

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.C.R. 20
By: Fallon
Administration
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Forever associated with Jim Bowie and the heroic Battle of the Alamo, the Bowie knife has long been a vivid and colorful symbol of the history and heritage of Texas.

It is thought that the first Bowie knife was made by Rezin Bowie, Jim's brother, during the 1820s, when the two siblings were in business together in Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana. After Jim was involved in a gunfight, Rezin gave him the large hunting knife for personal protection, and in September 1827, in the chaotic aftermath of a duel near Natchez, Louisiana, Jim used it to stab an assailant who was trying to kill him. The story of the "Sandbar Fight" ensured Jim's reputation as a deadly knife fighter, and all across the South, men began to ask blacksmiths to make them a knife like Jim Bowie's.

The weapon's fame grew when Jim Bowie took it with him to Texas, and he and other defenders of the Alamo are thought to have used the knives during the battle. The Bowie knife later became popular with the Texas Rangers who served under the legendary Jack Hays and Ben McCulloch, as well as with Confederate soldiers, who were known to engrave "Sunny South" and other mottoes on the blades of their knives.

During an era when guns often misfired, the Bowie knife was a valuable back-up weapon, and schools were set up to teach the technique of using the blade in a fight. Knife makers throughout the country met the increasing demand by creating versions of the blade, and a journalist in Louisiana wrote that "all the steel in the country, it seemed, was immediately converted into Bowie knives." They became internationally famous as well, and cutlers in the English steel town of Sheffield began crafting models that featured elaborately etched titles and slogans, such as "Arkansas Toothpick," "Rio Grande Camp Knife," and "Americans Never Surrender."

The blade became less widely used as firearms became more reliable, but it has continued to be popular with hunters and collectors. Designs have varied over the years, but today, the Bowie knife typically features a steel blade that is at least an inch and a half wide and eight inches long and between 3/16 and 1/4 inch thick, with a clip point that gives the weapon its distinctive shape. The knife's handle often incorporates an S-shaped guard, with the upper part angled forward so as to catch an opponent's blade during a fight.

In 1958, one scholar wrote that "in the history of American arms, three weapons stand out above all the rest: the Kentucky rifle, the Colt's revolver, and the Bowie knife." Since the days of the Alamo, the knife has served as an evocative reminder of Texas' storied past, and it is inextricably linked with the fierce and independent spirit of the Lone Star State.

RESOLVED

That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas designate the Bowie knife as the official state knife of Texas.