



Smoke Signal—Newsletter

of the Alamo Muzzle Loading Gun Club, est. 1964.

November & December 2020—Farewell to 2020, welcome 2021

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas, a wonderful winter solstice, and a cautiously optimistic Happy New Year!!

Ian Straus contributed a few photos of our December shoot, included here. As folks know, the work of the gas company actually entailed a pair of gas trucks supplying Castroville, so the range in La Coste was closed until mid-November. As a result, the November Turkey Shoot was cancelled. For that reason, the December shoot was actually the Turkey shoot instead.

TOYS for TOTS charity—Christmas 2020: A huge thank you very much and good job done to Betty Burke and John Burke, Sr. and John Burke, Jr. who parlayed donations from our Alamo Muzzle Loading Gun Club together with H.E.B., Sam's Club, Target Mesa Equipment Co. Inc., Walmart, and David Crockett Grange along with other donors for a total combined donation of \$2,038.50! Times are tight, and so this concerted effort will bring a lot of Christmas cheer to many families. Below are just a few pictures of some of the toys from John Burke, Sr.:



Yearly business meeting: Saturday 2 January 2021. By now you should have received a mailed notice from the AMLGC Secretary inviting you to renew your membership, and to attend the traditional "first Saturday" business meeting and elections to the Board of Directors. As in past years, there will be door prizes, including items not

exclusive to muzzle loading and black powder shooting! Unlike past years, we will not be having a banquet. Instead, we intend to hold it out of doors at the La Coste range, getting under way at 1pm. The meeting starts with BoD reports, with a few door prize raffle tickets read out to keep things lively. After the reports, there are award ceremonies. Typically, the meetings last about an hour.

Bring your own portable chair so we can maintain the spread out “distancing” per the pandemic! Please dress appropriate to the weather! It just might be cold! There should be coffee and maybe hot chocolate available for attendees.

A number of members have already mailed in the a) new lien release for 2021, which we have to have on file, and b) the renewal membership fee, which remains \$125 for an annual family membership. New member fees are \$150. THANK YOU FOR RENEWING!

Do you have any old coffee cans or creamer cans? The Board is thinking about putting up some smaller cans for use in collecting patches and other waste intrinsic to muzzle loading. Hopefully this can help keep the range a bit neater.

Members of the Board whose terms are coming up for an election at this years meeting include Gary Quandt, Dennis Rich, Greg Delk (whose resignation was filled by Bill Knipscher, and hence, Bill is up even though he was club president for a single year—a doozy as it turned out...), John Burke, Sr., and Ian Straus. If you’d like to make recommendation or nomination or stand up yourself, do give it some thought.

The back-stops/ earthen berms require improvement in the coming year, 2021.

MATCH SCORES—

17 OCT. 2020—Civil War Skirmish

A Civil War Skirmish event was held on 17 October. Participants were divided into teams of Alan, Wendy, and Gary (No.1) versus Dennis, Dave, and Alex (No. 2). Bill K. ran the line and kept score.

Team rifle musket

Pigeon	1	4	Paper--	16	22
Tile	3	7	Orange paper	15	20
100 yards	3 ½	7 ½			

Team 1: 38 ½ [second place], Team 2: 60 ½ [first place]

Carbine—individual event. There were Sharps paper cartridges and a Cooke muzzle loader, and Merrill, with three participants—Dave C., Alan P., and Dennis R.

100 yards	Dennis	Alan	Dave
	6	5 ½	½

14	7	6
5	3	3

Dennis: 25 [1st], Alan 15 ½ [2nd], Dave 9 ½ [3rd]

November Turkey Shoot: The November shoot was cancelled, so no scores.

December Turkey Shoot re-match scores

Class A.

25-yd. bull	25-yd. 2x bull	50-yd. bull	50-yd. 5x bull
Bill Knipscher 48 2x	Bill Knipscher 43	Bill Knipscher 43	John Burke, Jr. 39
Clif Denny 48 2x	Clif Denny 39	John Burke, Jr. 38x	Rich Beardsley 38
John Burke, Jr. 48	John Burke, Jr. 37	Dennis Rich 38x	Clif Denny 29

Class B:

A. Michlberger 47 2x	Gareth Henderson 39	Gareth Henderson 38	A. Michlberger 28
Gareth Henderson 44	A. Michlberger 38	John Burke, Sr. 37	D. Carlson 27
John Burke, Sr. 43	John Burke, Sr. 25	A. Michlberger 36	John Burke, Sr. 17

Class A Rifle Agg: 1. Bill Knipscher 162 2x 2. John Burke, Jr. 162x 3. Rich Beardsley 151

Class B Rifle Agg: 1. Alex Michlberger 149 2x 2. Gareth Henderson 128 3. John Burke, Sr. 122

Class A Pistol: 1. Clif Denny 79 2. John Burke, Sr. 52

Class B Pistol: 1. Gary Quandt 60 2. Ian Straus 48 3. Gareth Henderson 42

Again, wishing you all a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

Book review:

Balázs Németh, *Early Military Rifles: 1740-1850* (Osprey, 2020).

Many target shooters, hunters, and veterans know a good deal about the history of firearms, particularly the technological developments that represented a watershed in the development of guns for sporting and military applications. Fans of muzzle loading and black powder are often aware of a wonderfully informative Youtube channel run by one of the champion muzzle loader and target shooters in Hungary, who also is a professor of military history in his native land, a traditional hunter, and a Pedersoli rep. too – capandball.eu < <https://www.youtube.com/user/capandball> > aka. Balázs Németh. In

Magyar, the surname comes first, followed by the given name, so I'm actually not quite sure which is which? Perhaps someone rather more familiar with the language can tell me...

