express his feelings. His boys were laughing at him, even Simble, the old cook—the only privileged person anywhere around.

Murk had the feeling that perhaps Ranger Vannie wasn't what he was really cracked up to be. Rangers had sometimes come to camp on foot, carrying their saddles or leaving the gear hanging on a mesquite or jack pine, or some other tree, near a dead horse.

If Vannie had just said the word—begged—he could have borrowed a horse. Now wouldn't it be a real humdinger if this Jesse Lou Vannie couldn't ride? That was all he needed to make him unique in the Ranger captain's experience. It would, in fact, be a historic number in the whole history of the Rangers!

Murk rode out along that foot-man's trail. Vannie was still walking up over the ridge ten miles away, where even glasses could no longer show his dust—if it hadn't been dark before he got that far. The captain read the tracks. There it was five miles, ten miles, and without a break clear up to North Fork spring.

There Vannie had sat down to eat a lunch. Bread crumbs, a shred of skim-meat, a piece of cookie. From the looks of things, the Ranger had been there in the dark. He'd struck a match and burned a sliver of jack pine pitch wood. Imagine a Ranger who couldn't eat by starlight—who risked having a light when on the trail of outlaws—of Mosey Jack's outlaw band!

But a few yards on beyond the springs, Murk found a rattlesnake about six feet long, four inches in diameter and shot through the head with a very small bullet, about BB size—in fact, a 22-slug. It

was the truth. Here was a Texas Ranger with a single-shot 22-gun!

"It'd be mighty funny," Murk sighed, "if he wasn't in the comp'ny—and was scored up to Austin Headquarters—Huh!"

Nevertheless, there the tracks led, after more than twenty miles of hiking, bound up toward the north side of the Texas Panhandle where that band of \$150,000 outlaws was coming down through No Man's Land, according to the reward notices and accompanying news clipping. Murk bristled from his high heels to his pulled down Nutria wide-brim, a distance of five feet, and 135 pounds of gristle, salt and bone between.

JESSE LOU VANNIE caught the Panhandle stage up to Dallam Court. He arrived there in the dark and kept walking north all night long, three miles an hour for ten hours. He excused himself for not knowing just where the state line of Texas stood up against No Man's Land. He came to the Beaver River valley, following an old buffalo trail, in No Man's Land.

The Beaver River was mostly wet quicksand where he struck it. He looked and listened, as if that wild country sounded any different from down along the Rio Grande or over on the Canadian, or Red River, or the Arkansaw. In fact, though, he was the only man in all the West who was able to hear what the little birds were telling him—chirruping, cheeping, cluck-ticking. He built a fire, made a camp and shot three prairie chickens with BB-caps, using that funny little pistol of his.

He set up three stiff sticks, the top ends sharpened, and stuck the skinned and gutted prairie chickens on the points. There the dry heat of the driftwood fire he built browned and dried the little carcasses out. A soft south breeze was blowing. This carried the thin blue fumes and the rich meaty smell of fire and birds up along the buffalo migrant trail.

Presently, Vannie sprinkled salt on one of the carcasses and bit off chunks of wing-breast meat, eating heartily. He had just got the breasts eaten, and was nibbling the splintery leg meat when he heard a voice.

"Pilgrim!" the voice said, "don't git nervy—We're hongry, too!"

"Help yoreself!" Vannie answered, nibbling and not looking around.

Two tall, thin, whiskery men came around into

view. They had mean-looking guns of full size for 45-scabbards in their right hands. They looked at Vannie and they looked around.

"Where's your hoss, pilgrim?"

"I ain't got no horse," Vannie replied.

"Shucks! You ain't hoofin' it in this country?"

"Only way I got's to hoof it!" Vannie answered, still nibbling.

"He's got a gun, too—if yuh look close, Mosey!" one said, in kind of an awed tone.

"Doggone! That's right, Cupfull—a gun—that?" Mosey broke into an enthusiastic laugh, reaching and plucking the 22-single-shot from Vannie's hip pocket.

There it was, with a grip for a fair hand, a tapered 6-inch round barrel, and a tip-up button dingus. In the barrel was a piece of copper tube, size of a bird-quill. It had a bullet big around as a BB shot.

"Now ain't that comical!" Mosey exclaimed. "I bet yuh're from back East—Ohio, or Jersey, or Maine, one of them foreign countries."

"No suh," Vannie shook his head, "I'm from Texas!"

"Texas—an' a twenty-two for a gun! Ho, ho!" the two men burst into a loud laugh. Then three other men came riding down the buffalo trail driving three pack horses ahead of them, and three or four other spare horses switching and prancing around.

"Look boys!" Mosey waved his arm, hooking down, "this feller says he's from Texas! An' he's packin' a twenty-two, one-shot gun, too!"

The little pop gun was passed around, the five men standing on the ground, having shared the two prairie chicken breasts, legs and wings with one another, tearing the frames apart. They looked with first one eye and then the other.

"So he's from Texas, eh?" Cupfull repeated, shaking his head. "Ain't it funny how some little runt of a tenderfoot, walkin' aroun', pretends he's from somewhere special, now? Why, I bet this feller'd claim he's a Texas Ranger, if yuh asked him!"

"That's so— Hey, pilgrim?" Mosey's voice inflected up. "Now, ain't it the truth yuh're not only a Texan, but yuh're a Texas Ranger?"

"A Ranger don't never lie, yuh know!" Cupfull added with a grin.

