



Darnack's right arm  
swept over and  
knocked the gun  
aside

## RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

*All's Fair in War on Outlaws, Decides Lawman Tom  
Darnack When He Tries a New Way of Getting His Man!*

**A**BOUT two hours after dawn Tom Darnack, Texas Ranger, rode up out of a coulee and crossed the boundary line from Texas into New Mexico. By that act, he put himself outside his official jurisdiction and was reduced to the status of a citizen.

The dew was heavy on the rocks and sage, and a slight mist was commencing to

lift as he touched with his spurs, and his pony started along the narrow, winding trail at an easy lope. The pony was a tough little buckskin he had bought after his former mount had gone lame, and the mount did not bear the Texas state brand.

The guns Darnack wore and the rifle in his saddle-boot were his own, and not of State issue. His gun-belt and holsters were

not Ranger regulation. His clothing was the ordinary attire of a range rider.

But Darnack remained a Ranger, nevertheless. He was a stern, determined, relentless lawman on the trail of a wanton killer—Luke Stanner, murderer and thief, one of the notorious King Lobo band of Border raiders.

Stanner had made a get-away a couple of months before in a blaze of gunfire and a hail of smoking lead, during a battle in which most of the others of the King Lobo band had been either killed or caught by a posse. In making his getaway, Stanner had killed a Ranger, Ed Richards. Stanner was the sort to slay at sight any man who wore a law badge.

Darnack and Richards had been friends from boyhood. They had enlisted in the Rangers together, and Richards had sided Darnack in many a perilous adventure.

Richards had left a young widow and two babies. Darnack was engaged to marry his friend's sister, Sue. So Darnack had obtained permission to take the trail and follow it to the end, for personal reasons as well as duty.

"Bring in Luke Stanner!" had been the stern order of his captain. "Alive, if possible. We want him to stretch rope, teach those Border hellions that it's not healthy to kill one of our boys. But, alive or dead, get him!"

Darnack had been trailing his man for almost two months now. Several times he had strayed off the trail, for Stanner was clever and elusive. But Darnack always found the trail again, for though Stanner could change his name, he could not change his appearance.

He was tall, stringy, red-haired and freckle-faced, talked with a nasal drawl, and had a knife scar on his chin that not even a scraggy beard could hide. He was a man easily remembered, though catching up with him was another matter.

DARNACK knew now that Stanner was making for the little town of Silver Butte, about ten miles inside New Mexico. The place was only a cluster of adobe shacks, but was a trading center for a few large ranches and some mines back in the hills. It would be a good hide-out for Stanner.

Darnack, only two or three days behind his man now, was unknown in Silver Butte, and Stanner did not know the Ranger by sight. But Darnack once had seen the killer and would recognize him immediately.

It was Darnack's task to lure Stanner back across the line into Texas, then make an arrest. He had no authority in this State, and did not intend to ask the New Mexico officials for help. Stanner also was wanted in New Mexico, and the authorities might decide to hold him instead of surrendering him to Texas.

Darnack wanted to take Stanner back to swing for killing Ed Richards. The Ranger could ride into Silver Butte like any range wanderer seeking work, and locate his man.

He rode on slowly, constantly alert, as the sun came up from behind the hills like a fiery ball. The mist started lifting and the rocks began smoking. The wind scattered the fine sandy dust. Darnack pulled his neckcloth up over his mouth and nostrils to keep the dust out, and squinted his eyes against the glare of the sun.

He topped a hill finally, and in the near distance saw a cluster of shacks he knew formed the town of Silver Butte.

When he neared the town, he noticed that the place was a scene of excitement. Men were hurrying in and out of buildings. Ponies lined the hitch-rails. The wind carried the sound of shrill voices to Darnack's ears.

The public stable was at the end of the street, and Darnack stopped there. Nobody

answered his hail. He dismounted and led his buckskin inside. Removing his riding gear, he stabled the pony, watered him, and gave him a generous feed of oats and hay.

When he went outside again, he saw a group of excited men in front of the saloon, and another in front of the principal store. Darnack strode toward a shack which had a restaurant sign on it. A fat Mexican appeared when Darnack entered.

"I'm fresh off the trail and powerful hungry," Darnack said. "I want meat, eggs and a heap of spuds, and about half a gallon of coffee."

