



HARRY LOVE

(18??- 1868)

"Captain Harry Love and the California Rangers,"
circa 1853. The California Rangers were formed in 1853
Harry Love is in the center

Set a thief to catch a thief. Or, better, "Knavery is the best defense against a knave," as Zeno held. Harry Love, first, last, and only chief of the California Rangers, may not have been a thief by dictionary definition, but the ex-Texan was a cruel and vindictive hardcase, a tough hombre who proved a natural choice for the job of catching California's legendary bandit, Joaquin Murrieta.

We are assuming, of course, that there really was a man named Joaquin Murrieta as well as a legendary figure. Several Mexican bandits raided Mother Lode settlements in the 1850's, and some of them bore the popular Christian names of Hispanic countries.

It was the San Francisco Daily Alta California which suggested on December 15, 1852, that the probable murderer of General Joshua Bean at San Gabriel was a Mexicano named Murrieta. Most reports of marauders in 1853 cited a Joaquin but gave no last name. If the guilty party was Murrieta, he was a cowardly scoundrel, for he preyed largely on unarmed and helpless Chinese miners.

On the other hand, he was as slippery as an eel in eluding the pursuit of sheriffs' posses even when they were guided by Indian trackers.

When an exasperated Governor John Bigler posted a reward of one thousand dollars for the mysterious Joaquin or Murrieta, he mistakenly called him Carrillo. But he also attracted a first-rate man hunter in Harry Love. The latter, a mean-looking, mustachioed bucko with narrow-slitted eyes, followed developments in the Capitol carefully.

There, the legislators were urged by Assemblyman P. T. Herbert, of Mariposa, to pay an additional five thousand dollars reward for Joaquin. Herbert's bill was tabled after objections in committee, but he came back with another bill, which created a force modeled on the famous Texas Rangers.

This bill was passed into law and signed by Governor Bigler on May 17, 1853. The chief executive chose Harry Love to raise and head a twenty-man force because the Texan was an ex-peace officer, scout, Indian fighter, Mexican War veteran, and El Paso express rider —or so "Captain" Love claimed. He was charged with the ex-termination of Joaquin, whether his name was Murieta, Carrillo, Valenzuela, or whatever.

The only rub as far as Harry Love was concerned was the brevity of the enlistment—only three months. The pay was good, \$150 a month, each, and a chance at the governor's thousand-dollar reward.

Love put together as tough a band of roughnecks as ever graced a Mother Lode saloon. Among them were Judge W. H. Harvey, who killed Jim Savage, the White King of the Tulare Indians; Patrick Edward Connor, a general in the Civil War; Charles (Bloodthirsty Charlie) Blutworth, sometime sheriff of Merced County; James Norton, alias the Terrible Sailor; William J. Henderson, who once hanged a man, singlehanded; and Billy Henderson, who, eventually, cut off Joaquin's head at Love's behest.

Some five of the twenty would ultimately die with their boots on. Many others claimed to have been members of the Rangers and some—William J. Howard and Horace Bell—actually put forth their claims to this dubious honor in published books. Most curious of all, perhaps, Assemblyman P. T. Herbert was not only a Ranger as well as an assemblyman, but, according to historian Joseph Henry Jackson, was familiar with a Colt, being the killer of a Washington, D.C., waiter.

Love first led his men in a scout, or reconnaissance, of the San Juan Bautista area and arrested a cattle thief named Jesus (again, no last name), who claimed to be Joaquin's brother-in-law. According to the war correspondent of the San Joaquin Republican at William J. Howard's ranch on Burns's Creek in Mariposa County, where Love was resting up, the Rangers were confident of catching their prey.

The reason was revealed by Captain Love in a letter to Governor Bigler of July 12. Writing of his captive, Jesus, Love said, "He says he will take and show us to Joaquin if we will release him. I will try him a while, to see what it will end in." Love eventually sent Jesus to jail in Mariposa. Two other Mexicans, suspected horse thieves, were not so lucky.

According to Love, they were shot when they tried to escape. The reporter said nothing of the ley de fuga but observed, "They were found dead on the wayside, perforated with half a dozen balls, each." Apparently, Love was not interested in taking prisoners.

On July 25, 1853, on the dry side of the Coast Range where Cantua Creek reached for the San Joaquin plain, Love overran the camp of a band of Mexicans.

In the ensuing gun battle, four of the Mexicans were killed. Love described the affair in a report to the governor from Quartzburg on August 4: "Joaquin was immediately recognized and on his being aware of the fact, immediately sprang to his horse and endeavored to escape. He was closely pursued by some of the Company and, his being wounded, some of the men shot him dead before going far."

In order to be sure to collect the governor's reward, Love had Joaquin and his lieutenant, Manuel (Three Fingered Jack) Garcia, decapitated, taking the heads as evidence to Fort Miller to be preserved in liquor. Since Jack was shot in the skull, his head did not pickle well and had to be buried at the fort. Perhaps at this time his crippled hand was cut off as an alternative.

Many newspapers, like the important *Alta California*, dubbed the capture and decapitation a humbug, asserting that the head on exhibit did not resemble Joaquin Murrieta in the least. But Love stuck to his guns.

He wrote the governor, "There is not the least doubt that the head now in my possession is that of the noted Joaquin Muriatta [sic], the Chief and leader of the murderers and robbers of the Calaveras, Mariposa and other parts of the State." Witnesses other than Rangers were few. Two prisoners were taken, but one conveniently drowned in Tulare Slough and the other was rumored to have been lynched in Mariposa.

