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Texas Ranger: The Epic Life Of Frank Hamer, The Man Who Killed Bonnie And Clyde



Synopsis

The New York Times bestseller! “Frank Hamer, last of the old breed of Texas Rangers, has not fared well in history or popular culture. John Boessenecker now restores this incredible Ranger to his proper place alongside such fabled lawmen as Wyatt Earp and Eliot Ness. Here is a grand adventure story, told with grace and authority by a master historian of American law enforcement. Frank Hamer can rest easy as readers will finally learn the truth behind his amazing career, spanning the end of the Wild West through the bloody days of the gangsters.” --Paul Andrew Hutton, author of *The Apache Wars*

To most Americans, Frank Hamer is known only as the “villain” of the 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*. Now, in *Texas Ranger*, historian John Boessenecker sets out to restore Hamer’s good name and prove that he was, in fact, a classic American hero. From the horseback days of the Old West through the gangster days of the 1930s, Hamer stood on the front lines of some of the most important and exciting periods in American history. He participated in the Bandit War of 1915, survived the climactic gunfight in the last blood feud of the Old West, battled the Mexican Revolution’s spillover across the border, protected African Americans from lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan, and ran down gangsters, bootleggers, and Communists. When at last his career came to an end, it was only when he ran up against another legendary Texan: Lyndon B. Johnson. Written by one of the most acclaimed historians of the Old West, *Texas Ranger* is the first biography to tell the full story of this near-mythic lawman.

Book Information

Hardcover: 528 pages

Publisher: Thomas Dunne Books; 1st Edition edition (April 26, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 125006998X

ISBN-13: 978-1250069986

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 4.3 x 9.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 188 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #106,710 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #101 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Law Enforcement #320 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Crime & Criminals #1280 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States

Customer Reviews

Praise for Texas Ranger" In terms of sheer action and violence, from close-quarters gunfights to Mexican-border ambushes to face-offs with lynch mobs, I'm hard-pressed to think of [a biography of an American lawman and detective] that rivals John Boessenecker's excellent 'Texas Ranger'... a notable achievement" - Wall Street Journal" Fair-minded and thorough... Boessenecker tells the gruesome story with power and force." - New York Times Book Review" The author's painstaking research... brings forth an astounding story.... A superb account." - The Washington Times" A fascinating look into the epic life of one of the greatest American lawmen of the 20th century." - San Antonio Express-News" Boessenecker goes through Hamer's career chronologically, methodically and in great detail, exploring both good and bad. - Austin American-Statesman" "Colorful and comprehensive." - True West Magazine" Finally, a complete, thoroughly researched and true account of Frank Hamer, whose experiences proved that the Wild West didn't end in 1900. All of our favorite lawmen pale in comparison to Hamer's service. ... Frank Hamer was the real deal and arguably the greatest lawman of the West." - Roundup Magazine" In Texas, 'Frank Hamer' is just another way of saying 'Texas Ranger.' John Boessenecker has written the definitive biography of a lawman who did way more than rid the nation of Bonnie and Clyde." - Mike Cox, author of Wearing the Cinco Peso: The Texas Rangers 1821-1900 and Time of the Rangers: Texas Rangers from 1900 to the Present" "Texas Ranger should be required reading for students of Ranger history. John Boessenecker follows the career of legendary Texas Ranger Frank Hamer from the horseback days of the Old West through battles with bootleggers and gangsters in the 1930s. The level of original research here is apparent and Boessenecker leaves no stone unturned in his sleuthing of Hamer's past and his 52 gun battles. This is an action-packed story that does not read like a traditional biography." - Stephen L. Moore, author of Texas Rising: The Epic True Story of the Lone Star Republic and the Rise of the Texas Rangers, 1836-1846" Early on in this fine biography, author John Boessenecker makes the bold claim that Frank Hamer was the greatest American lawman of the 20th Century. Then, much like the man about whom he's writing, Boessenecker proceeds to back up what he says. Writing in clear, fast-moving prose and bolstered by meticulous research, Boessenecker tells the story of Frank Hamer's life and reveals that there was much more to it than simply being the man who tracked down Bonnie and Clyde. As a Texas Ranger, city marshal, range detective, special investigator, and other law enforcement positions, Hamer battled bandits, lynch mobs, revolutionaries, gunrunners, bootleggers, gangsters, and crooked politicians. Boessenecker spins this epic tale with great skill and without neglecting Hamer's mistakes and