The restaurant man shouted at the kitchen and Darnack sat down at a table where he could have his back to the wall and watch the door.

"What's the excitement?" Darnack asked when the Mexican brought him coffee. "Seems there's somethin' goin' on."

"We have had a killing, senor. Less than two hours ago. They are now trying to form a posse to chase the killer. Word has been sent to Sheriff Bill Williams, but he cannot get here for hours, and Jim Benton will not wait."

"I'm a stranger," Darnack said. "Tell me about it."

"The victim was Senor Hiram Benton, owner of the Double Circle Ranch, a man much esteemed. His only son, Jim, is a man of thirty. Jim Benton is a good man but for one fault—he plays poker too much."

"I've seen men like that," Darnack commented.

"Two days ago, a tall, thin stranger came to Silver Butte. He told a story of seeking a place to invest money. He was always playing poker in the saloon, and always seemed to win."

"I've seen men like that, too," Darnack said.

"Yesterday afternoon, Jim Benton got into a poker game with this stranger and began losing large sums, giving written promises of payment. They played throughout the night. About two hours ago, Senor Hiram Benton came riding into town. Somebody had carried word to him of what Jim was doing. He ordered his son to cease playing, and denounced the stranger as a card cheat. The stranger shot and killed Senor Benton, then fled on his pony. Always he had his pony ready, like a man who may have to ride quickly."

"What else?" Darnack asked, as a Mexican woman waddled in from the kitchen and put a platter of food before him.

"Jim Benton was like a wild man. He blamed himself for his father's death. He sent word to the ranch for the Double Circle riders to come. They wait now for riders from other ranches. There will be a big manhunt. Senor Jim has offered five hundred dollars to the man who catches or kills the slayer."

"I'm right handy with my guns, and I could use five hundred," Darnack said, his eyes glittering.

AS HE began wolfing the food he was thinking that, if the slayer was Luke Stanner, as he believed, he had some swift work to do. If he wanted the murderer himself he would have to save him from the posse.

"What's this killer look like?" he asked the restaurant man.

The man described him, even to the scar on his chin. The killer was Stanner all right, and he had been fleecing Jim Benton. Darnack made a swift decision.

"I'm trailin' that hombre myself," he said. "He killed a friend of mine a couple

of months ago, and he's on the dodge. I'll ride with that posse."

"I'll tell Senor Jim Benton."

The restaurant man hurried out. Darnack went on with his meal. He would be ready by the time the posse was formed.

He glanced up quickly as the door opened and a man came in with the restaurant owner. The man strode forward and surveyed Darnack, with narrowed eyelids. He was tall, heavy in the shoulders, and in his face was tragedy and sorrow.

"I'm Jim Benton," he said. "Would yuh mind statin' yore name and business hereabouts?"

"My name's Darnack," said the Ranger. "I rode in a short time ago and came here to eat. The restaurant man told me what had happened. From the description, I'd say the man yuh're goin' after is the one I've been trailin' two months."

"Why was yuh trailin' him?" Jim Benton asked.

"Down Texas way, he shot a friend of mine, brother of the girl I aim to marry, durin' a little ruckus. I started out to gun him, but he's kept on the dodge right lively. I'll be glad to ride with yore posse."

"All right!" Jim Benton said. "We can't wait for the sheriff to get here, so we'll be startin' in about an hour. Waitin' for some more ranch boys to get to town."

Darnack stood up, adjusted gun-belt and holsters.

"I don't want the lobo killed if that can be helped," Jim Benton said. "I want to see him stretch rope—"

"That's what I want," Darnack broke in. "Who's leadin' the posse?"

"I am," Benton said. "It's my right."

"Shore," Darnack said. "But man-huntin' is somethin' special. I've been a law officer down on the Border, and I've

done considerable man-huntin'. There's tricks to it . . . Which direction did the cuss ride?"

"Started back toward the Texas line," Benton replied. "Got a good start. But he prob'ly turned north before he got to the Line and made for the rough canyon country about twenty miles away. There's a thousand hidin' places there. Used to be an outlaws' hang-out. But we'll get him."

