

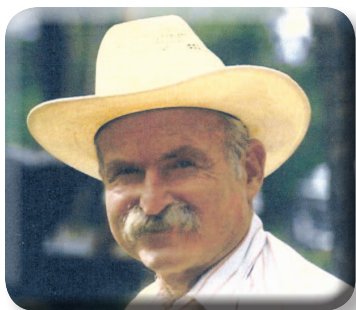
ALL COWBOY & ARENA CHAMPIONS

HALL OF FAME

Lt. Col. Paul Bruce Montague, USMC

(deceased)

Calf Roper • Steer Roper • Soldier



Bruce was a lifelong ambassador, aficionado, and devoted advocate of the cowboy way of life. Born on August 18, 1924, on the historic Montague Ranch in Bandera, Texas, he was the son of Frank Montague Sr. and Ouida McCarty Montague. He passed away on February 9, 2006, from complications of ALS (Lou

Gehrig's disease). Throughout his life, he embodied the enduring truth that once a Marine, always a Marine—and once a cowboy, always a cowboy.

THE EARLY YEARS

Bruce grew up on the Montague Ranch, established by his great-grandfather in 1854, where he and his brothers learned ranching from an early age. The Montague Ranch was one of the ranches used along what became known as the Great Western Cattle Trail. Working cattle, horses, mules, sheep, and goats gave Bruce constant exposure to practical roping. He developed his first roping skills by watching his father and ranch hands perform heading-and-heeling and forefooting. His earliest inspiration in trick roping came from studying the style of Will Rogers through photos and old films.

Entertaining others was a natural part of his upbringing, encouraged by his parents and strengthened through performing in a musical trio with his brothers at events across Texas. During the



Great Depression, he even traveled Texas with a troupe from Bandera in a show called Bandera Days, further sharpening his trick roping skills and stage presence. His fluid trick-roping style was also shaped by Mexican vaqueros and charro ropers, especially Jose Diaz, with whom he worked closely.

As he grew older, Bruce competed professionally in rodeos as both a calf roper and steer wrestler. His

roping techniques were influenced by time spent around legendary Bandera cowboys such as Toots and Bob Mansfield, Ray Wharton, Bennie Adamietz, and Scooter Fries. These experiences blended ranch work, cultural influences, and professional competition into the foundation of his lifelong mastery of roping.



2005, Memorial Day Parade Bandera, TX

THE COWBOY SOLDIER

Drafted at eighteen, Bruce chose the Marine Corps. He served as a Corsair fighter pilot during WWII and in post-war China. He later flew 147 combat missions in Korea with VMF-311, leading American icons, Ted Williams (Boston Red Sox Hall of Famer) and John Glenn (future astronaut) on their first combat flights. During Korea he earned the Bronze Star for directing more air strikes than any other Marine forward air controller. After Korea, he became a test pilot, serving in multiple test and operational squadrons. During the Vietnam War, he flew 188 combat missions as commanding officer of VMFA-122 and served as Marine air controller during the withdrawal from Khe Sanh. Over the course of his career, Lt. Col. Montague earned 23 air medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroic actions in Korea. According to the Marine Corps, he flew more jet-fighter combat hours in Korea than any other Marine.

Known to his fellow servicemen as “Tex,” Bruce carried his cowboy identity throughout his military career, entertaining troops and local villagers in China and Korea with his trick-roping skills—even practicing on beaches when his squadron wasn’t



flying, performing in mess halls or performing on the wing of a F9F panther jet. Senior officers often asked him to rope to build rapport with locals. His antics even appeared in a humorous letter John Glenn wrote home about an unsanctioned “rodeo” involving a borrowed cow.¹ In addition, Tex went to great lengths to keep a roping horse with him wherever he was stationed, once attempting to ship his horse, D-Day,

to Japan in a cargo container before the plan was foiled. He also performed at major rodeos across the country, including Madison Square Garden, the Cow Palace, the Nashville Coliseum, and the Boston Garden.

THE TEXTBOOK ON ROPING

Bruce spent years writing *The Textbook on Roping*², a detailed exploration of both trick-roping and rodeo roping techniques. True to his analytical nature, he explained the physics behind roping—centrifugal force, balance, speed, and how rope movement interacts with a target—while also documenting the methods and insights of well-known rodeo cowboys. Although rich in cultural and historical value, publishers at the time showed little interest. The book covered trick roping maneuvers, ranch life — mule roping to cattle drives, dude ranches, rodeo events, and the texture of rodeo life itself: calf-roping variations, steer wrestling, announcers, and fairgrounds. Together, his writings created a vivid record of cowboy skills and the traditions that shaped them.

LATER YEARS

Bruce returned to Bandera after retiring from the Marine Corps in 1969 and continued performing public trick-roping exhibitions for decades. Beginning in the mid-1980s, many of his events were recorded and are now preserved in the UT San Antonio Libraries Special Collection Portal to Texas History. He performed at major venues such as the Texas Folklife Festival, the San Antonio Livestock Show, Sea World, and the Bandera PRCA Rodeo. Known as the Cowboy Soldier, he was Inducted into the Texas Heroes Hall of Honor in 2021 at the Frontier Times Museum in Bandera. He continued to perform his trick roping stunts until the crippling effects of ALS no longer allowed this old cowboy to do so.

1 Letter from John Glenn to Annie Glenn, February 27, 1953 courtesy of the John H. Glenn Archives at Ohio State University, Box 118, Folder 23, Location 01-8-30-15-02-0-1.

2 The Textbook on Roping (Copyright ©2020 Armella Montague Grainer)