

## CONNECTIONS

*By Jim Morriss  
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Somewhere around 25 years ago, there was a TV show on PPS that we used to enjoy. It was called "Connections" and was created and hosted by a guy named James Burke. Every week Burke would describe different inventions and discoveries and explain how they changed our society. I used to think he was an offbeat genius because of the skillful way that he was able to find seemingly isolated facts and inter-relate them into an hour-long TV show. Burke was really a good showman and had an excellent grasp of history and science, but I've come to believe that his ability to tie different events together was not nearly as special as I once thought it was. Since Joyce and I have been researching our genealogy we have encountered dozens of occasions where our own family's histories have been inter-connected with news events in ways that might defy the laws of probability. Most recently this happened on a white water raft trip that we took in northern Georgia.

On June 19, 2004 the Morriss family was having a family reunion at the home of our brother Jerry on the outskirts of Atlanta. Eleven of us made a side trip to spend a half-day in the mountains that straddle the Georgia-Tennessee line. It is a primitive area of the country where two wild rivers, the Ocoee and Toccoa provide (at least to our way of thinking) more fun than all of the up-scale amusement parks that have popped up all over the place. Some of its charm is because the area is pretty much untouched by progress and is like it must have been a couple of hundred years ago when our ancestors dared to venture west of the smokies.

Joyce and I spent a lot of time researching such people in rural Crawford County Georgia where her ancestor, Anderson Ray (1810 - 1836) volunteered along with about 300 young men and traveled to Texas to fight there against Santa Anna and the Empire of Mexico. Before they left, the group, called Ward's Battalion, was given a battle flag made of blue and white cloth with a single star on it. The flag was inspirational in the development of the flag of Texas, even though the whole troop from

Georgia was wiped out in battles at Goliad and Refugio, Texas.

That flag carried by the men from Georgia had an even deeper connection to our country's history. It was often called the "Bonnie Blue Flag" and the design was first used by what was once called West Florida. It became one of the first flags of Mississippi and was the first flag of the Confederacy in 1861.

You can find all kinds of references to that flag on the internet and in books by authors such as Jeff Shaara and Stephen Ambrose.



Stephen Ambrose was a very well known writer, in part because of his studies of Lewis and Clark who led a daring expedition of discovery up the Missouri River just 20 short years before the family of John P. Morriss (1787-1851) first settled there. Ambrose lived for many years in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi, just a couple of miles off of the path that our great-great grandfather, John Orr took in the Civil War from New Orleans to capture the city of Mobile, Alabama. Only a couple of years before that, Edward James Morriss passed right through the area with the Texas Eighth Cavalry on the way to Bowling Green, Kentucky.

The Texas Cavalry fought in the Battles of Woodsonville, Shiloh and Corinth. At Shiloh and Corinth our great-great uncle Edward as a part of the Confederate Army would face another great-great uncle, Pete Orr who was fighting for the Union. Pete went on to be killed in Tennessee but Edward was sent back to Texas where he was given a special commission by the Governor of Texas to stage a daring naval raid on the Union fleet that was occupying the city of Galveston. Edward commanded the squadron of Marines on board the steamship Bayou City in what was a stunning victory for the South. Many of the battle techniques used by the Texas Cavalry were used in the sea raid which routed the Union Navy. As a result Galveston was the only Confederate port city

that was still open at the conclusion of the war. It was two months after the surrender of General Lee before any Federal forces would re-enter the city.

Stephen Ambrose was very well aware of the importance of the Battle of Galveston just as he knew of the part that the soldiers from the State of Missouri played in the war. He also knew about the blue flag, a copy of which was created in Georgia and became a part of the history of the area. During the Civil War, there was also a popular song written about that flag. It was called "The Bonnie Blue Flag," and at the start of the war it was more popular in the South than "Dixie." In 1861 when Harry McCarthy wrote the song, he started the first verse talking of a "Band of Brothers." McCarthy was quoting a well known line from the Shakespeare play, "Henry V" where after the Battle of Agincourt, King Henry said:

*"From this day to the ending of the world,  
But we in it shall be remembered;  
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother"*

The first lines of the song, "The Bonnie Blue Flag" are these:

*We are a band of brothers and native to the soil,  
Fighting for the property we gained by honest toil;  
And when our rights were threatened,  
the cry rose near and far,  
"Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single  
star!"*

*Hurrah! Hurrah! For Southern rights hurrah!  
Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single  
star.*

Stephen Ambrose also chose the term "Band of Brothers" to identify a third group of fighting men. In 1992 he wrote a book about the exploits of Company E of the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in the Second World War. This Band of Brothers was further celebrated in a TV series on the HBO network. In portraying the remarkable accomplishments of this particular "Band of Brothers," the show easily won an Emmy Award. Before they were sent to England for their participation in D-Day, the paratroopers endured intensive training at a special Army camp set up in the wilderness of north Georgia and called Camp Toccoa. That location is just down stream from the place where we enjoyed our white water raft trip some sixty years later.

To all except James Burke it might seem odd that several unrelated facts can be so easily connected, but there is at least one more. When Edward J. Morriss took part in the recapture of Galveston, it meant that all of the slaves, who would have been set free, continued to be the property of their owners. The Emancipation Proclamation gave the slaves in the Confederate States their freedom on the very same day that Galveston was recaptured by the CSA. They had no way to know that until General Gordon Grainger of the Union Army brought them the news on June 19, 1865. That day became a day of celebration for black people in Texas and many other parts of the country. It is called "Juneteenth" and our raft trip just happened to occur on the 133<sup>rd</sup> Juneteenth.

*Jim Morriss*

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