"He didn't have any outfit with him," Darnack pointed out. "He'll have to have grub. He can't hide in the canyons forever. Might catch some fish and shoot game, but he won't even have salt. And no man carries a whale of a lot of matches. He wouldn't dare keep a fire goin', for the smoke would lead yuh to him."

"Well, what do you think?" Benton asked.

"I know this cuss. What he called himself here makes no difference, and the name I knew him by don't because he changes his name every few days. He don't like to be alone, the kind of feller that's always wantin' action. A cold-blooded fighter and killer. He won't hole up in any canyon for long."

"We'll start trailin' him and see where he goes," Jim Benton declared.

"How many men yuh got?" Darnack asked.

"You make twelve. There'll be more riders comin' in from the ranches before we start."

"A few good fightin' and hard-ridin' men would be better," Darnack informed him. "Yuh're chasin' only one hombre. A crowd only slows up things and makes a dust cloud the cuss can see miles away. Pick out about six experienced men. That's what yore sheriff would do if he was here."

"Mebbe yuh're right," Benton said.

"And don't go yoreself," Darnack added.

“Not go? To catch the hellion who killed my father?”

Darnack lowered his voice a little. “Yore father’s dead, and you have to carry on for him, I reckon. Stay here and ‘tend to things. Pick men yuh know to catch the cuss and bring him back to swing.”

“I want to see him swing!”

“So do I,” Darnack repeated.

**G**RADUALLY he took charge, found that the men had faith in his ideas. Other riders came thundering into town and Darnack went to the stable, mounted his buckskin and rode to the store, where the men were gathering.

Jim Benton had decided not to ride with the posse, but take his father’s body to the ranch. About twenty men were ready to ride, but Darnack knew some of them would turn back when their excitement died down.

The posse left town in a cloud of dust, Darnack riding in the middle of it. He was not thrusting himself forward, but he was scanning the country ahead and to either side, watching the serrated skyline, hoping to see in the far distance a puff of dust which would indicate a hurrying rider.

They were about six miles out of town when they saw a rider coming toward them.

“The cuss is comin’ back!” somebody yelled. “I’d know that spotted of his anywhere. Get ready to nab him!”

“That may be his pony, but it ain’t him!” another shouted. “It’s Lon Smith, from the Box Q!”

The rider, coming on slowly, lifted a hand and signaled them. The possemen rode swiftly to meet him as he stopped the pony in the shade.

As rapidly as possible he explained that the fugitive had stopped him and made him trade ponies at gun’s point.

Stanner’s mount had been almost exhausted.

“Shot Hi Benton, did he?” Lon Smith squeaked. “He won’t get far. He didn’t know it, but that pony of mine he took threw a shoe and was lamin’ already. I was pokin’ along to town to the blacksmith shop.”

“Let’s get after him!” a posseman shouted.

“I saw him ride past the canyon’s mouth,” Lon Smith told them. “Tearin’ for the State line, mebbe. Fetch my pony back if yuh find him.”

Darnack had urged his mount a little toward the lead as the posse rode on. If the pony Luke Stanner was now riding went lame, the outlaw would be overtaken rapidly if the posse did not lose the trail.

Darnack realized that they were not even looking for trail, taking it for granted that the man they wanted was somewhere ahead. None were experienced man-hunters.

They came to broken country, where the trail wound and twisted among the rocks, and there were soft sandy spots. One of the riders shouted and pointed to fresh hoof prints.

The posse rode on, scattering as they emerged from the rocks and came to a wide level stretch. Darnack knew they were almost to the State line, and also knew that the line would mean nothing to them, since they were not law officers. They would chase Hiram Benton’s slayer beyond it to catch him.

The mid-day sun was blistering hot. The ponies were tiring. Some of the men were dropping back and Darnack guessed many of them would head back to Silver Butte. One of the older men was leading the riders now, scanning the ground for signs. He held up his hand, and the others stopped.

“Trail forks here,” he said. “Wind has filled tracks with sand. We’d better split up and cover both trails. Gents, we’re over the line in Texas. But I reckon that won’t stop us any.”

This splitting up of the posse might help him, Darnack thought, as he rode off to the right with one bunch, and the others went to the left. Darnack was in command of his bunch of five men.

