

Ruston Gun Club, Inc.



1954 Wafer Road
Ruston, La. 71270

C.M.P. 42041
NRA Affiliate B2345

April 23, 2008

RANGE REFLECTIONS

SPRING

According to the astronomical definition, Spring begins on the 21st day of March and last until the 20th Day of June. Quite a long time although the designation is meant to coincide with the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere. Spring however means so much more than that as the season is celebrated as an occurrence not shared by any of the other three seasons. Spring stands for the explosion of life and rebirth that occurs. It is due to this celebration of life that Spring has assumed such importance in every culture and every religion. Every language has an expression celebrating the arrival of Spring. Every year we have a religious celebration for Spring and greet one another with a greeting of “Happy Easter” and exchange Easter cards. I have never greeted anyone with “Happy Summer”, “Happy Fall” or “Happy Winter”. It is not that the other seasons do not have their merits and positive qualities. It is because Spring represents the beginning of the cycle of life again. For some of us who were told we would never see another Spring it has a personal meaning more in keeping with its cosmic significance. Every day should be greeted with the same reverence that we have for the quintessential

day of Spring, Easter morning.

I am pleased to report that we had an exceptional turnout for our first workday of this year. And when we refer to it as a workday it was very definitely a full day of work. We were able to get all of the cross ties moved from the ground onto the ridge behind the backstop. Hail to all of the faithful who came out and dropped honorable perspiration. We also want to thank Gary Acklin for his help in putting some of our tired and dilapidated target systems back into operation. A special word of thanks must go out to Mitch Dufour for his performance above and beyond in taking the day off on Friday to move fifty cross ties and to operate the Bobcat all day Saturday. We would not have been able to get as far as we did in one day without his help.

We can also give a good report of the performance of our club members at the first Personal Defense Saturday event of Close Quarters Engagement. It is always gratifying to see a group of already competent shooters move up another notch in proficiency and to acquire the expression of a man confident in his abilities to defend himself and those around him. I do not believe I could have drafted a better group than the seven family members who participated. It is seldom that a class is comprised of already accomplished shooters who grasp the techniques of close quarters engagement so readily and with such confidence. As usual the Arkansas contingent was well represented in both numbers and proficiency. I actually had to refine the curriculum a bit because everyone mastered the preliminary techniques so quickly. Thank you to all of the family members who attended.

We are adopting an emblem for our group. An emblem is a short hand expressive symbol or object which conveys succinctly who or what you are. Our group has a distinctive personality which should be reflected in a single emblem which conveys at a

glance the essence of each and every member of our group. After some reflection it has been proposed that we adopt a symbol which not only originated in Louisiana but also reflects the individuality and uniqueness which characterizes not only our members but also our people. In keeping with the individuality and independence which so accurately reflects our family members we are proposing to adopt the Bonnie Blue as our symbol.

What is the Bonnie Blue you ask and why does this symbolize me as a gun owner, a free thinker, a republican, as an American. It is because the history and meaning of the Bonnie Blue means all of those things. The American spirit is not only exceptional it is indomitable and free spirited, chafing under any duress. The men who brought the Bonnie Blue onto the world scene were all of those things just as each of our family members do. Let me pose a few questions. Why does a certain part of Louisiana have the name of the Florida Parishes? Was all of the state of Louisiana included in the Louisiana Purchase? Was there an independent Republic which predated the Republic of Texas? What was the inspiration for the state flag for the state of Texas? What flag flew over five states after they seceded from the Union? What Republic declared its independence from a foreign power on American soil after the American Revolution?

The answers to all of these questions are in a brief history of a simple emblem displayed upon a banner, the spirit of independence and self reliance, a single white star. A symbol that many have seen but so few understand.

The story of the Bonnie Blue began with the Seven Years War in North America, better known today as the French and Indian War and more specifically with its end in 1763. In that war France fought a war against Britain on the North American continent. In the end France lost to Britain and its ally at the time,

Spain. One of the results of this conflict was the cession by the loser, France, of the portion of Louisiana west of the Mississippi to Spain. This area would later become known as the Louisiana Purchase. It is important to remember that the present state of Louisiana was the same as the territory acquired in 1803. The territory east of the Mississippi was ceded to Britain. This portion of North America was renamed West Florida. The other portion of the area known as Florida is shown on contemporary maps as East Florida. The area of West Florida incorporated the state of Louisiana from the Mississippi River on the West to a point on the Florida gulf coast which included the present city of Pensacola Florida. The boundaries of West Florida included approximately one third of the present states of Mississippi and Alabama and the toe of the Louisiana boot.

The involvement of France in the victory against Britain during the American Revolution is well known. Lesser known is the fact that Spain supported the American cause and that the residents of West Florida supported and fought in support of American independence.

In the Treaty of Paris which ended the American Revolution, Britain and the new United States agreed to a boundary between the United States and foreign province of West Florida. As a condition of the Treaty Britain also ceded both Florida provinces back to Spain but did not specify the exact location of that boundary between West Florida and the United States. The issue of where the boundary exactly was resulted in the customary and continuous negotiations which accomplished nothing.

