

## The 1865 Red River Forts

# SCUTTLEBUTT

Issue 1

The Official Newsletter of Friends of Forts Randolph & Buhlow, Inc.

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### Welcome to the First Issue Of the FFRB Newsletter

The Friends of Forts Randolph and Buhlow (FFRB) are finally here, and we're hoping that you are going to be one of us. (C'mon, you know you want to!) Meanwhile, you can peruse this newsletter and learn a little about why these forts, and this area, and this time in our history is so special.

First off, what is scuttlebutt, and what is its connection to our story? The term isn't used that much these days, but a few of you old timers know that "scuttlebutt" is a term used for unsubstantiated stories, rumors, or gossip. But you've got to be a real old-timer to remember when a scuttlebutt was a barrel full of water, with a handy dipper nearby, placed on a ship for hard working sailors to quench their thirst. That's right, it was an old-timey water fountain. And what better place for rumors to spread than around the water fountain. And that's how the information picked up at the scuttlebutt came to be known as "scuttlebutt." And this Scuttlebutt is going to become the best source ever for information about the goings-on around Forts Randolph and Buhlow – back then as well as now.

But don't forget that Forts Randolph and Buhlow State Historic Site (FRBSHS) also has a website and Facebook page. Those are the best places to keep up-to-the-minute on the day to day goings on at the forts. You can get the old news here – for the new news, keep up with the State Historic Site.

Oh, and one more thing. While scuttlebutt may most often be considered to be "unsubstantiated," the scuttlebutt you'll be picking up here will be completely legit. If you read it here, you can take it to the bank. If the information you get here is rumor, gossip, or opinion, we will let you know.

### One Historian's Opinion

#### What Ed Bearss Thought about Fort Randolph

Ed Bearss passed away in 2020. I will forever be honored to have called him "friend." The Smithsonian Magazine called him a "Rock Star of Civil War History," and he definitely lived up to that name. He not only knew history, he lived it, having served in the Pacific with the Marines in WWII, and having a shriveled arm to prove it. He was a regular encyclopedia of American History.

Back in the late 1990s or early 2000s (not sure exactly when), Mr. Ed led a Civil War tour through central Louisiana. Over his lifetime, he had led hundreds, possibly thousands, of similar tours.

The fort was totally undeveloped at the time, still on property owned by the Central Louisiana Insane Asylum, and access was strictly controlled. But Sam Mayeux, a local reenactor, was also an employee there, and was able to get permission for the tour to see the fort. Mr. Bearss was in his 70s at the time, and had probably seen every Civil War fortification in the country.

There was no Visitor Center at the time, nor any boardwalks, so after walking through the trenches, we made our way, inch by inch, up the wall. We were standing side by side when we reached the top of the fort. He was like a little kid in a candy store with a pocket full of nickels, practically dancing, and kept repeating, "Amazing! Amazing!" One of the best preserved earthworks he had ever seen, he exclaimed, and completely undisturbed.

The Historian Emeritus of the National Park Service thought that we have a treasure here. I agree. Hopefully, you do, too.

## **The Lovely Ladies of Pineville – and their squirrels**

We may be cheating a little bit with this story, as it took place a little before the forts were built. But it took place here, so that should be close enough. The following is an excerpt from a diary of a Union soldier.

“Saw quite a number of the Pineville ladies. Two in particular were out on a display promenade, one of which had a beautiful black squirrel which ran all over her, up her dress sleeves and under her lace cape into her bosom with a familiarity that made me envy the little favorite and sent a thrill that did not feel very bad through all the little veins in my body exciting desires not over complimentary to the fair exhibitor.”

William H. Stewart diary, March 20 [19], 1864

Apparently, Pineville had a lot of squirrels back then:

“As there were a number of squirrels in the woods, the boys thought to catch them, and it was a common thing to see a soldier with a hatchet in his belt climbing the largest pine trees to the top to cut off a limb, when the poor squirrels, limb and all, would fall among a thousand soldiers, either watching for the fun and scaring the poor animals almost to death.”

Scott, R. B. *History of the 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment Indiana Infantry Volunteers*. 1892. Page 74

Scott’s book can be found in the Friends of Fort DeRussy (FFD) Library, which is located in the Visitor Center at Fort Randolph. There are over 400 volumes in the library, with thousands of stories similar to the ones above. The books are accompanied by two very comfortable reading chairs, and a small end table where you can plug in your computer. It’s an excellent place to sit, read, learn and relax in air-conditioned comfort.



# **WE WANT YOU!**

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RANDOLPH AND BUHLOW**  
Join Friends of Forts Randolph and  
Buhlow (\$20 a year),

**or make a one-time donation.**

**100% of your donations goes to operation  
and programs here at the forts.**

For more information, or to join,  
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The Friends of Forts Randolph and Buhlow was organized for the purpose of assisting the FR&B State Historic Site staff with fundraising and other projects around the forts, as needed. All funds generated by the group go to improvements and programs at the forts. Dues and donations can be sent to the above address, or can be deposited in the donation box at the Visitor Center.