



Yours to Command: The Life and Legend of Texas Ranger Captain Bill McDonald (Frances B. Vick Series)

Harold J. Weiss Jr.

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Captain Bill McDonald (1852-1918) is the most prominent of the “Four Great Captains” of Texas Ranger history. His career straddled the changing scene from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. In 1891 McDonald became captain of Company B of the Frontier Battalion of the Texas Rangers. “Captain Bill” and the Rangers under his command took part in a number of incidents from the Panhandle region to South Texas: the Fitzsimmons-Maher prizefight in El Paso, the Wichita Falls bank robbery, the murders by the San Saba Mob, the Reese-Townsend feud at Columbus, the lynching of the Humphries clan, the Conditt family murders near Edna, the Brownsville Raid of 1906, and the shootout with Mexican Americans near Rio Grande City. In all these endeavors, only one Ranger lost his life under McDonald’s command. McDonald’s reputation as a gunman rested upon his easily demonstrated marksmanship, a flair for using his weapons to intimidate opponents, and the publicity given his numerous exploits. His ability to handle mobs resulted in a classic tale told around campfires: one riot, one Ranger. His admirers rank him as one of the great captains of Texas Ranger history. His detractors see him as an irresponsible lawman who accepted questionable information, precipitated violence, hungered for publicity, and related tall tales that cast himself in the hero’s role. Harold J. Weiss, Jr., seeks to find the true Bill McDonald and sort fact from myth. McDonald’s motto says it all: “No man in the wrong can stand up against a fellow that’s in the right and keeps on a-comin’.”

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