shortcomings, so that Texas Ranger is a fully realized portrait of a complex but admirable man. This is a compelling, long overdue biography of an important figure in the history of Texas and the Southwest." *—James Reasoner, author of Outlaw Ranger and winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award from Western Fictioneers* "Well researched, extremely well written, thorough *—a fine tribute to one of the greatest lawmen of the twentieth century.*" *—Robert M. Utley, author of Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* "Exhaustively researched and action-packed, John Boessenecker's rendering of an extraordinary lawman's life will thrill casual readers and enlighten fellow historians about the winding paths to justice in the United States. In Texas Ranger, Frank Hamer emerges as a principled, fallible man who strove to do the right thing under the most trying circumstances." *—Scott Zesch, author of The Captured: A True Story of Abduction by Indians on the Texas Frontier, winner of the TCU Texas Book Award* "Frank Hamer, last of the old breed of Texas Rangers, has not fared well in history or popular culture. John Boessenecker now restores this incredible ranger to his proper place alongside such fabled lawmen as Wyatt Earp and Eliot Ness. Here is a grand adventure story, told with grace and authority by a master historian of American law enforcement. Frank Hamer can rest easy as readers will finally learn the truth behind his amazing career--spanning the end of the Wild West through the bloody days of the gangsters." *—Paul Andrew Hutton, author of The Apache Wars.* "A compelling and dramatic biography of a Texas lawman in a era when laws were ignored and outlaws pretty much ruled. With its rich you-are-there-detail, Texas Ranger takes you on a trip into the past. Brace yourself for a white-knuckle ride. This is story telling at its best." *—Margaret Coel, author of The Man Who Fell From the Sky* "The definitive biography of one of America's greatest lawmen. Impressively researched; a whole posse of historians couldn't corral the ins and outs of Frank Hamer's fascinating life as well as John Boessenecker has done with this must-read book." *—Mark Lee Gardner, author of To Hell on a Fast Horse: The Untold Story of Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett* "Through the extraordinary experiences of this straight-shooting, honor-bound lawman, Boessenecker sets forth a critically needed look at the history of Texas lynchings and race riots while presenting evidence for the murderous nature of Bonnie and Clyde that foreordained their violent deaths." *—Library Journal* "A biography of Texas Ranger Frank Hamer, from his youth in the Hill Country to his appointment to the Rangers in 1906. He's most famous for killing Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker in 1934, but there's much more to the cowboy lawman." *—Fort Worth Star Telegram* "Frank Hamer's is perhaps the last great story of the American West

to be told. ... Well, Hollywood? Now you have the book, so go make the movie." —Dallas Morning News

John Boessenecker, a San Francisco trial lawyer and former police officer, is considered one of the leading authorities on crime and law enforcement in the Old West. He is the award-winning author of *Bandido: The Life and Times of Tiburcio Vasquez* and *When Law Was in the Holster: The Frontier Life of Bob Paul*. In 2011 and 2013, *True West* magazine named Boessenecker Best Nonfiction Writer. He has appeared frequently as a historical commentator on PBS, The History Channel, A&E, and other networks.

It would be difficult at best to say more than what's already been said. About the only thing I can add is WOW!!! This book lives up to John Boessenecker's reputation as a biographer who leaves no stone unturned. In fact he has probably turned over a few that most would pass by. The book is bursting at the seams with facts about Hamer's career that are just unbelievable but I'm sure beyond a doubt quite factual. If you have any interest in how the west was won in the twentieth century, read this book. Once you start, you won't be able to put it down. I've read everything he has written and he has never let me down.