He has several publications in his native language, but Osprey has published an English-language book on the subject of early military use of the rifle as part of its "weapon" series, with a particular focus on the United States, Great Britain, and most particularly Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is a fascinating and informative book based around the simple premise or argument building on what most shooters know: In military circles, the smooth bore musket retained prominence in the linear tactics of the 18th and long into the 19th century over the rifle, simply because it could be loaded and fired much more rapidly than the patched round ball muzzle loading rifle. From this observation, he outlines that with the rifle, there is a firearm that was developed first as a civilian sporting and hunting and target shooting arm before it was used by militaries, the opposite of many other developments. His time line indicates the first use of rifles by a handful of European armies, the rebellious Continentals of the American Revolution, and the adoption of rifles for use by skirmishers and marksmen in the Napoleonic Wars. France got the memo comparatively late, only adopting rifles by the 1820s, after the power-hungry Corsican despot had been exiled.

This book should exert a wide appeal among members of the shooting public interested in the subject, and the bibliography and works cited are worth the entrance price alone, at least to me. Personally, I am fascinated by the various early attempts to work around the slowness of the loading procedure for rifles. For instance, after Britain's defeat at the hands of "Brother Jonathan" in North America and his French and Spanish cobelligerents, the army of that empire became much more serious than its early use of mostly German-speaking jägers or hunters/ cazadores as skirmishers that halted after the French and Indian or Seven Years War. Green jacketed riflemen armed with the flintlock Baker rifle, a .62 caliber arm using a lead round ball with a linen patch sewn around the ball, and using a 1 turn in 120 inches rate of twist, appeared in Portugal and Spain in the war against France, and continued in service. The Baker rifle's rate of twist is so slow, that it is surmised that it may have mostly been an attempt to control fouling. Worried that riflemen were vulnerable to French Dragoons, the expedient to have the advantages of the rifle's accuracy, but also allow for an inaccurate but quicker-to-load rate of fire like the musket involved simply issuing some bullets without the linen patch! That was one early solution.

Another, that of the specialized border guards of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire, that I'd never even heard of before I read the book was the M1768 Doppelstutzen. This was a double barrel "over-under" configuration flintlock with two locks. The resulting arm was quite heavy, and very expensive, which curtailed any thoughts of a wider issuance of it. In the Austrian practice of the era, the touch hole under the battery or steel was over-bored, such that it would be "self priming" when the powder charge was loaded down the barrel. The trade-off, however, was less accuracy. One barrel was rifled for a patched round ball. The other was a smooth bore barrel. The quandary of precision and accuracy versus rate of fire was thus "solved" after a fashion by simply having both. There is a brief section on the military use of the Bartholomäus Girardoni "Repetierwindbüchse" or air rifle too. A Tyrolean unit from the Alps would pump up two to four air chambers, one of which screwed onto the action and served as the butt stock. A magazine of 13-mm lead balls operated by a sliding breech block.

I learned a great deal about U.S. martial use of rifles from the book too. As aficionados of Texas history know, Ben Milam was killed in Bexar, December 1835 by a Mexican army cazador “tirofijo” using a British-made Baker rifle. David Crockett’s “Old Betsey” is an example of the North American long rifle tradition, which equipped so many early settlers to Hispanic Texas. There is a lot of information on the Model 1819 Hall rifle, which is actually the first machine in history to accomplish the goal set out by Eli Whitney, namely, interchangeable parts. John Hancock Hall carried out this technical revolution at the rifle works in Harpers Ferry, now West Virginia. This innovative if unlovely arm was thus a first: first breech-loader to enter service and the first with interchangeable parts. (Fans of the Model 1842 .69 cal. smooth bore musket will hasten to note that the first machine with interchangeable parts *across factories* was that musket, produced at both Springfield, MA and Harpers Ferry. At the time, this “American system of manufacture” simply boggled people’s minds!)

The book concludes by noting that with the development of the percussion cap, ever-more reliable breech loading, and crucially for muzzle loaders, the development of conico-ogival Minié/ Burton bullets, which could slide down the barrel like a smooth-bore, but flared to engage the rifling on the way out upon firing, marked the end of an era—the use of civilian-based jäger or hunting rifles for military applications. Henceforth, the specialized military rifle came of age, and in the four decades between the 1836 Texas Revolution, fought mostly by flintlock, single shot, muzzle loaders, and 1877 when metallic cartridge repeaters were solidly entrenched in the consumer market and constabulary and militaries of the age, technological development more often arose with military research and development first, even if undertaken by civilian inventors. Readers of Németh’s book will particularly learn a great deal about less-often written about Central European military and industrial history.

Below: One of my maternal 3x great-grandfathers was a “fältjäger” and “skarpskyttar” in northern Sweden in the 1840s. He would have used this “Tappstudsare m/1840-48” rifles. Muzzle loaders will recognize this as a caplock, and with a so-called “back action” lock, with the barrel held to the stock by keys just like a contemporaneous U.S. Hawken rifle. What is less visible, is that this rifle uses a dead-end “Thouvenin” or “a tige” pillar breech to accomplish rifling the pointed bullet. In such a system, the powder is introduced down the bore, and comes to rest in the breech around a central pillar. The bullet goes down next and lands on the pillar with the powder underneath. Three thwacks with the heavy rammer are then used to distort the shape of the bullet, and cause the pillar to force the base into the rifling. Far from satisfactory, as one might imagine, and of course changing the compression of the bullet changes everything, which is all too frequent given its reliance on absolute consistency. Still, for the time, it was a solution.



[Source: digitaltmuseum.se]



Tappstudsare m/1840-48 för arméns skarpskyttar. Vapennummer: 653.]

Thanks, Ian, for the photo!

Dec. 2020 La Coste, TX