He had been watching ahead, and had seen a tiny streak of dust ascending out of a curving coulee, and knew a rider traveled there. As they went over the crest of a hill, the other group of riders were swinging far away from him. He would not have them to deal with if he overtook the fugitive. But he didn’t forget he would have Luke Stanner to handle.

He saw tracks the others did not see, went past them where they turned off the trail, and held up his hand in the stop signal.

“Our man’s probably down one of them gulches,” he told them. “Get yore guns ready. Don’t take any chances with a man like him. If there’s shootin’, try just to wound him so he’ll live to stretch rope. Two of yuh take that first gulch, and two the second to my left. The other man can ride up the hill, keepin’ to cover, and see what he can. I’ll ride this last gulch to the right.”

As they scattered, Darnack rode into the gulch from which he had seen that telltale dust. He rode cautiously, for the others were moving away, and if he encountered Luke Stanner now, it would be man to man.

**D**ARNACK had been with the Rangers who had worked against the King Lobo band on the Border, and knew some of the outlaws’ tricks. One was a signal of recognition between bandits who did not know each other—the left fist held in front

of the breast knuckles up. Another was a wolf howl with a peculiar high “yipe” at the end, with which members of the band had attracted one another or called for help.

He was playing a game with Death now, too. Luke Stanner could assume that any rider he met was an enemy and open fire. So Darnack rode cautiously, and finally, going around a sharp curve in the gulch, he saw another puff of dust some distance ahead. There were hoofprints in the sandy earth now, and from them Darnack could tell that the pony Stanner rode was limping and would not be able to travel with any speed.

The others of the posse were far away, and the wind was blowing toward Darnack from them. He gave the King Lobo band’s wolf yell, and the wind carried it along the gulch.

A little later, he gave the signal again. He was watching the hoofprints in the sandy earth, and came to where he could tell the pony ahead had been stopped, then gone on. No doubt the rider had gone into ambush to wait for the trailer.

Though Darnack was sure Stanner did not know him by sight, he knew he was riding into deadly peril. Stanner might kill him without questioning him. He had to chance that. Experience had taught him boldness generally paid.

He was thinking of Ed Richards as he rode on, after pulling up his neckcloth. He must make Ed’s slayer pay. He couldn’t look Sue or Ed’s widow in the face again if he didn’t bring Stanner in.

He jogged around another sharp curve in the gulch, and saw a wide open place before him.

“Stop right there, hombre!” he heard in Luke Stanner’s nasal whine.

Darnack pulled up his pony and lifted his right hand high, holding the reins with his left. Deliberately he made the King

Lobo sign with his left fist held high in front of his chest.

"Stanner!" he called cautiously. "Where are yuh? There's no time to waste."

"Who're you?" came an answer from some rocks to his right.

Stanner would be waiting there with gun ready, Darnack guessed.

"What's a name mean?" Darnack asked, laughing. "Lobo's not dead. They didn't get him. He'll be gettin' busy again soon."

"What you doin' here?" Stanner demanded. He had not shown himself.

"I've been on the go, too. Got into Silver Butte a couple of hours after yuh gunned that hombre. Managed to come ridin' with the posse. They've scattered to the north. Saw yore dust trail and got away from the others. We've got to get out of here, pronto."

"Drop yore neckcloth!" Stanner called.

Darnack pulled it down, and looked toward the rocks from which Stanner's voice had come. This was the danger moment. If Stanner had ever seen him and knew he was a Ranger, he was as good as dead right now.

No shot came from the rocks.

"Keep yore hands up!" Stanner called, and came riding around the rocks with a gun held ready.

"I know yore pony's lame," Darnack said. "We met the hombre yuh took him from. He said his pony'd thrown a shoe."

Stanner's expression was one of suspicion. His eyes gleamed.

"Let's ride!" Darnack urged. "We'll get away from that bunch of cowhands. No sheriff is with 'em. Had to laugh at the way they tried to trail yuh. Come night, we'll get to some ranch and snake a good pony for yuh out of a corral."

"How do I know yuh're dealin' fair?" Stanner asked.

"Yuh don't," Darnack replied. "But would I slip away from the others and come down the gulch givin' that wolf call and take a chance of gettin' a slug in me if it hadn't been to get in touch with yuh?"