A small Texas town in the 1890s gripped by mob fever driven by racial hatred, almost the whole populace crowded around the courthouse, most hellbent on lynching the accused African-American in the jail, the rest there to watch the fun. An automobile forces its way through the crowd into the public square. Several men get out, big, tough, armed with shotguns and submachine guns. One goes to the courthouse steps where he sits alone, brandishing a Tommy gun, a hard look on his face. The news whips through the mob: "That's Frank Hamer!" And with that the mob slinks away like the cowardly beast that it is, deprived of its courage and bravado by the presence of just one man, Frank Hamer, the toughest Texas Ranger that ever lived. This is just one of the many incredibly dramatic incidents that made up the life of Frank Hamer. John Boessenecker has written an accurate, deeply researched biography that doesn't flinch from the unsavory, downright awful aspects of Texas history and the genuine character flaws of his subject. Like every other human being, Hamer was a product of his time and place. He grew up tough working as a cowhand and farming at a time when Texas was little removed from its frontier origins and his beliefs and views were affected by that. The author

makes no bones about the fact that Hamer was a white supremacist, as indeed most Americans were quite unapologetically until recent times. Yet he also points out how Hamer differed from many of his contemporaries in his concern for the underdog. This is illustrated by the many times when Hamer fought off lynch mobs intent on murdering accused African-Americans, often at great risk to his life. Again, the author doesn't turn away from the raw and hateful racism that was so endemic in Texas and the Deep South at that time. Incorruptibility was another sterling quality of Hamer. In a state so famous for corruption that they joked that a spotlight was focused on the state capitol's dome at night so the governor couldn't steal it, Hamer simply could not be bought or influenced. This led to frequent conflicts between him and other, highly politicized and compromised Rangers and most significantly for his own career, with Ma and Pa Ferguson, cheerfully brazen grafters who first played the alternating spouses for governor trick later used by George and Lurleen Wallace in Alabama (my, there really is something about Dixie, isn't there?). Hamer's most famous exploit was, of course, the manhunt he organized that successfully put an end to Bonnie and Clyde's murderous crime spree. The Ranger would be pretty much a footnote outside of Texas today if he hadn't had attention brought to him by Arthur Penn's 1967 film, *Bonnie And Clyde*. Aware that this is the best part of his story, Boessenecker draws out this section of the narrative, explaining in detail how Hamer carefully followed the criminals, always keeping his plans secret, until he was able to trap them with the help of one of their confederates, Henry Methvin. He also debunks the romanticization of the couple in Penn's film, pointing out how many people they viciously killed and the basically pointless, nihilist nature of their rampage. After a life filled with so many violent incidents including multiple gunfights, Hamer died peacefully in his old age in Austin. He left behind a vastly different state from the one he'd known as a young man, a good deal more civilized in many ways. Much of that progress can be attributed to Frank Hamer. Despite not having much formal education, he brought a level of professionalism, integrity, and courage to the job that has served as a model to Texas Rangers to this very day. For that, he still deserves praise. I recommend this book to everyone interested in modern Texas history, the Southwest in general, and anyone who wants a rip-roaring read about one of the last of the genuine rooting-tooting buckaroos, the real McCoy. Frank Hamer was all that and more.