The grisly relics were placed on exhibition in Stockton and San Francisco, at one-dollar admission, and came to be accepted as bona fide evidence that Joaquin Murrieta and Three Fingered Jack were no more. Certainly, bandit raids attributable to them stopped, so the chances are good that Love happened upon the right band of Mexicans at Cantua Creek.

(The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed the trophies when it wiped out Natchez's Arms Store and Pistol Gallery on Clay Street.)

Captain Love collected Bigler's thousand dollars but was hungry for more. He urged the extension of the Rangers' enlistment period, hinting strongly when he advised the governor, "I have good and reliable information of the existence and whereabouts of other bands of robbers but it will be impossible for me to visit all their strongholds on account of the short period of time before our three months expire. . . ."

He planted similar seeds in the ear of the San Joaquin Republican correspondent, scaring him enough with his tales of bands of guerrillas swarming over California. The reporter wrote: "Harry Love says that Joaquin, at a pinch, could have raised two thousand [!] desperadoes to sack the country and announce himself [dictator?] at Sonora." Small wonder that the affrighted reporter added, "We think it would be desirable for the Rangers to be kept in the field. Harry Love knows the men who are leaders of the brigands, and is probably one of the only men acquainted with their haunts; his companions know not what fear is, having proved their worth, and merit the praise of all. ..."

Love did not get his extension. He did much better. His cronies in the Legislature tapped the public till again and by an 1854 bill, for the relief of Captain Love for capturing "the notorious robber, Joaquin," pressed five thousand dollars on him.

The politicians acted despite the skepticism of editors and others. The Alta, while not saying that Love was guilty of unjust acts, pointed out that he had shot down men said to be robbers and had taken others prisoner and seized their stock and property contrary to the laws and constitution. "To pay Mr. Love for such acts would be a dangerous precedent," warned the paper. "What did Love do with all the cattle taken from suspicious-looking strangers? How many men were killed by his Rangers? These are questions which should be answered.

... A proposition for the relief of Captain Love is before the Legislature. Of what Captain Love wishes to be relieved is not stated in the Legislative Report but probably it is of an empty pocket."

Now, Yellow Bird, or John Rollin Ridge, the poet laureate of the expatriate Cherokees, picked up the story of Joaquin Murrieta and turned him into a trans-Sierra Robin Hood. More books followed his and, soon, Murrieta was a full-fledged legend. Love took advantage of the myth; in fact, he made a career out of his capture of Joaquin.

He coasted for years on fame and notoriety, enjoying the nickname of "The Black Knight of the Zayante." When he sailed for the East on the clipper Yankee Blade in June of 1854, the Golden Era, of course, described the ship's outstanding passenger as "the renowned capturer of Joaquin."

He was soon back in the news. A report from Aspinwall, Panama, held that Love and six other passengers from the clipper had formed up a Judge Lynch firing squad to

punish C. E. Bingham for his treatment of Mrs. Woodward (nee Susan Denin). One of seven pistols charged with powder was also loaded with a ball. All seven men then fired, blindfolded! at Bingham. The Alta could not verify the tale but it ran the story, as is, on July 3, 1854.

When he returned to California, Love settled down. He married the Widow Bennett of Santa Clara. By 1868, the aging Mary Bennett Love was so fearful of his rages and all-around bullying and beatings that she hired her foreman, Christian Fred Iverson, as her bodyguard.

On June 28 of that year, the brutish temper of Captain Love finally exploded in his own face. He drove up Santa Clara's Grant Street in his buggy that day and loudly told two carpenters working on his wife's house that the damned Dutchman would enter the building again only over his dead body.

That afternoon, Iverson returned from a business trip to San Jose with Mrs. Love. Her daughter, Samantha, tried to signal them away but, failing, then shouted a warning. Just then, Love, kneeling behind the fence, fired at the pair.

Iverson reached for his pistol but had to handle the rearing horse, frightened first by Mrs. Love's screams and shortly by the whoosh of a charge of buck-shot in a near-miss. Part of the charge cut Iverson's hand, but he got his gun out and, still out of effective pistol range, scuttled toward the house, sideways, to offer Love as little of himself as a target as possible. Shortly he fired; so did Love. To witnesses, the two shots sounded as one. Iverson missed but Love's buckshot wounded him in the right arm.

Iverson shifted his revolver to his left hand and fired but again missed. Love had no pistol and with his shotgun empty swung the weapon as a club, but missed. At close range now, Iverson shot him in the right arm.

The old Ranger—Joaquin's nemesis—now fled ignominiously, crying, "Murder!" and begging the carpenters to intervene. The German caught up with him and clubbed him to the ground with the pistol. Finally, the carpenters grabbed him and held him back before he could finish off his ambusher.

When a doctor arrived, he found Iverson's wound to be minor but Love's arm badly shattered. He operated immediately in Mary Love's yard, but the captain died just as the amputation was completed.

The coroner's jury ascribed his death to a pistol shot fired in self-defense. According to old Santa Clara tradition, a final ignominy was reserved for Love.

The handwriting of the coroner's clerk was so bad that his "Harry Love" appeared to cemetery officials to be "Mary Love." Far-fetched as it seems, the story is that the

captain was buried as Mrs. Love. In any case, no stone now remains to mark the last resting place of the bloody California Ranger.



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