"An' a Texas Ranger's always proud he is one, too!" another man said. Two voices laughed and

went on, "Jes' so, Jud— Take a Ranger an' he ain't never 'shamed he's a Ranger, come snakes or high water!"

"So yuh ain't a Ranger, be yuh?" Mosey inquired, an ugly glint in his eyes.

"Oh, yes! I'm a Texas Ranger!"

The man in hunting boots, beside the little bird-toasting fire nodded, and smiled. All five of the men who had come down the trail threw their heads back, laughing a guffaw that could be heard a mile.

"A man who can talk thataway shore is from Texas!" somebody choked gleefully. "When a Texan does lie it's shore a big 'un! Hi-i-i! On foot, flat-heel boots, an' a twenty-two pop—a Texas Ranger— Hey—what's goin'—?" There stood this pilgrim. He had pulled two short-guns from the belts of bystanders. He had stepped back three steps. Now he was turning the muzzles of those two 45s this and that way, belt-high pointing at the five men who had gathered close to look at that 22-pop.

"I'm a Texas Ranger, shore enough!" the pilgrim proclaimed. "There's the paper—"

Mosey himself picked up the flutter sheet from an Austin blank appointment book. He opened it up, blinked the sunshine out of his eyes and read that "'Know all by these presents that Jesse Lou Vannie is hereby and by these presents appointed a Texas Ranger—at Austin.'"

"By gosh it's a darned lie—a forgery!" Jud the Canary sang, and the five clustered men sprang back, stooping, going for their guns.

MOSEY JACK and Cupfull had empty scabbards. Jud the Canary and the Barbed Wire Twins filled their hands, but only one of them managed to shoot. Jud's gun plugged into dry sand and puffed up a little cloud of dust. The three men went down together. Mosey Jack and Cupfull gulped their Adam's apples, putting their hands up, disarmed—helpless.

"We'll be amblin' back south—I will! Yuh'll keep me company—dead or alive, Mosey—which?" Vannie asked.

"Alive— Me!" Cupfull nodded, and Mosey followed suit.

"I'm takin' yore word, boys," Vannie said. "I'll take their guns—yuh'll load 'em—two on their horses, and one on that light-loaded packer. I want a horse to ride, myse'f—stylish like."

"Then that twenty-two pop's just a bait to distract us!" Mosey said it as if it was the huskiest

curse he ever said.

"Why—it had to be," Vannie answered as he shrugged. "You boys was gettin' to be bad, real bad. It was a mistake—comin' to Texas."

"Texas—what are yuh talkin' about? This is No Man's Land! Don't yuh know that, mister?" Mosey yipped. "Yuh ain't got no right—"

"Listen, Mosey! I got eight six-guns an' more specially that twenty-two one-shot, backed up by a Texas Ranger commission," Vannie said. "Was the paper makin' a real gun of that twenty-two, or wasn't it?"

The two outlaws stood staring at the ground thoughtfully. Their three companions lay where they'd fallen. They were themselves disarmed. A Texan had come at them, barehanded, practically, and a piece of paper in his pocket—but a Ranger's commission printed on it. A Texas Ranger—they'd forced his hand, demanding the truth. Five to one—and he'd taken them, slam-bang!

"Mister, I always said if it was a Ranger, all he needed was a short squirt, an' I'd surrender!" Mosey exclaimed, sincerely.

The ride back down across the No Man's Land-Texas boundary was slow but steady. The animals with inert packs walked ahead, the two outlaw prisoners came next and following along behind was Ranger Vannie. Vannie had taken their words. He had let them ride open and free-handed. All he insisted on was they keep close and not move sudden.

The trail kittering down to the Lost Fork camp was long and wild. Even a Ranger couldn't go that far, keeping awake with two prisoners. Ranger Vannie headed down to Dallam Court. He'd been awake four nights and three days. He'd bitten his tongue and gnawed his lips, keeping awake. He rode into that dusty main street and came to the Court Square. Ahead of him, strung out in single

file, were the spare horses, the three pack horses, the three men dead on their saddles and the two prisoners, riding head up, insolent, arrogant, mean—taken by a Ranger!

Reeling in his saddle, Jesse Lou Vannie searched for an officer, sheriff, city marshal—somebody to take over. Coming down from the courthouse steps, was a perky little man with a wide hat and cold green eyes, wearing a small button—the dimmed eyes of the Ranger presently realized that that was a Lone Star cut out of a two-bit piece. That little man was a Texas Ranger—He was Captain Judson Murk!

Murk had got to thinking and worrying about that 22-gun appointee from Austin Headquarters that he'd tracked him clear up to Dallam Court. Nobody had seen Vannie going through, though his tracks were around the edge of the town, walking after taking a stage!

Now here he came, riding, worn out, blowing dust out of his mouth, after taking all five of Mosey Jack's gang. Captain Murk took over. Private Ranger Jesse Lou Vannie fell down off his horse and curled up, going to sleep in the shadow of a cottonwood tree.

When Captain Murk returned from putting the outlaws into the county jail and the Dallam undertaker's morgue, he brought two large Indian blankets with him. He rolled the dead-weary Vannie over onto one of the blankets, and spread the other one over him, tucking it in.

Then Murk leaned his back against the cottonwood tree and whittled a toothpick. Once or twice he held up his hand and said:

"Sh-h!"

That was enough. Nobody uttered a sound, much less a whoop. This Texas Ranger private had earned his rest anywhere he darn pleased! His Cap'n was there to see he got it, too! You, betcha!