

The Bandera PROPHECY

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Today in Texas History

Record-setting sharpshooter Elizabeth “Plinky” Toepperwein dies in San Antonio

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On Jan. 27, 1945, Elizabeth Toepperwein died in her home in San Antonio. She was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1882. At 18, while working in a Winchester factory, she met Adolph (Ad) Toepperwein, a member of a vaudeville-circuit shooting act who was also employed as an exhibition shooter by the Winchester arms company. After they married in 1903, Ad gave Elizabeth her first shooting lessons and discovered she was a natural.

By 1904, the Toepperweins were working as a team professionally; their first appearance as a famous husband-and-wife team was at the St. Louis World's Fair. Elizabeth acquired the nickname Plinky during her early shooting lessons.

After several tries, she shot a tin can, which made a plinking sound. Elizabeth exclaimed, "I plinked it"-perhaps the first use of this echoic verb now common in shooting publications.

She and Ad performed in a career that spanned 40 years. Their displays of expertise included shooting while standing on their heads and while lying on their backs.

She was the first woman in the United States to qualify as a national marksman with the military rifle and the first woman to break 100 straight targets at trapshooting. She also held the world endurance trapshooting record, hitting 1,952 of 2,000 targets in five hours and twenty minutes.

The celebrated shooter Annie Oakley once said to Plinky, "Mrs. Top, you're the greatest shot I've ever seen."

Memorabilia of the Toepperweins' career is on display in San Antonio's Buckhorn Saloon.