Is this the best biography I've ever read from cover to cover? Not quite. It was a very good rather than a great read. Why 5 stars then? Because I think the author did an incredible job with the

material he was able to find. The weakness of this as a book is that AFTER Mr. Hamer gets Bonnie and Clyde, the book is nearly over even though he lived another 2 decades. However I don't really think this is the author's fault as it appears he did not so much decide to detail the later part of Hamer's life less thoroughly, as 1, Hamer's life became somewhat less eventful, and 2 There was simply less information available about how Hamer spent his later years. From start to finish I think John Boessenecker did a fantastic job pulling together research on Hamer's life and actions, and presenting events to us in a very honest manner. (Word of caution BTW, if this book were a movie it would be rated NC-17 for violence) He tells us what he knows tells us what he does not know, and does not substitute speculation for fact. He also does a fantastic job with his citations. While generally an admirer of Hamer, he does not apologize for Hamer's faults (such as his temper), he simply tells us the story as it is. He also picked a great topic as Hamer was an authentic western legend, a man who was seemingly involved in more gun fights than say the entire Earp family combined. The time period Hamer's career spanned also made for a very interesting story as he essentially started his career as an old western lawman (rural Texas in the early 20th century was apparently more similar to the old west of the 1870's than it was to say WWII era America), but evolved into a recognizably modern urban police officer. The author also does an admirable job of separating myth and legend from reality where Bonnie and Clyde are concerned. My only objection here, is that he seems to imply that Bonnie was an equal accomplice of Clyde and while I think he's right in the legal sense (if your boyfriend gets in a firefight with police and guns one of the officers down, and you see he's in trouble and lay down covering fire and you both get away, you can both be charged with murder one even if you don't kill or even injure any officers yourself), he's wrong in the moral sense. Not for a jury trial, but in being a bit too uncritical of the notion that Bonnie, like Clyde, was too dangerous to be taken alive (not that this was the position of Hamer himself apparently, but you'll have to read the book to learn about that). That disagreement is the only criticism I have of Boessenecker's scholarship, and in fairness to him the only reason why I'm able to make it is because of the info HE provides. The book also takes a fascinating look at race relations police policies towards use of force in a bygone era in the Jim Crow south which is especially interesting in that the relationship between the two concepts then was the OPPOSITE of what it is perceived to be today, ie protection of civil rights (such as they were) usually REQUIRED extremely heavy-handed responses from police officers especially given the lack of manpower, budget and equipment they face relative to the modern day. While a modern day police officer's use of force continuum is typically: open hand, pepper spray, baton, tazer, gun, for most of his career Hamer's options were: open hand, pistol whipping with the front of a gun, pistol whipping with the

butt of his gun, and firing the gun. Today that's barbaric. Then it was literally all they had, and the book also includes a harrowing tale of Hamer and a small detachment of Texas Rangers trying to hold a court house against a lynch mob literally numbering in the thousands mostly by pistol-whipping the rioters every time they tried to enter the court house because while the direct attackers were men, the crowd was also full of women and children who Hamer and his men REALLY did not want to fire into (albeit women and children behaving terribly). All in all highly recommended for people interested in the history of the old west,, the Jim Crow south (not a pleasant topic but one I feel we should never forget), depression era motorized bandits, or just a good real life shoot em' up.

I did not want to put down \$50.00 plus, on a used Frank Hammer original book, so I purchased this one and thoroughly enjoyed it. I have read many history books and biographies on the old west figures, and the infamous bank robbers of the 1920's and 30's. I found the life and exploits of Frank Hamer simply amazing and did not want to put it down. His fearlessness in gunfights and able to stand down mobs and crooks with his demeanor, are one of a kind. His have been in 52 gunfights and 17 bullet wounds, attests to his life and the book is not wanting for action. Frank like Wyatt Earp walked the thin line of law and order, and may have crossed over it a few times. But in a different era of "one riot, one ranger"--he proved that he could handle the toughest that was thrown at him. I thought that the section on Bonnie and Clyde could have been more detailed, but I've got books that on Bonnie and Clyde that go into detail on them. After all, the book is about Hamer, not just Bonnie and Clyde. It was said that Wyatt Earp was fearless by men who were around him at the time and knew him. Frank Hamer, seems to have been the definition of "fearless" in his life as a Ranger. One of the best books I have ever read (and I have read a few).

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