Later, in the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso of 1800 Spain returned the former French colony of Louisiana to France but the boundaries of the colony returned to France was not specified. It should be pointed out that the boundary between French territory

and British territory was established as being the Mississippi River. The most significant feature of this secret agreement was that the provinces of West Florida and East Florida were not included in the territory returned to France. As a side note France only acquired what it had previously possessed and did not include a clear boundary of the western boundary between Mexico and the Louisiana Territory. This region would gain notoriety in later as the Neutral Zone, a large swath of Southwest Louisiana which was not included in the Louisiana Purchase. It is not possible to sell something you do not own and France only got back what it had previously held and the portion of the Gulf Coast east of the Mississippi River had always been held by Spain or Britain. It would not be a part of the United States until seven years after the Louisiana Purchase in 1810.

Any maps which you see which depict the entire present state of Louisiana as being a part of the original Louisiana Purchase are wrong. The province of West Florida was never included within the boundaries of the Louisiana territory or the Louisiana Purchase. Of some interest is the fact that West Florida included no part of the present state of Florida.

Just like the Americans living in Louisiana the flag that flew over West Florida changed frequently and they found themselves under the dominion of foreign powers that did not sit well.

Americans lived in the province of West Florida and objected to the constraints on their liberties imposed by Spanish rule. The Spaniards had numerous complaints about American troublemakers. One of the characteristics of people of America and particularly the South has always been a stiff neck that does not bow. They frequently complained about “social chaos, crime and political unrest.” Among the most prominent troublemakers for the Spanish authorities were three brothers, Nathan, Reuben

and Samuel Kemper described in dispatches are being “white Indians and river pirates.” Despite the popularity now of the Indian after the movie “Dances with Wolves” to be called a white Indian in the first decade of the 1800’s was the worst insult possible. From 1804 until 1810 the Kemper brothers engaged in episodic attempts to expel the Spaniards and to engage others in their filibustering activities. Not only were the Kemper brothers a disruptive element but also Aaron Burr causing them to be called “those evil spirits of the frontier.” Various groups continued to clamor for independence from Spain but the government if it could be called that in West Florida was weak and the impact on the people of West Florida was that of neglect.

Rambunctious NorteAmericanos continued to foment independence and rebellion but did not reach the point of open insurrection until 1808 when Napoleon Bonaparte as the Emperor of France placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. With Joseph on the throne it was expected that the Americans living in West Florida would have to contend with much more than benign neglect. It was out of the area of West Florida which is now called Feliciana that the movement to declare independence came. The planters in the far western portion of West Florida, on the plantations north and south of Baton Rouge, became concerned about the possible intervention of France in their affairs decided it was time to exchange loud discourse for the actions necessary to bring democracy to West Florida.

On September 23, 1810 Republican forces led by Colonel Philemon Thomas with a troop of West Florida dragoons under the command of Major Isaac Johnson, captured the Spanish fort and provincial capitol of Baton Rouge. At the head of the forces a dragoon carried a blue flag with a single white five pointed star. The flag had been made a few days earlier by Mrs. Melissa Johnson.

Upon taking the fort, the Bonnie Blue flag was raised over the capitol declaring West Florida an independent republic. Three days later the president of the West Florida Convention signed a Declaration of Independence and the Bonnie Blue flag became the emblem of the new republic. Now in 1810 a new independent Republic, not a part of the United States, declared its independence from the foreign power which had previously exercised dominion over one fourth of the present state of Louisiana, two thirds of the states of Mississippi and Alabama. The capitol of the Republic of West Florida was established at St. Francisville and the boundaries included everything south of the thirty-first parallel, the Perdido River on the east and the Mississippi River on the West. None of the present state of Florida lay within its borders.

On October 27, 1810 the United States annexed the Republic of West Florida by proclamation claiming the region was included in the original Louisiana Purchase. As you might imagine this did not sit too well with the West Floridians who would have preferred to negotiate their annexation on their own terms. The rebels in true Southern fashion and in keeping with the independent spirit which continue to characterize our people threatened to rebel again. The first and only President of the Republic of West Florida, Fulwar Skipwith, a former American consul general to France under President Thomas Jefferson and who helped negotiate the original Louisiana Purchase pronounced himself ready to “die in defense of the Lone Star Flag” when William C.C. Claiborne was sent by Washington to take possession. Despite his opposition the annexation of the Republic of West Florida was accomplished without further bloodshed.

The strength and vigor of the independence movement in the Republic of West Florida resonated with the Southern culture. As a result of the example set by the Republic of West Florida and its

emblem, the Bonnie Blue flag, the fledging Republic of Texas which existed from 1836 to 1839 adopted the same flag, a blue flag with a large white star and the name Texas between the points. The flag would further inspire the State flag of Texas when it was annexed into the United States in 1839.

The Bonnie Blue flag remained as an undying symbol of independence and as the secession crisis of the 1860's intensified the Bonnie Blue Flag became the unofficial banner of independence and self government of the Southern people. Many states used the Bonnie Blue Flag as their symbol upon secession and many states used variations of the flag in their state flags. The single star of independence runs constant throughout. When Mississippi officially seceded on January 9, 1861, the Bonnie Blue Flag was raised over the new capitol of the new Republic of Mississippi. The Bonnie Blue Flag represents the South, it's people, it's culture and independent streak.

The rebels of West Florida personified the American spirit and lived out one of the maxims of Thomas Jefferson:

“I hold it, that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political as storms in the physical.”

Those words remain as true now as then and the people of Louisiana continue to reflect them. That spirit is reflected in the Bonnie Blue Flag and is represented in every one of our family members. That is why the Bonnie Blue should be our emblem.

ALBERT W. BLOCK, JR.
P.O. Box 3096
West Monroe, La. 71294
318 366-4368
318 396-9511 Fax
E-mail address awblock@blockld.com