

**Burton C. "Cap" Mossman**

One would think that by the time the 20<sup>th</sup> century came into being that the Old West would be relatively tame. But not so in the Arizona Territory (AT). As law and order pushed its way west, many of the outlaws were pushed into Arizona where lawmen were scarce, the population was sparse, the open range provided rustling opportunities and the rugged terrain provided many excellent hideouts. On February 15, 1900, a train pulling into Fairbanks, AT, was boarded by five bandits. Only heroic action by Jeff Milton, who was severely wounded and passed out from blood loss, caused the bandits to get away without gain. In March, cattle rustlers killed Gus Gibbons and Frank Leseuer near St. Johns, AT. In the search for the rustlers, famous lawman George Scarborough was shot in the leg, had it amputated and died the next day on April 6, 1900. Two days later a former lawman turned train robber, Billy Stiles, forced the Cochise County jailer to open the jail and release prisoners. Murderers, rustlers and outlaws seemed to be running the asylum. Cattle owners, miners, businessmen, railroad officials and newspapermen were pressuring the governor to form a law force similar to the Texas Rangers.

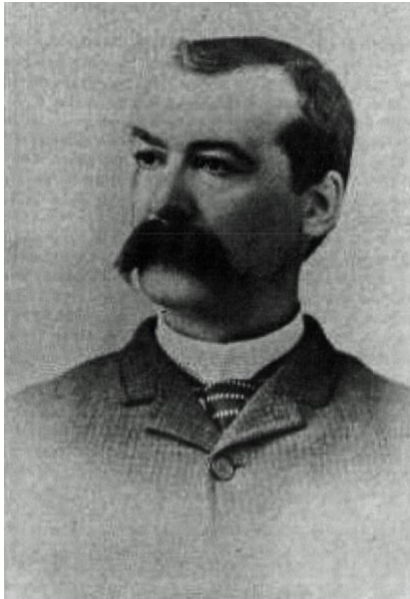
On March 21, 1901, the Arizona Territorial Legislature enacted the Arizona Ranger Legislation. The act funded one captain at \$120 per month, one sergeant at \$75 and thirteen privates at \$55 each. The only person that the governor considered for the position of captain was Burt Mossman. He reportedly refused the position two times before the governor called him to a hotel room where he was met by the governor and several of the most powerful men in the state, some who were his friends. He finally accepted under the provision that he would be the one to select the men, serve only one year, not be interfered with and name his own successor.

Mossman was born on April 30, 1867, near Aurora, Illinois, to a Scot-Irish farming couple. His father rose from private to major with the 36<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. After the war the family moved to Lake City, Missouri, and in 1882 they moved to New Mexico where Mossman learned to speak Spanish like a native.

At the age of 17 he turned to cowboying and his temper cost him a few jobs in the beginning. By twenty-one he was a foreman and five years later he was hired as the manager of the Bar OO Ranch just north of Phoenix, AT. In 1897 the Bar OO Ranch was sold and Mossman was hired as superintendent of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, commonly known as the Hash Knife, which grazed 50,000 head of cattle and 2,000 horses on two million acres near Holbrook, AT.

He realized that the ranch was full of lazy cowboys and that some of them were either rustlers or helping the rustlers. After one week on the job he fired the foreman and fifty-two of the eighty-four cowboys.

By 1900 the Hash Knife owners decided to liquidate their holdings and Mossman and a partner bought a slaughter house and retail store in Bisbee, AT. Burt then opened a branch store in nearby Douglas, AT, and built a new brick building. He soon sold the building for a hefty profit. Shortly thereafter he moved to Phoenix in 1901 and accepted the position as Arizona Ranger Captain.



Captain Burton C. Mossman, Arizona Rangers

His commission was dated August 31, 1901. The Ranger Act stipulated that the captain should select "as his base the most unprotected and exposed settlement of the frontier." He chose Bisbee located just eight miles north of the Mexico border and in the center of the territory's most lawless region.

Mossman completed the recruitment of the thirteen Rangers in October. Democrats complained that all the Rangers were Republican. Mossman had never asked any man about his political affiliation. The Democrats would always consider the Rangers as a Republican organization.

The first Ranger gun battle took place on October 8, before the thirteen man force was completed. On that date Rangers Carlos Tafolla and Duane Hamblin, along with seven posse members, caught up with the Bill Smith Gang in the beautiful, but foreboding, wilderness along the Black River. In the shootout Tafolla and posse member Bill Maxwell were killed and the gang escaped. Tafolla was the only Ranger killed while on active duty. Jeff Kidder was killed on April 5, 1908 in Naco, Sonora, Mexico, but his enlistment expired on April 1<sup>st</sup>. He was waiting for his captain to arrive for the swearing in of the next enlistment.

Mossman as the first captain of the Rangers was to spend almost all of his time in recruiting, organizing and administrating and very little in the field making arrests. But in the final months of his term he was obsessed with the capture of Augustin "Peludo" (Hairy) Chacon a black-hearted bandit and murderer. Chacon was believed to have killed more than two dozen men.

Chacon was known to be hiding down in Mexico. Mossman enlisted the help of Billy Stiles and Burt Alvord in his plans to capture Chacon. Both of these men were former law enforcement officers who had turned to outlawry. Alvord had been known to have run with the Chacon gang in the past. Mossman learned that Stiles was driving an ore train in Mexico. Mossman established contact with Stiles and persuaded him to help find Chacon. To acquire his assistance, Mossman told him he would participate in the reward money for Chacon, he would place him on the Ranger payroll and he would

speak on his behalf in court. Alvord was desperately in love with his wife who was beginning divorce procedures. Mossman spoke to his friend Judge William C. Barnes who wrote a letter to Alvord promising he would try to persuade the wife to drop the divorce proceedings, agreed to try to get train robbery charges dropped if he returned and surrendered and gave assurance that he could totally trust Mossman.

Upon reading the letter from the judge, Alvord agreed to set Chacon up for capture. The plan called for Mossman to pretend that he had escaped from the Tucson jail and that they were going to steal a herd of fine horses across the border in the U.S.

In August Stiles returned from one of his frequent visits into Mexico with a letter from Alvord to Mossman. Mossman and Stiles were to proceed to a spot sixteen miles into Mexico to a spring where they would meet Alvord and Chacon. From there the four would venture into Arizona and steal the horses. On September 2<sup>nd</sup> the four finally met and laid out their plans to steal the horses. Chacon seemed to be suspicious and remained extremely wary.

Mossman was finally able to get the drop on Chacon and had Stiles disarm and handcuff him. They were still in Mexico where the arrest was illegal and his commission had ended on September 1<sup>st</sup> but no one but Chacon was ever going to testify to the Mexico arrest. Chacon was put on a train and taken to Solomonville (since shortened to Solomon) where he would be hung on a scaffold that was built to hang him five years earlier. Chacon had escaped the night before he was to hang.

Mossman was unemployed for several months before he began operating the vast Diamond A in South Dakota. In 1905 he married his first wife Grace in Kansas City. She gave birth to a son and then a daughter. She died nine days after the daughter was born. In 1916 he moved permanently to Roswell, New Mexico, where he married again in 1925. In the '30s he began to suffer from arthritis and he died on September 5, 1956, after several years in a wheelchair. He is buried next to Grace in the Mount Washington Forever Cemetery in Independence, Missouri.



**The Mossman headstones in Mt. Washington Forever Cemetery  
Independence, Missouri**



**Plaque on the Hall of Fame Wall in the National Cowboy  
& Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City**  
**Source: *The Arizona Rangers* by Bill O'Neal**