

# THE CALIFORNIA RANGERS



*The Bandit Joaquin Murrieta*

Many people have heard of the famous Texas Rangers, but few people know that California also had a group of Lawman Rangers, organized for one deadly mission: To track down and capture a murderous gang of outlaws and their leader, the infamous bandit Joaquin Murrieta. The first "official" California State Police agency, the following is their story...

In 1849 a Mexican named Joaquin Murrieta and his wife traveled to the California gold fields to make their fortune. They built a little wooden cabin beside a creek and began to pan for gold. Some of the Americans who had immigrated to Old California were cruel and evil men who hated all Mexican Californio's. One night a band of such men broke into Murrieta's cabin, battered him unconscious and assaulted and murdered his wife.

Driven by grief and an unquenchable thirst for revenge, Murrieta assembled a band of outlaws. By 1851, everybody knew of the notorious Murrieta gang that was committing crimes throughout California. By 1853, the Murrieta gang's countless robberies and murders had reached alarming proportions. Citizens from all over the State petitioned Governor Bigler to take action against the outlaws. On May 17, 1853 the California State Legislature passed *The Ranger Act of 1853*, which authorized the raising of a company of Mounted Rangers. They were tasked with capturing the gang of robbers commanded by the "Five Joaquin's" [Joaquin Murrieta, Joaquin Ocomorenia, Joaquin Valenzuela, Joaquin Botellier, and Joaquin Carrillo].

Led by Captain Harry Love, a former Dragoon and Veteran of the Mexican War, a company of 20 rangers was mustered in at Quartzberg, CA on May 28, 1853. For two months the Mounted Rangers pursued Murrieta, capturing many outlaws along the way.

California Rangers, continued:

The Ranger's persistence paid off on July 25, 1853. After several days spent observing the Tulare slough, the Rangers cornered Murrieta and his gang in a camp on the Arroyo Cantua. Murrieta fled on horseback, but was de-horsed by Ranger Billy Henderson and then killed in the ensuing gunfight. To prove that they had killed the bandit, Capt. Love had Murrieta beheaded. Murrieta's head was placed in a glass jar filled with Bourbon. It was publicly displayed at the Stockton House. It was displayed in a San Francisco museum until destroyed by a fire during the 1906 earthquake.

On August 29, 1853, Governor John Bigler paid Captain Love the \$1,000.00 reward money and then disbanded the California Mounted Rangers. On May 28, 1854, the State Legislature decided that the Mounted Rangers had not been adequately rewarded for their efforts and awarded them an additional \$5,000.00 bounty.

Years later, the Rangers were re-activated in the form of the California State Police. The California State Police provided executive protection for the Governor and served the people of California for 108 years until July 12th, 1995, when it was consolidated with the California Highway Patrol in the interest of conserving state fiscal resources and to streamline government agencies and operations, a sad ending for a proud and historic law enforcement agency.



*Captain Harry Love, California Rangers*