Stanner urged his pony closer, his eyes still glittering with suspicion and venom, his gun pointed at Darnack's heart.

"It'd be easy to shoot yuh, take yore pony and hit on," he said.

"I know this country," Darnack told him. "Yuh can get away from here quicker if I'm with yuh . . . Listen!"

Darnack pretended he had heard something. He looked along the gulch, and up the side of the hill, then jerked his head back quickly. Stanner had risen to the bait, was looking at the hillside, too.

**T**HE RANGER'S left arm swept over. He knocked the gun aside, swung his right fist and smashed Stanner in the face. They grappled, and Darnack twisted Stanner out of his saddle while the outlaw cursed and fought like a fiend. As they fell to the sandy earth, Stanner was kicking and gouging, trying to strike Darnack's head with his gun, which he had retrieved. Exerting all his strength, Darnack twisted the outlaw's arm and made him drop the gun again.

There had been no opportunity for Darnack to get one of his own guns out of holster. But he managed to get one out now, and smashed at Stanner's head with it. Stanner stretched on the ground, groaning, and passing into unconsciousness.

The Ranger picked up Stanner's gun, ejected the shells and tossed the weapon away. From a pocket, he took a short length of stout cord, and bound the outlaw's wrists. He was panting as he worked, for Stanner had been tough to handle.

Then, sitting on a rock beside the

murderer, Tom Darnack unpinned the Ranger's badge from the inside of his shirt and put it on his vest, where the sun struck it and made it glitter.

He got his canteen and gulped a drink of warm water, then poured water on Stanner's face, washing away the blood and reviving him. Stanner opened his eyes and struggled to sit up, groping with his bound hands. Darnack propped him against a rock.

"Wh-what's this?" Stanner stammered.

"Yuh're my prisoner, Stanner. Wanted for the murder of Ranger Ed Richards, and other crimes. I've been trailin' yuh for more'n two months. I'm Tom Darnack, Ranger. See my badge? Richards was my friend. Be glad I don't fill yuh full of slugs right now! I'm takin' yuh back to swing, Stanner! We'll be headin' on in a minute. If that posse catches us, yuh'll swing a lot earlier."

Stanner cursed and raged, tugged ineffectually at his bound wrists.

A hail came from the hillside. Darnack reached for a gun as he sprang up. Riding down the hill was the man he had sent to travel above the gulch.

"Yuh got him?" he howled. "Need any help?"

"I've got him!" Darnack called back. "Don't need help!"

The posseman, a young Double Circle man, skidded his pony down the hillside and rode up.

Darnack indicated his badge.

"I'm a Texas Ranger, and yuh're in Texas," he said. "This man is my prisoner, wanted for murder. I'm takin' him in."

"Yeah? We can handle him!"

"I'm an officer, protectin' my prisoner," Darnack warned. "Ride back

and tell the others that. If they try to take my prisoner away on Texas land there'll be shootin'. I know how yuh feel. But this hellion murdered a Ranger, my friend, and he's goin' to swing in Texas."

"What'll I tell Jim Benton?"

"What I've just told you. And tell him where my prisoner's dated to swing, all lawful and legal, I'll let him know, so he can come and see it. I'll stand side by side with him."

The cowboy hesitated, then decided he could do nothing about it.

"Take yore time ridin' back to the others," Darnack warned. "I don't want to have to hurt any of 'em. If yore sheriff, Bill Williams, was here, he'd understand."

"I'll be goin'," the cowboy said. "Glad you got the cuss. I'd like to smash him!"

"Smashin' or shootin' him would be too good," Darnack said. "He's goin' to swing. Mebbe, before yuh start, yuh'd better take yore gun out of leather easy-like, and drop it in the sand. I don't want yuh tryin' to use it while I'm off guard."

"That's a good gun—"

"Drop it!"

The cowboy got the gun out carefully and dropped it.

"If yuh ride back in half an hour, yuh'll find the gun on this rock, with the shells missin'," Darnack said. "Good-by."

The cowboy grinned and wheeled his pony.

"Ranger," he warned, "if yuh let that murderin' hound get away from yuh, all the Double Circle bunch will come ridin' all the way across Texas to see yuh about it."

Darnack looked grim.

"Don't worry, amigo," he said. "He won't get away from me."